

The Geektastic Challenge

Baroness Eithni ingen Talorgain, OL, OP
eithni@gmail.com

This challenge came about when I realized that I could, with disturbing accuracy, predict the winner of a populace bean count A&S display by standing 10 feet away and identifying either the *shiniest* (or failing that, the *largest*) item on the table. While shiny and large projects may have their merits, I'm a nerd. I like to see other people display their nerd. I want other people to feel like their nerd is loved and cherished, even if it is not shiny or typical or exciting in the usual sense.

Being an Action Girl, I announced and sponsored a Geektastic Challenge to celebrate and promote Quality Scholarship and Truly Epic Geeking. I scheduled it for our group's big summer event, to be hosted in the Authentic Encampment. Hosting it at a large event increased the pool of potential entrants while having the display out during the Authentic Encampment's Open House meant that the display got a lot of exposure both from the populace and the public tours that were running through site at the time.

The Competition explicitly encouraged the entry of items that were exceptionally well documented, especially those that were in some way unusual or atypical. (There's nothing wrong with another embroidered T-tunic, but a working Viking lock is *hot*.) There was no theme, simply the understanding that this was not a beginner's A&S and that the entries would be judged to a very high standard.

Basic components of this sort of competition:

- **Announce the competition well in advance**
You are asking for complicated projects and lots of documentation. That takes time. Some people will enter things they have already completed or have in progress, but they also need time to polish things up. A reasonably long lead in, with periodic reminders, will give you the best response to the challenge.
- **Require pre-registration**
I required each entrant to provide their name, a short description of the piece to be judged, and whether or not they wanted face-to-face judging. This allows for an estimate of the amount of space needed and for appropriate judges to be sought.
- **Line up appropriate, respected judges**
It is fun for no one when their piece is evaluated by judges who either know nothing about the field or who are rushed. Find judges who have knowledge about the topics to be entered and who can be tough, fair, and constructive.
- **Schedule a drop off and pick up time**
It is best to have set times for people to drop off/pick up their items. Even if they would like to be present for face-to-face judging and/or the display time, it is better to have a set time for drop offs so you are not constantly being interrupted by the latest

entry arriving. If possible, have documentation submitted in advance so judges can read in advance at their leisure and be prepared with questions.

- **Schedule judging time – a lot of it**
Judging takes time! Even if each judge only evaluates 1-2 items (and ideally not more than three), this sort of competition calls for a lot of documentation, which means that there will be a lot of time where the judges are simply reading. If someone wants face-to-face judging, have them come back after the judges have done their initial assessment, so the entrant is not staring at them while they are trying to read.
- **Schedule a viewing time**
There should be a time for the entered items to be on display to the general populace. This competition is not only about creating geektastic items for our own personal use and enjoyment, but for sharing that with other appreciative gentles and taking the time to appreciate their entries in turn. Hopefully, the exposure to Epic Geeking and the resultant glee will convince others to join us! If the entrants can be with their projects, that is ideal, but not strictly necessary.
- **Have a nifty prize**
This is a Geektastic Challenge, so have a Geektastic Prize. Find something neat and period or a supply for future projects. If the prize is inappropriate for the winner of the challenge (or it is an item they already own), offer to provide a different one at a later date.
- **Announce the entrants and the winners publicly**
This is your best advertisement for future challenges! Ask to announce in court what exciting entries you had and invite the populace to enter, or at least visit the display, the next time it is held. Make similar announcements on regional or Kingdom email lists and post pictures on the Kingdom Gallery, FaceBook, Photobucket, or however people share photos in your area. The more the merrier, so be enthusiastic and welcoming when letting the geek light shine!

A note on the judging scale:

A sample judging sheet is provided below. I dislike the tendency to have all the entries receive 8's, 9's, and 10's because it hampers the judges' ability to make fine distinctions of quality. Therefore, on this scale a 5/10 is considered a "good" grade – equivalent to a B in school. Excellent work would deserve a 7 and only really truly spectacular entries would deserve a 9 or 10. However, since many people are used to the status quo of getting lots of high scores, prepare everyone in advance so they expect the scores to be in alignment with your intended scoring system. Under this and similar scoring methods, I have given out 1's, 2's, and 3's without tears or temper tantrums. It's all about expectations and kind and clear explanations when necessary.

Geektastic Challenge Scoring Sheet

Entrant's Name	
Entry	
Culture & Time Period	
Judge's Name	
Judge's Contact Info	

Category	Score
<p>1. Documentation <i>Historical information about the culture and items the entry is meant to represent. (1-culture & time period of item, 3-one page summary of project, 5-three to seven page well-cited document, 10-thorough and complete tightly cited work)</i></p>	
<p>2. Authenticity <i>Use of appropriate materials and techniques in the creation of the entry or sound justifications for the use of substitutions for period documentable materials. (1-significant substitutions made without justifications, 5-significant substitutions made with adequate justifications, 7-minor substitutions with excellent justifications, 10-authentic materials and methods throughout or impeccably justified)</i></p>	
<p>3. Workmanship <i>The skill with which the creation techniques are applied to the entry and the overall quality of the resultant entry. (1-basic effort, 5-adequate construction for its use as a reenactment good, 7-adequate craftsmanship that would stand up to period conditions of use, 10-neat and excellent craftsmanship throughout)</i></p>	
<p>Judge's Discretion <i>Up to five additional points may be awarded at the judge's discretion for particularly exceptional work and general "wow!" factor of the entry.</i></p>	
<p>Categories 1-3 are judged on a ten point scale where: 1 = Minimal/Low 7 = Excellent 3 = OK/Could improve 9 = Truly outstanding 5 = Good 10 = Masterwork level</p>	<u>TOTAL:</u>

Additional Comments: