

Film Review: Mowgli's latest jungle run releases on Netflix



CHENNAI: Technology is not a bad thing, but when stretched to the extreme it can hamper films. “Mowgli: The Legend of the Jungle,” which was released on Netflix this week, seems to suffer on this precise point.

Directed by the Hollywood legend that is Andy Serkis, the film employs his trademark use of technology that records an actor’s performance in three dimensions then maps the digital character, in this case the animals of the jungle, over the top.

While he is famous for his performance-capture techniques, it can be distracting from the plot and a little bizarre to watch on screen as the all-star cast — Benedict Cumberbatch as Bengal tiger Shere Khan, Cate Blanchett as the snake Kaa and Christian Bale as the panther Bagheera — morph into animal form.

Disney’s 2016 computer animated remake of Rudyard Kipling’s work was a huge hit and Serkis’ effort pales in comparison, but the upside to this latest remake of Mowgli’s adventure is that it focuses on the boy-cub’s (played by Rohan Chand) interaction with

other humans and does so delightfully.

According to an interview with The Associated Press, Serkis was deep into planning when Disney's version was announced, and, although he knew the films would be quite different, there was still pressure to be first. Once that "went away" when Disney beat them to theaters, Serkis said, they decided to take the time they needed to refine the story and get the performances and the technology up to his standard.

The film follows Mowgli as he is captured by a hunter (played by Matthew Rhys) and taken to a neighboring village, where a kind woman (Frieda Pinto) nurses him and even sings him a lullaby. Ultimately, the plot boils down to a choice between two worlds — the jungle and the village — and the young boy must choose between the lesser of two evils.

Serkis' work has an important message for audiences and shouts loud and clear about the dangers of expanding urban developments in countries like India. The forests are shrinking, says a character in the film, and perhaps this film will shed light on the need to save the wildlife therein.
