

Baalak Returns

Book Three of the Baalak Trilogy

by Saddletramp1956

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End of “Son of Baalak: Book Two of the Baalak Trilogy”:

“So, once again you've saved the world from your brother's evil schemes,” Max said as he took Adrestia in his arms. “Do you think we've finally heard the last of Baalak?”

“One can only hope. But when it comes to my brother, I've learned never to say never,” Adrestia replied, a trace of wary weariness in her voice.

“I guess we'll just have to be extra alert, then,” Max said philosophically, luxuriating in the feel of her soft, warm skin against his.

“Where Baalak is concerned, that's always wise,” Adrestia said, a hint of concern in her voice. Then she relaxed, put the cares of the world aside for an unfortunately short time, and gave in to the all too human urge to sleep.

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Chapter One

Twenty-five years later...

“Remove his chains,” the large dark being ordered, his booming command echoing off the rock walls of the cavern.

Two smaller winged creatures scurried to the naked man chained to the wall and feverishly worked to free the captive from the heavy chains holding him in place.

“NOW!” the larger being commanded with a deafening volume that promised unending pain for perceived sloth.

“Yes, master,” one of the smaller creatures squealed, working as fast as possible to avoid Beel’s wrath. Its compatriot didn’t waste the breath. Finally, the chains dropped to the floor with a loud clang, and the captive man stood, rubbing his wrists. It was good to have the chains removed.

“Bring him,” Beel snarled.

“Yes, my lord,” the other small being replied, relieved at not being eviscerated or incinerated. Taking the naked captive by each arm, the two beings followed their master, the bald prisoner between them, stumbling. They reached their destination after walking for an hour.

The captive man saw a thick, dark, knotted rope extending into a thick black fog. It looked as though there was no end to the rope. Beel turned to the captive and motioned for the smaller creatures to let him go.

“Against my better judgment, we have given you another chance, Baalak,” Beel growled. “This is your way out of here. You are in relatively good condition, so reaching the top should only take two to three years.”

“Two to three years?” the captive complained, astonished.

“It is nothing in the grand scheme of things. Two or three years as compared to an eternity here. It is your choice, of course.” The hulking demon leered at him, his tone pointing out eloquently that the torment of the last forty-six years could continue FOREVER.

“I’ll do it,” the captive replied. “But I need clothing, supplies, food, and water. And my standard.”

“You will find sustenance along the way. Someone will provide clothing when you reach the top. We have also devised an improved version of your primitive standard. We will make it available when you reach your destination. That is IF you reach your destination. I would think someone in your position would be more... grateful.” The tone suggested they could reconsider his release at any moment.

“I am grateful, Beel,” the captive replied. “More than you know. I will do this. You will see.”

“Yes, we will, won’t we, Baalak? It’s hard to believe only 46 years have elapsed up there since the tall rider tossed you and your pathetic... standard... into my domain. I guess time really flies when you’re having fun,” Beel added with a maniacal laugh.

“It seems like it’s been much longer,” Baalak gasped.

“Why do you think it’s called ‘Hell,’ Baalak? Things have changed up there since the tall rider brought you here. Of course, your sister and her mortal husband are still terrorizing the inhabitants with their outdated notions of justice. Other than that, it is much as it was when you first walked the Earth. That should make things much easier for you. Now, get to it before I change my mind.”

“Yes... Master,” Baalak cowered sheepishly. He grabbed the thick rope and began climbing, ignoring the dire protests of his long-unused muscles.

“Remember what I said, Baalak. Failure is not an option. Screw this up and you will not like the consequences,” Beel shouted when Baalak had gone about 100 feet up and was just below the

thick, dark cloud layer.

“I will not fail, Beel,” Baalak shouted down. Beel laughed and followed Baalak's determined climb, thoughts of revenge against his immortal sister filling his mind more than thoughts of escaping torment.

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“Well, son. I told you one day if you kept to your work, all of this would be yours,” Dr. Terry Fletcher, the outgoing Director of the Gadsden Pacific Archaeological Institute, said as he regarded his son, Ron, across the desk.

“Yes, Father, you did,” Ron replied. “I know I have some rather large shoes to fill. I will do everything possible to make you and Mother proud of me.”

“We've always been proud of you, son,” Terry said. “Don't ever forget that.”

“Thank you. That means a lot to me,” Ron replied.

“I know the board said they thought the Institute needed some fresh blood in the top spot. Don't read too much into that, son. That's what they said when I took over from Dr. Edwards, and I'm sure it'll be what they say when it comes time for you to retire,” Terry said with a chuckle.

“I miss Uncle Malcolm,” Ron said, remembering the British archaeologist who ran the Institute before his father took over. “He was a good man and always kind to me.” Ron remembered the many hours he spent in this same office as a child, listening, spellbound, to the stories Malcolm told him.

“Yes, Malcolm was a good man — the best. I felt the same way when they handed me the reins of this place as you do now. I miss him as well,” Terry replied. “How is Leah adjusting to all of this?”

“Like a trooper,” Ron replied. His wife, Leah, who he named “Strawberry” in college, was now the CEO of a major social media company worth trillions of dollars.

“And Malcolm?” Terry asked, referring to Ron's son, now a student at UCLA, his father's alma mater. Ron and Leah named him after Dr. Edwards, which made everyone in the Fletcher household happy.

“He's almost as excited as I am,” Ron answered with a smile. “Says he can't wait to come to work for me.”

“I was proud when he said he wanted to follow in our footsteps,” Terry said.

“Me too,” Ron agreed. “So, when are you and Mother leaving for your cruise?”

“We’re flying to Florida on Friday, then leaving from there,” Terry replied.

“This cruise... I understand it’s an ‘adult’ cruise. Are you sure you two are up for that?”

“We may be senior citizens, but we’re not dead, son,” Terry laughed. “Hell, there are places in Europe where people are still very active well into their 100s.”

“Please spare me the details,” Ron chuckled. “That’s an image I do not need in my head.” The two men laughed at that.

“It’s time, son,” Terry said, standing up. “As my last official duty as director of this institute, I hereby hand you the keys to the kingdom. Good luck, son,” he added, handing Ron a key ring with a security fob and several quantum key passes.

“This place isn’t going to be the same without you and Mother,” Ron said, taking the key ring reverently. “We’re gonna miss you two.”

“I’m as close as the phone, son,” Terry said, shaking Ron’s hand. “But I’m confident you’re ready for this.”

“Thank you,” Ron said, taking his father in his arms. Terry returned his son’s hug and held him tight for a moment. “I love you, Dad.”

“And I love you too, son,” Terry replied, with a tear in his eye.

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Baalak continued his climb out of the hellish cavern. Every muscle in his body screamed, and the pain was worse than anything he had ever experienced, even in Hell. But thoughts of vengeance against his sister and the Fletcher family drove him forward.

As Beel promised, he encountered “sustenance,” such as it was. Pools of cold water quenched his thirst and refreshed his skin. Outcroppings of a tasteless fungus-like substance filled his belly and gave him strength. He rested on the rocky ledges as he ate and drank, then slept for a few hours before continuing his climb.

He had no idea where the rope would take him, but he didn’t care. All that mattered was escaping this place and getting his revenge. As he climbed, his body changed. He became stronger and more muscular, and the scars from the abuse he had endured at the hands of Beel and his demons were healing nicely and fading.

Baalak also realized something else. That which he held dearest—his manhood—the organ he used to model his phallus, was returning to its original state. It wasn’t as large as before, but the more he climbed, the closer it got to where it was so many years ago. Baalak smiled wickedly at that.

Baalak wondered what kind of world awaited him as he considered the rope. What was it Beel had said? It was much as it was when he first walked the Earth. What did he mean by that? Indeed, technology has advanced since then. Perhaps he meant something else. Baalak shook his head, finished his meal, took a drink, then leaned back to sleep for a while.

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Two years later:

Adrestia sat back from her computer and looked out the window, taking a brief break from her work. The last decade had seen a considerable increase in the interventions she and Max handled. The level of cheating, deception, and cold-hearted hubris exhibited by these mortals was as high as before the Flood. It had passed Sodom and Gomorrah levels years ago. Joshua, her primary contact in the upper realm, had warned her about this, but it still concerned her.

Fortunately, she thought, she didn't have to worry about her brother. This was the type of environment in which he thrived. She had enough to worry about without having him in the mix. Pouring herself a cup of tea, Adrestia looked out the window and smiled as her husband, Max, chopped wood for their fireplace.

He didn't have to do that, but he wanted to. Most men his age wouldn't be able to do what he was doing now. Although he was eighty years old, he had the strength, stamina, appearance, and drive of a man half his age, thanks to her loving care and ministrations. She loved him with all her heart and knew he loved her just as much.

Still, it pained her to know that his mortal body could only last so long. Even her ministrations would not stop the inevitable ending. What then? Would they make him immortal, like her, or would he end up like every mortal being before him?

After wiping his brow, Max stopped chopping, looked up at her with a broad grin, and waved. She smiled and waved back, knowing he could see her love for him on her face.

Her computer pinged with a notification that required her immediate attention. Adrestia moved her mouse to view the screen and was horrified to see the one thing that would make her blood turn cold—a large red “B” inside a triangular-shaped yellow icon.

“Oh no,” she hissed. “He’s back.”

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Chapter Two

Baalak took in his surroundings when he stood up. He knew he was somewhere in the country, but where? A small adobe house stood nearly 100 yards away, and a wooden barn stood not far from it. The terrain, which he could see in the moonlight, appeared rough and barren. It was

warm but felt cold compared to where he had been the previous 48 years.

He felt something tickling his bare foot and looked down, where he saw a large scorpion. The thing prepared to sting him but never got the chance, as Baalak flicked it away with one finger. He looked around, wondering if Beel lied to him. Someone should be here. Then a man's voice called out from behind him.

“Are you Baalak?”

“Yes,” Baalak said, turning around to find a man in a strange hat approaching from a large metal beast.

“Been waitin’ for ya for a while now. Was beginnin’ to think this was all bullshit,” the man said. “You may want to put this on. Don’t want to get busted for indecent exposure. This ain’t California, ya know.” The man threw something at Baalak’s feet.

“What is this? Where am I? Who are you?” Baalak demanded.

“Them’s called clothes,” the man said with sour amusement, pointing at the pile at Baalak’s feet. “You need to put ’em on. This here’s a little hole-in-the-wall place called Hard Rock, Texas. Actually, we’re just a few miles outside Hard Rock. This here’s an old state park called the ‘Jones Adobe.’

“Me? I reckon I’m yer tour guide. Name’s Marshall Hansen. No, I ain’t no marshal. That’s my name. You need to dress so we can get outta here. Might wanna shake them clothes out first just in case a scorpion or two got in ’em. They’re all over the place out here.”

Baalak picked up the clothes Marshall threw on the ground and shook them as the man suggested. Sure enough, one more of the pesky things fell to the ground before scampering away. Baalak had no experience with this clothing, but eventually figured out how to wear it.

“Reckon you’ll do,” Marshall said after Baalak figured out how to wear the boots and socks. “We’d best high-tail it outta here before the Sheriff’s boys come out to check on the place.”

“What?” Baalak asked, confused.

“We need to get the fuck outta Dodge, big boy,” Marshall shot back. “C’mon, let’s go.” Baalak followed Marshall to the metal beast, which he learned was a “truck.” Marshall opened the passenger door and motioned for Baalak to climb in. After showing Baalak how to adjust the seat and use the seat belt safety harness, Marshall shook his head, shut the door, and climbed into the driver’s seat.

Marshall touched a couple of screens and smiled when everything lit up. He saw Baalak look over the controls of the large truck, confusion on his face.

“The absolute latest, fresh outta Detroit-City,” Marshall bragged with a wide grin. “This thing is fully electronic, with an extra bank of batteries, and it’s all solar powered. Got Internet, satellite radio, radar detection, the works. Hell, I can go 3,000 miles in between major charges. They’ve come a long way in the last 40 or 50 years.,” he added with satisfaction.

Baalak had no clue what Marshall had just said but nodded anyway.

Putting the truck in gear, Marshall turned on the night vision screen, kept the headlamps off, and slowly drove out of the park to the main road. Seeing no traffic, he turned on the road and sped off, only turning his lights on once he was far from the state park.

He took the exit to the freeway that bypassed the town, then reached back and grabbed a bottle of liquid, which he handed to Baalak. Holding another bottle, he opened it, took a long drink, and placed it in a holder between the driver’s and passenger’s seats.

“What is this?” Baalak asked after taking a drink. “It’s cold. And... fizzy.”

“Soda pop. Of course, it’s cold. Ain’t worth a shit warm. Got a cold chest full of the stuff. Help yourself.”

“Where are we going? Where is my standard?” Baalak grunted, eyeing the beverage suspiciously.

“We’re going west to LA. If you’re talking about that fancy big-ass high-tech dildo, it’s there. Don’t worry. It’s safe.”

“What is this... ellay?” Baalak asked.

“Yer shittin’ me, right?” Marshall asked. “Only got the biggest collection of weirdos, nuts, and sluts in the country. Mr. B said that’s what you were lookin’ for.”

“Mr. B?”

“Yeah. My benefactor. Who do you think paid for all this shit? You sure ask a lot of questions. Where have you been, anyway? In a hole somewhere?” Marshall asked. The look he got from the big bald man made it clear he needed to shut up.

“This... Mr. B. What did he tell you to do?” Baalak asked.

“Said I was to pick you up, bring you back to my place. Get you set up and look after you until you could make it on your own,” Marshall replied.

“Have you ever met this Mr. B?” Baalak asked.

“Not face-to-face. Talked to him online, though. Why? Have you met the man?”

“Yes,” Baalak said, gazing out the front windshield.

“Is he as scary as he sounds?” Marshall asked.

“More than you can imagine,” Baalak grumbled, scowling at the landscape.

“At least he’s kept his promises to me, and that’s what matters. I got bills, you know. Listen, if you get tired, put the seat back and grab some shut-eye. We’ll be on the road for quite a while. Let me know if you get hungry, and I’ll find someplace.”

“Okay,” Baalak said.

“Where did you come from, by the way?” Marshall asked. “And how did you get there? I didn’t see any cars or trucks.”

“I came from a place far away,” Baalak said. “And I... climbed. The entire way.”

“Uh, huh,” Marshall said, not quite believing the man. He was afraid to inquire further, so he let the matter drop. This whole thing was strange.

“I am... tired. It has been a long, hard journey. Perhaps I will... sit back and grab some... shut-eye,” Baalak growled.

“Uh, yeah. Sure. Help yourself,” Marshall said as the big man adjusted his seat. It only took him a few minutes to figure out the controls. Marshall heard snoring from the passenger seat, activated auto-drive, and put on his headphones. He then turned up the country music.

He could not concentrate on the music, however. He was unable to grasp how a large naked man could just... appear... out of nowhere with no means of transportation. Who is this guy? And why is he so important to Mr. B?

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“What do you mean, Baalak is back?” Max asked Adrestia. “How is that possible? Could your system be incorrect?”

“I have double-checked the surveillance routines. I even rebooted the system. Everything is within normal parameters. I have no explanation for this. He should not have gotten out. To my knowledge, no one ever has. Unless...”

“Unless what?” Max asked.

“Unless he had help. I will need to speak with Eli,” Adrestia replied.

“You know Baalak will come looking for you,” Max told her.

“I know,” she answered.

“Do you know where he is now?” Max asked.

Adrestia moved her mouse cursor and saw a map with the “B” icon moving. She nodded her head. “Yes. He is apparently on his way to Los Angeles,” she told him.

“At least we know where he is,” Max replied.

“For now. We must be extra careful, Max. YOU must be very careful. He can kill you with a single blow.”

“Noted. I’ll keep my eyes open. What are we going to do?”

“I’d like you to stay put and monitor his movements if you don’t mind. I will check on the Fletchers. You know Baalak will also go after them. Then I will get with Eli. We’ll coordinate from there,” Adrestia said.

“Yes, ma’am,” Max said with a grin. “I’ll keep an eye on things.”

“You know how much I love you, Max,” Adrestia said, taking his head in her tiny hands. “I couldn’t bear to lose you.”

“Don’t worry about that, sweetheart. I’m not going anywhere. And I love you far more than you love me,” he replied.

“That’s impossible,” she said, emphasizing her statement with a scorching hot kiss. “And I’ll prove it to you when this is over.”

“I can’t wait for that,” Max said with a knowing smile.

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