

An Introduction to “The Society!”

Hi there! I'm A.Ron. You probably don't know me from my weekly podcast, *Blue Yonder*, found at www.baldmove.com. But you totally should. It's entertaining as hell. But I'm getting off topic... You presumably now hold in your hand a copy of “The Society”. You probably have questions about the weird concepts and game play the deck represents. I have answers!

This game was born one day when fellow cast mate Gino and I were waiting for our friend Peter to show up one Saturday afternoon to drink beer, play some table top games, and then, when we were good and liquored up, watch some crazy movie.

Me and Gino got started a bit early on the drinking.

We were reminiscing about our former lives as Jehovah's Witnesses, and how bizarre our current friends found the life when we'd talk about it. We talked about all the crazy rules and requirements we had to keep, the peculiar doctrines you had to learn and believe. We started joking about how all the Byzantine rules reminded us of our favorite collectible card game, Magic: The Gathering. Quickly we started defining our lives in terms of creature cards, instant spells, tapping manna, etc. Pretty soon a whiteboard came out, more beers were had, and what had started off as a complex CCG morphed into a fun little casual game.

The idea struck us as very funny, but we came to a realization; this could be a fun teaching tool for our friends. Play the Witness game and learn what it was like to be one! What little the public at large knows about Witnesses tends to be quirky; not celebrating most holidays, waking you up on Saturday mornings to offer you the latest copy of the Watchtower magazine, and leading quiet, clean-cut, unassuming lives.

Most people don't know that the Witnesses life is a tightly regulated one. They keep separate from friends and family that are not themselves Witnesses, referring to them as “worldly”. Like many religions, they proscribe extra-marital sex, drug and tobacco use, homosexuality, drunkenness, swearing, and other forms of vulgar speech. They are often out of touch with popular culture, as their strict views on violence, sex, magic and the occult are at odds with most entertainment including video games. They are forbidden from taking blood transfusions or other blood based therapy, even if it would mean their lives or the lives of their *children*. They are forbidden to be involved in politics, or even to vote! Men are forbidden to wear beards. They are strongly discouraged from attending higher education, pressured instead to engage in full-time ministry work. They are required to believe in *all* doctrines taught by the organization. Unlike almost all other religions, no dissent is allowed. This often requires incredible feats of Orwellian double-think. For example, Witnesses must simultaneously believe that the Society and the men who run it are God's divinely appointed channel and sole possessors of the Truth blessed with unique understandings of Bible prophecy, but yet not view these men as false prophets to be held accountable when their many predictions turn out to not be true.

These restrictions have teeth. When a Witness is baptized, they take an oath of loyalty, not just to their god, but to the “Society” that will rule their lives. Any baptized Witness is subject to “theocratic” tribunals, called Judicial Committees, when they step off the straight and narrow path. To be found guilty of an offense and found unrepentant -- and keep in mind they are being judged by three men with no special qualifications other than their loyalty to the Organization -- you are “disfellowshipped”, or excommunicated. Because of the requirement for Witnesses to keep separate from the “World”, this is effectively their social death. Blood relatives, including mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, as well as lifelong friends, are required to shun disfellowshipped ones, or be cast out as well.

This proves to be a very effective means of control.

Many of my close friends are ex-Jehovah's Witnesses (JWs) and have been through the disfellowshipping process.

Some for teenage indiscretions, some for outside research that lead them to reject teachings which they discovered to be false. You might think we would be bitter for our experiences, but on the most part we feel pity for the ones still left behind. These were and are our friends. Witnesses are good people, and try to be humble and kind. To the extent that they have to abide by and enforce intolerant, unloving policy, it is because they are afraid of the isolation that would come with refusal. Our beef is not with the “rank and file” Witness, but with “the Society”; the old men that make up the “Governing Body” of Jehovah’s Witnesses and the many “Overseers” that act as their enforcers. The Governing Body twists the Bible and even their own organizational history to hide their serious errors and ever changing policies. Since Witnesses are forbidden outside research, it is impossible for them to discover much of this, and for ones that live through a major doctrinal change, all they can do is accept the new reality (which Witnesses refer to as “new light”) or face excommunication.

When I say, “Doctrinal Change”, let me give an example. For many years, Witnesses taught that 1975 was going to be the end of the world. Thousands of Witnesses foolishly sold their homes, quit their jobs, forfeit retirements, and otherwise mortgaged their futures to engage in full time ministry work to warn others of the impending Armageddon. When 1975 came and went, not only were no apologies issued, but the official magazine of the Society, the Watchtower, chided believers who had gone all out on this prediction as being “over eager” for the End to come. Anyone who complained was disfellowshipped. Most witnesses coming into the Organization since then are probably not even aware of this “old light” that took such a large financial and emotional toll.

We look forward to the day where Witnesses parents will not be compelled to allow their children to die by refusal to take blood; where families will not be torn apart when one member sins or has a theological disagreement with the Society. When the general public and their own members are made aware of the ever-changing nature of their policies and doctrine, and the dire consequences that has on people’s lives. We feel that the Society will one day face the same decision that all extreme fundamentalist religions face; to change with the times and allow dissent and new ideas in; or to go extinct. We wish the Society a speedy journey on either path.

As I said, I don’t feel that we are bitter, nor are we the walking wounded, carrying the social martyrdom of disfellowshipping around with raw, bleeding cuts in our emotional selves. BUT! We are sarcastic, snarky, cynical geek gamers, and I do hope that comes across in the presentation. LOL, as they say.

The goal of this game is to educate people in a fun way, and to put you in the mindset of the paranoid and often inhuman way of life of Witnesses. We feel the game in its alpha state is fun to play, but the second objective we are not satisfied with. Future versions of the game will have additional cards, like “beard growth”, “violent video game”, and “Disney movie” to help give it the precise flavor we want. The alpha cards were chosen because they were easy concepts to grasp and understand; there was humorous stock art available, and we had little time to prep the game. The beta will also feature completely custom artwork, a smoother, less “MTG” type look and feel, and further game play balance and rule streamlining.

Hope you enjoy! If you do, visit cult.baldmove.com and refer some friends! We’re going to be releasing the complete game as a free downloadable plug into the OCTGN so you can play online with your friends very soon. When you sign up and refer a friend, you’ll be alerted to this and other releases. Drop us some mail at cult@baldmove.com if you have feedback or suggestions!

Glossary of Witness Terms and Card Commentary

Apostate -- Someone who does not 100% agree with the Society teachings. Even private disagreement on doctrines in intimate settings such as within a family would not be tolerated if discovered. This is grounds for disfellowshipping.

“Bad Association” -- 1 Corinthians 15:33 is used to justify keeping separate from “worldly” people. This is hard for young people, especially. When they question the doctrine, and whether or not it applies to their friends who are “so

nice, they're practically Witnesses", Witness youths are reminded about the story of Dinah found in Genesis 34, where a Hebrew woman makes friends outside her religion and is raped. That's right. If you hang out with your "worldly" friends, you'll get raped.

Bethel -- Derived from a Jewish term meaning "House of God", Bethel is the name of any regional headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses. The World HQ, or "Bethel Prime" if you will, is located in Brooklyn, NY. It houses the Governing Body, a group of elderly men who exclusively make doctrine and run the lives of the millions of Witnesses worldwide. Witnesses have an almost idolatrous love for any Bethel facility, and tours are given constantly throughout the day. Touring Bethel is almost like a pilgrimage for a Witness. One of the highest privileges extended to young men is to serve at Bethel. They sign up for a one or two year commitment, take a vow of poverty, and work whatever task is assigned to them in maintenance, printing, cleaning, gardening, laundry for approximately \$40 a month in wages. Some enjoy this indentured servitude so much that they stay much longer than their initial assignment, and become somewhat institutionalized and... a bit off. Or as even other Witnesses refer to it, "Bethel Weird".

Birthdays -- Don't celebrate them. Why? Uh... not humble *mumble mumble* pagan origins *mumble mumble* some person got his head cut off during a birth day event portrayed in the bible... so there!

"Blood Transfusion" -- The tragedy of the Witness doctrine on blood is that it is completely un-scriptural. They take the Jewish prohibition of eating unbled meat and consider transfusions to be "eating" of blood. Thousands of Witnesses -- including minor unbaptized children of Witness parents -- have died because of this. In the past, Witnesses have been prohibited from organ transplants and vaccines, and many have died because of this. Can you imagine how the friends and families of these ones who died must have felt when the teaching changed, with no comment or apology? "Sorry your father died because he wouldn't accept a kidney transplant, but now we've decided that transplants are A-OK. Hey, at least it won't happen to anyone else's father! Rejoice in Jehovah's mercy, brother!"

Brother -- What all male witnesses are referred to as. If you happen to possess a "Y" chromosome, can recognize your ass from a hole in the ground 4 out of 5 times, and do not engage in "serious wrongdoing", you'll probably "make elder" one day.

"Convention Work Conflict" -- Each summer the Witnesses gather in vast conventions; renting out stadiums and arenas where tens of thousands gather for 4-5 days of what many religions would call "Revivals". Hundreds are baptized. Costumed Bible dramas are performed. Hours long sermons are delivered. New books printed by the Society are released to thunderous applause. The days start early and run long, but the events are looked forward to for months in advance. However, it causes some Witnesses with shit jobs to have problems getting off work, when their bosses decide to be assholes about it. Unfortunately, since Witnesses are discouraged from higher education, many times shit jobs are the only ones they qualify for.

"Demonic Yard Sale Item" -- This one is pretty funny. Witnesses are demon crazy. House just creaked kind of weird? Probably because you watched something on TV that featured violence or magic. Picture fall off the wall? Maybe that vase you bought at a yard sale came from a church, or worse, some Satan worshipper's house! You hear these Witness urban legends growing up all the time, and they are passed around completely straight faced.

Disfellowshipping -- The Witness practice of excommunication. Because Witnesses are only allowed close association with their fellow "brothers and sisters", and upholding excommunications is a requirement for every Witness, even blood relations like parents and siblings, being disfellowshipped is a social death sentence for Witnesses. It is hard to overstate the psychological consequences to the victims. Consider being a teenager, who succumbs to the desires of the flesh and has pre-marital sex. Imagine you're a young sister who is now pregnant. Guess who *won't* be there support you in this difficult time? All of your family and friends, that's who. This is

considered a loving provision, to guide a sinner back into the fold and to reconcile with God. Thus, Witnesses who have been disfellowshipped can apply for “reinstatement”, discussed below.

Elder -- Roughly equivalent to a priest or preacher in other religions. Elders, despite their name, can be as young as mid-20's for an especially up and coming male prospect. There are a half dozen or more in each congregation. Several elders are assigned particular duties; Accounts Overseers manage donations and pays bills, Service Overseers manage the preaching territory assigned to the individual witnesses, etc. One elder is appointed as the “Presiding Overseer”, and is in charge of the overall operations at the local congregation. They tend to have considerable power and influence, and one way to “win the game” is to achieve a rank of 20 Spirituality points (SPR) and be appointed as the “PO”.

Governing Body -- The GB is comprised of a group of elderly men who claim to be specially chosen and anointed by Christ to reveal the Truth of the Bible to mankind. They make many biblical predictions for the apocalypse and other Ends of the World. But they're not prophets! Hell no! That would be immodest to take that title, and then people might hold them accountable for getting all the dates wrong. But, they're the only authorized channel that Jehovah and Christ uses to communicate, so we're stuck with them anyway... Note that the GB, the Society, the Organization, and term “Faithful and Discreet Slave” are all used interchangeably by Witnesses. Although the Organization can also mean the whole group of Witnesses as a whole, when a Witness says the “Organization says” they mean the GB.

Holidays -- Don't celebrate them. Why? Probably because they have a pagan origin, are patriotic and thus worldly, or in the case of Thanksgiving, *mumble mumble* we just don't do that.

“Independent Research” -- It's hard to describe how isolated Witnesses are from modern access to information. Forbidden to use social networks, and warned of the evils of the Internet, where a quick search of “Jehovah's Witnesses” can destroy your faith in minutes, they do not read material printed outside of the Society. JW's believe Jerusalem was destroyed in 607 BCE. Why? Because that's what the Society tells them, and because if they believed the correct date, of 587 BCE, their complex chronology that is the cornerstone of many Witness beliefs wouldn't work.

“Judicial Committee” -- So, you've been accused of Serious Wrongdoing. Three elders from your congregation will be appointed to poke into your affairs and determine the truth of the matter. You will not be given a chance to meet your accuser, or hear any eye witness testimony. You are reminded that Jehovah already knows the truth of the matter, and these men are given Holy Spirit so that they can determine your guilt and repentance. A confession and repentance is no guarantee that you will not be disfellowshipped. If the Elders decide your sin is extra-serious, or notorious, or you bonked one of their daughters, or they just plain don't like you, you're going to get disfellowshipped, or “DFd” as the Witnesses commonly abbreviate it. If you do escape with your fellowships intact, you will always be announced at the next public meeting as being “reproved”, which signals Witnesses that they should have limited, but guarded associations with you for a period of three to six months.

Kingdom Hall -- What Witnesses refer to their “church” or gathering place as. Witnesses would never call their Kingdom Hall a church. A church is where the Great Whore of Babylon (all other religions) meets at.

Loyalty -- Witnesses are required to be absolutely loyal to the Society and its organization. To God and Jesus too! But mostly to the Society. This involves adherence to doctrine, and reporting others, including friends and family members, when they sin or hold views that do not align with official Society teachings.

“Making Fine Progress” -- Witnesses have a unique internal vocabulary. They actually have a name for it, “Theocratic Speech”. No, they haven't read *1984*, so they don't understand the irony of it all. I was actually scolded one day for saying that a particular Elder did a “good job” when preaching, as he piously reminded me of Christ's

words that “Only God is good.”

Magic -- A prime vector for demonization! If you're a kid, I hope you're not too attached to Walt Disney movies (even when they don't feature magic outright, which is rare, they come from the Magic Kingdom you know), most Saturday morning cartoons, or fairy tale stories, because those are going right out the window. Same thing for toys and video games featuring anything that could be described as uncanny. I'm looking at YOU, X-Men. A Witness youth in possession of a black market Harry Potter book would be suspected of possession (the demonic kind) and the topic of Kingdom Hall gossip for months.

“Masturbation” -- Yeah, you can't do this. Everyone does, of course, except those few guilt ridden dolts that take this seriously, and get censured and suffer the loss of “privileges” in the congregation for their effort.

Ministerial Servant -- Younger or less capable brothers that roughly equate to “deacons” in other religions. Sometimes elders who step out of line are busted down to MS. They assist the elders in their various duties and run the more mundane aspects of the Kingdom Halls such as the sound system, maintenance, distribution of literature, etc.

Overseer -- In Godfather terms, these are the *pezzonovantes*, the “Big Shots”, which have power and influence in the Society and throughout the Organization. In rough ascending order of importance... Presiding Overseer (PO) of a local congregation < Circuit Organization (CO) < District Overseer (DO) < Branch Overseer (BO) < various branch committee Overseers < executive officials of the various JW corporations < Governing Body. The CO and DO make regularly scheduled week long trips to congregations they are assigned to, where they make speeches, get people fired up about the ministry, and crack elder skulls for non-compliance on Organizational policies, congregation finances, etc. About the only thing a PO is scared of in his “theocratic” life are the CO and DO visits.

Privileges -- Witnesses LOVE their privileges. Since nominally the org chart is fairly flat, these are about all the social status many witnesses get. Handling microphones, counting donations, cleaning the Kingdom Hall toilets, conducting Bible studies, answering questions during Watchtower studies, even basic associations with fellow Witnesses, is considered a privilege. And *all* privileges can be taken away, no due process required.

“Public Talk” -- The hour long Sunday sermon that takes place at every Kingdom Hall. Elders and up and coming Ministerial Servants receive ridiculous praise after giving one of these. They're taken out to lunch, gushed over, and told “we particularly enjoyed point X” in your talk.” Fun fact: All Public Talks are based on about 60 or so outlines provided by the Society, with 2 or 3 new outlines introduced per year and the same number retired. Given that there are 52 weeks in a year, and that these outlines control what the Elders say, they are basically being praised for how well they regurgitate the same information that is heard year after year.

Reinstatement -- A formal process of writing a letter expressing repentance, and then attending every meeting for a set time, such as six months. Since no one will talk to you, make eye contact, or otherwise acknowledge your presence at the Kingdom Hall during this time of repentance, it is pretty emotionally and mentally tough process to go through. Apostates aren't generally eligible for reinstatement, unless they recant their disagreements. If you do make it through and get reinstated, you will receive the Love Bombing of your life. Every member of the congregation will hug and kiss you and tell you how happy they are that you are back, and you will feel extra grateful for their mercy.

“Shepherding Call” -- In theory, Elders should visit every family in the congregation to encourage and support them several times per year. These visits are friendly in nature where prayers are said, scriptures are read, and faith is built up. In practice, elders are busy and lazy, so when you are assigned a Shepherding call, it means your ass has screwed up somehow and is terrifying.

Sister -- Every female witness is referred to as this. Sisters cannot hold any official office (although an Elder's wife can hold a surprising amount of influence in the congregation), cannot pray in public while a baptized brother is present, and must wear a head covering if they pray in private or conduct a Bible study, even with their own children. If you are a woman playing this game, in real life you could never attain the winning condition for the Witness side. About the highest spiritual aspiration you could have is to be an Elder's wife. How does that make you feel?

Theocratic -- Anything blessed by the Society. The "right" way to do things. As opposed to "un-theocratic". Again, these poor people have never heard of Orwell.

"Watchtower Comment" -- Aside from the "Public Talk", the other main component of the Sunday meeting is the Watchtower Study, which is a 45 minute discussion of a Watchtower article. If you have ever seen questions printed at the bottom of a random Watchtower article and wondered why; it's because it is a Study Article. An elder leads the entire congregation in a Q&A session, as a lesser brother, such as a Ministerial Servant, reads each paragraph one by one. The Elder conducting the study asks the question below for that paragraph, and someone from the audience reads the answer right out of the material. Higher functioning Witnesses will reword the answer so it doesn't sound quite as lame. Some of the scriptures cited are looked up and read. And that's the study. It's exactly as exciting and as spiritual as it sounds.

Worldly -- *Anything* not Witness. Associations, entertainment, politics, higher education, etc. If you are nominally friends with a Witness, and wonder if they refer to you as worldly behind your back... yes, they do.