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FRIDAY, AUGUST 14, 2009

FILM / SPORTS **Utopia Is a Matter of Taste: Welcome to Skatopia.**

POSTED BY JANE "THE INTERN" CARLEN ON FRI, AUG 14, 2009 AT 7:18 PM

If I took one thing from a preview screening of *Skatopia: 88 Acres of Anarchy* at Plan B this week, it's this: When it comes to utopia, there's a fine line between a place where everyone lives in blissful harmony, and one that's perfect to you. Generally, the latter type is abhorrent to everyone else.

This isn't news. I believe Plato first got this distinction down on paper, or clay, or whatever it was. When it comes to a ruling class, we're better off with philosophers than warriors, merchants, or slaves.

Brewce Martin, the founder of Skatopia, an 88-acre skate park in the boonies of Ohio, thinks we're better off with skateboarders. He founded Skatopia as a haven for skaters. It's unclear whether his ultimate goal is to maintain this pocket of anarchy, or fashion the world in his image (not that it necessarily matters, since he's always teetering on the brink of bankruptcy).

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The movie screens again this weekend at Seattle's [Skateboard Film Festival](#). If you can't make it, but want to know more, take the jump.

Given the history of skateboarders being shooed out of public spaces, Martin's passion to build a skaters' commune is understandable—noble, even. Martin attended city council meetings at the age of 12 to push for public skate facilities, and the fact that Skatopia has been around since 1995 is a testament to his energy, persuasiveness, and sheer force of will. He commands a small band of young wanderers and some free-thinking professionals. Together, they maintain and expand the park using concrete, rebar, and borrowed money. (I can't help but take this as a reminder of how easy it was to build things in the free-flowing credit markets of America's recent past. Yet even now, with Martin out since June due to a serious injury, Skatopia lives.)

The place is more than ramps and peanut bowls. It's like a counselor-less summer camp, where boys skate all day, drink, total cars, play with dogs, invite strippers over, and sometimes do chores. Whether or not you consider this a utopia is just a matter of taste.

Skatopian anarchy, led by Martin, is like the rule of an aggressive but friendly alpha-dog: The pack follows his lead in exchange for room, beer, and a place to skate freely. Their submission is voluntary, but there's no question that Martin's word goes, under threat of kick in the face. Even when he's jailed for a couple months for fighting, he delivers orders through his son, Brandon. His zeal is laudable, but his belligerence and philandering ways might make you cringe.

The park's primary money-maker is Bowl Bash, an annual skate festival. It's free to get in, but you have to cough up cash, booze, or be coerced to buy Skatopia merchandise to get out. Admittedly, Martin is selling out the Skatopia name to keep it going. He laments that he was *this* close to getting a Skatopia line at PacSun (i.e. the local mall), and his associate says he prefers to think of selling out as their best way of "not giving up."

Does selling the name mean selling out the idea? Not necessarily. The way Martin struts around, he makes it seem like preaching anarchy one minute and barking orders the next is the most anarchic thing you can do—adhering neither to a set order, nor a lack of it. If that's what you like, then be glad there's a place for you.



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