

THE MARINE CORPS BUILDS MEN
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This idea came out of a writing exercise with [ManingUp](#) - thank you, sir!

Devin wasn't quite sure what the building was called. He knew it had something to do with the military. It was in the middle of town, a one-story red brick building with an acre of grass connected to it, surrounded by a chain link fence topped with barbed wire. Welcoming it was not, but Devin was fascinated by it every time he walked past on his way home. It wasn't that big, so it couldn't be more than just some offices with an area for occasional training. But he never saw any training going on. He never saw *anything* going on. There was sometimes a car or two parked in the lot, but for all Devin could tell, that could be spillover from the nearby strip mall.

It wasn't that Devin was fascinated by the military. In fact, he wasn't at all. It all seemed too intense for his liking. Teachers usually described him as 'sweet,' which he got teased for, but it was just how he was. He liked giving high fives and meeting new people, and didn't care much for physical exertion, even though he was skinny. It was the *building* that interested him. Devin imagined it as abandoned, full of old artifacts like in the Captain America movie. A place he could sneak inside to explore and maybe film one of those YouTube videos. He'd just started his own channel and didn't know what to really do with it, but that sounded like a fun project.

Every day, he walked by, inching a bit closer than the day before. It felt like the building was calling to him, like he was on some collision course with fate to learn all about the inside of the place. It was probably boring, he told himself. But he was just so curious. He'd googled it and not even the local newspaper had articles about it.

And then, one day, to Devin's surprise, there was an actual person standing outside the building. He touched the bill of his baseball cap and pulled it down to hide his face. It was the first time he'd seen any sign of life. The guy was walking into the building when Devin made eye contact with him.

"Hi," Devin said, before realizing he was planning on talking. He just blurted it right out. Pushing his cap back up he smiled.

"Well well," the man said. "I've seen you wandering by just about everyday. You thinking about joining the military when you're older?"

Devin was surprised he'd been noticed. So much for sneaking in. He laughed. "Me? Nooo, no. My mom and dad would kill me if I told them I was doing that."

"Nothing wrong with wanting to serve your country," the man said gravely.

Devin felt like he shrunk into himself. He wasn't trying to make the guy mad. He just knew his parents had a different vision for his future than the army. "I didn't mean any offense."

"Maybe you have to get acquainted with the service, see that it's not so scary. I have some time today if you want a tour?"

Devin couldn't believe his luck. After all his idle curiosity, the universe was giving him a present. He nodded excitedly. The man placed an arm around Devin's back and guided the hesitant teen inside. Devin removed his baseball cap and tucked it under his arm. He tried to quickly straighten out his medium length hair to make it look more presentable. Walking into the first room in the building was rather lackluster. There was a young man no older than 24 sitting at a desk with a computer. He was too focused on his work to notice Devin or the man walk in, or so Devin thought, until he heard a chime he recognized from one of his favorite mobile games, Cosmic Empire.

That first impression really put him at ease. This place wasn't empty because of ghosts, just negligence, Devin realized. No wonder they didn't have people clamoring to join the division. But he kept his mouth shut in case he came off as rude.

"Good day, sir," he said timidly, trying to add some respect to it. Unfortunately, it went unheard by the young man.

The man beside Devin coughed. "Private," he whispered and the young man looked up.

"Good afternoon Corporal! I didn't notice you leave."

"Yeah, yeah sit down. Just don't let the sergeant catch you slacking off, alright?"

The young man nodded then looked at Devin. "You here to sign up?"

"Oh no. I'm not-" Devin didn't want to be insulting again, so he backpedaled. "Not today. The corporate was just giving me a tour of the place."

"The corporal."

"Corporal!" Devin corrected himself, cheeks reddening.

"Nice," the private smiled. "I can answer any questions you might have at the end, if you want to talk to someone closer to your..." He trailed off. "Sorry sir," he said to the Corporal, who chuckled.

"No offense taken. You're right, you might have a valuable perspective as a younger guy. Take his picture, would you?"

The corporal stood aside and Devin smiled for the private as he snapped a quick picture. Probably for security, he reasoned.

The corporal nodded to the private. "At ease."

The private sank into his chair with a relieved sigh and the man led Devin onward. "I'm Corporal Armstrong, by the way," he said.

"Devin Teller." The man's handshake was crushing. Devin winced. "I thought everything would be scary in here, but that guy back there seems normal."

"Hutton? Nice kid. Needs a little more discipline, I'd say, but he's on the right track. Why'd you think this place was scary?"

"Because it's mysterious," Devin said. "I've lived in this town my whole life and nothing has ever gone on here. I always thought I'd see people twirling guns and stuff like that."

Corporal Armstrong laughed. "Funny! Nah, this is just a training center. This isn't where Basic Training happens. That's only a handful of places, like Fort Sill in Oklahoma." Armstrong took Devin down a hall and let him poke his head in a few rooms. None of them were interesting. There were some classrooms, some cubicles, and a bunch of metal cages labeled 'Unit Storage.' The library was a little more fun to look at, but it wasn't like Devin was going to sit down and read something. In fact, the most interesting thing was the halls, which were at least colors other than white and had some framed photos and other things to look at.

Devin handed his phone to Corporal Armstrong. "Could you take a picture of me in front of this thing?" It was the United States Marines Corp seal sculpted from bronze and mounted on the wall. Devin stood in front of it with two thumbs up. He turned his baseball cap around so the bill didn't obscure the big smile on his face. "Thanks!" he said, checking the picture and approving of it.

"I'd like to hear more about you, Devin, but I think others would too and I don't want to make you repeat yourself," Corporal Armstrong smiled as he opened a door and ushered Devin inside. "How about you tell these gentlemen too?"

The door clicked shut, and suddenly Devin felt nervous again. He placed his cap back on, folded his hands over each other, and looked at the floor to avoid making eye contact with the two uniformed men he was now in the room with. They both sat on the same side of a table, looking at him - like it was an interview. One was pretty old, the other closer to Devin's dad's age. Corporal Armstrong stood by the door.

"Hey there, young fella!" the young man in the middle smiled. "You look like you're about to throw up!"

Devin shook his head, the long hair sticking out of his baseball cap rustling. "Oh, I just - didn't realize I'd have to like..." He didn't know what to say. What was expected of him here? He was just walking around, after all.

“Don’t be so nervous son, we’re not here to judge you. We just want to know more about you.” The man’s voice was powerful and booming but also carried a hidden warmth that set Devin at ease. “To prove we’re all friends here, how about you call me Private Ryan.”

“Ridiculous!” An authoritative voice broke through. Devin jumped back in shock. “Lowering your rank to this recruit is absurd.”

“I’m not a recruit,” Devin said, but the man’s gaze cut off anything else he would have added. Corporal Armstrong made no attempts to correct the mistake either. The second man was large like a bodybuilder, beautifully sculpted, but close in age to Devin’s grandparents.

“I was just trying to show some goodwill. I think the boy would have gotten a bit overwhelmed if we shared our actual ranks,” Not-Private Ryan stated.

“Please.” The older man grumbled. “Look at this kid, practically in diapers. He wouldn’t know the importance of rank or anything about the Marines.” As if to prove a point the man turned to Devin, “Stand at attention!”

“Uh?” Devin was confused with the order, but he watched enough movies to understand he was supposed to be standing upright with his chin up and chest out.

“See? He knows some things,” Ryan spoke, a chuckle on his lips.

“A wise guy eh? Let’s see your salute,” the older gentleman barked.

Devin imitated all the salutes he’d seen in his life.

“Not as good,” the requester said.

Devin didn’t like hearing that. He had just been thrown into a room, and now just mocked. Perhaps he could get the older gentleman to calm down if he showed some interest.

“Could you show me how to do a proper one?”

“Why should I?”

“Please sir.”

The older man grumbled, “That’s Lieutenant Higgins to you, kid.” The large man stood up adjusting his belt before saluting. “Do you see this? A perfect salute is flawless and second nature.”

Devin tried to replicate it, but the withering gazes from the table showed he was not doing well.

“No, no. You’re making a hand like a doll, see that? Your fingers need to be straight. Lock your thumb. Try again.”

Devin tried. He snapped his hand up so quickly he smacked himself in the head with it.

“Easy kid. Right hand in line with your brow, forearm at a 45 degree angle. No bend in the wrist or fingers. Everything straight from your elbow to your fingertip. Try again.”

Devin lowered his salute just to do it again. He kept the speed of the previous attempt but this time really focused on keeping his entire arm locked at a 45 degree angle, like it was a hinge.

“*Much* better,” Ryan said. “Now, what you’re supposed to do is have your fingers touch the brim of your hat, not your forehead.”

“Like this?” Devin moved his fingers out from under the bill of his baseball cap, resting the tip of his middle finger against the front of it.

“Yes, but you need to straighten up again,” Higgins said, displeased. Devin felt Armstrong’s hands on his shoulders, and then the Corporal pulled them back. Devin’s spine cracked loudly, like he was at the chiropractor, and all the men in the room chuckled and whistled. “He’s never gonna slouch again after that,” Higgins laughed.

Devin was standing impractically straight. It felt unnatural and uncomfortable, like he had a steel rod in his back instead of a spine.

“Salute, kid,” Higgins said.

Devin did so without thinking. His fingers tapped against the bill of his baseball cap. He stood stiff and motionless, arm bent perfectly.

“Well done. Again.”

Devin lowered his arm and repeated the gesture. The bill of his baseball cap suddenly widened out an inch on either side.

“We’re going to do this ten times. Again.”

Devin obeyed, his hat’s bill continuing to broaden, encircling more of the crown.

“Again.”

The bill now stretched halfway around Devin’s hat, a strange look made stranger by the fact that the curved bill was flattening. Another salute transformed the logo on the front of his hat from white thread to metal.

“Again. Again. Again.”

Devin kept saluting, the gesture now perfect as could be, as the two sides of his bill met at the back of his head and connected to form a flat brim as stiff as his spine. Each tap of his fingers against the brim changed it further: the bright colors turned drab, the logo shrank and morphed.

“Again.”

Devin was getting frustrated and bored, but didn't show it. His impeccable salute was putting the finishing touches on his new Stetson: the crown stretched up taller above his head as the hat turned olive green.

“Well done, young man. At ease.”

Devin slouched - or thought he did, though his new spine was incapable of slouching - and took his hat off. It took work, because there was a weird strap on the back holding it against his head, but he finally removed it and noticed how different it was. This wasn't his hat; it looked more like Smokey the Bear's. The crown was tall and had four symmetrical indentations like someone was pinching it at the top, and the brim was broad, stiff, and flat. There was a ribbon around the base of it.

“What's your name, kid?”

“Devin. Devin Teller.”

“Tell us about yourself, Devin. What makes you want to be a Marine?”

“I don't want to be a Marine, sir, I think there's been some mistake. I just came in for a tour,” Devin admitted. When none of the men immediately interjected, he plowed on, hoping to smooth the awkwardness over. “But I really admire military guys, I think they're great! And super necessary. Just not my thing. I'm not a fighter, my dad always says. Um, I dunno...I go to school, I like going to movies with my friends. I really like action movies. I watch a lot of soccer and baseball. I give everyone high fives in the halls at school, it's kinda my thing, everyone knows I do it.” Devin rattled on and on about his hobbies and interests, and the men in the room listened attentively. No one acknowledged what appeared to be some wild static electricity where Devin was standing, or whatever was making his long hair stand on end. Strand after strand rose up toward the ceiling, floating above Devin's head until every hair was stretched straight out from its root. He looked like a dandelion. “Oh, and I really like skateboarding!” Devin said. “Can't believe I left that out. That's one of my favorite things to do. I've gotten pretty good at it.”

“Is that why you keep your hair so long?”

“Yeah, that and I just hate going to the barber,” Devin smiled, as his hovering hair suddenly shrank by an inch, taking up less space in the air around him. “I would cry when I went there as a baby so my parents just didn’t make me. I go a couple times a year just to get it trimmed up.” Another inch of Devin’s hair vanished. “It saves us a lot of money too, which is nice. And it looks cool when I do tricks, especially when I slow down the video. Here, I’ll show you!” Devin’s hair shortened by another two inches as he rummaged in his pocket for his phone and pulled up TikTok. By the time he approached the table and handed over his phone to proudly show off the videos of him in his cul-de-sac jumping around on his skateboard, six inches of his once shoulder-length hair was gone. “Oh, watch that one!” he said, reaching over to Ryan’s hand and flipping to the next video. “That one got 100,000 views for some reason.”

The transformation of Devin’s hairstyle was speeding up the more he showed off his skateboarding tricks to the men. Instead of lurching down an inch at a time, now the strands were steadily shortening, sinking inward. Four inches remained...then three... “And you think this is the best use of your time?” Higgins asked.

“It’s fun!” Devin said defensively, now sporting a long crewcut. “I’m not gonna be a kid forever, might as well have fun while I am one, y’know?” He took his phone back from Ryan, wondering if he should’ve bothered showing them his social media. But if they wanted to know about him, that was a big part. Devin locked his phone, missing the reflection of his head on the black screen before he slid it into his pocket. He would’ve seen the sides of his hair vanishing into near nothingness, fading to pure skin shaved with a straight razor. On top, the hair continued to stand on end, but shortened down to half-an-inch, brushed straight upward. With one final lop, the new hairstyle revealed its shape: a perfect flat top composed of 90 degree angles, tapering down into a skin fade. It made the top of Devin’s head look like a box and gave him a sharp, precise appearance.

“Maybe you’re too concerned with fun,” Higgins needed. “What about someday if your country needs you? If you have to provide for your family? Is fun gonna put food on the table? Is fun gonna keep you safe?”

“Um...I, well...maybe, if I monetize my channel!”

Ryan started laughing, and Higgins cracked a smile. “Okay, that was funny, kid,” Higgins admitted. “What happens if you go through a growth spurt?”

“What do you mean?” Devin asked.

“Like, if you got real tall. Aren’t skateboarders usually pretty short?”

“I dunno, I guess - ‘cause when you f-a-a-aall...” Devin’s neck suddenly stretched like a brontosaurus, pulling his shoulders and torso up longer. “Sorry...when you fall, you have less distance to cover. If I was tall, I’d just...I dunno-o-o-o-...” His legs pulled upward, jeans riding high. “I probably wouldn’t have gotten into skateboarding if I was a tall guy, it’d be a lot harder.”

“How tall are you?”

Devin was sprouting like a weed right before the men’s eyes. “Like five-six or so.”

“I don’t think so. You look taller than that.”

“Like maybe six feet?” Devin said hopefully, stretching further toward the ceiling.

“Taller than that.”

“Like six-foot-four, maybe? That’d be cool, if I were that tall,” Devin grinned, now towering in the middle of the room, his clothes hopelessly small on his lanky frame. “I can’t even imagine. It’d be crazy.”

“You’d be pretty intimidating if you were six-four,” Ryan said.

“Pfff, me? I could never be intimidating,” Devin laughed, crossing his feet over each other. “No one takes me seriously.”

“Maybe that’s because you don’t take yourself seriously,” Armstrong volunteered from behind Devin.

Devin turned to look at him, nearly falling thanks to the ten inches of height he’d just added. “I guess maybe not. I don’t *not* take myself seriously, but I’m friendly.”

“Every recruit starts out a real sweet boy,” Higgins said.

“I’m not a fucking recruit!” Devin snapped, and then he turned red. “Sorry - sorry - I shouldn’t have sworn, I never swear, I just meant-”

“I liked it!” Ryan laughed. “Swear more.”

“More?” Devin gulped.

“Say anything you want right now, as long as there’s profanity in it.”

“I’m not...uh, I’m not a...*fucking*...soldier!”

The men all burst out laughing, which reddened Devin’s cheeks further. “Of course you’re not, kid, this is the Marines!”

“Well then I’m not a fucking Marine! And I don’t wanna be a goddamn motherfucking Marine either!” Devin punctuated this sentence with an embarrassed giggle. It was fun to be around authority that let you say anything.

“And why don’t you want to be a Marine, Devin?”

“Because it doesn’t seem fucking fun. And I’m not some fucking tough guy.”

“Just cut your hair like one?”

“You think this shit’s a tough guy haircut?” Devin laughed, tossing his head to one side to flip the long wavy locks that he no longer had. “Tough to take care of, maybe.”

“Have to trim it up yourself at home, I bet, so it always looks fresh,” Ryan nodded.

“Yeah, sometimes.”

“You must shave every day, too.”

“Shave?” Devin laughed. “Fuck no, I don’t need to shave, thank Christ.”

“Someday you will,” Higgins said. “As you develop, you’ll find yourself with a heavy beard. The kind that turns into stubble after an hour. You’ll have to shave in the morning and in the evening, and you can use that time to tidy up your flat top. Maybe get your wife to help.”

“My *wife*?!” Devin coughed. “I don’t have a fuckin’ wife!”

“Well, maybe you should get one,” Ryan said sweetly. “Make some babies and raise ‘em up right.”

“That’s...that’s a long way away,” Devin said, scratching at his cheek. It was so rough! He hoped he wasn’t getting a rash. Probably just dry skin, he reasoned. And his balls hurt...his underwear was too small, which made them itch too. The men asked if he was all right. “Just fuckin’ itchy,” Devin shrugged.

“At least you keep your chest hair trimmed, so it doesn’t stick out of your collar.”

“I don’t have any fuckin’ chest hair,” Devin laughed. “What are you guys talking about?”

“But if you did, you’d keep it trimmed.”

“Of course! I’d always keep that shit trimmed so it didn’t stick out.” Devin imagined how he’d look with hair on his chest, and the mental image wasn’t half bad. If he had a heavy beard, he’d have a hairy chest too. Nice, thick, dark hair. Usually covered up, but if he wanted to let loose a

little, he could leave his polos unbuttoned so people could see his chest hair. Damn...was that really what he counted as 'loosening up' nowadays?

"Look at him smiling," Higgins said to Ryan, before turning to Devin. "What're you smiling about, big guy?"

"Nothing, I just had this funny thought about my chest hair - that letting people see it meant I was letting loose. I'm just laughing at that being my idea of fun, I guess."

"That would mean you were pretty uptight the rest of the time," Higgins observed. "Do you think you're uptight?"

"Nah, I've never thought that," Devin said. "I'm fuckin' chill."

"What about your wife and kids? Would they say you're uptight?"

"They'd say I was—hey, I don't have a fuckin' wife and kids!" Devin said. "I fucking told you that! Do I look old enough to be married with kids?"

"I don't know," Ryan admitted. "Maybe all the shaving talk threw us off."

"Fuck, just 'cause I have to shave twice a day and I have a hairy chest, doesn't mean I'm gettin' hitched anytime soon."

"And why do you shave twice a day?"

"'Cause I have a heavy beard," Devin said.

"Yes, but why not let it grow and save yourself the trouble?"

"I'm not allowed to have a fuckin' beard!" Devin responded.

"But why not?" Ryan smiled.

"What's with the third degree?!" Devin said, thrusting his arms outward to gesture his befuddlement. But it also strained his t-shirt too much and tore it down the middle, exposing part of his chest and all the new hair it sported. He looked down at the dark curls protruding through the rip. "Oops..."

"Oh dear," Higgins mused. "That must bother an uptight guy like you."

"I'm not fuckin' uptight!" Devin insisted, sliding his fingers across his chest hair.

Higgins cocked an eyebrow. "That's not what I've heard. I've heard you're a real tightass."

“Yeah, I heard you’re a square,” Ryan agreed. “A stick in the mud.”

“Where’d you hear that?! I just follow the rules, that’s all.”

“You’re a stickler for them, aren’t you? You’re by the book,” Higgins needled. “Rulebreakers bother you.”

“Of course they fuckin’ do!” Devin said, clenching his fists. “I’m a disciplinarian. I hate when people step out of line. Fuckin’ chaps my ass. But I’m not a square!”

“Right, you’re a hardass,” Ryan said.

“Heh, yeah, who *wouldn’t* be scared of these guns,” Devin joked, flexing his biceps above his head. The veins on his forearms were a new and exciting sight. “You army guys must work out a lot, right? I mean, shit, sorry, you *Marine* guys must work out a lot.”

“We do. We eat a lot, too.”

“That’s where I fuck up,” Devin sighed, slouching. “I just don’t eat enough to ever gain weight. I can’t put on any muscle.” Despite this pronouncement, his arms filled his sleeves nicely.

“Well, what do you typically eat each day?”

“For breakfast, I’ll have yogurt...uhhh, for lunch, something at school, a slice of pizza or something-”

Higgins held up his hand. “You just have *yogurt* for breakfast? No wonder you’re not growing, recruit! You gotta be shovelin’ food down your gullet! You have to be not just hungry to eat, you have to be hungry to *grow*. I want you eating all the oatmeal and eggs and bacon you can possibly muster. And a slice of pizza for lunch? At your age, you can eat the ENTIRE pizza! And then when you’re older, chicken and rice until you’re ready to burst. Your body is aching to grow. Shit, it’s growing right now just thinking about all the food you’re going to put in it.”

And it was. Devin’s shoulders and chest were a bit wider. His thighs touched now. The seat of his pants was tight across his butt.

“Didn’t you tell me one of the reasons you fell in love with your wife is because of what a good cook she was? And how much she liked cooking for you?”

“D-did I?” Devin muttered, his shirt tearing further. He scratched his head, fingers prodding against his flat top, and he winced at how odd it felt. His sleeve ripped open over his powerful bicep as it flexed upward. “I don’t...I don’t quite remember it like that, but it’d be nice to have a wife who cooked for me...”

“You’re tellin’ me!” Ryan said. “Mine gets mad if I EAT her cooking!” He and Higgins burst out laughing, hitting the table as they talked about their own wives. Devin tried to listen, but he felt distant and confused, like he was looking at them through a glass wall. And his body felt so strange. His jeans were tearing down the sides, and every breath he took made his chest bigger, his back broader. Testosterone pumped through him like his own blood, growing his muscles bigger and bigger, reshaping his body into a weapon. His sleeves shredded apart as his delts bulked big and round, and when he tried to look down at them his chest demanded his attention instead, broadening into a wide barrel with thick, deep pecs that protruded straight out in front of him.

He widened his stance as his thighs got too large to rest against each other, calves bulging beneath them - powerful legs ready to explode off the block at a moment’s notice. That was when his shoulders got competitive and decided to widen - and widen - and *widen*, broadening out nearly as wide as the table Higgins and Ryan sat behind. Their growth thickened his neck and traps, which hulked out across his upper back and tore the rest of his t-shirt off. He managed to remain silent through all of this, but when his glutes pushed out into a muscular bubble behind him, he finally moaned loudly as he felt the two spheres push together.

Higgins and Ryan looked over at the tall bodybuilder before them. Six-feet-four-inches of carved, rippling muscle, capped by a chiseled and deliciously hairy set of pecs. Devin grunted and groaned as he ran his hands over himself, pulling on what remained of his clothes in a sad attempt to cover himself. The scraps that remained were stuck to him thanks to his salty sweat.

“If eating a lot made me look like that, my wife wouldn’t have a problem cooking for me,” Ryan said.

“Made you look like what, sir?” Devin croaked, his biceps and pecs swelling bigger in a fight for his attention. He scratched under his armpit, unaccustomed to all the hair fluffing out of it.

“Superman.”

Devin laughed, his muscles growing further, quietly filling more space around him. His small waist knotted into a dense eight-pack. “I think I’d get more dates if I looked like Superman.”

“I think you’d get more dates if you weren’t such a hardass and didn’t already have a wife,” Higgins interjected. “Most gals aren’t into married men with kids.”

Devin kept scratching at his body hair. “Kids...” he murmured to himself. “Married with kids...”

“That changes a man, doesn’t it? To have a family of his own.”

“Shit, yeah, it must,” Devin said, rubbing the back of his thick neck, the size of his bicep barely allowing the motion. “Because you have to provide for them...make sure they’re fed and have warm beds to sleep in, all of that. You can’t put yourself first anymore.”

“It’s like leading a battalion, isn’t it?”

Devin clenched his jaw. It was sharper than before. Bigger. “Yes. They rely on you.”

“Your men must admire your muscles.”

“They fuckin’ better.” Devin looked down at his body and flexed, his muscles tensing in a show of power. He ran his fingers through his chest hair, admiring the size and shape of his pecs. The room was quiet except for his heavy breathing. He flexed his stomach and rubbed his palm across the rigid muscles. “But I don’t think anyone respects me. I’m goofy.”

“Goofy?!” All the men in the room laughed. “You’re the scariest motherfucker here! Your men always worship you.”

Devin’s jaw grew again, the angles hardening. “What do you mean, my ‘men’? Like guys at school?”

“No. You’re the teacher now, and you have a body that commands respect and attention everywhere you go. Why don’t you put that hat on, see if it helps you understand more?”

Devin looked down at the campaign Stetson at his feet, long since dropped. “Where’d my hat go?” he asked, crouching down and picking up the olive hat. “This isn’t mine.”

“Of course it is! It’s your size, isn’t it?”

“I don’t think so.” Devin flipped the campaign cover onto his head. As soon as the expensive felt touched his scalp, his growing jaw cracked outward with new, powerful angles that reshaped his face. It was an odd sensation, one that made Devin grimace as his chin grew. His lips lost their youthful fullness and thinned into a tense, narrow line. “It feels kinda...” Devin tried to say, but the bizarre feelings continued, as his brow hardened into a protruding ridge that set his eyes further back in his skull. The emergence of sharp cheekbones tightened his midface and pushed the fat out of it, making him appear older, an illusion that was quickly becoming reality thanks to the new lines around his mouth and between his eyebrows.

Devin removed his hat for a moment, trying to find a comfortable stance for it, and revealed a flat top far grayer than moments before. It matched his new face. His smaller eyes were steely and mirthless; his expression permanently intense. He looked like he’d never heard a joke in his life.

He put his hat back on, fiddling with the back strap that held against his skull so that the brim could tilt slightly forward over his eyes. The Stetson was like a mirror image of his face, indentations on the dome angling inward like his cheeks.

“What sort of clothes do you like to wear?” Armstrong asked. “What are your favorite brands?”

Devin’s shredded clothes were reassembling themselves and looked nothing like what he’d walked in wearing. Strips of fabric pulled together seamlessly over his muscular frame. “Favorite brands, hmmm,” Devin said, his voice cracking. “I’m trying to remember...but I can’t qu-ITE-” His chest was yanked forward as if a tailor had a tape measure around it, buttons starting to pop into place as a new shirt formed. Devin continued talking, not acknowledging his voice deepening slowly and gradually as he did: “I wear, uh...well, I don’t shop that much. At least I don’t think I do. I like clothes that fit my body. Those can be hard to find sometimes.”

“Because you’re so muscular?”

“Yes,” Devin answered in an ever-deepening baritone, “because I’m so muscular. I have to order my shirts two sizes up so that they fit my chest, then have them tailored for my waist.” Even so, as Devin’s short-sleeved button down continued to form around him, the buttons over his big pecs were taut enough to make deep breaths ill-advised. His shirt had a pointed collar now, which lay flat against the bulging slabs of muscle protruding from his chest. A few inches below the points, flap pockets were stitching themselves onto Devin’s shirt.

It took a few seconds for everyone in the room to realize that the bass voice speaking was Devin’s, so quickly had it changed. “Pants are a pain in the ass too, because of my ass,” he said, missing the obvious joke. The two powerful glutes standing out pompously did not lend themselves to an easy fit, nor did Devin’s rippling thighs. Still, his pants managed to just barely fit him, their snugness displaying the power of his lower half. Around his waist snapped a striking canvas belt with a large, square gold buckle that depicted the same eagle as on his hat. Devin shook one leg as he felt something race down it under his pants, but then he felt it clip onto his socks and remembered, of course he was wearing shirt stays. He was never not wearing shirt stays. He looked down at his khaki button-down, like a second skin on him, not a single wrinkle thanks to the stays pulling the shirt tails tight as a drum. He could see the shape of his pecs and the ridges of his abs.

His head snapped back up. “What were we talking about?” he asked, voice fully transformed into a harsh, croaking bass.

“Your clothes.”

“Not much to say about them,” Devin said tersely, as four rows of ribbons popped onto his chest above his breast pocket. His short sleeves, nearly tearing over his hulking biceps, now sported large chevrons. The last appearance was his name tag, cracking into place above his other pocket like a snap bracelet. “I wear what I have to wear.”

“Well said.”

“No disrespect intended,” Devin said, his new voice sending reverberations through the room, “but are we finished here? I just came in for a tour and should probably be headed home.”

“Of course, Staff Sergeant. You can leave at any time. We’re sorry to keep you,” Ryan said.

“Thank you, gentlemen.” Devin shook both the men’s hands and then turned to look at Corporal Armstrong. “Will you see me out?”

“Of course, Staff Sergeant,” Armstrong smiled, opening the door.

Devin angled himself through it as he looked down at his tour guide. “Wasn’t I shorter than you?”

“Actually,” Armstrong said with a snap of his fingers, ignoring Devin’s question completely, “there’s one more room I should show you that everyone loves to see - the Reality Room!”

“Reality Room?”

“It helps you see yourself as a real marine.”

“Oh, like VR?” Devin asked.

“Something like that.”

“Cool.” Devin walked behind Armstrong, his polished shoes clacking loudly against the floor. He was irritated by how long the tour took - why on Earth were those guys so long-winded back there? - but his curiosity about what other secrets the building held was enough to spur him onward. He followed the corporal to a room at the end of the hall, and noticed Armstrong needed a keycard to open it.

“It’s pretty high tech,” Armstrong smiled. “Check it out.”

Devin stepped into the pitch black room and heard the door click shut behind him. For a moment, he didn’t see anything, and was about to tell Armstrong to let him out and stop wasting his fucking time. But then a tall screen - at least, Devin assumed it was a screen, but it looked more like a mirror with a projection behind it - flickered on, surrounded by large bulbs, and Devin saw himself. Staring back at him was the picture that was taken when he walked in.

The picture stayed on screen only for a moment as it was, before it began to change. Devin’s big grin faded into a stern grimace, and the picture began to stretch taller, wider, ripples in the animation swapping out Devin’s clothes for a uniform. Devin watched himself age to manhood,

his physique bulking up into a bodybuilder's, even his stance changing to rigid military posture. The light shifted - it looked like it clicked off, leaving just the mirror, but that was impossible, because the man was still there in the place of Devin's picture. The mirror showed the biggest, scariest drill instructor Devin could possibly imagine.

"Heh, yeah, imagine," Devin mumbled, and his eyes widened in shock when he saw the man in the reflection say it too. He took a step forward, and so did the big, middle-aged muscleman. He took his hat off and saw his graying flat top, so stiff and precise that a book could be set on it without bending a single strand. "Holy shit," he croaked. It began to dawn on him what was going on...

...the most insane AR he'd ever seen! He wasn't even wearing a headset, and yet this thing was able to depict the brawniest, manliest drill instructor on earth as his avatar. It was so real that his hat looked like a real drill instructor's campaign cover, and his hands felt tough and weathered - like they'd lifted weights and been in fights. Devin couldn't imagine himself ever being in a fight, but he could imagine the unit staring back at him being in one, easy. Or maybe not, because no one would cross this guy. One look would send any assailant running for the hills. Devin practiced the glare, knitting his thick eyebrows together, thrusting his jaw forward. Damn, that was one big jaw. He wished it was really his.

He straightened up and passed his hat between his large hands. "It's me, boys," he said, gasping in shock when he realized this room could make his voice sound like the froggy bass of a seasoned marine. "It's me, Devin," he said, imagining himself walking into one of his friends' basement in this body - in this uniform - and scaring the shit out of them. That'd be a good joke.

Devin leaned in and inspected his face more. It had so many angles and crags. Like the side of a mountain. Just rocks and boulders jutting out everywhere. Just like this body! He flexed his chest and grinned at the buttons straining to hold in his pecs. "Not going to push me around anymore, fellas," he smiled, but the smile didn't seem natural on this face. The muscles just didn't move like that. So he said it again with a scowl, and it worked better. No one would push this man around. No one would disrespect him. Devin didn't fight with his friends, but he did sometimes feel like they didn't take him seriously. Just like girls didn't. But this man had on a wedding band - he had a wife! "Sorry ladies, I'm taken," he said, adjusting his nuts in his pants, then letting his hand rest on his bulge. It felt huge. But of course, a man like this would have big balls and a long cock. He'd use it to please his wife and get her pregnant, or to intimidate smaller men when he was in a communal shower. Devin leered at himself as he massaged his dick through his uniform trousers. He flexed his muscles and felt them squeeze against his uniform. "You fellas don't get to boss me around. I'm the boss now. Big bad...uh..." He looked at himself. He looked like Bruce Willis but even manlier and tougher. "Big bad Bruce," he smiled. "No one fucks with Bruce."

Devin was even more impressed when he unzipped his fly and held his girthy cock in his hand, stroking it lovingly. His calloused palm felt amazing against it. He'd been craving this. "...Craven. Staff Sergeant Bruce Craven." A tough name for a tough man. Even his breathing - harsh and

jagged - was manly. Even his scent, which filled the small space. He'd never felt better about himself than in this room. Seeing his reflection as a towering, terrifying drill instructor was something he'd never thought he wanted. He wasn't born to be a marine, but Bruce Craven was. Bruce Craven was one scary son of a bitch.

He kept stroking himself and began to wonder if virtual reality could depict cum. He was already surprised it showed his genitals, and was able to depict them as convincingly belonging to a man of Bruce's size. Devin wondered if he'd get in trouble if he masturbated to completion in here, but it seemed like something Bruce would do, because Bruce was a fearless specimen of manhood. Even if Bruce was a chronic rule follower, uptight and somber, he was a man with the testosterone of a herd of bulls. He could feel it inside of himself, like bolts of lightning. Masturbating was necessary to get through the day, and he still would be recharged and ready to go when he got home to his wife.

He snorted and stomped his foot as he jerked on his big dick. This military tech was next level - this felt 100% real - heck, it was so immersive that Bruce couldn't quite recall his real name. He'd worry about that once he nutted. For now, he was relishing his chest hair bristling against his shirt, and his big muscles straining, and the sight of that manly beast about to bust - "hnnnghhh..." - he grunted as he imagined that man was really him. The respect he could instill with one look. The fear he'd strike into the hearts of young recruits... "FUCK yeah..." He stomped his foot again. It was so fucking loud and powerful. Everything about him was powerful. Big, strong Bruce-

That's what got him blowing a load all over the mirror, which he realized wasn't a video screen at the same moment that he stopped caring. Thick white spunk splattered onto his reflection, each pump pushing Bruce back up straighter and taller, until he stood emotionless in the middle of the room as his penis zipped itself back inside his pants. He looked at himself, the picture-perfect drill instructor in his immaculate uniform, shining like the barrel of a freshly polished gun.

He felt out of sorts, which angered him - any time he didn't have complete control over a situation, it made him angry. He was scowling when he emerged from the room. "Corporal Armstrong," he nodded curtly.

"Sergeant Craven."

"Can I help you with something?"

"No, I was just wondering who was in there."

"Mm." Bruce nodded without another word and clomped off toward his office. His one stop on the way happened when he noticed the slouching young man at the front desk. "STRAIGHTEN UP, PRIVATE!"

The kid sat bolt upright. Bruce smirked and wondered if the kid had pissed himself a little. But it was his job to make others do *their* jobs. He was a mean son of a bitch, but he wasn't cruel. And he took his creed very seriously, running through it in his mind as he headed into his new life.

These recruits are entrusted to my care. I will train them to the best of my ability. I will develop them into smartly disciplined, physically fit, basically trained Marines, thoroughly indoctrinated in love of Corps and country. I will demand of them, and demonstrate by my own example, the highest standards of personal conduct, morality and professional skill.