# the dream, a western

I reckon I dozed off for a good two hours and found myself in the wildest dream, somethin' I'd never seen before. It was a world overrun with the undead, every corner crammed with unspeakable horrors. I was aboard a peculiar contraption, part train, part some otherworldly flyin' machine. My duty was to roam after each stop, checkin' for zombies that might've hitched a ride.

Winter had tightened its grip, makin' the sight of zombies scarce, but there were fresh faces on board – an old-timer and his sprightly daughter, rumored to be gun-runners. They claimed a spot on the top deck, settin' up shop. Now, before they could hawk their goods, I had the job of inspectin' their place to see if they were latent zombies. Fortuitously, they weren't.

You see, I was the Zombie Wrangler, given the title after I'd survived a horde attack all by myself, armed with nothin' more than a busted shootin' iron and my wits. Now, my gun had failed me again, leavin' me with a small tomahawk, a machete, and a clever gizmo strapped to my wrist – a razor-sharp blade that sprung out at a flick of my hand. Had it made special, just for me. Saved my hide more times than I could count.

My belly was rumblin', and the only grub I had was whipped up by none other than the legendary George Washington – who, in this dream, turned out to be my own mama. She was famed for her curious mixtures, and the most enigmatic of all was this orange-red paste, a guarded recipe whispered to be laced with her own blood.

I searched every hidden crevice and shadowy corner, vigilantly watchin' for any trace of the undead..There was a pair of 'em, but they wasn't the shopkeepers.. I found their little shop on the top deck, and as I entered, they drew some fancy-lookin' pistols, nearly sendin' me to meet my maker.

After a tense moment, I introduced myself as the protector of this vessel and asked if they had any firepower to trade. They produced a proper gun and some cartridges, but they wanted more in return. That's when I pulled out a sack filled with mama's special paste. I was famished and had a few cuts and bruises, so I dug in, offering them a taste. I proposed a deal: George Washington's blood, a fabled concoction said to feed a man and shield him from the undead.

After some haggling, they agreed. They offered to clean and hone my blades, throw in a few boxes of cartridges, and even shared their fears. They'd heard eerie moans and bone-crunchin' thuds against the vessel walls, so they'd holed up in their weapon-filled sanctuary.

I promised to clear out the undead I'd encountered and to secure the next deck. As I left the shopkeepers, I gave them reassurances that a clean-up crew would be along in less than an hour. They seemed relieved, and I felt a renewed sense of purpose. This was my vessel to protect, and I had a job to do.

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