The Social Network

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Director: David Fincher
Starring: Jesse Eisenberg, Andrew Garfield
Runtime: 121 mins
Rating: ****

If asked to describe David Fincher’s directorial style, one word that constantly springs to mind is ambitious. Never one to shy away from a challenging storyline (Zodiac, Se7en, Fight Club), here he tries his hand at dissecting the petty playground politics of Facebook’s founders and the subsequent struggle for power in The Social Network. It’s an unusual choice for Fincher in many ways, with very little in the way of action. It is set primarily as a heavily script-driven boardroom drama crossed with a conspiracy thriller, slowly unfolding into a fascinating and absorbing character study: an insight into the mind of Mark Zuckerberg, the supposed brainchild behind the biggest Internet phenomenon of a generation.

The crux of the narrative provides the element of conspiracy; did Zuckerberg, essentially a geared-up Gordon Gekko, steal the idea for Facebook from fellow Harvard grade-A students Tyler and Cameron Winklevoss? Behind all of the hype and excitement of ‘the facebook’ (as it is originally named) lies a borderline sociopath played expertly by Jesse Eisenberg in what could have been an unsubtle, laughable caricature of a social outcast. Instead, he depicts Zuckerberg as icy, bitter, heartless and sinister (not so different from Fincher’s serial-killer characters), but a strangely sympathetic boy caught in a man’s body. In essence, he is just a loner seeking a way into the social world after being rejected from various fraternities and clubs, with no intention of turning Facebook into a potentially lucrative business.

Zuckerberg’s quest for social acceptance in creating a selfdescribed “cool” website ultimately isolates himself further. His best and only friend Eduardo Saverin (played by Andrew Garfield) abandons him when
he discovers that Zuckerberg has found a new best friend in the form of Napster founder Sean Parker (Justin Timberlake), and is then secretly ousted from his position in the company. An inherent vulnerable streak inside Zuckerberg leaves him open to manipulation, and Parker, a suave and stylish entrepreneur who appeals to all of Zuckerberg’s most corruptible instincts, proves to be this catalyst. Not that Eisenberg gives anything away, with a permanently set stone-faced expression that serves as a mask to shield his inner torment and self-loathing.

Through drawing out themes of loyalty, jealousy and greed, Fincher allows an air of pessimism to linger throughout each frame, with his implied message ringing loud and clear: the Internet is capable of taking over our lives and purging us of all emotional and moral balance. In being more fiction than fact (Zuckerberg has come out and rejected his onscreen portrayal), *The Social Network* ultimately serves as a moralising tale, illustrating the corruptible influences of power and money. Despite having to sift through immense legal detail, the film zips along thanks to fast-moving, mile-a-minute dialogue and technically efficient and exhilarating direction. Intellectual property rights and computer programming have never seemed so riveting.