Hot Spots:™
Renaissance Florence™

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An e23 Sourcebook for **GURPS**®

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INTRODUCTION

Late in the Middle Ages, Europe began to recover from a series of catastrophes ranging from the collapse of the Roman Empire to the Black Death. This political and economic revival, accompanied by a renewed interest in Classical literature, became the Renaissance. Scholars in different fields use different dates and definitions for the Renaissance, but undeniably the height of the period was what the Italians call the *quattrocento*, the 1400s. Just as undeniably, the center of the Renaissance was Italy, and one of the most important players in that revival was the City of the Flower, Florence, or, to the Italians, Firenze.

This book deals with the city of Florence during the height of the Italian Renaissance and its immediate aftermath, from about 1400 to the 1550s. During this period, Florence produced a political dynasty that ruled for nearly a century without holding formal office, a man whose name is synonymous with practical politics, and many of the most important figures in the history of Western art. All of this happened against a backdrop of warfare, intrigues, international trade, civil unrest, and the invention of modern diplomacy. Finding adventure in Florence isn't a problem, but getting away from it might be.

## FLORENCE, EUROPE, AND THE RENAISSANCE

Much that happened in Florence won't make a lot of sense without knowing what's going on with the rest of Italy, the rest of Europe, and the Renaissance as a whole. Although Italy had been touched by feudalism, a system built around scattered rural military strongmen, it never completely took root there. Italy retained urban centers better than the rest of Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. Many of those cities, almost all of which were independent city-states, established republican or broadly oligarchic forms of government instead of setting up military autocracies like the north (with some exceptions – southern Italy, long dominated by Normans, acquired a more feudal character).

While northwestern Europe was getting into the High Middle Ages, full of Crusades, courtly love, and Gothic cathedrals, Italy was reviving trade across the Mediterranean, creating links with the Byzantine empire and the Muslim world. Expanding trade led to an increasingly educated urban middle class. Merchants, after all, needed mathematical skills to keep track of ever larger and more complex transactions. They also benefited from an education in rhetoric and law, the better to persuade potential customers and write contracts. It further helped them participate in communal government.

For their better education, and to indulge in a new taste for the arts and philosophy, the Italians pursued once-lost Classical texts. They sought works in the Iberian peninsula, which was undergoing the *Reconquista* (an expansion of Christian kingdoms at the expense of the crumbling Muslim emirates, which had separately preserved the works of Classical authors). They also found writings in Byzantine territories, which was collapsing under the advance of the Turks. The Classical texts provided the rising merchants with ideas created by a society more like their own than the rest of medieval society, more urban than rural and, particularly when it came to Greek philosophy, more republican than authoritarian. It also presented them with a sophisticated set of philosophies entirely free of Christian concerns. This created a new school of thought, humanism. Renaissance humanism in no way rejected religion, but it *did* accept nonreligious topics as worthy of consideration and did not necessarily leap to theology for all of its arguments.
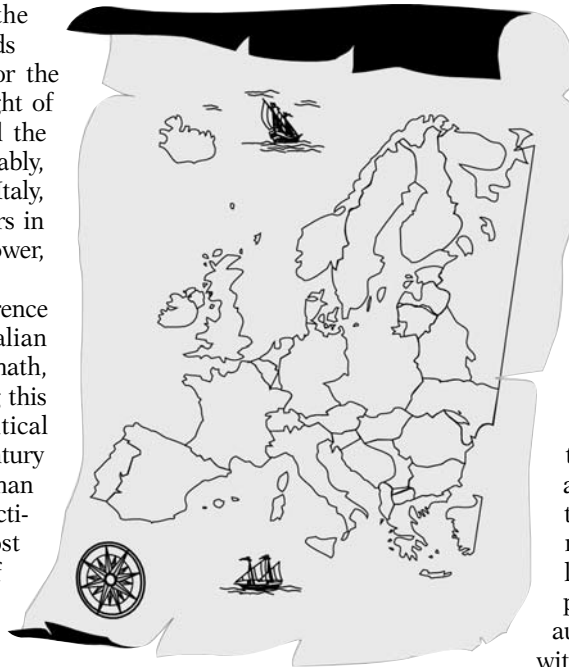
Glossary

This book uses a few Italian terms, mostly place names, but there are a few technical terms well worth knowing.

condottiero: Literally, a contractor, but in general use, a mercenary, particularly a mercenary officer.
Firenze: Florence.
Milano: Milan.
Napoli: Naples.
palazzo: Literally, palace, but in use, more like a large urban house (as opposed to a villa in the countryside).
piazza: Plaza or public square.
Quattrocento: Literally, 400, meaning the 15th century, or the 1400s; preceded by the Trecento (1300s) and followed by the Cinquecento (1500s).
Roma: Rome.
Sicilia: Sicily.
Toscana: Tuscany.
Venezia: Venice.

And thus it is seen in all human affairs . . . that you cannot avoid one inconvenience without incurring another.

– Machiavelli, **Discourses on Livy,** *VI*

This, then, was the beginning of the Renaissance: wealthy, educated city dwellers participating in a growing revival of Classical learning, and supporting new philosophy and art dealing more directly with their own world. It saw its earliest flowering in the 14th century (Florence was a leader here as well, with the painter Giotto and writers such as Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch). Its finest hour, however, came a bit later, in the mid-15th century. Two events in the early 1450s made this possible. First, in 1453, Constantinople fell to the Turks, finally bringing the Byzantine empire to an end. A last wave of Greek refugees filtered into Italy, the nearest unthreatened Christian land. They brought copies of Classical texts long lost to the West. Second, the Treaty of Lodi led to improved diplomatic relations between Italy's major players. The treaty was initially just a nonaggression pact between two cities signed in 1454. Subsidiary agreements allowed others to join, and join they did. Within the next few years, the major Italian powers and many of the smaller ones had become part of the "Most Holy League," which the treaty had established. Italian wars did not stop completely, but for the next 50 years, they were much smaller and shorter. The need for constant communication between governments to head off or limit fighting led to the world's first permanent, resident ambassadors.

Prior to this period, ambassadors visited foreign governments to perform specific missions (the negotiation of a peace treaty, petitioning for trade privileges, etc.) and then returned home. The establishment of permanent embassies kept governments much better informed about their neighbors' intentions and sped negotiations. For five decades, the relative peace allowed Italy to get on with other matters.

Then there was the rest of Europe. Whatever the achievements of the Italian Renaissance might have been, one thing the Italians would never have even dreamed of doing was creating a large nation-state. Despite some consolidation in their own territories, the Italian cities were mostly concerned with maintaining a balance of power. Meanwhile, nations like France and Spain were building themselves into large, centrally governed kingdoms. Compared to those two nations and the Holy Roman Empire (essentially Germany), even the most powerful Italian city-states were minor players. Their minor status became sorely felt later in the Renaissance as the larger countries worked out their own concerns on Italian soil, using lessons in diplomacy they had learned from the Italians.

The balance of major powers meant that France might be allied with the Papacy against Spain and Germany one year, and Spain and the Papacy against France and Germany the next, all the while fighting wars in their Italian possessions and client states. The Italian powers, used to cutting deals to keep one another in check, were unable to unite against them. The best artists, merchants, and scholars could do little to stop the massive armies descending on them from outside, taking the ideas of the Renaissance with them but leaving considerable destruction where those ideas had first sprung up.

About the Author

Matt Riggsby is trained in anthropology and archaeology and, like the rest of his generation, has a job in computers. He works for an international medical technology company and lives with his lovely and talented wife, above-average child, and a pack of dogs. He is unique among game writers in that he owns no cats.

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the **GURPS Basic Set,** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

Pikes and How to Use Them

The long polearms of the Renaissance require a new maneuver (planting a spear), a new weapon (the pike), and a new perk (Two-Man Pike Training).

Any spear or impaling polearm with a reach of 2 or more can be planted against a charge. The butt of the weapon is pressed against the ground to take the impact of someone running into it. Planting a weapon requires a Ready action, and the wielder must Wait until he decides to unbrace it. While planted, the weapon cannot parry and can only be used to attack someone entering the hex occupied by the tip of the weapon from one of its front hexes. When a planted spear hits, it does the *better* of damage for a normally braced weapon *or* damage similar to a couched lance (p. B397): Compute collision damage based on the moving target's HP and velocity (see p. B430), add the weapon's damage bonus, and apply it to the target as impaling damage.

A pike is an exceptionally long spear, reinforced near the point end to withstand impact. It is ill-suited for individual combat, but an array of closely set pikes is a terrifying sight to even the heaviest cavalry.

New Perk: Two-Man Pike Training

With this perk, you are trained to work with another warrior to move and fight while wielding a large spear or polearm (minimum reach 3). Once you and your companion have both taken a Ready maneuver to grab hold of the weapon, you move and choose maneuvers as a single fighter with these stats:

- The worse Basic Speed, Move, and Spear skill of the pair.
- Effective ST equal to the strongest man's ST plus 1/5 the other man's ST, rounded down, for the purpose of damage, resisting knockback, etc.
- Effective HP equal to the larger HP score of the pair plus 1/5 the other man's HP, rounded down, for the purpose of making or resisting slams.

The front man can let go with one hand as a free action, if necessary. He can even draw a one-handed weapon and fight at his usual skill with that weapon, although the team still moves as a single fighter with the lower Basic Speed and Move, and the pike cannot be used to attack during this time. To resume pike use, the front man must take another Ready maneuver. If anyone is separated, he must take a new Ready maneuver to get back on the pike. Until then, he's fighting individually while his partner drags the giant spear.

If either fighter lacks this perk, the team cannot combine ST or HP at all, still uses the worst Basic Speed and Move, and fights at (lowest Spear skill)-2.

Pike

TL	Weapon	Damage	Reach	Parry	Cost	Weight	ST
SPEAR (DX-5, Polearm-4, or Staff-2)							
2	Pike	thr+3 imp	5, 6*	0U	$80	15	13†

As wealthier states could afford more labor, battlefield engineering also became more important. Engineers would direct construction of ditch-and-earthen-wall battlefield fortifications, lay out siege works, and plan canals. Permanent defensive positions might have better cannon, but with enough time and effort, attacking engineers could and did flood them with diverted streams.

Many great architects spent at least some time dealing with military engineering. Brunelleschi was responsible for a number of earthworks and battlefield canals, while Michelangelo was once in charge of Firenze's fortifications (and, apparently, his work was effective, standing off the Spanish attack of 1530 for quite some time).

ORGANIZATION

Troops were frequently organized into a small unit called a "lance." The term was used to describe different small units across Europe, but during the early Italian Renaissance, it consisted of three men. Two members of the lance fought, while the third man (or, often, adolescent boy) stood to the rear holding spare horses, weapons, and other accessories. Fighting men who broke a weapon or had a horse killed from under them could quickly rearm and return to the battle. As the Renaissance wore on, the size of a lance grew, but the additional people usually just held on to more horses or looked after more of their master's gear. (A French-style lance, occasionally seen late in the period, included a combined force of archers, infantry, and cavalry.) A late-Renaissance army could have twice as many people as an earlier one, but no more fighting strength.

By the end of the 15th century, some standardization had arisen in the organization of army units and ranks. There were three to five men per lance. Twenty to 25 lances formed a squadron commanded by a *caposquadra* or *squadriere*, though squadrons might be subdivided into smaller units of five or six lances. *Colonello* commanded formations of eight to 10 squadrons, while a marshal or captain general commanded larger armies.

Aside from the "spear-carriers" in a lance, armies were essentially composed entirely of fighting men; even the boys holding the horses had access to arms and would use them, albeit ineffectively, if attacked. Logistical support was provided by mostly unofficial camp followers: cooks, cleaners, personal servants, prostitutes, smiths, and other people looking to turn a quick profit by selling goods and services to soldiers. Being a camp follower was lucrative, but it was also dangerous. If enemy troops broke through friendly lines, they'd often rush to loot the nearest encampment and slaughter anyone who looked like they might possibly get in the way.

Pope Alexander VI (1431-1503)

Born to a noble Spanish family, Roderic de Borja came to Roma not long after the elevation of his uncle to the papacy as Calixtus III. Roderic himself became pope in 1492 after a contentious election that involved carefully arranged political deals and bribery on all sides. (Funding was supplied by a number of governments, each with their own favorite candidate.) Roderic, now Alexander, quickly moved on to putting relatives into positions of wealth and authority. (This included his illegitimate children, who were among the first to be acknowledged by a sitting pope.) To support them, he started expanding the Papal States into southern and east-central Italy. He was only moderately successful in the face of alliances of Italian powers against him and the 1494 French invasion. However, the brutal means he used and his openly corrupt administration became a scandal across the peninsula. When he died after a brief but painful illness, he was only grudgingly accepted for burial at St. Peter's basilica, and his body was removed to Spain not long thereafter.

Though his reputation was somewhat exaggerated, Alexander was known as the most corrupt of popes, entirely ignoring spiritual matters in favor of empire-building and other worldly pursuits. His most lasting achievement, though, was his 1493 division of the New World between Portugal (which got Brazil) and Spain (which got everything else).

Charles VIII, King of France (1470-1498)

Charles became king at the age of 12. During the regency of his older sister Anne, a revolt by a number of noblemen was firmly put down, leaving Charles with a free hand and a full treasury when he came of age.

Short, unattractive, and in chronically poor health, Charles didn't present a regal image. He also had a reputation for not being very bright, though his enemies probably underestimated him. Certainly, he was canny enough not to try to conquer all of Italy as he went, tying down his forces with occupation and garrison duties.

Contacts and Patrons

Though they might be used as Allies, these historical figures are probably better used as Contacts or Patrons. Values as Patrons are indicated here, along with hints at skill levels.

As a Contact, *Cosimo* has the highest Administration, Diplomacy, Finance, and Politics skills in the campaign, as well as a high level of Current Affairs. For bribes, he prefers to deal in favors rather than money; he's one of the richest men in Europe, so he hardly needs more money. As a Patron, he has a base cost of 25 points.

Lorenzo has exceptionally high Connoisseur, Current Affairs, Diplomacy, and Politics skills; good Administration, Poetry, and Philosophy; but only moderate Finance skill despite being immensely rich. Being fond of sports and hunting, he also has better than average physical traits and combat skills. He has a base cost of 25 points as a Patron.

As a Contact, *Savonarola* has a high Public Speaking skill, though he is likely to be offended by bribery attempts. During the mid-1490s, Savonarola is head of the local Dominican order, during which time he is a Patron worth 10 points. However, by 1498, his clients may find themselves acquiring enemies.

Catarina Sforza has good Strategy and Tactics skill, and if some conjectures about her are true, tolerable fighting skills as well. Until her exile to Firenze, she has a base cost of 10 points as a Patron.

If used as a Contact, *Machiavelli* has a high Administration skill and very good Current Affairs. If it becomes applicable, he also has high Writing and Philosophy skills. During his years in government, he might qualify as a 10-point Patron.

When she becomes queen of France, *Catherine de Medici* is worth 30 points as a Patron, though she's far from Firenze when that happens.

Giovanni dalle Bande Nere has a high ST and excellent fighting and military leadership skills. However, he's only worth 10 points as a Patron.

Cosimo I has Diplomacy and Politics skills approaching those of his ancestors, as well as above-average physical traits and fighting skills. He is worth 20 points as a Patron.

Francesco Sforza has high Strategy and Politics skills, as well as excellent physical traits and fighting skills. He is worth 20 points as a Patron.

Alexander VI is worth 30 points as a Patron.

Charles VIII is worth 25 points as a Patron.

While he has his father's support, *Cesare* is worth 15 points as a Patron, but he probably has Bloodlust and possibly Bad Temper or something like Paranoia as well. Relying on him too much invites trouble. (To be fair, Cesare isn't out of touch with reality; it's Renaissance Italy, so people probably *are* plotting against him.)

Most of the artists presented here have negligible value as Patrons or Allies (while directing construction on the Duomo, *Brunelleschi* might make an appearance as a very inexpensive Patron). However, young artists may have them as employers. If used as Contacts, most have, at best, one or two moderate social skills, but all have at least one Artist specialty at 20+.

Many of the artists (most notably *Leonardo*) not only never married, they had close relationships with male pupils, leading to speculation that they may have been homosexual. If true, they may qualify for a Secret, though that would be, at worst, a -5-point disadvantage in cosmopolitan Firenze; despite a special court to investigate sodomy and tens of thousands of trials, hardly anyone was actually punished.

FANTASY

Another obvious use for Firenze is in a fantasy campaign. Firenze hardly has to be retooled at all to fit into a conventional fantasy setting. Indeed, with deposit banks, rudimentary clockwork, and high-quality plate armor, many fantasy worlds bear as much resemblance to TL4 Italy as they do to TL3 feudal Europe.

Even in a campaign free of mythical monsters, Firenze can be an important center for mystics. Medicine was hardly distinguishable from magic, and mystical texts of every kind could easily make their way there. A number of prominent figures studied alchemy, including Grand Duke Cosimo I himself. Firenze also would be one of the most likely places in Europe to find Jewish Cabalists.

To turn Firenze into a fantasy city, all that needs be done is to make it all true. Magicians might have their own guild (St. Cyprian of Antioch is an appropriate patron). The rich and powerful would sponsor magical scholarship, and they might dabble in magic themselves. They would work to recover and import magical artifacts and materials. A magical Firenze would be a center of mystical as well as mundane commerce and learning.

CLOCKPUNK

Magic isn't the only way to make a fantastic Firenze. The city had more than its fair share of technically gifted artisans, so it may also be the center off a clockwork-powered industrial revolution.

In this alternate history, Brunelleschi would have started the clockwork revolution, inventing pendulum-powered cranes to lift materials to the top of the Duomo and spring-driven temporary supports that could walk themselves along the walls. Cosimo then saw the advantage of clockwork-powered industry, and he built waterwheels along the Arno to wind masses of automata. The technology would have spread quickly through Europe, particularly as the restless Leonardo da Vinci traveled from one high-paying court after another, but Firenze kept enough of its native sons like Michelangelo to maintain a technological edge.

This creates a TL(4+1) Firenze, where the streets are full of ticking bronze horses pulling trams, and the tower of the Palazzo delle Signoria is reached by mechanical elevator. Firenze grows even wealthier on the sales of clockwork-powered toys, household conveniences, and weapons, and the Medici bank is starting to use fast, accurate mechanical adding machines. On clockpunk Renaissance battlefields, crossbowmen and musketeers are replaced by troops armed with repeating spring-powered dart guns, and multi-barreled cannon are mounted in slow-crawling armored vehicles shaped like turtles and elephants. Meanwhile, rumor has it that Venezia is developing a gryphon-shaped ornithopter . . .

HORROR

The Renaissance wasn't all glorious art and new learning. The fears and superstitions of the past remained in full force. The most obvious threats were ghosts, witchcraft, and demonic possession. (However, Italy appears to have been less concerned with witchcraft than northern Europe and Firenze less concerned than average for Italy.) The Bargello and the Stinche should be particularly full of angry spirits, and many prominent people of the age, notably the Medici and the Borgia family, may have left any number of unhappy ghosts in their wake. PCs could pursue a career as ghostbusters just by tracing the history of human brutality. If they do, it's worth knowing that it was illegal for laymen to attempt exorcism. Unofficial supernatural investigators face the double problem of unearthing a past that others would prefer to keep hidden and offending the Church as they go.

Since Firenze's foundation was recent relative to many other Renaissance cities and its underground not at all extensive, it's unlikely that it sits atop any long-buried horrors. Nevertheless, the Florentines can import them or invent them on their own. The collectors of Classical (and older) antiquities could easily bring in long-lost books of dreadful knowledge, cursed Greek idols, Egyptian sarcophagi containing long-slumbering vampires, or baleful pre-human artifacts. Meanwhile, new knowledge can easily become perilous: musicians may discover melodies that drive men mad, artists may use new techniques that make their paintings take on a horrible life of their own, and an alchemist may invent a universal solvent with the power to destroy the world.

SCIENCE FICTION

If it can be stripped of its technological aspects while preserving that social milieu, much about Renaissance Firenze can be transported to some *very* different settings.

For cyperpunk, by replacing the Black Death, humanism, and velvet with a biotech catastrophe, cybernetics, and spandex, Firenze moves from the Renaissance to a dystopian future. Just as in the historical past, the Medici can be a powerful dynasty of bankers who use their wealth and influence to unofficially assume control of the government. They have subverted the respected civic cyberdemocracy that randomly selects eligible citizens for positions of authority to chose only their own candidates. Some of the people of Firenze are avid supporters of the Medici family and their unflagging philanthropy. After all, the family constructed one of the most powerful local area networks in existence, and they support a new generation of artists working in direct brain stimulation, to say nothing of the combat *calcio* league. Others distrust the Medici and the power that their control of the network and ominous new brain-stim technologies give them.

As a post-apocalyptic example, the world may have been shattered by a plague. In the aftermath, a powerful commercial interest has quietly taken over the government while an influx of new knowledge combined with bold new forms of art transform society to the great dismay of cultural conservatives.

In a space campaign, Italy can be a belt of inhabited asteroids, with each city as its own bubble habitat; Spain, France, and the Holy Roman empire are highly populated terraformed planets, while the Muslim world is a nearby system reached by slow FTL. Spheres of influence are determined not just by shifting alliances, but by shifting orbits as well.

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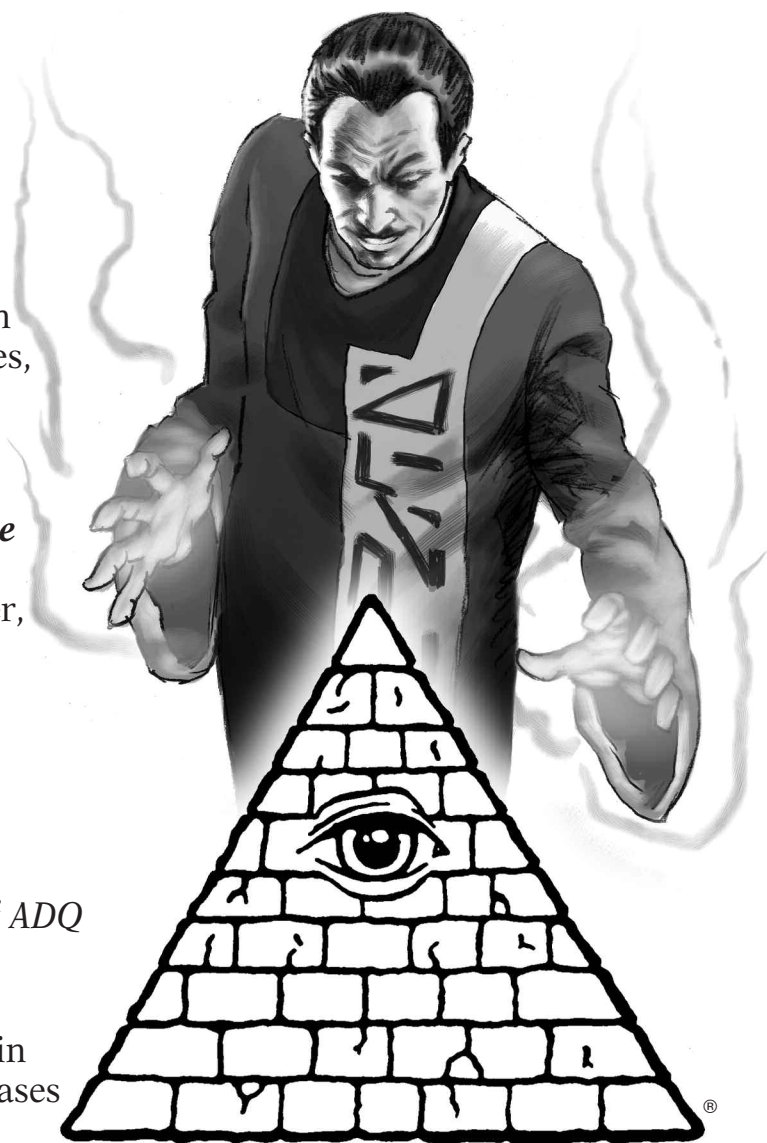
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