



Word Nerd: Dispatches from the Games, Grammar, and Geek Underground

John D. Williams Jr

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In this zany, one-of-a-kind memoir, former executive director of the National SCRABBLE Association John D. Williams Jr. brings to life the obsessions, madness, and glory of the SCRABBLE® culture?from living-room players to world champions.

Beginning his career on a lark as a freelance contributor to *SCRABBLE News*, John D. Williams fell down a rabbit hole inhabited by gamers, geeks, and the grammar police. For twenty-five years, as the executive director of the National SCRABBLE Association, Williams served as the official spokesperson for the game, and as the middleman between legions of fanatical word-game fans and the official brand. Now *Word Nerd* takes readers inside the byzantine, dog-eat-dog world of top tournament players, creating a piquant (seven-letter word, 68 points!) work that is part pop-cultural history, part anthropological study. Indeed, what Christopher Guest did for the world of dog shows in his film *Best in Show*, Williams does for the world of competitive word games in this funny and perfectly observed memoir.

As readers will discover, *Word Nerd* explores anagrams, palindromes, the highest-scoring SCRABBLE plays of all time, the birth of the World SCRABBLE Championship, as well as many of the more colorful figures that inhabit this subculture. Die-hard word fans will find invaluable tips on how top players see their boards and racks to come up with the best play, how they prepare, and the psychology of tournament competition. Those uninitiated in the mysteries of SCRABBLE mania will find a delightful, madcap memoir about all the fun people have with language and how words shape our lives and culture in unexpected ways.

Whether reminiscing about past national champions, detailing the controversy over efforts to purge the *Official SCRABBLE Players Dictionary* of all offensive words, opining on the number of vowelless words that are allowable (cmw for a Welsh deep-walled basin or nth for the ultimate degree), noting how long it takes a word to get into a dictionary, or explaining why there remain more male than female champions, Williams crafts a loving tribute to words and the games people play with them. *Word Nerd* will fascinate both amateurs and seasoned experts alike.

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John Damm:

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