Macbeth

Tragedy by William Shakespeare, first performed in 1605–06. Acting on a prophecy by three witches that he will be king of Scotland, Macbeth, egged on by Lady Macbeth, murders King Duncan and becomes king but is eventually killed by Macduff. The play was based on the 16th-century historian Holinshed's Chronicles.

Summary Article: Macbeth
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One of Shakespeare’s later tragedies (see tragedy), Macbeth was probably written in 1606, the year after the Gunpowder Plot (a failed attempt to blow up Parliament and with it King James I of England), and so would have been especially relevant to contemporary audiences. The play is recorded as being performed at the Globe Theatre in 1611, although it is probable that it was first performed sometime before then. It was not published until the First Folio of 1623. As a play about Scottish kingship, it may have been written to please King James who was also James VI of Scotland, and who claimed Duncan as one of his ancestors. James was particularly interested in the evils of witchcraft and himself author of a work on demonology. He was also patron of Shakespeare’s company of actors the King's Men. The principal source for the play was Holinshed's Chronicles and the character of Macbeth was based on a historical figure, the King of Scotland from 1040 to 1057. Like Shakespeare’s creation, the real Macbeth seized the crown after murdering Duncan whose family made several unsuccessful attempts to regain the thrown. The play explores themes of evil and witchcraft, suspicion and mistrust, and the supernatural; set in 11th century Scotland, the action is fast-moving and many of the scenes take place in the dark of night. Macbeth is sometimes known as the Scottish play, especially by members of the theatrical profession. The play has traditionally been associated with bad luck, and there is a superstition in the theatre that mentioning its real name will bring misfortune.

SYNOPSIS:
Macbeth and Banquo have returned from a victorious campaign fought on behalf of Duncan, King of Scotland, and encounter three Witches. They hail Macbeth as Thane [chieftain] of Cawdor (a title he
does not yet possess) and predict that he will become King, and that Banquo will father a line of kings. When Duncan rewards his bravery in battle with the title of Thane of Cawdor, the seeds of ambition grow in Macbeth. Possessed by the idea of becoming King and encouraged by his ruthlessly ambitious wife, Lady Macbeth, he commits his first murder, killing the King who is staying with him. Macbeth is crowned King, but begins to fear that Banquo suspects him and arranges for his murder. Macbeth is haunted by Banquo’s ghost and, fearful that his crimes will be discovered, he consults the Witches again. They tell him to beware of the old King’s general, Macduff, but say that only a man not born of a woman can harm Macbeth and that he will be safe until Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane. These apparently impossible predictions restore Macbeth's confidence, but when he hears that Macduff has gone to England to join forces with the old King's son, Malcolm, he arranges for the murder of Macduff’s wife and her son. Lady Macbeth goes mad and sleepwalks and Macbeth's crimes increasingly prey on his mind. Remembering the Witches’ promises, Macbeth is unafraid at Dunsinane as Macduff’s army advances, but the soldiers camouflage themselves with branches cut from the trees of Birnam Wood so that it appears as if the woods are moving towards him. Macduff and Macbeth meet and Macduff tells him that his was not a natural birth, so that technically he was not born of a woman. Macbeth knows then that the Witches’ predictions have proved true; he is killed in combat by Macduff, and Malcolm is proclaimed king.