

How to Judge in an Amtgard A&S Tournament

By Baron Master Thalen Tannon

I've been entering Arts and Sciences competitions since 1992 and judging tournaments since 1995. In all that time, I've only noticed a decline in A&S in the last few years. Not particularly in terms of quality, but definitely in terms of quantity. I believe that the decline is caused by the lack of faith in the A&S system. The methods of the system aren't as clear cut as a fighting tournament because the judging criteria can change with every competition.

More often than hearing artisans tell me what they hope to enter in an upcoming tournament, I hear several complaints from entrants about the lack of organization of the tournaments themselves and about the quality of the judges. I suggest restructuring and standardizing the organization of our tournaments for Arts and Sciences. To achieve that goal, we should train our Masters and Knights in the Art of Judging: something that we expect from them, but rarely teach.

These pages contain a proposal for a standardization of judges and for the method by which those judges score an A&S entry.

Selecting a Judge

When you're dealing with such a wide variety of artistic endeavors, it's improbable for any one judge to know the ins and outs of all of the possible categories and sub-categories. So if it's improbable to find one judge, then likely it's impossible to find three or more. So what is an autocrat to do when faced with such a Herculean feat? In the past, they were resigned to ask their friends or ask those Knights and Masters who are usually called upon to fill such roles and hope for the best. I offer another option.

First, it's important when selecting Judges that an autocrat chooses a variety of talented individuals. For example, if possible, choose a Dragon, a Garber, and a Owl rather than three Owls or three Garbers. While the Judges don't have to be Masters, choose Judges with at least 5 orders of a

particular ladder award. It's important that the Judges have enough experience to perform their duties. Additionally, try to choose Judges who understand the impact of their duties. It may just take an hour or two out of their event time but it could have a lasting effect on the entrants.

Once the autocrat selects the judges, then it's time to show them what they're looking for.

The Judging Criteria

In order to regain the confidence of the artisans, it's imperative that we standardize what the judges are looking for in any given entry. In this way, the competitors know in advance what's being expected of them beyond the initial creation of their entries. Then, with proper presentation at the tournament, the playing field is leveled and the judges can more efficiently do the job we've asked of them.

There are five different criteria that the judges should look for when judging any entry:

Documentation aka "The Write Up"

Documentation is the foundation of a good entry. It provides the judges with the necessary details of the conception and creation for the item entered. It shows the entrant's understanding of the overall techniques and the adaptations that had to be made for this specific project. Many times the competitor is more knowledgeable in the specific entry than the judge and the documentation should reflect that knowledge. It should answer any questions that the judge may have in regards to that entry.

Judges may give a lower score to entries for a lack of color pictures or for not putting the write up into a binder. However, while organized documentation should score higher than disorganized or hard to read write ups, this is less important than a document that shows an overall understanding of the work involved.

Scope of Work

This section is used to determine the depth and breadth of the work. The judges should try not to look at the piece as it is, but what the entrant was envisioning from the start from what is written in their documentation.

For example, if they are trying to produce a piece of court garb, their documentation might indicate that they were attempting to replicate an outfit from a movie. They may include stills shots of the outfit from that movie. This would be their scope of work. The Judge would then attempt to determine how closely the finished product matches the intended result.

Various factors that increase the scope are the level of complexity of the piece, availability of source information, number of elements, time required, etc.

Relevance

While we aren't "Period Specific" like they are in the SCA, Amtgard DOES have a time period and place that we're trying to represent. The Rules of Play define that period by declaring that "Every persona must be either of an ancient, medieval, or swords and sorcery related background." That gives us a lot of time and space to work with. Keeping that in mind, the entry should bear some relevance to what we do in Amtgard. The obvious things like garb and weapons are easily recognizable as relevant, but it might take some real thought to decide if a bardic entry is "Amtgard Relevant".

A Judge should ask themselves "If Amtgard were real, would this (insert entry here) be out of place?" If so, the Judge would need to determine to what extent and critique the piece accordingly.

Skill + Complexity = Workmanship

This is the section where experience in the field of the entry is the most helpful. In this section, the judges will determine how well the entrant completed the piece. Complexity is the degree of difficulty in creating the item. Consider how much physical time the entry took to construct, the use

of elaborate or sensitive processes, and the availability of materials used in the creation of the item. Workmanship is the degree of quality of the item created. It shows the entrant's skill in the use of the documented processes and materials.

Creativity

Creativity is the degree in which the entrant shows their understanding of the processes and materials to create an original item. It also shows how well the entrant can adapt and interpret what they have learned. Is this an original work? Did they do anything innovative or creative in the production? Did they employ a degree of experimentation in the creation of this item?

For example, the entry is a sword. Is it "Old Tech" or "New Tech"? Did they use foam other than the typical noodle? Is the grip wrapped in a new technique? Does the cover match their heraldry or their company colors? Any deviation from the standard Rules of Play sword would be an example of their creativity.

Judge's Observations / Aesthetics

This section is designed to cover how all the other sections fit together; what is the overall effect of the piece? Aesthetics is the degree in which the entry is pleasing to the eye.

This is the judges' one spot to let their personal feelings through. If the entry has documentation, matches its scope of work, is well crafted and original but the judge just does not like it, this is where that opinion goes. On the contrary, if you like the piece you're judging, score high!

The corollary, however, is that for all the other criteria, the judges must remain impartial and objective.

The Critique

The most difficult task for a judge is offering a meaningful critique on the entry. The critique should tell the entrant how well they did in regards to the judging criteria. It should also tell the entrant areas in which need improvement and offer comments about the entry. The critique is also the appropriate place for the judge to ask questions about the artist's work.

The Points Awarded

One of the most important duties for a judge is to rate the item upon the criteria by assigning to it a point value. A judge should develop a set of standards for each criterion that they compare the item to for assessment. For the two 5 point values, use these criteria and divide by 2. The following is a suggestion on establishing such a standard:

9-10 Points: The item meets the criteria perfectly or near perfectly. There is little to no room for improvement for the item in regards to the specific criteria and it is exceptionally done.

7-8 Points: The item exceeds expectations for the criteria. There may be room for improvement but it is well done.

5-6 Points: The item meets all expectations determined. There is room for improvement but it is properly done.

3-4 Points: The item is lacking in meeting the expectations you have determined for the criteria. A definite effort has been shown and it is adequately done.

1-2 Points: The item shows a rudimentary effort in meeting the expectations. A basic effort has been shown and it is marginally done.

0 Points: No effort at all made to meet the criteria.

At the end of the scoring, the result will be a number from 1-50. Once this number has been obtained, moving the decimal one space to the left gives us the 5 point score that we traditionally use. The method of determining the winner based off the score may vary with the Autocrat.

Dos and Don'ts for Judges

Do

- Read the entrant's documentation thoroughly - The answers to any questions you may have may well be present in the documentation, but may not be obvious at first glance. Entrants will complain about being marked down for items that were explained in their documentation.
- Ask for help if you are not sure how to interpret a specific line or wording in the criteria.
- Let the tournament-crat know if you have any food allergies or aversion to alcohol when signing up to judge cooking or Brewing/Vintner entries
- Keep an open mind to new and different techniques and approaches.
- Make comments frequently; it is especially good to make a comment whenever you give a less than perfect score to answer the inevitable entrant's question "Why?"

Don't

- Don't judge an entry you are uncomfortable judging; it's okay to say no!
- Don't judge a project based on your own research. Personal research and/or experience with a project certainly aides in interpreting skill and scope and helps you give useful comments. However, entering into judging with predetermined ideas of how a project should have been done and/or how the final result should appear can result in you unfairly penalizing the entrant.

With the application of the methods and concepts within this proposal, the standardization of the judging process should help restore the confidence in the Arts & Sciences tournaments. Once implemented, I believe there will be a noticeable growth in both quantity and quality of entries and informed judges.

A & S Competition Entry Sheet

Event:

Competition Category:

Entry #:

Judge:

NOTE: Each judge is required to write comments!

These are for the edification of the artisans.

| | Score |
|--|---|
| <p>Documentation (1-10): Does it have the details of how, why and what of the item created. Does it answer questions about the item? Comments:</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> |
| <p>Scope (1-5) What is the depth and breadth of the work? How close did the entrant come to meeting their intended goals? Comments:</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> |
| <p>Relevance (1-5) To what extent does this entry belong in Amtgard? Comments:</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> |
| <p>Skill / Complexity (1-10): To what degree is the difficulty in creating the item? How well did the entrant complete the piece? Comments:</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> |
| <p>Creativity (1-10) Is this an original work? Did they do anything innovative or creative in the production? Comments:</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> |
| <p>Judge's Observations (1-10) This section is designed to cover how all the other sections fit together; what is the overall aesthetic effect of the piece? This is your one spot to let your personal feelings through; Comments:</p> | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> |
| Total Score | <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div> |