

# **Jeopardy Pass**

**Raising Cain #1**

**Guy Venture**

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## **DEDICATION**

To my parents, Ralph and Lenora. When I was shorter than a wooden yardstick and still susceptible and feared cracks by one, they decided to relocate from crime-ridden Detroit to Ohio. It set our family on a path of great accomplishment and joy.

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## PREFACE

If you were lucky enough to be raised in Ohio in the 1950s, you were exposed to a richness and innocence that has all but disappeared.

The Ohio I remember is all the things “America the Beautiful” proclaimed wonderful — “spacious skies,” “amber waves of grain,” and “fruited plains.” It was a land of diverse manufacturing, innovation, and higher education. Jobs were plentiful in factories that produced steel, automobiles, and the rubber that kept Americans on the move. The landscape was dotted by farmlands, sparkling waterways, great lakes, schools and universities, football fields, baseball diamonds, and highways that stretched in every direction.

Ohio was the land of presidents. Seven in all — Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Harrison, McKinley, Taft, and Harding — called Ohio home. High-flying Ohioans John Glenn and

Neil Armstrong were two of my boyhood heroes.

Early in my years of formal education, I was introduced to Ohio history. Although it was provided in wide brush strokes, I always was enamored by tales of the Northwest Territory and the brave settlers who came before us. As an adult, I learned the depth of their wisdom and sacrifice. Now, I feel compelled to share it.

“Jeopardy Pass” documents a small part of Ohio history that is too precious not to share.

## PROLOGUE

Before 1800, American Colonists considered the lands that stretched beyond the Appalachian Mountains the “howling frontier.” The distant lands were uncharted and populated by more than a dozen native tribes that did not welcome white settlers. Many of the savage tribes had aligned with the British during the War of Independence, and tales of their brutality were still fresh in Colonists’ minds.

Victory and independence ignited the flames of adventure in Colonial America, which was struggling with overcrowding, indentureship, and poverty. The Northwest Territory — namely the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains and north of the Ohio River — beckoned to those with adventurous hearts.

Most of the territory was dotted with virgin forests, raging rivers, remote forts, and isolated trading posts. Few white men and

even fewer settlers had set foot in the uncharted land. There were few roads, fewer settlements, and no government west of Pennsylvania. It was the land of fur trappers, native peoples, unknown danger, and great promise.

Under British rule, migration beyond the Appalachians was forbidden. Trappers and explorers told of its wonder, though. A brash twenty-one-year-old George Washington spoke of its grandeur after he traveled north of the Ohio River in 1753. Commissioned by Lieutenant Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, Washington was sent on a diplomatic mission to dissuade French expansion into the region. It didn't work.

The future of the "vast interior" was settled via wars with the French and the British. It finally was defined by the Treaty of Paris, which surrendered a quarter-million square miles of wilderness to the fledgling United States, doubling its territorial reach.

The mighty Ohio River, long recognized as "the natural highway to the west," became the focal point of expansion long before the

U.S. Constitution was ratified by the founding fathers. The Northwest Territory quickly became the target of a handful of enterprising New Englanders, who sought expansion and speculation of the rich lands in the Northwest Territory. In 1787, The Ohio Company sought to gain control of the uncharted land north of the Ohio River. The sale of the newly-inherited land instantly became attractive to the Continental Congress, which was swimming in war debt.

The acquisition came with strict guidelines that would extend and guarantee the freedom Americans had fought so hard to claim during the long war with Great Britain. The Northwest Ordinance was adopted and became the cornerstone of all westward expansion. In essence, the guidelines set up a wilderness government even before a federal government had been ratified.

Based on the Constitution of Massachusetts, written by John Adams, the Northwest Ordinance had four basic guarantees:

1. Freedom of religion;
2. A commitment to government-



sponsored education;

3. The exclusion of slavery and servitude;  
and

4. The promise native people would not be expelled from the lands they had called home for generations.

Never before had the young nation owned land. The founding fathers, in their infinite wisdom, decided to sell rather than give it away on a first-come basis. With some tinkering, the Continental Congress accepted the terms of the sale of five million acres to the Ohio Company for \$3.5 million, which amounted to less than eight cents per acre. The sale gave the entrepreneurs the rights to the land that stretched from current-day Marietta in southeast Ohio to Huntington, West Virginia, and signaled the first western migration of American settlers.

Despite considerable foresight and good intentions, the Northwest Territory — the Ohio Country, in particular — was not settled easily. It took hard work, determination, and the willingness to endure unimaginable hardship. Only the hardy survived.



*“No colony in America was ever settled under such favorable auspices as that which has just commenced at Muskingum.”*

**George Washington,  
U.S. President**



## CHAPTER 1:

### *Caught Stealing*

“I didn’t mean it. It was an accident,” young Billy Cain lied.

Only thirteen years old at the time, Cain had been detained by Dwight “Ike” Carpenter, an iron-fisted overseer of all things that took place at Clayton Maxwell’s ranch and lumber company. Maxwell owned a large piece of land outside of Marietta in the Ohio Country and supplied lumber for the shipbuilding operations, located on the Muskingum River, and homes along the river’s shoreline.

Desperate and hungry, Cain and a friend had happened onto the Maxwell land by chance. They heard a cock crow in the early morning hours and followed the sound of livestock to a clearing where a barnyard operation existed. He immediately spotted a small pig that could soothe their hunger pains.

Hiding behind a large tree, he sharpened the point of the hickory spear he had made specifically to secure a meal. He had a flintlock pistol stuck in his belt but firing it would attract attention. A spear was his best choice. It had been a couple of days since he had secured a solid meal. Barefoot, he snuck up on the young pig and drove the spear home with little regard for anything else.

The naïve youngster didn't realize Carpenter was watching on the warm June morning of 1801.

"Don't lie to me, boy. I seen ya drive your spear into the heart of that piglet," Carpenter said, grabbing him by the collar with one hand and securing his flintlock with the other.

"It scared me when it charged out of the brush," Cain said. "It was about to take a bite out of my ankle. I had to defend myself."

"What kind of a man is afraid of a one-year-old piglet?" his captor asked.

Carpenter, a towering man, oversaw things at the ranch, which supplied everything the lumber operation needed,

from axes to horses and the wagons that carried timber to shipbuilders.

“I ain’t a man; I’m just a boy,” Cain replied, hoping if he played innocent and naïve he might get away with the transgression.

Dragging him by the collar of his shabby coat, Carpenter led the youngster away to what he felt sure would be a flogging or worse. He hoped his friend would eventually rescue him, but *Quingus* ran off the minute his friend was seized.

“B-But that pig was attacking me,” Billy argued.

“So, ya gonna blame the pig, are ya?” Carpenter said and slapped the boy on the back of the head. “Tis time for ya to learn responsibility, lad.”

“Where are ya takin’ me,” the boy argued.

“I’m taking ya to the barn so ya can work off your debt,” Carpenter said. Seconds later, Carpenter lifted him from the ground and tossed him to the sawdust floor of a huge

structure that housed a variety of cattle and livestock.

Cain landed hard, pushed a crop of auburn hair from his face, and asked, "What debt?"

"Ya worthless waif. You killed one of the master's prized pigs. You can't do that with impunity," the overseer said.

"What's that mean?"

"It means you have a debt to pay."

"I don't have any money."

"That's obvious," Carpenter said. "So, I'm gonna let ya work it off."

"Work? How? Why?"

"One of the master's prized hogs sold for five dollars recently. Being you killed one of Brutus' offspring, I reckon that is the sum of your debt. If ya work hard and do as I say, we'll be square in three months or so."

Still seated in the dust, Cain looked down at his fingers and calculated his so-called debt. Seconds later he looked up at the overseer and said, "Ya mean to pay me five cents a day?"



“Ah, so ya know your numbers,” Carpenter said. “That’s good to know. You’ll be able to keep track of the days then. Now, get at it, boy.”

“T-This isn’t fair!”

“Oh, but it is. If Max had seen your unlawful deed, he woulda hung ya from a rafter and given ya a dozen lashes. He don’t take kindly to thievery of his livestock.”

“I’m only thirteen years old,” Billy argued.

“And ya committed a manly act that requires remuneration or punishment. I’m saving you from the punishment.”

“I ain’t gonna be your slave,” Billy argued.

“Slave labor is forbidden in the Ohio Country. That’s why I’m payin’ ya a fair wage in exchange for your labor,” the overseer said.

“It doesn’t seem fair to me,” Cain said.

“What ain’t fair is killin’ somethin’ that don’t belong to ya,” the big man stated. “Consider this to be your new home, boy. I expect the stalls to be mucked daily and the

animals fed and watered. You'll get two meals a day and you can bunk down in the loft."

"What if I refuse?" Billy countered.

"Then you'll have Big John to deal with."

"Who's Big John?"

"He's in charge of everything within these walls and most of the livestock," Carpenter replied without smiling.

Before the boy knew what was happening, he was accosted by two giant hands that grabbed him from behind and hoisted him swiftly to his feet. A gravelly voice said, "I'm Big John. If you know what's good for ya, you'll do what I say, when I say it, and without any backtalk."

Startled, he looked up and saw the biggest black man he had ever set eyes upon. Billy, who weighed less than one hundred pounds and was tall for his thirteen years, suddenly felt he was surrounded by two giant oak trees. And there was no escape. His mouth dropped open as he looked from one man to the other in astonishment.

John Terry, whom everyone called Big John because of his immense size, stood six-

foot-six and weighed every bit of three hundred pounds. His shirt, stained from the previous day's work, strained to cover muscles that were beyond intimidating. He glared at the boy with eyes that were as dark as coal. His black hair was cropped short to his scalp and his bushy, black beard was speckled with gray. Like the overseer, he wasn't smiling.

Billy took a step backward and bumped into Carpenter, who stood well over six feet tall and was the opposite of the Negro who appeared out of nowhere. He had sandy hair he tied at the nape of his neck, blue eyes, a thin waist, and shoulders as wide as the Muskingum River. He was dressed from head to toe in leather and wore a dark-brown, tri-corner hat with a red feather stuck to its band.

Billy was cornered and his fate was doomed. He knew he had no other choice but to comply.

"I-I'll do whatever you say," he stammered. "J-Just don't hurt me."

Big John laughed so loud, it startled a couple of horses. They whinnied and kicked the side of their stalls. When his belly quit

shaking with laughter, the Negro said, "Work never killed nobody, boy. It won't kill you neither."

"He's all yours for the next three months, John. He owes Max for the pig he killed," Carpenter said and tossed the dead piglet at the boy's feet. "Make sure he toes the line. If he gives you any trouble, let me know. I'll show him trouble can be painful."

"Sure thing, Ike. He won't be no trouble, though, will ya boy?" the black man replied and looked down at his new charge.

Still intimidated and scared, Billy nodded his head in agreement.

"Whatcha want me to do with this pig?" John asked as Carpenter exited the barn.

"Cook him up; I'll stop by for lunch," the overseer said and laughed.

With his mouth hanging open, Billy watched his captor stomp off and worried about what would happen next. Not since he and his mother left Massachusetts had he seen a Negro. This one was so big, he had to duck to enter the barn. Now, it appeared he was going to be working for him. He glanced

quickly outside and saw no sign of his Delaware Indian friend. He hoped he made a swift getaway.

“What were you gonna do with this pig once ya killed it?” the big man asked.

“It was an accident. It charged me from the brush and I was defending myself,” he replied.

“Right, and ya just happened to have a handmade spear at the ready in case a critter attacked,” Big John said and smiled. Then, he put a big hand on the boy’s shoulder and squeezed. As his massive fingers clamped down like a vice, he added, “Let’s get somethin’ straight right now. We is gonna be workin’ together. No more lyin’ and stealin’, boy. It just ain’t right.”

As the black man’s grip continued to tighten, Billy started to cringe. It felt like his shoulder was about to be crushed. Finally, he admitted, “I was gonna eat it. I was hungry.”

“That’s better,” Big John said and released him. “Do you know how to gut and prepare it for the fire?”

“Yep!”

“Then, follow me out back. I’ll get a fire going while you do the preppin’. Ain’t gonna be much there to eat, but the meat should be sweet.”

Billy reached into his pocket and pulled out the pocket knife he used to make his spear.

“That won’t do the job. Use my skinnin’ knife,” Big John said and pulled a blade from his waistband. From handle to tip, the knife had to be twelve or fourteen inches long. It was intimidating to look at. John saw the boy’s hesitation and added. “It’s razor sharp. So, be careful, ya hear?”

Billy grabbed the piglet by the hind legs and followed him to the yard behind the barn. There he spotted a campfire ring and a massive stump stained with blood. It was obvious that was where butchering took place. Billy threw the piglet on the stump and got to work.

By the time the piglet was gutted and cleaned, Big John had a fire started. He skewered the swine on a long pole that stretched across the length of the fire pit and gave Billy his instructions: “Your job is to turn

this critter regularly so that it cooks evenly. We want it to cook slowly. So, make sure the fire don't get too hot."

"I can do that," Billy said with a wide smile. Of course, the black man had no idea Billy hadn't eaten in a while.

"While you're doing that, I want you to begin splitting that pile of firewood over yonder. All the tools ya need are in plain view."

"That's a lot of wood," Billy said.

"It takes a lot of wood to keep this place goin'," Big John said. "Once I start hammerin' steel, the wood disappears pretty fast. So, this is what you'll do every morning. Every afternoon, you'll be caring for the animals and cleaning stalls."

"Every day?"

"Yep, them animals dirty the stalls every day."

"What about the wood pile?"

The wood pile is replenished daily by the crew that cuts timber for the boss," Big John said.

“Are you a blacksmith?” Billy asked.

“That and more. I do whatever is needed to keep the boss’ livestock healthy and ready for the daily chores. Lord knows I’ve been askin’ for help for some time. I’m glad you’re here, and pray you learn quickly.”

“Back in Boston, the teacher said I had potential because I was a fast learner,” Billy revealed, still playing the role of a meek young boy.

“Is that right?” Big John replied.

“Yup, and I could read better than my mama,” Billy admitted.

“What happened to your ma, son?”

“How’d you know?”

“You’re barefoot and killing pigs that don’t belong to ya for food,” Big John said as he began to turn the piglet on the spit. “I never had no schoolin’ but I ain’t stupid neither.”

“She died,” Billy said sorrowfully. “I’ve been alone ever since.”



“Well, you ain’t alone no more; you got me looking over your shoulder day and night,” John said.

“Does that mean you’re going to be my boss?”

“There’s a lot of bosses on this here ranch. I’m going to be one of them where you’re concerned,” John said.

“What if I don’t like being bossed around?”

“I promise to be not too hard on you, boy. Now, you got a pile of wood to split and this piglet to tend to. Make sure it cooks to a golden brown. I got work of my own to do. I’ll check on you every once in a while.

“Keep in mind, don’t be thinkin’ about runnin’ off. If you do, Ike’ll send the dogs after ya. You don’t want that. You and me’ll get along fine if you do as instructed, just like Ike said. Tonight, maybe we’ll see about getting you somethin’ for them bare feet. Max believes a man’s labor is only as good as the boots he wears. We go through a lot of boots in this place. I’m sure he’ll have something in your size. We’ll ask Ike when he returns.”

The thought of getting protection for his feet, regular meals, and a warm place to sleep was appealing to the thirteen-year-old. He headed for the wood pile, thinking the big black man wasn't as scary as he first thought.

*"Maybe I'll hang around here for a while. Big John seems like he's on my side."*

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