



FILM: **BlackBerry**

FDG RATING: 2.9

Film Discussion Group (FDG) Scale is 1-5 (5 is best)

Matt Johnson: *director*
Jay Baruchel: *actor, Mike Lazaridis*
Matthew Johnson: *actor, Douglas Fregin*
Glenn Howerton: *actor, Jim Balsillie*

DATE: December 17, 2023

DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **BlackBerry**

We all remember the BlackBerry as the first popular “smart phone” and how President Obama, who in 2015 was known as the most tech savvy president to date, frequently had BlackBerry in his hand using it inside and out of the White House. The film is a fictional account, loosely based on real people and events, of the extraordinary rise and fall of the BlackBerry.

In 1996, Waterloo Canada, two techie nerds, Douglas Fregin and Mike Lazaridis, pitched their cellular device to fast talking, aggressive, ruthless, businessman Jim Balsillie, who after being fired from his company, decides to work with Doug and Mike if he is made CEO of their company RIM (Robotics In Motion) and given one third of the company. They hesitate, but after discovering that their deal with US Robotics was a malicious attempt to bankrupt them, they bring Balsillie in as co-CEO and give him a third of RIM.

Yes, it was a goofy exaggeration of free-spirited start-ups with techies playing all sort of games in the work area and Fregin leading the clownish antics, but it captures the creative brilliance that flourished in that crazy intense and playful work culture. Basillie has no patience for their lack of focus and pressures Fregin and Lazaridis to build a more advanced prototype of their “Pocket Link” device overnight for a presentation to Bell Atlantic the next day in New York.

A favorite scene is in the taxi when Lazaridis is eating a blackberry scone, dribbling the berry juice on his shirt, so when at the presentation they are asked the name of their device, he says, BlackBerry. (Evidently, this is entirely fiction)

Success ensues under the aggressive business efforts of Basillie but things get out of hand, he hires an “enforcer” to keep the engineers in line, challenges from competitors have to be overcome, culminating with Jobs announcing the iPhone, and the decision to outsource BlackBerry production to China, which Lazaridis was not in favor of. He was right. Production in China proved disastrous as the shipments they received were laden with operational problems.

Several discussion participants resented that the film deviated from the real story of BlackBerry to make the story more entertaining. Personalities were greatly exaggerated but at the same time, the outrageous, humorous stereotypes made them more entertaining.

One discussion participant who fondly remembers the BlackBerry, thought the film was very nostalgic and especially liked the scene at the end when Lazaridis is trying to use a paper clip to fix the annoying buzzing in each phone in the big shipment from China. Other comments pointed out how many Silicon Valley start-ups grew too fast and brought in rigid management to take control which meant the original creative culture was destroyed. Ruthless competition and personality pissing contests were captured which turned off a couple discussion participants noting that the outline of the story was good but those aspects were a detraction.

Interesting story, good acting, but BlackBerry could only emit a weak 2.9 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!
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