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Fight Club: Movie Analysis

Plot Point 1: Stasis

*Fight Club* (1999) begins as a circular plot, revealing the ending scene initially and breaking down the characters journey towards the final resolution. ‘Cornelius’, the main protagonist throughout the film, has found themselves swallowed by the capitalist nature of a high-brow office job. As he narrates over his expensive lifestyle and top-level condo, the protagonist tells us of his struggles with narcolepsy and insomnia with a tone suggestive of an unfulfilled worker, despite all his belongings and successful career. The film moves rapidly through the first act, as Cornelius finds some solace in attending group counselling for people struggling with life-altering illnesses. As Cornelius attends more support groups, he finds he can sleep peacefully and without disturbance.

Plot Point 2: Trigger

Soon after Cornelius joins the various group meetings, we are introduced to Marla Singer. By this point Cornelius has completely enveloped himself in various support groups such as cancer groups, HIV-positive meetings and various others, and Marla has begun shadowing his steps. Albeit without much consideration as she smokes several cigarettes during group meetings and making light of the struggles of others. Due to this, Cornelius begins to sink back into insomnia, again becoming unable to sleep properly. This in turn marks the point where ‘Tyler Durden’ begins to make himself known.

Plot Point 3: The Quest

Cornelius ends up meeting Tyler Durden on a business flight, during which Tyler tells of his career as a soap salesman, with added anarchistic ideas of destabilizing the status quo. One notable comment by Tyler on his knowledge of soap to develop explosive compounds, sets a precedent for the events which follow. As the flight ends, and Cornelius is held back by airport security for a suspicious item in his bags, he finds himself in front of his burning condo, incinerating all his material possessions he had once valued. This begins Cornelius’s quest with Tyler Durden, as he enquires whether he can stay with Tyler until his condo can be renovated, to which Tyler accepts.

Plot Point 4: The Surprise

Shortly after Tyler agrees to house Cornelius, the pair leave the bar into the open parking lot where the first development of the films arc into underground boxing takes place. As somewhat of an initiation into Tyler’s house and lifestyle, Tyler tells Cornelius to hit him as hard as he can. As the pair begin to enjoy the parking lot brawl, it becomes a regular occurrence as they frequent the bar. Throughout living in Tyler’s dilapidated household and going to Lou’s Tavern for the sole reason of fighting, other patrons begin to take notice and ask to be included in these fights. Cornelius loses sight of what he lost in the fire and begins to devote himself into the underground boxing scene, forgoing a lifestyle of expense and consumerism with Tyler pushing his descent into anarchism and self-sacrifice.

Plot Point 5: Critical Choice

By this point, Fight Club has expanded nationally, with several underground boxing rings set up by Tyler throughout the country. As Cornelius slept, Tyler would be travelling and recruiting people into his organization, keeping the protagonist from uncovering Tyler’s goal: Project Mayhem. It is by now that Cornelius follows in Tyler’s footsteps across the country, discovering what had taken place as he slept and the movements Tyler has made to evolve Fight Club into a destructive, anarchist organization. The critical choice comes as one of Project Mayhems members ends up being killed on a job, this member being one of Cornelius’s closest friends during his time at group support meetings.

This event adds to the chaos developing around Cornelius, as Tyler’s house has now become the headquarters of Project Mayhem, with dozens of members conceiving destructive plans to reset the status quo, and fulfilling those plans. As such, Cornelius finds himself in over his head, attempting to sabotage Tyler’s work in every city he could retrace his steps but to no avail, as Tyler had meticulously considered what Cornelius would do, and set roadblocks at every instance.

Plot Point 6: Climax

The climax of the movie begins rapidly as Cornelius discovers that Tyler had been making long-distance phone calls and ordering place tickets as he slept in his hotel room. Tyler, who had been absent throughout Cornelius’s discovery of Project Mayhem, now confronts Cornelius directly, uncovering how the events had taken place and answering the crucial question of how he was able to do this, and why Cornelius has so many unanswered questions. As the main twist of the story, Cornelius discovers that him and Tyler Durden are the same person, and Tyler has been working hard setting up his anarchistic plan while ‘Cornelius’ seemingly slept. The climax reaches its peak as Cornelius realizes what Tyler has done, and runs to disable one of the bombs set up by Tyler in an underground parking garage. As he discovers that he shares his knowledge with Tyler, and in turn realizing he has control over Tyler’s actions, the fight circles back to the movies initial scene showing Tyler holding a gun to Cornelius’s mouth.

Plot Point 7: Reversal

Cornelius now finds himself at the mercy of Tyler, who invites Cornelius to witness the destruction of several banks and debt agencies he had plotted to destroy in order to reset the national debt to zero. At this point Tyler holds all the power, his plan is taking fold and he is holding Cornelius hostage at gunpoint. Tyler then explains how his persona was created by Cornelius as someone he could idolize with his carefree attitude and confident demeanor. Cornelius begins to understand how Tyler’s actions were in fact his own, and how Cornelius instead has the power to ‘control’ Tyler just by simple realization that the gun is not in Tyler’s hand, but in his. However, as Tyler is just a manifestation of his own mind, and he cannot simply shoot Tyler to rid himself of Tyler’s influence, Cornelius turns the gun on himself and fires, and Tyler dissipates from the foreground leaving Cornelius with a gaping hole in his cheek, indicating Tyler has left for good.

Plot Point 8: Resolution

After Tyler is eliminated, the audience is then reunited with Marla Singer, the initial trigger of Cornelius’s descent into madness. Marla now comes across as a survivor of Project Mayhem, having escaped Tyler’s rampant actions and unpredictable behaviour leading up to the climax of the film. The resolution here is that despite them both surviving this chaotic journey, Tyler’s plan still takes place as the banks and conglomerates are destroyed, but both Marla and Cornelius have evolved in their understanding of their roles, and realize the extent of Tyler’s actions, successfully returning the status quo to zero.

**Protagonist:** The main character ‘Cornelius’ exists as the protagonist, as the main character in distress attempting to thwart Tyler’s plans.

**Antagonist:** Tyler Durden, Cornelius’ alter ego, plays the part of the antagonist as he brings Cornelius into his shadowed web of anarchy.

**Love Interest:** Marla Singer eventually becomes Cornelius’ romantic partner, after Tyler is eliminated by the climax of the movie. Throughout much of the film, Marla is disliked by Cornelius as she involves herself more and more with Tyler Durden, only coming to the realization at the climax of the movie.

**Confidant:** Tyler Durden also plays the part of Cornelius’ confidant throughout the movie. Both Cornelius and Tyler have an almost inseparable bond while they spend time together in Tyler’s house, sharing obscure conversations and allowing the viewers a very brief glimpse into both of their natures.

**Deuteragonists:** The support group member, Robert Paulsen, plays as a part of Cornelius’ side-confidants before the appearance of Tyler. Robert confides in Cornelius about his battle with cancer, and in turn encourages Cornelius to let go of his built-up anxieties and confide in Robert.

**Tertiary Characters:** Before Fight Club’s evolution into Project Mayhem, Cornelius’ boss and his co-workers play tertiary characters, bringing Cornelius’ office job life into perspective and adding realism to the plot before Tyler Durden makes his entrance. Once Project Mayhem takes center stage, the ‘soldiers’ of Project Mayhem exist as tertiary characters, such as Pretty Boy, and various other recruited members. These characters progress the plot of the movie, but their appearances are more of a tool to show how much Fight Club has expanded rather than having a direct influence on the plot.