

Hello, My Name Is James, And I Am An Asshole

by j. h. woodyatt

There's the Golden Gate Bridge. I've always loved the Golden Gate Bridge. I love walking over it on the pedestrian path. I love driving over it in a convertible sports car on a warm, sunny day. I especially love passing beneath its giant center span on the deck of ship, especially from the deck at the top of the superstructure. On a really large ship, it's almost like you can reach up with your hands and touch it as you glide underneath. I don't get a chance to see the underside of the Golden Gate Bridge very often, so I'm savoring this brief moment of Zen while it lasts.

By my calculations, all hell is uncoiling. At the moment, this fact is not really obvious to anyone, but I'm confident that will change soon enough. At this point in the process, there's pretty much nothing anyone can do to stop the disaster currently underway. It's just a matter of how much damage can be averted. The way I figure it: not much. But then, I've always been a pessimist.

My moment on the flying bridge is over, and I'm done looking out across the interior of San Francisco bay, so I slide down the ladder to the main bridge deck without taking any steps. I'm too pumped with adrenaline not to engage in this little juvenile stupidity, and I kick myself mentally for it. Adrenaline glands, I'm firmly convinced, need a little regulator dial so you can cut yourself off when you've had enough.

I land on the deck and give a little salute to the pilot. He doesn't return it— which is only natural, because he's sitting on the deck, blindfolded, gagged and duct-taped securely to the rail. He's got a hand-lettered sign hanging around his neck that reads, "Looking for the crew? Ask me!"

I start singing an old Irish drinking song on my way back into the pilot house, filking it horribly as I go:

We had one million bags of the best Kabul cake
We had two million barrels of blood
We had three million bales of old Mexican shake
We had four million barrels of crude

The *T.T. Jahre Viking* was once the largest floating object in the world. Some fool built a floating hotel a couple years ago that holds the record now. The *Jahre Viking* can carry a little over four million barrels of crude oil. It's in the class of oil tankers called Ultra-Large Crude Carriers. A few years ago, the shipyards started making these things so huge that the word "supertanker" just didn't carry enough weight. So now we have wonderful acronyms like VLCC and ULCC to distinguish the truly brobdignagian leviathans of the petroleum shipping industry from the merely oversized monster ships we used to call "super" tankers.

I'm on the bridge of the *Jahre Viking* now, and I'm feeling pretty confident that this whole plan is going to work. The engine telegraph is still signaling full speed, and that's why I was a little worried about planes in the air. If the U.S. Air Force had any of their air patrols running over San Francisco today, then an alert and knowledgeable observer in one of them might have noticed the length of the propwash the *Jahre Viking* was pushing. At full speed, there is no way the ship can safely make the scheduled turn into San Pablo bay on its way to the Tosco terminal in Richmond.

Safety is— how shall I say this?— taking a back seat to expediency today.

We're barreling up on Treasure Island when I make eye contact with Fillmore and Warfield, checking to see if they're still keeping a lid on themselves. Fillmore gives a nod to signal that he's still at optimal readiness. Warfield is at the wheel, and he has a stony expression, so I make a sign of the cross for him. He starts praying under his breath, and I walk over to the engine telegraph and grab both levers with each hand. I push them all the way up, then all the

way down, back up again and down to stop at the point on the dial that reads "Finished With Engines".

"Okay, Roxie— if you want a ride home, you better get your ass out of there," I bark into the engine control room communicator.

"Yes, sir," he responds. "Be right there."

I take the wheel from Warfield, and he marches out to the starboard bridge wing. I turn the wheel hard to starboard, and annunciators start going off all over the bridge. It's not long before I pick out a nice rhythm and start grooving to the beat. The ship begins to heel over to port just a little, but only by a few degrees.

By this time, the nice men on the Coast Guard cutter are aware that a situation is developing. I have little doubt that the skipper of that boat is right this minute practicing what he's going to be saying to the review board.

I know what you're probably thinking.

You're wondering whether crashing a fully-loaded ULCC into the pedestal of the new Oakland Bay bridge will be enough to destroy or damage the structure sufficiently to stop Interstate 80 from connecting to San Francisco until Caltrans can finally rebuild it. The answer is no. It won't. Yeah, it'll damage the bridge a bit, but only enough to make it really dangerous for travellers— not enough to close it. Hey, they didn't close the Bay Bridge when it was damaged in the Loma Prieta earthquake.

Shut down all that commerce? Are you crazy? That's why I'm really hoping to thread this huge needle between the pedestals, and leave the bridge completely intact. If I hit the bridge, then I will close the bridge for a few days, and I will dump four million barrels of crude oil into San Francisco bay— and don't get me wrong, that would suck a very mighty wind for a long time, and lot of people will be really assed up about it— but that would *not* be a jackpot.

Steering the ship under the Oakland Bay bridge is a close call. In the end, the port bridge wing gets a bit scraped on the east pedestal, but I get hugely lucky and the ship barrels top speed, engines cranking at full throttle, right under the bridge with no major problem.

I'm quite successful at shooting for the bow of the *M/V Kaanapali Kahuna*, a Matson Lines container ship offloading at the Port of Oakland. With a ship the size of the *Jahre Viking*, you need about two miles of rough ground to bring all five hundred sixty-two thousand tons of deadweight to a full halt, and the Port of Oakland is just about that wide.

I clip the *Kahuna* very nicely and push its bow up onto the beach with me for some extra braking force. The noise this makes is the only thing anybody can hear for miles around. It is unlike anything most people who live here have ever heard. And the sound keeps going for the better part of five minutes, and it echoes off the East Bay hills with an eerily long delay.

I really want both the *Viking* and the *Kahuna* to come to rest right in the middle of the inter-modal terminal at the largest shipping port on the west coast of North America. When it comes to planning an operation like this, you have to make some guesses about what sort of outcome you'll achieve, but there are some things you can do to get educated about the basics.

My team and I spent six months working at the Boneyard in Pakistan. That's where they run ships right up on the beach with their engines running and crews work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, with cutting torches, converting old obsolete ships into the recycled steel that China needs for all those skyscrapers they keep building like mad all over Shanghai, Tanjian, Sichuan and Guangdong. When I worked there, I watched at least a dozen ships get beached before I figured I could predict how it would all play out in Oakland today with reasonable confidence.

The *T.T. Jahre Viking* is so long and narrow that I'm expecting it to snap in the center after the collision with the *Kahuna*, and I'm not disappointed. This means we're now riding on top of a giant physics lab in plastic deformation of materials. The liquid crude cargo of the *Viking* is spilling into the bay and all over the wharf. Four million barrels of crude is a lot. A flipping huge lot. And most of it is still in the tanks that are sliding up onto the land among the wreckage of both halves of the *Viking*, the *Kahuna* and all the ancillary cranes

and loading equipment that were servicing the *Kahuna* a few minutes ago. I can already see fires starting inside the bow section of the *Viking*, even before the aft superstructure part of the ship passes onto dry land.

We haven't even come to a stop yet, and Fillmore's explosive charges start going off. We set charges on all the diesel fuel tanks shortly after we took over the ship in the Straits of Malacca. The theory being: if you're going to dump a few million barrels of crude oil all over the Port of Oakland, you want to make damned sure it catches fire quickly.

This works almost too well. The plan calls for the crew to escape this disaster by dressing as City of Oakland firemen and slipping out during all the resulting chaos. Unfortunately, the fire that results from the explosions grows so hot so fast that the four of us— Fillmore, Warfield, Roxie and me— are almost cooked alive inside our hiding place in the number four shaft.

We've got cutting torches, a big portable AC generator, and various power tools down here with us, and about two hours after the ship comes to a halt, we start cutting our way out of the ship. First we cut a small hole in the outer hull, so that we can take a peek outside. There's a huge fire there, and the flames start licking into the shaft the moment I kick out the last piece of steel from the cut. Paint is starting to bubble and discolor on the inside of the outer hull surface a moment later.

So we move about fifty feet up the shaft to a spot where the hull doesn't feel quite so warm to the touch, and we cut another small hole. We're starting to get nervous at this point that we might not be able to get out of the wreck alive.

Once we get the first hole cut, I stick my head out and look around. The fire near the stern of the *Viking* is uncontrolled, and the fire crews still arriving on scene are more concerned with the larger fires around the bow section of the ship. We cut a larger hole in a matter of minutes, and I jump out onto dry ground. I look around for any witnesses, but there don't appear to be any.

A moment later, Roxie, Fillmore, Warfield and I have blended into a crowd of Oakland firemen, and nobody is looking at us edgewise at all. From there it's a fairly simple matter for us to make an inconspicuous exit from the scene.

"Hi! My name is James, and I'm an asshole," I say. I adjust the microphone so that it picks up my voice a little better. I'm looking into the camera clipped to the laptop's display, and I'm speaking in the tone of a twelve-stepper at his turn to the podium. I can hear a couple of chuckles come in on the AV conference.

I continue. "It's been six hours, seventeen minutes since I last used force against persons and property to intimidate and coerce a government and its civilian population in the furtherance of political and social objectives."

"Hi, James!" a couple of voices on the group feed say. I can hear others laughing now, as they get the joke.

These are generally a good bunch of guys, but I'm going to be happy if I never see any of them again.

"Gentlemen, thank you for taking the time to attend this final meeting of the San Francisco chapter of Assholes Anonymous," I say. "You've all been of great help to me personally. You've been where I needed you to be to help me through the most difficult times of my life, and I just want you to know how grateful I am for it."

"Yeah, blow me," I hear Fillmore crack back at me. "You said there would be a bonus for calling into this."

"I did, and I meant it," I said. "As you know, we have pulled in a pretty big score today. I'm sure if you check out the trade press in the coming days, you'll see that we have a lot of reasons to be proud of our accomplishments."

"Get on with it," said Roxie. "Some of us are in short windows."

"I just want to let you know that our investors are extremely satisfied with our performance, and they have told me to extend to you all their most sincere thanks for an outstanding job. I'm direct messaging you individually with the decryption keys for your bonus

account files. While we wait for these to transfer, I just want to thank you all personally.

"Unlike the rest of you, I didn't learn the tricks of this trade from studying at WHNSEC or any of those other fine schools. I'm strictly amateur, and you guys have treated me with every bit of the respect I deserve for that."

More laughter all around.

"Inside those bonus account files, you should find— in addition to your account numbers and authentication codes— a message from our investors, thanking you personally for your heroic bravery—"

Groans and booing from multiple voices.

"—and inviting each of you to contact them in parallel using channels similar to the ones I discovered. They would very much like to assist you with recruiting your own teams and conducting more operations of the sort we did today.

"What are you going to do?" Roxie asked.

"First, I'm going to Disneyland," I say. "Then, I'm going to see a man about a horse. I recommend all of you do something similar."

"Sure," says Warfield.

"Be seeing you," I say, and I cut the link.

