

Forget the first two rules of **Fight Club**. Dipping into their personal photo collections and taking **Total Film** on a three month journey over as many time zones, David Fincher, Brad Pitt, Edward Norton, Helena Bonham Carter and Chuck Palahniuk reflect on making, quite simply, **The Greatest Film Of Our Lifetime**



Giggling Idiots 1



You wake up in Hollywood, California. An unmarked building sandwiched between garages at the grubby end of the boulevard — where the Walk Of Fame’s stars dim with dust and butts. David Fincher’s office. “The first article I ever read on *Fight Club* was Alexander Walker’s,” says Fincher (always Fincher; rarely David). “Yours will be the last.”

Total Film and Fincher are in a spartan, corpse-green conference room, adorned only with a wall-length notice board bearing a timeline of events relating to the ‘Zodiac’ serial killer — the real-life basis for the “newspaper movie” the director hopes

will be his next. The focus, however, is *Fight Club*, the 1999 box-office “disaster” Fincher is now “very proud and incredibly happy” to see hailed as an anarchic masterpiece and *The Greatest Movie Of Total Film’s* Lifetime. “It’s great. I’m flattered,” he says, before showing the wry, self-deprecating wit he’ll display frequently throughout our two meetings. “I mean, I don’t think I can take the rest of the week off...”

Fincher has become inured, at least on the surface, to critical praise or damnation. He’s had to. Upon its release, Walker — the *London Evening Standard’s* late, infamously cantankerous critic — laid into *Fight Club* like a 10-pint drunk whose

drink you’ve just spilled. “It is an inadmissible assault on personal decency. And on society itself... It echoes propaganda that gave license to the brutal activities of the SA and the SS. It resurrects the Führer principle.” On and on. Any *Total Film* reader won’t need telling why he was wrong. And over the interviews with Fincher, Edward Norton, Helena Bonham Carter, Chuck Palahniuk and Brad Pitt, Mr Walker’s coffin may as well be on a rotisserie; it’s going to do a lot of spinning. “Forget the reviews,” says Fincher, of the vitriol poured out by certain critics. “Nobody really gives a shit about that.” More of an issue for the director was the audience reaction when the picture >

WORDS NEV PIERCE PORTRAITS EDWARD NORTON, HELENA BONHAM CARTER

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: ANDY LOWE



Hells bells: Fincher and HBC see the funny side to a tough shoot. "Mental stamina was vital," says Bonham Carter.

T. F. Crew —
For me, these two pictures best capture the experience of making Fight Club...
... a semi-serious film made by deeply unserious people.
Thanks from all of us for this bold assertion of good taste...
(-but don't overdo it.)
E.N.
EDWARD NORTON

Giggling Idiots 2

Summer 1997. New York, New York. A baseball-capped figure sits outside a plush apartment, clutching a script. A security guard checks who he is. "David Fincher." A car pulls up and out steps Brad Pitt, worn out from a day shooting *Meet Joe Black*. "I'm tired, Finch," says Pitt, balking at the prospect of spending hours discussing *Fight Club*. "No, no, no, no. This is not a big, long conversation, it's a three-minute conversation," says Fincher. "All right," says the star. "Why should I do this movie?" "Because this will be one of the best movies you'll ever be in and probably one of the best movies I'll ever make." Pitt nods slowly. "Okay. Let's go get some pizza."

I Am Jack's Inflamed Sense Of Rejection

Sean Penn could have been Tyler Durden. "I just couldn't get the movie made at the scale I wanted to make it at," explains Fincher, of why *The Game's* co-star didn't take up the fight. "And I love the irony of it being Pitt, ultimately." Sean Penn could have been The Narrator, too. "But he's too wise, too knowing. He's not guileless enough to be The

'Fight Club is the poster child for movies that should be picketed' DAVID FINCHER

Narrator." Sean Penn could have been Marla... Okay, no. The studio wanted Winona Ryder. Fincher wanted Janeane Garofalo, but she was "uncomfortable with the idea of all this sex." Courtney Love was considered and rejected, for reasons unclear. (As Chuck Palahniuk tells it, "She was desperate to do it. Fincher said she was too obviously 'the type.'" According to Fincher, she was "romantically involved with Edward and that proved to be problematic.") Thanks to an agent's idiocy, Fincher even ended up pitching the role to *Seinfeld's* Julia Louis-Dreyfus. "She had no idea who I was. I'm sitting there thinking of myself, 'My God, you are such a fucking loser.'"

Then there was Reese Witherspoon. "She's somebody else who the studio brought up," says Fincher. "I think she's amazingly talented, I just thought she was too young. When you realise Tyler

doesn't exist and The Narrator's been abusing Marla himself, it needed to be somebody who, for lack of a better explanation, was there out of choice; not somebody who didn't know any better. I was at Brad's house and he goes, 'Look at this actress; don't think about it, just look at this actress' and he put on the sex scene at the end of *The Wings Of The Dove*, when Helena's just so unbelievably sad. I thought she was emotionally exquisite in that movie."

A meeting was swiftly arranged, but Bonham Carter needed convincing. "I think her mother had read the script and just thought it was awful and I think that's partly why she was ambivalent about it. Actually, ambivalent may be giving the material the benefit of the doubt. She may have been repulsed by it."

You wake up in London, England. If you wake up in a different time, in a different place, could you wake up as a different person? Helena Bonham Carter, HBC, Hells, Judy (we'll explain later), what is your power animal? "Tim [Burton] thinks I'm a cat. He's a dog." Which historical figure would you fight? "I've never had the urge to hit anyone." Bonham Carter is at home. And she's laughing (she does this a lot): "Mum put the script outside her bedroom, because it was a pollutant! I didn't get it when I first read it, either. I thought, 'This is weird. Is this message particularly life-enhancing?' But once Fincher explained it to me, I just thought, 'I want to go with this; go with him.' He said he was making a comedy and I thought, 'I completely get your point-of-view now.' I wrote him a huge fax about my misgivings, you know? In it I just said, 'I've got to play it with a big heart.' Marla had to have a heart, otherwise she'd be just a nightmare. I was talking myself into it. By the end of the letter I'd convinced myself to do it."

Was she surprised to be offered the part? "I was, but I was also really pleased because I thought, 'At least somebody sees beyond the corset,' you know? That and at the same time it was just around the Oscar thing so in my cynical way I just thought, 'Oh, this is what happens when you're up for an Oscar.'"

Spring 1998. Beverly Hills, Los Angeles. Brad Pitt is a



Dressing down: "I borrowed the gown off my housemate," says Pitt. "I came down and said to Finch, 'Is this Tyler?'"

fidgety ball of energy, bouncing off the furniture in the rehearsal room. Fincher's laid-back in a baseball cap, shoeless feet stretched out on the script-strewn desk. He tosses a Nerf football to Norton, who pings it along to Pitt, back to Fincher, onto Norton, back to Pitt, to Fincher, to Norton, to Pitt... Who slams it home into the basket. "Score!" To one side, sitting in a cloud of smoke, sits Helena Bonham Carter, watching the boys "sizing each other up." Eventually, she stubs out a cigarette and calls, "Hey! Can I have a go?"

I Am Jack's Colon. I Get Cancer, I Kill Jack

"At the end of the shoot I gave Finch an x-ray of my lungs," laughs Bonham Carter. "I had to have an x-ray because I got bronchitis — surprise, surprise — during the six months of filming. And Fincher does so many takes and lots of smoke shots. He got obsessed with the smoke. It had to float in a particular way. So I was just always sitting there in a cemetery of cigarette butts."

"It was kinda funny," says Fincher. "Helena was surrounded by chintz at the Four Seasons, having this kinda civilised life, and then she would go to work at Fox and we'd give her black eyes and put lipstick on her teeth and make her hair all fucked up and make her chainsmoke and gargling old coffee and stuff. It was like she was visiting and she'd have to go down and do all these horrible sex scenes and then go back to the hotel and be polite."

The sex scenes were a particular challenge for the

technical team, briefed by Fincher to make the actors look like "one of the statues at Mount Rushmore fucking the Statue Of Liberty. It was as if you had these two giant monuments fucking each other and you can sort of fly around them with a helicopter, that was kind of the idea. It was kind of inspired by Francis Bacon. This idea of the twisted perversion of flesh."

Shooting them was resolutely unsexy, however. "It was really weird," says Bonham Carter. "Because me and Brad had to spend a whole day virtually

how we were going to handle the sex between Marla and Tyler," says Fincher, whose trade-off for the studio shelling out on Pitt's dentistry (they paid for the removable cap that ensured Tyler could have a chipped tooth) was that the star would sometimes take his shirt off. He did it twice. One of which was when he opens the door after sex with Marla — wearing a rubber glove. "We had that take starred and sent over to Fox under the guise of, 'Look! Look how good he looks, he has his shirt off!'" laughs Fincher. "I've learned that one way to control

'In part Fight Club turns on the Baby Boomer generation and says, "Screw you for the world you made"' EDWARD NORTON

naked, which wasn't bad I guess, with dots all over ourselves, like little stickers. He had white dots and I had black dots and we had to assume different positions in a very overlit studio and be surrounded by all of these still cameras. Fincher would just say, 'And... Have sex! Okay. And orgasm!' It was just completely absurd, but Brad was very chivalrous."

And then there were the off-camera sound effects. "That was just HBC and I sitting in a room screaming our guts out," says Pitt. "The sad thing is we had no qualms about it, no politeness, no little hint of embarrassment — just go!"

"One of the studio's issues with the material was

people is to give them other things to worry about. If you're worried that somebody is too fearful you can either try to empower them or you can give them so much to fear that they just don't want to be around you. Either way you've sort of neutralised them!"

The biggest concern of the studio, though, was not the sex, or the violence, but one line: when Marla lies back in bed with Tyler and says — and this makes even Tyler shudder — "I want to have your abortion."

"I always thought it was a good line and it made people uncomfortable," recalls Fincher. "But they didn't want to get into the whole Religious >

Spot check: Bonham Carter behind the scenes of the FX-laden sex scene. "It was pretty impossible for it to be sexy."

my spots — for special effects —
(spent one day in bed with Brad —
sady with these on).

Right thing. I mean, this movie is the poster child for movies that should be picketed. And Laura [Ziskin, president of Fox 2000] begged me, 'Please come up with something else.'" Fincher agreed, but only on condition he wouldn't have to change it again. Then Ziskin heard the changed line ("I haven't been fucked like that since grade school"). "You know in *ET*," says Fincher, gleefully. "When his head extends up on his neck? Laura did the inverse. The first vertebrates in her neck just contracted wafer thin. She just cringed so hard." You wake up in Manhattan, New York. Lose an

'Mum put the script outside her bedroom, because it was a pollutant!' HELENA BONHAM CARTER

hour, gain an hour. Edward Norton is taking two out from editing modern western *Down In The Valley*, on which he is lead actor/cutter. His power animal? "It's pretty hard to top the penguin." His historical figure? "I'd be happy to go 12 rounds with any member of Bush's cabinet." He's recounting the grade school story and laughing hard. "They begged him to put the other one back and he wouldn't!" There's no doubt, Norton knows how significant *Fight Club* is. But for all his intellectual edge and perception — his demolition of the critics; name-checks from Nietzsche to Goya; spot-on analysis of how the film nailed the zeitgeist — the overwhelming sense from him is that *Fight Club* was, well, fun.

"We were looking at each other going, 'We can't believe a studio is going to give us this much money to make this movie. They're giving us \$70 million to make a movie that they are going to fucking hate!'" he laughs. "From the beginning, when we got the book, we all had the same response, sort of half-laugh, half jaw-dropping that someone was saying those things. We felt that this is for us and our crowd. Not in an inside-joke sense, but very much this is about our times as we have experienced them. We definitely had the feeling that if a lot of

people didn't understand it, then we'd probably done it right. Now and then I'll give a script that I'm working on to my dad. He's a very smart, very broad-minded guy. He loved *The Graduate*, and he gave me this look like, 'Why the hell would you want to do this?' In a way it was liberating because it confirmed that feeling that this was a generational statement to me."

And what is that statement? "In part, *Fight Club* turns on the Baby Boomer generation and says, 'Fuck you for the world you made.' Of course it's irritating, at the least, to some people." Little wonder *Fight Club* riled so many viewers, then — as Pitt acknowledges, "It attacks a way of life, it attacks the status quo that men have given 40 years to. They can't roll over now."

But it did find an audience. With time, it connected. It was on the tip of everyone's tongue. Tyler just gave it a name. "We would have loved for it to be *The Matrix*, you know what I mean?" says Norton. "But it just couldn't be and it may have been the way it was supposed to be. The movie itself was like the experience of *Fight Club* is for the people in the movie. It was the kind of thing that you didn't want other people to understand, you didn't want other people to tell you it was okay, you wanted to find it yourself, talk about it with your friends and that's how it radiated out."

Norton discovered how much it had "radiated" when Dustin Hoffman phoned him up and asked him to read the Edward Albee play *Zoo Story* at his daughter's high school. "It's very much about the inability to connect with other people and the sense that maybe an act of violence is the only way to get someone to pay attention to you," says Norton. "And we did this Q&A after and these kids immediately started comparing it to *Fight Club*. This was six months after the movie came out. You could feel the parents and the teachers in the room looking around and whispering to each other, 'What is this?' It became the conversation in this entire school how this play is just the *Fight Club* of its time. I called Fincher up saying, 'There's a whole school of 12 to 17 year olds in Santa Monica who are obsessed with the film and none of their parents

even know what it is!' That was our experience of it, it kind of leaking in slowly. I went to some concert around that time and as I was walking out, these two young guys turned and looked at me and said, 'Nice to see you out and about, sir'. I was like, 'Aww, man, this is weird.'"

But the older generation still don't get it. "I really think that *Fight Club* is an expression of a lot of the same things that our parents' generation got out of *The Graduate*, but explored through a very different lens," observes Norton. "I think the Baby Boomer generation was a much more innocent generation than ours. *Fight Club* really, really got down into the textures of the world we grew up in and the psychological impact of those particular pop culture/marketing/advertising/materialist experiences. I'm not saying nobody over the age of 45 understood the film — that's ludicrous, lots of people deeply appreciated it — but I think for the same reasons a lot of Baby Boomers didn't understand Nirvana, they didn't understand *Fight Club*. I think a lot of the Baby Boomers looked at their children and said, 'Why so negative?' I don't think they related to the ambivalence of our generation. We have grown up with so much broader a sense of global dynamics, of the impending catastrophes of the environment and the economy and world politics and nuclear war — all mainlined into us at a speed that they can't comprehend. I think that feeling of being overwhelmed at a very young age, being overwhelmed at the prospect of trying to engage in adult life, just didn't resonate for them the way it does for us. But I think at its core *Fight Club* springs out of a feeling of being overwhelmed and alienated, cut off from anything that feels like an authentic sense of being alive. If you choose to fully explore what are the roots of

CLOSE, BUT...

The other key contenders to be The Greatest Film Of Total Film's Lifetime

The Lord Of The Rings Trilogy 2001-2003
So near, PJ. Pipped by virtue of one ending too many. And, really, is there anything left to say about it?

Magnolia 1999
One man's genius is another's geni-arse, with PTA's multi-layered epic splitting the office in two.

City Of God 2002
We called it the "Brazilian *GoodFellas*" and we were right, but *Fight Club*'s a true original.

Donnie Darko 2001
Like *Fight Club*, a glitteringly inventive movie about finding meaning. But not a bitch-tit in sight.

Gladiator 2000
Brawn meets brain in Ridley Scott's fighting fit epic. Swagger to spare, but not much to say.

Kill Bill: Vol. 1 2003
It kicked our arse and split our sides, but this is one great film sliced into two.

The Matrix 1999
We were wowed at the time and we still are... When we can divorce the original from the limp sequels.

Three Kings 1999
Provocative, powerful and hugely entertaining, but doesn't speak for a generation.

Memento 2000
Chris Nolan's tricky thriller is second only to *Fight Club* in the gets-better-the-more-you-watch-it stakes.



those negative feelings, on the way to maybe suggesting that there's a way out of that, you're going to lose a lot of people."

"My mom," chuckles Pitt, reflecting on the generation divide, "she actually justifies the movie because I play a character who's not really real. She can sleep at night, cos it's really Edward doing it!"

Autumn 2001. Manhattan, New York. The air is thick with smoke. People are screaming, crying, looking horrified at the sky. The second plane smashes into the second tower. The world has changed.

I Am Jack's Cold Sweat

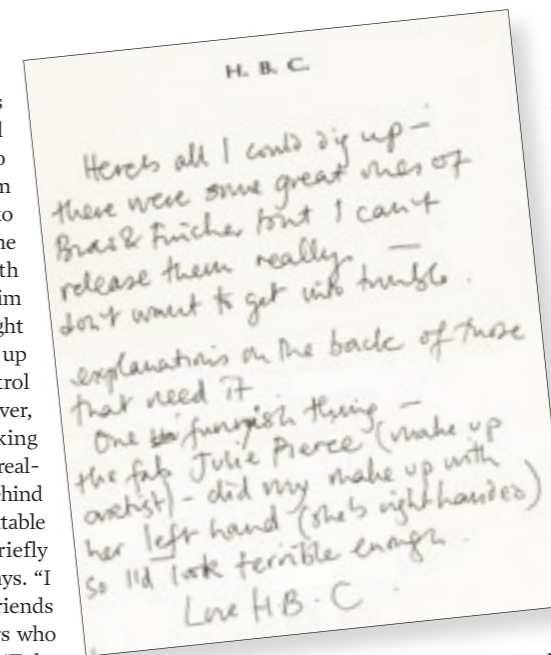
"*Fight Club* was never meant to be, 'Watch out or this will happen!'" says Fincher, reflecting on the link between the film's skyscraper-smashing conclusion and the attack on the World Trade Center of two years later. "For me it goes back to the Monty Python routine where Graham Chapman says, 'Who can honestly say that at one time or another he hasn't set fire to some great public building?' For me it was more deeply rooted in Monty Python than it was in, you know, *Fail-Safe*. It was a very oblique look at where some of this could take us. Chuck Palahniuk is a prescient guy."

"Yeah," says Norton. "I think that you can carry it too far and yet I agree. I don't think that what's being explored in *Fight Club* is deeply interrelated with, you know, those kinds of events, but on the other hand certainly there's something in there, when you're talking about the kind of furious compulsion to tear down, like, everything that's oppressive about modern consumer material society. You have to be careful, because there's nothing positive or valid in those real-world actions, but there may be something in the psychology of it that has echoes to the kind of frustrations that are being expressed in that film..."

You wake up in Portland, Oregon. This is your life and it's ending one minute at a time. Chuck Palahniuk. Power animal: "Oh, the penguin." Historical figure? "Jesus would be good. It isn't fighting in the traditional sense. It's more consensual — exploring power through an organised kind of S&M. Jesus would understand that, because spiritually he was into endurance and asceticism." Palahniuk is where it all began. "I read scripts all the time," says Pitt. "And after a while you just start seeing the same thing. Then, out of nowhere, comes this voice: Chuck Palahniuk." Fincher seems genuinely awed by his talent; his "beautiful prose." "To me," says Fincher, "the movie is 60-70 percent of what the book is and that's as much as I think you could do in 1999 in Hollywood." Says Palahniuk, "I actually wish they'd taken more licence with the book and surprised me a little bit more." Not that he doesn't love it. "It's raised the standards and made me disgusted with most movies!" And he has a line on why, perhaps, the likes of Walker and US critic Roger Ebert (who called the film "cheerfully fascist") were so down on *Fight Club*. "It strikes a chord with young men, but tends to frighten older men," he says. "They have the power, but they're not ready to give it up. They recognise the world they're moving into isn't their world, and that's gotta be scary." Palahniuk took a backseat with the adaptation. "My editor told me not to get excited when it was optioned because only two

percent of books are ever optioned and only two percent of them ever get made into movies. I had some conversations with the screenwriter, Jim Uhls, but I thought I would just fuck it up if I tried to control it." He did, however, visit the set, taking along some of the real-life inspirations behind the book's unforgettable characters. "I briefly went down," he says. "I took a handful of friends who met the actors who were playing them. 'Tyler Durden' now lives in Bend, Oregon. He's a carpenter. He was a rebel who wasn't sure what he wanted but knew that he didn't want what he was getting. He was ready to fight everything just so he was fighting. Just a big bundle of anger and angst."

And Palahniuk helped the actors, whether he remembers it or not. "I spoke to Chuck," recalls Bonham Carter. "And I got a feel for the person who inspired Marla and I read the book in and out." The other touchstone was an idea from costume designer Michael Kaplan. Recalls Fincher, "He said, 'Here's who she is' and showed me a picture of Judy Garland. I was like, 'Run with it, it's a great



idea.' We'd call her Judy, just out of fun. Or Liza. But mostly we called her Hells. 'Hells, daarrling!'" Kaplan wasn't the only unlikely voice, with Cameron Crowe having a somewhat surprising, but crucial, influence on the script. "I talked to Cameron," says Fincher, "because we had problems with Tyler. And he's like, 'It's easy! The real problem with Tyler is that Tyler knows the answer. You've got to take out that Tyler knows the answer, so

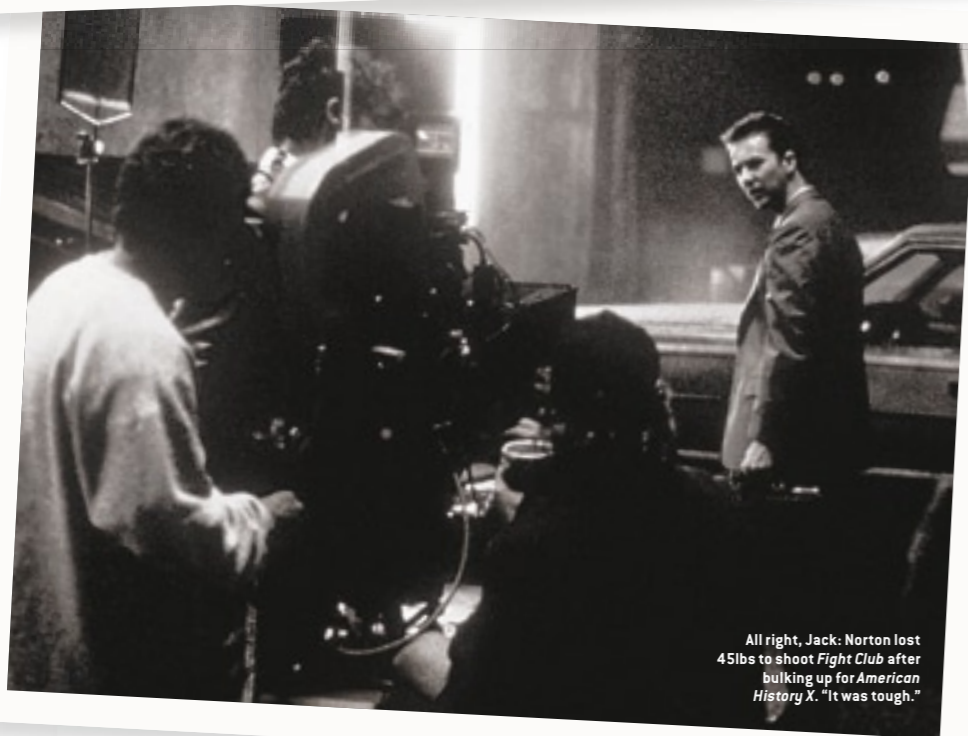
that every time somebody says to him, 'My life's fucked up, what should I do?', instead of him saying, 'Well you do this' you have him say, 'I don't know, I don't know your situation, I don't even know you, but if it was me, I'd try this, because at least you might learn something, even if it's painful.'"

Screenwriter Andrew Kevin Walker (*Seven*) was drafted in for the changes — about 20 percent of the script, by Fincher's reckoning ("Jim had done all the fuckin' heavy lifting") — but the Writers' Guild of America denied him a credit. Hence, the three detectives who try to castrate The Narrator are credited, 'Detective Andrew, Detective Kevin, Detective Walker'. *Autumn 1998. Beverly Hills, Los Angeles. Pitt's >*





"People don't talk about Helena enough," says of this Norton, who snapped this bit on set. "She's remarkable."



All right, Jack: Norton lost 45lbs to shoot *Fight Club* after bulking up for *American History X*. "It was tough."

tossed Norton's stunt double down the stairs several times already. Eventually, Fincher will use take one. Now, he's heading for take 12. Pitt grabs the guy and chucks him... Out, out, out, missing the first flight of steps and — CRUNCH! — slamming like meat on a chopping block, down onto the first landing. Fincher gasps. There's a long, long silence. The crew is waiting. The director takes his hands from his mouth and says, voice questioning, "Um, cut?"

I Am Jack's Smirking Revenge

"Fincher does all these tough things and he's such a puss when it comes to blood and injuries," laughs Norton. "There's a shot in the movie where Brad throws me through the toll booth of a parking lot and I crawl under a car. It's an elaborate shot and Fincher wanted to do it all in one. So we did it a lot of times. Like a lot. Like 20 or 25 times. I remember going into a headstate of like, 'Fuck it. I can do as many as he wants me to, because there's no going back now.' Eventually Brad started getting uncomfortable, around 33 or 34, and he said, 'Look, seriously, no more. He's really getting beat up!' Fincher just goes, 'Last one, I swear! Last one!'

So I went crawling under the car as hard as I could and I was too tired and I didn't duck enough and I really rang my head hard against the transmission and sort of screamed and he jumps up and goes, "That was the one!"

"Yeah, a lot of people got hurt," remembers Fincher. "We had people with dislocated fingers and broken ribs. We didn't want burly stunt guys, we wanted them to look like scrawny prep cooks and concierges and bellmen. The great news about actors is they all, ironically, look like waiters..."

The oddest experience, though, was surely for the leads, whose injuries started mirroring each other. "It was weird," says Norton. "Like, I jammed my thumb really badly and then Brad jammed his thumb, and then he really took a bad shot to the ribs and he was hurt under his ribs and I remember thinking, 'Ooh, I hope I don't get that one!' And then like a week later I fell on it right on my ribs. I remember walking out of the soundstage holding my ribs and Brad was like, 'Noooo!' It wasn't the only parallel. The pair did a lot of "fun things" — they learnt to make soap and, at the mischievous suggestion of Fincher, Norton hired

Edward's snap.
Edward Norton
Set of FC
summer '99

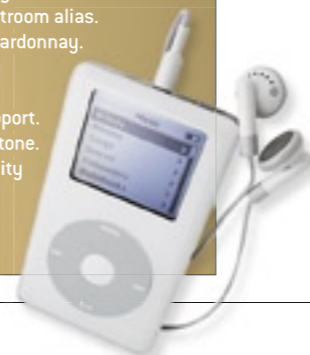
the same truck as his co-star. He also chose to lose weight for the role of The Narrator, while Pitt bulked up for Tyler. "Fincher and I both thought a little bit of *Fight Club* as like a drug metaphor," says Norton. "The Narrator talks like a junkie. And the more The Narrator falls apart, the more in his mind Tyler is becoming more and more idealised. I don't remember if it was a conscious conversation between me and Brad and Fincher, but I know Brad got bigger and bigger the more the shoot went on and I got smaller and smaller and felt worse and worse and I think it just seemed right. It seemed like the right progression, because it takes him a long time to see that it's not empowering him anymore, he's turning into a bruised, scabbed skeleton and I think I tried to go as far as I could with that."

The differences weren't only physical, with the

YOU ARE NOT...

It's been more than five years since Tyler Durden's inspired rant on, "The all-singing, all-dancing crap of the world". Time for an update...

- You are not your iPod.
- You are not your video mobile.
- You are not your alphabetised DVD collection.
- You are not the magazines you read.
- You are not the books you buy and don't read.
- You are not your internet chatroom alias.
- You are not your choice of Chardonnay.
- You are not the channels you subscribe to.
- You are not the team you support.
- You are not your fucking ringtone.
- You are not your herd-mentality rejection of commercialism.
- No, wait...



stars' acting styles contrasting, too. "Edward's strength is he always knows where he wants to be within the context of the story," says Pitt. "The drawback is sometimes his planning keeps it from being fresh, in theory anyways, but the guy is just so exquisitely good that he never gets in the way. I'm the opposite, I let the day dictate what's going to happen and so for me it's more of a hit-and-miss. The drawback for me is when I'm missing I'm really missing, I don't have that to fall back on."

"Brad's more anarchic," says Bonham Carter. "He's more instinctive and intuitive and playful and prepared to be extremely bad in order to release something interesting. I think people who are willing to go off the deep-end are going to be the most exciting and unpredictable. And Ed's got amazing facility but he's very intellectual. But they were both really impressive."

It was up to Fincher to juggle the different personalities and styles. "They aren't fuckin' puppets, you know?" he recalls. "No matter how far you stick your hand up their asses you can't make their lips move. A dance is two people and when you're dancing with a camera, a dance is five people. It can be tricky."

Everyone, though, is full of praise for the director, in a manner which he would no doubt find embarrassing face to face. "He's got the most encyclopaedic knowledge technically of any filmmaker I've worked with," says Bonham Carter. Although, regarding the amount of takes he demands, she adds, "As long as the camera's moving

don't even start acting until take 12!"

"I remember when Fincher sent me the book," recalls Norton. "I thought, just off having seen *Seven*, 'This is such a great guy to make this movie because he is completely comfortable posing questions and refusing to give you the answer. That's the kind of courage needed to make *Fight Club*.' I mean, it's a high compliment to say, I think he just doesn't give a fuck, you know? He really doesn't. He's human, and more than he lets on he's as susceptible as any of us to that sort of reflexive

'People are hungry for films like this; films that make them think' BRAD PITT

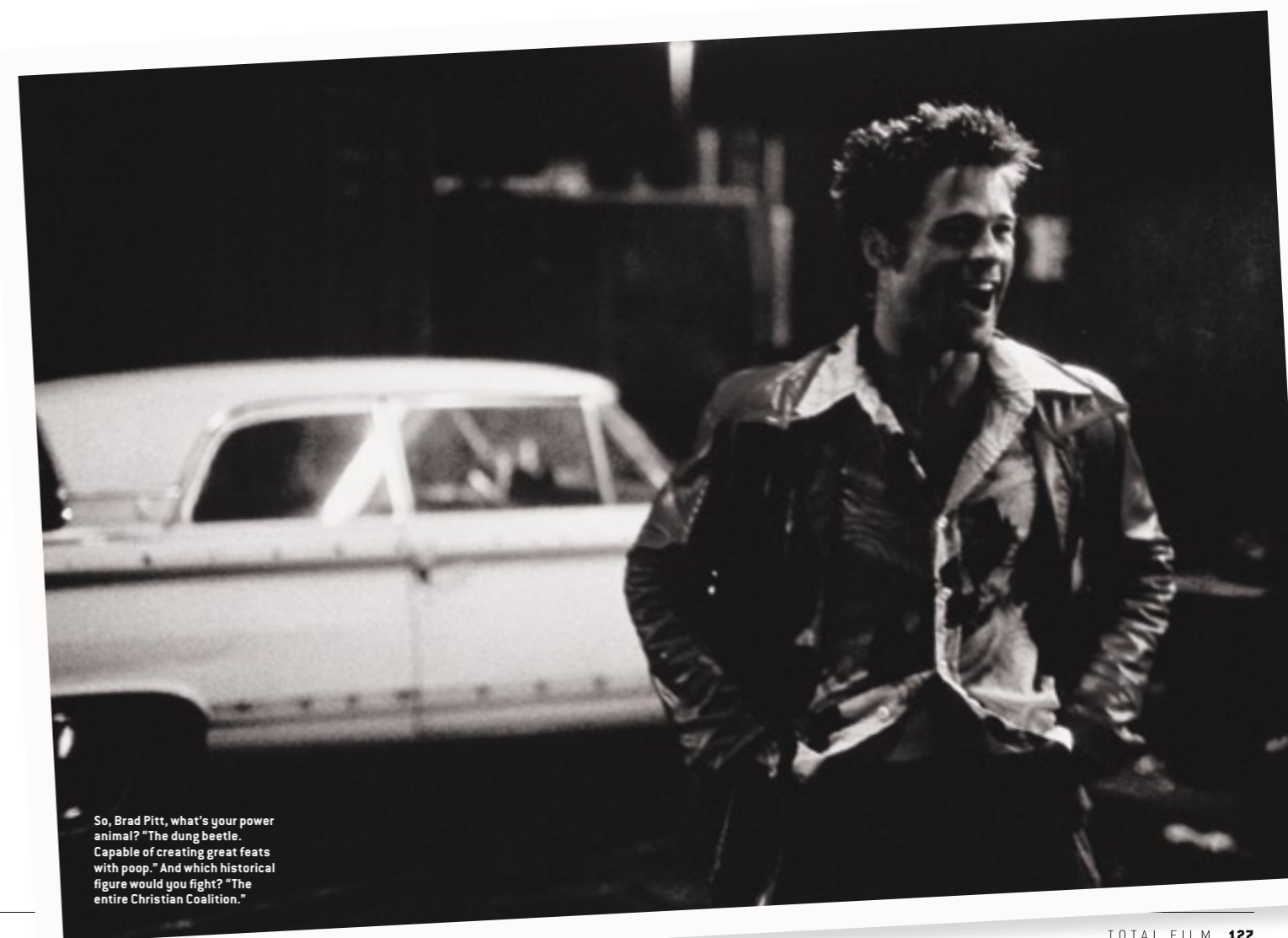
disappointment when a movie doesn't catch a wave, but he never baulked at all. His leadership gave everybody the courage to say, 'We're going to go all the way.'

I Am Jack's Broken Heart

You wake up in Hollywood, California. It's the second meeting with Fincher, after a weekend spent discussing *Fight Club* with half its cast. His power animal? "A scorpion." Historical figure? "I don't know... Irving Thalberg." He chuckles, "If I had a dime for every person that was offended by that movie, I'd buy the negative from Rupert Murdoch. I

was born to make this movie." You wake up in Beverly Hills, California. "It's an amazing movie," says Pitt. "It's provocative, but thank God it's provocative. People are hungry for films like this, films that make them think." You wake up in London, England. Bonham Carter says, "Fincher's got a big streak of a girlie. He's a huge softie. He's deliciously soft and vulnerable and a really nice person. He bullies everyone but he's not a proper bully, it's 'Come on, cry babies! And again and again and again!'" You wake up in Manhattan, New York. "Fincher can be a pretty hard-ass in his talk and sarcastic," says Norton. "But I think it's not insignificant that he decided to put the ending in a different place than the book. You know, even though The Narrator's shot through the cheek and the world is falling down, when he turns to her and says, 'I'm okay,' I actually believe him. Like it doesn't matter, you still have to ultimately link up with other people and care about other people if not all the bullshit around you. I thought it was kind of hopeful." You wake up in Hollywood. Again. "It's less of a love story than it is an apology," says Fincher. "It's an apology for bad behaviour."

Autumn 1999. Venice, Italy. The premiere audience hates the picture. It doesn't matter. The credits roll, the house lights flicker on. Pitt turns to Norton and smiles, "That's the best movie I'm ever going to be in." The crowds are dispersing. Some people storm out shouting, "Fascists, fascists!" Norton nods, "Me, too."



So, Brad Pitt, what's your power animal? "The dung beetle. Capable of creating great feats with poop." And which historical figure would you fight? "The entire Christian Coalition."