

SANTARCHY HO, HO, HOLD ON TO YOUR HATS*Rhiannon Coppin. The Globe and Mail. Toronto, Ont.: Dec 16, 2005. pg. R.24*

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Much like [Santa Dave] himself, Santarchy has travelled all across the planet -- from Tokyo to Helsinki to Antarctica -- and all without a real driving force. As a New York Times reporter discovered last year, there is no leader or 'main Claus' in the movement: only subordinate Clauses. As the Santarchy motto goes: "no force on earth can stop one hundred Santas!"

Full Text (531 words)

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A drinking, smoking, debauched cabal of St. Nicks floods the streets for a ritual known as the Toronto Santa Rampage

Forget leaving out milk and cookies; Santa prefers gin and tonic.

It's not that Santa has a drinking problem, he's just having a little fun -- and Santa isn't alone.

On Saturday night, more than a hundred Santas will take to Toronto's streets in various states of dress and undress, toting candy canes for those who are nice and spankings for those who are naughty.

The Santas will smoke, swear, strip, and sip Santa Juice. They will also be using secret army tactics.

"We recruit people as we go along; we bring extra Santa hats," says Santa Dave, who has been involved in the Toronto Santa Rampage since its inception four years ago.

Santa Dave will join Santazon, Santa Blu, Santa Raj and other dedicated Santas in greeting each and every Santa at The Imperial Pub. The Santas, who have diplomatic immunity under unofficial Arctic law, are subject to only a few rules: Don't mess with the police, don't mess with store security, and be nice to the kids. However, parents are fair game.

The Santas must also answer the public's questions truthfully: Who organised this? Santa. Who are you? Santa.

"The answer to everything is Santa," explains Aussie Santa, who went on the rampage for the first time last year, though she may have gone before -- she doesn't quite remember.

Joined by others dressed in holiday outfits -- elves, gingerbread people, reindeer -- the Santas should be making a stop to hand out candy canes at Nathan Phillips Square, despite the near-riot that ensued last year with the call of "free candy."

"It was a mosh-pit. The kids were really rapacious. I suppose they were raised on hockey and see no problem with body checking anybody," recalls Aussie Santa.

As in years past, the Santas will regale passers-by with Christmas favourites such as *I'm Dreaming of a White Russian* and *Chipmunks Roasting On an Open Fire*. At the Eaton Centre, the Santas plan to cheer on the real Santa. The Santas will also stop to chug a few cold ones at various pubs along the way, like Traders Bar, and Santa hopes to get thrown out of The Rex (again).

Santacon, Santanarchy, or just Santarchy, began in San Francisco 1994 when disheartened Burners -- folk who have attended the yearly Burning Man Festival in Nevada -- took to wearing cheap Santa suits to spread some holiday cheer. Supposedly the original gathering was a holiday anti-consumerism protest. These days it seems rather to encourage consumerism instead; the Santas consume spirits with zeal.

Much like Santa himself, Santarchy has travelled all across the planet -- from Tokyo to Helsinki to Antarctica -- and all without a real driving force. As a New York Times reporter discovered last year, there is no leader or 'main Claus' in the movement: only subordinate Clauses. As the Santarchy motto goes: "no force on earth can stop one hundred Santas!"

Santarchy starts at 7:30 pm at The Imperial Pub at 54 Dundas St. E. For information, visit www.burnon.ca

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