

The Clubbin' Clown — Write-Up

Story Driven OSINT CTF Event — Halloween Special

⚠️ **SPOILER WARNING:** This write-up contains the full solution to The Clubbin' Clown. If you haven't played yet, download the Contract first and come back if you get stuck.

The Story

A killer clown has been terrorizing the United States, leaving a trail of victims and baseball bats behind him. Local police are completely stumped, so SERPENT has been brought in. The clown — arrogant as he is cruel — has been taunting investigators with a chain of encrypted ZIP files, each one opening the next. Special Agent K, your job is to decipher his clues, follow his trail across the country, and find out where the clown is escaping to before he vanishes for good.

Disciplines: 🧩 Logic, 💾 Data, 🌐 Geolocation, 🚢 Maritime, 🌐 Internet

Step 1 — The Riddle (**california**)

The first ZIP contains a handwritten note from the clown, taunting the detectives. It's a riddle whose lines each point to a distinctive geographic superlative:

"I found the place where the world records bake. Where the mercury once touched fifty-six point seven, the hottest spot a body could ever take."

56.7°C is the hottest air temperature ever recorded on Earth — set in **Death Valley**.

"I danced where the tallest trees stand guard."

The tallest trees in the world are the California **redwoods**.

"I walked the lowest dry land on these United States of ours. Eighty-six meters below the ocean's door."

Badwater Basin in Death Valley, at 86 m below sea level, is the lowest point in the United States.

"They dug for riches, couldn't get enough, so they named me Golden."

The **Gold Rush** — California, the **Golden State**.

All roads lead to one state. The note tells you the format:

"Type the state I call my killing ground. One word, all lowercase, that's the rule."

Password: **california**

Step 2 — The Bird (**tonyhawk**)

Inside the second ZIP is a rebus: a **bird**, a **plus sign**, a **man**, an **equals sign**, and a **skateboard**.

Bird + Man = Skateboard. A "hawk" of a man synonymous with a skateboard: the most famous skateboarder of all time.

The note confirms the basement he's hiding in belongs to this person — and reminds you of the format: *"All one word, lowercase, you know the drill..."*

Password: **tonyhawk**

Step 3 — The Hiding Spot (**ranges . sung . eyeful**)

The clown's next note reads:

"I went due north, away from the bird's nest, to a place of bricks. ... What's better than one word? That's right, not two, but three. what.three.words — that is the game..."

Two things are needed:

1. **The "bird's nest"** — Tony Hawk's home in Encinitas, California. Without this anchor, the note is a dead end: there's nothing searchable in the note itself.
2. **The tool** — what3words, which divides the world into 3×3 meter squares, each with a unique three-word address.

The note includes a deliberately low-resolution satellite tile with a crosshair — recognizable *only* if you already know where to look. Measuring due north from Tony Hawk's house lands you in a place of bricks: **LEGOLAND California** in Carlsbad, just up the coast from Encinitas.

Look up the square in the what3words app or at what3words.com, and you get the address of the spot.

Password: **ranges . sung . eyeful**

Step 4 — The Pirate (**blarney - allmanjohnson - 9068809**)

The clown's final note: the paint dries, the costume changes — it's a pirate's life for him.

*"After all this Blarney, I've tugged away... I'm jackin my butterballs out of San Diego... I have to say, IMO, this rum tastes hella fine! ... I've tangled my winch, the thing doesn't work right this pinch... find me this and I'll be yours: **vesselname - winchbrand - imo**"*

Three answers, three different OSINT techniques:

The vessel name — Blarney

The clown escaped San Diego Bay on a **harbor tug**. His wordplay gives it away — "After all this Blarney" — but to confirm it and learn more, visit the fleet page of the tug's owner, **Pacific Tugboat Service / Pacific Maritime**

Group: pacificmaritimegroup.com/fleets/blarney/. The *Blarney* is a 94-foot model bow ocean tug, built 1945 (a WWII-era US Navy yard tug, ex-*Owachomo* YTM-401) and fully rebuilt in 2024.

The winch brand — Allman-Johnson

The fleet page links to a downloadable **spec sheet PDF** for the tug. Dig one level deeper and it lists everything: dimensions, engines, generators — and the **tow winch: Allman-Johnson**.

⚠️ Trap for the unwary: the spec sheet lists an "Official Number" (565613). That is the US vessel documentation number — **not** an IMO number. It will not work in the password.

The IMO number — 9068809

The IMO is *not* on the spec sheet. The only way to get it is a maritime AIS database: **VesselFinder** or **MarineTraffic**. Search for the tug *Blarney*, and her vessel page shows:

BLARNEY — Tug, IMO 9068809

The IMO (International Maritime Organization) number is a permanent 7-digit identifier that never changes, even if the ship changes name or flag — which is why it's the gold standard for vessel identification.

Assemble the final password: vessel name, winch brand, IMO — all lowercase, no spaces:

Password: [blarney-allmanjohnson-9068809](#)

The Ending

Well done, Special Agent K.

SERPENT's B.T.R.U., together with the US Coast Guard, caught up with the slow-moving tug and boarded her. "Bozo" didn't put up much of a fight — he pulled a little stiletto knife, to which Liam responded: "*Oi, that's not a knoife, this is a knoife*" and presented his Aussie bushwhacker machete. Bozo's smile vanished and he gave up.

The whole thing turned into quite a circus — the media were waiting in droves when we brought him to dry land. Congratulations, Special Agent K: with Bozo out of the way, the Oval Office will be a lot calmer and the people of the United States will sleep a lot better at night.

Shadow Wing is waiting at San Diego International Airport. We're soon needed elsewhere...

Tools & Techniques Used

Step	Discipline	Skills practiced
1. The Riddle	🧩 Logic 🌐 Geolocation	Research, verifying geographic records
2. The Bird	🧩 Logic	Rebus / image reasoning
3. The Hiding Spot	🌐 Geolocation	Anchor-based navigation, what3words, satellite imagery
4. The Pirate	🚢 Maritime 📄 Data 🌐 Internet	Vessel identification, document OSINT (PDF), AIS databases (VesselFinder/ MarineTraffic), IMO vs Official Number

Disclaimers

The Clubbin' Clown is a work of fiction. All characters and events are invented for this OSINT exercise. Tony Hawk, LEGOLAND California, Pacific Tugboat Service, the tug *Blarney*, and any real persons, companies, places, or vessels referenced are in no way affiliated with, involved in, or aware of this CTF — they are used purely as real-world anchors for a fictional story. No clowns were harmed in the making of this Contract. 🤡