Los Patios
(Part One)

Plants mature quickly in Alqueria. Sensing the start of Spring, they grow as in a race to mature before the vagaries of the Alquerian climate arrests their development. This early show of colour is used to full advantage by the people of the pueblo as they open their patios to all. The Day of the Patios is hotly contested between the two factions in the village. The Calle Límite becomes an Iberian iron curtain separating both communities. It is in secrecy and perceived security that the patios are tended, planted and arranged. The younger members of El Gente del Cerro and Los Recién Llegados act as the strike force while the older more sedate villagers cultivate the patios. Information gathering, disruption and sabotage became the daily missions of Alquerian youth in the run-up to the Day of the Patios.

In the early days of the competition fairly simple methods of disruption were employed. Such as firing snails by catapult into the opponents flower beds or replacing plant food with weed-killer. A mixture of white vinegar, salt and dish-washing liquid was found to kill any plant, all but Remitroot that is. This seemed to thrive on the stuff. As time passed so the means became more sophisticated with chemicals that simply stunt growth, to others that attract the fearsome Alquerian Horsefly, *Tabanus Alqueriaus.* These insects are fearless and have mandibles that can open a Scotsman's wallet. Others have taken more drastic action to sabotage the patios. Two years ago the Guardia visited the village and questioned one individual about an attempt to buy the defoliant Agent Orange and several litres of Napalm. He didn't get hold of any which was just as well as he lacked a viable warhead and the means of delivery.

The two bars in the village provide a focal point for each faction, each with its own patio centrepiece. La Golondrina Verde for Los Recién Llegados had a wonderful display of potted colour hanging from all of its outside walls. The focal point was however two poplar trees arranged in a 'V' with a plaque stating, “Our tribute to our

fellow Alquerians, Los Gente del Cerro”. This 'tribute' did not go unnoticed and resulting in renewed activity at The bar La Casa Devante which represented Los Gente del Cerro. Their patio is guarded by a private security firm armed with pepper spray and an extremely bad attitude which resulted from being sent to Alqueria. The patio would be unveiled just before the judging held in the village’s plaza.

The individual patios of the folk of Alqueria tend to reflect their personalities. More of them later