

# BABEL



A chamber-jarp about pride  
by Anders Karls 2013  
First edition

CDOP

*I, the Ever Highest,  
have summoned thee,  
the best of people,  
to choose amongst you  
— before the sand runs out —  
the one most humble,  
who will receive  
the greatest honor;  
lest the worst will occur.*

## PREFACE

B A B E L is a chamber larp built on conversation, intrapersonal conflict and the juxtaposition of pride and humility. It is designed to be an intense experience, hoping to give the participants new insight into the complexity of pride and their own relationship to this deadly sin.

The game is suitable for three to eight people, and it is also possible for the game master to fully participate. The effective game time is one hour, but to this should be added approximately one hour for character creation and preferably some time after the game for debriefing. The more participants, the longer each part of the process will take.

This game was created by *Anders Karls* in the summer of 2013 and this is the first edition of its English manuscript, created March 5, 2014. Questions, comments and feedback can be sent to the game designer at: [anders.alf.karls@gmail.com](mailto:anders.alf.karls@gmail.com)

Special thanks to *Finlands Svenska Rollspelsförening Eloria rf*, a Finno-Swedish role-playing association, for its support in this work.



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Cover picture: “The Confusion of Tongues” by *Gustave Doré* 1868

## PRACTICAL PREPARATION

The game is designed with low demands on space, propping, and costume. However, it is the belief of the designer that the game experience will be more profound if some energy and care is put into preparing these aspects.

Costume – No special costuming is needed for this game. If the game master wants some kind of costuming, it should preferably blend into the atmosphere of the space; perhaps black, dark or neutral colors.

Space – For this game you need a table (preferably round) and as many chairs as there are participants. If no table is available it is possible to sit on the floor. The game asks for a mystical atmosphere, which can be enhanced by dim lighting, candle light or some other suitable element.

Hourglass – The only prop really needed is an hourglass. However, since it is quite hard and expensive to come by a real hourglass measuring 60 minutes, any other kind of chronometer will do, as long as it is precise enough to show when the game time has run out. An hourglass is perfect, as it creates a sense of mystique and heightened occasion, and since it is hard to judge how much time remains it also serves to amplify the sense of stress and desperation in the participants. Place the hourglass in the middle of the table.

Opening verse (optional) – An additional prop that may be included is a printed or handwritten copy of the opening verse to serve as a reminder of the game objective. Place the paper on the table beside the hourglass.

Voting stones (optional) – In order to simplify the voting process you may include a set of unique or uniquely marked stones, as many as there are participants. Do not mark them with numbers, letters or any other hierarchical symbols. Place the stones on the table beside the hourglass and the opening verse.

Name tags (optional) – If deemed necessary, the game master may choose to provide the players with name tags.

## CHARACTER CREATION

### – Becoming the best of people –

The participants will be playing the best people in the world. What this exactly means should not be defined, but should be something to ponder over during the game. It suffices to say that the best of people are extremely virtuous, but the concept of virtue is also hard to define. The best people come in all variations, from a Nobel peace prize winner to a devoted schoolteacher, from a Buddhist monk to an international environmental activist, from the kindest parent to the fiercest diplomat, and so forth. Ergo, it should not be difficult to create a diverse gallery of characters. However, all characters are human and thus imperfect, possessing at least the vice of pride in one of its many manifestations.

Characters are created before the game and, if possible, one hour should be devoted to this, depending on the amount of participants. The game master should guide the participants through the creation by following the steps below. In order to better help the participants, the game master should preferably to some degree have studied the concepts of humility and pride.

I – The participants get five to fifteen minutes to think about what the best human would be like and to write down their thoughts on a small piece of paper. The participants then take turns presenting their thoughts.

II (optional) – The game master may collect the notes and redistribute them at random in order to challenge the players a little bit more.

III – Using the notes as a starting point, the participants get five to ten minutes to come up with a name, concept, and personality for their character. The participants take another round presenting their characters to each other.

IV – If necessary, a third round can be held, where all participants are allowed to comment on each others' characters, giving suggestions how to give the characters more depth, more flaws, and a unique relationship with their own greatness, pride and humility.

## GAME BEGINNING

- I have summoned thee -

The game begins with all participants sitting around the table in a sleep-like state. The game master signals the beginning of the game by reading the opening verse. The game master then turns the hourglass, or starts the clock, and after a brief moment the participants wake up and begin the game. If the game master also is a participant of the game, a few more moments should be reserved for the game master to “fall asleep” as well.

In a realistic scenario, the characters would probably wake up in a state of panic, thinking “Where am I?”, “How did I come here?”, “What time is it?”, “Why am I here?” However, this is not desirable in this game, as it would consume a lot of the precious game time to settle these questions. Instead the characters should casually accept the situation and instead focus on the task at hand. The characters wake up knowing what must be done and that it is of great consequence. The only question that should be addressed is “Who are these other people?”, since no characters know each other. Furthermore, the characters are encouraged to speculate around the vagueness of the mission and what the different superlatives in the opening verse actually imply.

## THE GAME

- Choosing the most humble -

The opening verse states what the game is all about; choosing the most humble of the people convened. It is not stated how this choice should be made, but it should be made through consensus. For the game to work, it is of utmost importance that all characters are driven by the will to be chosen and receive the highest honor. Parallell to the open discussion, the players should also be encouraged to keep an inner dialogue. The beauty of the game comes from the paradox of humility; if you for one second think you are humble, then you have let pride take over. The game is supposed to be spiritually challenging for both characters and players.

## MONOLOGUE

- A meta technique -

The game also makes use of a meta technique often called *monologue*. This technique can be used by any player who wants to tell the other players what thoughts are going on in the character's mind at the moment. Since a big part of the game happens within each player, this technique serves to open up the game and enhance the total game experience. Also, the information divulged in the monologue can, with a certain amount of game sense, be used by the other players to drive the conflicts in the game. A monologue is initiated when a player places a hand on the hourglass and ends when it is withdrawn.

## VOTING STONES

- An optional game mechanic -

In order to simplify the voting process, the game master may include voting stones as described in the prop list. The thought behind these are that each character has one stone, which represents one vote. Placing your stone in front of any player, including yourself, marks your current choice as the most humble person. Each player can move their own stone at any time during the game.

## GAME ENDING

- Lest the worst will occur -

The game ends when the sand in the hourglass has run out. This happens whether or not the fateful choice has been made. If a choice is made early in the game, there is simply a lot of time to second guess and change opinions. Immediately after the sand has run out the characters close their eyes as if entering a state of meditation. After a few minutes of silence, the game master signals the end of the game.

Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing whether the choice was correct...