

Foreword:

This myth, part of the Before Babe collection, seems to chronicle the events that lead to the One True King climbing the tower and being crowned. It's historical merit is questionable, but it's a compelling story.

## Part 1: Tavern Meeting

Four men were gathered at a table. While they hailed from different corners of the Far Realms, they were united on this stormy night with a shared purpose. They were to climb The Tower, and claim The Babe. However, on the final night before the expedition, they found themselves engaged not in final preparations, but in heated debate.

"Nonsense!" cried the KING. "You cannot sully grounds as holy as this with your greed!"

"Surely," countered the MERCHANT "your 'keep' would be just as sacrilegious? Your protests are not born of care, but of pure selfishness."

"My fellows!" interjected the DOUBTFUL. "Why must we argue at a time like this? If we fall to petty squabbling, not one of us will even reach the top! All of our efforts will be for nothing!"

The TRAVELER, as usual, simply chuckled.

M: " 'Our' efforts? Perhaps my memory fails me, but as I remember it you have not contributed a penny to our expenses.

K: "Nor have you sworn allegiance to the throne!"

D: "The way you talk about it, one would think you more devoted to claiming the throne than the Babe."

K: "Bold claims from one who doubts the Babe's very existence!"

M: "He makes a point, you know. You seem far more devoted to planning the construction of your keep than planning our expedition."

K: "Are you blind to the truth? Or do you simply look away from the truth out of malice? A keep must be built to protect the Babe from pretenders to the throne!"

M: "In your obsession, you fail to see the obvious: no pretender to the throne may ever reach the Babe. Only a true JUMP KING will be able to reach the top. If you are, as you claim, the One True King, then surely you will be able to prove it."

K: "Legends are legends! We are only inviting our own ruin by tempting fate."

Surprising the group, the TRAVELER spoke up.

T: "And yet, you fully believe in the legend of the Babe's existence, do you not?"

The KING was struck silent.

As the MERCHANT moved to speak, the DOUBTFUL cut them off.

D: "Do not think yourself off the hook. You berate the KING for his self-absorption, yet you haven't the slightest interest in the Babe! All you want is fame! You're no better than him."

The MERCHANT, too, was struck silent.

(Note: This section was originally accompanied by a prolonged silence from the storyteller.)

As quickly as it fell upon the party, the silence was broken.

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## Part 2: Messenger's Notice

Several years had passed since the four adventurers set off on their expedition, and their efforts had shown fruit. The KING had his keep, and was recognized by most as the true JUMP KING. The MERCHANT had built a bustling centre of commerce, and was known the realm over. The DOUBTFUL came closer to learning the truth of the Babe every day. And the TRAVELER... seemed pleased.

Of course, it was not to last.

The KING's messenger had returned from the frontier, with exciting news! The KING summoned the three others to his keep with great haste. And so, once more, the four found themselves united.

M: "I hope this is urgent, my lord. I am needed in Commerceville."

K: "I assu-"

Before he could finish his sentence, the DOUBTFUL interjected.

D: "You really chose that name? I assure you, it does not sound as good as you think."

K: "My friends, pl-"

The KING attempted to speak up, but was drowned out by the MERCHANT's rebuttal.

M: "What would you know about naming? Do I tell you you're musing wrong?"

D: "Actually, you have. Several times."

The KING, tired of this, decided to put his foot down.

K: "ORDER IN MY COURT!"

The group was finally quiet.

K: "Thank you."

K: "As I was saying: I assure you, this matter is of the utmost urgency."

K: "The storms at the peak have cleared."

K: "Our expedition can finally continue."

Reactions at the table were mixed. While the KING and the DOUBTFUL were overjoyed, the MERCHANT was visibly frustrated and the TRAVELLER remained inscrutable as ever.

M: "Not to sound heretical, but... must we go? We already have so much, why risk it?"

K: "'Why risk it?' 'WHY RISK IT'??? Have you lost your mind? Have you forgotten what brought us here in the first place?"

M: "My lieg-"

K: "Or, as usual, are you simply blinded by greed? Do you fear the people will leave you once I'm truly king?"

M: "You don't un-"

K: "I understand perfectly. You never cared about the babe."

M: "My lord! Ho-"

K: "I will hear no more from you. We leave tomorrow."

Once more, silence filled the room. Save for the TRAVELLER, who chuckled.

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Part 3: The Climb

And so, they climbed. Past the furthest frontier of civilisation, through the calmed bluff, until they reached uncharted territory. A golden cathedral, standing tall amongst the snow-capped peaks. And standing above it, barely visible, was the tower. At long last, victory was within reach.

As usual, it was not to be.

At the foot of the cathedral, a fight broke out. The KING wanted to prove himself and himself alone as worthy of the throne. The MERCHANT wished to protect Tradeshire from the KING's inevitable power grab. The DOUBTFUL saw his fellows as simply undeserving of the Babe. The TRAVELLER had no reason to fight, yet he joined in anyway.

First to fall was the MERCHANT. While as passionate as the others, his old age meant he was unable to trade blows as efficiently. All it took was one left hook from the KING, and he was sent plummeting. As he fell, the most peculiar thing happened. A grey smoke engulfed him, and when it dissipated he was nowhere to be found!

Next was the DOUBTFUL. While he was able to dodge the KING's blows using his nimble frame, his erratic movement would be his downfall. As he sparred with the KING, he forgot the terrain he stood on, and slipped on a patch of ice. As he fell back down to the frontier, the mountain's storms raged back to life behind him.

And then, only two remained. The KING, and the TRAVELLER.

The KING never stood a chance. The TRAVELLER evaded every single one of his blows, while never missing one of his own.

As the KING lay defeated, the TRAVELLER did not finish him off. Nor did he leave him for dead, and start the final ascension. No, he simply chuckled, and leapt down the mountain.

More determined than ever to reach the summit, the KING dusted himself off and continued climbing.

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Part 4.

At last, the KING had reached the top of the tower. The Babe was right there, he just had to walk a few more steps, and- wait. Why was there wind blowing? This was all wrong! He was the king! He couldn't fall after all of this! This wasn't how it was meant to be! He was going to save the Babe! He was going to rule the lands!

His protests did little to save him. Much as he tried, the KING couldn't fight against the noxious wind for very much longer. He tried grabbing onto something, anything, but the ground was slick with dew and he was too fatigued to brace himself. And so, as he fell, the KING was no more, and the DISGRACED was revealed.

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The DOUBTFUL finally awoke, and when he did, he was wrought with despair. How could he have got so far, only to lose it all? As he sat there, he realised something. He would never see the Babe. And so, the DOUBTFUL became the SPITEFUL.

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When the DISGRACED fell back to his keep, the people turned on him near-instantly. During the ensuing riots, someone managed to lock him in one of his own cages in the keep. And there he would stay, forever.

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When the MERCHANT finally reached solid ground, the strangest thing had happened. He was in the ruins of a town, and he couldn't remember how he got here at all! Whatever he fell off of, it must have been a long fall. Ah well, it didn't matter. With a little bit of repairs, this town could be turned into a blooming center of trade, and he knew just the name!

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The TRAVELLER, finally content, took a seat by the pond.

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