

The Jungle Book Review

- Kyra Veprek

A new revitalization of a childhood classic, *The Jungle Book*, directed by Jon Favreau, brings life to Rudyard Kipling's beloved book. Primarily following the plot line of the book rather than the 1967 film, the movie follows the journey of Mowgli (Neel Sethi), a young boy raised by wolves in coexistence with the jungle life. After Shere Khan (Idris Elba), a menacing lion who plays the role of Alpha in the jungle community, threatens the peace of the jungle if "the man cub" is not removed, Mowgli is forced to leave his jungle life and find his way on his own. Supported by a level-headed panther and free-spirited bear, Mowgli makes his way through the jungle while finding out more about himself on his quest for peace.

It is inarguable that Favreau's most impressive feat are the visual effects that brought the film to life. Accustomed to the one-dimensional images of the first children's movie, I find the enhanced animation, save the story, a different atmosphere over all. Unlike the whimsical feel of the original, the new movie boasts highly-detailed, hyper-real animals and settings, making Mowgli's journey appear to be more of an action/adventure film. Although the graphics are impressive, they can be too much at times. For example, King Louie, a childish character I remembered for foolishly being tricked by Mowgli and Baloo, is presented as a real *gigantopithecus* and rendered as colossal and grotesque. This image is not only threatening, but also makes his scenes overly scary and suspenseful. Although I understand that this was most likely the effect Favreau was looking to achieve, I do not find it to be fitting for the movie, and therefore it was not enjoyable to watch.

Furthermore, the classic score, including songs such as "I Wan'na Be Like You" and "The Bare Necessities," is poorly integrated and out of place. Lacking the whimsical tone the original movie carried throughout its entirety, this latest adaptation is, unexpectedly, a musical. "The Bare Necessities," although not successfully woven into the plot, is not a complete failure. With Mowgli sitting and singing on Baloo's stomach as they float down a river, Favreau was able to achieve a sense of happiness which the movie otherwise lacked. However, my liking to this scene may simply be due to my love of Bill Murray, who voices Baloo. Less successful, however, is "I Wan'na Be Like You," which is outright menacing. Favreau turns a number which was fun and playful into a threatening attack on Mowgli. As King Louie coos the song to Mowgli, his frightening image rocks excitedly in place, while the presence of his monkey minions creates a feeling that Mowgli is about to be jumped. Besides creating a new frightening tone, it is also poorly incorporated. The threatening stature of the monkey and the direness of Mowgli's situation do not present a suitable setting for a musical number.

Although *The Jungle Book* is a visual spectacle, I was put off by the film because I could not identify the target audience. The intensity of the animation presents the idea that the film was produced for a more mature audience, for some of the images are simply not appropriate for small children. On the other hand, the plot is at a basic enough level that it became boring. Would I recommend it? Maybe. However, if you're looking for a fun family movie, I would check out *Zootopia* instead.