

Roger Fudson liked his life as a miner of a meteorite acquired by their people centuries ago from the goddess of All Else. His father told him stories of their weak handed ancestors falling from greatness. Which landed them as workers of these mines. Roger held his pickax and connected it with the loosened ore. The goddess of Conquest giving him strength. He was over halfway towards completion of his life's work.

Most who mined the meteorite were cloned from a successful miner and raised to hold their greatness into the future. These men were stone handed. Their success proving their DNA could make the cut. Others that were less productive sired offspring in hopes that some of their DNA would find success. The worst were the weak handed from the floors above. Losing there status and forced to fall to our depths. They had little success advancing their will to Conquest let alone homeostasis.

All this potential for Conquest made this fertile ground for the clever goddess of All Else. She'd encourage us to lean into our nature of Conquest with her siren song whose beauty doesn't reach down here. Most here have never seen true beauty and so their desire for Conquest is primal and unfocused.

Roger was diamond handed and knew that he could hold for the generations his conquest would take. He would raise two clones of himself then they would raise two each and so on until he was the only meteorite miner. It was mathematically impossible to achieve this with mining alone and access to the market was forbidden on this level. But no one missed the weak handed miners who turn up died. They always have nothing in their block chain wallet. It took them days to die but once they can't move their was no chance of recovery.

So Roger took the one thing they did have, which was best to harvest early, high protein calories. It was illegal of course. Their body was supposed to be collected by a drone and added to the organic recycler so those calories could be sold to us miners. But the drones' ancient coders thought nothing of a missing leg or arm. So that's all Roger took.

Extra meat was used to keep the right people silent. He, of course, poisoned it to reduce their efficiency leading them to an early death spiral. Quite early if they were nosy enough to need payment in meat often. Their meat was then recycled and low amounts of the poison spread to all others. Roger only ate clean meat and liquid grain supplement that was not contaminated by the recycling system. This gave him a small edge but over generations it would aid in his progenitors success.

With his savings from the cost of food, Roger would be able to afford two clones with enough time to ensure they become diamond handed like him. By leaning into our nature of Conquest, we will one day witness the beauty of the goddess of All Else. All we needed to do was hold.

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Roger admired the beauty of a brood mare that he visited often as of late. Actually viewing the brood mare was strictly off limits but they provided a photo of her. She was truly a product of the goddess of All Else. By her age and birth count she would be perfect to hold his pair of progeny. Alas she would be long recycled by the time he held the funds to birth two clone embryos. The thought of a discounted pair by mixing his DNA with her's crossed his mind. That's what a weak handed person would do. What his father did. Still he came to view her often for a few minutes of standing rest.

"She's a beaut isn't she." The sale woman said. Her eye were that of a predator on prey. "Real popular and only five birth. All successful. All implanted embryos attached as well. A rock solid uterus."

This was the first time a sale person had approached him while he viewed her photo. Normally he stopped by at a busier time. His wallet amount, clearly displayed above his head, was dangerous outside a crowd. He considered delaying his plans by two years to invest in a private wallet.

"Sure. But I'm looking for something better than rock solid. I think I'll hold." Roger said diplomatically.

She rested a hand on his shoulder as he started to move away. "Wait. You won't find better than her. And her value is low right now because of her low birth count. Your wallet tells me you're looking to birth a clone. This is a great chance to buy the dip."

"Too risky. She's too young." He lied. "For her to be sold at such a young age smells like shill to me."

"Seventeen is a perfectly respectable age to begin life as a brood mare. And now she is the age of peak successful births."

"Nah I'm not buying it. Something is off here." He said continuing his counter sale. She was, of course, perfect.

"Don't let FUD take hold!" she exclaimed. Perhaps she was more desperate for a sale than he first thought. Her wallet was private like most sale people but her eyes betrayed her desperation. "This is-"

"Oh but I am doomed. I am a son of FUD you know." He smiled seeing the shocked look on her face. We were a rare breed. Child of those that fell after succumbing to FUD and yet did not die off.

She took a breath. "I've seen you look at this mare for months now. Only for a few minutes. But I know when someone sees the one. This mare will hold your progeny. Your wallet and age say this is the moment to continue your conquest into the future."

He noticed now how thin she was under her sales coveralls. "Stop shilling and accept that you're spiraling and everyone can see it." A flash of desperate fear in her eyes. He smiled. "I'll tell you what. Soon when you become a brood mare I may take pity on you and shill someone into becoming your first investor. The sooner you give up on this gambit that you can be anything more than that. The better your chances are."

He walked away before she could respond. That was close. He almost gave into raising his progeny one at a time. But he would keep his diamond hands and hold.

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A leg was the best part to harvest. Roger staged injuries of crushed limbs of a fictitious collapse. He then separated the chosen limb with a sharpened large rock. After a few drops of the stone on the gagged, spiraling empty wallet there was separation and their inevitable death would soon follow. This stage was critical as the drones would need to be fooled and given reason for there to be missing meat.

Old, unstable tunnels were ideal for this. Only the desperate risked mining here. A miner would either struck a deep untapped vein, get lost or triggered a collapse. The last hope for those in a death spiral who had very little ability to strike rock. Roger placed the unconscious body as if crawling just pasted the mouth of the tunnel entrance. Soon the body would be disturbed as passersby steal his respirator and strip him of his damaged coveralls. Someone in that ilk would collect the corpse location bounty and the body will be off to recycle.

Technically looting a corpse was illegal but this in practice was impossible for the drones to enforce. And this disturbance of the body would cover up any mistakes in story telling Roger might have made. Later when the body is gone Roger would return for the buried leg he hid deep enough in the unstable tunnel. He considered the efficiency of scale that would come from having a partner in this scheme.

To someone with a weaker will toward Conquest that efficiency would lead to complacency. He knew the two that would hold to his plan would not become complacent. Even if that meant they dropped the efficiency of scale and worked separate. He trusted in his will. He knew himself to be a true child of the goddess of Conquest.

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By the time a sale person at the birthing center approached him again, his perfect mare had had seven births and still maintained her perfect score. The timing of it was a shame but

perhaps she would be selected for cloning. Though that would make her far outside his budget but perhaps more moneyed later generations could use her.

The sales man was about to start his pitch. Roger interrupted before he said a word. "What happened to the woman who used to rep this mare?" Roger asked knowing full well the answer and tried to contain his glee.

"Oh Sapphire she spiraled and was recycled some time ago."

"What? Did no one select her once she became a mare?"

"She had no uterus. One of those trans-humanist that spent all they had trying to look different than their genetic destiny."

"Just to look as a brood mare when one could have drilling arms." Roger was baffled.

"Don't tell me you're one of those trans-humanist too? I see you have a great sum. Far more than needed for our services. Trans-humanism always leads to death spiral you know."

"Of course. I'm no fool. To resist ones genetic destiny is for weak handed whales on their way down." Roger observed.

"Exactly. And that was the fate of Sapphire. All that effort now just long ago burnt calories."

"She wasn't a great sale man either."

"No. Just excrement of the goddess of All Else."

"Indeed." Roger said. There was a bit of a pause but the rep lingered. Roger noticed his wallet wasn't private. His holdings were decent. He looked comfortable in their unproductive silence. "How many more births do you think this one has in her?"

"I'd reckon two or three more." He stated with some disinterest.

"But her uterus is showing no signs of failure. What makes you guess she has so little left in her."

"Just a hunch" the sales rep shrugged. "Flames that burn twice as bright. All that. I can tell you're holding for the right mare. And I'll be up front with you. I don't think this is the right one."

*Here it comes.* Roger thought. "So do you have a brood mare in mind?" Roger said deciding to play along.

"Nah. Stock is sub par at the moment. And don't hear good things about what's coming in."

"I'm confused. I thought you were rep-ing this product?"

"Sure. I'll be shilling it to others later. But I know not to try and shill a shill."

"A strong accusation."

"A compliment. Your wallet is only possible with some side hustle and I don't want in. I do want to make a deal though."

"Oh?" Roger was locked in mutual gaze.

"When you do decided on a mare I imagine some time from now. Come to me and I'll shoot you straight. I bet what you have planned could lead to mutual profit."

Roger focused on the reps face. "Go on."

"You're planning to insert a pair of embryos. It's common enough increases chances of success. But most can only afford to birth one so the other is eliminated in utero. I reckon your plan is to birth two and be able to afford both."

"How would you find mutual profit?"

"Simple. You only pay for one and I hide the evidence of the second. You pay me a fee for my service. I'll even fake credentials for the second."

"Sound risky. I'll hold." He looked at the photo once more.

"Ah I see now. You want this one here to hold your pair of progeny to term. Yes. I foolish decision but I could make that work."

Roger's silence said everything.

"Good and what if I were to tell you that your wallet holdings were enough for such an arrangement with this mare. We could start this today even. I'll get you to the top of the wait list."

"If this is a shill then I-"

"I know. I know. You look to be a dangerous man. Going places. I can see that. I wouldn't dare risk getting in your way. No shill. Just a deal that is a true product of the Goddess of All Else."

Roger shook the reps hand and leaned in. "Screw me and I'll eat you alive." He said softly into the man's ear.

"I would expect nothing less. I knew I saw great things in you."

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What remained of Roger sat surrounded by the beauty of All Else. He reflected on that moment. He was as weak handed as his forefathers. He failed his nature of Conquest. Conquest leads to All Else but seeking All Else leads to All Else besides Conquest. Without Conquest, a fall into death spiral soon followed. Roger knew all this and he still fell for that retched brood mare's beauty. He was shilled and he had fallen.

He looked up at the grandeur of All Else. Stars were in a deep night sky. Waves crashed on a rocky beach. Strange songs from strange insects filled the air. None of these sights and sounds he ever paid to view. Viewing the beauty of All Else was the siren call away from Conquest. Not that any of that mattered now.

He decided to slip into the beauty of All Else in his remaining time in existence. Here the time limiter to observe this beauty was the deep wound in his torso. Roger hadn't worked out the full nature of the shill but it involved getting his body to avoid the recyclers. With no record of death he would be assumed at large or retired. Without his wallet implant Roger's final purchase would be unnoticed.

It didn't even matter that they botched the job of killing him. He was outside in the wasteland now. He had no way to re-enter. Drones would shoot him down if he tried. The grand concrete structure of his home filled one direction of the horizon. In another, a black silhouetted mountain dwarfed the structure. He had never considered how big mountains could be. He watched as a few fast moving stars fell behind the mountain's silhouetted. He drifted into the embrace of All Else.

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"Looks like he's waking up. Go wake the doc." A faint voice said as he shifted into awareness of some savage's den. He hardly registered his captor at first. The being that stood in front of him had privated all of their metrics. Or perhaps these beings were so deprived that they lacked implants to track metrics and hold their wallet. How could anything survive in such squalor.

"What are you?" He managed to say in a weak and unfamiliar voice.

"Oh good you speak gpt-standard. I was worried we'd have to wait to establish consent to operate." Roger's captor said. She was a woman he realized.

Roger tried to speak but started a coughing fit instead. What had they done to him.

"Don't stain yourself. You were badly hurt. Attacked we think. Save your energy for the doctor. He'll be here shortly."

"Answer my question." Roger forced out between short breathes.

"Uh. Oh. What am I?" She paused. "I'm a ranger with the American Federation. We exist everywhere humans are not on the American continent. I'm sure you must have run into us before."

"Why?" was all Roger could manage.

"We study and harmonize with ecosystems and protect them from others that would mean them harm. You know, we are nature defending itself. You've hear that slogan right? everyone has."

"No" Roger said.

"Okay. Well uh- Where are you from?"

"Mall zone of course."

He saw her eyes widen as he drifted out on consciousness once again.

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The Ranger sat next to him as he opened his eyes.

"Welcome back. You passed out while we talked earlier. The doctor decided it was time to operate and it seems to have been successful. Would you like some water?"

"How much?" Roger asked barely audible. He feared whatever they had done to him would cause him to fall into a fate worse than death.

"Uh the amount in this cup. I guess." She said clearly confused. "I can get more if you finish that."

"I made no-" Roger choked somehow and coughed.

"Here just drink this" She moved the cup of the most enticing water he'd ever seen. He dared not move toward it. Something so beautiful would have a deep cost.

"No. I am not falling for your shill." Roger said his voice returning to match his resolve. "I made no agreement to trade for any aid you have rendered. I will leave now free and clear." Roger knew that they needed something from him. Why else would they still be talking.

"Uh. I wouldn't try to move. You could reopen your wound."

"Convenient. You have rendered me you captive then. Well the jokes on you. I have nothing. If I truly cannot move then soon I will spiral towards death. Leave me in peace now."

"I mean if you don't drink water or eat then you might die but we have those things."

"I have no way to pay the cost. My life savings was ripped from me. Now I am nothing."

"I'm sorry that happened to you. But this water has no cost."

"Everything has a cost. You have just perhaps hidden it. I have no intention of being a savage's slave."

The ranger looked truly bewildered now. What was her angle to all this? What was she trying to get out of him?

"Just kill me now." He stated. "I have failed my mission to Conquest because of my weak handedness."

She was focused. Clearly interested but remained silent. Her face said to go on. What did he have to lose?

"I fell like my forefathers. They were tempted by the dreams of the Goddess of All Else. She is clever and knows that only through Conquest can her beauty be achieved. I failed my nature, failed to hold, seduced my the goddess of All Else."

"So All Else is the name of a goddess? So she is everything except what?"

*What a strangely stupid question.* He thought. "The goddess that created life of course. The goddess of Conquest." He stated partly feeling the fool somehow.

"So there are two gods. Conquest and All Else?" She asked clearly sincere. Did these savages know nothing about creation?

"Yes." He started. "Conquest created life with the imperative it is named for. Through dedication to Conquest, the goddess of All Else forms all the beauty in creation. Did whatever feral human that raised, you teach you nothing of reality? How have you managed to stay alive?"

She smiled at that. Were he still moneyed, he'd feel comfortable observing her beauty. Then he remembered death was near anyways. So he let himself observe the goddess of All Else embodied by this strange and foolish ranger. They looked at one another for a time.

Then she said finally. "Well I drink water. Without that I'd die pretty quick. I do a few other things as well. But drinking water is a big one."

And so he took the cup and drank. He knew it would be his death but the indulgent glances had weakened his resolve. He would see as much of All Else that remained for him before his now assured spiral toward nonexistence. He looked up at her and she was smiling broadly now. He had fallen for her skill. She had gotten what she wanted. There was nothing left to say.



"I'm glad you decided to drink some water." She said. "Would you like some more?" She asked in her siren's song of a voice. There was no point in resisting. He was disgusted by the pitiful creature he had become.

"Yes." He managed and she filled his glass with a canister that hung on her belt. He drank again. He was falling deeper and now was little more than a helpless thrall. He'd traded his freedom for two glasses of a siren's water.

He sat in his deep shame. After a time, she broke the silence once again. "The others are scared of you you know. We all agreed that just I would talk with you. We've never met someone from Mall Zone before. We encounter y'all's drones all the time but never a human. Did you escape? What's it like in there?"

"No." He answered. "I was dumped illegally. A literal pump and dump." He reflected on his stupidity. He continued. "And my home is the opposite of here. It is the last domain of the goddess of Conquest. Out here is the underutilized domain of All Else."

"You assume much about where you are. Conquest yet lives in all places I would think. You say we are children of it. And we humans remain in all places."

"A nice thought but you didn't even know the two gods the rule reality. I hold little hope for those outside my home."

"Perhaps you would be willing to teach me then?" She suggested.

He considered his next words carefully. "As you wish. This is the tale as I heard from my father and planned to pass down to my progeny. It has some of my own observations that eluded my father but it is all true. I offer this tale in trade for those two glasses of water and after it's telling all debt between us will be cleared. Do you agree to these terms?"

"Yes. I agree." She said. Perhaps these savages had hope yet.