Matas of the Sierra

We will leave the 'tranquil' whitewashed streets of Alqueria for a moment and venture into the Sierra Alhamilla. The dramatic landscape peculiar to this part of Spain offers a unique opportunity for those who seek solitude. Solitude to meditate, solitude to avoid detection or perhaps simply seeking solitude out of an acute sense of stupidity. For Galeno Matas solitude was a combination of all these things. He had time enough to dwell on the injustice of living rough in the hills while his political opponents lived off 'the fat of the land' in Alqueria.

Matas, still believing the Civil War to be raging hid from his imaginary enemy. He saw Franco's troops behind every rock. Matas spent his days dodging his insubstantial adversaries, foraging for food and maintaining his ageing arsenal of weapons. What he would do if he came face to face with these erstwhile belligerents he wasn't quite sure, something heroic no doubt.

Matas still does his bit for Spain's defunct Second Republic. Every fourteenth of April, the day the Republic was proclaimed in 1931, Matas fires a shot at the gable-end of Alqueria's church. The church because of all the evil it represented to Republicans, also because it was the only ruddy thing big enough for him to hit and still remain undercover. The ancient projectile would cause a little 'pock' mark to appear and a puff of whitewash to momentarily materialise as it harmlessly struck the wall.

Womenfolk of the Village would gather on every fifteenth of April below the gable-end and stare in wonder at the new pock mark. It was surely a divine sign and offerings in the form of bread, cheese, jamón and wine were duly prepared. Just why these worthy ladies thought that an absolute being would make his presence known in such a fashion is a mystery. They marched in a solemn line-ahead to the Village's shrine north of Alqueria. With prayers and many gesticulations they placed their offerings at the foot of the rough stone cross.

On every sixteenth of April Matas would scramble down from the cave he called home. Making his way from tree to tree, from rock to rock, carefully, head low he would sprint to the stone cross. There he would find the 'banquet' left by the villagers. Surely he thought this was a sign that the Village was still loyal to the Republic. Matas appreciated their supply of rations, especially the Remitroot Wine of which he was very fond.

He only wished it would happen more than once a year.