

Operation Black Antler: A Briefing

UNTIL 28TH MAY 2016

"You can say the wrong thing" – William Drew offers a spoiler-free preparation document for interactive performance Operation Black Antler, part of the Brighton Festival.

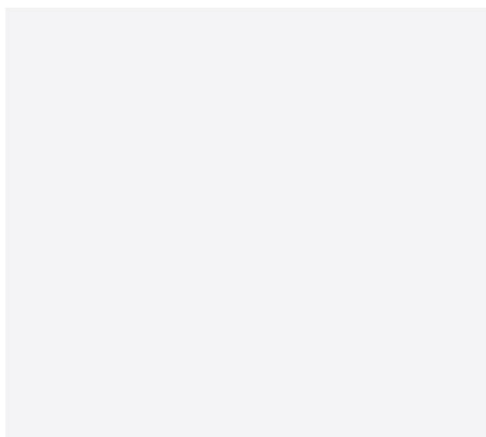
WILLIAM DREW



Operation Black Antler at Brighton Festival. Photo: John Hunter.

Briefing notes (no spoilers)

Here's what you need to know about Operation Black Antler:



It's a collaboration between Blast Theory and Hydrocracker

It was co-commissioned by the Brighton Festival

Blast Theory have been making interactive artwork for 25 years. They are based in Portslade (Brighton and Hove). They frequently now make

work that tastes the limit of new technologies before those technologies are rolled out to wider markets. Thematically, they have long had an interest in political extremism and violence motivated by political beliefs. They have made several pieces that reference the IRA.

Hydrocracker are an immersive theatre company, also based in Brighton, and an Associate company of the Brighton Dome and Festival though they started when “immersive” wasn’t a thing so they describe themselves as making “site specific theatre with a purpose”.

Operation Black Antler runs every evening Tuesday to Saturday from 7th to 28th May

If you can get a ticket and if you’re interested in work that asks more of you than sitting and watching, this is something you should really experience.

Here’s a bit more detail (still no spoilers).

The show begins when you receive a text message. This simply tells you a pub to meet outside. When you’re outside the pub, you notice there are a few other people around you doing the same thing. You are given directions to a nearby safehouse.

In the safehouse, you’re given a briefing about the undercover operation you’re about to undertake in a nearby pub.

The reason you’re going to do this pub is that there are several individuals who are considered to harbour views that might be incompatible with parliamentary democracy.

You adopt an identity for the evening and test these identities out on each other.

You are subdivided into groups, each with a specific target that you want to extract key information from.

When you’re in the pub, you won’t know who is a performer and who the other undercover agents are. You will question whether anyone there is just a regular punter.

You can say the wrong thing.

You can adopt the wrong tactics.

You can fail in your mission, at least partially.

We failed in our mission quite spectacularly but the guy at the end was very nice about it.

To call the piece immersive actually doesn't represent what it's doing. It is interactive. You have to do things, say things and pretend to harbour views that you might find distasteful. Everyone will have an entirely different experience both in terms of what happens and how they feel about what happens, how they feel about the characters they encounter and what the state's role should be in monitoring people like them.

I suspect that, like me, you will feel the need for a debrief. You'll want to share your own experience with others and to hear about what they did. For this reason, going to another pub at the end feels like an as important part of the experience as any other aspect.

The performers sometimes feel like they are launching into monologues rather than just having a chat with you in the pub. Hopefully, as the run goes on, they will settle into the kind of improvisation needed for a piece like this and let the audience do the work themselves.

I can only comment on some aspects of the show because, as mentioned above, we were quite bad at being undercover agents. I won't tell you what made us bad because that will put you at an unfair advantage. You'll have to work it out for yourself.

End of briefing



WILLIAM DREW

William Drew is a writer and games designer based in London. He makes work at the intersection between live performance and gaming as Venice as a Dolphin and an associate of Coney. As well as Exeunt, he has written for Wired UK, Rock Paper Shotgun and Unwinnable. In the past, he worked at the Royal Court Theatre and the Young Vic and he's been a script reader for the National Theatre, Hampstead and Traverse Theatres. You can find out more about his work here: <http://www.veniceasadolphin.com>