The Pursuit for Power

Throughout Chuck Palahniuk’s novel *Fight Club*, the idea of power is persistent. The Narrator, or as we know him, Tyler Durden, seeks to find himself and his capabilities. As the pursuit to find the REAL “Tyler”, or whatever his name is, edures, we see him struggle to find what this really means. It is very evident that the Narrator wants to be powerful, and in order to do this, he deals with the issues of consumerism, masculinity, mental health, and rebellion. All of these ideals are entwined into a twisted hunt for power. And as the Narrator moves closer to uncovering the mystery of himself, chaos ensues.

Keeping to a chronological order, the earliest thing we know about the Narrator is that he asks his Dad how he can be fulfilled. With this, the Narrator's dad conjures up a kind of “American Dream” idea. The Narrator’s instructions are: to go to college, and get a nice paying job. He does just this; he goes to college, gets a nicely paid job, and starts to put together his house. Something to note is: Palahniuk uses unique language when describing the Narrator's house designing process. He says, “It took my whole life to buy this stuff. The easy-care textured lacquer of my Kalix occasional tables. My Steg nesting tables. You buy furniture. You tell yourself, this is the last sofa I will ever need in my life. Buy the sofa, then for a couple years you're satisfied that no matter what goes wrong, at least you've got your sofa issue handled. Then the right set of dishes. Then the perfect bed. The drapes. The rug. Then you're trapped in your lovely nest, and the things you used to own, now they own you (Palahniuk, 44).” Reading
through this, it’s easy to see that the Narrator is very attached to his possessions. The language of “The Vild hall clock made galvanized steel, oh I had to have that (Palahniuk, 43),” or “The Klipsk shelving unit, oh, yeah (Palahniuk, 43),” give off this obsessive and prideful nature that the Narrator finds through these items. This is where we first see the Narrator’s attempt at feeling satisfied and in-control.

As we know, this doesn’t work. After going to college, getting a job, and putting together essentially his dream home, the Narrator contacts his father again saying “…now what (Palahniuk, 51).” To this, his father tells him to get married. This idea however, is quickly dismissed because the Narrator says, “I’m a thirty-year-old boy, and I’m wondering if another woman in my life is really the answer I need (Palahniuk, 51).”

Moving forward, the Narrator also tries to find power through this warped idea of masculinity. This is where “Fight Club” comes in. The first scene we see of Fight Club is very strange. Tyler asks the Narrator to hit him as hard as he can. After their first initial punches, the Narrator says, “I felt finally I could get my hands on everything in the world that didn't work, my cleaning that came back with the collar buttons broken, the bank that says I'm hundreds of dollars overdrawn. My job where my boss got on my computer and fiddled with my DOS execute commands. And Marla Singer, who stole the support groups from me. Nothing was solved when the fight was over, but nothing mattered (Palahniuk, 53).”

The notion that “nothing matters” is a popular one in this book. The Narrator feels liberated just because he was able to hit someone, take a hit himself, and survive. This is that warped idea of masculinity I was talking about. The Narrator explains the people that come to fight clubs as a “generation of men raised by women (Palahniuk, 50).” In order to understand this and how it compares to masculinity, pay attention to the language. “Men raised by women,” this
could be interpreted so many different ways. However, the main point is clear. Women are looked at as being inferior to men when it comes to things like strength, endurance, and grit. Following this idea, every man at fight club is working to prove to himself (or others) that he can be a true man.

To Tyler, the Narrator, and the Fight Club men, Fight Club is everything. All of these men are looking for an escape from their day jobs and responsibilities. They are seeking power over their lives. They want to control something for once. This of course, digresses. Once these men get a taste of “power” and “freedom,” they can’t get enough. This is where the true intentions of Tyler come out with Project Mayhem.

This brings me to my final point: the Narrator ultimately uses his relationship to Tyler, and Project Mayhem as his highest form of power. Throughout the novel, we see the Narrator’s consistent awe and fascination with Tyler. Their first “meeting” was described as this, “I took a vacation. I fell asleep on the beach, and when I woke up there was Tyler Durden, naked and sweating, gritty with sand, his hair wet and stringy, hanging in his face. Tyler was pulling driftwood logs out of the surf and dragging them up the beach. What Tyler had created was the shadow of a giant hand, and Tyler was sitting in the palm of a perfection he’d made himself. And a moment was the most you could ever expect from perfection (Palahniuk, 33).”

To any “normal person” this would be strange, muchless “perfection.” But it is easy to see that the Narrator looks up to Tyler. Let’s not forget one of the first things we heard about Tyler was: “We have sort of a triangle thing going here. I want Tyler. Tyler wants Marla. Marla wants me (Palahniuk, 14).” Another, and perhaps the most important thing the Narrator says about Tyler is this: “I love everything about Tyler Durden, his courage and his smarts. His nerve.
Tyler is funny and charming and forceful and independent, and men look up to him and expect him to change their world. Tyler is capable and free, and I am not (Palahniuk, 174).

In order for us to see how truly desperate the Narrator is for power, is through Tyler. He couldn’t find a way to break free from the responsibilities, and holds on his life. This is why he created Tyler. He needed an avenue to show himself what it could be like if he just let go. Tyler is the extension of himself that he prays will take over, and in a way, it does.

From here on, Tyler’s desire is to lead the Narrator, and everyone around him to “hit bottom.” This starts with Tyler blowing up the Narrator’s perfect apartment. At first, the Narrator is very torn up about it. When talking to the police, the Narrator says this: “Tell him,” Tyler whispered. "Yes, you did it. You blew it all up. That's what he wants to hear." I tell the detective, no, I did not leave the gas on and then leave town. I loved my life. I loved that condo. I loved every stick of furniture. Everything, the lamps, the chairs, the rugs were me. The dishes in the cabinets were me. The plants were me. The television was me. It was me that blew up. Couldn't he see that? (Palahniuk, 110).” It is interesting to note, that even here, the Narrator still can’t let go of his old life. Naturally, Tyler takes it up a notch.

All of this leads to Project Mayhem. Tyler starts to build an army of men just like him. They want to see the world burn or “hit bottom.” Everyone calls him (or the Narrator) Sir, and they are not allowed to ask questions about their assignments. Basically, it’s a bunch of men in Tyler’s complete control. The assignments start out somewhat minor. Their first assignment, is this: “... take some old joe on the street who’s never been in a fight and recruit him. Let him experience winning for the first time in his life. Get him to explode…” What we have to do, people,” Tyler told the committee, “is remind these guys what kind of power they still have.” (Palahniuk, 120).” This is so that whomever they are fighting will feel liberated, and maybe even
join their cause. As these assignments progress, so do their intensity. They start to blow up buildings and attack people while pushing guns in their faces, or threatening to sever their private parts.

The Narrator looks at these men and calls them “space monkeys.” Insinuating that they have no minds of their own, extensions of Tyler, and he is right. Eventually, Project Mayhem seems to take all of Tyler’s time, and the Narrator is desperate to find him. In this pursuit, he finds out that he was Tyler the whole time. His desire for power had manifested itself into “Tyler Durden.” Upon learning this, the Narrator tries to undo all of his damage. This of course, doesn’t work. Tyler, who the Narrator wants to be, is smart and cunning. He built safeguards for himself. Once the Narrator tried to call things off, the men were forced to serve his previous wishes. This meant, things would be severed.

In conclusion, all of the things that the Narrator struggles with are a means to sustain power. It starts with his apartment. He does everything in his power to make it absolutely perfect. It gives his a certain satisfaction. Inside though, he knows this doesn’t give him any real power. In fact, it keeps him from truly hitting bottom. This is why he uses Tyler to destroy it. Then, it moves into “Fight Club.” Fight Club is closer to the power he desires. To feel truly alive when being so close to death. To know that nothing will hurt any worse than this. No fear of pain. Next, and most importantly, his relationship to Tyler. The man that he wants to be. Tyler is courageous, smart, funny, charming, forceful, independent, he is powerful. These are all the things that the Narrator thinks he is not. The only way he can be all of these things, is if it’s someone else. And finally, Project Mayhem. The Narrator's last stitch effort to exude power. Using Tyler, the Narrator creates an army of men to carry out the plan he has for the world. He
wants everyone to feel as liberated as he does with Tyler. If he can create the right amount of chaos, people might realize what matters to them, and where their true power lies.