

Hills of Volterra

(A poem in commemoration of the first IEEE-RAS/IFRR School of Robotics Science)

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The wise ones of old built a city, I'm told
High in Tuscany's hills called Volterra.
A gate high and wide led to beauty inside
Arts and science fed the spirit in Volterra.

Years later there came eager seekers of the same
Questing knowledge in the hills of Volterra;
From all corners of the world, many flags
Were unfurled as we met in the hills of Volterra.

Two wise men in shorts gave us t-shirts and exhorts to join minds
In pursuit of new knowledge.
Six wise ones they brought to stimulate our thoughts,
And help us to (hopefully) finish college.

Thirty-four we did number, brilliant minds
Unencumbered by the weights of the world left below.
New thoughts bloomed and grew,
Friendships forged and renewed,
Fueled by wine, cappuccino and gelato.

Robots were our focus, no sci-fi hocus pocus
But real human-robot interaction;
HCI, evaluation, spatial representation,
Leonardo, even robots alabaster.

Five whole days did we meet
In the bus, on the street,
As we trudged up the hills of Volterra.
We argued, we laughed, we questioned our craft—always
Thinking, in the spirit of Volterra.

Til finally there came the day when the wise ones did say,
“That's enough-it's time to go home now.
But first we must go to a special place
We know just outside the gates of Volterra”.

The Etruscans of old built a gate high and bold,
Leading into the streets of Volterra.
Through that gate did we pass,
Forty strong to the last,
Walking down to the place of blue water.

On a hillside we stopped,
Ate and drank til we popped,
Then the bravest of us breached the water.
With Stefano singing, the crescent moon ringing the sky
And the stars, it was magic.

The next morning we met one last time
In the square at the top of the hill in Volterra.
People, robots, the future, our calling,
We promised to finish the work
That we started up here in Volterra.

Cory's laugh in the square,
Pranila's smile, Zoz's hair, Javi's dance—
All these things I'll remember.
And when I am home, back at work in the zone,
I will think of you all and the times
When we talked as we walked through the hills of Volterra.