The Beauty Pageant
(Part one, the odds)

To say that attractive Alquerian women are in short supply would be wrong, there isn't however a surplus. Most young ladies with sufficient looks and guile have already attached themselves to unsuspecting non-Alquerian men and quietly but happily left the Pueblo. Those that remain have, for one reason or another family or business commitments which make escape impossible.

Rodriquez's daughters, Robertina and Iñes were the first to complete the entry forms for Alqueria's Beauty Pageant. As they are only slightly less masculine than their obese and loathsome father, their chances are not highly rated by El Chanchullero the village bookie and spiv. Most Los Recién Llegados girls are of the short legged Iberian variety. El Gente del Cerro womenfolk however have the long limbs, raven hair and almond eyes which betray their Moorish ancestry. The contest is an uneven one with the People of the Hill drawing by far the shortest odds.

Rodriquez however believes his daughters are the essence of pulchritude. In reality the only chance they have would be either through their personality or through bribery. Unfortunately, their personalities are akin to the Wagnerian Maidens and as Rodriquez believes they are both exquisite, he doesn’t see bribery as necessary. Their odds are marked up at 100-1. Dolores del Viento for the Newcomers is an outside possiblity, but her habit of belching the Royal March when her frequent indigestion is at its height may go against her. She is at 50-1. These are the frontrunners for Los Recién Llegados, The Newcomers.

El Gente del Cerro, The Hill People are fielding a better line-up but they lack the funds for effective bribery which is in general lengthening their odds. Pilar del Redondorodillas, the owner of the Village ferretería was initially quoted at 15-1. The odds soon shortened in proportion to the rumoured length of her dress for the 'Evening Gown' section of the pageant. Amalia de Vega, 102 and the town’s matriarch

entered at the last minute after seeing the quality of the competition. She hopes to rely on the sympathy vote. Amalia is quoted at 100-1 the same odds as Rodriquez`s daughters, although some think she stands more of a chance.

Way out in front is Manuela externally desirable and extremely ornamental but flawed with her dark soul. A lot depends on the judges and Manuela is not above using her 'talents' to influence their decision. The judicial panel will consist of Blythe Gruntmore, a male hairdresser called Jerold from Níjar and a 'shot putter', La Musculosa or El Musculoso, which epithet applies depends on the results of a DNA test. On the face of things these judges shouldn't succumb to Manuela's attentions but she is an inventive girl. El Chanchullero is aware of this and has made her the favourite at 2-1.

Who will be first passed the post? Will a late entry take the day? More later.