

SOCIAL INTERCOURSE

The Darjeeling Limited

Opens 19 October
Directed by Wes Anderson
Starring Owen Wilson and Adrien Brody
Princess Theatre

Wes Anderson has always been a critical favorite, and he's come up with another oddly titled entry in the genre that is his forte: the tragicomedy. The film takes the viewer on a voyage across India, following the story of three brothers who, after the death of their father, went to the Eastern country in order to reconnect with each other. To make sense of everything, the train they go on is called the Darjeeling Limited, a fictional train that is based on a real one called the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway.

Carmen

Runs 20, 23, 25 October at 7:30pm
Jubilee Auditorium

For those not up on their opera, *Carmen* is considered one of the classics of the genre and is one of the most performed operas in North America. But this wasn't always the case: Georges Bizet's tragedy was a considered a failure upon its release and was called "immoral" and "superficial" at the time.

For anyone who unfortunately watched MTV's terrible modernized version, *Carmen: A Hip Hopera* starring Beyoncé, those critics would be right. However, it's now being touted as "smouldering, passionate, exotic" by the Edmonton Opera Association. Canadian soprano Lyne Fortin stars as Carmen, the fiery gypsy who steals the heart of corporal Don Jose—and never gives it back.

The Details

With *Zuckerbaby* and *They Were Expendable*
Saturday, 20 October at 8pm
Victory Lounge

It's all in the details, as The Details would probably say. This possibly anal-retentive rock group from Winnipeg just released their first full length album. *Draw A Distance. Draw A Border* is twelve songs of moody, melodic rock that borders on emo but doesn't quite cross into that territory—though, with song titles like "I Asked What We Should Do. You Said, 'I Just Don't Want to Think,'" they're treading awful close to the line.

Art in Transition

Thursday, 18 October from 5–9pm
11618 76 Ave

A recent graduate of the University of Alberta, local artist Alexis Robb-Chute is showcasing her diverse art portfolio and even auctioning some of it off, all from the comfort of her own home. Delving into such categories as wedding photography and abstract paintings, Robb-Chute also does work with an environmentalist bend, making household items into wearable art. Featuring pictures of girls in dresses made of rice packages, backgrounds made of bubble wrap, and Pollock-esque colour splashes, it's all very trippy and very cool.

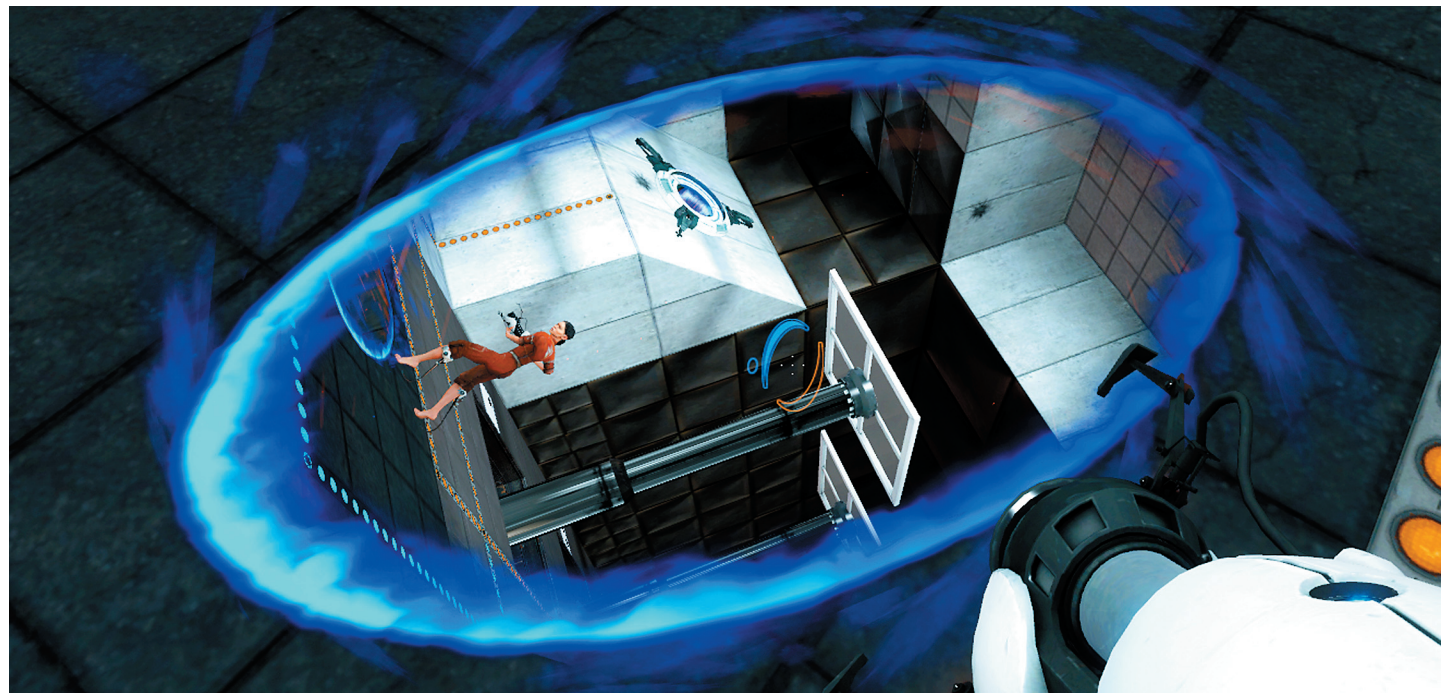
Dave and Ian Thomas

Monday, 22 October at 8pm
Winspear Centre

Half of the original hoser squad and his just as famous (though less well-known) brother bring their comedy to the Winspear. A Canadian icon, you may remember Dave Thomas as both a star on Second City Television (SCTV) and as Doug of Doug & Bob Mackenzie fame.

Despite not enjoying the same degree of fame and recognition, his brother Ian is a Juno-award-winning songwriter and musician who has composed music for a number of acts, and even a few TV shows.

JOHN KMECH
kmeches well in the office



Orange Box filled with golden delights

The latest offering from Valve is a physics-defying, game-spanning package that's more than just a fix

gamereview

The Orange Box

Available Now
Developed & Published by Valve Corporation

MIKE KENDRICK
Design & Production Editor

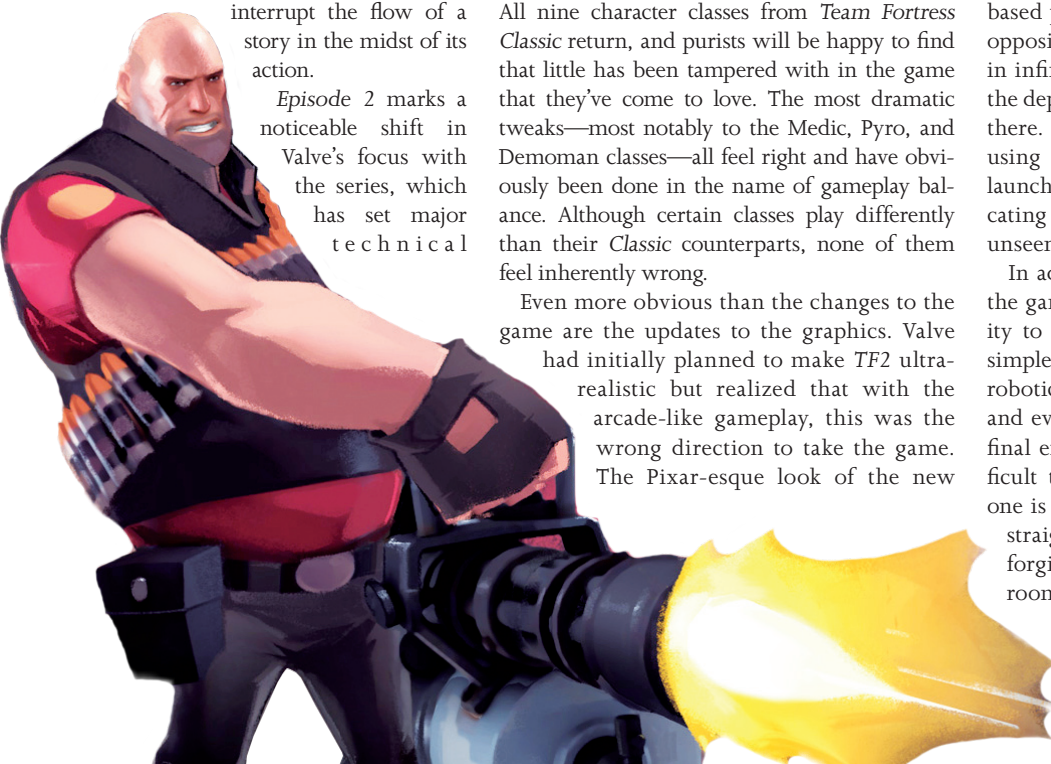
Valve Software is one of the great companies of their time and trade: while they have a habit of keeping fans in waiting—sometimes for years—their final products are never disappointing.

The Orange Box is their latest entry into their relatively small games library but is bound to take up one of the largest spots on their wall of masterpieces. Packing the previously-released *Half-Life 2* and *Half-Life 2: Episode 1* with three new releases—*Episode 2*, *Team Fortress 2*, and *Portal*, the Orange Box is a value-priced bundle that's got more guts than a Heavy Weapons Guy.

Half-Life: Episode 2

The headliner of the Orange Box, *Episode 2* picks up the story arc of *Half-Life 2*, which last left players speeding away from a Citadel about to go Chernobyl and engulf the surrounding city. With little hesitation, the plot starts as the player awakens from the wreckage of the crashed train barely escaping from City 17 with its passengers intact. Brief reminders appear on the screen to refresh the player's memory of the basic controls, but the pacing never slows down enough to interrupt the flow of a story in the midst of its action.

Episode 2 marks a noticeable shift in Valve's focus with the series, which has set major technical



landmarks with its previous installments. While the original *Half-Life 2* introduced the groundbreaking Source engine, adding whole new level of physics to videogames, and *Episode 1* brought with it HDR lighting and complex AI-character interaction, *Episode 2* seems to spend more time developing the storyline rather than its technology. Although a large part of the action occurs in more open, outdoor environments than the game's predecessors, with an aging game engine, these tweaks are highlights to a bigger picture.

Granted, the unravelling story is an immersive experience, full of thought-provoking questions that beg to be answered. *Half-Life 2* still has some of the most realistic portrayals of human emotion in its AI characters, and with the addition of new characters, the human experience of the game certainly isn't in short supply. While *Episode 2* may not be the highlight of the Orange Box package, it's a decent eight hours' worth of gameplay that leads up to what's sure to be a spectacular climax.

Team Fortress 2

Possibly the most overdue game after *Duke Nukem Forever*, *Team Fortress 2* resurrects itself from the pits of videogame vaporware to kick ass and take names.

Since its early screenshots were unveiled in 1999, *TF2* has undergone a major overhaul in both graphics and gameplay, being treated to an entirely new game engine in the process. All nine character classes from *Team Fortress Classic* return, and purists will be happy to find that little has been tampered with in the game that they've come to love. The most dramatic tweaks—most notably to the Medic, Pyro, and Demoman classes—all feel right and have obviously been done in the name of gameplay balance. Although certain classes play differently than their *Classic* counterparts, none of them feel inherently wrong.

Even more obvious than the changes to the game are the updates to the graphics. Valve had initially planned to make *TF2* ultra-realistic but realized that with the arcade-like gameplay, this was the wrong direction to take the game. The Pixar-esque look of the new

character models brings some tongue-in-cheek Cold War humour to the game, and the sexiness of the details feels right at home. Very few class-based games can properly make their classes recognizable in the heat of a firefight, but *TF2*'s models all stand out instantly and add a psychological thrill to the rock-paper-scissors balance of team combat.

As the name implies, teamwork in *Team Fortress 2* is now more important than ever. While there's a class for every style of player, the game dynamics of *TF2* make for endless hours of online action and offer a fresh alternative to the already stagnant *Halo* style.

Portal

The smallest of the bundle but making the biggest splash, *Portal* is easily the number-one contender in the Orange Box lineup.

Developed initially as a student project by independent game makers, Valve picked up *Portal* and its team—one of their smartest moves in years. The basic premise of the game places the player as a test subject in a high-tech laboratory with a single tool: a gun that's able to create portals in the space-time continuum. Though portal technology has been experimented with in past games such as *Prey*, Valve has finally done it right, both technologically and gameplay-wise.

The concept of the portals are introduced to the players in easy-to-follow steps, ensuring that they grasp every facet of how portals work before plunging them into complex, physics-based puzzles. The ability to create portals on opposite ends of a room and run through it in infinite regression is quite a mind job, and the depth of the puzzles only goes deeper from there. By the end of the game, the player is using momentum gained from gravity to launch himself across gaping chasms and relocating portals in mid-air to reach previously unseen heights.

In addition to the mind-blowing physics of the game, the writing offers a delicious hilarity to the entire experience. What begins as simple instructions from a non-threatening robotic female voice evolves into snarky taunts and eventual death threats. This leads up to a final encounter that's so entertaining, it's difficult to complete smoothly, simply because one is likely to be laughing too hard to shoot straight. Fortunately, the game is extremely forgiving to newcomers with plenty of room for experimentation, not to mention the desire for replay. Unfortunately, the game only takes three to four hours to complete, so you'll want to play this one a few times over—especially with an ending song as brilliant as this one.