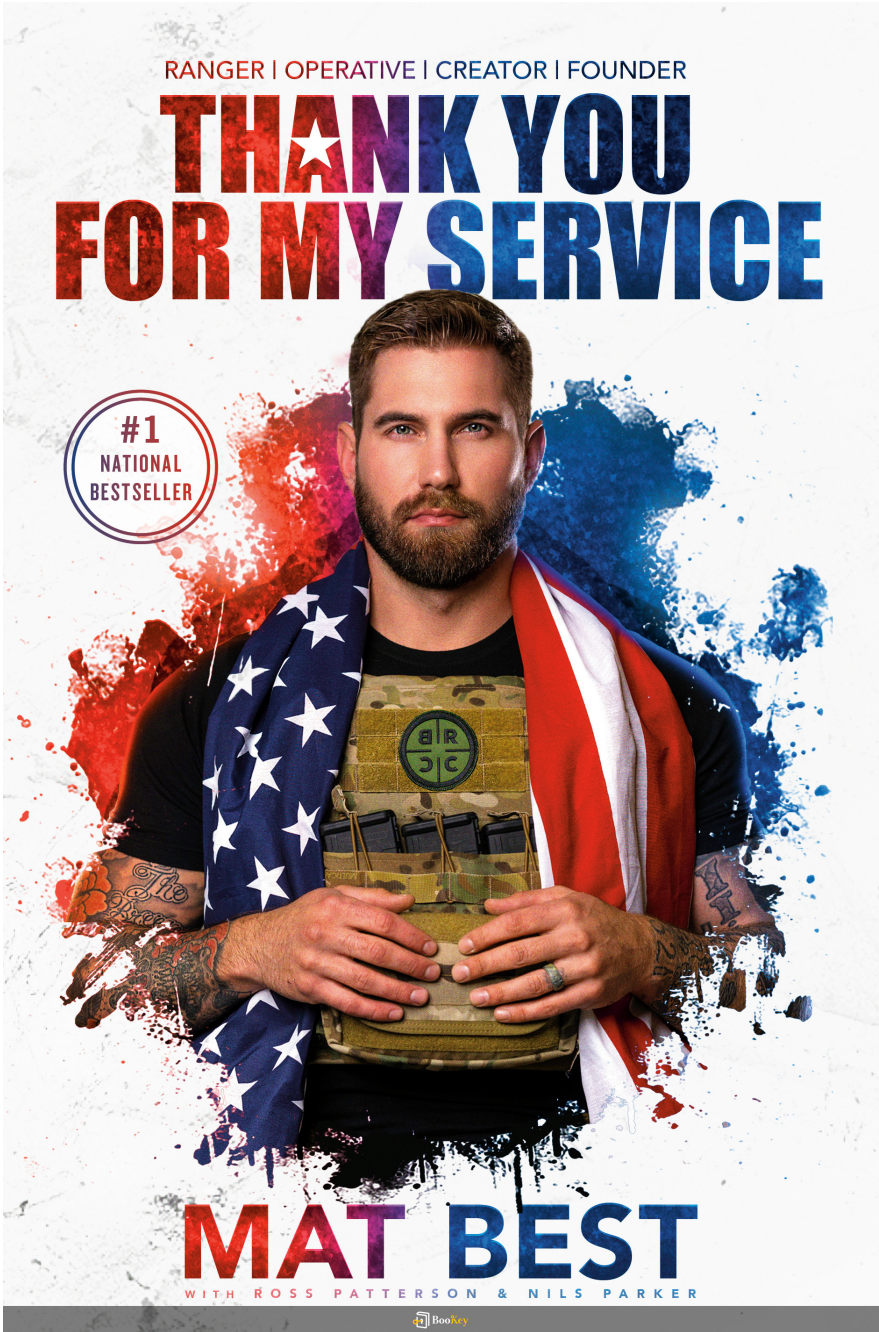


Thank You For My Service PDF (Limited Copy)

Mat Best



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Thank You For My Service Summary

Behind the Laughter: A Soldier's Journey Beyond the Battlefield

Written by New York Central Park Page Turners Books Club

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About the book

In "Thank You for My Service," Mat Best, a former Army Ranger with five tours of duty, blends humor and heartfelt reflections in his military memoir. The book opens with Best's origins, detailing his early life and the path that led him to enlist in the Army. As readers follow him from the military training grounds of Columbus, Georgia, to the gritty streets of Ramadi, Best recounts his intense experiences as a special operations soldier, bringing the unique challenges and high-octane adrenaline of combat to life.

He shares gripping anecdotes that highlight the camaraderie, sacrifice, and thrills of serving in elite military units, but he doesn't shy away from discussing the darker aspects of combat. Best confronts the emotional struggles many veterans face upon returning home, including the quest for identity and the challenge of reintegration into civilian life. Through his candid storytelling, he offers insight into the mindsets of soldiers facing these transitions, emphasizing the dual nature of their experiences where pride in service meets the complexities of post-combat adjustment.

Throughout the memoir, Best employs his trademark humor to balance the gravity of these topics, making his insights accessible to both veterans and civilians alike. His reflections serve as a comforting reminder that healing and forging a new path after service are universal journeys shared by many. Ultimately, "Thank You for My Service" is not just a military account, but a

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poignant exploration of resilience, identity, and the enduring bonds formed through shared experiences in the line of duty.

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About the author

In "Thank You for My Service," Mat Best, a former U.S. Army Ranger, takes readers on a journey through the complexities of military life and the challenges veterans face when reintegrating into civilian society. Known for his humorous yet poignant storytelling, Best blends personal anecdotes with broader reflections on service and sacrifice.

The memoir opens with Best's experiences during his time as an Army Ranger, where he describes the intense camaraderie formed among soldiers, the adrenaline of combat, and the gritty reality of life in the military. He also introduces the rigorous training that Rangers undergo, highlighting the mental and physical resilience required to endure such challenges. Through these narratives, Best captures the unique culture of the military, illustrating both the pride and the burdens that accompany service.

As the narrative progresses, Best begins to delve into the transition to civilian life—a shift that can be jarring and confusing for many veterans. He candidly shares his struggles with adapting to a world that often feels foreign, where the routine and purpose found in the military are replaced with uncertainty. This section highlights the psychological toll of deployment, such as PTSD, and underscores the importance of mental health awareness within the veteran community.

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Intertwined with his serious reflections are moments of humor that Best employs as a coping mechanism. His comedic outlook serves not only as entertainment but also as a means to connect with readers, emphasizing how humor can be a vital tool in resilience. This lightheartedness resonates particularly with fellow veterans, who often face similar challenges but can find relief in shared laughter.

As Best navigates this transition, he also emphasizes the significance of building a community among veterans. He underscores the power of support networks and how reconnecting with fellow service members can foster healing and understanding. Throughout the memoir, he portrays himself not just as an individual grappling with his own experiences, but as part of a larger narrative of veterans seeking to reclaim their identity after service.

Ultimately, Mat Best's memoir is not just a personal reflection; it is a broader commentary on the veteran experience. By skillfully blending humor with poignant insights, he invites readers—both veterans and civilians alike—to empathize with the complexities of life after service while advocating for the support and understanding veterans need. Best's work stands as a testament to the resilience of those who have served and the importance of community in overcoming adversity.

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Chapter 1 Summary: Does Anyone Need a Hand?

In Chapter 1, titled "Does Anyone Need a Hand?", Mat Best shares his journey as an Army Ranger and later as a private contractor, detailing nearly ten years spent in various combat zones. Drawing inspiration from veterans, including his father, Best reflects on the profound pride he felt in donning the military uniform. This sense of pride is intertwined with the deep camaraderie he forged with fellow soldiers—a bond he desperately seeks to recreate after leaving the Army.

Throughout the chapter, Best explores the notion of building relationships through entrepreneurship, specifically by prioritizing the hiring of veterans. He expresses a longing for the adrenaline-fueled excitement of combat and the profound sense of purpose that came with serving his country. A pivotal story unfolds as he recounts a highly intense mission in Iraq, where he and his squad encounter insurgents, shedding light on the high-stakes atmosphere of warfare. This mission highlights tactical decisions made in real-time during an ambush.

In one gripping encounter, Best illustrates the chaotic reality of combat as they confront enemy combatants. His recounting includes moments of gallows humor—a coping mechanism during the madness of war—such as a stark moment involving a severed arm, revealing both the dark absurdities and the harsh truths of combat situations.

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Overall, Best skillfully captures the complexities of military life, emphasizing the significance of camaraderie and the psychological toll that war inflicts. Through a blend of vivid storytelling, humor, and stark reality, he conveys the duality of war—the camaraderie shared among soldiers and the dark, unpredictable moments that define their experiences.

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Chapter 2 Summary: From Green Day to Green Thumb

Chapter 2: From Green Day to Green Thumb

In this chapter, we delve into the formative years of Mat Best, the youngest of six siblings in a military household in Santa Barbara, California. While Mat initially felt disconnected from military life during his high school years, preferring to explore interests in music, science, and business, he also pursued extracurricular activities that would become instrumental to his personal development. His participation in the botany club and an emo band—both pursuits he humorously describes as unconventional for a young man—highlight his diverse passions.

Although Mat's interests might have seemed frivolous, they equipped him with essential life skills. He learned the importance of teamwork and entrepreneurship in efforts to fund a greenhouse project for the botany club by selling hamburgers. While school authorities ultimately shut down their initiative, the experience underscored a resilience and resourcefulness that would serve him well later.

A pivotal moment in Mat's life occurred during Family Day at Camp Pendleton, coinciding tragically with the events of September 11, 2001. Attending his brothers' graduation from Marine Corps boot camp that day,

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the gravity of the 9/11 attacks began to reshape Mat's perception of military service, marking a significant turning point for his family.

Amid this turmoil, Mat's brother Alan faced his own battle—struggling against Stage 2 Hodgkin's lymphoma while clinging to his military aspirations. Alan's steadfast spirit, characterized by his refusal to complain despite his illness, inspired Mat profoundly, showcasing a remarkable resilience that would influence Mat's views on strength and loyalty.

As the U.S. ramped up military efforts in response to 9/11, the atmosphere surrounding the Marine graduations transformed. New Marines were acutely aware that their lives were on the brink of a major upheaval. Despite his diagnosis, Alan's determination did not waver; he navigated through bureaucratic red tape to secure deployment to Kuwait. His relentless pursuit of service, even in the face of significant personal challenges, motivated Mat and reframed the concept of duty within him.

By the chapter's conclusion, Mat reflects on the impactful bravery of his brothers, Alan and Davis, recognizing how their unwavering commitment to serving their country ignited a sense of duty within him. This deep-seated admiration transformed Mat's perspective, ultimately guiding him toward a path of military service—seeking not only to honor his brothers' sacrifices but to forge his own identity within a mission greater than himself.

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Chapter 3 Summary: You're in the Army, Now?!

In Chapter 3, titled "You're in the Army, Now?!", Mat Best grapples with the pressures of sibling rivalry as the youngest member of a family rooted in military tradition. Feeling the weight of expectation from his Marine brothers, he dedicates himself to understanding the mindset and strategies of warfare by immersing himself in military culture, including watching war movies and studying esteemed military figures.

Though his family anticipates his enlistment in the Marines, Mat opts for the Army, drawn by the prospects of Special Operations. During his preparation, he engages in discussions with friends about the best ways to prepare for military life, initially joining the Civil Air Patrol. However, he soon recognizes that this organization doesn't align with his ambitions, prompting him to refocus on rigorous physical training instead.

A significant hurdle arises as Mat seeks his parents' approval for his enlistment. After rehearsing his arguments, he is taken aback when his mother swiftly endorses his decision. In contrast, his father, a veteran himself, addresses the harsh realities of warfare, ensuring Mat comprehends the serious implications of his choice. Despite his initial concerns, Mat's father's eventual acceptance comes from recognizing his son's unwavering determination.



This chapter encapsulates Mat's journey of self-discovery and the complexities of gaining parental support as he endeavors to forge his own path in the military. It highlights Mat's resolve to distinguish himself from his brothers while preparing for the challenges that lie ahead in his military career.

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Chapter 4: Baby, It's Cold Outside, So Please Piss on Me

Chapter 4 Summary: Baby, It's Cold Outside, So Please Piss on Me

Introduction to Ranger Battalion Training

Becoming a Ranger in the U.S. Army begins with an 11x Option 40 contract, which guarantees a slot in Ranger training. This journey starts with fifteen weeks at One-Station Unit Training (OSUT), followed by Airborne School and the Ranger Assessment and Selection Program (RASP). The setting for much of this grueling training is Fort Benning, Georgia, humorously depicted as one of the most challenging military bases due to its tough conditions and rigorous program.

OSUT Experience

OSUT merges basic and advanced infantry training into a cohesive experience designed to foster camaraderie among recruits. This program consists of ten weeks of basic training, where soldiers learn essential military skills, followed by five weeks of advanced training that builds on these fundamentals. Although the training is intense and demanding, it plays a vital role in preparing young infantrymen for the challenges ahead and instills a sense of teamwork and brotherhood.

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Airborne School Challenges

After OSUT, the journey continues at Airborne School, where recruits must complete a five-mile run in under forty minutes and successfully jump from a plane. This phase emphasizes the mental fortitude required to face fears, particularly the fear of heights, rather than merely physical prowess. The procedure for parachuting is straightforward but requires absolute trust in the parachute packer's expertise, illustrating the reliance soldiers must have on one another.

Danger and Reality of Military Training

While the author injects humor into the absurdities of Airborne training, he remains cognizant of the real risks involved, including the potential for fatal accidents during jumps. This chapter intertwines comedic elements with the more profound realities of military life, drawing attention to the high stakes of service where life and death hang in the balance.

RASP Introduction

Transitioning from Airborne School, the author faces RASP, a gauntlet designed to identify the most resilient candidates. The instructors waste no time in pushing recruits to their limits, with the training's physical and

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mental challenges intensifying almost immediately. At RASP, the pressure is relentless, forcing prospective Rangers to prove their durability and determination in life-or-death situations.

Camaraderie Under Adversity

Through demanding exercises, soldiers forge powerful bonds. A particularly humorous and poignant moment arises when the author and a fellow soldier engage in a comical act of solidarity to stay warm during a frigid exercise, showcasing the depth of their camaraderie that is formed under extreme stress.

Conclusion of RASP and Selection

As RASP progresses, it culminates in the selection process for battalions. The author experiences a surprising yet gratifying turn of events when he is assigned to the sought-after 2/75 Ranger Regiment. This unexpected assignment signifies both a personal victory amid hardships and a reminder of the unpredictable nature of military life, underscoring the importance of resilience throughout the rigorous training journey.

In reflection, the author's trials through intense training and the experiences of camaraderie foreshadow the challenges of impending combat while creating bonds that transcend mere friendship, establishing a profound sense

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of brotherhood essential for soldiers facing the realities of war.

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Chapter 5 Summary: A Soldier Comes Home

Chapter 5: A Soldier Comes Home

In this chapter, Mat Best reflects on the complexities of returning home after his first combat deployment in Mosul. Having recently graduated from the Ranger Assessment and Selection Program (RASP), Mat grapples with his limited combat experience as a new private. Despite pulling security while seasoned soldiers led missions, he feels a mixture of frustration and determination, eager to apply his rigorous training in real-world scenarios.

As he embarks on block leave, a military-mandated break designed to alleviate stress and facilitate family reunions, Mat travels to Santa Barbara. This period of respite is particularly significant for him after the rigors of deployment. He looks forward to reconnecting with his family and old friends, his heart filled with gratitude for the comforts of home.

Upon his arrival, Mat experiences an emotional reunion with his parents, recognizing the transformation he has undergone from an awkward high school student into a more confident young adult. The prospect of reuniting with friends and peers excites him, setting the stage for her personal growth.

At a high school party, Mat is taken aback by the attention he receives,

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especially from Anna, a girl who had previously overlooked him. Their unexpected interaction underscores his newfound confidence, culminating in their departure together—a remarkable turnaround from his high school days when he felt invisible to peers.

Amidst this unfolding social life, Mat encounters unique challenges. He humorously recounts a particularly awkward moment while attempting to buy condoms, reminding readers of the often comical difficulties of navigating old friendships and dating. Despite his self-consciousness, he relishes the excitement of his newfound allure and the validation that comes from overcoming his past struggles.

As he continues to reflect on his identity, Mat recognizes how his military experiences have reshaped him. The essence of his transformation is highlighted by the attention he now garners from women, which feeds his sense of accomplishment and emerging masculinity tied to overcoming real challenges.

The chapter takes a lighthearted turn during a meeting with Meg, a high school acquaintance. Their moments of flirtation are hilariously interrupted by her brother, prompting Mat to navigate the absurdity of the situation with humor, showcasing his adaptability and newfound confidence.

As the chapter concludes, Mat ponders the evolution of his identity and the

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exhilaration that comes with pursuing his dreams. Through his military experiences and personal growth, he has prepared himself for future challenges but remains aware that the path to achieving dreams can lead to unexpected and sometimes humorous realities.

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Chapter 6 Summary: Brehm and Barraza

Chapter 6: Brehm and Barraza - Summary

In this chapter, Mat Best shares his experiences during his second deployment to Iraq with the 2nd Ranger Battalion, just a year after enlisting in the Army. Driven by a yearning for real combat, Mat has high hopes as he embarks on this mission.

Before heading into combat, Mat's team leader, Sergeant Dale Brehm, strengthens their bond by passing on his Ranger tab and scroll, valuable symbols of brotherhood and mentorship within the elite Ranger community. This gesture boosts Mat's confidence as they arrive in Anbar Province, where their mission is to capture or eliminate insurgents following a significant military offensive.

As the deployment unfolds, Mat's unit faces a notable shift in their operational tempo. Rather than engaging in heavy fighting, they conduct numerous raids that meet little resistance, particularly as winter approaches. This low intensity leaves Mat feeling frustrated, revealing his deep-seated desire for authentic warfare experiences.

The narrative takes a turn when Mat's unit is redeployed to Ramadi, a

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hotspot of insurgent activity. Here, Mat experiences the true dangers of conflict as fighters show readiness to confront American forces directly. An operation highlights the high stakes of their mission, culminating in an unexpected IED explosion that injures several members of Mat's unit.

Tension escalates during a mission targeting a transient house used by foreign fighters. Mat faces a pivotal moment when he hesitates, opting to let an enemy combatant surrender instead of engaging. This decision underscores the moral complexities intrinsic to combat situations.

Tragically, the situation deteriorates into a fierce gun battle, resulting in serious injuries to both Brehm and Sergeant Ricardo Barraza. Mat's frantic efforts to assist his injured comrades illustrate the chaos and emotional turmoil of warfare.

In the aftermath, Brehm and Barraza are declared KIA (killed in action), a loss that profoundly impacts Mat. He reflects on the values of duty, comradeship, and leadership that have been instilled in him and is determined to honor their legacies while vowing to improve his leadership skills.

The chapter encapsulates the fierce reality of battle, the strong bonds formed among soldiers, and the deep losses that accompany military service. Mat Best's reflections convey the emotional weight of his experiences and the

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lasting influence of fallen comrades on his life and purpose.

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Chapter 7 Summary: Tab on the Shoulder, Tats on the Sleeve

Chapter 7: Tab on the Shoulder

In this chapter, the author delves into the demanding experience of Ranger School, a prestigious and grueling two-month leadership training that all officers and non-commissioned officers in the 75th Ranger Regiment must complete. The training is divided into three challenging phases: Darby, Mountain, and Florida, each designed to progressively cultivate essential skills and resilience crucial for effective military leadership.

Experiencing the Pain of Darby Phase

The Darby phase presents a strenuous "crawl" dynamic, where instructors employ tough love and exacting measures to prepare trainees for the realities of combat. Deprived of sleep and subjected to harsh verbal assessments, the author reflects on his apprehension as he embarks on this phase equipped with previous combat experience but burdened by the haunting memories of past losses. This internal struggle underpins the demanding nature of the training, showcasing how vulnerability coexists with the pursuit of strength.

Challenges in Florida Phase

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Transitioning to the Florida phase, the author describes an environment filled with oppressive humidity and discomfort akin to swamps, further heightening the challenges faced during training. He humorously recounts the unpleasant circumstances and overwhelming demands placed on him and his fellow trainees. As the days drag on, he develops painful sores on his arms, initially dismissing them as mere mosquito bites, only for them to worsen as training progresses.

Medical Misdiagnosis and Struggles

With his condition deteriorating, the author's visit to medical personnel leads to frustration, as they mistakenly diagnose his sores as spider bites, leaving him feeling helpless and discouraged about the possibility of being recycled back to the beginning of the program. Fortunately, a fellow Ranger medic eventually recognizes the issue as bullous impetigo, providing clarity amidst the confusion, but not without the author enduring significant mental and physical challenges along the way.

Emotional Resilience and Friendship

Throughout these trials, the bond he shares with fellow trainee Trey becomes a pivotal source of emotional support. Despite the competitive atmosphere, they find strength in their camaraderie, demonstrating how

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friendships can flourish under extreme stress. Trey's eventual graduation elicits a blend of pride and frustration in the author, who must confront his ongoing physical challenges, amplifying the emotional complexity of their experiences.

Conclusion and Personal Transformation

Upon finally graduating several weeks later, the author reflects on his profound personal transformation, underscored by the scars that mark his journey through Ranger School. In a moment of levity, he decides to commemorate these scars with tattoos, each symbolizing the arduous experiences he endured and paying homage to fallen friends. This decision encapsulates not only his resilience but also a poignant recognition of the bonds formed during this rigorous rite of passage, solidifying his commitment to honor those who sacrificed for their country.

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Chapter 8: Head and Shoulders Above the Rest

Chapter 8 Summary: Head and Shoulders Above the Rest

In this chapter, Mat Best offers a candid look at the complexities and frustrations inherent in military operations, particularly focusing on the bureaucratic obstacles that soldiers face after combat missions. He highlights how, even after adrenaline-fueled successes, troops are often burdened with the meticulous task of documenting enemy casualties, which he finds absurd given their primary role as warriors.

Mat recounts a specific mission where his platoon is reactivated for a vehicle interdiction operation. The situation quickly escalates into a grim discovery when they come across the body of a high-value target. Without the appropriate identification tools, Mat and his partner, Danny Fulton, are compelled to employ improvised—and grotesque—methods to collect DNA evidence. This darkly humorous approach underscores their struggle to balance the harsh realities of war with the absurdity of military protocol.

The narrative takes a macabre turn as Mat and Danny face the unsettling task of dismembering charred remains in a race against time. Their ability to maintain a sense of humor amid such grim circumstances serves as a coping mechanism, contrasting sharply with the previous high-octane moments of

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their missions. Ultimately, they succeed in retrieving crucial evidence, but complications arise when they return to their commanding officers, navigating through military red tape which feels increasingly ludicrous. The chapter concludes with Mat reflecting on the inherent absurdity of their situation, blending humor with the heavy weight of their duties in a war-torn landscape.

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Chapter 9 Summary: I Am the LAW

Chapter 9: I Am the LAW

In this chapter, Mat delves into his role as the platoon master breacher during a crucial deployment in Iraq, where he is responsible for managing a diverse array of ammunition and explosives stored in a large Conex container. This role not only heightens Mat's sense of control but also injects excitement into his duties, as he oversees weaponry that could significantly impact their operations.

As the deployment progresses, the operational tempo escalates, creating an environment where both Mat and his squad leader, Danny Fulton, adopt a reckless attitude. This shift leads them to prioritize a sense of daring and thrill over essential safety protocols, resulting in increasingly audacious maneuvers with munitions.

A pivotal moment occurs when Fulton hands Mat an outdated thermobaric LAW (light anti-armor weapon) before a nightly mission. Despite Mat's reservations about its suitability for their current operations, military hierarchy leaves him little choice but to comply. The LAW, which is typically reserved for more intense engagements, symbolizes the overzealousness and impulsive behavior that has taken root within the squad.



As night falls, Mat leads his squad through challenging terrain, weighed down by the LAW. The mission takes a dire turn when they come under enemy fire, thrusting Mat into a harrowing engagement. In a moment of instinctual action, he kills an enemy fighter, which escalates the firefight and propels the squad into a series of intense combat encounters.

Amidst the chaos, Mat finds himself unexpectedly tasked with using the LAW, despite his initial skepticism. Driven by adrenaline, he races to the front, prepares the weapon, and fires with remarkable accuracy, successfully obliterating an enemy stronghold. This moment not only highlights Mat's newfound competence but also underscores the unpredictable and frenetic nature of combat, where even the inexperienced can achieve incredible feats under pressure.

Post-mission, Mat grapples with a blend of triumph and the weight of their destructive actions. He feels an urgent desire to share his experience with Fulton, fully aware that a friendly repartee awaits. The chapter encapsulates the tumultuous nature of warfare, the inherent responsibilities that weigh on soldiers, and the unique camaraderie that emerges in the face of danger, all while reflecting the high stakes and emotional complexities of their experiences.

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Chapter 10 Summary: Iraqi Rave Party

In Chapter 10 of Mat Best's narrative, the author recounts his time on a two-week combat search and rescue (CSAR) rotation with an Air Force Pararescue team in Iraq. This experience illustrates the unpredictable nature of military life, where calm moments can abruptly transition into high-stakes missions.

Best begins by elucidating the CSAR team's critical roles. Rangers secure crash sites while Pararescue jumpers, known as PJs, provide essential medical care. This leads to a lighthearted analogy where Best humorously compares suiting up for CSAR missions, where threats are unclear, to "putting on a condom to have sex with a blow-up doll," emphasizing the absurdity of the situation.

On the fourth night of his rotation, amidst a leisurely video game session, Best receives the call to respond to a downed drone. Though initially frustrated by the interruption of his downtime, he quickly readies himself for action, embracing his role with characteristic humor. He amusingly prepares explosives, adhering to the philosophy that having "plenty" is better than "not enough."

As the team attempts to secure the crash site, they face unexpected delays caused by a slow-to-respond Quick Reaction Force (QRF), which struggles

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to find their location. Best's frustration with their navigational ineptitude leads to comedic exchanges, highlighting the challenges faced in the field.

In a creative attempt to guide the QRF's lost Humvees to their position, Best uses ChemLights to signal them. This initiative results in a comical scene where he jumps around flamboyantly, combining military seriousness with a whimsical 'rave' undertone, further accentuating the chaos and absurdity of the moment.

Once the QRF, accompanied by a National Guard unit, finally arrives, the team prepares to detonate the downed drone. Filled with confidence and a touch of humor, Best rigs the drone with explosives, resulting in a spectacular explosion that metaphorically revitalizes the surrounding community.

As the helicopters come back to extract them, Best reflects on the transformation of his team's image within the military. In an instant, they shift from being ordinary soldiers to figures of admiration, sparking feelings of pride and significance. Humorously, he downplays the "hero" label, juxtaposing these moments of valor with his own struggles, like failing to conquer the video game Guitar Hero.

Ultimately, this chapter presents a vivid tapestry of the chaotic, humorous, and surreal experiences that define military operations, capturing the

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camaraderie and absurd realities faced by soldiers in combat.

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Chapter 11 Summary: Balad. James Balad.

Chapter 11: Balad

High School vs. Military Deployment

Mat Best begins his reflections by drawing an intriguing parallel between the excitement and camaraderie of his senior year in high school and the intense experiences of his fifth deployment as a Ranger in Iraq. Senior year is often idealized as a pinnacle of youthful freedom and adventure, filled with lasting friendships and a vibrant social life. Similarly, as Mat approaches the conclusion of his military contract, he feels an exhilarating sense of empowerment and camaraderie among his fellow soldiers, reminding him of that quintessential high school experience.

Transition to Balad

In June 2008, Mat's deployment leads him to Balad, Iraq, where he quickly immerses himself in the rhythm of high-stakes military operations. The initial sense of excitement rapidly escalates into a grueling tempo of intense combat missions. Utilizing aerial assets extensively, Mat finds himself in situations reminiscent of the explosive scenes often portrayed in war films, where danger looms at every turn.

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Brotherhood and Understanding

Throughout these missions, Mat underscores the deep, unspoken bond he shares with his comrades, particularly with Fulton, a trusted friend. Together, they adopt a mindset centered on their team's safety, pushing themselves to the limit in the heat of battle. This bond is fortified by the harrowing lessons they've learned from fallen comrades, instilling a profound sense of responsibility and urgency in their actions.

Life at Balad

Contrasting the harsh realities of many previous deployments, Balad presents itself as a surprisingly pleasant base. Mat revels in the comfortable living conditions and quality food available, creating a relaxed environment that encourages a sense of normalcy among soldiers. This comfort stands in stark relief to the grueling conditions they've encountered elsewhere, fostering a carefree atmosphere that sometimes leads to overindulgence.

Romantic Interests

Amidst the conflict, Mat's attention is caught by Wendy, a captivating presence he meets at the pool. Their flirtation reflects the unique dynamics of deployment, where the stresses of military life blend seamlessly with

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moments of personal connection. This interaction not only highlights the allure of romantic possibilities but also Mat's musings on the world of Special Operations and the fantasies surrounding that lifestyle.

Mortar Alarms and Combat

However, this sense of safety is periodically shattered by the piercing sound of mortar alarms, which serve as stark reminders of the ever-present danger surrounding them. These jarring disruptions force Mat to reconcile the fragility of peaceful moments with the relentless threat of combat, illustrating the delicate balance soldiers must maintain between their personal lives and the demands of military duty.

Friendship and Future

As Mat navigates his experiences in Balad, a message from a friend back home prompts him to contemplate a future beyond the military. Torn between the adrenaline and brotherhood of military life and his yearning for a more conventional existence, he grapples with the challenging prospect of reintegration into civilian life.

Decision to Not Reenlist

Ultimately, after deep reflection on his journey, Mat arrives at a significant

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crossroads: he decides against reenlisting. Recognizing the toll that military life has exacted on him, he embraces the opportunity to return home, yearning for a semblance of normalcy and the carefree young adulthood that eluded him amidst the chaos of deployment. This decision marks a poignant step in Mat's transition from soldier to civilian, embodying his desire to forge a new path in life.

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Chapter 12: Snowflakes in Los Angeles?

Chapter 12: Snowflakes in Los Angeles?

Transition from Military to Civilian Life

Mat Best's journey begins on September 13, 2008, as he leaves the structured environment of the Army, witnessing his platoon prepare for deployment while he secretly plans a night out in Los Angeles. Initially, the excitement of freedom in Southern California is intoxicating, allowing Mat to escape the rigors of military life. However, this thrill quickly gives way to the familiar shadow of self-destructive behavior that he struggles to shake off.

Cultural Disconnection

As Mat immerses himself in social scenes, he becomes disheartened by the superficiality and ignorance displayed by many young Angelenos. Their dismissive attitude toward military service frustrates him, as he attempts to share his experiences only to be met with vapid responses. The contrast between their carefree lives and his combat experience showcases the cultural divide, leaving Mat feeling isolated and misunderstood.

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College Expectations vs. Reality

Seeking a renewed sense of purpose, Mat enrolls at California State University, Northridge, using the educational benefits of the GI Bill designed to assist veterans. On his first day, anxiety fills him as he walks onto campus, grappling with doubts about whether the academic environment will truly relate to his lifetime of real-world challenges. He questions if he can connect with a generation shielded from the harsher realities of life.

Concerns about Student Perspectives

As Mat observes his peers, unease grows within him; their obliviousness and entitlement strike a chord. It becomes evident they live in a bubble, untouched by the dangers he faced in the military. This realization fosters a deepening disdain for their lack of respect and awareness, highlighting the chasm between their trivial concerns and his deeply forged experiences.

Job Search and New Opportunities

In need of financial stability, Mat turns to Craigslist, where he finds work in Executive Protection. His military expertise allows him to secure this position, but he soon feels unchallenged and frustrated by the mundane tasks he is assigned. Transitioning from high-stakes operations to guarding

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wealthy clients leaves him feeling underwhelmed, exacerbating feelings of directionlessness.

Struggles with Identity and Purpose

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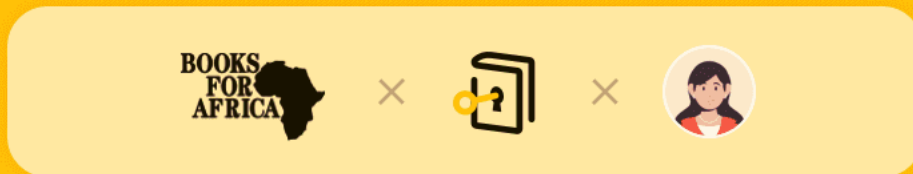




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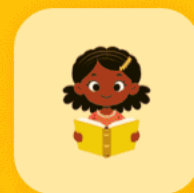
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Chapter 13 Summary: Party Patrol

Chapter 13: Party Patrol

In this chapter, we follow Mat Best, whose last day in private security unfolds at a lavish party in Hollywood Hills. As he prepares for the event, he experiences a mix-up regarding the meeting time, setting the stage for an amusing evening.

Mat learns about a humorous "flamingo incident," involving a damaged statue that has irked the wealthy party host, Goush. Curious about the situation's absurdity, he decides to investigate further, which foreshadows the eccentric encounters awaiting him.

Upon arriving at Goush's opulent mansion, Mat is struck not only by the sheer wealth but also by his interaction with Serena, Goush's attractive assistant. Their brief, flirtatious exchange highlights the superficial glamour prevalent in the Hollywood social scene.

Meeting Goush, a character defined by his quirky behavior and indulgent lifestyle, Mat quickly realizes he is dealing with someone who enjoys the chaos of his high-society parties. Goush expresses a desire to hire Mat for handling potential disruptions at the event, specifically fights that might

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erupt among guests.

As the night wears on, Mat finds it increasingly difficult to maintain his professional distance. The vibrant atmosphere, coupled with the allure of attractive women and fine drinks, draws him into the festivities, leading him to navigate the thin line between being a security guard and a partygoer. This internal struggle highlights the conflict between his role and the fleeting pleasures of party life.

Amid the revelry, Mat confronts his own personal discontent. He reflects on the emptiness of his lifestyle, questioning his relationships and the direction of his career. This introspection contrasts with the surrounding chaos, emphasizing his growing sense of unease.

The situation escalates when Mat intervenes to break up a fight between two guests outside the pool house. This moment of confrontation not only clarifies the absurdity of the party scene but also prompts Goush to consider Mat for the security role more seriously. Mat's moral and professional dilemmas deepen as he grapples with Goush's offer.

As dawn breaks, Mat is left with feelings of confusion and disconnection, realizing that he needs to escape his current life in Los Angeles. This sense of clarity prompts a profound decision: he resolves to return home, signaling a desire for a fresh start and a search for deeper purpose beyond the chaotic

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existence he's been leading.

The chapter concludes with Mat contemplating the conversations he had with his father, reinforcing his need to redefine himself and step away from the superficialities that have characterized his life. This pivotal moment suggests a longing for stability and identity as he moves forward.

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Chapter 14 Summary: When Life Gives You an Ox, Make Oxen

Chapter 14: When Life Gives You an Ox

In the sun-soaked backdrop of Santa Barbara, Mat Best navigates the highs and lows of life after military service. His days are marked by a sense of leisure, but the nights spiral into chaos as he increasingly finds himself in bar fights. These altercations reflect his internal struggle; he yearns for peace yet feels compelled to defend his boundaries through violence.

One night, a provocative encounter with a drunken young man pushes Mat over the edge, resulting in a regrettable confrontation that leaves the instigator unconscious. Unlike the nightmares that many veterans face, Mat finds solace in dreams of war, reliving the adrenaline-fueled moments of battle that once defined him.

Amidst this tumultuous phase, Mat receives an unexpected call from Trey Bullock, a fellow Ranger. Trey suggests Mat explore contracting work, an opportunity that ignites a glimmer of hope within him. This path seems to offer a chance to reclaim his sense of belonging and purpose. Motivated, Mat commits to preparing for the stringent physical assessments that come with this new vocation.

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His training journey is intense, involving a rigorous physical fitness test and scenarios designed to hone combat skills. In this competitive atmosphere, Mat shines, especially during firearms training, showcasing a level of proficiency that earns him respect among his peers.

As he reconnects with former military comrades and engages in demanding drills, Mat is reminded of the strong bonds formed during his service. The camaraderie rekindles his spirit, providing a renewed sense of identity. After the exerting sessions, the group indulges in moments of revelry, each member's distinct personality adding flavor to their interactions.

However, a comedic twist arises when Mat and his friends discover that the women they met at the bar had ulterior motives, seeking financial gain rather than genuine connections. This revelation strikes a humorous chord amid the awkwardness, highlighting the complexities of nightlife.

As Mat completes the demanding selection process for contracting work, he feels a wave of gratitude wash over him. The chapter closes on an uplifting note, as Mat acknowledges his readiness to embrace a meaningful and action-packed career once again. In this way, he takes a step towards finding purpose in a world that often feels disconnected from the brotherhood he misses.

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Key Themes:

- The challenges of civilian life for veterans and the struggle for reintegration.
- The significance of camaraderie among those who have served in the military.
- The tension between personal ethics and the chaotic nightlife experiences.
- The search for purpose and community within the realm of private contracting.

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Chapter 15 Summary: The Hundred-Foot War

In Chapter 15 of "Thank You for My Service," titled "The Hundred-Foot War," Mat Best offers an insightful and humorous look into the often-overlooked realities of contracting in a war zone, sharply contrasting the glamorized portrayals seen in media. Although there are moments of excitement and danger, Best reveals the cumbersome bureaucratic processes and extensive red tape that characterize contracting work. These elements add a layer of complexity to everyday tasks, often making the experience less adventurous and more routine.

Best humorously recounts a personal anecdote involving a romantic interest, affectionately dubbed "Libra." Despite the strict regulations against fraternizing with colleagues, he finds himself drawn into a clandestine relationship with her. The chapter captures the complications and comedic misfires that arise from attempting to keep their romance secret in an environment where everyone knows each other's business. The intimate setting, shared by a small group of contracted workers, amplifies the challenge of maintaining discretion.

Further complicating matters, Best introduces another character, "Scorpio," who inadvertently creates a love triangle. This situation exacerbates his struggle to balance personal relationships with professional responsibilities, shedding light on the unique emotional tension present in a high-stakes

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military environment. The chapter deftly illustrates the absurdity of trying to manage these romantic entanglements within the confines of their day-to-day lives, further demonstrating the often humorous and ironic outcomes of such situations.

Amidst the levity and awkwardness, Best takes a moment to reflect on deeper themes of resilience and personal loss, inspired by his brother's battle with cancer. This introspection leads him to create a song titled "Champagne, Facebook, Problems," aimed at addressing the trivial complaints of others, especially in stark contrast to the sacrifices made by his brother and friends. Through this reflective lens, Best acknowledges that even in the chaotic and sometimes farcical moments of deployment, there can be profound lessons and emotional depth. Ultimately, Chapter 15 highlights how humor can coexist with hardship, revealing the complexities of life in a war zone while navigating love and loss.

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Chapter 16: Hey, Aren't You That Dude?

Chapter 16: Hey, Aren't You That Dude?

In this chapter, Mat Best reflects on his transformative journey into content creation, sparked by his initial hesitations about publishing his first video, "Champagne Facebook Problems." Despite feeling vulnerable as a former Army Ranger and embarrassed by the video's quality, Mat felt compelled to share his message, motivated by encouragement from friends. This leap of faith paid off, as the video resonated with viewers, leading to significant engagement and a burgeoning subscriber base on his YouTube channel, MBest11x.

Creative Growth and Initial Success

Over the next year and a half, Mat dedicated himself to experimenting with video content. His early works, like "Exploding Bear!!" and "How to Pick Up Chicks," showcased his evolving style and humor. As he honed his skills and improved production quality, his audience began to expand, especially among military personnel, who found relatability and entertainment in his unique perspective.

Networking and Collaboration

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Recognizing the need for professional guidance, Mat reached out to Jarred Taylor, an experienced video producer. Their partnership proved fruitful, as Taylor helped elevate the quality of Mat's videos and broaden his audience. Their collaboration endured even during Mat's deployment in Iraq, where they continued to strategize new projects. Following his deployment, Mat traveled to El Paso to further develop their ideas, marking a significant step in his creative journey.

Growing Notoriety in the Military Community

As Mat's videos gained traction, his popularity surged, particularly within military installations. However, this newfound fame brought challenges; he struggled to maintain a low profile necessary for operational security during his deployments. Interactions with fans began to overshadow his ability to operate discreetly, prompting him to reevaluate how he engaged with admirers and the implications of his growing public persona.

Recognition and Validation

Within the military community, Mat's work continued to receive recognition, further validating his creative endeavors. One meaningful encounter involved members of his former Ranger Battalion expressing their gratitude for his videos, reinforcing the impact his content had on their lives.

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This affirmation not only boosted Mat's confidence but also ignited the realization that creating content could evolve into a legitimate career.

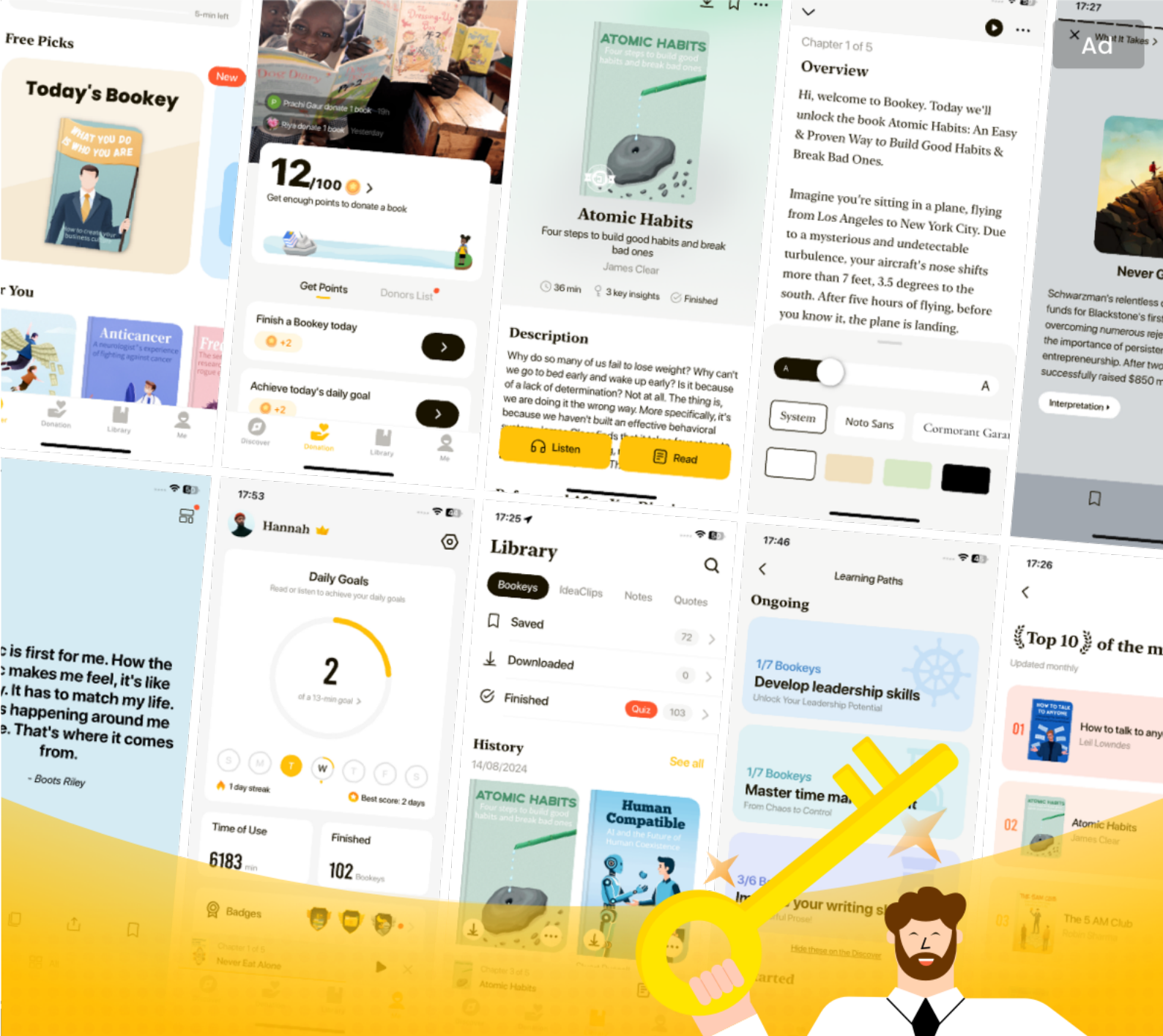
Conclusion: Balancing Dual Careers

As he navigated the complexities of balancing his contracting work with his aspirations in content creation, Mat faced uncertainties about his future. The chapter concludes with a pivotal revelation: perhaps he could pursue content creation full-time, marking a decisive turning point in his transition from a military background to becoming a celebrated figure in the digital landscape. This shift underscored his growing belief in the potential of his creative voice and its relevance in the broader military community and beyond.

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Chapter 17 Summary: Shirts & Shots & Shows & Service

Chapter 17 Summary: Shirts, Shots, Shows, & Service

In this chapter, Mat Best reflects on his post-military journey alongside co-founder Jarred, highlighting their transition from creating online content to building a meaningful business. Recognizing the power of their YouTube and social media presence, they sought to reshape the narrative surrounding veterans. Instead of focusing solely on issues like PTSD, Best aimed to celebrate the camaraderie and joy often found in military life, emphasizing that many veterans feel gratitude for their service rather than victimhood.

Building a Message and a Business

To manifest this vision, Best and Jarred launched Article 15 Clothing, a T-shirt brand that resonated with their audience from the start. The business not only showcased the unity within the military community but also served as a springboard for additional ventures, including Leadslingers Spirits, a whiskey company, and a podcast called Drinkin' Bros. These projects reinforced their commitment to portraying positive veteran experiences in popular culture.

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From Ideas to Reality

An unexpected yet transformative idea emerged when Best and his team considered producing a film. Engaging with their audience and assessing interest, they ventured into making *Range 15*, a unique blend of comedy and military themes. The film's success was remarkable, becoming one of the most significant crowdfunding projects of its era and proving that there was a substantial market for narratives that celebrated rather than stigmatized veterans.

Entrepreneurship and Growth

As Best navigated the complexities of entrepreneurship, he confronted challenges inherent in managing a growing team. He realized that not all veterans are naturally suited for entrepreneurial roles, prompting him to adopt a pragmatic approach to leadership. With a renewed focus on accountability and professional standards, Best emphasized the importance of fostering a culture of responsibility among his partners and employees.

Conclusion

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This chapter encapsulates Mat Best's evolution from a veteran with a passion for humor and storytelling to a committed entrepreneur leading a veteran-centered business. His reflections underscore the multifaceted identities of veterans, contrasting societal perceptions with the realities of civilian life. Ultimately, Best's journey serves as a testament to the potential for growth and success among veterans, encouraging the acknowledgment of their diverse capabilities in the post-military world.

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Chapter 18 Summary: By Veterans, for Veterans

Chapter 18 Summary

Introduction to Business Transition

In this chapter, Mat Best reflects on a decisive moment in his life that redirected his career and entrepreneurial aspirations. He introduces Evan Hafer, a former Green Beret whose proposal for a business collaboration ignites a transformative journey for Best.

The Coffee Venture Begins

While stationed in Afghanistan, Best learns of Hafer's interest in partnering with him in the coffee industry. Despite his inexperience in this field, Best is intrigued by Hafer's home-based coffee operation, which inspires them to create a special coffee blend, aptly named Freedom Roasters Coffee.

Formation of Black Rifle Coffee Company

By late 2014, this collaboration blossoms into the officially named Black Rifle Coffee Company. This venture embodies not just a business endeavor but also a heartfelt commitment to the veteran community, illustrating a

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shared mission of service and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Rapid Growth and Fulfillment

As 2015 unfolds, Black Rifle Coffee Company experiences rapid expansion. Best finds immense satisfaction in crafting products that resonate deeply within the military community. His partnership with Hafer solidifies as they share core values of teamwork and dedication, even as Best continues to manage contracting work that often keeps him away from home.

Struggles with Transitioning

Amidst the success of their growing company, Best grapples with the complex emotions tied to leaving his contracting job and the treasured camaraderie of military life. He vividly recalls the challenges of reintegrating into civilian life after his deployments, confronting feelings of anxiety over purpose and connection.

A Brush with Danger

A pivotal deployment experience brings Best face to face with mortality, prompting him to reassess his life choices. This brush with danger underscores the fragility of life and ignites his desire to prioritize safety and meaning over reckless thrills.

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Decision to Commit Fully

Following a horseback riding accident that results in a broken arm, Best makes the courageous decision to fully dedicate himself to Black Rifle Coffee rather than returning to contracting. This choice marks a critical turning point, allowing him to embrace his new role and commit to nurturing the business alongside Hafer and Jarred.

Personal Growth and New Beginnings

The chapter wraps up with Best reflecting on his emotional journey as he builds the company, highlighting milestones including his marriage and a renewed sense of purpose. He expresses deep gratitude for his military past and honors the sacrifices of his fellow service members, emphasizing his aspiration to inspire future generations of veterans.

Conclusion

Chapter 18 encapsulates themes of transformation, courage, and the quest for meaningful purpose in civilian life following military service. Best's journey to establish a business rooted in community support and veteran advocacy exemplifies his commitment to fostering connections and inspiring others.

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