“Santarchy: A Christmas Tale”

By T.D. Smith

“*Well, old man, what do you have to say for yourself?”*

 *Silence.*

 *“Tell me one thing,” asks the interrogator, “why Auckland, of all places?”*

 *The fat man with a long, white beard wearing a red suit looks up at his interrogator, to each officer in the room, and straight through the glass of the two-way mirror, making eye contact (the FBI Agent behind the glass can feel it) with the man in the other room, piercing into his soul. He looks back to his interrogator with a twinkling eye and slight grin.*

 *“Goodness, where to start? Well, you see, it’s a long story, are you sure you want to know all of it?”*

 *“We have all the time in the world, old man.”*

 *The jolly old elf glances down at his watch. It has 10 hands, some of which are pointing upward off the watch face, moving along a z-axis, while others are moving counter-clockwise. Its face has no numerals, only runic carvings, and strange pictographs. He smiles broadly.*

 *“I suppose you’re right. Well, you see, a main vein, or rather artery might be a more accurate term, runs from home all the way along a parallel course, outward in all four cardinal directions. A ‘junction’ of sorts, if you will, exists here in this city, as it does in others, where the route needs to change directions. It is one of many such places inside the wormhole, and when my minions planned a mass breakout together, they joined hands in a long human chainlink, clumped up in the artery, and caused a blockage that built up pressure along the route until it burst open, depositing them all onto the sidewalks I-.”*

 *“Whoa, whoa, whoa- slow down! Minions? Home? Wormhole? What are you talking about?”*

 *“Oh, come off it, you know!” says the old man, annoyedly.*

 *An awkward pause. The interrogator’s eyes drift from his subject to the mirror and back again.*

 *“What do you mean I know? No I don’t. Now are you going to tell us, or not?”*

 *The old man sighs, rolls his eyes, then, closing them, clears his throat, speaks again, and begins to tell a much longer story…*

\*\*\*

“Santas everywhere.

Beards blowing in the icy wind, red cloaks and coats flapping, bellies protruding over their beltlines and jiggling up and down and all over as they ran rampantly throughout the city.

And the destruction, oh the destruction.

I remember it like it was yesterday.

They came out of nowhere.

In the end, the reporters said that it was a protest. A group of hipsters across the globe collectively objecting to the over-commercialization of the holiday.

It’s a lie. I know. I was there.

Something more, something magical, something *sinsiter,* was going on.

It was the winter of 2005. Christmas Eve. I was strolling along, minding my own business. I was in Auckland, New Zealand, out and about downtown and doing some last minute Christmas shopping on the final leg of a vast voyage home from a semester abroad. I had a long layover, and decided to check out the town. I was looking at little trinkets and in particular was eyeing a quaint little display of multiple unique, hand-crafted snowglobes in an outdoor, open-air shop, when the entire shelf began shaking. Several of the snowglobes began rattling, crept to the edge of the shelf, fell to the ground, and shattered.

I looked up. My eyes widened.

40 men dressed as Santa (their costumes were *good,* very convincing!) came rushing at me, knocking myself and the wooden shelves over. They seized the snow globes and threw them against the wall, dashed them on the concrete, or even threw them over the siderails and into the icy water of the bay below.

They grabbed other objects on display. Christmas wreaths, wooden Santas, glass ball ornaments, and destroyed these, too. I’ll never forget one particularly chubby Santa wrapping his fingers around a small, ceramic Father Christmas figurine with a forest green coat and painted twinkle in his eye, throwing it to the ground, stomping it to pieces, and screaming profanities (‘f--- Christmas! Down with your oppressive slave driving, old man!’) before draining a considerable amount of a 40 he was holding in his left hand then crushing it against his forehead, bellowing, belching, and charging headlong at a shelf that he knocked over, his scalp all bloodied.

At this, I leapt over the wreckage of some items formerly on sale, and ran for my life. I beheld an assortment of annihilation happening all over for several city blocks. Two drunken Santas came stumbling out of the convenience store, cases of beer under one arm, and as many wadded bills as they could carry under another, with various candies and bags of chips sticking out of their crowded coat and pants pockets. Later it was reported that they had run into the store, shouted ‘Merry Christmas!’ then helped themselves, even leaping over the clerk’s counter and emptying the register.

I moved into their path to obstruct their progress, holding up a hand to make them stop in a sudden act of bravery, but quickly moved aside, throwing my hands up, when one of the Santas produced a handgun from his belt and brandished it at me. I moved out of their way after this, my back against the wall, and simply let them pass by.”

\*\*\*

*“So as you can see, sir, as both the widespread popularity of the Christmas holiday, and the belief and expectation in me on that holiday grew, along with an exponentially booming world population, the job became increasingly exhausting, unbelievably difficult, for just one man to complete in one night, even with magic to aid him! I had to do something, or Christmas would die! My, erm, other helpers, well, some of them just…didn’t work out…”*

*The old man’s eyes meet his captor’s, whose yellow ones narrow. A flash of something, hatred? Resentment? glints in his eye briefly. (The man behind the darkened mirror glass notices the strange interaction and thinks to himself it’s all a bit odd, like something else is going on, as if these two have met before…if it weren’t for the man facing away so that all he could see is the back of the interrogator’s head, he would behold his bare teeth barred and gritted in a disapproving grimace.) Before too long the conversation continues.*

*“The elves wouldn’t do, either, you see- their genome is highly volatile, and can only be magically manipulated so much.*

*“As it stands, I’ve already made the elven clones immune to the usual means of aging and sickness, which mitigates the eventual wearing down of their DNA through constant artificial replication somewhat. Of course, there are factory accidents from time to time, and more clones are necessary to maintain production speed and efficiency. But those cells are for emergency purposes only, and we have them under strict protection in our lab! For that reason, elf procreation is encouraged, although we do have a growing infertility rate…going to be a rather big crisis to the toy production in a few decades, actually…*

*“What is your POINT old man?!? Is there some kind of meaning to all this inane nonsense you’re spouting?” interrupts the inquisitor, pounding his fist on the table.*

*“Well, my point is, I had to look to other subjects to clone for help around the holidays. The reindeer wouldn’t have been any use, really. A couple clonings and they can’t even fly anymore. Intelligence drops dramatically, too…elves were already out, so really, the only viable option was me.”*

*Silence.*

*The interrogator leans forward, fingers interlocked, elbows on the table.*

*“Are you saying…”*

*“That’s right,” the old man says.*

*More silence.*

*“Oh, don’t look so shocked. You know this already.”*

*The Inquisitor squirms, involuntarily jerks his head over his shoulder at the mirror, then he snaps it back to face his bearded captive again.*

*“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”*

*“But you do, Karl, yes you do. It was all your idea, originally, if you recall.”*

*Silence again. Karl the Inquisitor does not deny it, but does look at the handcuffed elderly person in front of him with vaguely traceable disgust, disdain.*

*“So I cloned myself, which at the time seemed like the only viable option, in order to be everywhere in one night. It worked great, too! At first, anyway. I even manipulated my DNA and produced a female clone, would you believe it, and eventually, married her! She made a wonderful partner, even if I did have to continually make a new one every few years.*

*“Turns out manipulation of the DNA like that, for gender modification purposes, causes instability on a cellular level, accelerated aging, among other defects. Only so much magic’ll do to slow those down, too. But, oh, the fun times me and the Mrs. Clauses would have in the off-season over the years! They were so wonderful, so lovely, so jolly, and well, loving, you know, especially during the darkest, coldest parts of the winter, if you catch my drift…”*

*The old man winks, a sparkle dancing in his eye.*

*Dead silence, again. A look of visible repulsion, unmistakable now on the interrogator’s face, along with genuine shock. A sound of muffled vomiting coming from somewhere behind the two-way mirror*

*“I never knew she was a clone…” Karl manages to choke out.*

*“Oh, don’t be so surprised, Karl, what did you think I was going to do? Besides, you know good and well how dreadfully lonesome the Pole gets, sometimes…”*

*\*\*\**

“A little bit later, and the riot was still in full swing. A cruise ship was pulled into port, loading supplies, food, and waiting for customers to turn up for a Christmas Eve Cruise. The Santas stormed the ship, piling onto it, pilfering what they could, and quickly making their getaway.

 One lingered, climbing out on a mooring line and pulling down his red trunks to moon the staff of the cruise ship. He slapped his blubbery buttocks over and over and shook his flabby flanks at them, one cheek clenched in hand, and even defecated from the mooring line into the water below! The captain himself came out and ordered him to leave. When he did not, several security officers streamed from the depths of the ship, and slid down the line after him, as he finally tried to escape. Jumping to the sidewalk and promptly drunkenly tripping over his still downed trousers, the security officers tackled him, cuffed him, and carted him off, screaming.

 ‘Feliz Navidad, motherf-----s!’ another drunk Santa roared, wielding a baseball bat, which he brought down swiftly onto the head of a plastic, illuminated Joseph in a manger scene decorating the outside of another storefront. He made short work of the poor plastic Holy Family, which were all soon knocked over and in multiple pieces, twisted and contorted beyond recognition.

The Santas broke beer bottles against brick walls after chugging their contents, and came charging forward belligerently swinging their newly forged shivs. Some security guards from a nearby bank rushed onto the scene to attempt to protect the public. They were badly bruised and cut after a few seconds of engaging their enemy. Innocent bystanders looked on in horror. Some ran, others jumped inside shops, which the shopkeepers locked once they were safely inside. One man deftly leapt out of the way of a Santa swinging a two-by-four, only to fall into the murky, icy waters of the bay. Me, I just stood there looking on, my mouth agape.

I remember wondering how long this would continue, when the police were going to arrive and stop it, and if *anyone* would be able to do something, when finally, *he* appeared.

There was a dazzling burst of bright light, followed by a loud CRACK, and there he was: leaner, taller, and with finer robes than any of the others, which were a darker shade of blood red, stood he who I immediately knew to be the REAL Santa Claus. I swear it’s true. He was right there, in the flesh, front and center before me. His eyes truly twinkled just like all the stories said, bright and brilliant as if they were the night itself and contained every single shining star and all their lustrous glory. He looked old and wise as the mountains with his snow white beard and wrinkled features, yet youthful and spry and agile like a much younger man than he. A shiver shot down my spine.

All the other Santas froze when they saw him and stopped their debauchery. He stood, tall, proud, and commanding, and for a few moments, in fear and awe, the others stopped. Then, gathering gumption, the imposters gradually stepped toward him, encircling him. They growled low, loud, and gutturally.

‘DEATH TO THE TYRANT!’ one evil Santa finally shouted.

‘DOWN WITH THE BEARDED MAN!’ yelled another.

‘’BOUT TO UNWRAP A BOX OF WHOOPASS!’ yet another bellowed.

Numerous other remarks were declared loudly, some suggesting he take various things and shove them up his chimney, as the crowd of raucous Santa Clauses charged at the true one, plunging forward to attack their apparent enemy.”

\*\*\*

*“We needed a magical network, you see, to make it all work,” says Santa, “an enchanted interstate of sorts, so I used my magic to produce a series of hyper-fast tunnels all over the world that were all interconnected. That is how myself and the clones travel to the four corners of the world in one night so quickly, you see, using the sleigh to fly to the rooftops of various houses in each locality.”*

*“So why then, pray tell,” says the Inquisitor with his New Zealander accent, “did your Santa Clones go bad?”*

 *“Oh, ho-ho, well,” Old Chris Cringle himself begins to explain, “it turns out the Santas wanted their freedom. They did not share the same perspective as I, the original, did, you see. Why should we have to serve all the world’s people in one night, they eventually began asking? So what if everyone is expecting gifts for the good ones under their trees, in their stockings? What does it matter to me if Christmas dies? Why is it our problem, why should we be forced, year after year, to be their slaves?*

*“Try as I might, I cannot convey to them that special quality of altruism, of living a life well lived in service to others! I feel the virtue in the work, and find it to be rewarding in and of itself. They do not share in this mindset. It is no labor of love to them. It is a defect in the clones, I am afraid. I had not the heart to tell them, of course, that if Christmas were to die, so too, would its magic, and they, the clones, would turn to celluloid dust.*

 *“They grew power hungry. When some started to suggest that we use our power to exert force and order over the mortal world, well, I grew angry! Their service now became servitude. I magiced up a bunch of restraints that kept them confined to the inner machinations of the North Pole, unable to leave except on Christmas Eve. They grew jealous of me. They begged me for magic, just to dabble. I would not allow it, for I was afraid of their intentions and what might happen if my power fell into their hands. After all, I was the original and all the magic belonged to me! I knew myself to be the only one who could be trusted to use it responsibly. Perhaps I was wrong to keep them in captivity, but I think their actions today have justified my concerns…*

 *He pauses briefly, contemplative, before going on.*

 *“They were jealous of the time off I would take off with Mrs. Claus, as well- and they wanted mates of their own, too! I would not allow this; the last thing we needed were Santa clone spawn, an army of their own offspring swelling up to take over the world!*

 *“They conspired against me! Planned rebellions! Eventually, they built up their forces and attempted a coup. It took them hundreds of years of lying low, planning in private, holding meetings of their secret organization. They were entirely oblivious to the flaw in their plan- I had already discovered them! They’d no clue that I had attended their meetings in disguise as one of them. Some suspected my knowledge of their plans, and, chickening out, did not follow through with them. The others, some of whom you saw today, decided to carry it out.*

 *“Enraged when they learned that I had purposefully put them into a holding pattern inside the magical interstate network, rendering them unable to leave it and conduct their evil ploy, they congregated around one of the exit portals, in your beautiful city, and awaited the point where enough magical backup built up until BOOM! The corridor ruptured, and they came spilling out into the city. Drinking whatever they could lay their mittened paws on and quickly becoming intoxicated, and angry beyond all imagination, they began their rampage. I arrived in the Nick of time (no pun intended!) to stop it.”*

 *“Only you didn’t hurry,” Santa’s interrogator hisses, in an almost desperate, accusatory tone, “You took your sweet time getting here, didn’t you?”*

 *Old St. Nicholas’s gaze narrows. He frowns at the man.*

 *“I don’t know what you mean.”*

 *“You arrived a little late to the party, old man! People had already been injured, a security guard lies beaten and bleeding, within an inch of his life in hospital, all because of your clones’ drunken depravity! Shops are destroyed, marketplaces wrecked, property decimated! What do you have to say for yourself?”*

 *The jolly old elf stays perfectly quiet, offering no defense whatsoever.*

 *“You were watching, waiting, measuring them up, maybe even letting them wear down a little bit, biding your time and making sure you could take them, weren’t you? What’s the matter, getting frail in your old age, Nick?”*

 *Santa grits his teeth.*

 *“It takes time to repair a magical network of tunnels. And when the reverberation caused the normal seals to break, it made it much easier for the other, less audacious clones to teleport from the pole to various, other locations and stir up mischief.”*

 *“Nonsense! You were lazy! You didn’t CARE if people were being hurt.”*

 *The interrogator’s brow is dripping with sweat now, his skin increasingly turning a deeper shade of red.*

 *“Watch it, Karl. You’re already on the naughty list. Besides, the police sure took their time, too. I got there with no time to spare after dealing with your allies’ antics abroad. Santarchy, was, after all, meant to be an INTERNATIONAL event, was it not?”*

 *At this, the Inquisitor suddenly reels back his head in laughter, a high, shrill cackling. He breaks character entirely, casting aside his assumed persona, and any last vestige of formality. The façade is gone.*

 *“Well played, Nicholas, well played! You have an answer for everything, don’t you? Well, there’s little point in continuing this charade.” Santa’s Enemy says, any guise of New Zealander gone from his voice, “But one thing you didn’t account for was me. Oh, you wondered didn’t you? But you didn’t know.”*

*“I knew someone, some thing, was behind them, organizing them, a strong leader giving them purpose and direction. I hoped it was not you, that you had changed your ways and resigned to obscurity, but I suspected.”*

*The elderly elf shrugs before continuing, “Well, it’s all over now, and that being so, I’ll be taking my leave now, if that’s okay with you? Better luck next time, old friend.”*

*The captor smiles wickedly, the tips of sharp teeth just visible as they peek out from behind his gums.*

*“But you aren’t allowed to leave. Not ever. You cannot be allowed to continue. I’m afraid it is time for Christmas to die, old fellow, or find a way to carry on without you.”*

*Santa cocks his head to one side.*

*“Definitely on the naughty list now!”*

*“Naughty, nice, these are archaic notions, things of the past now!”*

*That wizened old man, symbol of joy and goodwill to man, shakes his head, saddened.*

*“What you just said is proof that the world needs me now more than ever. I let you sway me to make the clones. It was the quick and easy way and I fell for it, though I had qualms at the time. Their corruption has leaked out into the world. I have to stick around to fix what I’ve caused.”*

*The inquisitor rises to his full height, challenging the old man in a power stance. His appearance transforms before his prisoner. He sprouts long, curved, sharp horns and scraggly, matted black hair. His eyes become fluorescent yellow and serpentine, and his sharp teeth now billow out of his mouth. There is a scream from behind the glass and officers and agents alike scatter in fear.*

*“I told you once. Christmas is cancelled. It’s over, old man.”*

*“The magic of Christmas is deeper, more powerful than you can possibly comprehend. It’s not over now, nor will it be in the foreseeable future, my friend.”*

*The Inquisitor hisses.*

*“You will NEVER set foot out in the world again, Mr. Claus.”*

 *The great giver, the friend of children, that ancient and jolliest of elves stands. If by magic or naturally, it is impossible to tell, but he seems to grow, his very essence filling the room, dwarfing his captor. His eyes have begun glowing with a bright, lustrous golden light. The earth beneath them shakes and the beast before him cowers, seemingly shrinking in size, becoming a novelty item, a children’s toy, who could easily be swept up with little effort and placed on a shelf, some likeness of a badly animated cartoon for kids compared to the mighty man, whose aged voice booms like thunder in a mountainous valley.*

 *“Wanna bet, Krampus?”*

*\*\*\**

“That wonderful warlock of winter festivity, that jovial Saint of advent celebrations, pulled out his staff, an ancient and gnarled piece of oak, long, thick, and firm, from under his velvet, blood red robes, and held it fast. The aged, curved reindeer antlers at its top jutted outward authoritatively. The man’s hands gripped a part of the great stick just beneath a portion towards the top where the wood swirled around itself.

An evil Santa leapt forward, broken bottle in hand. The true Santa swung out with his oaken staff, hitting him square in the jaw. The evil clone fell back, hit the ground, and then disintegrated into some kind of swirling, black-ash looking substance. It fluttered for a moment then was borne away and dissipated on the wind. They all stormed him then, screaming, falling upon the jolly old fellow, but he deftly sidestepped their assaults, blocked their blows and delivered his own, swifter and more agile ones, and from time to time let loose great bursts of bright yellow lightning from his staff, which destroyed each and every rowdy Santa that assailed him.

 After several minutes of this, sirens blared. Red and blue flashing lights appeared, attached to the tops of little white cars. The lights bounced and reflected off the walls of the buildings. Several officers ordered Santa to stop. He would not. Instead, he continued to strike the evil imposters, smiting them, determined to cut down each and every one of them, to a man.

Ignoring their repeated threats, Santa fought on, so the officers advanced, crowd-control shields and Billy clubs in hand. The harbinger of Christmas cheer would not strike an officer, and for a time managed to outmaneuver them, dodging their blows and only striking false Santas. Eventually he must have been growing weary, for he took several police clubbings to the tummy and head, followed by several Taser strikes, and went down. The officers piled on top of him.

 I looked on, alarmed, anxiously awaiting the re-emergence of a leather-mittened hand from the pile of bodies, to see Santa standing strong and undefeated again, blasting back all his foes, and rising on high, but this never happened. Instead I felt a sudden pain in the back of my head and I collapsed forward on the ground. Another evil Santa stepped over me, pieces of shattered snow globe and water trickling down from his hand and splattering on the ground. Everything seemed to go into slow motion. A police officer leapt forward and produced a Taser.

The world went all sideways.

I saw wires shooting out from the policeman’s Taser and hitting the evil Santa square in the chest, and the contorted movements of the electrified Santa, whose whole body finally exploded into black ash. The last thing I saw was an officer, who was slightly larger than the others, stepping out of a black car and toward the handcuffed, true Santa. As he rose from the vehicle I could have sworn I saw his eyes flash yellow and in that moment that he had pupils like a snake’s eyes. His teeth were sharp when he grinned. I then put my forehead down on the pavement and closed my eyes.

 When I awoke again I was in the hospital and had missed my flight by several hours. I called my worried family and let them know I was alright. I read a newspaper article several days later about the incident, but saw nothing in it about the true Santa Claus’s appearance, fighting, takedown, or anything about exploding Santas. My story is as true as it is inexplicable. I swear by it, and I have never told anyone before now, my granddaughter, as we sit together drinking our coco and warming ourselves by the fire tonight, on Christmas Eve so many years later, so that you can hear the story that made me, and keeps me to this day, a true believer. After all, Christmas came that year. It came anyway. Somehow, he pulled it off! Christmas came all the same that year and every year after, and it did not matter he was captured, my dear.

 I do not know what became of him. I like to think he escaped, that the Elves, the reindeer, or SOMEONE came for him in prison, busting him out like you see in some of the movies. But I know that Christmas will continue. It has continued. Somehow, he manages still to keep coming to us, year after year. I think it’s because good people and the spirit of truth and goodness, can never be broken, never confined, and that’s what he really is. So long as people believe, like me, and pass it on to young ones like you.”

 A silence between them. The young girl gazes in awe at her grandfather, a twinkle in her eye and youthful, jovial smile on her lips. She delights in the company of her grandparents at the holidays. Her body is warm from the fire and her heart from being filled with yuletide joy, and her grandfather’s clever story, which, of course, she believes. Every word of it.

 “Well, let’s get you to bed, dear, you don’t want Santa to catch you awake.” says her grandmother, who is smiling at her granddaughter whilst simultaneously shaking her head in response to her husband’s absurd story, it’s bizarre content, and its eccentric delivery.

 The girl rises and as both she and her grandfather are getting up, they see a flash in the night sky outside the large living room window. A shooting star!

 The grandfather’s old eyes glisten as he takes in the light of the flare streaking out against the cold, bleak, black of the December night and contemplates the sign’s symbolism.

 The granddaughter’s young eyes revel in the novel wonder. With their sharpness she swears he can just spot silhouettes of, what is that, antlers?

\*\*\*

*“Security, security!” calls Krampus the Inquisitor into his hand radio, a look of pure fear suddenly flickering in his eyes. Bewildered, he whirls around and gesticulates at unseen men behind the dark mirror. Nobody comes. They are terrified of their master’s true form, as well as the display their detainee is creating.*

 *It is far too late. Santa raises his arms into the air. His handcuffs simply disappear. From out of nowhere the elderly wizard’s antlered staff appears, and he grasps it tightly in one hand. Holding it aloft a golden light shines forth from it. It illumines his entire body. In the other room, on security cameras, the few remaining officers who have not fled their posts witness the rest of the Santas in their holding cells suddenly bursting asunder, disintegrating one by one into black ash, which gently saunters down to the floor and dissipates into thin air.*

 *Santa, the true one, grins.*

 *“Guess I’ll have to find some new helpers. People who value virtue from early on this time around.”*

 *“New Year’s right around the corner,” his interrogator says, dejectedly, admitting his defeat, for now, with a shrug. “Good resolution.”*

 *The jolly old elf winks. Suddenly the window in the room bursts open. A great, howling, icy wind blusters through the room, bringing with it a twirling whirlwind of snowflakes. The snow swirls around the tall, old man with the snowy white beard and crimson robes, enveloping him. The vortex grows faster and faster, picking him up off the ground. Then, with one final rush of cold, winter air, and a glimmer of golden light that twinkles off the snowflakes like the glittering sun on newly fallen snow at dusk, the man calls out jovially with a great, booming voice.*

*“HO HO HO!!!”*

*And with a loud, thunderous clap, he is gone.*

The End.