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Into the Jungle Stories for Mowgli

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

Children now know **The Jungle Book** almost exclusively from its animated film version, which leaves Katherine Rundell a free hand to tell her stories in the way she likes without having to replicate any of Kipling's former prose sonorities. And she does so supremely well, making every word work in a way the master would surely have appreciated. Her five action-packed tales involving Mowgli and a different animal friend and mentor mix the exotic with everyday forest life in just the right balance. Cheerfully anthropocentric and always up for a chat, her animal characters also kill, scavenge and fight, although there is nothing about their sex lives. Illustrated as discreetly naked for the most part, Mowgli too shows no intimation of the growing feelings that eventually led him to look for a mate in Kipling's great original. The addition of Kristjana's wonderfully glowing illustrations adds extra quality to an already outstanding book.

Disappointingly Rundell chooses to finish off her narrative with a boring, over-extended battle between good and bad members of the animal kingdom. Exhortations to win the good fight above all else seems an increasingly threadbare strategy for solving long-term problems in life or in fiction, and the evil Great White Ape living and plotting at the top of his mountain is the only character who fails to convince. The demonisation of his monkey followers along with that permanently grumpy tiger Shere Khan also seems out of place in fiction otherwise stressing the inter-dependence of animal species all with a right to their own existence. But this cavil apart, Rundell has done an excellent job. She tells a good story well, providing her illustrator with ample opportunities to add memorable extra ingredients to an already richly imagined scenario.

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