El combate de lucha libre

There was to be a grand wrestling match in Alqueria. A combatant from each of the barrios would contend for the title of Alquerian All Comers Champion. To organise such an event in a town with a potent barrio divide and intolerant hatred for the opposing faction may seem like a well planned disaster waiting to happen. The powers that be thought it would allow barrio rivalry to be confined to the ring and away from the streets. The naïve fools.

The Alquerian weapons of choice tended to be cobblestones, bricks, bottles and fire-bombs. Hand to hand combat was considered too dangerous so outside wrestlers had to be recruited. Only the meanest and fittest fighters were head-hunted by the respective barrios. They were given Alquerian citizenship, something which can be purchased reasonably cheaply and briefed in the ways of the Pueblo. Manuela took an active part in the selection of the Hill People's champion. She spent quite a time interviewing each personally. She was very thorough and enthusiastic in her singular selection technique.

Santiago 'Spleen Ripper' Gonzales was to represent the Hill People while Ángel 'Granny Masher' Tierno was the chosen one of the Newcomers. Both wrestlers left a grisly reputation of broken limbs and chewed ears in their wake. Loco Paco regarded the two fighters with an academic interest and threw morsels of food to them. It wasn't until he heard them speak that he realised they weren't some exotic variety of hairless Ouran-Utang but human. Paco was rightly disappointed and turned his attention once more to his imaginary rodent friend, Bert.

Come the day of the contest and the Town's Plaza was packed with what seems like the entire population of Alqueria. The square was regaled in garlands and bunting. The wrestling ring stands ready and the crowd have already started exchanging jibes and insults. Enter the protagonists, lumbering, knuckles scraping the flagstones. The crowd goes wild. Things more tangible than insults are now thrown, a number of

supporters are felled by well aimed projectiles. The ring was torn apart and its planking used as weapons. All in all it was a well planned disaster that had an inevitability Nostradamus would have found easy meat.

The two wrestlers took refuge in the Bar la Casa Devante where they discovered they were once close friends. They had shared the same room while on an advanced grunting course organised by the World Wrestling Council. They sat chatting while bedlam reigned outside.

The irony of the situation seemed somehow quite normal in Alqueria.