

# A Fat Divemaster and Vile Puke

I was checking in divers off my roaster as they were boarding the dive boat to Catalina Island when I saw the ape. This dude had thick, coke bottle glasses and man tits. He was a beast. On top of his head was a ball cap that read in big blue letters “Divemaster.” I’m thinking, What the hell kind of divemaster is this? Is he for real? He came aboard and I asked him his name.

“Arvid,” he said with a smile that revealed huge horse teeth. His Yeti breath was visible in the cold early morning.

“I’m Eric. I’m the divemaster today.” I said, returning the smile and shaking his sausage finger hand. Then I told him where to stow his dive gear. After all the divers had checked in, the boat left the dock and headed out for our two hour plus ride to Catalina Island.

A divemasters’ role in the US is a bit different than a divemaster working in the Caribbean and South Pacific Islands. A divemaster in the tropics takes the certified divers down and guides them on an underwater tour of the reef, wall, ship wreck or whatever is down there. A divemaster in the U.S., at least in California, usually stays on board the boat and coordinates the dive, assists divers with their gear, keeps track of the divers time in and out of the water and notes their maximum depth and bottom time. But most importantly, a divemaster stays on the boat for surface supervision in the event a diver gets themselves into trouble because the Pacific Ocean isn’t like the Caribbean Sea. Currents, choppy swells and thick kelp beds can take their toll on divers at the surface, and as most experienced divers know, the majority of diving accidents happen at the surface, not underwater. And I was about to find this out on my first boat charter as a divemaster.

“Eric, can I talk to you for a minuet?” I heard a voice say from behind me. I was at the stern of the boat talking with Kathy and Terrie, two girls I always dived with off the shore of Laguna Beach.

“Arvid, what’s up?” I said turning to face the abominable yeti. Kathy and Terrie took off into the galley to get something to drink. They had shit eating grins on their faces as if they both knew I had my work cut out for me.

“I never dived in these waters before,” Arvid said. This time though, he was not smiling his horrible horse teeth at me. He looked concerned, almost afraid.

“What do you mean Arvid?” I said pointing to his hat, “Your a divemaster.”

“I did all my training in the Caribbean,” He paused to wipe off the sweat beading down his forehead. “I’ve never been in these kind of waters before.” Arvid looked away from me to gaze out over the cold, choppy Pacific Ocean.

“Well, make sure you listen closely to my dive briefing when we get to the dive site. I’ll double check your dive gear before you hit the water.” I said with a smile.

“You’ll keep an eye on me then?”

“Of course. You’ll be fine. Just remember to be positively buoyant in the water at the surface before and after the dive.” I said. That gave Arvid a little bit of relief; However, I could still see some uncertainty in his wide ape face. He gave me a slight smile, then lumbered over to his dive bag and started messing with his gear.

The anchor dropped at Bird Rock, the first dive sight located about a quarter of a mile off Isthmus Bay, Catalina. Bird Rock was always a good first dive because of it’s depth. Divers could get their deep dive in first then work their way up to more shallow depths amongst huge underwater rock formations and scattered kelp forests. Lots of horned sharks, bat rays, and of course, the California State fish, the orange Garibaldi, were always cruising around down there.

I gathered up all the divers at the stern of the boat for the dive briefing. When I was finished explaining the dive site and safety

procedures, all the divers started suiting up, eager to hit the salty, greenish blue water.

The divers entered the water on the starboard side. I stood at the entry point logging the divers times into the water and checking that their dive gear was secure and their air was on. Kathy and Terrie had just exited the boat and there were only about six divers left to get into the water when the fat divemaster appeared at my side. I almost screamed. I thought Arvid was a beast just in his normal clothes, but when I saw him all geared up he looked like a hellish creature with evil intent. He was as wide as he was tall. His face looked twisted and deformed under his dive mask. I was just hoping that he wasn't going to scare the other divers when he saw him underwater come looming out of the murky haze of plankton towards them.

"Okay Arvid, your all set." I said. "Look straight ahead and do a big giant stride." I made sure King Kongs' BCD was fully inflated because, Jesus, this dude had at least fortyfour pounds of lead on his weight belt. Arvids' dive buddy was all ready in the water waiting for him. Arvid looked at me one last time then took his first giant stride into the deep Pacific Ocean.

All the divers were in the water now and pretty soon the first divers that went in would be coming back to the boat. With twenty divers on the charter there wasn't really any down time. Soon I'd be helping the divers exit the water from the stern of the vessel. It was a beautiful morning. The sun was rising higher above the low lying cloud formations and its warm rays penetrated and soothed my body. The sea gulls hovered overhead in the salty ocean breeze. I closed my eyes for just a minuet to listen to the waves crash against Bird Rock and then, I heard the scream.

A gargled shrill of panic came from the stern of the boat. The captain and I ran back to the swim step and saw Arvid thrashing around, trying desperately to get out of the water. Kong was terrified. He flung his mask off his face and spat out the regulator. He was sucking in saltwater like a vacuum cleaner. I jumped down to the swim step and grabbed one of his arms that was as thick as my thigh. The boat captain grabbed the other. We got him

on the swim step and tried pulling him up to the boat deck. It was no use, Arvid was a ton of a sea monster in a full blown panic. Then, two divers surfaced from their dive and, along with Arvids dive buddy, assisted getting the beast up onto the deck. We struggled with the creature trying to calm him down. It took a bit of time but we finally got the fat divemaster to sit down on the deck. After we had taken his BC off, and his million pound weight belt, Arvid unzipped his wetsuit spilling out his grotesque, hairy belly. The captain handed Arvid his coke bottle glasses as he tried to catch his breath. Arvid put on his glasses and sat there wet and weak staring out into nowhere. It was a disturbing sight.

“What happened?” I said.

“I got water in my mask,” he said, as his distorted goat eyes squinted at me from behind those quarter inchers.

“What?” I couldn’t believe what I just heard.

“My mask flooded,” said Arvid between breaths.

I was speechless and amazed. Finally I said, “Why the hell didn’t you clear it?”

“I tried, but I wasn’t ready for how cold the water was,” he said as he turned his head away from me to stare back into nowhere. “Then I got water in my regulator and started choking.”

*Holy shit, I thought. You have got to be kidding me. I can’t believe there was an instructor somewhere out there that actually certified this dude as a divemaster.*

What came next was vile puke spewing out of his mouth. Arvid caked his naked belly with steamy vomit chunks. The stench was devastating. I heard female divers somewhere around me scream in revulsion. The captain grabbed the on board hose and started spraying down the deck. Captains take great pride in their vessels and defacing it in anyway is like someone trying to harm a mothers baby. It’s just not a good idea. I could see the captain trying to control himself, but at the same time he was boiling inside, pissed off. The captain could no longer control his anger and he turned the hose on Arvid. Arvid jumped in wild shock from the cold water. His arms were flailing in the air as the captain sprayed the puke off his body.

“I’m sea sick,” Arvid screamed. Loud, ferocious burps and guttural noises started booming out of his body. “I think I need to go down below in the cabin. I’ll feel better.”

“No,” I said. “Jesus Arvid, get a hold of yourself. Going down below will only make it worse. And besides, if you blow chunks down there in one of the bunks, it won’t be water the captain sprays you with the next time. No, the next time he’ll spray you with gasoline and light a match to go with it.” More divers were coming aboard and I had to get back to my job. “You need to stay up here in the fresh air and fix your eyes on Bird Rock. It’ll help the motion sickness.”

“Okay. I’m sorry for all the trouble I caused,” Arvid said, looking at me with traces of puke streaming down the corners of his fat mouth.

“No trouble, but I think you should take a long look at what that hat says, the one you wear on your head.”

Arvid nodded, gave me a slight smile and turned his head back towards Bird Rock.

