

GTM #137 - The World Boardgaming Championships

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The **World Boardgaming Championships**, or "WBC", as it is known to its adherents, is not your typical gaming convention. For starters, it's owned and operated by its attendees who vote for the Non-Profit Corporation's management and event eligibility. You can travel the world over and not encounter anything else quite like it. WBC is not the biggest gaming mecca, but most of its attendees think it's the best. Dealing exclusively in board and card games, it attracts the most competitors for those games on the planet.

As such, it is home to what many in the trade refer to as "elite" gamers – those who view their game collection as something more than a pastime. They find enjoyment in competing and sharing vicarious adventures with other kindred souls. It's not just about winning, but the journey of being recognized as the best you can be and the sense of accomplishment that it brings. In short, it treats gaming as a hobby or sport with goals to be obtained – not just a diversion. WBC does this by adherence to a competitive theme. Not only are its champions pictured and their exploits detailed on the web, (www.boardgamers.org/yearbook/hrcpge.htm) but their achievements are accorded "laurels" – the currency by which it keeps score and ranks its members with a common

denominator regardless of the diverse games in which they compete. By such means, an overall champion is named each year in a meta-competition amongst all of the events offered, including those of Euro Quest and ongoing email tournaments that widen worldwide participation.

Amassing laurels allows one to post their high water mark against the passage of time and to gauge their progress in the hobby similar to marking previous high scores in a video game. Winning a tournament is a feel good experience to be sure, akin to past or never achieved athletic prowess, but it doesn't end there. The WBC is all about traditions. Champions attempt to repeat their victories, amassing higher levels of mastery akin to the various colored belts of karate. Laurel totals and championships of the past 20 years are a matter of public record and proclaimed on event kiosks at every tournament.

With all this emphasis on winning, a high intimidation factor for the uninitiated is to be expected. In truth, WBC offers an incredibly friendly atmosphere. The players tend to have shared experiences and value the camaraderie of skilled opponents who enhance the challenge and excitement found in the games. Most compete in the same events year after year and come to know and befriend their opponents... so much so, that among the regulars WBC is often said to be more about reunion than tournaments. Then too, sportsmanship is stressed. Prizes are honorary in nature (shield shaped plaques in keeping with a Roman theme for levels of achievement). And not all tournaments cater to the skillful. Events are color coded by the experience required. A red kiosk summons the experienced only with quarter neither expected nor given. Yellow, by far the most numerous category, admits beginners if they have read the rules or attended an hour demonstration beforehand. Tales of helpful advice freely given toneophytes costing their veteran advisors



the match are frequent. Green events are so simple that your fellow players teach you as you play.

The Game Masters are volunteers with up to 20 years experience. Many take more pride in running their event than in playing themselves. Even the events are in competition at WBC – vying to remain eligible for the following year's slate that is purposely limited to provide focus. These GMs not only pay the same admission as their entrants, but they

do so first and author a special web page preview of the event beforehand and an account of the action afterwards. It is a degree of dedication not found elsewhere. That, and the absence of individual event fees, makes attendees extremely loyal... many returning every year as an annual vacation from all across the world.

While tournaments are what sets WBC apart from other conventions, they are not the sole attraction. The week also features one of the best Auctions and flea markets for used and out-of-print games. A free kids program for those 12 and under augments the resort hotel's claim as a family destination – which is further enhanced by the adjacent amusement park. Open Gaming advocates have exclusive use of a 13,000 square-foot tiered dinner theatre with an extensive free Game Library. And those thirsting for the newest thing can play the latest games demonstrated in the Sampler Showcase or make purchases from a packed Vendors Room filled by many of the hobby's best publishers. Check it out in detail at www.boardgamers.org.