

# A History of the Mirror of Nations, an Imperial Exploration of Prowess and Excellence

*Who was Pythia? What was her arete? Why did she write this? No other writings are attributed to her, maybe this was an exercise for a older child.*

Written by Pythia of Anka in the year of the Empire 64.

The contest was first formed in the spires of Urizen, each spire contributing both an arete and a side with which to compete for excellence. It is now used as a friendly, though hotly contested, competition between the nations of the Empire.

The prize is the great artefact of the Mirror of Nations, it is believed some way to be created at a similar time to the Sentinel Gates, though the exact creation remains a mystery. Its powers are well known, and thus will not be discussed here, please see the many other fine scholarly treaties that have been published on the topic.

*Some kind of interruption is happening downstairs, it is annoying when things disturb study. This author is very bad at conveying information*

Each spire, or in this case, each nation hosts its own competition. However a spire could not compete in their own competition as it would be obvious that they had already achieved what excellence is possible within the bounds of this world. Each competition is of course weighted equally, no one skill being specifically above another. How the positions are

*Where is the mirror now? How can we find it? When was it lost. No current text reference it. Perhaps Pythia is not truthful? I have last heard that the Mirror was last won by Dawn, who took it to the Barrens. What use would have it been?*

decided is up to each individual spire, or nation. But everyone must be ranked according to their excellence. Maximal points are given to the winner, equal to the number of teams, and one less point for each position after that.

**I** WILL NOW describe each nation's competition that is traditionally used:

## Dawn

**T**he Dawn have a strange contest. A pair of heroes from each nation must fight a standard Dawnish duel against another pair, the winner of the fight is determined as normal, but the result is unimportant. A musician or poet from each side narrates the battle in turn. Dawnish judges then determine, on the basis of the bard's presentation alone which side in the fight was most glorious. These are declared the winner of the tournament. The fight, which acts as inspiration for the performance is filled with as much drama as the sides can muster as this would make for a more glorious story. This does lead to inefficient combat that would not be suitable for either a battlefield or a duel of pure skill.

## Highguard

**T**he Highborn sport uses their steeds, a joint effort between wise rider and courageous mount. Usually the Chapters provide horses from their own stables, with the first, and some might say most difficult part of the competition being selecting a companion to ride and of course being accepted in return. Few outside of

*How I would have loved to see the horses in this competition. Maybe the extinction caused an end to the Mirror?*

*Pythia is displaying her obnoxious bias here. It is strange how different but the same people in early Empire are.*

Highlanders are skilled in horsemanship, making this competition very challenging. Many teams spend some time on 'pilgrimage' to Bastion, increasing their riding skills in the process. The contest itself is a Hexathlon, effectively dividing the single event into six smaller events. Members of the team from each nation are expected to perform one event each as a minimum, excluding any team events. These events do change year on year, but are usually relatively similar. I will list some here as an example. The audience should not be surprised if the list differs from those described here.

*The  
disturbance  
seems to be  
getting  
worse, I can  
smell smoke.  
The vshabti I  
sent has not  
returned.*

**M**ounted Archery - There are six small targets, and each rider is supplied with nine arrows. Riders must complete the course in turns, with time penalties awarded for every target missed. Time bonuses are given for any arrows remaining at the end, though these are less than the penalties. The targets are often formed into the shape of animals such as birds, rabbits, dodos or small deer.

**T**ent Pegging - The riders move around the course picking up tent pegs with the tip of their lance while on horseback. Penalties to time are awarded if the peg is dropped from the lance tip. Nations compete in turns to achieve the best time.

**B**eeple Chase - A horse race where the rider must work with the steed to jump a series of fences, ditches, moats and other obstacles. This is a direct race with each rider competing against all others simultaneously.

**D**ressage - This is akin to a display of refinement and poise, but with the horse as the focus of attention. It is necessary to work with the steed to perform a number of basic maneuvers such as hoof lifts and turns on the spot, culminating in complex dance-like movements. The horses and riders are also judged on their appearance, the Highborn prefer to decorate theirs with bells and chimes to sound in response to the horse and rider moving. Other nations have their own decorations but those that cause rhythmic sounds always score well among the Highborn judges.

*Nicouar's guards are here, they are burning the library. I must save what resource I can. If I don't make it out and someone reads this. Thank you.*

**J**ousting - Riders pair off and charge at each other along either side of a small fence with blunted lance, while wearing heavy armour. Points are scored for dismounting your opponent, or making them drop their lance or shield, but are deducted for harming the opposing horse in any way.

*If you can, please visit the peak of Screed, at the place of the glass flowers. To finally shine a light on my mother's*

**H**orseball - It is said that this game was originally played with a basket containing a live dodo. Currently it is played with a wicker ball with six handles. Inside the ball is a weight which causes the ball to tumble and throw in strange ways. Riders in teams of five must compete to place the ball in the net at the opposing end. Tradition also states that it was played between two Chapters with the first to place it in the oppositions hold being the winner. Games could last several days. Currently a long pitch is used, with a basket at each end know as the hold. The first team to score three goals is declared the winner.

*resting place. I have still not managed.*

*Goodbye.*

# The Brass Coast

The Freeborn competition does not seem to fit with others, but they are notoriously independently minded, and it does add diversity to the Mirror of Nations. The competitors are provided with a number of ingredients and equipment and must create a Syrah, a drink of special import. The apparatus, spices, liquids, infusions and liquors provided are not known to the teams before the competition. All competitors have the same set of supplies. The Freeborn judges of the competition then state how much they would pay for a measure of the drink. The winner is the one who has the highest mean value of all judges' results.

# The League

From the twin cities comes the bridge fight. The team must get to the other end of the bridge, seize the banner of their opponents and transport it back to their own end. A good strong cup of tea usually sees the competitors right again, though there are some surgeons on hand for the more serious injuries. The number of deaths reported in the field have been deemed acceptable, especially when there is no actual bridge to fall from. Bladed weapons larger than a knife, magic that is intentionally used to maim or kill, strong poisons and bows are not allowed. Though small crossbows apparently are allowed. In the cities without many bridges it is believed that narrow alley ways or sewer tunnels are used.

# The Marches

The Marches, as is their way, is simple and to the point, though often somewhat unclean. It is believed by the author that their original suggestion for the mirror of nations was rejected by common consent, as it mainly involved heavily greased farm animals, or so the rumours say. The current event is a sport called Tug-of-War, each team takes hold of a thick rope, and then tugs, apparently over the most muddy swamp of ground that can be found. The team that pulls the other off their feet or causes the other to drop the rope or moves a marker tied to the centre of the rope a certain distance is declared the winner. The teams compete in a tournament structure until a single winner remains.

# Navarr

As befits the wandering and somewhat wild nature of the Navarr, a large area is needed and sometimes the contest can take several days. There are stories among the Guides, the sages of the Navarr, that such games were played for years. It is not advised that the games as part of the Mirror of Nations take such time, and that a limit is placed upon it. Each team is given a number of cloth strips equal to the number of members in the colours of their nation, each member then tucks the cloth strip loosely into the back of their belt. The teams then compete to steal the strips from other teams, placing additional ones with their first. If an individual does not have a strip they can

STILL STEAL FROM OTHERS. At the end, the nation with the most strips usually wins, with one point awarded per strip. However the Navarr judges often award bonus points for interesting feats, particularly in tie breaks, such as having at least one strip from every other team. Or managing to lose all their own strips but still not having the least. Or possessing all the strips of one other nation. It is important to note that members of the same nation cannot steal from one another, and should be taken as given that any breach of imperial law can be grounds for disqualification.

## Urizen

The Urizen spires have perhaps the most complex and interesting event, and also the most visually spectacular. It takes performing magical rituals to a complex and beautiful level. The ritualists from the nation must select a ritual to perform. The judges will award some score for the magnitude and difficulty of completion or rarity of the ritual. However the most important is to use as much symbolism, grace, theater dance and other art forms to create an aesthetic and appropriate spectacle for completing the ritual. The most graceful and magnificent displays will be awarded the most points by the Urizen judges. Some of the greatest acts of both art and magic have been performed by Urizen magicians when competing in this honoured tradition.

## Varūshka

The Varushkan contest usually requires little physical ability, it is a test of mental skill. The old wise Varushkan judges ask questions or riddles of team members individually, nations cannot hear the response of others. The answers given are graded and the Wise ones choose who has answered correctly, or best, as the two are not the same. Some questions are facts, others puzzles of logic or words or some ethical or religious conundrum. The exact methods of scoring remain obscure to me as truth is not necessarily the optimal answer, but priests of Wisdom seem to accept their methods.

## Wintermark

The Wintermark of course have three sub contests that must be completed simultaneously. Each stage is completed by a separate team member, and the team members cannot complete each others tasks. Each team competes simultaneously.

The first stage involves collecting a resource of some kind, which will contain small pieces of bark parchment bearing runes. For example the gutting of fish, with the parchment sealed in wax bags in the stomach of very few, or the finding of a certain type of log in a wood. Once one is found, and only one may be carried at a time, it is taken to a specific drop off point where it is passed to the next member of the side.

The second is a run over difficult or dangerous terrain, possibly made more difficult through the introduction of obstacles in the path. For example,



SHORT WALLS TO CLIMB, NARROW PLANK BRIDGES OVER GORGES, CAPTIVE ORCS TO FIGHT. ASSUMING THE PIECE IS SUCCESSFULLY CARRIED IT IS PASSED OVER TO THE THIRD MEMBER OF THE TEAM. THE SECOND MEMBER MUST THEN MAKE THEIR WAY BACK TO THE FIRST TO COLLECT MORE OF THE PARCHMENT.

**T**he third and last stage is a puzzle that must be assembled with the scraps of rune paper. The third member will have a starting piece that has instructions or a start to the puzzle. Once the correct answer to the puzzle is found that team is the winner with fewer points being awarded for subsequent team's completions.