

Venetian Crucible



Andy Burtis

It is 1630 and Venice is being torn apart by factions within and enemies without. Our two now-grown Alberti friends from 'Venetian Born' fight through plague and war in this, their "Venetian Crucible," to rise from the ashes fully equipped to fulfill their separate destinies; Piero to the American frontier, and Giulio to Ottoman Istanbul.

Venetian Crucible

By Andy Burtis

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10922.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Venetian Crucible



Andy Burtis

Copyright © 2020 Andy Burtis

ISBN: 978-1-64718-002-7

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida, U.S.A.

Aside from much of the journey, dates of events, court records, and signed contracts, the author's animation of these characters and others in this story is fictitious. That said, most of the people in '**Venetian Crucible**,' the second book in my trilogy '**Venice, East and West**,' actually did live and did play similar roles at this time.

To the reader: Please refer to the glossary in the **back of my book** for **Venetian Nomenclature** and to my website below* for hundreds more of Venetian terms, including units of exchange, an extensive list of job classifications, ships lexicon, cost of goods sold, list of market goods, weights and measures, food and drink, wages and prices, etc. All of it to give you a better understanding of a culture unique and, in many ways, antecedent of our society today.

In addition, you will find on my website an extensive **bibliography** of books and articles written not only about Venice but many of the other colonial powers as well, like the the Dutch Netherlands and England, including their prey, the Algonquian population living on the northern seaboard of America.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2020

First Edition

***Contact the Author @ <https://aeburtis.com>**

CHAPTER 4 – *IL BOMBA*

Piero was second in line now; it would be his turn soon. And then out of nowhere, a lean old man appeared at his side. The man's presence seemed to demand his attention in a strange sort of way. Although obviously old, he looked healthy; his stoic wrinkled face framed penetrating eyes, eyes like steel. Not having seen the man before, Piero hesitated before allowing the man to examine his hands. The old man's touch was soft but strong and confident. Satisfied with what he saw, the stranger asked if he was nervous.

Piero replied that he was, his eyes cast down, embarrassed to be so freely questioned by a stranger.

"Do you know what you are standing on, young man?" he asked quietly.

Piero glanced in back of him, not quite knowing what to say. "An alleyway?" he ventured.

"This is mud we are standing on son, which once was *all* that comprised this great city. Islands of mud, reeds, grass. Nothing connected to nothing, all completely submerged at times, thanks to a tidal wave that destroyed your home town, which was then our capital. No crowds, no glory, no shade from the sun—simply the mud, us and our *carrante della laguna*, the silently flowing current of the *Brenta flu* we call *Canalazzo*. So we built salt pans in the lagoon and houses on the mudflats and bridges over the water, and pounded a million piles into this mud to hold our city up for all the world to come marvel at from the bridges. Bridges like you will soon be fighting on."

He pointed to the bridge around the corner. "So fight not just for your life but our very history, our future. For that bridge might divide our people today but in the end it connects us—makes us one. And now it is you, Piero, who will perpetuate this city. You are a *Malamocchi*, anciently called *Maimochin*, are you not?"

He nodded his assent. Yes, he was from Malamocco, the ancient seat of what the Romans once called the Veneti. And *Maimochin* was still what his people called themselves with pride, especially when riled up. But who was this man who talked like those his friend, Giulio, called *illuminati*?

“So you be a *Maimochin* today, Piero. Listen to me. I understand what it takes to win, what perpetuates our republic, and I understand you, Piero—for I am your *reverendissimo*.”

So *he* was the one his trainer Michiel told him about—the old man who lived in Father Leo’s parish, in the sestiere of Castello, and who all admired—except maybe not the good father so much. Piero guessed the man must have shrunk a great deal over the years, but was certainly still zealous about fighting.

“Our bridges are hallowed ground,” he went on, “built and fought over mostly by sailors and fishermen at first, thus Castellani and Nicolotti—both strong and tough, then and today. So trust your trainer Michiel while in the *arengo*. What advice did he give you?”

“Tonin is strong, but has become flabby and his left rib has been injured before, so I will work it over until I break it like a barrel stave. I am shorter than him so I need to keep low and let his punches graze off my left hand or the top of my head while I hammer at his ribs.” He pointed to the fifth rib on his left side. “After I break it his punches will have no strength, Michiel told me. My skull is harder than that rib, which will be exposed because he will be protecting his head with his left hand—it is the way our bodies work. Michiel showed me. When he gives me a sign that Tonin is weakening I will know to stand up and end it.”

The old man smiled thinly. “Your weakness, your strength?”

“Lack of experience, so I am to be patient and stay in the center of the *arengo*. But I can both give and take a good punch.”

The *reverendissimo* smiled. “Fight today like the valorous Piero Alberti from your Lido did in the Fourth Crusade, the very one who first breached the tower of Constantinople. Fight your best fight, ready to leave your life on the bridge like your ancestor left his in the tower he breached!” He nodded curtly and walked back down the alley.

Piero’s mind spun from the effect of the slightly touched but enigmatic old man’s words. He heard the crowd in the campo behind him roar. So the Castellani fighter had won. He smiled. It was a good sign. Piero moved one step forward, which put him in the shadows of the bridge. Standing against a wall of the building connected to the bridge’s steps, he pondered how the old man knew so much about him, but then guessed it was his job to know these things. It was then

he heard his name called from a recess in a doorway a short ways down the wall, where stood a little gang of Quintavalli roughnecks he had already recognized from the Arsenale, but ignored.

From the shadows they hissed and taunted him like they always did, for being the Vice Admiral Luganegher's pet—as Luganegher and him shared a friendship with Giulio, who dressed nice and used to visit them both at the Arsenale. And for a second he thought he saw his friend in a gondola by the bridge, of all places, so looked again, and that is when he was pulled down to the fondamenta from behind. Hitting his head hard on the pavement he looked up dazed at the smirking face of the gang's huge leader who called himself *Pisto*. His rival's chest puffed out like a mushroom, his veined face, especially his nose, was the color of a beet, most likely from drinking. When Piero tried to get up he was kicked over on his face and dragged by his thin fighting boots into the shadowy doorway.

Yanked to his feet by *Pisto*, his back pinned to the door, Piero instinctively reached for his *feri*, the wide chisel-like caulking iron he always carried in his backpack while in the city, just in case. And just before *Pisto*'s fist struck, Piero jammed the butt of it into his assailant's mouth. Out of his assailant's mouth came blood, slobber, and broken teeth. Quickly, Piero threw him off to run back to the stairs, where he waited his turn, raging inside at being attacked, convinced he might have killed the man if not for the match ahead. He knew he would not have to wait for a punch to see red as he pushed his way up the stairs to meet the waiting Michiel.

"What the hell, Piero?" his trainer asked as he took his backpack and shirt off.

Turning his head back in the direction of the attack, "*Pisto e una ideota*," was all he could to say. At Michiel's orders, he took deep breaths to calm himself before explaining what happened.

After listening, Michiel made a gesture to someone behind him. "Well, come with me then." Michiel walked him up the stairs towards a referee. "*Pisto* will get his due," Michiel growled in his ear on the way. "Now take this glove and get it inspected so I can get it on and laced it up. The second fight's already over. The crowd is plenty angry, but you are too, so take it out on Tonin."

When Piero was ready, Michiel handed him the leather mouthpiece and spit on his hand to rub Pisto's blood and slime off his face. "Are you sore from the fall?"

"No."

"Good. Remember what we worked on, watch for my sign, stay in the middle. Your dander is up, so take the fight to him! And watch your footing."

After the exchange of two kisses, Piero backed off to wait for the referee's signal, and when it came he went right to work on the man's ribcage despite taking a punch to the head first. And his rage took its full measure, Tonin buckling slightly from the force of his blows to the man's ribs. Elated, his blood rushing like never before to hear the swelling roar from the Castellani side, Piero fought on, and in the process forgot completely about being patient. Over and over Tonin clenched and over and over he pushed Tonin off and went for his ribcage, until Tonin caught him full in the face with an inside punch which blurred his vision enough to let Tonin get another punch in, and then another. He staggered back, got hit again, and now it was him who clenched ahold of Tonin. He was breathing hard, and the fight had barely started! Or had it? He didn't know he was so turned around.

Tonin must have heard him breathing hard. For another barrage of blows sent him spinning. It was then he heard a voice cry out that he was on the edge of the bridge. He ducked just in time to miss a roundhouse punch that would have sent him into the water, then retaliated as quickly as he could, catching Tonin in the ear which gave him enough time to collect his wits and heed Michiel's call to get in the center of the ring at once. After that it became a slugfest, and just as Piero hoped, he survived it, until one of Tonin's blows caught him just below his left shoulder somehow so that it hung down like a lead weight even as he continued to pummel Tonin's ribs. Realizing that his time was short, Piero punched as hard as he could and took Tonin down to a knee. But before he could land a knockout punch the referees forced their way in to give Tonin time. As the boos flooded the air Piero knew his time had come and gone, for a grinning Tonin now attacked his injured arm just like Piero had attacked his ribs. Spinning him around he knocked him down. Lying in a heap of pain, Piero got to his knees and then his feet, but one last

blow snapped his neck back and sent him falling backwards. It felt like slow motion, his falling, eyes seeing only sky before WHACK, he hit the water and slowly sank to the bottom like a millstone.

“Piero! Piero!” Giulio called as he leaned over the gondola to wake his friend, who was being attended to on the watery landing by Piero’s now-grown childhood friend, Carlo.

“Did you pull me out, Giulio?” Piero asked groggily when he opened his eyes and looked up to see his face.

A well-drenched Carlo smirked. “No, it was me, Piero. Your city friend didn’t want to get wet, it seems, but let his gondolier row him over here with some Turk aboard dressed up like a parrot. Come on, get up, I’ll take you back to Malamocco. That is what *real* friends are for.”

“Not in his condition, you won’t,” Giulio heard a sharp retort from an old man standing over Carlo, the old man telling him that his fighter needed to be treated at once, and in the city. And that Carlo should help Piero into the gondola Giulio sat in, and help him carefully. Which the normally irreverent Carlo did at once and without a word of protest.

Having others clear a way down the canal for their gondola, the old man, obviously of considerable influence to order someone like Carlo around, now joined them to sit opposite of him and Ji—with the dazed Piero slouched down in the seat next to the old man. On their way up the canal to a spot where the old man said someone would meet them, Giulio watched the old man feel for breaks in Piero’s limp arm, then slip a crude sling over his friend’s shoulder to cradle it. He then gave Piero something to chew on that would ease the pain, he said.

After Romano stopped where the old man said to, the old man said Piero would need to see his doctor.

“I know a good one, signore,” Giulio offered, thinking of his family’s friend, Dr. Anzelieri.

“Thank you, signore, all the same, but it is common for us to take care of our own when such things happen. Are you Piero’s friend, may I ask?”

“Yes. We are closer than brothers. Could I go with him, perhaps?” Giulio asked him.

“Yes, but we will have to wait until our boat arrives.”

“Where is it, may I ask, that your doctor lives?” Giulio asked.

“S. Martino Parish, by the church there,” he replied.

When the boat came, Giulio turned to his friends, who were perfectly willing to return to the Fondaco by themselves. Giulio had never seen Romano so subdued, nor Ji, perhaps in awe of the old man, who looked strangely familiar for some reason.

Soon after the boat arrived and the transfer made, Giulio could see that Piero was beginning to feel the effects of the medicine. Very politely, the old man then asked Romano for a ride back to the bridge, where he promised to have someone to watch over their gondola while they were taken to Sier Palpigna’s balcony overlooking the rest of the fights. As Giulio accepted Piero’s backpack from the old man, he could see that Ji and Romano could barely contain their delight in what lay ahead—Ji once more telling Piero how well he had fought until Romano put an end to that. At least Ji and Romano would get to see the rest of the fights and their fill of the war to follow, from their perch above the melee, Giulio surmised, rationalizing the voiding of his vow to his uncle. The old man bowed low before they parted, “I hope you understand, signore. As *reverendissimo* of the Castellani, I can assure you that your friends will be well taken care of.”

Giulio bowed back and nodded his assent, dumbstruck by the realization that he was most likely the only one in the whole crowd who had not recognized who the man was. Even after Ji had pointed him out. As he leaned forward to see his friend had gone to sleep, he couldn’t believe how beaten up he looked. Or even gotten into fighting, for that matter. As the rower made good headway towards the Ducal Palace and Bridge of Sighs came into view, Giulio wondered how he had let their friendship slip. And decided then and there to make up for that. As they passed under the bridge’s shadow Giulio had to smile, though, for the trick Ji and Romano had played on him. And the unlikely-looking fellow who went by the strange name of *reverendissimo*. And that Ji was now in the capable hands of Sier Palpigna.

Venetian Crucible



Andy Burtis

It is 1630 and Venice is being torn apart by factions within and enemies without. Our two now-grown Alberti friends from 'Venetian Born' fight through plague and war in this, their "Venetian Crucible," to rise from the ashes fully equipped to fulfill their separate destinies; Piero to the American frontier, and Giulio to Ottoman Istanbul.

Venetian Crucible

By Andy Burtis

Order the book from the publisher BookLocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10922.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**