

# CANDYCANE

Otherwise known as the *Covert Assault National Defense Youth Cadre, Air-Naval Echelon*. And it's just what it says on the label; a clandestine American military agency that recruits children to fight hidden wars in the skies every December, just to make sure that Christmas comes to America every year. And that Santa Claus survives the night.

...What? Good Lord, people: NORAD tracks and escorts Santa Claus every year. What, did everyone just assume that this was for *fun*? It's not for fun. It's to keep Saint Nick from being ambushed mid-air by all sorts of Nasty-Gnawers and Bad Witches and Shrieking Goblins and all the rest of the disgusting monstrosities that can bubble up from the depths of the Collective Unconscious. Jung was right about that concept, you know -- but if he had truly known about some of the stuff that was *really* down there, the man would have probably burned all his notes and fled to a monastery. Suffice it to say that the world can get real scary-bad, real quick.

But! Fortunately, you can fight that stuff off pretty easily... if you're a kid. The youngest members of CANDYCANE

start training at around eight, and they typically manage to get to about fourteen or so before the child's mind can no longer manifest enough belief in Santa Claus (or Shrieking Goblins) to allow them to function in the Cadre. In the meantime, though: oh, there's a lot of adventuring. Broomstick battles in the air, naval sorties in the Collective Unconscious, stick-fighting duels just about everywhere; it's a grand life for an adventurous child, for as long as they can truly keep believing in both the physical existence of their enemies, and their own immortality.

Of course, eventually a member of CANDYCANE gets too old to really *believe* in all that kid stuff. The government doesn't even have to suppress memories; the new adolescent will do that him- or herself. After a while, the brain just rewrites itself so that the whole thing turns into merely an elaborate kids' game, played with friends whose names can't quite be remembered. Such is the price of growing up -- besides, without CANDYCANE out there and fighting the good fight the Nasty-Gnawers would swiftly rule the airspace, and **then** where would we all be? Such is life, really.

Oh, what's that? Why, yes, many members of CANDYCANE **do** grow up to have a taste for an adventurous life, retaining both a worldview and a certain

set of skills that makes them excellent at dealing with strange and complicated problems on an ad hoc basis. Why do you ask?

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