

4-13-08

ZOOM



"8 1/2"



"EIGHT MEN OUT"



"HARD EIGHT"



"EIGHT MILE"

Film's lucky number

In the suspense film "88 Minutes," opening Friday, Al Pacino stars as a college professor and part-time FBI forensic psychiatrist who receives a death threat claiming he has only 88 minutes to live.

Bad luck? Maybe not. Pacino's character might not survive, but movies with the number "8" in their title are often a boon to the people who make them.

Eight is a lucky number in Chinese culture — that's why the Olympic Games in Beijing are scheduled to begin on Aug. 8, 2008 — yep, 8-8-08 — at 8:08:08 p.m. The number is also auspicious in Hollywood: 8 mm is a standard film format that doubles to 16 mm (the digits in 35 mm, not surprisingly, add up to 8). Here are eight lucky "8" movies to ponder. *Michael Giltz*

BUTTERFIELD 8 (1960)

Roll of the dice: Elizabeth Taylor — who was treated like a whore after breaking up the marriage of Eddie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds — played a high-class prostitute in this sordid drama.

Lucky eight: Almost dying of pneumonia during Academy Awards season gave Taylor the sympathy vote — and her first Oscar, despite her admitting that the movie wasn't very good. Taylor, by the way, was married eight times.

8 MILE (2002)

Roll of the dice: Starring in a Hollywood movie inspired by your own life is about the uncoolest thing a hard-core rapper could do. But that's exactly the risk Eminem took with this biopic about a white-trash kid looking to win a local rap contest.

Lucky eight: His song "Lose Yourself" won the Oscar for Best Song. It was his eighth hit single on Billboard's Hot 100 and by far the biggest of his career. The film grossed \$116 million in the U.S. and \$242 million worldwide. Now add up either of those numbers (1+1+6, for example) and you get ... 8.

HARD EIGHT (1996)

Roll of the dice: Struggling writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson crafted this quiet drama about losers on the fringe of the gambling world and cast his favorite actor, Philip Baker Hall, as the lead.

Lucky eight: Anderson hated when the studio changed the name to "Hard Eight," but it became a critical breakthrough that led to "Boogie Nights," "Magnolia," "Punch-Drunk Love" and "There Will Be Blood." There are eight letters in the last name of Anderson, "Boogie" star Mark Wahlberg and "Blood's" Daniel Day-Lewis.

48 HRS. (1982)

Roll of the dice: "Saturday Night Live" breakout Eddie Murphy was teamed with Nick Nolte in a rough and tumble action flick that Murphy enlivened with his quicksilver wit and a hilarious rendition of "Roxanne" (the first hit for the Police, whose eighth U.S. single was "Every Breath You Take," which was No. 1 for eight weeks).

Lucky eight: Murphy was such an immediate sensation that by his eighth film, "Harlem Nights," he took the reins and directed it himself. Murphy followed that with "Another 48 Hrs.," which grossed \$80 million.

EIGHT MEN OUT (1988)

Roll of the dice: Writer-director John Sayles tarnishes America's pastime by retelling the gripping, heartbreaking story of the Chicago White Sox players who threw the 1919 World Series in exchange for money.

Lucky eight: At the heart of the scandal was Joe Jackson (played by D.B. Sweeney), who was kicked out of the game despite batting extremely well and not making a single error in the field that series. His nickname "Shoeless" has eight letters in it, and he began his pro career in 1908. According to the Baseball Page Web site, Jackson currently ranks as the eighth greatest left fielder of all time.

EIGHT BELOW (2006)

Roll of the dice: In this superior live-action Disney film, Paul Walker stars as an Antarctic scientist/explorer determined to rescue the eight sled dogs he is forced to leave behind by a vicious storm.

Lucky eight: This was the eighth film Walker made since his breakthrough in "The Fast and The Furious" in 2001. Grossing just over \$80 million (okay, \$81 million to be exact), it remains his only substantial hit outside that action franchise.

8 SECONDS (1994)

Roll of the dice: After breaking out in "Beverly Hills 90210," Luke Perry was dying to prove he was leading-man material. The story of legendary bull rider Lane Frost seemed the perfect vehicle, complete with a tragic early death.

Lucky eight: The movie barely lasted eight seconds at the box office, but Perry could take solace in decent reviews. His post-"90210" career has not been bad, including stints on HBO's "Oz" and "John From Cincinnati," so clearly someone was watching. It could have been worse. He could have been Ian Ziering.

8 1/2 (1963)

Roll of the dice: Director Federico Fellini had made a career out of being wonderfully self-indulgent, but would a movie about a famous director making a movie be going too far?

Lucky eight: Hardly. "8 1/2" became one of Hollywood's greatest odes to itself, even if it was made in Italian. It scored two Oscars and three more nominations, a rare feat for a foreign film. "8 1/2" has since lived on as the stage musical "Nine," which itself is being made into a movie starring Javier Bardem that comes out in ... 2009. Some people have no sense of timing. ♦