



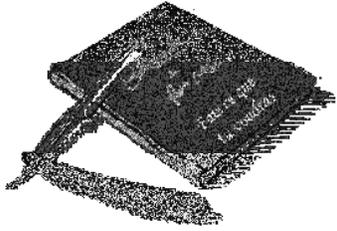
Johannes Cabal the Detective Free Excerpt

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Chapter 1

In which death awaits and a plot is hatched.



The condemned cell stank of cats.

There were no rats and no cockroaches, for which Johannes Cabal—a necromancer of some little infamy—was grateful. But the cost of vermin control was an army of cats who crept in and out of his cell and wandered throughout the dungeons of the Harslaus Castle with complete impunity. Even the cell doors had cat flaps cut into them. It was no secret that the warders had a much higher opinion of the animals than they did of the inmates. When Cabal was given his introductory tour—which took the form of being thrown down the stairs and shouted at—he had been left in no doubt that any harm that he might cause the cats would be returned to him, plus interest.

So now he sat and waited for the authorities to find a window in their very busy schedules to execute him, and he did so covered in cat hair in a cell that countless generations of toms had proudly and extravagantly claimed as their own. Things could probably be worse but, despite some careful thought, Cabal couldn't put his finger on how. So, instead, he considered how he had come to be in such a circumstance. Strictly, necromancy was the telling of the future by summoning up the spirits of the dead and asking them searching questions. This, Cabal believed, was a singularly poor way of finding out anything. The dead were moderately strong on history, weak on current events, and entirely useless for discerning what was to come. They were, after all, dead. Still, that was the dictionary definition of *necromancy*.

Over the years, however, it became apparent that *necromancy*, *necromancer*, and *necromantic* were fine words wasted on useless definitions, and the lexicological group consciousness gently slid them over a few notches so that they now pertained to something interesting—i.e., magic *involving* the dead. This was far more satisfying: summoning up the ghost of Aunt Matilda for an insight into next week's lottery numbers was dull; a maniac with a pointy beard unleashing an army of skeletal warriors, however, was fun. Thus, we see the evolution of a language—and a gratifying sight it is, to be sure. Johannes Cabal had no time for the Aunt Matildas of this world or the next. He fitted neatly into the newer definition of *necromancer*—he dealt with raising the dead (although skeletal warriors he left to those of a more theatrical bent). First and foremost, he considered himself a scientist embarked upon a search for a cure for a terrible disease. Death. This would seem laudable if it were not for his methods, his manner, and his failed experiments, the latter tending to hang around the countryside, dismaying the yokels. Even this might have been forgivable—pharmaceutical companies have done worse—if it were not for the bad reputation that the more melodramatic necromancers have given the profession. Skeletal warriors are all very well when they're chasing Jason and the Argonauts around on the silver screen, but when they're battering down your door...Well, that's a different matter altogether. So the necromancers were all besmirched with the same gory brush, and Cabal, who just wanted to be left to his research, found himself in a profession proscribed in the most capital terms. It was very galling. Especially when you got caught.

Cabal had been caught trying to check out a book from the library of the Krenz University. The book was in the Special Collection, and Cabal had intended the loan to be of

an extended, open- ended sort of period. Anticipating resistance from the library authorities, he had made the loan at half past one in the morning of a national holiday and might have got away with it, too, if it hadn't been for an enormous mastiff that patrolled the corridors and of which his contacts had unaccountably failed to warn him. When the library was reopened, they'd found Cabal pinned down by 180 pounds of overfriendly dog in the reading room, half drowned in slobber. Just out of reach was a well- travelled Gladstone bag that was found to contain an enormous handgun, a collection of surgical instruments, a closely written notebook, a padded case holding several sealed test tubes full of murky fluids, and the library's own demy- quarto copy of *Principia Necromantica*.

Nobody wanted a long, drawn- out trial. In fact, nobody who mattered wanted a trial at all, so Johannes Cabal didn't get one. He was just told that he was going to be executed and taken to Harslaus Castle. That had all been almost a month ago, and Cabal was getting bored. He knew full well that his execution was unlikely to be any more formal than his sentencing and at any time, probably in the wee small hours, the door would thud open, he'd be manhandled off to some dark cellar, his throat would be cut, and his twitching cadaver thrown down an oubliette. But there was nothing he could do about it, so why worry? Still, it hadn't happened yet; they were still feeding him with nearly edible food, and the more intelligent cats had long since learned to stay out of his cell. So why were they waiting? He had a vague and uncomfortable feeling that somebody somewhere had plans for him.

Then it happened just as he'd expected after all, in the wee small hours of the morning. He was awoken by the sound of the cell door being thrown open and, before he could recover his wits, a sack was pulled over his head and he was bundled off down the labyrinthine corridors. He didn't try to fight; there were at least four of them, of whom even the slightest might be described as "burly." He could only stay calm, wait for any small opportunity to escape, should one arise, and hope that, if all failed, and he was to die, the entry procedures for Hell had at least been rationalised since his last visit.

He was half dragged, half carried for a short time and then thrown into a chair. The sack was whipped off him and, as he blinked in the hard light, he caught a glimpse of a dour, portly man stropping a cutthroat razor on a leather strap. He had the presence of mind to be impressed that such clandestine executions were so common that they seemed to have somebody employed to commit them. This sangfroid slipped slightly when brutal hands stripped him of his stinking clothes. Any complaints he might have wished to make thus provoked were drowned when he was thrown into a tub of soapy water and belaboured with sponges. He was still coughing bubbles when he was dragged out again, held down in the chair, slapped in the face with a quantity of lather, and the portly man—glowering fiercely—grabbed him by the throat and slashed at him with the razor.

Cabal stopped struggling immediately. The man slid his eyes sideways to look at the quantity of bristles and soap scum that hung from the blade. He twitched the razor and the scum flew in a discrete body off into the shadows, where it fell with an indistinct *plap*. His eyes swivelled back to regard Cabal.

"Warm for the time of year, isn't it, sir?" he grated. The razor swept in again.

Ten minutes later, Cabal—cleanly shaven, bathed, and dressed in freshly pressed

clothes—regarded himself in the mirror. He stood a shade over six feet tall and, although he'd have preferred his blond hair cut back a little and the suit they'd given him was a dark grey rather than his habitual black, he wasn't altogether displeased with his appearance. It was sober, and Cabal was a very sober man. "Not bad," he said, running his hand over his chin. "Not bad at all. You're the prison barber, then?"

"No, sir," said the man as he put his razor and strap away. "I'm the executioner. But it pays to have more than one feather in me cap. Good morning."

Cabal watched him leave with mixed feelings.

"Feeling more human, Herr Cabal?"

Cabal turned his head to look at the newcomer and instantly suspected that he'd been there the whole time, in the shadows. An educated voice. Cabal sighed inwardly—this was probably going to become political, and politics and politicians bored him immeasurably. "No more than usual," he replied. "I gather I am to be released?"

"You gather incorrectly," said the newcomer, stepping into the light. He was in his late thirties, slim, moustachioed, and beautifully turned out in the uniform of a captain of the Imperial Hussars, the jacket over his shoulders, the busby tucked under his arm. His bearing and the order hanging at his throat loudly proclaimed "landed aristocracy." He walked to the table upon which Cabal's old clothes lay, swept them to the floor, and perched on the corner. He produced a cigarette case, took one for himself, and then offered the case to Cabal. "Do you smoke, Herr Cabal?"

"Only to be antisocial," replied Cabal, making no move.

The hussar smiled, put the case away, and lit his own cigarette. "Do you know who I am?" Cabal shrugged noncommittally. "I am Count Marechal of the Emperor's own bodyguard. Yes?" Cabal had raised a finger of query.

"Perhaps it's just me being a stickler for nomenclature, but doesn't the title of 'emperor' presuppose some sort of empire? I wasn't aware that Mirkarvia has ever gained so much as an inch of land from its neighbours, excepting that business with the faulty theodolite a few years ago. And that you had to give back."

"I thought you an educated man, Herr Cabal. You've never heard of the Mirkarvian Empire and the Erzich Dynasty? You disappoint me."

"Of course I've heard of them, but that was all centuries ago. You can hardly harken back to some medieval golden age as if it happened yesterday." He looked at the count and reconsidered. "Or perhaps you can. My mistake."

The count twisted his head as if working a crick out of his neck. "Do you believe in history repeating itself? That what has passed will come again? I do. Names and faces will change, but their rôles will be the same. Wars will be fought with new weapons and new tactics, but for the same goals and objectives."

Cabal thought it was nonsense but could see that it might be a very comforting theory to cling to for a third-rate backwater with dust on its laurels. Bearing in mind that if this interview didn't go just so he might well not live much longer, and bearing in mind, too, what a great nuisance that would be, he instead said, "I'm not a historian. I can make no comment."

"But you disagree. No matter." Something in the way he said it made Cabal think that it was a comment frequently on the count's lips, and that a lot of the people who didn't matter

ended up floating out of town facedown. With an effort, he made a stab at diplomacy.

“You know my profession. I have to think in the long term. There may be something in what you say. In my own researches, I’ve noticed repetitive patterns developing down the centuries. But my interest is not history. I’ve never had the desire to analyse these patterns.”

“Patterns? Patterns.” The count mused for a moment. “Yes, I like that. Patterns forming through time. Destiny, as manifest as geometry. As irrefutable as pi. Yes!” His eyes gleamed oddly as he grinned and started pacing up and down, drawing fiercely on his cigarette. “Yes!”

Cabal started to have a bad feeling about the count. In his experience, military aristocrats fell into two classes. The great majority were in the army because they liked the uniforms, were unpleasant to their batmen, spent fortunes on moustache wax, and did it all to appeal to the sort of woman who is envious of a cavalryman’s horse. A tiny minority, however, were in uniform because they had plans, *military* plans. And a minority of this minority actually had the wits to do something about it, too. Whatever else Count Marechal was—mad, for instance—he was also intelligent. Thus, despite his characteristic impatience with the rest of humanity, he let Marechal pursue his train of thought to its conclusion, or at least until he ran out of cigarettes.

Marechal threw the fag end to the floor and crushed it out beneath the heel of his gleaming boot, taking its successor from the case even as he did so.

I’m at the mercy of a demented chain- smoker, thought Cabal. Oh, happy day. “Mirkarvia has plans, Herr Cabal. Great plans. The Mirkarvian Empire is not just a footnote of history. It is a blueprint for the future.”

Cabal remembered what little he could about the excesses of the Mirkarvian Empire and thought this was a future only Mirkarvians could enjoy.

“In ten days’ time the emperor, Antrobus II, will make an announcement to the people in Victory Square from the balcony of the palace. He will tell them that the time for living in the shadow of our neighbours is over, that foreign spies and agents will no longer be tolerated within our borders, that our climb back towards greatness starts now. At the same time, the secret police will move against known spies and their sympathisers. Their corruption of this country’s spirit will cease immediately, and patriot shall work with patriot to ensure that— Am I boring you?”

Cabal finished yawning. “My apologies. My sleep was disturbed. So, you wish to turn your country into a police state and eliminate any dissent. You’re not the first, and you certainly won’t be the last.”

“You disapprove.”

“I don’t care. People are cattle. Do as you will, it’s your country. I’m just wondering where I fit into your plans.”

“You’re focussed. I like that. I respect clear thinkers. These dissident factions have poisoned the people’s minds. We must act quickly or it will be too late.”

“A revolution.”

“A rebellion. Civil war. Which is, of course, what our enemies want. I . . . we cannot permit that to happen. The emperor’s announcement will nip these rebellious movements in the bud. The police actions will remove the possibility of their reoccurrence. Then we can get on with making destiny manifest. But there is a small problem.”

Ah, thought Cabal. Now we come to the crux of it.

Count Marechal looked at the ceiling for a moment, frowning slightly as he tried to couch his next words as best he could. Finally, he said, "The emperor is as dead as a doornail."

"For how long?" asked Cabal bluntly. There seemed little point in being coy, now it was plain what they wanted him to do.

"Three hours. He has been unwell for some time. We suspected the worst but hoped for the best. To no avail." His upper lip twitched savagely. "The stupid old bastard. He only had to last long enough to make the speech, and then he could have died right then. It would have become a crusade on the instant. 'We must fulfil the emperor's dying wish!' Yes, that would have been grand. And that"—he looked meaningfully at Cabal—"is the way it is going to be. The emperor will make his speech. Then he will die. In that order. Mirkarvia's future depends upon it. As does yours."

"Can't you just declare, 'The emperor is dead, long live the emperor'? Don't you have a spare for emergencies?"

"The emperor's son is eight years old, and none too bright. His Imperial Majesty dropped him on his head at an early age, and it shows. It would be necessary to declare a regent—"

"Who would be you, no doubt?"

"Who would be me, yes, but by the time such things were in hand we would be up to our necks in revolting peasants. The speech *has* to go ahead as planned."

Cabal straightened his jacket. "I shall need my bag with *all* its contents. That includes the *Principia Necromantica*."

"The book you tried to steal? The university greybeards won't like it."

"They don't need to. Tell them they'll have to make sacrifices for the greater glory of Mirkarvia. If they don't like it, offer to have some of your secret policemen come calling to explain patriotism in detail."

The count smiled wryly. "You should have been a politician."

"I shall ignore that comment. I shall need a laboratory, and I shall need it now." "Naturally. Assistants?"

"I work alone. If you insist on having a spy present to report on my actions, he can sit quietly in the corner and stay out of my way. I give you your emperor doing a reasonable impersonation of a living person and you give me my freedom. That is the deal."

"Very nearly. I'm afraid there is one item I cannot let you have. That handgun of yours, for obvious reasons. Tell me, why do you carry such a cannon? Its bullets are more than half an inch in diameter."

Cabal shrugged. "A gun is a tool for killing. It isn't an enterprise that calls for subtlety, only certainty."

"Guns don't kill people. People kill people."

"But guns make it so much easier. Shall we go?"

They were ready for Cabal. He was taken from the prison and smuggled into the Imperial Palace via an impressively abstruse secret route. A bathroom larger than some ballrooms he had seen had been scrubbed, disinfected, and fitted out with surgical tables and equipment. Plainly, his execution had been put off in anticipation of the emperor's dying inconveniently.

The knowledge irked him; he disliked being a pawn in somebody else's game.

The late Antrobus II lay supine and naked on a sluice table, a trolley of instruments standing by. Sitting by them was Cabal's Gladstone bag, and as he reached the table he realised that the instruments arrayed were his own, sterilised and ready. Out of interest, he opened the bag and found that Marechal had been as good as his word: everything was there—*Principia Necromantica* included—but for his gun.

He cast an eye over the dead man. By the look of him, Antrobus hadn't been a great believer in exercise and diet. One leg looked gouty, and his gut settled about him like unset blancmange. Cabal made a swift estimate of the cadaver's weight, counted the number of test tubes of reagent he had, and decided it wasn't enough.

Marechal had sat down on the marble edge of a geyser and was just tapping a cigarette against his silver case when Cabal raised a cautionary finger. "No smoking. Does this place have a meat freezer?"

The count looked longingly at the cigarette before replacing it. "Yes."

"Excellent." Cabal drew a tiny amount of liquid from one of his phials into a five-millilitre syringe and injected it into the cold, motionless, imperial carotid artery. "This will start a catalytic reaction throughout the emperor's cardiovascular system to slow down deterioration. The freezer will do the rest." He took up his notebook and wrote rapidly. "While the emperor is on ice I shall be synthesizing the necessary reactants. I shall require these components." He tore off the sheet as he walked over to Marechal and placed it in his hands. The count read the list. Then he read it again, his eyebrows raising. "Time is of the essence, Count," Cabal added sharply.

The count tapped the paper. "Two pounds of fresh human pituitaries. I don't believe the imperial grocers stretch to fresh human pituitaries. This isn't an easy list to fill."

"That," said Cabal, walking back to the emperor and taking off his jacket as he went, "is hardly my problem. If you want this vast quantity of blue-blooded lard to make his speech on schedule, fill it you will." He hung his jacket from a wing nut on the surgical light stand and started to roll up his sleeves. "And fill it promptly."

For a moment, the count looked as if he might say something. Then he changed his mind and stood up. "I'll see to it you have your"—he glanced at the list again and curled his lip—"components." He marched out, his boots making sharp clicks that echoed around the tiled walls.

Out in the corridor, Count Marechal snapped his fingers and his adjutant was at his side in an instant. The count handed over the list. "Get these together as soon as possible and have them given to Cabal."

The adjutant, who was very much of the majority of aristocratic soldiers and maintained an apiary dedicated to the glory of his moustaches, silently mouthed the list as he read it. "I say, sir. What *is* a pituitary when it's at home to visitors?"

"It nestles in the middle of the human brain, and it's not the sort of thing one can voluntarily donate. Scour the mortuaries. We want them fresh, mind!"

"They don't sound very big. It might take quite a few to make a couple of pounds of the

blighters. What if we can't find enough in the mortuaries?"

The count fixed him with his gaze. "Then find some donors," he said with an emphasis that even Lieutenant Karstetz could fathom.

"Right ho!" said Karstetz, and clattered out in boots that were a lot brighter than he. He paused at the door and turned back. "Incidentally, sir. If this necromancer chappie delivers the goods and old man Antrobus sits up and does the business, d'you still want me to bump friend Cabal off?"

The count thought about it for a very short moment. "No, that's one small change to the plan. When Cabal's done his best, whether he succeeds or fails, you are not to kill him." He let his hand drift to the hilt of his sabre. "I shall."

All over the city, causes of death were altered to allow the taking of brain samples. Men carried in with knives in their backs were pronounced dead of strokes. Some of the more principled mortuary staff saw fit to complain. "This is a nonsense!" a district coroner barked at Lieutenant Karstetz as they stood by a slab upon which lay the fresh body of a young man. "I utterly refuse to open this man's head when the cause of death is obviously a sword wound to the chest! He may have needed his head examined before he got into the duel, but it's far too late now."

"No, I assure you, sir," said Karstetz. "This man died of a seizure caused by a morbid condition of the"—he took a crumpled piece of paper from his sabretache and read from it—"pituitary gland." He put the paper away again. "That's in the brain, you know."

"I know where it is! I simply fail to see how you can possibly see a sword wound and associate it with— Urgh!"

For Lieutenant Karstetz had lost patience, drawn his sword, and run the coroner through. He wiped his blade clean on a handy shroud and scabbarded it. "See?" he asked the assistant coroner, who had gone a horrible shade of frightened. "Sword wound to the chest and what did he die of?"

"A morbid condition...of the pituitary?" ventured the assistant.

"Good show! Knew you were the man for the job after poor old"—he waved vaguely at the dead coroner—"Herr Poor Old here turned up his toes. Anyway, be a sport and fish out the offending organ. Pop it in a jar when you've done and a little man will be around shortly to pick it up. Got to go— there's an absolute epidemic on. Cheerio!"

Cabal worked slowly but surely as the necessary elements came in. He hardly slept, hardly ate, hardly spoke but to demand some new substance or piece of apparatus. His every move was reported to Count Marechal: every drop from every pipette; every process observed; his notes were stolen, copied, and returned every time he napped. The count studied them but found them impenetrable, some sort of personal cipher, and he passed them on to the Imperial Intelligence Section for cryptanalysis. Less impenetrable, to the count's shrewd eye at any rate, had been Cabal's demand for fifty pounds of freshly shaved cat hairs. The gaolers of Harslaus Castle would be wearing bandages for weeks. The sack containing the fruits of their painful labours sat, ignored, in the corner. The count knew petty revenge when he saw it, and he welcomed it here; it showed Cabal was more human than he liked to

pretend, and that lurking somewhere within him was a sense of humour, albeit a cruel one. A man is known by his actions, and the count liked to know those he dealt with.

The day of the speech approached, and Cabal finally sent for the late emperor's mortal remains. He thawed it in a circle of lamps that had been manufactured to his specifications, fuelled with a blend of oils that baffled and disturbed the small army of chemists Marechal had assembled. Cabal had Antrobus carefully placed on the cold white floor before surrounding him with a circle of five of the lamps—their glistening reflectors facing inwards—each vertex of the precise pentagon joined to its neighbours with fluorescent tubes filled with gases that, theoretically, shouldn't fluoresce. The gas mixture had cost one of the artisans charged with their construction his sanity. Now he lay in a padded cell screaming about the infraviolet and the corners in time. Marechal deliberately left the technical report unread and ordered the destruction of all Cabal's equipment when it had fulfilled its purpose.

The lamps and the tubes burned for exactly twenty- three hours before abruptly extinguishing themselves. All through the time Cabal had sat cross-legged, in a light trance, muttering some sort of mantra beneath his breath.

"Well, I don't know if he's the real thing or a fraud," Karstetz commented late that evening, "but he's frightfully good at whatever it is he's doing. More Bikavér?"

The instant the lights went out, Cabal's eyes rolled back down in their sockets and he jumped inside the line of tubes. He plucked a syringe case from his pocket, drew a quantity of faintly shimmering liquid from a bottle, and began injecting the corpse at specific points—the temples, the base of the throat, the solar plexus. Marechal had the misfortune to be the only person handy when Cabal needed part of the emperor's bulk moved out of the way so that he could get at some of the less savoury locations. "What are you doing?" asked the count, making conversation in an attempt to distract himself from what he was doing and where his hands were.

Cabal said nothing as he drew a full fifty millilitres of the fluid, carefully positioned the point of the great steel needle, and pushed it in with some effort and the sound of separating gristle. "Do you know what the ka is?"

"No."

"Ki?"

"No."

"Chakra?"

"Ah, now that's a sort of round throwing knife from somewhere or other on the subcontinent. Fearsome thing, in the right hands," Marechal said with enthusiasm.

Cabal paused for half a second before carrying on. "And that's all?"

"Yes."

"Then I can't explain it to you. Come back when your education includes the details of life as well as the commission of death."

Count Marechal looked at Cabal, paling with anger. Cabal looked back at him evenly, noting both how very easy Marechal was to provoke and the scar on his cheek that seemed to be visible only when he was angry. "You duel, Count?"

The count brought himself under control. "I did, when I was at university. You mean the

scar? Yes.”

Cabal seemed to have lost interest. He'd moved on to the corpse's legs and was inserting the needle behind the patella of the right knee. “You can put that down now. Unless you've developed a personal attachment, of course.”

The count let that comment pass, stood up, and walked to a sink to wash his hands. “You really believe you're some sort of obscene parody of a doctor, don't you? Saving lives after they're already lost for the good of humanity.”

“Obscene parody?” Cabal repeated without rancour. “I'm not sure that particular phrase was in my mind when I decided on my career. As for humanity, anything I do for it is purely by accident.”

“Then why? Immortality? Perhaps you should have become a vampire.”

Cabal stopped and looked at the count very coldly indeed. “Perhaps I should,” he said finally.

“These lands used to be full of them,” said the count conversationally, having entirely missed Cabal's look. “Tottering old castles on craggy mountaintops packed to the rafters with them. More *Nosferatu* than you could shake a stake at. Not anymore. They had to go. They wouldn't pay their taxes.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“They thought that, just because they'd dodged the certainty of death, dodging the certainty of taxes somehow went by on the nod.” He snorted. “They were wrong.”

Cabal momentarily considered the sight of bailiffs armed to the teeth with stakes, garlic, and court writs. Then he stood up and stepped out of the pentangle. “Finished.”

“What?” The count was incredulous. “Just like that?”

“He's alive. Or at least he's doing a convincing impersonation. I need some sleep. Then I shall require the text of the speech he is to deliver.”

“Why?”

“Because,” snapped Cabal, his tiredness catching up with him, “he's nothing more than a heap of walking offal. He can't possibly read the speech himself—it will have to be conditioned into him, like teaching a parrot.”

The count had walked over and was looking down on the emperor. He was undeniably breathing. He shook his head; he'd only half believed all this mumbo- jumbo could possibly work. “He doesn't look very well.”

“He's *dead*. He's hardly going to be a picture of vibrant health. Just before he delivers the speech, I'll give him something to make him look a little less like a side of beef and more like a head of state. Now”—Cabal sighed, wilting slightly—“I'm very tired. We shall continue this tomorrow.” He started to walk out.

The count stayed where he was. The plan to resurrect the emperor had always been a desperate contingency plan. It was very hard to accept that it seemed to be coming off. “Shouldn't you put him on, I don't know, a saline drip? Or glucose or something?”

“He's only performing basic respiration. I think he has enough reserves to last a few hours,” said Cabal without even turning. Then he was gone.

Count Marechal was left with the undead emperor and his grand schemes.

Central Matriculation Board:

Level 5 History Paper Section 4: The Second Gallacian Conflict

Read the following brief description of the Second Gallacian Conflict, its results and ramifications, and then answer the questions that follow it. This section is worth ten per cent of your overall mark. Show all work.

Some four hundred years ago in Eastern Europe, Mirkarvia made significant inroads into the territories of two of its neighbours: Senza and Polorus. These conquests were accompanied and succeeded by a series of atrocities, mostly carried out under the pretext of counterinsurgency actions. Over the following decades, these acts settled into a pattern of ethnic discrimination and violent suppression. Finally, Senza—newly resurgent after the discovery of major gold deposits in the southwest and a generally burgeoning economy—militarised its border with Mirkarvia. The Mirkarvian emperor, Dulcis III, listened to the council of his hawkish generals, armchair strategists all, and declared war. This was exactly what the Senzans had anticipated; several secret treaties were triggered that ultimately resulted in Senza and Polorus, with support from their neighbouring states of Ruritania and Graustark, forming an alliance against Mirkarvia. The antiquated Mirkarvian army was quickly routed, and the captured lands recovered.

Polorus argued for the occupation of the Mirkarvian capital of Krenz, with the implied erasure of Mirkarvia as a state. Senza, however, had no desire to control lands containing ethnic Mirkarvians. Therefore, the Mirkarvian exchequer was emptied, large quantities of art treasures and transportable wealth were seized, and swingeing trade concessions were taken as reparation.

It took Mirkarvia generations to recover financially from these humiliations, and the scars still run deep in the national character. The days of the Mirkarvian Empire are domestically regarded as a golden age for all, the terrible crimes of that period expunged from Mirkarvian schoolbooks. Politically, the ramifications of the empire's collapse are still evident in Mirkarvia's dealings with its neighbours. Her only local ally is the notoriously backward Katamenia to the north. They share no borders, however; travel between them must go through a mountainous isthmus of Senzan territory extending from the bulk of the country off to the west, where strict customs inspections are the rule. The only other route would require travelling over the Gallaco Sea, but Katamenia has no coastline. Thus, any such journey would still require some travel through either Senza or Polorus.

- (A) In what year did Mirkarvia invade Senza?
- (B) i) With hindsight, what was Dulcis III's most serious error?
ii) And without hindsight?
- (C) Discuss any two (2) of the following statements:

- i) Mirkarvia behaved like a right bunch of bastards.
 - ii) Polorus behaved like a right bunch of bastards.
 - iii) All countries behave like right bunches of bastards.
- (D) Write a political treatise—not to exceed 250,000 words or 500 sides, whichever is less—detailing your solution to stabilising relations in the region. Military force above brigade level is not permitted, nor is divine intervention. You may include diagrams.