

LIFE AFTER LOST

The TV fantasy was supposed to launch him to superstardom but Matthew Fox prefers to stay out of the spotlight. Now, at 47, he has landed his first lead movie role. **Ryan Gilbey** meets him



The steely handsomeness of Matthew Fox rests to some extent on his stubborn refusal to smile on screen; his face looks so taut, the skull straining beneath the skin, that it might cause him physical distress to do so. Not that there is much call for merriment in his latest film, *Emperor*, in which he plays General Bonner Fellers, dispatched to Japan to determine whether Emperor Hirohito should be executed for war crimes. Nor was Fox exactly whooping it up in the role that thrust him into every living room - and a few million wistful daydreams - in the land. As Dr Jack Shephard in the fantasy TV phenomenon *Lost*, he was too busy fighting monsters or pursuing hallucinations of his father to crack jokes or plant

whoopie cushions.

So it's not a shock to enter his London hotel suite and see him gaze up slowly from the remains of his pizza with an expression that says, unmistakably: "Who is this chump?" But if the 47-year-old actor seems grave at first, his amiability is not slow to emerge. He is polite and thoughtful. His look is off-duty military: black suit, dark blue polo shirt, black boots, a black buzz cut peppered with silver,

as though metal shavings have been sprinkled on his head. He has the sort of face and fortitude that would make people follow him into battle, or at least around a treacherous desert island for six series.

What he hasn't got yet is a distinctive post-*Lost* career. The question of what exactly Fox does in between brooding and scowling is a mystery to rank with anything on that JJ Abrams head-scratcher. He couldn't care less. He hasn't even been on a film set for 18 months. (As well as making *Emperor*, he had a small role in *World War Z* that got even smaller after that movie's extensive reshoots.)

Lately he has preferred to stay at the home he shares with his wife and their two adolescent children across the mountains from Portland, Oregon. "I like to just get on with the work," he shrugs. "I've always approached acting with a very blue-collar work ethic. It's like laying bricks. You do it and you don't walk away from a job until it's done."

This explains how he can labour so fastidiously on something as poor as the serial-killer movie *Alex Cross*, where he played a tattooed, shaven-headed psychopath-cum-artist-cum-cagefighter. "It was an experiment

in how far I could take something as an actor. Acting is always about the challenge I put in front of myself."

The challenge with *Emperor* is to see whether he can carry a movie. "I really hadn't done that yet. Me being me, I chose a film that's not so easy to carry." He laughs suddenly at his own

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*"Pressure cooker":
Matthew Fox as General
Bonners Fellers, with
co-star Eriko Hatsune*

