

THE SHELL



Part 2

Herewith the second part (out of four) of the analogy that was started in the last edition of Twinspire. If you've forgotten what it was about, find the last magazine and read it! For those who have asked, and if it helps, the Wash House is the Church in general, and the Freedom Fighters are the Christians. Don't be too anxious – it has a happy ending.

Jerome

There once was this General in the US Army. He has lots of stars on his shoulders and he was really well liked. Unfortunately, his army was defeated in a war with the Imperialist Yellows. When he was forced to retreat from a big battle with the Imperialist Yellows, he was so angry at having to leave the people of the land that he was meant to have been protecting behind. He was so very angry that he made this promise, "I will return". Well, he was a man of his word and he was definitely a promise keeper. About two years later, he came back to that land (along with a heap of planes and ships and really, really big guns – and lots of soldiers) and he forced that land out of the hands of those Imperialist Yellows. That was a proud moment when he stood before those people and he said, "I have returned like I promised". The people of the land went wild that day because they really did not like those Imperialist Yellows.

A long time ago, an even greater and an even mightier General left the land. He wasn't retreating, though. He had just fought a great and awesome battle in which he had defeated the Enemy so badly that the Enemy's power was broken and smashed. The General said to his Freedom Fighters, "Look! I have won the victory. We've done it! We're free! Now, go on with the mopping up operations. There are still many, many battles to be fought, but I will send people to help you. It will take years and years to finish this war, so you will need to keep up the ranks of Freedom Fighters and make sure that they are well trained. You have your Swords and Arrows and Shields and Chants. You know how to use them. You have each other. You have good Officers and you know what to do. Don't be afraid. Just get out there and win the battles. Your banners are full of Colour and brightness. You are Concerned for those trapped in the Enemy's darkness. You can do it. Go on. Make it happen. I will return."

That was a long time ago.

The ranks of the Freedom Fighters have become thin since then. Of those that remain, few are skilled in Freedom Fighting. Most no longer have Concern for anything other than themselves. Their weapons lie rusting and unused, or, perversely, put in pretty display places in their homes. Some of their children, when given a Sword by Gideon, take the first opportunity to throw it in the bucket. The Enemy grows strong again and takes and takes and takes – not with Darkness. Oh no, the Enemy has a much stronger weapon than that now. It is called Greyness and with it the Enemy has built vast Shells of Indifference that join together and cover the land. Imagine that: a land simply covered with hard, grey Shells of Indifference.

But the Great Leader had not forgotten his promise, nor, by God, was he going to let the Enemy take it all back again. He sent one of his best Warriors to that Village I started this story off talking about. NO, he didn't walk into the Village. He was too big for that. He was mind-numbingly big – massive actually. There were many opinions about what this Warrior looked like, but the one thing that everyone agreed upon, was that the Warrior was big.

I will tell you what I saw: The Warrior descended from the sky and as the Warrior came down through the air, the Warrior did not move, but simply rotated slowly around until the Warrior's feet touched upon the Shell. The Warrior's feet were bare and the Warrior wore a single robe as the only piece of clothing.



The robe was pure white and the Warrior glowed with many bright and beautiful colours. I cannot remember the Warrior's face – it seemed neither male nor female. People who saw the Warrior will claim all different things, but I could not really tell you what the Warrior's face looked like.

But I can tell you about the Warrior's muscles. When the Warrior alighted upon the Shell, the Warrior immediately began to roll up the sleeves of his robe. This Warrior meant business and with each folding over of the material on the sleeves, more and more of the Warrior's arms were exposed. Massive arms, huge muscles and sinews. I have heard the expression, 'rippling muscles', but I had never really seen what it meant until I saw these upper arms and shoulders. There did not seem to be anything there, but solid, rippling muscle. These were arms that were meant to express power; these were arms that *could* work and never grow tired.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about the Warrior, though, was the weapon that the Warrior carried. It was a Mace, crafted with elegance and precision and, like its bearer, was designed for serious business. The handle of the Mace was long – about three quarters of the height of the Warrior. It seemed to be made of a deep yellow metal, like gold, but not quite. The head of the Mace was cylindrical and was made of a deep dark purple. Protruding from the Mace were vicious silver coloured spikes. There were 66 of them in all and each of them had a name engraved upon their lengths. They were strange names amongst them. One particular row of spikes on the one side of the Mace head seemed to make a sentence that read, "Get Every Pub Closed Tonight Tonight Tonight Phil". Weird, huh? But very memorable. The four biggest and most vicious looking of all the spikes were named Angelus, Leonine, Taurus and Raptor. They, like everything about this Warrior were clearly designed not to be trifled with, but to be treated with the greatest reverence and respect.

When the Warrior was done with rolling up the sleeves, the Warrior took two steps back from the crown of the Shell so that it was more or less in line with the Warrior's stomach. The Warrior placed the head of the Mace gently upon the Shell in front of its feet and rested its hands on the end of the handle. For some minutes the Warrior just stood there, motionless, as I watched. The Warrior stood tall, feet apart and for the whole time looked intently at the crown of the Shell. It was as if the Warrior was giving the Shell just this one last opportunity to back away with some measure of pride intact. But the Shell declined to do so. It arrogantly remained where it was, confident in its pride and strength. After all, it had been lovingly built and expertly created with layer upon countless layer of Indifference. Others had challenged it before (admittedly, no-one as impressive as this Warrior), but if it withstood this test, there would be nothing that would concern it ever again. This was a fight to the finish.

Satisfied that it had given the Shell a chance, the Warrior's hands moved from the top of the handle and in a gentle motion, almost a caress, began to slide his hands down the handle. The hands stopped, they flexed and tightened around the handle and the Mace was lifted from the Shell. The Warrior leaned to its right and in doing so swung the Mace around the right side of his body. When the Mace was directly behind the Warrior, the Warrior strengthened his grasp upon the handle still tighter, arched his back and in one glorious, violent, sweeping action brought the business end of that Mace full onto the crown of the Shell.

If I had been the recipient of that first blow, I swear there would have been nothing left of me. I would have been reduced to a form that was only a few atoms thin. If I was lucky, there would, maybe, have been a faint smear on the surface of the Shell to commemorate a life swatted into nothingness. If it had been one of those bungalows or flats in the Village below the Shell, or even, I dare say, the Wash House, that first blow would have destroyed them utterly and completely. There would have been just an explosion of dust and you could not, try as you might, find a single piece of masonry that even resembled what had been there before. What the Warrior was striking, however, was not flesh and bone; nor was it stone or brick or iron or steel or even diamond. No, the Shell was harder and stronger by far. You see, it has been lovingly constructed over years and years. It had as its cement one of the hardest and most potent properties known to humanity – Indifference.



That first potent blow did nothing to the Shell at all. I expected it to shatter instantly, but nothing happened. There was no cracking of the surface, no chipping away of the material, not even the tiniest scratch nor pockmark. Nada. I think most people gave up at that point. If such a Warrior could not penetrate the Shell, what hope was there? But I noticed it, and I suspect quite a few others did too. And it was this that gave us Hope. You see, if the Shell was that strong that the Mace would never be able to overcome it, the head of the Mace would have just bounced right off and as likely sent the Warrior staggering backwards. But it didn't – the Mace head stayed where it was and the force of the blow was consumed and dissipated by the Shell. The Shell's shape was required to deal with the blow it experienced. ANY weaknesses in the Shell would be multiplied over and over by the blows of the Mace. The Warrior must have known this too. There was Hope. The Warrior left the Mace where it was for a brief moment, gave a little curt nod of the head, grasped the handle again, leaned to the right, swung it around again, arched his back again, and dealt the Shell another, gloriously savage, blow.

Again and again, the Warrior attacked the same spot with blow after blow. The Warrior never tired or faded. The Warrior had come to do a job, and the Warrior was determined to see it done. The Shell could not withstand the blows forever. Pit marks and scrapes and scratches began to appear where the Mace head struck. The vibrations of the blows could be felt eddying throughout the Shell. This was a test of determination and endurance.

In the Village, things were beginning to stir. Many of the faithful Freedom Fighters had heard rumour of the Warrior and the promises made by the Great Leader. When the blows began to rain down upon the Shell, they heard the faint, regular boom of the blows and their hearts were enlivened by what they heard. Some of them even claimed that they could detect the vibrations in the Shell. They began to gather at the Wash House in earnestness and sincerity. Concern began to infect them and they were eager to do something to help. They made sure to bring their Swords and Bows and Arrows and Shields. There was none of them that counted themselves too old to bend a bow again and release Arrows – in fact, they would have been angered at the suggestion that they were past such activity. Many of them reckoned that, if anything, their aim had improved with the passing of years. Even if their strength and endurance was no longer what it was, they had Accuracy, Experience and Concern enough to counter-balance that.

Again and again, the Archers gathered together. Again and again they went out and took aim at first this part of the Shell and then another. More often than not, their Arrows just bounced off the inside of the Shell and fell harmlessly to the ground. Often enough, some of the Archers would begin to succumb to the Greyness and give up and long to return to the Great Busyness. When that happened, the Shield Bearers would gather around these Archers, remind them of the Promise, help them to listen to the regular Boom, Boom, Boom, of the Mace, and urge them to bend their Bows once more, and then once again. The Officers would try to help wherever they could in giving direction and encouragement and keeping the Freedom Fighters filled with a sense of Concern.

Every so often, however, one, or perhaps two, of the Arrows would stick fast into the Shell and NOT bounce off it. When that happened there was great rejoicing. More Archers would be brought in and more arrows fired to weaken the Shell. If the place where the Arrows stuck was close enough to the ground, the Sword wielders would get into action, slashing and cutting at the Shell. The Shield bearers would always be at their side. Some of these Shield Bearers were very young, but their Shields were as strong and sound as those of many an elderly Freedom Fighter, so they were encouraged to be part of these skirmishes and struggles. Every so often, a flake, a chip or even a tiny whirlwind of dust would fall from the Shell through the efforts of the Freedom Fighters and the Warrior. Each of these was noted with delight, pointed out to all the other Freedom Fighters and their resolve was strengthened and their determination renewed.

To Be Continued