

## SPINNERS IN THIS GOOD COMPANY:

An explanation of the skill levels within the Company of the Silver Spindle

For those that wish to pursue them, the Company of the Silver Spindle has three levels to formally recognize the spinning and other textile-related skills developed by members of the guild. These levels are Apprentice for beginning spinners, Spider for journeyman spinners, and Norn for master spinners. As I have had many spinners inquire about whether or not they should try and prepare submissions for the different skill levels given their current comfort level of spinning, I thought I would go into a little more detail about what it means to hold the skill rankings in the Guild.

First of all, let me say that the purpose behind spinning in this Guild should be to gain knowledge about the textile arts of the past, produce yarns that you can use in projects, and most importantly, to have a good time and enjoy yourself! You will not be treated any better or any less based on what skill level you hold, and holding one of these levels does not make you a better spinner than the next person. Holding the levels of Apprentice, Spider or Norn means that you are a skilled enough spinner to accomplish the requirements for these levels and that you are willing to share what you've learned with others as outlined in the various ranks within this Guild system. It does not mean that you are a journeyman or master spinner in mundane guilds, or even in other SCA-related guilds, as each guild may have their own set of requirements.

I have designed the requirements for the skill levels to help you progressively expand your abilities and learn new fibers and new techniques in hopes that you will become proficient in a variety of skills as they relate to spinning. (And I hope that, at least where traditional techniques are concerned, you could spin as well if not better than any mundane guild requirements. As far as more modern skills like novelty yarns, modern dyes and such, if you want to learn those you are more than welcome and encouraged to do so, but as these were not practiced during the SCA timeframe, they are not part of the requirements for our Guild.

That being said, let's talk about the levels within our Guild:

An Apprentice is someone who is usually relatively new to spinning. They have had some degree of instruction in spinning techniques, and are able to produce a stable thread using a dropspindle, spinning wheel, or other spinning implement. These spinners are just learning the art, so their threads may be uneven and unbalanced, but they should have enough control over their fingers and spinning tool to produce threads that are somewhat consistent in relative thickness or thinness, and they should know how to take two single threads and ply them together to make a thicker, more balanced yarn.

In order to be recognized as an Apprentice, candidates should fill out the application form and submit three one-ounce skeins of yarn to the Guild Holda: two skeins of yarn (singles are fine) where one skein is visibly thicker than the other and one skein is visibly thinner than the thicker one, and one skein of a two-ply yarn. ("Visible difference" means that there is at least a 6 WPI (wraps per inch) difference between the skeins.)

If your yarns don't fall to pieces and meet the requirements as outlined above, you cannot be turned down for Apprentice level. Apprentices are awarded a copper bracelet as a sign of their rank, and are strongly encouraged to seek assistance from other guild members in learning the art and enter their yarns in arts & sciences competitions.

A Spider is someone who has been spinning on a variety of spinning tools with several different types of fiber. Spiders should be comfortable enough in using those tools and fibers to be able to easily produce yarns in a variety of consistent thicknesses and plies in both worsted and woolen spinning methods. Spiders are familiar with different aspects of fiber preparation and are able to take and process raw wool into spun yarn, and they should be familiar with some aspects of natural dyeing to impart color to their yarns. In addition, spiders should be able to take their yarns and use a fiber technique to create a finished project with their handspun yarns.

In order to be recognized as a Spider, candidates must fill out the application for and submit ten 1-2 ounce skeins to the Guild Holda: One skein spun on a dropspindle and one skein spun on a spinning wheel that show your skill in using both spinning tools; two uniform skeins of wool spun in a worsted method with visibly different yet consistent thicknesses; two uniform skeins of wool spun in a woolen method with visibly different yet consistent thicknesses; two uniform skeins of any type of fiber other than wool spun in any method with visibly different yet consistent thicknesses; and one three-ply skein of any fiber spun consistently in any method. One additional skein should be submitted in the form of a finished project at least 4"x6". In addition, the applicant must process any one of the woolen skeins from raw wool into yarn, and any one of the skeins must be dyed with a natural dye by the applicant.

These skeins will be judged by a panel of three judges of at least Spider rank, and must demonstrate an adequate knowledge and skill in order to score a total of at least 70% of the possible points in order to be admitted to the rank of Spider.

Spiders need to be able to research various aspects of spinning and other textile techniques in order to gain more information about the art and increase their skills. They should be skilled in using the different spinning implements to produce yarns of consistent thicknesses, and be able to teach others to spin and mentor them in developing their spinning skills. Spiders should also be knowledgeable enough to make entries for arts and sciences competitions out of their handspun yarns and be able to assist in judging handspun entries.

A Norn is a master spinner. They have been spinning long enough to perfect the skill of spinning consistent yarns in a variety of thicknesses and plies on a variety of fibers on a variety spinning tools. They can use the yarns that they create to produce finished products using several of the fiber arts techniques (weaving, knitting, etc.) and should be skilled enough in at least one of those techniques to produce pieces of excellent quality.

As in the Guild systems present in the Middle Ages, this is not an easy level to achieve. It usually takes years of practice to develop the necessary skills to be a master spinner. Norns must be able to do research on period spinning tools and techniques, be able to teach the knowledge they have gained with others, be able to judge quality and workmanship of items made of handspun yarns, and assist others in their pursuit of the art

of spinning. As you must prove your mastery in the different aspects of spinning, the requirements are quite extensive – but then again, so is the knowledge base a master spinner should have, so that they can better share the knowledge of their art with others.

In order to achieve Norn status, the applicant must be a member of the Guild for at least one year. They will have taught classes on spinning and other textile arts within the Society, mentored at least one member of the Guild in developing their spinning skills, and served the Guild by assisting in the judging of applicants for Apprentice and Spider levels. The applicant will fill out the application for and submit the following 18 skeins and three completed projects:

- 1) Cotton, two different uniform thickness, any ply (two skeins)
- 2) Cotton, 3-ply yarn
- 3) Flax, wet spun, uniform thickness, any ply
- 4) Flax, dry spun, uniform thickness, any ply
- 5) Flax, 3-ply yarn
- 6) Silk, spun from caps or noil, any thickness or ply (may be textured)
- 7) Silk, spun from top, any thickness or ply
- 8) Silk, 3-ply yarn
- 9) One “exotic” fiber not mentioned above, any ply or thickness (including, but not limited to, llama, alpaca, dog, camel, cashmere, ramie, rabbit, etc.)
- 10) Any two fibers blended together for textured yarn on handcards, combs or a carder (any ply or thickness)
- 11-18) Submit examples of dyeing with at least three natural dyes using at least two mordants or techniques per dye. (minimum 7 skeins, including one of the original undyed fiber)

Applicants must also submit two small projects at least 4” x 6” size using any two of the fiber art techniques as outlined (but not limited to) the techniques outlined in the body of the charter. They must also submit one major project in any one of the fiber art techniques (different than the ones used for the smaller projects) that demonstrates the applicant’s excellence in one of the fiber arts forms. (Can be of the same art form as the entry for Spider rank, but not the same piece.)

These skeins and projects will be judged by a panel of three judges of Norn (or other master-level spinner rank until there are three or more Norns in each chapter), and must demonstrate superior knowledge and skill in the various spinning and fiber arts techniques in order to score a total of at least 70% of the possible points in order to be admitted to the rank of Norn.

Norns can assist the Guild Holda in teaching and coordinating spinning activities for the Guild and mentoring any members of the Guild. They are able to do research on all aspects of spinning and textile arts, and to assist others who are learning to do research of their own. They should be able to both enter and judge excellence of handspun entries in arts and science competitions. It is also encouraged that Norns be experienced in the more modern conventions of spinning, including the use of modern chemical dyes, blending fiber for color and texture, and spinning/plying techniques to produce textured, "modern" yarns.

I hope this clarifies in greater detail what is expected of Apprentices, Spiders and Norns within our Company. If you have any questions or need any further clarification,

never hesitate to contact the current Holda, and they will be more than happy to help you any way they can.