¿Por qué?

Why does Alqueria have a stable population? Stable, at least in terms of numbers. Stability is not a word one would apply to the mental state of the residents. Psychiatrists have written books, given after dinner speeches and generally 'grown fat' on the collective dysfunctional psyche of Alqueria's population. The question could be better put, thus. “Why do people live there?”.

Alqueria was rebuilt in a valley below the Sierra Alhamilla during Spain's Muslim years. The Valley suffers mysterious temperature inversions due to complex climatic aberrations. The Village can be superheated, in the high forties centigrade and then within an hour the unfortunate residents of Alqueria shiver as the mercury plummets.

Strange mists occur for no apparent reason, green, smelly and worryingly sticky. Where they come from, why they linger and where they go to are mysteries, unfathomable even to the most gifted meteorologists. They cause respiratory problems, aggravate the eye's cornea and for some inexplicable reason can cause the bowels to become autonomous.

Perhaps the most baffling atmospheric phenomenon affecting Alqueria is its smell. 'The Alquerian Pong' as it has be dubbed by observers is omnipresent. It infiltrates the highways and byways of the Pueblo. It pollutes sealed rooms, refrigerators and the glove-compartments of cars. It is always there. Alqueria does however have bad drains. The result of an early botched attempt by Roman engineers to bring sanitation to this backwater but 'The Pong' is a different kind of odour. A cross between Nigora Goat pheromones and very ripe Stilton cheese is perhaps the best description for something that tries very hard to defy description.

The people themselves are continually at each other's throats. The two barrios comprising the Village hate each other will a will. Riots, civil unrest and general

mischief is a daily occurrence and is very debilitating for the infrastructure and the tempers of Alqueria.

Disowned by the Spanish Government after being somehow bypassed by the Christian Reconquest, perhaps on purpose, Alqueria became a stateless village. Declaring a republic they now fend for themselves. The only income is from their Remitroot crop. Alqueria being the only place where soil conditions are right for this remarkable plant to grow. They make their own laws, choose not to collect any form of taxation and govern by referendum.

So to return to the original question. Why do people continue to live in this seemingly hostile environment and put their financial faith in the vagaries of the Remitroot growing season? Perhaps John Milton had the answer when he wrote. “Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heaven”