

THE TRUE NORWEGIAN BLACKBOX MANIFESTO

Status quo

It is known that the blackbox larps of today are still caught in a juvenile and immature state. The blackbox larps of today are created because the blackbox is “cool”.

And it is known that the blackbox larps of today would rather impose a specific world view on their players than leave room for interpretation. The blackbox larps of today hold little artistic merit.

And it is known that the blackbox larps of today are vessels for the story of the author, not spaces for players to tell their own. The blackbox larps of today are cages and shackles.

And it is also known that the blackbox larps of today do not use the blackbox. The blackbox larps of today could be moved into any room and nothing of essence would be lost.

The exceptions to this are exceptions

Without ideals, the blackbox will never be more than a passing trend

Without ideals, nothing will be lost when the blackbox is forgotten

Without ideals, nothing forces a larp into the blackbox

Without ideals, the blackbox serves no purpose

And so, to rescue blackbox larp I put forward these nine simple rules:

1. True blackbox design always starts with a question, and never gives an answer
2. True blackbox is never explicit
If there is nothing to interpret all thinking was finished before the larp had even begun
3. True blackbox actively confronts and challenges the player
If there is no reflection, there is nothing of consequence and nothing was put at stake
4. True blackbox allows nothing to be a direct representation of the theme of the larp
If the theme is death, nothing is allowed to be death
5. True blackbox allows no concept to be represented by more than one thing
An hourglass running out of sand and fading lights cannot both be the passing of time
6. True blackbox brings nothing into the empty space without reason
The complexity of the story should rise from the simplicity of its tools
7. True blackbox is designed for player agency not pretty pictures
8. True blackbox never spends more time on workshops than runtime
9. True blackbox is never designed for an audience

Anything that does not adhere to these rules is a chamber larp in a blackbox, not a true blackbox larp

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With opposition, challenges, input, and disagreement from Carl Nordblom, Erik Aarebrot, Jaakko Stenros, and Nina Runa Essendrop.
Online version: emptiest.space/manifesto