

# The Chemical Shell

By Eugene Chang

I grabbed my battery shell, and filled it with my last refill. The dusk was in its final moments as I prepared my Hummer to drive for what I hoped wouldn't be the last time. I replaced the empty magazine, holstered my rifle behind my back, and hopped into the back of the truck. "Ready to go, Desmond?"

"Jen, I'm always ready to go." Desmond said quietly as I disengaged the safety on my rifle. The engines murmured lightly and we slowly rolled along the rough terrain. "This tundra is probably the toughest location we've been through so far." We bumped up and down. "I wond-"

"Shhh!" Jen turned around and pointed to our left side." I took aim off the side of our moving vehicle.

While we drifted I held my breath. My red dot optic was already becoming faint but a minor detail like that wouldn't impair my shot. I sighted a caravan of nomads similar to us. "Should we take them?" I said to Jen as she controlled the wheel.

"Do we have any other choice?"

Time slowed down. My red dot centred on the wheels of the enemy pick-up while I slowed my breath again. The armour piercing round I loaded took flight and moved majestically through the air to hit the 200 foot target. The air was split in two as the quick moving bullet soared and connected with the rubber of the wheel. By now the melancholy darkness disappeared revealing Jen's long golden hair that leaked from her hood. She carried a small frame, backed by an athletic build so she looked fairly fierce for a woman her size. She turned towards the freshly immobilized caravan and stopped the engines about 100 feet away. She armed herself with a rifle similar to mine, checked her sidearm for bullets, re-holstered it and used sign language to gesture me to follow. As we drew close, there was a small congregation of people who sat harmlessly outside of their damaged vehicle.

"Identify yourselves," Jen said in a commanding voice.

"We are just a family trying to find a safe place to rest for the night. Please don't kill us!"

"Don't worry. I just have a few questions to ask you."

"Jen, take it easy on them, alright?" I said to her, interrupting her interrogation.

"You always did have a soft side behind those cold eyes of yours." She turned back to the people in question and found a knife at her throat as well as multiple handguns pointed towards the both of us.

"Jen," I said to her affirmatively as we both slowly raised our hands up. As our hands nearly finished the motion, in perfect unison, Jen gripped the blade of the knife with her leather glove, grabbed an arm with

the other, twisted into a jujitsu position, and with a swift jerk her attacker's arm was broken. In the split second of confusion, I stepped to the closest threat, broke his hand with his own gun by twisting it free, turned him around and aimed his revolver magnum to his head with arm constricting his neck. Without falter, in moments our situation was completely turned around. Jen quickly drew her silver handgun and aimed it at the man further away from the action. "Like I said, I have some questions to ask of you."

I can confidently say that the only two people who have ever contested me in close-combat fighting would be Jen and Roman.

"What do you know about Professor Roman Tarasov?" I said, interjecting in Jen's questioning.

"You mean the man who destroyed this world in his battery shell? Of course, everybody knows about him. He's the one who put us into this mess after all?" The man Jen was aiming directly towards would continue. "The government has held him captive since ... the incident. That man should have died during the explosion." At this point Jen was ready to snap.

"Are you absurd?!" She aimed downward and shot him in the foot. "Professor Tarasov was the man who saved the world! He was on the path to fixing the world's resource decline! If it weren't for idiots like you, playing with his research, we might still have reliable energy sources on the planet! Now all we have are remnants of his battery shell, and the chemicals to fill them are too rare to use excessively like humanity has been used to for the last century!" Jen was visibly ready to tear up. "He was a dear friend and scum like you don't even deserve to say his name!" She took aim at this head while he was still squirming around in pain. 'Jen, yo-.' Before I had a chance to finish yelling, the trigger was pulled. The gunshot echoed into the clearing sky, and the smell of blood was all but apparent. I felt as if the rainclouds should have begun to form overhead, but nothing came of it.

"Let's go, that's enough." I grasped her shoulder and backed away from the fresh bloodshed with my stolen gun still pointed outwards. "What were you thinking? You just – you know what you did!"

Jen has always been a worthy opponent to fight against but her weakness lies in her compassion.

"Roman is my friend too, Jen. We need to find him but the government is hoarding the chemicals that we need and this barren wasteland of a country we used to call the United States of America has no energy left for us. All the natural fuel sources ran out in 2019. It's been 2 years since then. You can't be doing anything irrational until we get closer." I was feeling pretty emotional too, but I couldn't show my weakness to her. "Anyways, we had better hide the Hummer. Our shell is almost empty and it's a long walk to the capital. We need to get moving. Professor Tarasov is waiting for us."

"Desmond..." Jen said quietly, a single tear falling from her eye.