

Novel ideas

Chuck Palahniuk wrote *Fight Club*. *Choke* is his next adap. Excited?



With his fiction soaked in anarchy (if you've never read short story *Guts*, we dare you to), it's not that shocking that *Choke* is only the second of maverick author Chuck Palahniuk's works to become a movie. The first, of course, was *Fight Club*, a work *Total Film* anointed 'best film of the mag's lifetime' in issue 100. From such lofty

beginnings, the only way to go is down — which is as good an explanation as any as to why the Washington-state based author's other books have struggled to make the big-screen leap. Who wants to be compared to *Fight Club*?

"I really haven't had expectations in terms of adaptations," the author tells *Buzz*. "That saved me with *Fight Club* because I had a chorus of people whispering in my ear that it's not going to happen, it will never happen. So it was completely without expectation that *Fight Club* did get made. I've really resolved myself to control the things I can control. That's why, so many years later, I have 12 books out, because that's the one thing I can control."

His fourth novel, *Choke*, is many things but primarily it's a satire about sex and consumerism, bad parenting and self-loathing, Colonial theme parks and lost faith, filtered through the tale of Victor Mancini, a rampant sex-addicted, self-asphyxiating con artist. Raised by his fierce mother Ida, who's losing what's left of her marbles in an expensive private hospital, Victor attempts to cope with his crippling sex addiction and winkle the identity of his father out of Ida's damaged brain.

"I always saw *Choke* as the sequel to *Fight Club*," muses Palahniuk. "When he grows old, Tyler Durden — someone who has rebelled against everything, has always attacked things but never created anything — becomes [*Choke's*] Ida Mancini, somebody who is haunted and tortured by the idea that they never stood for anything other than destruction. After



9/11, I wanted to take a look at standing for something rather than just always protesting things."

Like *Fight Club* before it, *Choke* at first was too hot to handle for most filmmakers until exec-producer Gary Ventimiglia handed a copy to actor Clark Gregg, who was immediately hooked. Once sorted, casting began with Sam Rockwell signing on for Victor, Anjelica Huston for Ida and Kelly Macdonald for a nurse who might offer Victor the redemption he seeks. When Gregg wrote a script he was happy with, he showed it to Palahniuk, who approved — although,

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as the author admits, he's not necessarily the best judge.

"I tried writing an original screenplay once and it was dreadful," he winces. "It was really, really bad. I took a class and everything! I bought two or three Syd Field books and I did my damndest. But it didn't work. I don't think my agent even sent it out to anyone. I eventually turned it into a short story called *Ambition*."

With the propulsive, nihilistic backbone that's key to his fiction — and research (he's been known to slip businessmen prescription drugs on flights to get them spilling the sordid details of their lives) — Palahniuk will always hone in on the darkest sides of the human experience. His next book is about the world's greatest gang bang. Looking



Faking it: (left) Sam Rockwell's Victor Mancini pulls another choking scam.

ALLSTAR, WENN, GETTY



Chuck tales: (below) Fincher's *Fight Club*; (bottom) *Choke* is Clark Gregg's directing debut.

back on *Fight Club*, he's still amazed it ever got made, let alone by a major studio (Fox were so horrified by what they'd paid for they dumped the movie in cinemas before exploiting its cult popularity on DVD).

"If Fincher had made it one year later, it would never have been released because it would have come out on top of 9/11," says Palahniuk, who found himself in Italy on a book tour exactly one year after the attack. "I was in an auditorium and just as I went on, they played the last scene from *Fight Club* and I found myself on stage with these collapsing Century City buildings. I was devastated by that image, just thinking how quickly it had become so loaded. So many transgressive books and films disappeared after 9/11." Perhaps *Choke* is a sign that Hollywood is lightening up again. **MM**

***Choke* opens on 21 November and is reviewed on page 53.**



GOOD LUCK CHUCK

The cinematic status of Palahniuk's other published works...



SURVIVOR

Shelved after 9/11 by Fox, who'd commissioned a script by Jake Paltrow (it features the hijacking and crashing of a civilian jumbo jet), it has been revived and is currently being developed by Francis Lawrence, director of *Constantine* and *I Am Legend*, as his next project. "There's a finished screenplay," says Palahniuk.



LULLABY

In the hands of Swedish music-vid director named Ulf Johansson. "They rebought the option this spring and said they've attached an Academy Award-winning actor as the executive producer and male lead. They won't tell me who it is because they know I'll blab it. I think they want to cast it first and get a start date."



RANT AND DIARY

Both of these stories have been optioned by unnamed producers.



HAUNTED

Even the short-story anthology that contains *Guts* and 22 other hardcore tales is being developed as a film. "We just signed the contract for that," says Palahniuk.