

Review: 'Along for the Ride' creates magic fantasy with young romance



CHENNAI: Netflix's latest young romance is celebrating what seems like the end of dark times, the easing of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a film based around sun, sand and surf.



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Although titled a little clumsily, “Along for the Ride,” is like a breath of springtime breeze in what has been a gloomy swag of films that spoke of death and unrequited love among teens and somewhat older girls and boys. We have seen this in “The Fault in Our Stars,” “Five Feet Apart” and “The Last Song” — among several others that left us with longing and pain.

In welcome contrast, Sofia Alvarez, who wrote the critically lauded “To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before,” creates a teen love story with distress and a dilemma leading to, in the end, a lovely and heartening resolution. It is elevating and optimistic, just the right kind of work to get us flying. Yes, it is a bit of a hotchpotch, the writing is not always focussed, but it is fun nonetheless.

Based on Sarah Dessen’s novel of the same title, “Along for the Ride” takes us on a rollercoaster journey with high-school graduate, Auden (played with the right degree of high and low by Emma Pasarow). She decides to spend her summer break with her father and young stepmother, who has her own struggles with a new baby. Auden is determined to bridge the gulf with her father, novelist Robert (Dermot Mulroney), who walked out on his wife, Victoria, portrayed by a marvellous Andie MacDowell. Victoria always calls the shots, loves to be in command of every situation and hates the idea of her daughter meeting a man who she feels is no good.

Her mother’s overbearing attitude has not allowed Auden to blossom; she is shy, diffident and a hopeless introvert. But a change of place, in this case the sleepy town of Colby by the sea, works wonders. And when she meets Eli (played with charming ease by Belmont Cameli), there is instant chemistry. They both have their demons to grapple with. He hides a terrible truth, holding himself responsible for a death. She is fighting hard to break out of her shell, to move away from the nest her mother had been feathering.

Alvarez creates an idyllic atmosphere with Auden working in her stepmother’s beachwear boutique with three other girls, and their camaraderie after an initial period of unease and discomfort nudges her to gravitate toward Eli, helping him to get over his sorrow. The movie sets up a climate of sweet fantasy, and there is one scene straight out of a fairy tale. He is in a tuxedo, she in an alluring yellow dress, and when they dance on the beach on a dark night, it is all silver and sparkle. Their sexual tension is confined to only two passionate kisses, and they lack fire, but the couple’s night swim, splashing water on each other, just about turns the tide. The music helps, and the soundtrack, “Along for the Ride,” is reportedly one of the best in years, with cinematographer Luca Del Puppo crafting splendid imagery to run along with it.