

THE STORY SO FAR

The campaign began with one premise: a fantastically powerful individual calling himself **Omnius** seizes political hold of a minor country and proceeds to wage war on the rest of the world. He has two advantages: first, he and his country are demonstrably invulnerable to nuclear attack; second, he claims sovereignty over that segment of the population gifted with extranormal abilities of any kind. He offers sanctuary to any paranormal individual provided he or she is "worthy."

The offer inspires various paranormals to create gaudy, high-profile identities and try to build up as big and infamous a reputation as possible. Governments become alternately shy of paranormals and intrigued by their possibilities as war matériel.

A very few individuals choose to use their powers against **Omnius**, walking a fine line between supervillain opposition and governmental suspicion. Of course, having superpowers is no guarantee of heroic motives or potential, but some have both...

History: paranormals have been known to the modern world before **Omnius** turned them into a crucial international issue. They have appeared mostly during times of strife and trouble, and villains are always more prevalent than "heroes." In the 1930s, the **Garrote** stalked Chicago (an insane industrialist named Zeke Simmons) and others such as **ShadowWalker** and the **Hammer** were involved in organized crime. A weird individual called **Jack O'Lantern** dazzled London with a series of warped thefts involving occult jewels and a mummified hand. During this time **Dr. Arcane** appeared, basing his activities out of New Orleans, concealing his identity of **Dr. Clinton Avery**.

While **Dr. Arcane's** exploits went largely unknown to the public, in 1938 he saved the entire material dimension from demonic invasion by the sensuous demoness **Ch'Andarra**, who swore vengeance upon him but was bound never to enter the material plane again. Perhaps less noteworthy but more publicized, he and a Scottish lad **Dennis MacPherson** put a stop to **Jack O'Lantern**, who turned out to have been a cabal of thieves led by an occultist, **Cecil Simm**. Their six mystic lanterns were cast into the demonic realms. In 1936, a fourteen year old girl named **Janice McKim** came to **Avery** for help in finding her past (she insisted her birthdate was in 1964) but vanished two years later, jumping time to the late 50s, and her mystery was not solved.

Dr. Arcane's banishment of **Ch'Andarra** in the lost city of **Lemuria** had important metaphysical consequences. First, a group of powerful human sorcerers called the **Coven** (including **ShadowWalker**, **Adept**, and a nameless **Hag**) blamed **Dr. Arcane** for disturbing the status quo, and because they were benefiting from **Jack O'Lantern's** crimes. Second, several proto-demonlords claimed to inherit the right to the material plane, including **Vanashta** (a fiery, medieval type of classic demonic appearance) and **Omnius** (also called **Obadiah West**, an exotic, forceful man with a mysterious past).

As Europe plunged into WWII, four masked individuals decided to provide an international private task force called **Legion**. They were Dr. Arcane (American), Ironclad (Scottish, MacPherson), **Captain Cold** (French), and **Osprey** (Jewish-American, and the only woman). They fought Axis supervillains such as **Whitefire** and **Scourge** who terrorized France, on the front, and home-style villains such as **Black Market Bill**. A closemouthed, nonpartisan group (aside from the enemy), they never attempted to support or defy any non-Nazi power and thus were never supported or suppressed.

The Legion never realized that Omnius was supporting the Reich. He was using the deaths on both sides and of the victims of the concentration camps to provide power to summon Ch'Andarra back to Earth. He was prevented in this aim at Breslau in 1943 by the intervention of a mysterious band of superheroes, including one who was not human, who then disappeared (they were actually Shield, a group of superheroes from the 1980s). Puzzled and fascinated, Omnius abandoned the Nazis to examine this turn of events, especially in regard to extraterrestrials. His demonic rival Vanashta aided some of the victims of the Nazis, most notably a group of gypsies who escaped to Spain during the war. In reward for his aid, he demanded to sire a child on their most powerful sorceress, a member of the Coven.

During the late 40s and 50s, the Legion turned to individual ways. Dr. Arcane was crippled in the war and yet continued his highly metaphysical battle against the demoness Ch'Andarra, as well as his conflict with the Coven. He also found time to marry and have a child, Karen Avery. Osprey became an international troubleshooter for Israel. They had planned to train replacements for themselves; in 1958, each contributed one recruit to form a new group. Unfortunately, neither the individuals nor the times were destined for superheroics. **Puzzle** was a brilliant tactician but borderline-psychopathic, **Conjuror** was a wry, amoral stage illusionist, **Rubber Sam's** intellect was nothing like his physical invulnerability, and **Hourglass** (again, the single woman) was not only young but also a stranger to the decade. In fact, she was none other than Janice McKim, now subjectively sixteen years old. The group was characterized by morale problems and ended in 1961 in a confusion of betrayal, failure, and the murder of Rubber Sam, centering around a decades-old case involving a mummy's hand.

The Case of the Mummy's Hand resurfaced in 1959 when murder victims were reported as having mentioned seeing a mummified hand within a week before their deaths. Each of these victims was an owner of one or more of the jewels stolen by Jack O'Lantern in the 1930s. **Puzzle**, whose real name was Stewart Rhodes, was committing the crimes with his Coven-trained occultist confederate Arthur Coleman, acquiring the jewels for the Coven at top prices. When his teammates came too close to the scent, he arranged a trap for Hourglass and Rubber Sam in an airtight bank vault; Sam died and Hourglass again employed her temporal power to escape.

From Janice's point of view, either **Puzzle** or **Conjuror** could have set the trap, and she was glad to leave that decade and her brief career as Hourglass behind.

The covert activities of the three Demonlords continued: Vanashta's daughter was born to the gypsies in Spain, although her occult powers were less than he'd hoped; Ch'Andarra watched Dr. Clinton Avery's family grow; Omnium's efforts to contact an extraterrestrial race were successful in 1959, and the "flying saucer scare" of that time was not entirely unjustified. Of the human-biocompatible ETs Omnium contacted, he chose the winged race **PyrWyn** for their easily-altered computer-based intelligence. He captured a female, disguised her as a human woman, and presented her to a man named Eric Darrell in Colorado in hopes they would produce a child.

The two other human-biocompatible races contacted by Omnium were the amphibious **Eshven** and the very close to human **Telex-zön**, neither of which had space-flight technology. His summons was so strong, though, that both cultures attempted to gain this capability in order to travel to Earth. The former invented an unreliable crystalline-teleport system; the other perfected android synthesis, to create bodies that could withstand FTL travel. The leading zön android scientist, **Ramon-zön**, came to Earth to join forces with Omnium, taking the human name **Raymond Long**. He was followed by one of his victims, **Kron-zön**, who would not arrive until much later due to faulty equipment.

The 60s were also difficult for superheroes. Only one paranormal had any kind of public significance, and he was as irresponsible as he was idealistic. **Johny Katz**, from Brooklyn, called himself **Psu^{per} Psycho**, and the clandestine neo-nazi organization **TALON** (Toward the Advancement of Law in Our Nation) and his own government had him killed at Kent State. While he did stop many of **TALON**'s operations, one member named **Hans Fahrille**, grandson of the Nazi supervillain **Scourge**, fled to Argentina. Also, a super-patriotic nuclear physicist, **Karl Mikovsky**, suffered a nervous breakdown after his encounter with the psychedelic hero.

A Japanese superhero **Sensei**, budding diplomat **Shiro Kenokogi**, was less radical in his terrorist harassment of Yakuza drug-smuggling in Tokyo, but he retired from these activities upon the birth of his daughter **Midori**.

For the most part, though, "different" people preferred to keep their abilities under wraps. For instance, when young **Roger Simmons** discovered his long-dead grandfather had been the feared and hated **Garrote**, he changed his name to **Roger Ashby** before entering Illinois politics. Similarly, throughout the 70s the only superpowered individual to become known was a dashing and bloodthirsty hitman called only **The Assassin**. **The Coven**, still fearing Omnium, also laid low.

Groundwork for the future was being laid, however. **Janice McKim** was born in 1964 and placed in an orphanage. Dr. **Arcane**'s grandchildren **Richard** and **Donna** were born to **David** and **Karen Hannah** in 1965. In 1971, Ch'Andarra struck: Dr. **Arcane**'s daughter and son-in-law were killed and his grandchildren, **Richard** and **Donna**, stolen to Ch'Andarra's plane. He followed, using up much of his stores of mystical energy, and ransomed his grandchildren for an unnameable price: Ch'Andarra's daughter, **Andrea Crusoe** was conceived. The hybrid child of **Eric Darrell** and the **PyrWyn**

woman was born in Colorado and named Angela Darrell in 1970. Vanashta's grandchild Alexandra Cordoba was born in 1972 and showed every sign of wielding great power.

Several organizations formed in the late 70s. When a biotechnology company called Strike, daughter to Biotron, Inc., lost its funding when biological warfare was declared illegal, it concentrated on bioengineering and humans as war materiél. Its chief technical consultant was the still-living Obadiah West, who was trying to find some way to oppose his demonic other self. In 1980, TALON re-surfaced in Chicago, led by a fellow named Thomas Hines, covertly backed by the power of barely-pubescent Andrea Crusoe (now calling herself the Enchantress) and the Assassin, and unexpectedly funded by Hans Fahrille in Argentina.

An Eshven craft, its crystalline drive burned out, crashed in Wisconsin. One of the occupants was captured by government agents; the other escaped into Lake Michigan.

Janice McKim ran away from her sixth foster home at age fourteen in 1978, then disappeared completely to 1936. In 1982, she managed to replace her self in time, subjectively eighteen years old. Disillusioned with superheroics, she attempted to live in obscurity until her capture by Omnius three years later.

In the mid-80s, Omnius appeared publicly and everything changed. The Telex-zön criminal Ramon-zön made his android-synthesis skills available for Omnius' use. The Coven, having feared him for years, burrowed even deeper and its power dwindled. Villains appeared by the handful as more people decided to put their powers to some use, such as Nucleon, Phosphene and Sunburst, Ripper, Psistorm, Widget, Parasite, Phobia, and more. A corporate "hero" calling himself Diamond appeared, a model/bodybuilder named Roger Connery (ironically, Janice McKim's lover). Christian Verlane, formerly known as Conjuror, decided to employ his illusion powers as Phantasm. A vicious Chicago street gang called the Royals included superpowered members (Jump Cut, Slipkid, Supercool). Organizations appeared to deal with the phenomenon: the American Security Agency (ASA), Parapsychological Studies and Investigations (PSI) (founded by the aged Dr. Arcane), as well as already-existing groups like TALON and Strike.

Less publicly, the PyrWyn woman regained her memory and returned to her people, leaving behind her half-human child and a mentally unbalanced husband. She bore in her mind Omnius' virus program to change the race's programming from Exploration to Conquest. Angela Darrell, partially realizing her own strangeness, fled her father and moved to Chicago.

Alexandra Cordoba, Vanashta's granddaughter, came to New York with her parents only to see them killed by TALON agents. Retaining her family's amulet, she fled to Chicago and there found a foster home.

Strike initiated a program called Strike Force to develop superpowered individuals as military weapons. They worked with what they could find: a Northwestern college student who gained super-speed from a drug experiment,

at first uncontrollable; a feral child from the Alaskan-Canadian wilderness; a blinded war veteran who consented to eye grafts from an Eshven corpse; a woman whose latent psychic powers were awakened by tests at PSI; a criminal who'd spent time imprisoned by the Eshven (the same who donated the eyes) and been exposed to its ship's stellar drive; and an android body apparently inhabited by a demonic spirit. Strike Force thus consisted of Jetset, Dire Wolf, Oculon, Spyder, Amethyst, and Virgo. West quit Biotron at this point, disgruntled with the characters of these individuals. He decided to attempt with his Nucleus computer to gather better-suited candidates together to oppose Omnius and his pawns.

SHIELD-6

By chance, design, luck, and fate, a very few individuals managed to forge a place of their own. SHIELD currently includes:

Insecto, secret identity Jimmy Toshinaga, amateur entomologist and comics fan, gained the ability to communicate with and control insects of all sorts in a lab accident. His uncle, the villain Shujin, plans to use him in the Amida Tong, but young Jimmy is quite idealistic and desires to be a "real superhero." His bright green and yellow costume, including a large "I" on his chest, multilensed goggles, and (natural) antennae display this desire. Insecto is played by Chris Miller, starting run #36.

Runaround, also known as Jack Flash (originally Flazetti), a biochem student-cum-blues musician. He is addicted to a powerful experimental drug UZ1616 that gives him phenomenal quickness and near-miraculous running speed. He is slightly idealistic, defying the military program Strike from which he gained the drug (in the same experiment that produced Jetset). Unlike the rest of the group, he freely acknowledges his identity to the world and eschews fancy costuming and masks, preferring a natty sport coat and high-top Keds. Runaround is played by Matt Jones, starting run #11.

Spectre, secret identity Claude Johnson, a mystically oriented and superstitious archeologist, gained arcane powers from a cloak and an amulet he saved from a collapsing Egyptian tomb. Unfortunately, he also acquired the curse of the mummy who resided there, which was subsequently revived into the necromancer Pharaoh. Spectre has developed magical abilities of his own, as the disciple of the hero of the 30s and 40s, Dr. Arcane. His costume is the white Egyptian cloak which gives him a frightening, eerie appearance; he has internalized the powers of the amulet, destroyed by the villain Jack O'Lantern (#23). He is cautious (some say chicken-hearted) by nature but has proven to be heroically self-sacrificing. Spectre is played by Ed Dunphy, starting run #2.

Tesseract, secret identity Janice McKim, grew up around the 20th century. Born in 1964, at fourteen she found herself in 1936. Twice more she "jumped" in time: at sixteen she was transplanted to the late 50s, when she assumed the role of the superheroine Hourglass and learned martial combat; at eighteen (subjectively), she finally placed herself when she belonged, in 1982. Omnius then captured her to exploit her temporal powers, which grew into a powerful time-manipulation tool which she used against him (#15). She wields a physical tesseract, which gives her teleportational and spatial abilities. She also is an expert technologist and computer programmer and designed powered armor to augment her physical prowess. Due to her experiences, she is necessarily a bit fatalistic and cold-blooded. Tesseract is a non-player-character run by Ron Edwards, the GM, starting run #15.

Zone, alias Charlie Spenser, original name Kron-zön. A hard-boiled troubleshooter and merc in the interplanetary Telex-zön-PyrWyn wars, he was placed in an android body by Ramon-zön (Raptor). He managed to harness the mimic powers inherent in the android cell-matrix and followed his enemy to Earth. Tough and sneaky, he integrated well into human society, writing science fiction to get by. Zone is played by Chris Funk, starting run #36.

Former SHIELD members:

Firenza, secret identity Alexandra Cordoba, a fifteen-year-old gypsy orphan. She emigrated from Spain to the United States with her parents where they were killed by the Assassin in 1984; since then, she often fought TALON. She is thieflly (not to say larcenous), acrobatic, and possesses an ancestral amulet with which she casts spells. Her costume is a fiery gypsy outfit with plenty of jewelry and several knives. Her physique is greatly heightened due to ancestry (her maternal grandfather is the demon Vanashta, the leader of the Church of Divine Harmony). Many small demons render her services from time to time, and one is her self-styled lawyer. She is vocal, snide, and obstreperous, but least known to the general public; she eventually left the group to travel with Phantasm (**Friends/Enemies**). Firenza was played by Maggie Goold (#1-12, 15-33).

Golum, pseudo-identity Sean Ford Hannah, was an Indian mystic who encountered Omnius in Limbo and believed him to be the Enlightened Buddha. She realized her mistake, then betrayed and was killed by the Chosen. However, she hastened her rebirth into a lesser form (that is, occupied a mind-wiped body the Chosen used as an android template) and acquired an amulet from their collection of mystic artifacts. Thus added to her already-considerable powers based on ascetic training and meditation were magical abilities of energy absorption, rearrangement, and transfer. She eventually transcended the earthly realm when Omnius returned to it (**His Master's Voice**). Golum was played by Simone Cooper (#23-31, 33-35).

Coriolis, public identity Richard Hannah, is the grandson of Dr. Arcane. Andrea Crusoe, the Enchantress, used Richard as a subject in a forbidden spell to control the elements; he embodied the Air. Unlike her three other victims, Richard resisted her control (**It Was A Dark and Stormy Night**). His transformation remained, and he was more of a natural phenomenon masquerading as a person than a person with aerial powers. Naturally insubstantial (and blue), he wielded awesome powers of lightning and aeromancy, but as his powers grew his conception of himself as human was diminished, despite his affair with Pyra Aquila. His wanton destructiveness often caused problems for the group. His career as a superhero ended when he lost his powers (**Reaping the Whirlwind**). Now fully human again, he provides the group with some financial support. Coriolis was an NPC played by Ron Edwards, the GM (#2-13).

Pyra Aquila, half human, half Pyrwyn alien, could switch between three distinct physical/mental forms: one human and empathic (Angela Darrell), one a winged fanatical warrior (Aquila), and a fiery version of the winged form (Pyra Aquila). As she became more aware of how her psyche was divided, the second, intermediate form became obsolete (**CRIME Wave**). When she found that her mother and father had been manipulated by Omnius, she grew dissatisfied with Earth and contacted her mother's people, not realizing that was Omnius' plan. She foiled his plan to use the PyrWyn as an army by reprogramming their communal computer mind, and left with them as they travelled away from Earth (**The Final Program**). Pyra Aquila was played by Cas Short (#1-14).