

## India Jones: "The Darjeeling Limited"

Written by Mike Schulz

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### ***THE DARJEELING LIMITED***

Regarding Wes Anderson's *The Darjeeling Limited*, let's acknowledge the elephant in the room right away: Watching Owen Wilson play a damaged, bandaged dreamer who recently survived a suicide attempt and masks his sadness with optimism and good cheer is almost painfully poignant, and at times, more than a little tough to watch. Happily, though, you can easily imagine being just as moved by him *without* awareness of the actor's off-screen troubles.

The greatness of Anderson's yarn, in which a trio of brothers (Wilson, Adrien Brody, and Jason Schwartzman) embark on a spiritual re-awakening while riding a passenger train through India, lies in the director's talent for making depression and inchoate longing feel so vibrant. Its genius lies in Anderson's gifts for making depression and inchoate longing *witty*. After the agreeable but fundamentally unsatisfying

*The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*

- a film that threatened to reveal its maker as merely eccentric for eccentricity's sake - it's a pleasure seeing this director return to the searching, human, proudly literary Anderson of *The Royal Tenenbaums*

; at his best, he's the closest American filmmakers presently come to the bitterly funny,

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indefinably moving spirit of J.D. Salinger.

If *Tenenbaums* was a novel, *The Darjeeling Limited* is a short story (or two, as it's preceded by Anderson's haunting 13-minute film *Hotel Chevalier*

), and an exquisitely well-crafted one. While exploring the brothers' determination to re-connect and escape the crippling shadow of their parents - a recently deceased father and a disengaged mother, played by Anjelica Huston - Anderson, working with co-screenwriters Schwartzman and Roman Coppola, plants his themes and motifs early and allows them to flourish throughout the entire movie; amusing throwaway bits such as Wilson's penchant for ordering food for his brothers, or the visual of the siblings toting an obscene amount of luggage, pay off sensationally in the film's final minutes. (Anderson has an uncanny talent for eventually making you teary-eyed at routines you previously laughed at.)

And Anderson's tone is so confident here that he can segue from raucous slapstick to wholly un-ironic tragedy without missing a beat and, more importantly, without you feeling that he hasn't *earned* the pathos; as in life, the film's comedy and heartbreak don't battle one another so much as simply co-exist. *The Darjeeling Limited* is beautifully acted by the three principals and extraordinarily well shot and scored, and exerts such a hypnotic pull that at the screening I attended, all but a few of us stayed to watch the end credits in full, despite nothing more dramatic occurring than a locomotive smoothly riding its rails. Apparently, none of us were quite ready to disembark.