

The only known photograph of an undergraduate awakening at sunrise.



SEE THIS IF YOU LIKED...

THE USUAL SUSPECTS
1995

A glossy noir with a not-to-be-trusted manipulator at its centre.

MAN ON WIRE
2008

Philippe Petit's World Trade Center tightrope walk becomes a heart-in-mouth heist movie.

CATFISH 2010

The directors of this WTF?-fest made the leap to fiction features. Expect Layton to follow suit.

For full reviews of these films visit totalfilm.com/cinema_reviews

The Imposter

★★★★★ Out 24 August

The man who wasn't (all) there.

THE IMPOSTER HAS THE CONCEPT of disappearance deep in its DNA. First there are disembodied voices, fading credits, the pounding, purifying Spanish rain. Later, witness testimonies trail away in horror, and departing figures bleach themselves into the oblivion of sudden sunlight. Bart Layton's beautifully crafted documentary begins with the vanishing of Nicholas Barclay, a 13-year-old Texan boy, in June 1994. But its central character is Frédéric Bourdin, an extremely damaged young Frenchman longing to lose himself in the illusion of another identity. "As long as I can remember," he says, "I wanted to be someone else, someone who was acceptable." He chooses Nicholas.

Despite not looking or sounding like Barclay, and being discovered by police three years later and 5,000 miles away,

in Spain, Frédéric disguises himself – *terribly* – as the boy, now grown-up, and is welcomed with open arms by his grieving family. A compelling liar, Frédéric confesses his pathological Pinocchio-ing straight to camera, with Nicholas' sister Carey and mother Beverly chipping in separately as credibly heart-sick witnesses. The reason neither of them questioned the inconsistencies in his tale is painfully simple: they *needed* to believe him.

Layton is just as skilled a storyteller as his subject, fleshing out these incredible, often conflicting accounts with whatever comes to hand: talking-head interviews with family members and state officials; home-video footage (some shot by Nicholas himself) that crackles with static;

snatches of conversations. Sometimes he intercuts police phone calls with clips from '70s detective shows such as *Kojak*. Elsewhere, he dramatises moments with stunning (if very subjective) neo-noir reconstructions benefitting from the contributions of cinematographer Erik

Wilson (*Submarine*) and editor Andrew Hulme (*Control*).

In lesser hands, such technique might feel like a cheat. After all, documentaries are about establishing the truth, however ugly, not colluding in a fantasist's beautiful cruelties. But this

is a documentary *about* fabricating stories, the allure of deception and how quickly the facts can vanish into the ether.

The effect of Layton's efforts is to give credence to each of the claimants, so

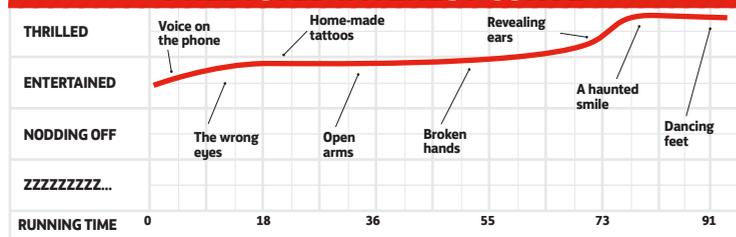
it's possible to feel sorry for Frédéric even as the horrendous weight of his actions hits home. One glimpse of Carey's traumatised eyes says it all – not everything can be washed away, no matter how much we pretend it can. **Matt Glasby**

'This is about the allure of deception and how quickly facts can vanish'

TALKING POINT

Bart Layton took great pains to ensure the narrative was "driven by testimony". To this end, the only dialogue in the re-enactment scenes is lip-synched from real-life accounts.

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE™



THE VERDICT Creepier than *Catfish* and as cinematic as *Man On Wire*, this is an unnerving story immaculately told and a strong contender for doc of the year.

► **Certificate** TBC **Director** Bart Layton **Starring** Frédéric Bourdin, Carey Gibson, Beverly Dollarhide, Charlie Parker, Nancy Fisher **Distributor** Picturehouse/Revolver **Running time** 95 mins