

*A centralized conversation on cinematic techniques and theming in The Social Network (2010). 600-word count limit.*

Despite its title, *The Social Network* (2010) isn't about Facebook. It's a story about the loneliness of power and the betrayal of a best friend. It's a Shakespearean tragedy, but instead of Caesar getting stabbed by Brutus, it's Eduardo Saverin's (Andrew Garfield) gangly earnestness getting murked by a business contract and misguided belief in his friend, Mark Zuckerberg (Jesse Eisenberg).

Director David Fincher shirks exacting historical accuracy for this biographical drama, preferring to lurk instead in the fuzzier realm of verisimilitude. At Harvard, it's almost always nighttime or a greyish daytime, and cinematographer Jeff Cronenworth desaturates the hallowed red brick to stifling effect. In murky dorm rooms, it's Zuckerberg who proves to be the unlikely lightning bolt, unblinking in the harsh blue light as he codes Facemash, Facebook's precursor that ranked the attractiveness of female classmates, to existence. Meanwhile, Trent Reznor's frenetic, thrumming score provides the techno heartbeat. It's no wonder that Saverin, despite his own recruitment into an elite finals club and practical misgivings, gets drawn to Zuckerberg like a moth to a particularly unstable flame.

Saverin and Zuckerberg are embroiled in a contentious lawsuit from the very beginning. But in Aaron Sorkin's screenplay, the present bitterness is constantly intercut with throwbacks to an freer friendship. Styled as part courtroom drama, part college movie, Sorkin deftly unravels the mystery of how a friendship could eventually dissipate into grim staring across an oaken table. And yet, even in the earliest stages, the friendship has been uneven. After getting dumped by his girlfriend (Rooney Mara) for acting like a man in STEM, Zuckerberg begins coding Facesmash. Saverin walks in, worried about his friend post-breakup. "I need you," says Zuckerberg, coding. "I'm here for you," says Saverin with open-faced sincerity, upon which Zuckerberg clarifies that he just needs Saverin's chess player algorithm to structure his ranking system. All the while, Zuckerberg remains fixated on his lines of code.

There are outside players for disruption, like Justin Timberlake's Sean Parker, founder of Napster, as the Silicon-bro Bacchus seducing Zuckerberg to California. But

ultimately, Fincher portrays Zuckerberg as the engineer of his lonely throne, even insinuating his involvement in planted cocaine and a police call. To get photos for Facemash, Zuckerberg hacks into Harvard network to collect student ID photos from private dormitory servers, an insidious premonition for Facebook's current controversies about selling user data.

Still, the film feels somewhat outdated on a current revisit. Sorkin's ability to write an engaging script isn't in question – *The Social Network* thrives in his rapid-fire dialogue, and a climactic “You better lawyer up, asshole” singlehandedly inspired thousands of artsy teens to consider law degrees, for better or worse. But the very nature of biography, dramatized or not, provokes comparison with the portrayed individual themselves. Eisenberg plays Zuckerberg with the fragility of an android having attained consciousness, or the sensitivity of a child in flip-flops and a bathrobe, while the living Zuckerberg infamously appeared in front of Congress and today's Facebook remains disturbingly untransparent about misinformation screening.

If you were a teen on Tumblr in 2015, you probably watched a clip in which Dan Avidan of the gaming channel The Game Grumps recounts his co-contributor Arin Hansen's dazed recollection of *The Social Network*. After ranting about how Eisenberg screwed over his best friend Spider-Man (a throwback to Garfield's star-making role), Hansen says, “I can't think of who the fuck invented Facebook. All I can think is who played the guy who invented Facebook – Who the *fuck* invented Facebook?” Not Fincher's Zuckerberg, that's for sure. But there was a betrayal involved somewhere, and that's as universal as a creation myth gets.