Luncheon of the Boating Party

Today was the annual riparian luncheon. The vision behind the idea was a relaxed waterborne journey down a meandering waterway then partaking in a luxurious and well watered repast on the river bank. Alqueria's Rio Verde isn't quite the Isis stretch of the Thames and some argue that the slimy green amorphous mass that flows in it isn't technically water but it is the only venue in Alqueria for water-sport.

The craft, 'The Saucy Sue', leaked, smelt, and always listed alarmingly to port, but it did float which was more than any other Alquerian registered vessel did. Progress was slow down the Rio Verde due to its viscosity, like green lumpy discarded engine oil it impeded progress and clogged the cooling systems.

Instead of the expected relaxed party of would-be diners partaking of leisurely aperitifs, we had a wide-eyed life jacket wearing mass of humanity huddling together for safety, some prayed while others wept openly. Judging by expressions and body language one would think they were freshly shanghaied to serve on some 'Yankee Blood Boat' never again to set foot on 'terra firma'.

A fatalistic depression descended on the 'passengers' and, unfortunately Loca Pepa was having an off day. She had decided to 'end it all' by throwing herself into the Rio Verde. The crew would 'fish' her out only for her to throw herself in again. It became great sport to wait until she submerged for the third time before dragging her on board. The crew warmed to their task and took it in turns to perform the rescue. Pepa was overjoyed as she played the victim with an audience, the fish however objected, it was bad enough having to live in the Rio Verde without having the sudden, unwelcome and repeated appearance Loca Pepa.

By some miracle of navigation or sheer good luck the Saucy Sue tied up at 'Dodgy Pedro's Wharf' close to the border with Spain. Their lunch awaited, spread over white

starched linen with the best EPNS cutlery at the ready. At Loca Pepa's place a plastic knife and fork waited, the Sanity Court had not yet agreed to her using sharp objects.

It was with relief that the luncheon party scrambled ashore, some kissed the ground, risking a dose of tetanus to show their surprise at having survived the Saucy Sue. The Alquerian Trout which had to be boiled for three hours in order to render it non-toxic was only toyed with. The Lemming Stew was left uneaten, the trauma of the boat trip had dissolved all appetites. It was a sullen and traumatised group that gratefully gulped their Remitroot chupito.

The luncheon party walked home as the Saucy Sue rose vertically, bow to the sky before plunging stern first into the sticky green depths of the Rio Verde.