Aesthetics of Black Metal in Nordic Comics

The second wave of Black Metal prominent in Norway in the 1990s has a certain aesthetic associated with it.

This aesthetic links black and white, grainy and homemade visuals from record covers, t-shirts and posters with the sound of Black Metal.

Black Metal is a form of extreme metal typified by "dark" lyrical themes, elitism, blastbeats, screeched vocals and "evil" sounding riffs.

(...)characterized by screamed high-pitched vocals, extremely rapid tempos, 'tremolo' riffs, 'trebly' guitar sound and simple production.

A few key record covers from bands in the scene became decisive for the general conception of what black metal aesthetics looks like: Darkthrone, Mayhem, Burzum, etc.

The gritty unfinished look mirrors the unfinished sonic expression of the records, merging and supporting the dark and misanthropic.

Always macabre; often with landscapes void of people or with scary looming figures.
But this particular Black Metal aesthetic style does not carry into the comics made about Black metal.

At least not in comics from the Nordic countries produced temporarily removed from the scene in the 1990s and onwards.

Finnish **Perkeren**

by Alare and Ahonen

shows black metal musicians to be misogynist and silly satanists.

In Norwegian **Fred Everli’s Pondue** the black metal guy Løtzen is ridiculed as secretly cuddly and cute.

And Norwegian **Terbjørn Lien** does not hesitate to paint black metal band Blackdeath as anything but evil and frightening.

Their choice of style supports this humorous depiction of the black metal bands in a caricatured, "cartoony" and clear choice of line and coloring.

Refusing the visual black metal aesthetics in style, line and coloring, but drawing on text characteristics used in metal:
The comics do however employ visual symbols associated with Black Metal,
but render them in a style very far away from 1990s Black Metal record covers.

One reason is because they are humor comics. Using a certain "cartoony" style to render their jokes and having strong ties with caricature.

And Black Metal from this period makes the perfect object of satire.

The seriousness, supposed evil, nihilism and explicit elitism are all elements begging to be made fun of.

Using black metal aesthetics in comics would support rather than contest the evil and the darkness.
Black metal aesthetics is notoriously illegible, both in text and image, a feature corresponding to the illegibility of their high-pitched screams and growls in the music.

(...) we should not assume that humour within the scene undermines the serious, as the serious and the humorous are closely intertwined.

A "cartoony" style connotes humor and allows the reader to understand what is going on.

And traditional black metal aesthetics vehemently and deliberately deconstruct symbols.
References

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Jüngst, Heike E. 2010. *Information Comics: knowledge transfer in a popular format*. Frankfurt am Main; New York : Peter Lang


