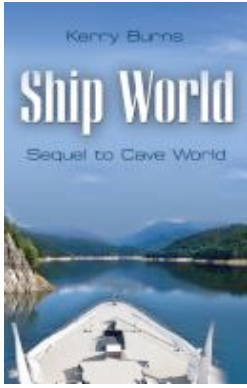


Kerry Burns

Ship World

Sequel to Cave World





Cave World sequel Alex and his women escape the caves and dock their ship in a large lake on a far continent. In order to establish their home, they must defeat aliens and try to rescue the few remaining colonists on their world. They must also establish a society where the gender ratio is about one man for every fifteen women. The intelligent natives of that world will want a price for their aid...

Cave World

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SHIP WORLD

Kerry Burns

Sequel to Cave World

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First Edition

Chapter IV

The Lake

“Mark the pillar here, Alisha. We go eight hundred miles. I’m setting the speed at twelve until we get everything set in navigation. Watch the bottom carefully, when we’re this close to shore. We’re on manual now.”

That evening after the meal, there was another attack by the black froggy creatures. It was little more than a contribution of weapons. Security and lookouts were ready on both sides of the ship, and they allowed the creatures to get aboard before they killed them to get their weapons. It was a slaughter with only a few minor injuries to the women. The sprinkling of human waste from the upper decks did as much damage as the energy weapons. The ship required maneuvering during the attack, but the steering room was well protected, and Ellen and Tanya were undisturbed. At the end of two hours, they had collected over two hundred energy weapons, and security carefully rolled the dead off the decks and into the water and then hosed down everything that had been exposed to the aliens.

“I don’t understand, Dad. Do they come aboard to die? The creatures may be stupid, but I doubt their masters are, if they are a space traveling race.”

“I’m not sure Alex, but you’re right. There’s more to this problem. We need to stay alert. This sacrifice is some kind of a test.”

The night guard was set, and Alex went to bed.

“Are we safe from another attack?” Carmen asked.

“It depends. The watchers are out. If anything tries to board, we’ll be called.”

Marie snuggled close insisting that it was her turn. Alex made a couple of feeble responses and fell asleep. The next

morning at the meal, Alex suggested to Phyllis that the security crew be divided into day and night units. She agreed and said it would be done in time for the evening shift.

“Angie! Alex called as she was walking by. What’s become of Jennie? I haven’t seen her since we were at the swamp.”

“She rarely comes out of her room. She’s afraid to be on the ship, and she was afraid to leave it to go to Andra. She’s rooming with Hannah who brings her something to eat each meal.”

“Ask her to come down, and I’ll talk to her.”

“I’ll ask, but I doubt it’ll do any good.”

“Should I go to her room? I feel responsible since I had her go down in the boat.”

“Remember, she volunteered, but let’s visit her. She shouldn’t be forgotten.”

Angie and Alex went to her room. It took some talk to get her to open the door.

“Are the sea monsters attacking again? They’re after me. Thank you for fighting them.” Jennie said. They sat down with Jennie clinging to Alex. “How many were there last night?”

“Quite a few, but security dispatched them. They’re dumb sea monsters. They weren’t looking for you. In fact I’d bet they don’t even know about you.”

“Has the big orange one been back?”

“He’s dead. We killed him before we left the swamp. We found some litro and Maxine threw it overboard, and he died along with several others.”

“Then I don’t have to worry about him anymore, but I suppose there are others to be afraid of. What about those attacking; will they eat me?”

“No, our body fluids are poison to them. They want to take over the ship, but we were ready for them.”

“Jennie, when was the last time you had a shower? You smell awful.” Angie asked.

“Only once since we got on the ship, I’m afraid to take my clothes off. They feel like some kind of protection. Phyllis said magicloth would protect us from bad things.”

“Angie, take her in the shower and wash her and her suit. I’ll stand guard.

“Maybe you should give me the bath, Alex, and let Angie stand guard.”

“I will next time if you get over your fears.”

Angie led a reluctant Jennie to the shower. They spent a long time, and when they came out, Jennie was naked.

“You look nice, Jennie, and you smell a whole lot better.”

“Thanks, I feel better. I have to do something other than worry.”

“Are you ready to take a tour of the ship and eat at mid-day meal?” Angie asked.

“If you guys will come and get me, I’ll try. My suit should be dry by then.”

They promised and left her and walked toward the front of the ship.

“I asked her if she was pregnant, and she stared at me in confusion. Then, she said she hadn’t thought about it at all, but couldn’t remember the last time she had a bleeding. Unless her fears have stopped things, she is. She certainly looked it when she was showering.”

“We’d better have her to see Maxine, and if she’s in good enough shape, could we have her as an assistant baby sitter since so many of the moms are on the steering crew.”

“An assistant would be ok. She shouldn’t be left alone with the babies.”

They said goodbye and parted. Alex went to the steering room to see what was happening. Ellen and Kathy were on duty.

“I’m supposed to be on duty soon, but I’ve lost track,” Alex said.

“You come on after mid-day meal.” Ellen said.

They made their way slowly for four more days.

“The screen says forty-seven miles; that’s about a four hours. We’ve had to slow down several times because of rocks. At least there haven’t been any more slimy attacks. Hazel figured out how to get all of other data you wanted, but she would need a couple of hours on the navigation computer to learn how to use it,” Kathy said. “Did you and Angie have a good time?”

“We went to get Jennie to come out of her room. She’s lived in fear since she came aboard, and she’s been forgotten. We’ll try to get her to come to mid-day meal.”

“You’re right; she slipped out of my mind. I don’t know her well. She was part of your wood expedition and then to find the ship. You left her on the ship because she was afraid to leave,” Kathy answered.

“We have to make an effort to get her out of her room and get over her fears.” Ellen said.

“That’s a great idea. If she comes to mid-day, have some women sit down with us and see if you can draw her in. Maybe show her the babies are safe or something like that. Talk to Hannah, she knows her better than anyone.”

Alex left the steering room to find Angie. She was waiting for him near the dining hall.

“Hi, I hoped you’d be by before long. We have some time before we get Jennie for her tour. Let’s go to my room.

Elizabeth is gone on a work assignment. Alex didn't object. Angie closed the door, and took off her clothes.

"Look Alex, I'm starting to pooch out a little."

"Well maybe a little or else you're getting flabby; it won't be long until we're sure. It's been a couple of months." They spent an hour enjoying each other.

"You know, Alex, this is the same room we used when we camped on the ship the first night. Everything is so different now."

"Somehow, we're hardly the same people as the little band of explorers who'd spent turns living in tunnels and came here looking for safety. Except for Jennie, She's not come out of the dark tunnel yet."

"Let's get her out of the tunnel and into the light. I hope she's waiting for us."

They dressed and went to get Jennie a few doors down the hall. She was shaking a little.

"Ok, I'm ready, I hope, but don't leave me alone. Let's walk around the ship until the meal or I can't stand it any longer."

She took a firm hold of Alex's hand, and they started. As soon as he felt her hand gripping his tighter, he would ask her direct questions. The talking seemed to relax her.

"Do you want to go to the steering room? That's where I have duty. I have to take over and drive the ship right after we eat." Jennie nodded.

"Oh, this is the place where we came aboard, right there by those boats. I haven't been here since that first night. You said the monster was dead in the swamp didn't you?"

"Yes, we're thousands of miles away from him and his relatives."

They went up the stairs to the steering room where Ellen was maneuvering around some rocks. Jennie closed the door when they were all inside. The two boys were fussing.

“Oh, Harold and Steven. They’ve grown so much. Can I pick one up?”

“Sure, be careful, they’re both big and heavy, and they squirm a lot,” Kathy said.

Jennie scooped up Steven and began smooching on him. He continued to complain until she held him close, then he rooted around looking for something to eat.

“Ellen, I can’t do much for him; he’s hungry,” Jennie said.

“Put him down, I’ll feed him in a little while: I have to focus right now.”

Jennie put him back in the bed and looked around the steering room.

“Would you guys like me to come up and clean. This room’s a mess.”

“That’s a great idea; no one has thought about cleaning,” Kathy said.

“Maybe I could get Hannah to come with me. I know if I go back to get supplies, I’ll go in my room and not come out.”

“After mid-day meal, Kathy and I could come back with you, and there’ll some different babies to watch,” Ellen said.

The horn blew for mid-day, and Angie and Alex escorted Jennie to the dining hall and sat with the moms. They were glad to see her and bombarded her with questions.

“Are you feeling ok?” Angie asked her.

“Yes, as long as I don’t have to look at the water and the side of the ship, it doesn’t bother me, but if I look over the rail, I can almost see the monster reaching for me. I lose it,

and all the fear comes back. Sometimes it feels like they're squirming down the hallways

"I have to go on shift now so those other two can eat."

He gave Jennie a hug and hurried to the steering room.

"I'm not letting you have it yet. This route is full of rocks' we're down below six miles per hour and about twenty miles from the meeting place," Ellen said.

The two boys were complaining loudly. Alisha came in with Julie and put her in one of the beds. She was wide awake so Alex went over to entertain her. Alisha took over for Kathy and she put Harold to her breast, and he shut up.

"He'll have me drained in about ten minutes. He is the hungriest kid here, but if I can get him filled up, he's a good baby."

"Ok Alex, we're clear of these rocks. Take over now so I can silence this kid. I'll coach you a little if you need it, but stay slow."

"Sixteen miles to go, are we coming to anything, Alisha?"

"Rocks and a shallow bottom. Drift out a little farther. There's a bad place about two minutes ahead."

Alex steered away from shore a little and crept along. He could feel the tension draining out of him as the boys were quietly nursing. He slipped by a couple of reefs and was once again in open water. Alex didn't notice when Kathy and Ellen left.

"You can speed up a little. This looks like a pretty good stretch."

Alex cautiously moved up to twelve. "Better move toward shore a little; you're getting close to the ten mile limit. The coast is sloping west."

"Slow down, Alex. We're coming to a mess. In fact, be ready to stop. I can't see a way through the rocks."

Alex let the ship drift to a stop. Kathy, Jennie, and Angie were cleaning the room.

“Is this some kind of a trick? We’re three miles from where we’re supposed to stop, and the way is mostly blocked. The other side is a hilly coast. I thought there’d be a bay or something,” Alex grumbled. Alisha continued to scan the water ahead. “Can we go around?”

“No, these rocks go out about fifteen miles. Have some patience.”

Alex relaxed but kept watch on the screen to be sure the ship wasn’t drifting and corrected when it did.

“Ok, I see the route. It’s going to be tight. Our mentors must have a cruel streak. If we damage the ship here, there’s nothing but a barren shore. Whatever is out in deep water would have to be bad to make this worthwhile.”

She started giving him headings and changing them every minute or two. Alex followed his orders carefully going slower and slower.

“Ok Alex, this next one is tough. Move in until you almost touch the rock, and then slew to the right, but not too hard, then edge forward.”

Richard came in to see what was going, but was shoed out. The incoming waves tended to push them gently out of position. Alex cut the power since he was a few feet from a large rock sticking out of the water.

“Now push to the right in pulses. We have to swing the back of the ship toward shore.”

Alex realized he wasn’t breathing, and tried to relax.

“That’s good, now forward a little. Now veer a little to the east. Cut your forward thruster or we’ll hit that reef.”

He did but the ship bumped gently anyway.

“Are we stuck in here? I couldn’t possibly back out.”

”No, not yet, but it’s tight. Navigator says we can do it. Thrust to the right, but not hard. The ship pushed against a large rock about half way back and slowly pivoted.

“Stop, you’re swinging too fast.” Alex cut the power. “At thirty-seven degrees push forward.”

There was some gentle scraping and then the ship floated in to an open area.

“That’s the worst of it, but we’re not clear yet.”

She gave him another heading, and Alex crept forward. The next opening was a hundred yards away.

“We have to approach this opening at about two hundred eighty degrees. Slew the back end around. Try reverse power and right thruster.” The ship responded slowly and began to rotate. It took a couple of tries before he got the heading right.

“That looks good. Come forward into the gap. Four more maneuvers put them into a rock free lagoon, which seemed to have no way out except the way they came in.

“Ok Alex, shut it down. We’re at the two hundred mile point.”

“Is my shift over yet? I wasn’t trained for this kind of work.”

“You did great, Alex. We scraped a couple times, but you didn’t hurt anything.”

“How do we get out of here? This feels like a trap.”

It’s not Alex; it’s protection. We’re sure our enemies can’t get into this lagoon. In a few minutes, you’ll see one of our ships. Follow it, but at a distance. We’re almost to our refuge.

Alex relayed the message to the others and slumped in his seat.

Richard came in and asked what was going on.

“We voted to follow the allies, and this is where they asked us to go. We couldn’t get out of here quickly, but then the enemy can’t get in, they tell me,” Alex said.

“You could never get in or out of here without our navigation program. You did a great job getting this big monster through the rocks.” Richard said.

“Thanks Dad and thanks Alisha. It was stressful.”

“Alex, there’s the guide ship over by that hump. They’re waving for you to follow them,” Kathy said. Alex sat back down and headed for the guide ship.

“Alex, navigation isn’t reading anything beyond the hump, but the bottom is good,” Alisha said.

Alex nodded and switched to the visual camera and focused on the guide ship until it disappeared behind the hump. When he passed the end of the hump, he could see a narrow channel going inland.

“Alright, navigation picked up the channel. It’s deep and wide. It looks artificial.”

Alex cut his speed a little and glided into the channel. They followed the other ship for about two hours until they entered a large lake.

Pick a spot at this end of the lake and anchor the ship. This is fresh water and the fishing is good, but don’t leave the ship until we tell you to, which will be in a day or so. We’ll have extensive talks about the future when we’re safely settled, the voice said.

“I could hear everything it said. Let’s move over toward the east side a little more. It’s shallower there and we can anchor,” Hilda said.

Alex complied and they dropped anchor and shut the engine down.

Alex walked over to the com and called Phyllis.

“Call a general assembly a half hour from now. We’re here, wherever that is.”

“It’s only a little over an hour until evening meal; can we do it before we eat?”

“No one leaves the ship or puts a boat in the water until we have permission. We can fish from the ship.”

“Ok ladies, line up and kiss our pilot. He did a great job,” Alisha announced.

Alex accepted his reward, and it relaxed him a great deal.

At the assembly, Alex explained where they were. He stressed they had committed themselves to the native species and were essentially trapped in the lake.

“We’ll keep the high security watch for whatever dangers may be lurking. Hazel can use our navigation system to alert us if anything approaches the ship from the surface or underwater. We can fish from the ship for the next couple days.”

“Alex, how do you know the voices you’ve heard are the native species,” Leona asked.

“I don’t. That’s why we’re keeping high security. I may have naively led us into a trap. We don’t know anything other than what the voices have told me which so far has been good. For now, we wait.”

Phyllis read the duty roster for the next few days, and then the meal was served.

“If we stay here and leave the ship to live on land, it’s time to do something about sexual relations. We don’t want mass pregnancies, and when there is one we must know who the father is. Tomorrow, we’ll announce our plan for debate,” Phyllis said.

As Alex was getting his plate filled, Ramona said to him,

“Alex, you’d better come and see me or I’m going to tackle you in the hall and drag you into an empty room.”

“I’m off duty tomorrow; talk to me after morning meal.”

Alex walked out on deck after the meal. The lake was quiet, and in the distance he could see the tree covered hills on the north and west sides of the lake. To the sea side the land was rocky and barren. There were high cliffs to the south with a split where river drained into the sea. *This looks like a nice place. I hope it’s peaceful and plentiful.*

He couldn’t see the ship that had led them in.

Carmen stood beside him. “Is this going to be our new home? It looks pleasant.”

“I hope so. This looks like a good place if it’s safe. Our mentors have something in mind for us, and that keeps me worried.”

After dark, they retired to their room which seemed hot and stuffy after the fresh air of the lake. In his heart, Alex wanted to return to a quiet fishing village with his ever larger family.

There were no alarms in the night and the four of them slept in blissful harmony until baby Alex began to complain about his lack of food. Celia soon joined in. The women got up to nurse. Alex tried to go back to sleep, but it was getting light and would soon be time to get up.

After morning meal, Alex met Ramona; she was more enthusiastic than before.

“Alex, you’ve ruined me. I thought that sex was a so, so thing, but you’ve taught me that it’s a wondrous experience that I don’t want to do without.”

“Then you won’t have to, but we may not be able to get together as often as we’d like. I’ve a large fan club.”

They parted and Alex went on deck hoping there would be no more overheated admirers.

“Alex, can I talk to you?” Judy asked.

“Sure Sis, what do you want to talk about?”

“Phyllis said that the women would be divided up among the seven men. That would be seventeen each. I don’t want to share a man with sixteen other women, most of whom I wouldn’t like. The women on the ship are so slutty.”

“How about uninhibited. They lived in a society where there was no love, affection or sex from the men. There were no babies, no romance, and often not even any kindness. As the turns went by they became more and more desperate. You and Agnes are the only women on the ship who grew up in a loving supportive society.”

“I don’t like it, and I’m not willing to share Eddie or Leo with a bunch of other women.”

“Then you don’t have to. Women who don’t want in this arrangement don’t have to be in it, but you can’t play around with a guy who is taken. There’ll be opportunities in to change your mind. For over a full turn, I was the lone guy. I only wanted Carmen, but I found that was selfish. Now there are seven. We don’t want fighting and conflict over affection and paternity.”

“Then I’ll say I don’t want in on any of it, at least for now.”

“That seems like the right decision; talk to Phyllis to get an idea what life was like for women in the kingdom.”

“Alex, why are all of these crazy things happening to our family?”

“I don’t know. When I saw Sara standing there holding Jeff’s baby and heard that Mom was dead and Dad and I had been kidnapped and sent on a mission we don’t understand, I about lost it and so did Dad. I’m glad Agnes and you kids came with us; maybe we can have a family.”

They sat in the quiet air and talked about family and life on Andra for a long time.

Before they parted Alex said, "I'd like you to help aunt Aggie teach the little kids what life is about in the new village they are in."

"Do you think we could have family meetings once in a while?"

"Sure, we have to get it scheduled; I don't know what will happen in the next few days."

Judy went to check on the kids, and Alex continued to sit and relax until mid-day meal.

I almost feel guilty sitting here doing nothing for most of the morning.

Don't feel guilty, Alex. Relax while you can. There'll be plenty of work to do in the near future. This lake will be your home, and it should be safe. As soon as we have our business finished we'll direct you to a place to dock the ship, and you can begin to set up your village, the voice informed him.

Alex got up and went to the dining room mulling over what would be required to set up a self-sufficient village,

"Where have you been, Alex? You disappeared this morning, and no one has seen you." Carmen asked.

I was on deck talking to Judy about life on the ship and what her role might be."

"Oh, your little sister, but then she's not so little. Who will she choose?"

"No one. She grew up in a one man, one woman society, and she's offended by ours. She can wait. I want all of you to be her friend. She won't be competition and is part of our family. I'm not sure what Colin will do. I guess that's up to Dad and Agnes if he doesn't get seduced first. Do you know what season it is here?"

"I'm not sure, maybe the dry season. I don't know where we are. Why do you ask?"

“We’ll be living here, if things don’t change. We have to start thinking about gardens and crops. See if you can find out when the proper planting time is. Our holiday cruise is over.”

The horn blew for mid-day and they left together.

Phyllis announced the dividing of the women would be held at evening meal. There would be eight groups one of which would be women who didn’t want any man.

“This is the third time we’ve tried to find a rational system for this problem, but every time we decide on a plan, there’s some change. I hope this’ll settle it, at least for a while. Before the women leave the dining hall, each needs to put her choice on a ballot. This evening, the men can say who they want from these choices. This may take several rounds before it’s completely settled. If you’re pregnant or have a child, you have to choose the father.”

“Well Alex, this won’t be an adventure for you,” Ellen said.

“You never know, I might get some good offers, but then every day is an adventure with all of you.”

Nearly everyone lingered in the dining hall after the meal mostly because there were few jobs that needed done while they were anchored. After an hour, the leadership group presented each man with a list of names.

“Keep these to yourselves and check the ones you want up to seventeen maximum and turn them in before evening meal,” Phyllis said.

The men got up and left the dining room. The women all sat looking at each other and wondering what the outcome would be. Alex and Richard went to the steering room.

“How many names did you get Alex?” Richard asked.

“Seventy-three, I don’t know who some of these women are. How about you?”

“I got four counting Agnes and Phyllis.”

“Well, fifty-seven will go back in the pool. I don’t have any choice, maybe one.”

“I don’t know what I’d do with seventeen. I’ll settle for four.”

“There’ll be ways to change assignments if people don’t like each other or someone develops a passion for someone in another group. There’ll be trouble no matter what we do.”

“Well, Alex, I’m going fishing. Do you want to come?”

“That’s a good idea; let’s go before my friends want the pleasure of my company.”

They picked up some bait and got in one of the small boats and lowered almost to the water and spent the afternoon catching large fish.

At the evening meal everyone was on edge waiting to hear the selections. Phyllis called on Alex first to state his selections so everyone knew.

“I didn’t have trouble choosing since the moms and the moms to be are all I want. Here are my choices: Alisha, Sonja, Marie, Tanya, Ruth, Ellen, Hilda, Susan, Kathy, Gina, Jennie, Angie, Louisa, Elizabeth, Carmen, and Ramona. Thanks to all of the others who chose me, but I’m at my limit.”

“Richard, you’re next.”

“I choose Phyllis, Agnes, Jackie, and Edna. Those are the ones who chose me.

Frank chose Maxine, Anita, and Ella. “That’s all I had on my list.”

Eddie chose Leona and Helen; Jake chose Jean and Lila.

“Leo, you’re next.”

“I’d like to make a request. There were eleven names on my list. I’ve been with Estelle for a few days, and I choose her, but I don’t know any of these women. Could I have a few days to meet them and maybe some others?”

“I have the same problem,” Young Eddie said. “I choose Hannah, but I don’t know the others.”

“Oh dear, I hadn’t thought about that. There are seventy six who are off the lists and sixteen who didn’t want on. Only twenty nine were chosen. We haven’t accomplished much by this since most of them were by default.” Phyllis said.

“I’d choose a couple if Dad would let me,” Colin said. There was a whoop from somewhere in the hall.

Richard shook his head and looked at the table. “What do you think, Alex?”

“He’ll be seduced by the end of the week if he hasn’t been already. You’ll have to tie him to your leg to prevent it.”

“Ok, two, but they have to be under thirty and willing to listen to me. He’s still a boy.”

“I’ll take a hand in this also,” Agnes said.

“We now have seventy four available women. How should we do this?” Phyllis asked.

“Why don’t we do a second round? Most of the women were on my list. Set up a dating pool for Leo and Eddie so they can get to know those who are interested and new lists for Dad, Frank, Ed and Jake. I suspect they don’t want sixteen each so they need to say right out how many they want,” Alex said.

“Ok we can try that. First, any of you can go to the no partner list if you don’t like what’s left. Second this dating pool needs to be no sex or some kind of infertility check. We’re not ready for dozens of babies, and it’s important that we know the genetic father,” Phyllis said.

While they were eating Colin brought over the names of Shirley and Dora.

“Dad, would you check these two; they’d be ok for me.”

Alex finished eating and was leaving the dining hall when Leona came up to him.

“Alex, could we talk a minute. I don’t know what to do.”

“Don’t look back. We were never together, and no one knows anything. If you have a good relationship, leave it alone. If something comes up in twenty turns we can deal with it.”

“Thank you Alex, this is what I want,” she said and walked away.

As Alex started up the hall he saw his entire harem was waiting for him.

Oh damn, now the hard part begins. I was hoping we could keep it informal.

“Alex, we decided we need a family meeting to decide a few things.” Carmen said. “I hope you’re up for it.” They all walked down to his room.

“First, where does everyone sleep?” Carmen asked.

“I see no reason to change things. We’ll be leaving the ship before long to set up quarters on land near here,” Alex answered.

“Is Carmen going to be first wife or wife in charge or something like that?” Hilda asked.

“No, that would cause trouble. Everyone is equal in our family. I may love some more than others, and I may spend more time with some than others, and that may change from time to time. You’re not wives; you’re friends, lovers, moms and partners. The main thing for the community is paternity. Some of you may decide you can’t stand it in our family any longer, but the babes are mine even if you mother them in a different house. I may find someone who I’m smitten by and bring her in. That’s not too likely since I’m pretty well smitten by this group.”

“How often will you have sex with me since this whole thing is official?” Ruth asked.

“I don’t know, and I don’t know how to decide or if I should decide. I have physical limits, time limits, and emotional limits. When I go with one woman, I think about who will be left out this week. When I play with Rosemary, I wonder if I’m neglecting Clara. It’s going to get worse. Soon there’ll be six or seven more infants and a town to build.”

“Alex, take Ruth to bed, and we’ll work out a system for sharing you, as much as each of us hates it, and if you and Ruth agree, that’s what we’ll do,” Carmen suggested.

Alex did as he was told and stayed with her until morning. When he got up the fishermen were working catching for supper. There were some remains of the morning meal for them. Alex paced the deck wondering when they would get word to move to shore. He wasn’t accustomed to having no duties. There wasn’t anyone in the steering room but Hazel. She was working on the navigation program. Finally, he went to Phyllis’ office to check on inventory for setting up an onshore community.

“Well, your brother is presently learning the ins and outs of a sexual relationship. He and Shirley got together this morning. They seemed a little too comfortable with each other, and I have my suspicions, but I guess it doesn’t matter. What was it you wanted?”

“Is the inventory in the hold complete? I was wondering what we had for building housing on shore. I got the impression there was a lot of prefab material down there.”

“I haven’t studied the list, but there was a long list of items. The inventory takers didn’t know what they were writing. Carmen knows as much as anyone. Ask her.”

Alex realized he had no idea what Carmen did during the day and decided to wait until mid-day meal to talk to her.

I’ve been so caught up with navigating the ship that I don’t know what anyone does beyond the steering room.

Alex wandered around the ship for a while and then gave up and went to his room. Susan was there babysitting.

“Is there something I can do for you, Alex?”

He caught her soft half smile, “You can tell me what the group decided.

“We decided I should be the only one you have sex with, and the rest of them should wait on our every desire.”

“Now wouldn’t that be nice, but I suspect that Carmen didn’t vote for that.”

“That’s about it. Carmen didn’t want to be an equal partner. She said she’s your promised lover, and she should be with you every night that she wants and not be limited in access to you.”

“And where does that leave me while this struggle goes on?”

“The old rules apply, and you get to pick during the day. I’m available now.”

Alex was about to accept that suggestion when a voice in his head told him to go out on deck. “Oops, I gotta go on deck, Susan, I’ve been called.”

“You better not be making that up.”

Alex left and went out to hear his message.

We’ve things in place for your settlement and comfort. Tomorrow morning we’ll guide you to the dock. Later in the day, we’ll introduce you to your new home. You’ll have to build your structures, but we have water and waste disposal ready. We’ve no underground tunnels for you to use as temporary housing. You’ll continue to live on your ship for a period of time.

Again, the voice was gone.

Alex didn’t go to his room, but went to Phyllis’s and gave her the message.

“I’ll announce it at mid-day meal. I have to get organized for a much bigger move. Did you find Carmen?”

“No, I’ll talk to her at the meal. Maybe we can get a report on what we have.”

Everyone at the meal was waiting to hear the results of the second round of the choosing, and who would be left out. Instead, they got Alex’s announcement.

“In a couple of days we’ll start the process of moving off the ship. There’ll be a lot of heavy work to do to build the living quarters. As far as I can tell, it’s near the end of the dry season here, and if this is anything like where we were, there’ll be storms coming in before long. Carmen, can you tell us what’s in the ship’s hold that might be useful to us?” Phyllis asked.

“I’ll try. I didn’t understand what the labels meant. The center of the ship is stacked full of large containers that said unit such and such. There are a couple of large boxes that appear to contain tools, and of course, Alex’s tools are there.”

“Excuse me Carmen,” Alisha said. “I was able to find the inventory on a computer. It appears that all of the boxes that say ‘unit something’ is a house waiting to be built. There are plumbing supplies and electrical supplies. Best of all, there are plans and instructions, but I’ve no idea of how we get them out of the hold.”

“Probably not a problem,” Frank said. “I was looking at the top deck in the middle of the ship. It appears to open, and I’m willing to bet there’s a crane to lift the units out of the hold and set them on a dock. After that, it’s brutal work. We won’t be ready to do that for a while. I wonder if there are parts for a dock down there.”

“We have a day to get familiar with what we have to work with. When they guide us to our location, it’ll take a day or longer to understand how to arrange our settlement. Our

mentors may have it figured out in advance, and they will tell us what to do. I've come to realize that there's more to this ship than we ever expected to find." Alex said.

"Now we'll find out if they're friends or not and what price they'll demand for bringing us here. Is this another exile?" Leona said.

"Depending on how you look at it, it's all an exile. We're about to settle on a lonely coast with no one near, and in a world where we hide from our enemies, and our own people are killing each other. There's no doubt in my mind that we've been betrayed by our home world."

The discussion continued for some time, but it was clear that little could be done until the ship was docked. Alex decided that Susan would be more interesting and left. She was at her babysitting duties, and the children all seemed content. They took advantage of the opportunity.

"I'm glad you came back Alex. Who knows when this relationship business will be settled? What did you learn on deck?"

Alex related the message and the discussion.

"Then everything is up in the air. I knew it was coming but I didn't want to think about it. We have a nice home here. Couldn't we stay for a while and get our houses built slowly?"

"I'd like to, but our mentors will want their price; one of which could be that our ship has to go somewhere. We'll have duties on land, and I'm sure they'll want our body waste. We have to be ready for planting when the time comes. We have babies coming, and some of our mother's to-be won't be able to work hard in a few months. We've also put a dent in our frozen food supply. I'm waiting to see what the next few days bring."

"There aren't enough of us to do all of those things."

“Well, maybe not quickly, but we’ll do the best we can. You might get to stay here longer than you think.”

“I’d better put some clothes on and change some diapers. I’m on duty.”

Alex kissed her and went out on deck and stared at the shore line trying to imagine where they would have their settlement and what it would be like.

I wonder what kind of house I should have so all of us can live together.

“Alex, we have to talk.” Carmen said as she came and stood by him.

“What has happened to our true love commitment?”

“Nothing, from my point of view. You understand I could’ve asked Sara to come on the ship, and she probably would have, but I kept my promise to you.”

“What about your collection of moms; do you love them too?”

“Of course I do, and my children also. Necessity has forced the men to have more than one partner. I love some of them more than others, but you’re special in my heart. Dad and his fishing crew don’t want a lot of women. They’re accustomed to having one, but they’ll end up with as many as they can manage if the colony is to survive, and our kids are to have a real life.”

“Well if I’m special, shouldn’t I have special privileges with you, like sleeping with you anytime I want?”

“You’re talking about power now, not love. You want to show the other moms you’re in charge, and that you’re over them. When I gave you little Alex, I knew you couldn’t nurse him, but you were special. I could’ve given him to Marie or Ellen. Is he less your baby because you don’t nurse him? We have to work together and love each other or we won’t survive.”

“Then would you promise two hours a day for me to be your love, and we can talk and be together. I don’t need sex everyday anymore,” she said tearfully.

“I’ll try for that if we’re not crushed by the workload that’s coming soon. I told Judy I’d try to be part of our family a little each day. It seems that every day I have more obligations so I can’t make you a rigid promise, and our together time might come at strange hours.”

“Ok, Alex, I’ll work with everyone on that. It’s that you seem to be drifting away from me, and I see you less as each day that passes.”

“You and everyone else has that problem, and I don’t like it, but until things settle down, nothing can be done. By the way, how is your drama project coming?”

“It’s not. Things are so up in the air no one can focus on it. Some quiet tunnels are what we need. I was ready for a casting call, then things came up.”

Carmen got two hours of togetherness and agreed to compromise on sharing Alex.

When they met with all of the women, it was decided that there would be strict rotation of the sixteen women in the group. There could be substitutes and extras within the group, but everyone would get their turn. Mostly Alex would sleep with Carmen, Marie and Susan as usual.

When the community met before evening meal, Frank agreed to accept Hazel. Eddie took four of the women rescued from the men. Jake said he’d take the other four. Ten women moved to the no interest group. That left fifty three in the dating pool for Leo and young Eddie.

“Let’s use this system for a month, and if there are problems, we’ll work on them. I’ll be crabby if you in the dating pool use pregnancy to lock in a man. We must keep

the pregnancy rate under control,” Phyllis said. “That goes for you young Alex. You haven’t been careful.”

“You’re the one who sent me off with four rowers without checking fertility. What did you think would happen?” Alex replied. “The same thing happened when Dad and his fishing crew came aboard.”

“You’re correct, Alex, those were both mistakes due to unexpected changes.”

“The other subject,” Hilda said, “is tomorrow we’ll find out what’s in store for us. We’re safe, but we’ll stay on full alert. If they’re telling us the truth, we can look forward to building houses and not living in caves as prisoners. Tomorrow changes everything.”

After the meal, Alex was handed a list of his moms in the order he would be with them. Starting tomorrow, Hilda would be first. Alex decided to go to his room and relax, but the entire group went with him. There was a great deal of chatter, and playing with babies. There would’ve been a lot more nudity, but the magicloth suits inhibited them. Gina and Ramona were outsiders, but relationships were warm and peaceable. They finally were quiet. Alex put his arms around Marie and went to sleep.

The following morning, Alex was up anticipating the day. He slipped out before the others were awake, and went to the dining room. Gina immediately brought him a hot drink. “The fish aren’t ready quite, but I’ll bring your plate as soon as they are.”

“Well, Gina, I can get my own plate.”

“Alex, there are fifty some girls who haven’t been chosen. I could’ve been one of them, but you picked me. I’m willing to do a lot for you in return. Now drink your tea.” She gave him a quick kiss and went back to work.

I'm certainly glad there aren't seven women and a hundred twenty guys.

Before he'd finished his meal, Richard and the kids came in with Agnes and sat down with him. Everyone had a hug for him.

"What's on for today?" Richard asked.

"I expect to get a contact from our sponsors with instructions to move the ship to a dock near where we'll live. This afternoon, we'll go ashore and look around. I can hardly wait to get started. I hope everything is safe."

"Alex, do I have to live with the women who didn't want a man?" Judy asked.

"No, you can live with any group that will accept you including with Dad and the family. You could live with me, but you wouldn't like that much."

"We haven't talked about housing. Do you plan to live with that mob?" Richard asked.

"Yes, but I don't know what kind of houses are in the hold. We're practically a whole town ourselves. I don't want to move from house to house every night. You'll need a lot of room too. Colin, are you three going to set up a household right away?"

"Gee, Alex, I hadn't thought about it. I'm not sure I'd know what to do in a house."

"You'd better discuss it with Shirley and Dora. You've a few days to decide what you want to do."

"Give this a lot of thought, because you have no experience, and they have experience. If you want to have them as girlfriends instead long term mates, you could stay at home, but I expect there'll be pregnancy before long," Richard said.

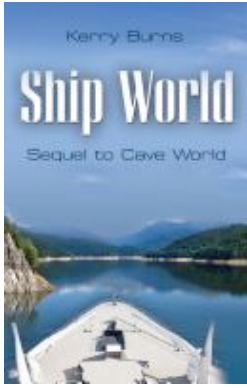
SHIP WORLD

“I can see the living arrangements are going to be as complicated as dividing up the women. We’d better think on this. I’ll talk to Phyllis,” Agnes said.

“That sounds good. See what everyone wants and compare it to the housing we have. Oops, I gotta go on deck, they’re calling.”

Alex left the dining hall and didn’t notice that Hilda followed him.

Alex, in about two hours our little ship will lead you to your area. We’ll give you careful instructions on the approach. Later in the day, you can go ashore with a limited party and explore the immediate area.



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