

Eight Below



In *Eight Below* there are two Alaskan Malamutes (Buck and Shadow) and six Siberian Huskies (Max, Maya, Truman, Dewey, Shorty, and Old Jack). Each actor-dog had help from other dogs that performed stunts and pulled sleds. In all, over 30 dogs were used to portray the film's eight canine characters. Max, Maya, Dewey, and Buck (Old Jack's stunt double) were played by dogs seen in Disney's live-action *Snow Dogs*.<sup>[5]</sup> The animal filming was supervised by the American Humane Association, and the film carries the standard "No animals were harmed..." disclaimer, despite an on-set incident in which a trainer used significant force to break up an animal fight.<sup>[6]</sup> Roger Ebert of the *Chicago Sun-Times* gave the film 3 out of 4 stars, and said "*Eight Below* succeeds as an effective story."<sup>[10]</sup> BBC liked the movie as well, but did not like its long length (2 hours).<sup>[11]</sup> Reel.com liked it, saying "the movie succeeds at drawing you into their incredible adventure".<sup>[12]</sup> Peter Hartlaub of the *San Francisco Chronicle* disliked the film, saying: "The movie is overly long and much too intense for small children, yet it's filled with dialogue and plot turns that are too juvenile to thrill adult audiences."<sup>[13]</sup> William Arnold of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reacted favorably ("the dog actors will melt your heart"), but pointed out, as did other reviewers, that "Antarctica buffs" will be critical of errors, such as portraying midwinter events occurring in "balmy, blazing daylight at a time Antarctica is locked in round-the-clock darkness and temperatures of 140 degrees below."<sup>[14]</sup> You think penguins have it bad? At least they've adapted to survive in Antarctica. "Eight Below" tells the harrowing story of a dogsled team left chained outside a research station when the humans pull out in a hurry. The guide who used and loved them wants to return to rescue them but is voted down: Winter has set in and all flights are canceled until spring. Will the dogs survive? Or will the film end in the spring, with the guide uttering a prayer over their eight dead bodies? In EIGHT BELOW, scientist Davis McLaren (Bruce Greenwood) arrives in Antarctica in search of a meteorite and embarks on an excursion led by guide Jerry (Paul Walker). Also on the trip are Jerry's team of eight sled dogs and his human pal Cooper ( Jason Biggs ). When Davis falls into freezing

water, the team has to rush him back to base. Then a powerful storm hits, and the guys must fly off and leave the dogs behind. Jerry is half delirious from his ordeal, unaware that they won't be able to come right back to retrieve his "family." And so the dogs' adventure begins. They must break loose from their tether, find food and shelter during the storm, and face down a fierce leopard seal. This goes on for some 175 days, while Jerry, stuck back in the States, looks for funding and means to get back to Antarctica to save them. In 1993, Jerry (Paul Walker) is the resident guide at the U. S. National Science Research Base in Antarctica. His jovial work companion is Charlie (Jason Biggs) a carefree cartographer. But it is clear that his best friends are his eight sled dogs — six Siberian Huskies and two Malamutes. Every morning, he takes a baseball bat and hits a few balls for them to chase, after which they feast on fish. The dogs have a difficult return trip as the biggest storm of the year plunges everything into a deep freeze of blowing snow. By the time they reach the station, the orders have been given to evacuate the place for the season. There is no room for the dogs on the plane, but Jerry is assured by Katie that she will come right back to get them. He chains the dogs outside the station so they will be easy for her to find. But when the storm strengthens, her trip is cancelled. To make the dogs' plight worse, the teams scheduled to winter at the station are cancelled. The eight dogs are essentially abandoned. The brief scenes of violence in *Eight Below* are mostly of the Animal Planet or Discovery Channel kind. To survive the Antarctic winter, the dogs learn to hunt. A scene shows them working together to capture seagulls; they hungrily tear apart their prey (no blood is shown). A leopard seal surprises the dogs, chases them and bites one on the leg. Retaliation involves biting and nipping at the seal until it flees. Old Jack cuts his paw while pulling the sled, leaving bloody paw prints in the snow. [Spoiler Warning] Two of the eight dogs perish; one after succumbing to the elements, the other after slipping off an ice ledge and breaking its leg. When weather closes in and a ferocious storm brews, the expedition people have to evacuate. Jerry chains the dogs in the snow thinking he will be back in two days. But he was unable to return and although he fought to get

support and funding to get back, it was five to six months before he could return. The dogs had waited patiently for Jerry's return, but after two weeks without eating, Maya and the team slipped from their chains. Sadly Old Jack couldn't be freed. The movie follows the hardy dogs as they face the wrath of mother nature and battle to get to a Russian base where they find food. Young Max became separated and was lost, but finally made it to the American Base which was locked. These amazing dogs followed their leader as Maya tried to find food. Battling through deep snow, exhausted and hungry, they fought against all odds. When Jerry made it back, there were six out of the eight left. Thin and exhausted, the dogs welcomed their master back. Then they led him to Maya who lay injured. Weak but still with a strong heart she joined the group. It gives a rare glimpse into the lives of a sled dog. How they cooperate as a team, and how it highlights just how well these dogs are adapted to such bleak conditions. Only a dog would welcome with joy the master who had deserted them. While it is just a story, it does showcase the incredible survival and heart of a dog. They never give up, they just take each moment and live it fully. 'Eight Below' is mostly set in Antarctica, where 30 below is more like it. But the title is a pun: The eight in question refers to a team of sled dogs left behind by a research team that is forced to evacuate because of an oncoming storm. On the review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes the film has a rating of 72%, based on 146 reviews. The site's critical consensus reads, "Featuring a stellar cast of marooned mutts, who deftly display emotion, tenderness, loyalty and resolve, *Eight Below* is a heartwarming and exhilarating adventure film." [6] Roger Ebert from *Chicago Sun-Times* gave the film 3 out of 4 stars, and said "*Eight Below* succeeds as an effective story." [7] BBC liked the movie as well, but did not like its long length (2 hours). [8] Reel.com liked it, saying "the movie succeeds at drawing you into their incredible adventure". [9] However, the *San Francisco Chronicle* disliked the film, saying: "The movie is overly long and much too intense for small children, yet it's filled with dialogue and plot turns that are too juvenile to thrill adult audiences." [10] William Arnold of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* reacted favorably ("the dog actors will

melt your heart"), but pointed out, as did other reviewers, that "Antarctica buffs" will be critical of errors, such as portraying midwinter events occurring in "balmy, blazing daylight at a time Antarctica is locked in round-the-clock darkness and temperatures of 140 degrees below." [11] Disney's test panels must have been proud of their work earlier this year when ***Eight Below*** was released to theaters. More descriptive and conventional titles like *Antarctica* and *Antarctica: The Journey Home* had been used in the film's pre-release literature and promos, but the name settled upon deserves some praise for hooking audiences onto an unlikely hit. Whether it conjures up a Fahrenheit or Celsius measurement, the title suggests a cold temperature (though fairly mild for the southernmost part of the globe, in which the movie is set), while actually referring to an octet of snow dogs left to fend for themselves. Of course, a title alone never makes or breaks a movie (one can hardly credit consistent surname spelling or the addition of an extra article for the blockbuster statuses of *Meet the Fockers* and *The Passion of the Christ*), so obviously, *Eight Below* had something else going for it to make it the first box office success of the year for Disney and one of the first for any studio. *Eight Below* prominently touts that it is "Inspired By a True Story", but a bit of research reveals that the phrase "inspired by" is being used in one of the loosest senses possible. Disney's version begins in early 1993, when passionate expedition guide Jerry Shepard (Paul Walker) reluctantly leads his fellow American, geologist Davis McClaren (Bruce Greenwood), to the site of where a meteorite from Mercury is believed to have landed. While their home nation may be in the midst of winter, Jerry and Davis are literally treading on thin ice on the world's coldest continent and they have only the former's expertise and eight faithful sled dogs to protect them from peril. Along the way, neither the canines nor Jerry can altogether prevent trouble, as an accident and stormy conditions soon have them back at base and homeward bound. For a few reasons, the dogs cannot board the plane, but the

group's bush pilot (and Jerry's ex) Katie (Moon Bloodgood) intends to return immediately and bring them back to the States. As you probably already know, that does not happen. With Antarctica dealt the worst winter in twenty-five years, all potentially interested parties express regret but offer no financial support, leaving the resourceful guide dogs stranded and their owner Jerry extremely concerned. The movie proceeds to follow both the affected humans -- chiefly Jerry, but also Davis, Katie, and goofy cartographer Coop (*American Pie's* Jason Biggs as the light comic relief) -- and the eight dogs (six Siberian Huskies and two Alaskan Malamutes) whose survival would defy all odds. As days turn to weeks and then months, the hope for a miracle in the face of such blustery extremes only partially fades for Jerry, who cannot stop thinking about his furry friends. Unlike Jerry, who has nothing but blind, distanced faith to go on, the viewer is privy to the dogs' adventurous trials. They settle for makeshift shelter in the snow and find tempting birds who might just cure hunger. They are enchanted by the nighttime glow of aurora australis (Southern lights) and have a close call with a leopard seal. And so on. As far as plot particulars, that is really all there is and all that is needed to sustain two well-paced hours. In only his fourth directorial outing, longtime producer/Steven Spielberg collaborator Frank Marshall (*Arachnophobia*, *Alive*, *Congo*) again proves capable at establishing a tone and holding one's interest with it. The film never approaches excellence, but it falls comfortably into the class of engaging entertainment, rarely underestimating the intelligence of its audience. It doesn't resort to a *Snow Dogs*-type dream sequence or even inject excess anthropomorphism into its canine heroes. The oft-noticeable score, briskly-edited photography, and human cast do not really ascend beyond sufficient, but the movie as a whole is hard to dislike, even when severe logic questions arise or one wonders why the occasionally-summoned on-screen "Days on their own" counter is so slowly faded (it certainly doesn't

heighten drama). Curiously, the real-life story that inspired *Eight Below* took place in 1958 and involved Japanese scientists. The events were dramatized in the 1983 Japanese film *Nankyoku monogatari* (credited as "suggested by"), which in America was released under this loose remake's working title, *Antarctica*. The fate of the true canine cluster was far more bleak than that of the pack in Disney's incarnation, though not enough to eliminate "inspiring" from the picture. In reality, there were fifteen dogs left "below" and the number surviving matched the number depicted as not making it here. Sadly, the decorated Japanese filming has not made it to DVD in any part of the world. Grounded in fact or not, moviegoers found *Eight Below* pretty compelling fare. Backed by warm reviews, the film went on to gross over \$81 million domestically, far more than even the cheeriest estimates had it destined for and enough to make it one of 2006's top-earning works through the recently-launched summer movie season.

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