

# TEXT ADVENTURE

*'HEY,  
WEIRD  
SHOES'*

by  
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## 1

Christmas, 1942.

Prosthetic legs at fifty percent power.

Hurts.

Admit it: scaring myself.

Duck behind the Mercedes. Vizier under much heavier guard than normal.

One right there. Laying on the ground. Check his pockets. Reload. Increase dosage by twenty percent for the next ten minutes. Glance at the snow.

Legs at forty-three percent. Not good.

Over the back of the car. Scuffed shoes on pavement. Back into my pockets for ammunition. Get into a rhythm. But: still losing power. Find a way to recharge.

Without warning, the Vizier's car resolves to pull away from the alley. Eyes follow the tracks. Realization: they're sticking with standard procedure. Get the VIP out of the line of fire.

Locate a sliver and waste thirty seconds charging my legs.

Phase one is a shambles. The old woman won't like my report.

Start running after the car.

## 2

The Vizier had switched himself out. Long before the barbecue. Just another changeover. Recent events scrolled by, nothing catching in his mind.

He sat in the back of his limousine, staring down at the VHS cassette in his hand. Black, rectangular plastic against pale flesh and gold brocade.

Inserted the cassette.

Presently, there appeared upon the screen a fifty percent blue/pink gradient field. Hovering above the smudge of colors was a familiar phrase, *USING MAGIC TO FIGHT DRUG ABUSE*. The Vizier was able to take some comfort in the kerning of the typeface and the contours of the drop shadow. He pondered the traditional refrain. One benefit of membership in his ancient fraternity was the freedom to seek refuge in its various conceits. Like so many before him, he decided to proceed as if the message were addressed specifically to himself, personally. He straightened his necktie and opened a packet of cocaine.

Word came from the driver that the Vizier's destination was within reach.

Sensing no alternative, he nodded his assent.

With some effort, reached.

"We need more btemps for the party," he shouted into the glass partition. "These other ones are dead!"

The vehicle lurched to a stop and his door was yanked open by someone standing outside the window. Harsh winter sunlight invaded the armored cabin. He stared up at the man's spiked hair, enveloped by the stench of some considerable amount of hair product. The man was grinning from ear to ear.

"I hope that's a limo full of money, 'cause we've brought mountains and moun-

tains of our finest white powder.”

A second man appeared, this one not grinning at all. He carried a sheet of translucent green paper. The man surveyed his surroundings as if for the first time.

“My partner’s not talking about the snow.”

### 3

Six miles down the road I botch phase two, as well.

More specifically, I slip in the snow.

One leg powers down completely as I approach the parked limousine. Drop to my knee and then pull myself back up and lock the joint manually.

Suddenly notice the others.

Large pink aircraft, catty-corner on the street. Strange triangular shape. Glossy.

Spinning up my weapon to take out the newcomers and then it happens, I’m face down on the slick pavement. Scrape my chin.

On second thought, relieved. Don’t think anyone saw me take aim. Or fall. But, locked leg and nothing to pull myself up with.

And now: unobstructed view of their ankles.

Spin up the gun.

Hey, weird shoes.

### 4

I lay here on the ground and consider my life.

Leaving the basement is increasingly difficult. Even on these short missions. Place has everything I need. Diversions, companionship, nourishment. The religious stuff I can take or leave. Then there’s that huge t-shirt.

Think about my room.

The old woman keeps the heat on. Few objectionable personal habits. Doesn’t seem to mind the state of my body, either. A steady supply of spare parts.

Eventually, I know, I’ll have to leave, whether I want to or not. Mission completion leads to extraction. The natural order. But it’s possible this excursion may last for years. I’ve no way of knowing when my employer will be satisfied. Just have to keep on, keeping on. Always do my best.

Speaking of.

Pants have gone cold. Legs dead. Visor control is on the fritz so I pull on my gloves.

Vizier’s still talking.

### 5

The shoes look soft. Puffy? No heels. Some sort of transparent section, there, along the bottom. An actual logo or insignia sewn onto the side. Tongue that reads: *PUMP*. Is that leather? And where are the laces?

Velcro?

Whatever, the conversation is concluded. The pink aircraft has vanished more quickly than makes sense for a vehicle of that size. Car starts up and peels out.

I'm humping it again.

## 6

The Vizier often diminished himself through commerce. He claimed the privilege under a branch of theological speculation less popular in the current century than in times passed. While it was necessary to conduct most transactions in private, he longed to demonstrate the art of the deal to his followers. Unbeknownst to his political advisers, he had prepared a treatise on the subject that he planned to issue in the spring.

The Vizier leaned his face against the glass of his window as the limousine accelerated into a long curve. As the road behind him came slowly into view, he thought that he could make out the silhouette of a man clad in full commando gear, sprinting forward into the vehicle's wake.

He wondered: Could this be a new customer?

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