

The Ancient Secret of the Secret Society of the Protectors of the Sacred Hobo Knife

Written by: Stephen

Quinten casually strolled down the street, looking for hobos.

Quinten considered this his favorite hobby: walking and taking pictures of hobos. He then got the film developed and taped all the pictures up on a big piece of cardboard that he hung on the ceiling of his bedroom, so he could lie in bed at night and stare up at all the hobos (he also collected broken TVs, but Quinten considered *that* hobby merely a time-filler).

Anyway, Quinten found a hobo on a street corner (he lives in New York) and proceeded to snap a picture of him. When the hobo saw Quinten, he turned around and ran away. Quinten puzzled over this as he walked home.

Later that night, Quinten was lying in bed and looking up at his hobo pictures, when he heard a soft click from the general vicinity of his front door. Then he heard the door quietly open and several pairs of feet scamper down the hall. He pulled his shotgun out from under his pillow.

Suddenly, a ragtag mass of hobos burst down his bedroom door, charging him, wielding long, wicked-looking knives. Amid cries of "Protect the Knife! Protect the Knife!" Quinten opened fire.

After the smoke had cleared, Quinten glumly surveyed the scene of death and destruction. He went back to bed.

The next morning, Quinten packed some of his things and went to the airport. He bought a one-way ticket to Portugal and waited for his flight to leave.

While he waited, Quinten thought over the events of the last night. A random bum (NOT a hobo) tried to steal his wallet, but Quinten hit him over the head with his shotgun and he ran away.

When he went to board his plane, he was stopped by a rough hand that grabbed him by the shoulder.

“Don’t turn around. Don’t try to look at me,” the owner of the hand said, as Quinten felt the blade of a knife prick his back.

“What do you want?” Quinten asked, more than a little nervous.

“Are you the one that was attacked?”

“By hobos?”

The knife shifted on his back and the assailant hissed, “Don’t say it so loud, fool!”

Quinten couldn’t think of anything to say to this, so he just waited nervously.

“Are you on Their side or Ours?”

“Do *you* want to kill me, too?” Quinten realized it felt rather strange having a conversation with someone he couldn’t see and didn’t know.

“It depends. Are you For it or After it?”

“For or after what?” Quinten asked, confused.

“*The knife*,” he whispered.

“The hobo knife?”

“Yes! Are you For it or After it?”

“I—I don’t know—”

“Bah!” Quinten’s unknown attacker let go of his shoulder. “Someone will meet you in Portugal—at the airport. They’ll have information for you. If you’re smart, you’ll get on Our side.”

He left, and Quinten was left standing alone. He hurried to get on the plane.

In the air, the plane had only been at cruising altitude for fifteen minutes before two burly-looking hobos appeared in the aisle and demanded that Quinten come with them. They both had

steel pipes in their meaty hands.

“Why?” Quinten asked instinctively. His hand slowly went to his shotgun.

By way of answer, one of the hobos clobbered him over the head with his steel pipe.

His vision starting to go black, Quinten shot twice, and both hobos fell. Just before he blacked out, he saw a single pellet go through the side of the plane. They started going down.

When Quinten came to again, he was lying on a beach, and Tempo, his pet monkey, was dead beside him.

Quinten slowly got up and stretched. Remarkably, except for a bruise on his left pinky finger, he was unscathed. Marveling at his good luck (and wondering why he couldn’t see any wreckage from the plane), he set off to explore the island he was on.

After only a few minutes, he stepped out onto a large plain. In front of him, a gigantic, Greek-looking stone building appeared.

Intrigued, and more than a bit dwarfed by the gigantic, awe-inspiring temple, he climbed the huge set of stone steps leading to a huge set of stone double doors. On them was a large inscription, with letters as tall as Quinten’s outstretched palms:

THE TEMPLE OF THE PROTECTOR OF THE SACRED HOBBO KNIFE

Shaking, Quinten timidly knocked on the doors. They swung open smoothly.

Inside, Quinten saw that the entire temple was one room. The cavernous space was completely empty except for an oversized fountain in the middle of the room and a huge stone throne with a carving of a man in it against the back wall.

Quinten slowly inched forward. He counted his steps until he got to the fountain, but gave up after a hundred. When he got to the fountain, water spouted out of it and it began filling.

Quinten walked toward the throne beyond, and presently he could make out words on the base of the throne:

BEFORE YOU LIES A MYSTERY:
WHAT IS THIS PLACE?
MAJESTIC THOUGH IT SEEMS,
THE ANSWERS LIE BEFORE YOU NOW:
CAST A COIN INTO THE WATERS
AND YOUR ANSWERS WILL BE FOUND,
OR REFUSE THE RISK
AND WONDER 'TILL IT DRIVES YOU MAD.

After some thinking over this riddle, Quinten made his decision. Tremulously, he walked back to the fountain, rifled through his pockets, and threw in a quarter.

Not really knowing what to expect, Quinten turned back to the throne. Watching it, Quinten saw the statue of the man on the throne change, transforming from stone into flesh and bone before his eyes. As he go off the throne and walked towards Quinten, he seemed to somehow shrink to a more-normal size.

He stopped in front of Quinten and sat down, a patient look of expectancy on his face.

“Who are you?”

Smiling slightly, the man replied, “I am the patron deity of standing water. I am he who compels the peoples of the earth to throw coins into artificial ponds and fountains. I am the guardian of the sacred hobo knife.”

Quinten tried to digest this as the man patiently watched him. “Where *is* the hobo knife?” Quinten asked, looking around the cavernous room. “In the fountain?”

The man smiled slightly. “Perhaps.”

“How . . . did it get there?”

“Untold ages ago, a sacred knife was given to the hobos of the world. They were allowed

to glimpse the knife's power, and they realized that they were too weak, too . . . fleeting—too mortal to guard it by themselves.

“So they called upon me, and I ceased my guardianship of the Holy Grail . . . they'll never find it anyway . . . and came here to protect this object of greater power. I . . . *built* this temple, and have remained in it for many years. Your casting of a coin into the fountain caused me to . . . *awaken* from my . . . inner thought and reflection. So here I am.”

Quinten sat in silence, trying to digest all this strange information.

“So, you have come here in search of the ancient secret of the secret society of the protectors of the sacred hobo knife? You have found it. However, the knife itself is another matter.

“The time has not yet come in which the sacred hobo knife will be turned over to another group of guardians or released unto the world at large. However, the time is coming when the hobo knife will return and again play a part in the activities of the world, as it had once, long, long ago.”

The man paused and regarded Quinten silently for a long moment. “You are more pure in heart than most of the others before you, though . . . therefore, I will send you back to your home.”

With that, the patron deity closed his eyes and snapped his fingers.

Quinten woke up in his bed, back at home. He turned on the lamp near his bed. Looking up, the pictures of the hobos were still there, but a new photo was among them: a picture of a certain man sitting on the floor in front of a large throne

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