

The **CORKSCREW app**



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CHAPTER 1

The blue-helmeted players of Somers Middle School huddled around their quarterback. The league championship and an undefeated season was possible, but they trailed by 8 to 6. They had driven to their opponent's eight yard line with fewer than two minutes to go in the game.

"Coach wants 31 Dive," Hunter Morrison said as he came in with a play.

With an assuredness beyond his fourteen years, Justin Deveraux countered his coach's call. "Nix that. Their outside linebacker is coming down hard toward the middle on each play. They're wide open for 19 Bootleg. Bobby, make sure you get a clean break off the line and head for the corner of the end zone. We'll score."

"Justin, are you sure you know what you're doing?" questioned Bobby James, the tight end for the play Justin had just designed. "Farmer will bite your head off if this backfires."

"We've come too far to fail now," said Justin with complete confidence. "19 Bootleg on one! Break!"

"Break!" the team shouted in unison, emptied the huddle, and strode to their designated positions with the conviction of their field general. Justin's poise seeped into the psyches of his teammates.

* * *

Mr. Gibson stood in front of his eighth-grade class dressed in buckskins, a fringed, deerskin shirt, leggings. He held a replica of a flintlock rifle. He knew how get the students' attention. "The name's Gist, Christopher Gist, and I've just come back from the O-hi-o country.

I'm an English scout. It's been my job to find out about the lands beyond the O-hi-o. The French are causing us a heap of trouble there."

Although his teacher was totally committed to his lesson and the rest of the class was absorbed by it, Justin was consumed by his recent past, the circumstances that had turned glory into disgrace.

Mr. Gibson's voice boomed with enthusiasm. "There's good land to the west of the O-hi-o. Plenty beaver, too, as long as we keep the French out."

Justin combed his fingers through his "streak"—the recently bleached blond strip running from his forehead to the nape of his neck, a yellow stripe set off by asphalt-black hair on both sides.

He shot Isabella Markette an impish grin as he passed her a note, *Quite the Halloween costume!* Isabella's smile was short-lived.

"MR. DEVERAUX, am I boring you?" Mr. Gibson bounded to Isabella's desk in three impressively swift steps.

"No-o-o, sir." Justin's sheepish reply was voiced with his head tilted down and his arms crossed on top of his desk.

With note in hand, Mr. Gibson rearranged Justin's schedule, "One hour after-school detention tomorrow, Justin."

No teacher could embellish a short dramatic role like Mr. Gibson. That's why students like Justin Deveraux—despite his mistimed note—enjoyed his class. “From last night's reading assignment, what can be told about the relationship between the French and Native Americans in North America during the 1700s?”

Nate Turnbull's hand shot up. “The French had a good relationship with most Native Americans in eastern North America.”

“Such as, Nate? Can you be more specific?” asked Mr. Gibson, scanning the class for any other signs of intellectual life.

“Well, the French weren't interested in taking over Native American land since the fur trade was their number one goal,” said Nate in a monotone.

“The French also learned the Native American languages in order to help their trading relationship,” added an enthusiastic Rudy Delgado. “I think that that skill is even important today. My dad said he got his job with his company in part because he could speak Bulgarian. His company does lots of business in Sofia.”

To Justin the discussion was muffled. He sank deeper and deeper into reliving the personal nightmare of the play gone wrong. He could even hear the announcers, “Deveraux is swinging left on a naked bootleg! Oh-oh, his tight end has fallen down. He's going have to make a sprint for the goal line. Whoa! What a hit! Fum-m-m-ble! Winchester has recovered. Look at Somers' Coach Farmer. He's livid!”

“Mr. Deveraux, are we interfering with your daydream?”

For a second time, Justin had drawn the ire of his most respected teacher. He improvised, “No, sir. I was just

thinking about playing a new video game about the French and Indian War.”

“Can you postpone your video game and join our discussion on the European struggle to control the North American continent in the eighteenth century?”

“Yes, sir. Would it be possible for you to repeat the question?”

“The French and Native Americans—what made their relationship a positive one?”

Clearly uncomfortable, arms crossed over the stately Native American emblem on the front of his Washington Redskins t-shirt, Justin said, “The French weren’t interested in controlling Native American land...”

“Old news, Justin! We’ve covered that while you were in Video Game Land!”

Mercifully, the bell rang.

Before Justin made it out into the hall, massive Adam Archer, who had been an offensive tackle on the team, pressed into him. “Nice going, Boots,” he mocked, looking down at Justin as he lumbered out of the classroom. “You zone out in class just like on the field.” Many of Justin’s teammates had forgiven him and moved on. Some, like Adam Archer, had not. Among the latter group, the nickname “Boots” had started to cling to him.

Michael Simpkins, Justin’s best friend, met up with him at Justin’s locker after school. Only Michael’s auburn cowlick allowed him to approximate Justin in height. Blessed with a photographic memory, he was an excellent speller and a solid repository of historical facts.

“How on earth do you find anything in that dump?” Michael razzed as he viewed a mangled mess of books, papers, and binders.

Justin was sloppy in everything from penmanship to artwork to locker organization. He squeezed out his French book and accompanying homework, and he muttered back to Michael, “I manage.”

“I hope you don’t botch up the basketball team like you screwed us over in football!” a voice cried out behind the two friends just as they had walked off school property. It was Lester Keegan. Having missed his bus because of some poorly-timed hallway horseplay, he was facing a two mile walk home. To Lester’s way of thinking, he was going to walk home satisfied.

Lester was a linebacker on the football team. Built like an anvil—average height with a solid V-shaped torso, he was the hardest hitter on the football team and the one player who had the toughest time forgiving Justin’s ill-fated play call. Without any common classes, their paths hadn’t crossed much in the past two weeks, and it was clear that Lester had a lot of frustration bottled up. He wasn’t going to miss this opportunity to vent now that he was off school grounds and beyond the supervision of teachers.

“How could you ignore Coach’s play?” By now, Lester had circled Justin and stopped face to face with him. His eyes stared coldly at Justin’s even though he was a few inches shorter, “We worked for two years to put ourselves in a position to win that championship, and you decided on your own to blow it for all of us.”

“I called an audible based on what the defense was doing,” Justin responded. He wasn’t upset; he gave a rational reply to Lester’s challenge. “Don’t blame me for Bobby tripping over his own two feet.”

“For crying out loud, moron brain, you’re fourteen years old! Since when do you overrule Coach? My dad was right. After the game he asked me, ‘Does that quarterback think he’s the center of the universe?’”

Justin began to step around him, Michael following. “Tell your old man to suck an egg,” Justin stated with a growing sense of exasperation as he turned to face Lester, who was now behind him. “Who gives a crap what your father thinks. He wasn’t in my position.”

“Hey, my father was there to see what everyone else there saw—you choking and costing us the game and championship.” Lester paused, “Then again, your old man wasn’t there as usual, *now was he?*”

Justin’s right arm exploded from his side. His clenched fist just missed Lester’s nose. The linebacker smiled, pleased to have evoked the physical confrontation. Dodging the punch, Lester crushed him onto a lawn. Justin’s head just missed the edge of the sidewalk. Michael watched helplessly.

Lester delivered a flurry of body blows and one solid left to Justin’s eye. Justin was in a precarious position. He took the only advantage left open to him and brought up his right knee square into Lester’s groin. Lester dropped like a rock and rolled over in agony. “Let’s go home,” Justin called out to Michael.

Billowing dark clouds accompanied the boys on the walk home. Michael fumbled for the right words, “I’m sorry that I wasn’t able to help you, Justin. I guess I just froze.”

“It wasn’t that big of a deal, Michael. I wasn’t expecting us to double team Lester. It was something brewing in him, and it was about him and me.”

Michael stopped for a moment and looked at his friend, “Justin, you’re going to have a real shiner in the next couple hours. You’re starting to bruise under your eye already.”

“I’ll put a bag of frozen peas on it when I get home. Hopefully, the swelling won’t be that bad and my mom won’t notice it.”

Michael squinted at Justin, “*Oh really?*”

“Well, I’ll have to come up with some explanation for the black eye other than I got into a fight.”

“Forget about what Lester said about basketball. Have *you* decided to go to basketball tryouts next week?”

Justin had pushed the upcoming basketball season to the back of his mind. He had enjoyed seventh grade basketball in which he had started as a forward. As recently as two days earlier, he had confided in Michael that he wasn’t sure that he would go out for the round ball team this year. “To tell you the truth, I guess I haven’t given it much thought since the last time you brought it up. Don’t worry; Lester Keegan won’t make my decision for me.”

“I can’t believe that you won’t be out on the court next week. You’re too good not to be playing; you’re too good not to be trying. The team will be hurting if you sit this one out.”

Justin appreciated Michael’s appeal to his ego. “Well, I need some more time to think about it. One way or another, I’ll know by next week.”

“What’s to think about? Are you opting for free agency or something?” With a grin, Michael exposed his newly-acquired braces. “Oh, I see where this is going. Next week you’ll have a televised press conference in the gym, and you’ll announce, ‘I’ve decided to take my talents to...’ that’s what you’re up to, right? Go ahead admit it.”

Justin stopped in his tracks and looked Michael in the eye, “Michael, you’re weird.”

Michael shifted gears. “I hear that Gibson went off on you eighth period.”

“It wasn’t that big a deal. I just sort of blanked out. In fact, I think I was more involved with that lesson than anyone else in the room.”

“Oh, explain that one to me. Better yet, explain it to Gibson during your detention tomorrow afternoon. The guy can be intense.”

“Well, the lesson on the French and Indian War got me thinking about the *Conflicts of America* game I want to play as soon as I get home. One game is all about that war. Apparently, much of the fighting wasn’t too far from here. I really *want* to learn more about it.”

Michael had one last question as they were about to go their separate ways, “You want to get together tonight and play some video games, or are you going to focus on that French game, if your Cyber Phone is fixed?”

“It’s the French and Indian War, not a *French* game. I have enough French homework thanks to Mademoiselle Parker!” Justin was surprised how crisply he had pronounced his French teacher’s title. Miss Parker always thought Justin had a natural ability for the language. His father’s ancestors had immigrated to the United States from France generations ago. Perhaps he was the recipient of a latent language gene. “Listen, Michael, I’m just going to chill with the game. Anyway, according to the shipping site, it’s supposed to have been delivered today. My dad got the second year warranty plan for my phone, or else I probably wouldn’t have gotten it fixed. Do you want to come over after dinner and check it out?”

“Sounds good, but first I need to make sure I finish my science project for Friday. Mrs. Cochran told me that I’d get a D if I didn’t finish it in time. I can’t explain that to my parents. They track my grades on the computer as if they were in the CIA or something, and they’ll torture me with questions, even though they already know my grades.”

The two boys separated for the last part of their routes home, Justin making his way down Winston street.

Justin wondered if his dad would make it home tonight. Charles “Chuck” Deveraux was a plumber for the federal Department of Agriculture. Oddly enough, he often didn’t come home during the week, claiming that some jobs needed to be completed into the night, so he would just stay in D.C. in a cheap motel instead of driving his government-issued van ninety minutes westward into the Blue Ridge Mountains. He would call home on those nights. If his mom didn’t wonder about those unusual working conditions, Justin did. However, he hadn’t had the guts to raise the question to his mother, who worked afternoons as an accountant.

His thoughts shifted from the change in seasons to his Cyber Phone. Due to its value, the phone would not have been delivered unless someone there signed for it. No matter, he couldn’t wait to play *Conflicts of America*. It was so realistic. Little did Justin know how real it could be.



CHAPTER 2

Once inside, Justin checked out the maple stand in the front hall. No phone. Perhaps his mother had placed it elsewhere. The mirror above the stand reminded him of the need for some frozen peas.

With the bag of peas pressed below his right eye, Justin searched the house for the phone. He hoped it had arrived fully refurbished, repaired, and ready to go. He retraced his steps back into the front hall to make sure he hadn't missed a small cardboard box or perhaps a weatherproof envelope with the blue and white CP logo emblazoned on it. He dashed into the living room. Perhaps it had been abandoned on the coffee table or sofa. No luck in the living room.

Foyer, living room, bedroom—three strikes—he was out of options. The void created by the missing phone allowed the cloud of doubt into his mind again. He remembered the volcanic reaction he had gotten from Coach Farmer, “What were you thinking? Bootleg? Bootleg? Bootleg? Thank you, Boots!” Coach Farmer launched the clipboard into the air and stomped off. Even now, Justin couldn't stop thinking about how Bobby tripped. That had been the demise of the play. Coach Farmer would just have to stew; Justin couldn't explain it to a man who just wanted to shout.

Down the hallway, his dad's office door was opened halfway. He took a chance by entering a room that was strictly off limits. With the blinds shut, the room was cloaked in an artificial twilight. If he concentrated, he could

make out the Art Deco lamp, oak office chair, roll top desk, desktop computer, opened box with phone, file cabinet... *Opened box with phone!* A Cyber Phone lay before him on his dad's opened desk, the box cut open and its sides peeled back like an orange.

It was bizarre that his mom would have left his phone in his father's office. Since the closing weeks of summer vacation, Chuck had become increasingly abrasive about anyone invading his territory. Several weeks earlier he yelled at Justin for entering his den looking for an alternate power cord for his computer. "NEVER, NEVER, NEVER MESS WITH THE CONTENTS OF MY ROOM AGAIN! DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?"

His father had started working as a plumber at the Agriculture Department two years earlier. Justin remembered wondering how plumbing could be so stressful that his Dr. Jekyll of a father became a raving Mr. Hyde. Justin carefully lifted the box containing the phone.

Justin's first task was to charge his phone to get it up to full power. The length of the charger forced him to sit at his messy desk. He inserted the phone in its charging cradle, and the green light, which signaled the phone was fully charged, lit instantaneously. *How could that be? Do these things usually come charged and ready to use?*

To contact Michael and make plans for the evening, he had to reenter his friend's number because the repair had apparently removed all of his stored numbers. He texted him to come over at seven. By then he would have had dinner.

Michael texted back, "b there @ 7."

Justin looked at his phone. Before the repair, his phone had its camera at the bottom of the black frame. Through experience, he had learned that he had to hold his camera a

few inches higher in order to get the exact shot he wanted. Now his phone apparently had two cameras—one at the top of the black frame just above the screen and one just below the screen.

He returned to his original focus of gaming with *Conflicts of America*. He glanced at the time on the phone's home screen. It was 4:20.

There were more applications on the home screen than before he sent his phone out to be fixed. An icon of a wine bottle opener, labeled *Corkscrew*, rested in the lower left quadrant of the screen. It wasn't far from the Internet app a few icons above it. It blended into the phone so well, it was as if it had always been part of the phone. Corkscrew had always been part of *this* phone.

The basic premise of *Conflicts of America* was that one had to strategize what to do as one of the warring parties during one of the many wars in American history. A player started by selecting a conflict and then was given a variety of dates corresponding with the important events that occurred during that war. In each setting the player had options as to the side he would take and how he would lead that particular group, given the circumstances including numbers of men involved, weather, topography, supplies, etc. It also had a skill component where the player could shoot at the enemy with the weapon of choice. Weapons ranging from bows and arrows to missiles were included in the program simulating the development of military technology across the spectrum of America's past.

The instructions appeared on command on the phone's screen in bold red, white, and blue. Justin had to select a war, and he checked the box next to "French and Indian War." He was given a series of dates from which to choose—1754, 1755, 1756, 1757 and 1759. He checked 1754 believing he

should start at the beginning. A submenu appeared with the linked date *May 28, 1754*.

Geographically, he was placed at 39 degrees, 53 minutes, 6 seconds north latitude and 79 degrees, 38 minutes, 45 seconds west longitude—somewhere in southwestern Pennsylvania. Justin wrote both the date and the latitude/longitude coordinates on a scrap of paper. If the game was interrupted by inactivity for several minutes, the player would have to type in this information or start from the beginning. It was an annoying flaw.

The game began by placing him in the role of a young colonial Virginia militia colonel seeking to reinforce a fort-building regiment at the forks of the Ohio River. The strategic options he was given as leader of this military expedition was either (1) *peacefully engage any French forces his men would encounter on the way to the forks of the Ohio River*; or (2) *orchestrate an ambush of French soldiers during peacetime*. Much of this conflict was still unknown to him.

Just as he was poised to make his first military choice as the Virginia colonel, his phone vibrated with an incoming text message...from Isabella! “Sry what happened 2 u in class today. Ur note was funny. Hope 2 hear from u soon. Btw I got ur # from Michael. Hope u dont mind.”

Mind? Mind? Do I mind? Feeling like he had just been awarded the Heisman Trophy, Justin’s ego swelled. He typed, “Want 2 go 2 Friday nights football game w/ me?”

“Id love 2 go w/ u.”

“Yes! Yes-s-s! Yes-s-s-s!” In total euphoria, Justin stood up and thrust his fist into the air, clutching the phone in his left hand. He plopped himself on his bed to return to the game. However, his index finger inadvertently opened

Corkscrew. The app opened with two sequential prompts that Justin was eager to answer.

Present your target date, the app prompted. The wording was a bit off from *Conflicts of America*. Justin was too love-struck to notice. “*May 28, 1754.*”

Present your location. He typed, *39 degrees, 53 minutes, 6 seconds north; 79 degrees, 38 minutes, 45 seconds west.*

The third prompt, however, did get his attention. *Proceed with Corkscrew YES NO*

Proceed with Corkscrew? What is that all about? Who cares? The fact that Isabella *wanted* to contact him gave him so much elation that incidental details about his cell phone didn’t really matter. Justin clicked “*YES.*”

Amber light sprung out of the top camera portal and in a spiraling motion engulfed Justin’s body. He felt an intense cold, as if a million pins were prickling his skin. He spiraled up and away from his bed. The last conscious thought he had was that of viewing himself off an immense iceberg bobbing up and down in frigid waters.