

REGINA SHEN: RESILIENCE

LANCE ERLICK

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed herein are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any similarities to actual persons, organizations, or events are entirely coincidental. Also, though locations used in this work exist, for dramatic effect details have been altered. Accordingly, they should be considered fictitious.

Copyright © 2015 Lance Erlick

All rights reserved, including the right to reproduce this ebook, or portions thereof, in any form.

Edited by Leah Carson and Laurie Laliberte
Cover Design by Donna Harriman Murillo

Finlee Augare Books, Chicago, IL
ISBN: 978-0-9914643-5-7 (print)
ISBN: 978-0-9914643-6-4 (e-book)

* * *

ONE

Richmond Swamps, June ACM 296

A gray Department of Antiquities patrol boat motored across our path. I paddled into a cattail-covered cove, kept a wary eye for alligators, and waited for the gray-uniformed agents to leave. In the morning heat, sweat trickled down my neck and soaked my green canvas top, causing me to itch. I ignored the irritation and swarms of black flies.

“Regina, we should go home,” Colleen whispered from the front of my log-boat.

“We’ll be fine, sis,” I said to keep her calm. “School is safe.” I hoped.

While there was ebb and flow to life in the swamps, three patrol sightings so far this week were unusual, and it was only Thursday. Something was up.

The Antiquities boat finally headed up the channel. We crossed and tied the mooring rope to reeds below our school. I made sure the log-boat was secure and hidden from view, in case the patrol returned. Then I led Colleen up the rocky incline beside stilts that kept the wood-frame buildings above water.

Colleen and I hurried to our respective classes. There was no one in the clearing between the buildings, on the stairs, or at the tiny balconies by classroom entrances. I ran up the steps, pushed open the rickety wood door, and dropped my wet, muddy boots beside others on a stone slab inside.

School was the best part of my day. I didn’t have to watch my twelve-year-old sister, since she was secure in her own classroom. Mo-Mere, our nickname for our teacher, Marisa Seville, brought the dozen girls in her class warm soup of beans, turtle, and spuds.

My favorite part: she let me touch real books—brittle paper ones, yellowed, edges worn, with stories that tickled my mind, stories the World Federation had purged from the Mesh-cloud. Mo-Mere’s books made the six-days-a-week slog through miles of swamp in a hollowed-out log worthwhile.

“Regina,” Mo-Mere placed her weathered face next to mine and whispered in a warm voice with a tough edge. “You might be my best student, but that doesn’t excuse tardiness.” She pinched my cheeks to let me know she meant both comments.

She was too kind. Though I was fifteen, doing seventeen-year-old work, I took too much of Mo-Mere’s time. She was like a second mom to me. In fact, the other girls gossiped that she was my donor mother, providing half her DNA to Mom to conceive me in the local fertility clinic. Mom refused to talk to me of such matters.

Mo-Mere nudged me toward the four rows of four small tables facing the front of the room. “Take your seat. I was telling the class I received a report of a Category-5 hurricane bearing down on us tomorrow night.”

I shrugged. This would be the second big storm of the year.

A new student sat in the first row, in front of Mo-Mere’s rough-cut maple desk. I took the vacant seat next to her, where no one else wanted to sit, so I could learn without all the distractions of the older girls whispering. Mostly they gossiped about how I had a little girl’s body. My hips hadn’t filled out, and I refused to stuff my bra like two girls did.

We all wore the same faded green canvas trousers and pullovers. Raw canvas came in one color, dull green, and most of us Marginals had nothing to barter for expensive dyes. Mo-Mere said if I studied hard, she might get me into the university on the other side of the Great Barrier Wall, in the Federation proper. "You could become a Professional and have a real future."

Yet life outside the Richmond Swamps seemed unimaginable. This was the only world I knew, unless you counted the literary world of banned books by ancients such as Charles Dickens, Isaac Asimov, and David Brin.

Compared to the river and swamp channels, the classroom felt small, boxy, and musty, though I didn't mind if it meant I could read.

"Let's pray to the Blessed Mary," Mo-Mere said, as part of our Federation-required morning ritual.

Tapping my foot, I mumbled along with the other students, paying no attention to words as distant as the world beyond the Great Wall, a massive concrete structure that separated us from the Federation. They accepted only one religion, though it seemed to me they'd picked the wrong one: devotion to Mary Devereaux and the other Grand Old Dames.

Our teacher pointed a gnarled wooden stick at the board on the right side of the room. "Let's recite our Twelve Commandments."

I mouthed by rote, recalling phrases with what Mo-Mere called my photographic memory. "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal," "Thou shalt not leave the Marginal swamps without Federation permission." Blah, blah, blah.

"Everyone should live as a Marginal swamp rat for a year," Mo-Mere said, "before complaining about their life." She made this sound like a badge of honor, a way to build character and help us survive in our drenched world. She'd said this on my first week and repeated it whenever a new student arrived.

"Who can tell Beth how the Community Movement and Federation began?" Mo-Mere's intense eyes looked from student to student. When no one volunteered, her sharp eyes drilled into me until I nodded.

She expected me to give the official answer for the new student, another chance to stand out so the older girls could ridicule me. It didn't matter. They wouldn't be friends with the "little girl" no matter what I did.

While I longed to be out, making preparations for the storm, my heart raced to recall official histories. I wanted Mo-Mere to like me so she'd let me read precious books she hid from other students. "You're the luckiest of the lucky," she'd told me. She only accepted students whose mothers could barter food, clothing, or other necessities. Those whose moms couldn't pay had to drop out.

"Three centuries ago," I said, "our atmosphere warmed, glaciers melted, and oceans rose, destroying croplands. The Great Collapse threatened to destroy civilization. The Community Movement rose up to establish the World Federation. They restored peace in order to save us." The last was a big lie. They restored peace so they could be in charge and remake the world in their image. To do so, they purged all knowledge and books from Before the Community Movement (BCM).

I didn't add how GODs ran the Community Movement and its World Federation. Their notorious Department of Antiquities controlled all electronic information on the Mesh, eliminating anyone and any information that threatened their control. Even those were just words to me. I'd never seen the Federation, GODs, or the Community Movement, although Antiquities patrols made their presence known.

I stopped my foot from thumping on the creaky wood floor.

Girls behind me snickered. “*Restoorr*.” They were making fun of my Federation accent, which Mom and Mo-Mere insisted I learn. It made me sound like Beth and some of the other newcomers.

Mo-Mere’s face hardened. “That’s enough.” She looked around the classroom then at me. “Very good, Regina. With waters rising, the Federation built the Great Barrier Wall to our west to hold back the seas and protect as much cropland as they could.” She gave the same introduction to each new student. Listening to it again had me squirming in my seat.

“Why are we on the wet side of the Wall?” I blurted out, since Marginals had helped build the Wall centuries ago.

Mo-Mere scowled at such an obvious question. “Why don’t you answer for Beth’s benefit?”

I shifted my bony rump on the wood seat, hung my head for disappointing her, and gave the official answer. “Marginals were cast out of the good lands after they rebelled.” Except my ancestors had been in the Federation at that time.

“And?” Mo-Mere prompted.

“We must work hard to prove our worth to the Federation.” I looked up. “But every year, the waters swamp more of our lands. Soon, we won’t have anywhere to live.”

“That’s why you must work for a chance to go to their university.”

“But—”

“Regina Shen! That’s enough. See me after class.”

While pretending to frown in shame, inside I smiled at the chance to spend more time with Mo-Mere. Looking around, I realized I’d dug a bigger grave for myself with the other girls. I wanted to learn, even if they didn’t.

Mo-Mere stood in front of her desk, towering over me. “This storm could be the worst in my lifetime.” She let that sink in.

Worst was relative. Each storm took homes and land, and made us scramble, but they were all bad. She seemed more worried this time.

“Since the storm isn’t expected until tomorrow night, school will be open in the morning, unless your moms want you home. Don’t take unnecessary risks. If you do come, bring examples of how you’ve prepared. In order to survive, we must share with other students and neighbors.”

She looked around the small room to be sure we were listening. “Find the highest shelter you can with protection against storm surges. Make sure you have emergency supplies, including medicines. Think about how the storm will affect your gardens and how you’ll hunt for food. Be careful what you scrounge to eat. Remember the pictures I showed you of poisonous seafood.”

* * *

Inspector Joanne Demarco watched the growing storm system onscreen from the helm of her Department of Antiquities patrol boat in the middle of the Richmond Swamps. Waves broke along the port side. *The hurricane will make landfall tomorrow night*, she thought. A big storm would send tens of thousands of Marginals scrambling for the Barrier Walls created to hold out them as well as the seas. *They’ll offer themselves into servitude for a chance to live*.

She remembered those days as a child. She swore never to let anything return her to the life of a swamp rat. Yet here she was, doing the Federation’s dirty work. A promotion might improve that.

An alarm pierced the calm, the sort that would send you jumping for lifeboats. Demarco cursed under her breath, forced a smile, and locked the cabin door. She took a deep breath and activated her Mesh-reader.

North American Governor Gina Wilmette's ancient face filled the screen with a wide canvas of wrinkles and tufts of skin. Like all Grand Old Dames, the governor was more than 300 years old. Meds, treatments, and replacement parts had helped, though she still looked like the fossils Demarco seized while clamping down on local salvage efforts.

"How's my favorite Antiquities agent?" the governor said in a politically cheery voice.

I'm probably the only Antiquities agent you know. "There's a storm brewing," Demarco said, sending an image of the massive swirl on her weather screen to the governor. It was the biggest she could recall, as if three storms had merged into one.

"There always is," the governor said, the mask of surgeries and makeup dulling any facial expression. "The reason I called is ... are you aware fertility clinics are failing everywhere?"

"I was not, Your Majesty." Though Demarco had heard rumors.

"We'll need more than flimsy Barrier Walls to protect us from this. The Antarctic governor pretends she has matters under control, but they're failing. Failing! The Federation made a huge mistake putting all our eggs in her basket, but she convinced the premier that Antarctica was the safest place on the planet."

While the governor let off steam, Demarco contrasted the calm of the swamp around her to what this new storm would do. At least the southern continent didn't have Marginals to deal with. Their glass-domed cities were impenetrable, though maybe that was a lie perpetrated by Antarctica's Department of Antiquities. As North America's chief inspector, Demarco had manipulated enough reports on behalf of Governor Wilmette to know how.

She returned her thoughts to the governor's comments. Though birth rates had dropped worldwide, Demarco never suspected a conspiracy, certainly not one involving the rivalry between Wilmette and the Antarctic governor. "Do we know the cause?"

"My medical experts tell me more defects enter the process with each generation. EggFusion Fertilization now fails to provide live births. If we can't solve this, we're a generation away from extinction."

The inspector mulled over the news. She had no children by choice, mostly the job, but the possibility of never having kids raised the stakes. This was the first time the governor discussed this issue so candidly. Demarco wondered why Wilmette was telling her now. Then it came.

"I need you to track down rumors of Marginal DNA offering better potential. They certainly replicate like mosquitoes."

The chief inspector rarely interested herself in affairs beyond North America, but this was big. It was time to toady up to her boss and set expectations. "I'll take this on personally, Your Majesty, but so far we've found no evidence."

"Look harder." The skin on the governor's face pulled in various directions, as if all the surgery in the world couldn't fix her. "You know what it means if we find a solution, even if it does come from our Marginal swamp rats."

"I understand the urgency, Your Majesty. I'm on it." A win could put the governor of North America in line as successor to the current Federation Premier, another GOD whose health was ... less than robust. Yet what did that mean for Demarco? Well, failure meant return to the shrinking swamps as an outcast, or worse.

Demarco cleared her throat. "I sent you an image of the storm."

"I see it."

"Our meteorological group reports the super-cell will hit the east coast tomorrow night. Rains will be heavy with damaging winds. We expect flooding on our side of the Wall."

"Your recommendation?" the governor asked.

“Open the dams. Push river and lake water beyond the Barrier.”

“Will that stabilize our water levels?”

“It’ll help. It’ll also thin out the Marginal population.” Demarco lowered her voice.

“Meaning fewer candidates for—”

“I know what it means. Have all your resources to put tracking devices on Marginals and draw blood samples. When the storm comes, have patrols and bounty hunters round up all the girls. We’ll sort them later, use what we can, and throw back the rest.”

Like throwing back undersized sea bass, Demarco thought. “We’ll tag as many as we can. Then I’ll oversee the roundup. What about the dams?”

“Open them. I don’t need mayors complaining we let them down. Then find me girls with productive DNA.”

* * *

LINKS to BUY REGINA SHEN: RESILIENCE

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00VDIZ72O>

<http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/regina-shen-lance-erlick/1121851970?ean=9780991464357>

<https://www.kobo.com/us/en/ebook/regina-shen-resilience>

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/book/regina-shen-resilience/id1085942805?mt=11>

STORIES by Lance Erlick

XENOGENEIC: FIRST CONTACT

Aerospace engineer Elena Pyetrov lost her father in space 18 years ago. She finally gets her chance to continue his research and her ship crashes. Alien pilgrims lost their civil war and seek to colonize Earth. Within caves on alien world, the Knoonk execute their plan to genetically adapt to Earth and displace humans. Kidnapped to the closed cave system, Elena finds other humans subjected to Knoonk experiments. With time running out, she must dig deep to uncover the alien plan and stop them before humans face extinction.

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

REGINA SHEN: RESILIENCE (Regina Shen book 1)

Outcast Regina Shen is forced by the World Federation to live on the seaward side of barrier walls built to hold back rising seas due to abrupt climate change. A hurricane threatens to destroy what's left of her world, tearing Regina from her family.

Global fertility has collapsed. Chief Inspector Joanne Demarco of the notorious Department of Antiquities believes Regina holds the key to avoid extinction. Regina fights to stay alive and avoid capture while hunting for her family. Does she have the resilience to survive?

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

REGINA SHEN: VIGILANCE (Regina Shen book 2)

Regina Shen is pursued by the notorious Department of Antiquities for her unique DNA. She jumps the Barrier Wall into the Federation to find her kidnapped sister. Stuck on a heavily guarded closed university campus in the mountains, she must use her wits to escape and rescue her sister without letting either of two rival Antiquities inspectors capture her.

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

REGINA SHEN: DEFIANCE (Regina Shen book 3)

Outcast Regina Shen has DNA the Federation believes can reverse a global fertility collapse. Rival Federation agents fight over capturing Regina to gain power amidst turmoil over who will become the new World Premier. Regina has to flee from Virginia through desert and wilderness to Alaska to hunt a treasure big enough to barter for her freedom and that of her sister.

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

THE REBEL WITHIN (Rebel Series book 1)

Annabelle Scott lives under the iron rule of a female-dominated régime that forces males to fight to the death to train the military elite. When pressed into service as a mechanized warrior to capture escaped boys, Annabelle stays true to herself by helping some escape. Her defiance endangers everyone she loves and thrusts her to a place of impossible life and death decisions.

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

THE REBEL TRAP (Rebel Series book 2)

Despite being a military recruit, Annabelle Scott rebels against her female-dominated régime by refusing to kill a handsome boy she fancies and helping him escape. Auditory implants and cameras allow her commander to watch her 24-7. Can she help the boy free his brother from a heavily guarded geek institute without destroying her family or getting killed?

Written as a standalone story, *The Rebel Trap* follows Annabelle's adventures from *The Rebel Within*.

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

REBELS DIVIDED (Rebel Series book 3)

The first time Geo sees Annabelle, they meet as enemies and she doesn't kill him, which mystifies them both. It's after the 2nd Civil War with the nation divided into an all-female Federal Union and a warlord controlled Outland. The Outland warlord kidnaps Annabelle's sister and kills Geo's pa. Can Annabelle and Geo overcome mutual distrust and work together to rescue her sister and gain justice for his pa's murder? Will their feelings for each other derail or further their goals?

Written as a standalone story, *Rebels Divided* is also part of the Rebel series, three years later.

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

ULTIMATE HACK (novelette)

Hercules considered himself an ordinary anonymous geek with a special reason to remain in his mom's basement. Ignoring warnings from his best friend and his girlfriend, he pursues the hack of a lifetime into a top secret security system. What could possibly go wrong when he meets his match?

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

SHE-DEVIL ROCKS (novelette)

Inspired by *Lord of the Flies*.

Bullied as the smallest of thirteen boys in his class, Bradley is on a plane that crashes on a remote island with a bully who is out of control. Bradley meets a mysterious tomboy who shouldn't be there. He has to learn to survive on the hostile island, deal with the tomboy, and come to terms with the bully.

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

REGINA SHEN: SALVAGE (novelette)

Living on the seaward side of barrier walls built to protect against rising seas, the only means of survival for Regina Shen is underwater salvage, which is banned by the World Federation. After a storm takes a friend's family and home, Regina is determined to help by defying the Federation

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

MAIDEN VOYAGE (short story)

Security Chief Nina Rekovic keeps the peace on the all-female Maiden's Ark that left Earth five years before. Distress signals say Earth is lost, stranding lunar colonists. While balancing Returners she sympathizes with, a dictatorial captain, and an estranged lover who betrays her, can Rekovic solve the conspiracy before she's imprisoned or killed?

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

WATCHING YOU (short story)

At the intersection of pervasive networks and the Patriot Act, we have the ability and some say the obligation to know everything about everyone. Can privacy survive? Can the individual endure?

Harold is a second-class citizen and a low-level worker in a government surveillance system charged with reviewing "criminal activity." He has private thoughts about a woman he's forbidden from approaching. He will not be deterred.

Buy it: [US](#) [UK](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lance Erlick writes science fiction thrillers for young adult and adult readers. He is the author of *The Rebel Within*, *The Rebel Trap*, and *Rebels Divided*, three books in the Rebel series. In those stories, he explores the consequences of Annabelle Scott following her conscience. He authored the Regina Shen series—*Regina Shen: Resilience*, *Regina Shen: Vigilance*, *Regina Shen: Defiance*, and *Regina Shen: Endurance*. This series takes place after abrupt climate change leads to the Great Collapse and a new society under the World Federation. A related short story is *Regina Shen: Salvage*. His latest novel is *Xenogeneic: First Contact* about encounters with an alien race aiming to take over Earth. Lance is also the author of unrelated short stories.

Find out more about the author and his work at LanceErlick.com. Go to the website or sign up [here](#) to receive occasional email newsletters with links to free short stories, and updates on new releases and other writing developments.