

# Arthur the King (2024)



Mikael & Arthur cross a river. (c) Lionsgate Films

Simon Cellan Jones bases his new film on the book *Arthur: The Dog Who Crossed the Jungle to Find a Home*. The film is a combination of the typical dog story, in which a mutt captures your heart, with a sports film aimed to pump up the rate of your heartbeat. The sport is Adventure Racing which calls for a team to engage in overland trekking, biking, kayaking and cliff climbing, as well as the employment of navigational skills. There are numerous check points over the course of the 435 miles, and a team is free to reach the next one by a shorter route that takes them cross country if they want to dare unforeseen consequences. The 5-day race in the book took place in Ecuador, but for reasons unspecified the film has been moved to the Dominican Republic.

The first part of the film moves back and forth between Mikael Light (Mark Wahlberg) securing a sponsor, assembling his team (which must include at least one female), and getting ready for the race. Michael has yet to win a race, so he is desperate, this possibly being his last shot at victory. While the human part of the story is transpiring, a street dog is eking out its existence in a city street in the Dominican Republic. We see just a few shots of the as yet nameless stray mutt scrounging amidst cast-off scraps of food, being chased by other more vicious strays, and occasionally being fed by a kind-hearted human.

Early in the race Mikael is eating meatballs during one of their stops when he notices the hungry dog watching them. He offers it some of his food, but the dog is hesitant to trust him. Mikael persists, and the dog accepts it. The team starts off again, advancing many kilometers through the jungle, the incident seemingly in the past, especially when a team member hurts his ankle. They hear a dog barking and are surprised to discover it is the same dog. How did it catch up with them? They decide not to drive it off, but to continue with them. A fortunate decision, because at night when they can see little ahead of them through the dense growth, the dog keeps barking as it faces them. They are upset by the ruckus—until they discover they are about to step over a cliff. The dog had been warning them!

After this Michael gives the dog the name of the title, Arthur from the name of the brave warrior of legend. In the rest of the film Mikael and the team will create their own legend, including the sacrificial act of kindness that will cost them a trophy but earn them—and Arthur—a far more meaningful victory. Like just a few other sports films, this one flies against the belief that winning in sports is everything.

With Arthur taken back home with him to Sweden. Mikael founds an organization named after Arthur that does far more good for needy dogs in Ecuador than any trophy could. This is a fun film, enriching for a whole family with children. One thing I appreciated about the film is the refusal to anthropomorphize Arthur. He is a loveable dog, obviously intelligent, but still a canine. Score another victory for one of the most likable actors to grace our screens, Mark Wahlberg.

**Note:** I was delighted to learn that Simon Cellan Jones also directed my favorite Beethoven film BBC's *Eroica*, based on the first performance of Beethoven's "Third Symphony."

*This review is in the March issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found*

*reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.*