



# Kates, Puds, & Socialism

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What Disney's "*Brink!*" taught our childhood selves  
about class solidarity.

It's the late nineties. My younger brother and I unroll a blue and white checkered cloth in the living room. We balance grease-splotted paper plates of pizza and oversize tumblers of Dr. Pepper, careful not to spill anything on the carpet before we plop down onto the safety of the "picnic blanket." Seemingly identical to any other Friday night of watching the latest Disney Channel Original Movie, this one is different—it's my first time checking out the Cali bro, smooth move masterpiece, *Brink!* And while I won't discount for a second the importance of Brink's half-pipe swagger, swoon-worthy hair, and perfectly lived-in t-shirts on my sexual awakening, the more lasting effect here was some light radicalization. That's right, I was about to take the first step in a long journey to grasping the cruel nature of capitalism. To understand the societal microcosm that is *Brink!*, we have to set the scene.

Andy "Brink" Brinker is a cool (but not too cool) teen living in middle-class West Coast Americana. He cleans his room, waits for the bus to school, and wants nothing more than to hit the pit and try to land a 540 with his ragtag crew of skater pals, the Soul Skaters. On the other side of the proverbial tracks, there's Team XBladz, a rival team of rich kids with a sponsorship deal and a proclivity for harassment. On the outset, we're be a classic battle of the haves vs. have-nots as they repeatedly



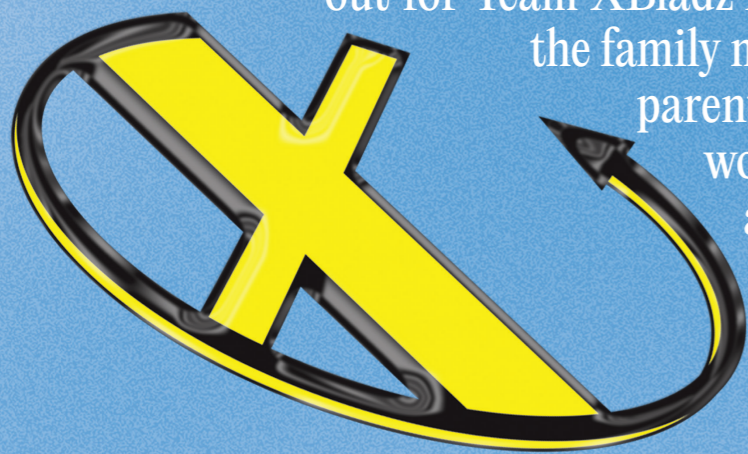
challenging each other on campus and at the skatepark over who's got the moves. But below the surface, there's a more nefarious conflict brewing: a class struggle. While the Soul Skaters undoubtedly embody the proletariat (the working class), the bourgeoisie (ruling class) isn't necessarily personified by Team XBladz. As much as evil haircuts, villainous entry music, and threats like "it's open season on your butts" suggest, Val and his XBladz crew are not the Soul Skaters' real enemies. If we zoom out just slightly, we can see a manifestation of Karl Marx's notion of false consciousness, the myriad ways the working class is misled to believe the social conditions are different than they actually are. So while Brink is at first under the impression that Val is the true villain, the real enemy is capitalism, a force that holds power over every skater in the film. This is especially evident through Team XBladz coach, Jimmy, a snake of a man with stacks of cash and any skater willing to sell the 24/7. With claims of worth of merchandise (yeah, okay, sure) and promises to GO BIG, Jimmy isn't just paying the newest gear ready for to fly the XBladz colors and rights to their skating. moving \$10M



XBladz. He's acting as their corporate overlord, controlling the labor of and Val with equal measure. In a just world, the Soul Skaters and Team would move beyond false consciousness and organize under principles of class solidarity, ultimately seizing control of their labor by overthrowing Jimmy and his fellow bourgeoisie. ○ Alas, Marxist revolutions don't typically leave much space for inline skating stunts and Disney-appropriate one-liners, so we're left to watch Brink learn important lessons like the impossibility of class mobility and the false nature of meritocracy as he sells his soul to hustle culture in an attempt to "have it all." And while the American dream is often posited like a grand notion, Brink isn't trying to bootstrap his way to riches; he simply wants a baseline existence of health, leisure, and the ability to spend time with his loved ones. ○ Fantasies of leisure be damned, Brink lives somewhere in unspecified America, and the complete absence of a social safety net is actually the driver of the entire plot. In a more socialist society, the collective wealth (of Jimmy and his fellow bougies) would be harnessed to make sure everyone's basic needs are met. Brink wouldn't have had to sell



Brink more XBladz and organize



out for Team XBladz in a futile attempt to pay the family medical bills or help his parents, one of whom is out of work after a construction accident, make their mortgage payments.

With even the most basic socialist systems — like universal healthcare and stronger unions — at play, Brink would have a shot at a real childhood. ○ But unfortunately, capitalism deprives Brink (and us!) of the freedom to pursue what really matters. In many ways, Brink is stuck in a Disney-fied lose-lose situation. He loses his sanity by packing his schedule with a second job at dog groomer Pup 'N Suds. He loses his sense of self by joining Team XBladz, and loses his friends and any remaining camaraderie by competing with



them. He would lose even more by choosing to simply not participate in the capitalist machine at all — if he didn't at least attempt to help his family, he would lose his humanity. ○ No one understands this more than Brink's dad,

Ralph. At the beginning of the movie, he's portrayed as a classic killjoy dad stereotype, making baloney sandwiches while ranting about "kids these days" and his disapproval of Brink's skating obsession. But by the time Brink has taken his own ride on the downhill course that is capitalism, he and Ralph are able to relate on a new level. In a heart-to-heart in the family garage, they bond over the lure of the American dream and the danger of labor as the sole means of identity. Ralph admits that after getting injured and being forced to go on disability, he felt lost without the ties to his capitalist worth. He used to define himself by his job title but came to learn that a construction foreman is what he does, not who he is. ○