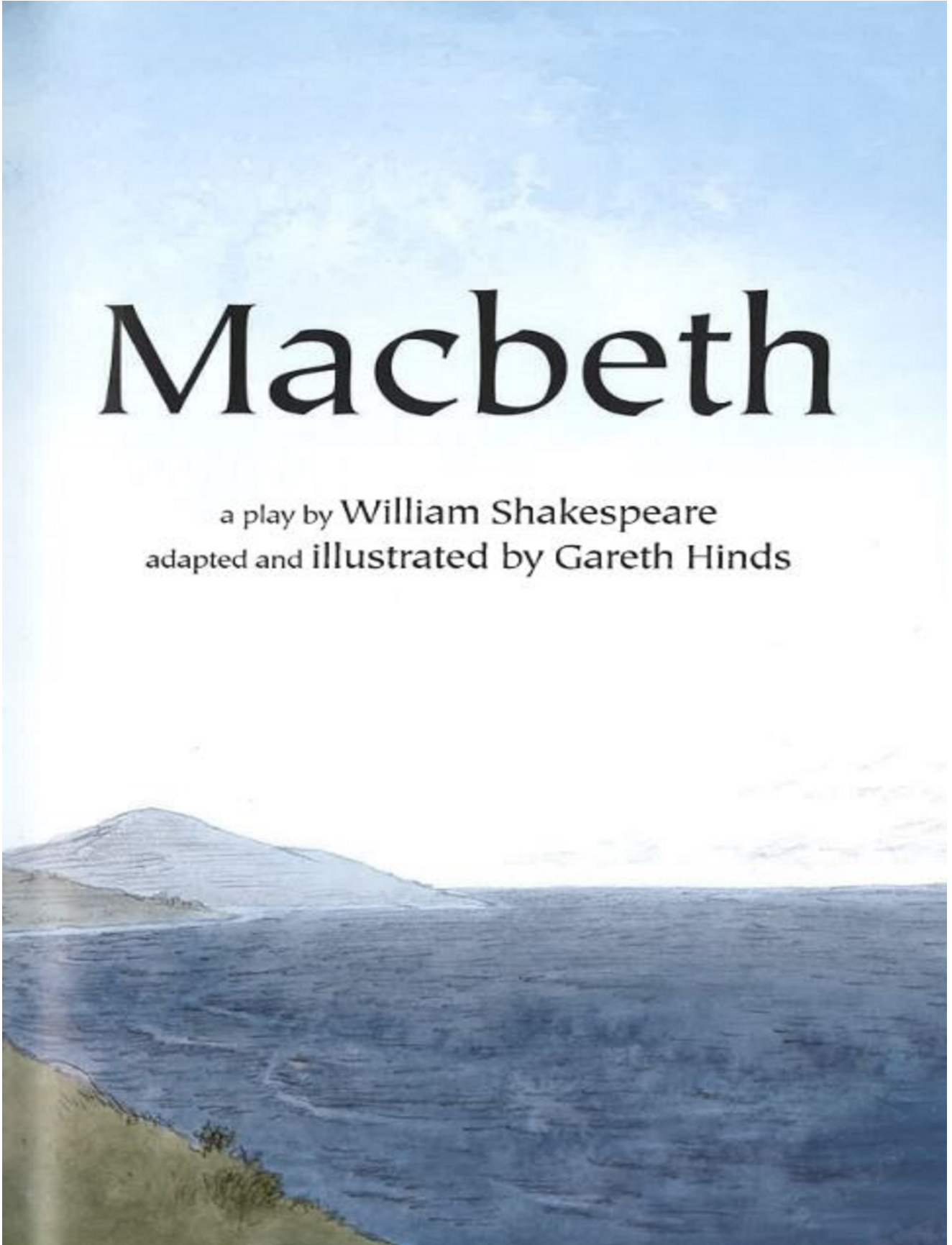# Macbeth

a play by William Shakespeare
adapted and illustrated by Gareth Hinds

ACT V: Dunsinane Castle

I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise and, upon my life, fast asleep.

How came she by that light?

She has light by her continually; 'tis her command.

Yet here's a spot.

The country near Dunsinane.

The English power is near, led on by Malcolm, his uncle Siward, and the good Macduff.

We'll meet with them near Birnam Wood, for that way are they coming.

BIRNAM WOOD

DUNSINANE

SCONE

FIFE

What does the tyrant?

Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies. Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him do call it valiant fury.

Now does he feel his secret murders sticking on his hands.

Those he commands move only out of fear, nothing in love. Now does he feel his title hang loose about him, like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief.
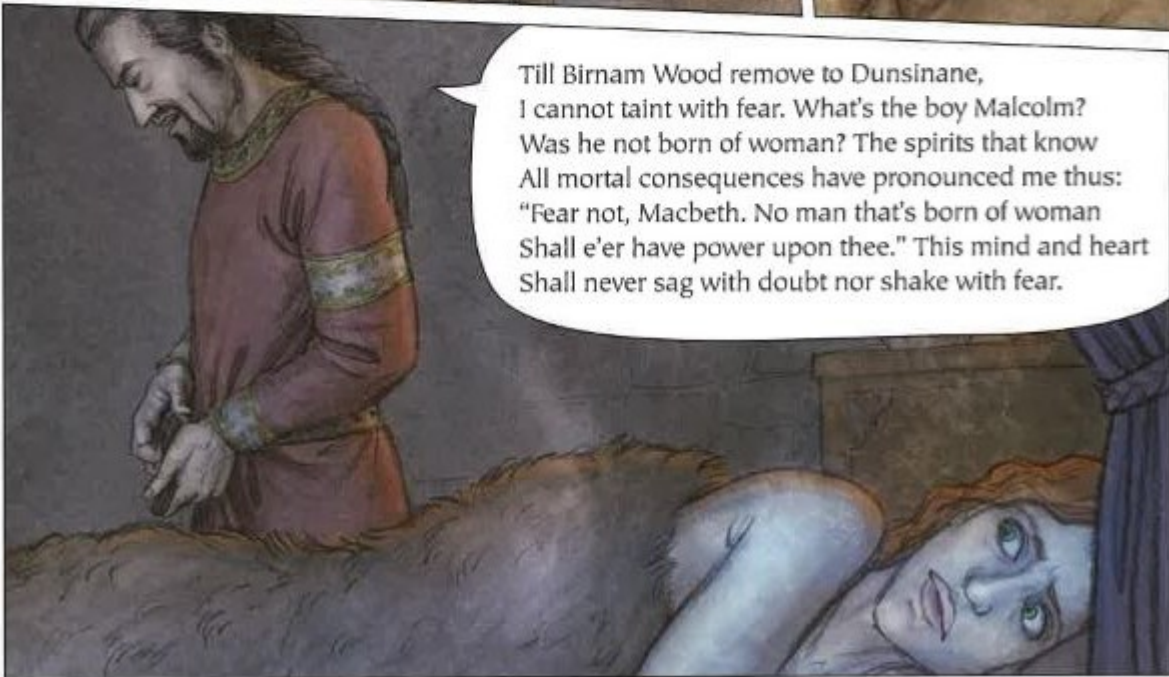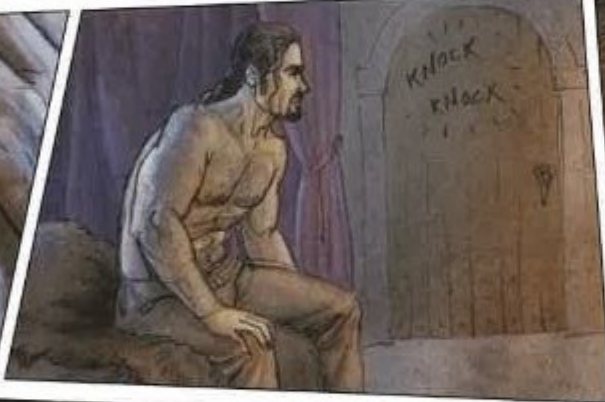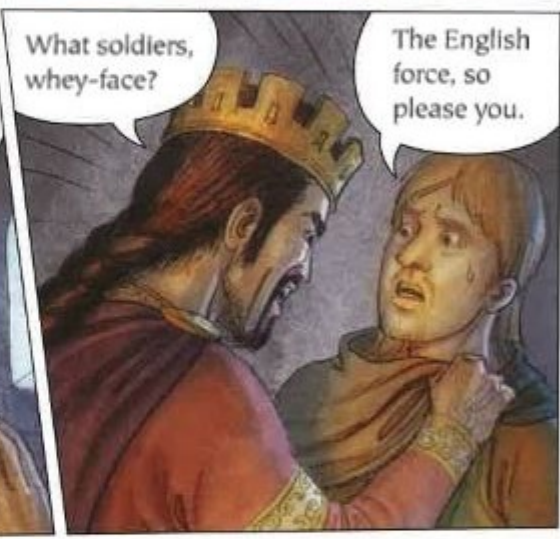
I have lived long enough. My way of life is fallen into the weeds, and that which should accompany old age, as honor, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have, but, in their stead... curses.

Seyton!!

What is your gracious pleasure?

What news more?

All is confirmed, my lord, which was reported.

I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hacked.

Give me my armor.

'Tis not needed yet.

I'll put it on.

Send out more horses. Scour the country round. Hang those that talk of fear. Give me mine armor.
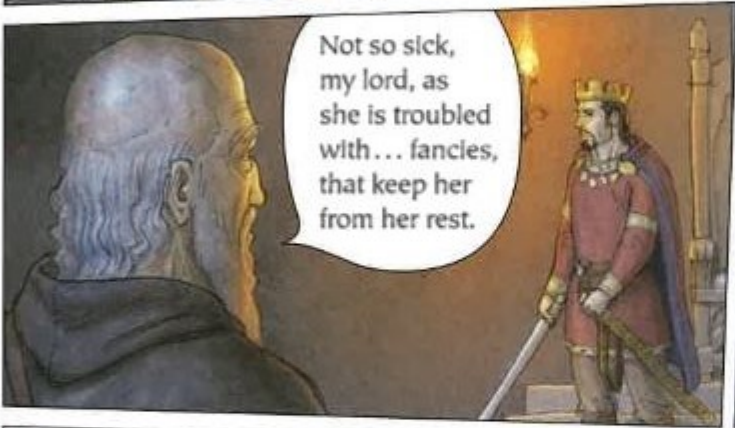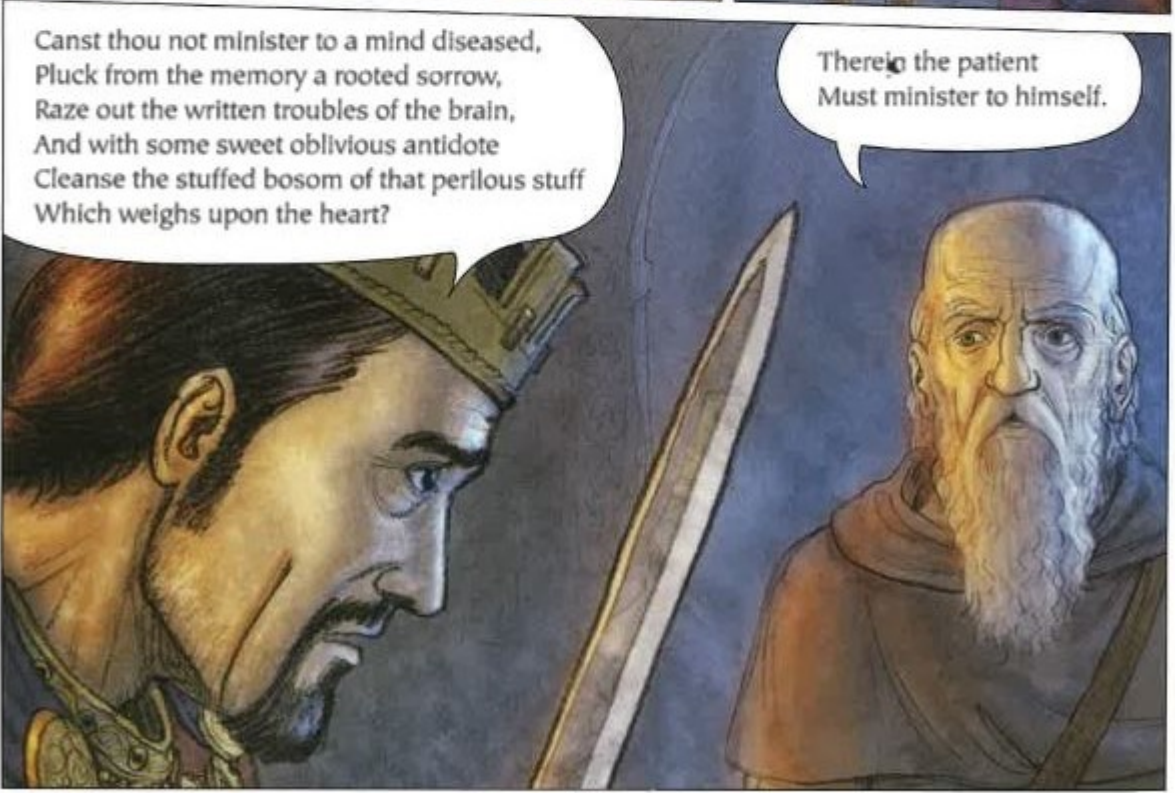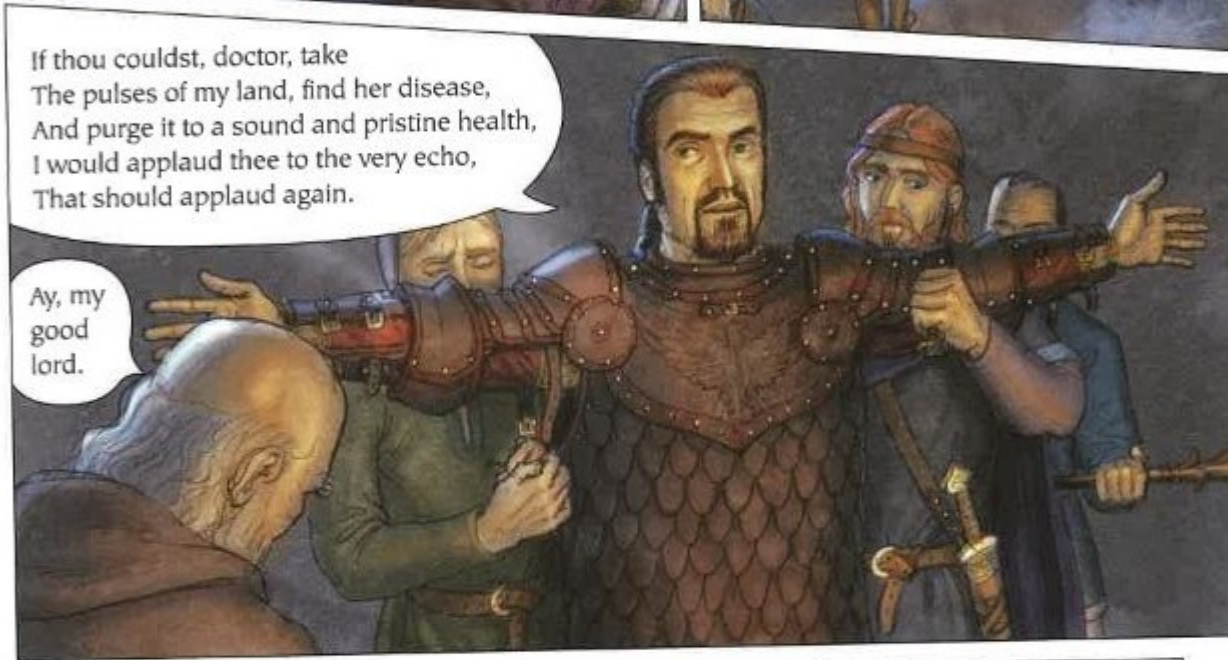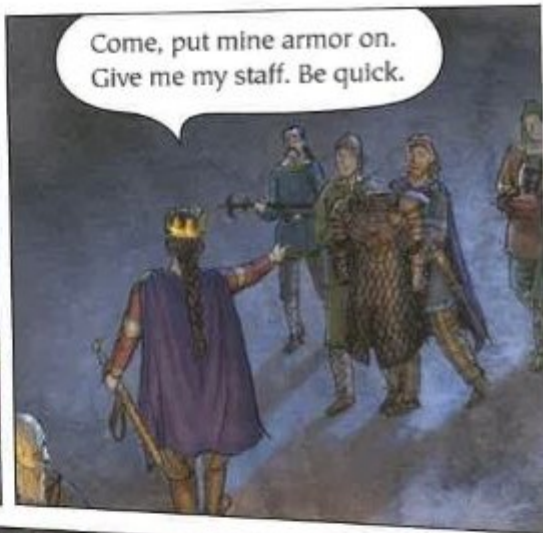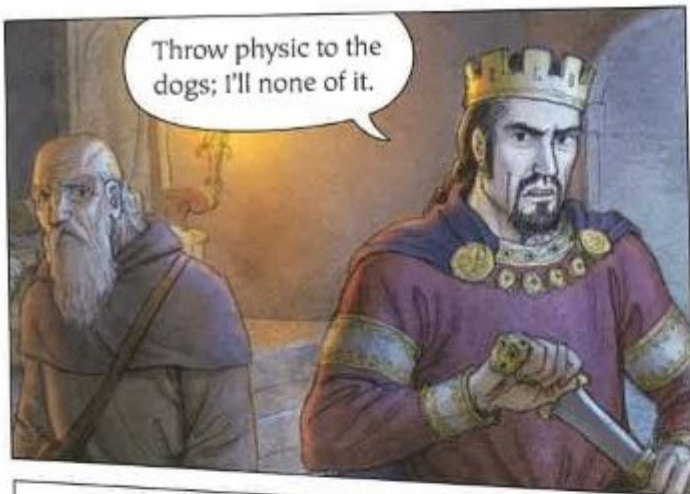
Just outside Birnam Wood
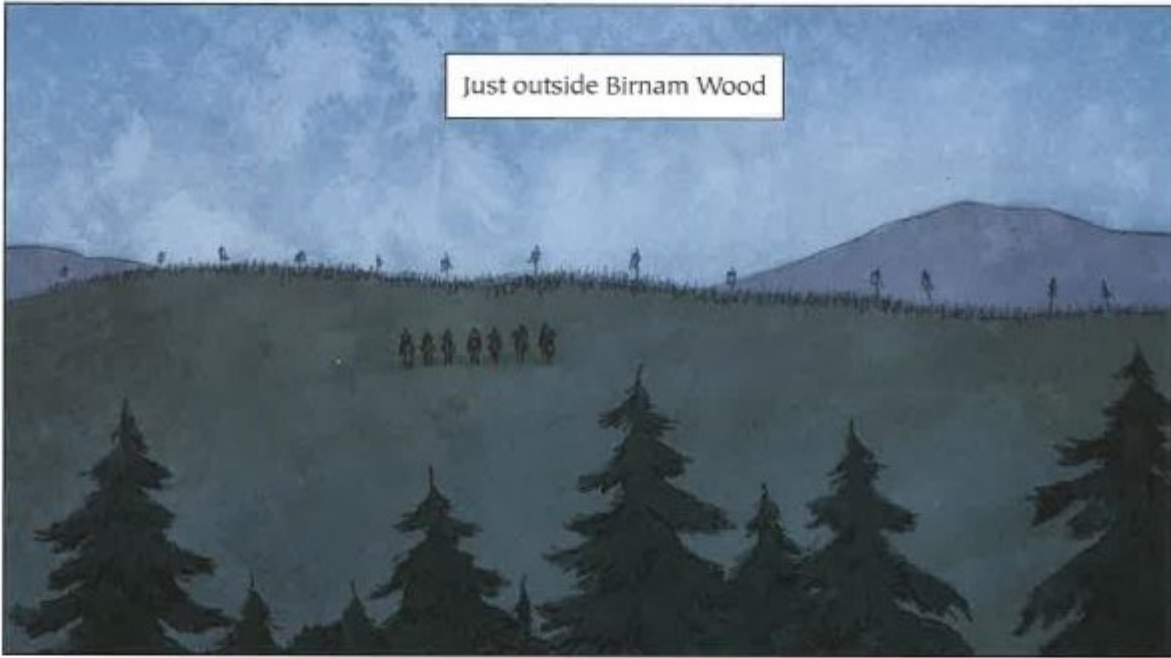
Cousins, I hope the days are near at hand that free men will be safe.

We doubt it not.

What wood is this before us?

The wood of Birnam.

Let every soldier hew him down a bough and bear it before him. Thereby shall we hide our numbers.

It shall be done.
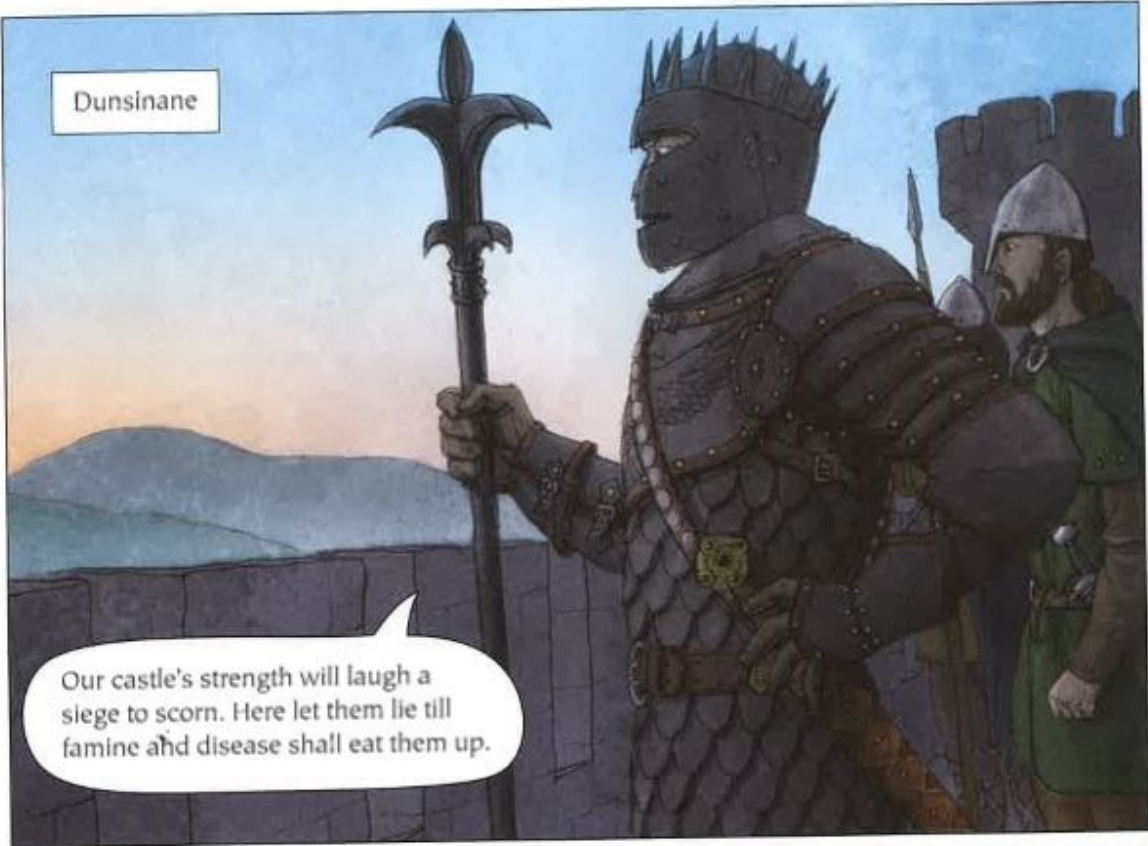
Dunsinane

Our castle's strength will laugh a siege to scorn. Here let them lie till famine and disease shall eat them up.

We'd meet them on the field, and beat them back again, if there were not so many traitors gone to swell their ranks.

EEEEEEEEEEEEE

What is that noise?

It is the cry of women, my good lord!
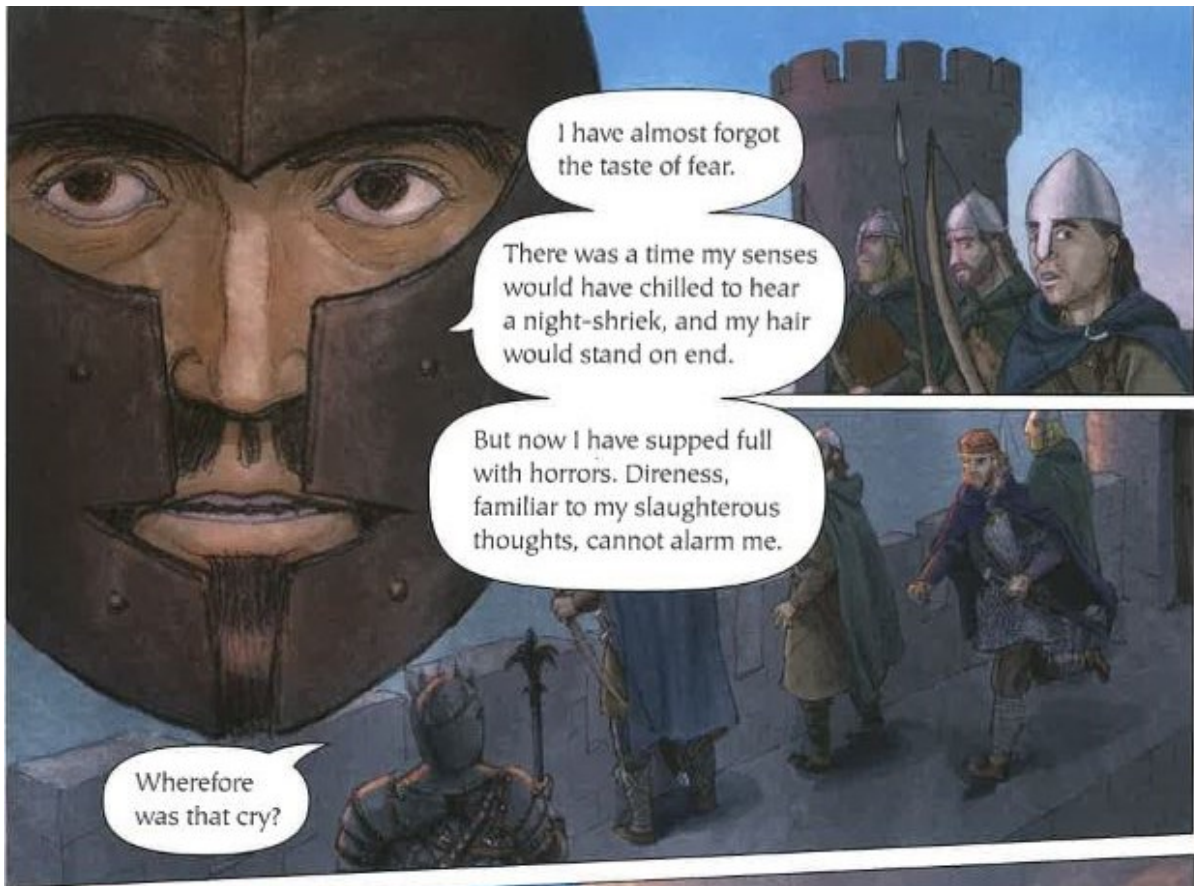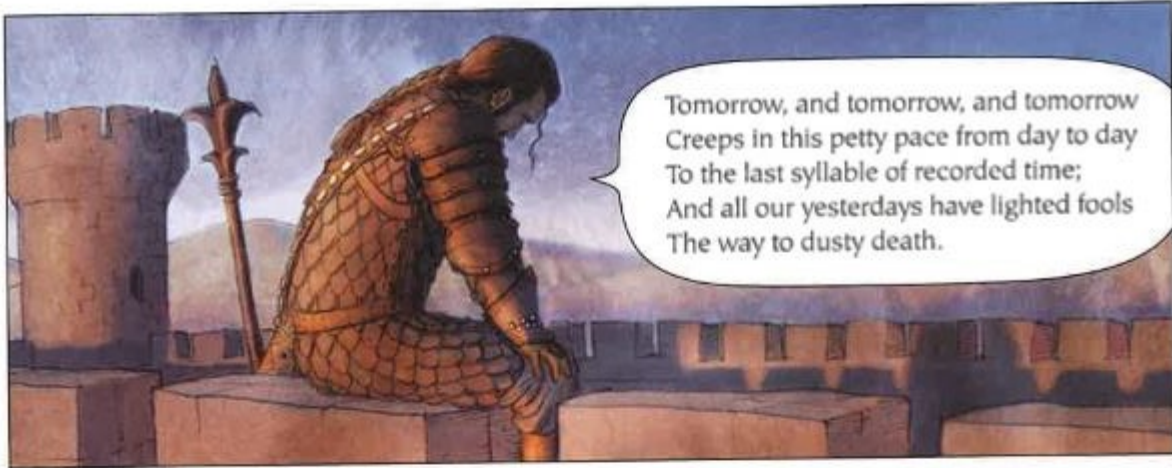
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.
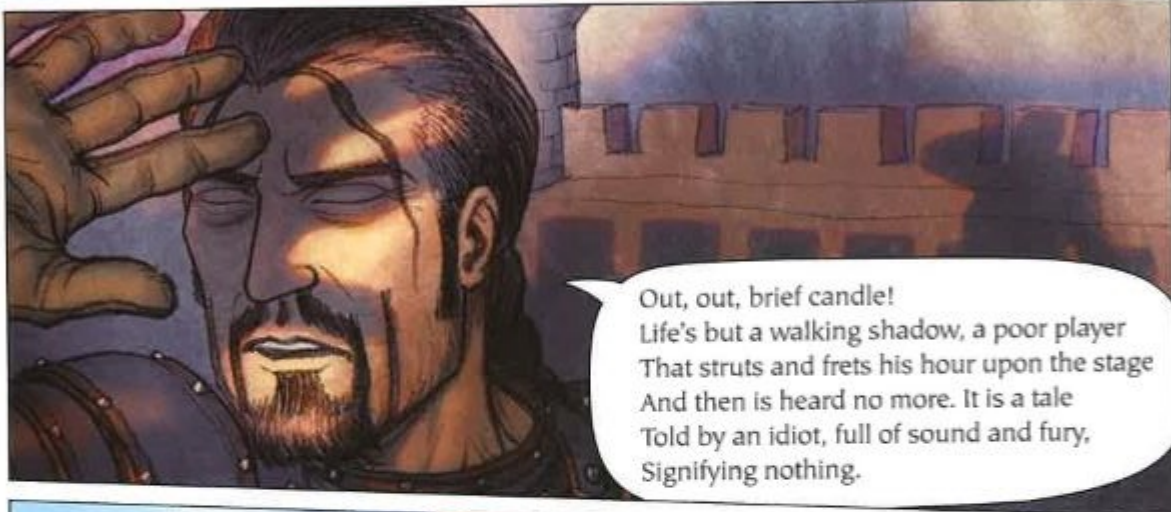
Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

Thy story, quickly.
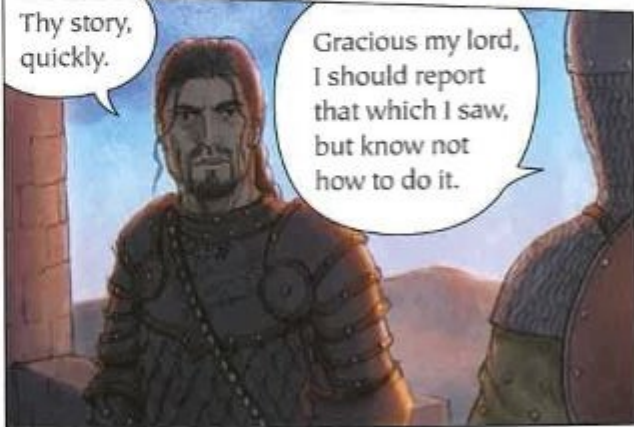
Gracious my lord, I should report that which I saw, but know not how to do it.

Well, say, sir.

As I did stand my watch upon the hill, I looked toward Birnam, and anon, methought the wood began to move.
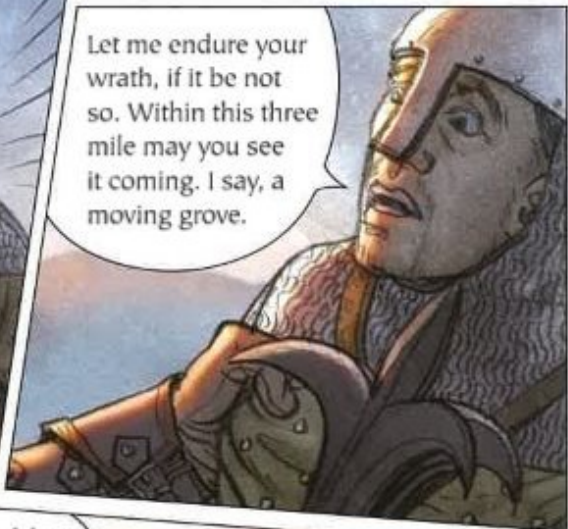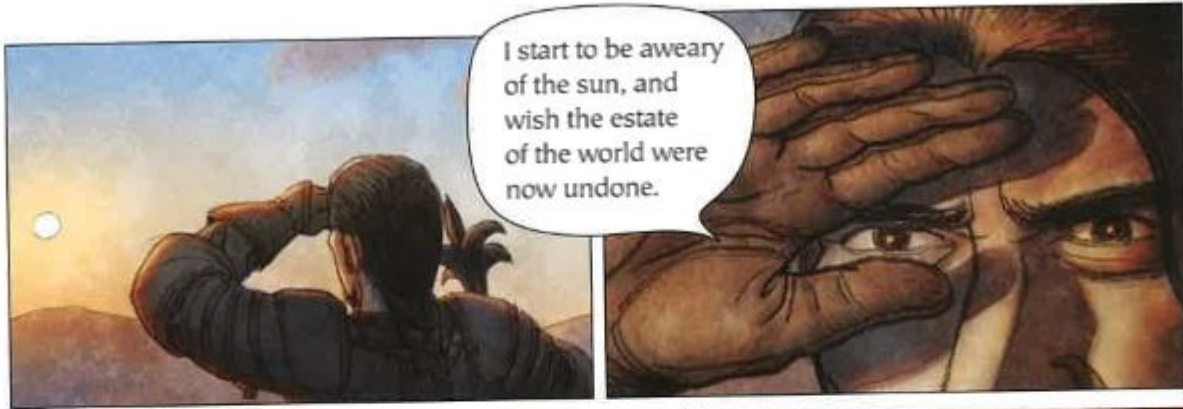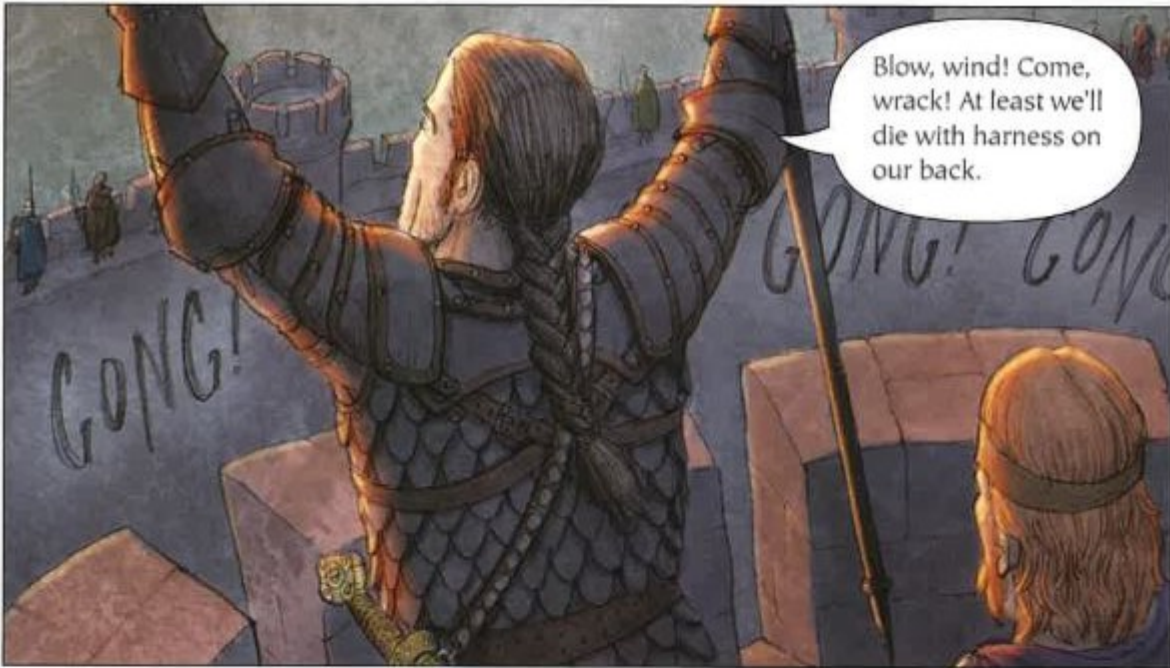
Blow, wind! Come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back.

Now near enough. Your leafy screens throw down and show like those you are!
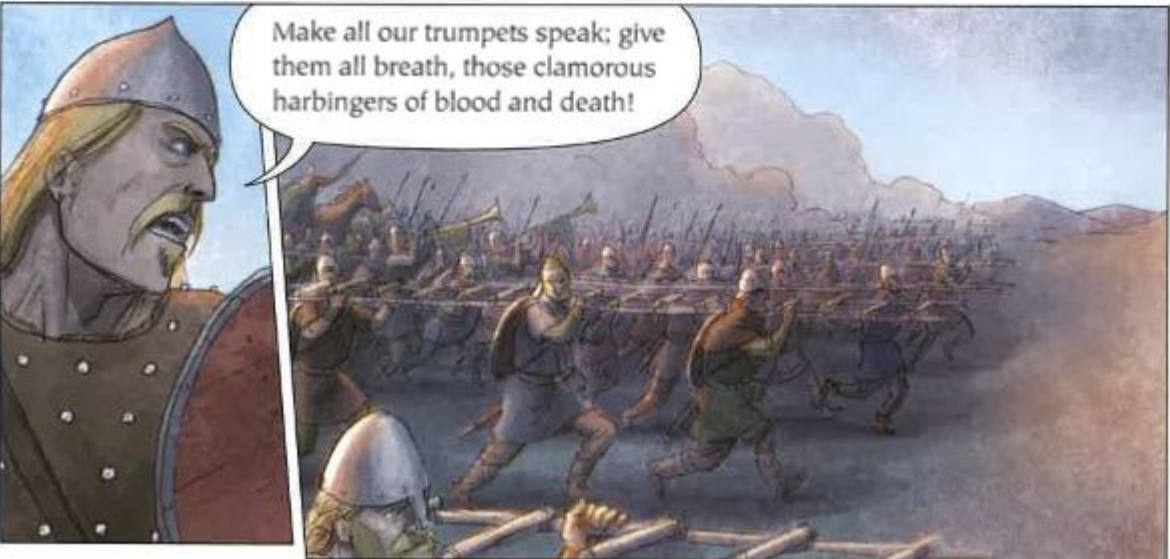
Make all our trumpets speak; give them all breath, those clamorous harbingers of blood and death!

They have tied me to a stake. I cannot fly, but, bear-like, I must fight the course.

What's he that was not born of woman? Such a one am I to fear, or none!

CRUNCH!

CRASH

CLANK

Thou wast born of woman.

I will not yield, to kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet and to be baited with the rabble's curse.

We shall be swift to recompense your loves, and make us even with you.
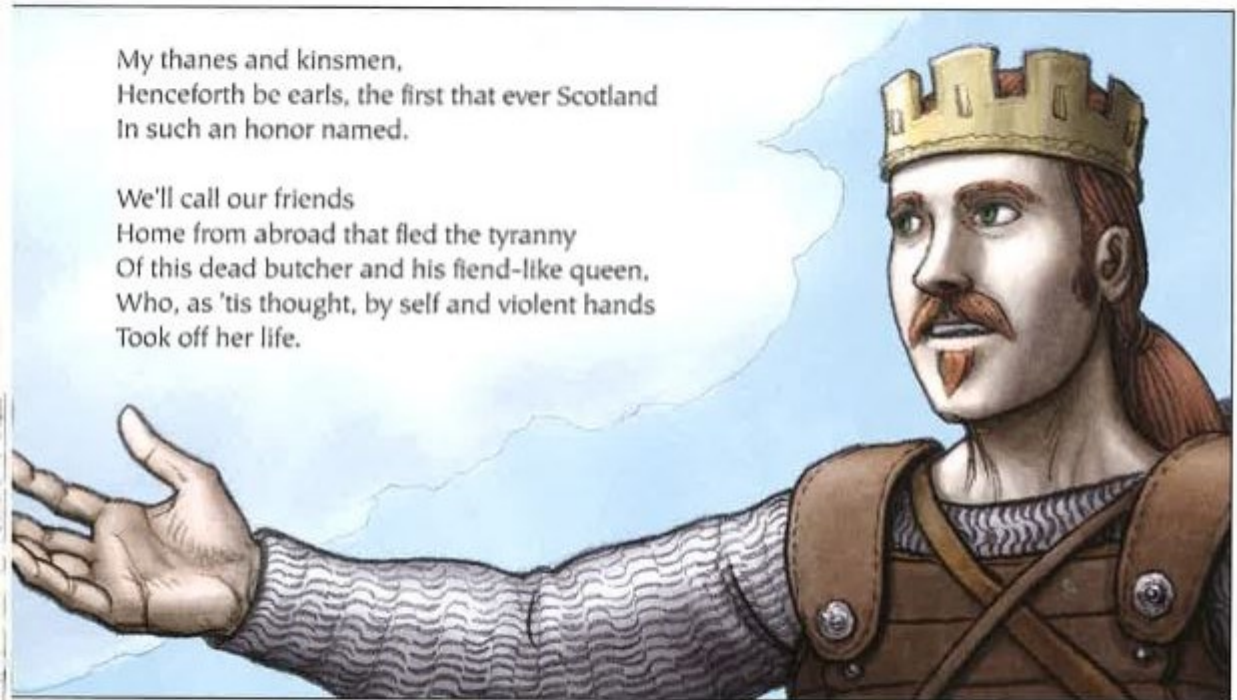
My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honor named.

We'll call our friends
Home from abroad that fled the tyranny
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life.

This, and what needful else that calls upon us, by the grace of Grace, we will perform in measure, time and place.

Hail!

Hail!

HISTORICAL NOTES WITH CONCEPT SKETCHES

Macbeth was an actual historical king of Scotland (Mac Bethad mac Findlaích) who reigned from 1040 to 1057. His story was recounted in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, which was probably Shakespeare's main source for this play. Historical scholarship was pretty weak at the time, so the accuracy of Holinshed's account is dubious, and in any case Shakespeare did not stick to it, instead exercising plenty of creative and dramatic license. According to Holinshed, the real Macbeth plotted *with* Banquo to kill Duncan, reigned peacefully for seventeen years, and was killed by Malcolm rather than Macduff. Macbeth was succeeded briefly by his stepson Lulach (missing from the play), who was then also killed by Malcolm. Malcolm became king in 1058 and reigned until 1093, when he was succeeded by his brother Donald Bain (Donalbain, or "Donald the fair"), who lost and regained his crown several times in a tumultuous reign. According to Holinshed, Banquo's son Fleance fled to Wales, and Fleance's son later returned to Scotland and became the royal steward. His descendants became the Stuart line of kings, eventually leading to King James I — who succeeded Elizabeth I and was probably Shakespeare's patron at the time he wrote *Macbeth*. Again, that's according to Holinshed. More recent scholars have made a pretty solid case that Banquo and Fleance are actually fictional characters.

Despite these historical inaccuracies, we can be fairly certain that Macbeth was a real person who lived at a specific time, so I felt I should keep him in 11th-century Scotland and depict the setting in a more or less historically accurate fashion. We don't have much archaeological evidence to pinpoint differences between the dress or habits of the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries, or in Scotland versus Scandinavia. But it's generally agreed that most of the Scottish stereotypes we know today — kilts, claymores, bagpipes, the tartan patterns we call plaid, and so on — didn't arrive until the 14th century (though there were some primitive tartan patterns used at least as far back as the eighth century BCE).

Most surprising to me was the fact that castles were not introduced into the British Isles until the Norman invasion of 1066 — nine years after the historical Macbeth died. So when Shakespeare repeatedly set scenes in "so-and-so's castle," he may have been unaware of the history, using the word very loosely, or (most likely) imagining a rather later period of Scottish history. This is probably also an example of how little regard was given to historical accuracy in the Elizabethan theatre. Generally there was little or no attempt made to get the period right; it was simply a matter of dressing the actors in cast-off court clothes appropriate to their character's rank.

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After weighing the various options, I decided that the best visual compromise, to respect both Shakespeare's text and the historical events, was to draw the setting of my adaptation as roughly 12th century.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

In my other adaptations, I've gone to great lengths to preserve Shakespeare's verse in the original iambic pentameter. In this play, however, the lines seem to read better as prose, so I took out the line breaks for most passages. There's still an iambic rhythm driving the lines, but I think they flow better without the line breaks to trip over (and unlike in *Romeo and Juliet*, there are almost no rhyming couplets to preserve). I also removed many of the contractions Shakespeare used to indicate when part of a word doesn't get its own syllable (for example, he would write *o'er* to turn *over* into a one-syllable word—you could say he was cheating). I believe removing the contractions makes it easier to read without sacrificing the power of Shakespeare's writing.

As with my previous adaptations, I've had to remove a fair amount of material from the original play in order to keep the script to a good length for a graphic novel and make the speeches short enough to fit inside comic panels. I try to do this in a way that respects the text and preserves the essential elements of the play. However, a lot of good material did end up on the cutting-room floor, so I highly recommend reading the unabridged play.

In addition to cutting material, I have occasionally substituted a more modern word for an archaic one, when I could do so without disrupting the poetic meter or diminishing the richness of Shakespeare's language. But because meeting both those criteria is not easy, I've left quite a few archaic words in place. Here's one example of what I mean:

In act 5, scene 5, Macbeth exclaims, "Blow, wind! Come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back." *Harness* in this context means armor. Both words have the same number of syllables, so it would be easy to substitute *armor* for *harness* without breaking the meter. But *harness* has other meanings, and if we consider the more common sense of the word (a device to connect an animal to a plow or vehicle), then the phrase "die with harness on our backs" has a powerful extra layer of meaning in a play about fate versus free will. It would also be more colloquial to change Macbeth's royal *we* to *I*, but isn't it more interesting that he could be saying we *all* die with metaphorical harness on our backs? This rich use of language is a big part of why Shakespeare rocks so hard—I mean, is so beloved by scholars.

PAGE-BY-PAGE NOTES

Pages vi–2:

The witches are drawn from my imagination and are not intended to be historically accurate. I wanted one hideous-looking example of a "classic" witch with warts and all, one earth-mother/fertility-goddess type of witch, and one decidedly non-Scottish witch. The witches call themselves "posters" (that is, rapid travelers) "of the sea and land," so I think they must have some power of flight, but I didn't want to show them actually flying because that seemed to depart from historical realism too early in the story. I decided to suggest that they transform into crows in the interval between two panels.

Throughout the book, I use black speech balloons to signify that a character is dwelling on, calling on, or channeling dark forces.

Page 3:

Historically it doesn't seem Duncan was any less of a hard-living, hard-fighting Scotsman than any of his thanes, or noblemen, but Shakespeare made him a very pure figure, so I gave him white hair and robes. However, on page 7, he appears haunted by dark shadows, a visual theme that you may notice I use frequently in the book. See how many creepy shadows you can find.

Page 8:

Standing stones with pagan symbols are common in the British Isles. The eye I've drawn on the stone isn't an authentic Wiccan symbol, but eye symbols do show up in many pagan traditions around the world.

Page 10:

Some of the early Scottish tribesmen were known as Picts because they adorned themselves with body paint or tattoos. While popular folklore has them painting themselves with bright-blue woad, most of my research suggests that it was more likely they were tattooed with dark metallic pigments, so I gave Banquo a swirly permanent tattoo in a dark metallic color.

The witches are wearing the symbols of the mythical Fates—a spindle for spinning the thread of life, a rod or tape for measuring the length of the thread, and a pair of shears to snip it. (The rod would have been more traditional than the tape, but I had already given them a stick that they pass around among them as a walking staff, stirring

stick, and flute, so I gave the African witch a measuring tape she could wear around her neck.)

The African witch also wears the skull of an impala (an African antelope), while the red-headed witch wears the skull and fleece of a ram.

The one genuine occult symbol I did use several times is the pentacle (usually a five-pointed star inside a circle), which indicates that the witches are summoning dark, otherworldly forces.

Page 15:

It's not easy to keep all the thanes, or noblemen, straight in this play, especially as Shakespeare barely mentions their names. I added the line "Ross and Angus" here to help readers identify the characters.

Chains of office, like the one Ross gives Macbeth here, have been a fairly common way of denoting noble rank from the Middle Ages all the way up to the present. There aren't many good surviving examples from the 11th or 12th centuries, so I'm not sure all the ones I've drawn are completely accurate, but it's likely Macbeth's new rank would have been signified by a fancy chain of some sort, and I've based my designs on examples from slightly later periods of history.

Page 20:

In 11th-century Scotland it was *not* commonly accepted practice for a king to name his heir. Usually when the king died, the nobles chose the next king (ostensibly according to merit). So actually Duncan naming Malcom as his heir is a bigger part of Macbeth's motivation than it may at first seem. He perceives that Duncan is making an unprecedented power grab, thus greatly reducing the chances of Macbeth rising to the crown "without his stir" (as is his hope on page 18).

Page 21:

I've drawn Macbeth's castle at Inverness as an early transitional type — a motte-and-bailey fort rebuilt in stone, relatively small and simple, lacking glazed windows or elaborate defenses. For staging reasons, I've given it a more complicated interior layout than would have been common in most early castles. This is mainly because I wanted there to be more places where one or two people could walk around by themselves (to plot murder, for instance!). In a typical castle of this type, there would be only a few rooms and no corridors, so privacy would be almost nonexistent.

Page 35:

I thought about having Lady Macbeth use a poison ring here to drug the wine, but I didn't want to imply that she poisons people on a regular basis, so I went with a *Princess Bride*-inspired tube. The outline of the inner panels echoes the jug, as well as the iconic stereotype of a female silhouette.

Pages 37-39:

When *Macbeth* is staged or filmed, I generally feel it's best if none of his visions are actually seen by the audience, with the possible exception of the ghost. It's scarier to see an actor's eyes fixed on empty space as he reaches for the nonexistent dagger than to see a special effect of some sort. However, in a graphic novel, where static images have to convey the scene, I think we need to see at least glimpses of what Macbeth sees. Luckily such special effects are much easier to draw than to create convincingly onstage or in film.

Similarly, turning the dagger into a shadow that leads the way out of the scene is the kind of touch I like because it works well in the medium of comics but you probably wouldn't see it onstage or in film.

Pages 46-48:

This is one of the few passages of genuine comic relief in an otherwise dark and claustrophobic play, so I wanted to give the Porter his full due. His monologue is quite long and a bit difficult in places, but it becomes much easier to read once it's broken up into logical chunks. Speaking of chunks, did you get the joke at the bottom of page 48?

Page 50 and pages 58-59:

I chose not to illustrate all the wild supernatural happenings described here, because they take away from the more realistic and psychological horror of the murder itself. Still, I like the idea that nature itself is responding to the "unnatural" deeds of Macbeth, and it's a theme that comes up again later.
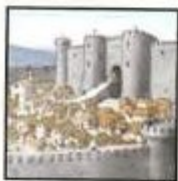
Page 61:

The royal palace at Forres is a classic 12th-century castle with typical features such as a church-like grand hall, an inner and outer curtain wall with a bustling town between them, a moat, ramp, drawbridge, and portcullis.

Page 62:

I chose to show the newly crowned King Macbeth wearing the same royal robe and crown as Duncan, but with the robe looking a bit stiff and confining on him. I wanted the crown to look like the crenellations on a castle turret, and the whole effect to subtly suggest a chess piece (without putting a big cross on his head, which seemed like the wrong image for him). Lady Macbeth's crown is more explicitly reminiscent of the crown on a queen chess piece.

Page 64:

Macbeth's fleur-de-lis scepter of office is based on several drawings of early Scottish kings but owes its finer details to a statue of Saint Margaret of Scotland in Farm Street Church, in London. In addition to being an important Scottish saint, Margaret was the wife of Malcolm, so it seemed appropriate to use her scepter as reference.

Page 70, panel 4:

The play's original line is "Come, seeling night, scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day." "Seeling" means sewing or stitching, and this is a powerful, disturbing image I didn't want the reader to miss, so I recast it to "Come night, sew up the tender eye of pitiful day."

Pages 71–74:

Shakespeare doesn't say who the third murderer in this scene is. Some directors make him a stranger; others use Seyton or one of the thanes who are loyal to Macbeth. I chose Seyton.

I've seen some very cool ways of staging this ambush, but for some reason the murderers almost never use bows, which seems to me like the obvious weapon of choice for a stealthy attack against a strong mounted foe.

Pages 75–77:

This is a subtle device, so in case you missed it, the ghostly borders indicate that this section is seen through the eyes of Banquo's spirit as he rises up from his body and seeks out Macbeth in the great hall, after which he manifests as a shadow and then as an increasingly gory ghost.

Page 87:

The pool of blood is an image that I first thought might be too literal, but as soon as I tried drawing it, I loved the way it worked.

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Page 89:

I removed from this scene the appearance of the witch-goddess Hecate. Many Shakespearean scholars believe she was written in by a later playwright. I tend to agree, and more important, I don't think she adds anything to the scene.

It wasn't until I decided to illustrate the ingredients of the witches' potion in their entirety that I noticed "witch's mummy" was an ingredient in the spell. Pretty dramatic, in the midst of a bunch of animal parts! I decided the witch would be mummified in a cross-legged position, as though she had died while performing some meditative ritual.

Page 92:

The first apparition is described by Shakespeare as an "armed head." Usually scholars and directors interpret this as "armored," that is, wearing a helmet, but I tried to picture how a disembodied head might actually be *armed*. This crown of daggers is what popped into

my mind. Although the head is almost totally fleshless, the jaw shape and facial hair are suggestive of Macduff.

Pages 98–99:

I cut much of the scene between Lady Macduff and her son. In the original, they have a rather charming conversation, which seems intended to make the reader fond of them (especially the kid) before they are murdered. This is a clever device, but I don't think getting to know the two of them is actually necessary to feel the horror of their murder. The best part of their conversation is as follows:

> Son: And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?
>
> Lady Macduff: Every one.
>
> Son: Who must hang them?
>
> Lady Macduff: Why, the honest men.
>
> Son: Then the liars and swearers are fools,
> for there are liars and swearers enough to beat
> the honest men and hang up them.

Ross also appears in the original scene, but I removed him because he delivers no important information except to remind us that Macduff has fled the country. He does have an interesting interaction with Lady Macduff at the end of the conversation, in which it's hinted that they may be attracted to each other, but that possibility has no bearing on the plot.

Page 100:

The building shown here is Westminster Hall, the only part of the Westminster complex that dates back to the original palace built by

him, but I (and many directors) have chosen to keep him within the castle walls. Some directors have Macbeth's henchmen desert him entirely and lay the castle open with no resistance. I preferred to have a large, but brief, battle. When Macbeth says Dunsinane will "laugh a seige to scorn," he is not taking into account that his foes are so numerous and his allies so demoralized that the castle can be swarmed and taken with little resistance.

Where, then, would he make his stand? I like the idea that a combination of grandiose, fatalistic, cowardly, and tactical impulses would have him defending the top of the tallest tower against all comers — so I placed him on the turret as a kind of extreme "king of the hill," if you will.

Page 115:

If you're interested in shadow imagery, here is Shakespeare's ultimate statement on the subject: "Life's but a walking shadow." He may have been referring to Plato's classic philosophical metaphor of the firelit cave, suggesting that everything in the world is a shadow of a more perfect, abstract, *ideal* form.

Page 134:

I removed the final two lines of the play, because I've always been bothered by such a dark story ending on an awkward rhyme and the word *Scone*. But now I'll end with those lines, in an attempt to make Shakespeare's ghost happy.

So, thanks to all at once and to each one, whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone!