

# AMC20

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by [Bob Hurt](#)

It's jumpin', it's rockin', it's hoppin', it's teeming with teenagers, it's paraded by parents...

It's the AMC20 movie theater complex tucked into the north corner of a sprawling suburban shopping center that is nestled between Curlew on the south, Tampa Road on the north, Oldsmar to the east, and Clearwater to the west. And it is the Place to find the action on Friday night in Clearwater.



Why?

Well, to begin with the AMC20 place is brand new as movie houses go, having been built in 1999. So everybody had to check it out. And after the checkout had been under way for a couple of months, several lesser and older theaters in a 10-mile radius closed their doors from lack of business. Clearly, AMC20 is IN, and the old are OUT.



And it is in a previously unpopular and uncrowded area, meaning out of the way, not really close to any action, and in a strip-style shopping center that surrounds a huge parking lot the size of at least half a dozen football fields; plus the center is super-boring and typical, with a K-Mart (Yuuuk! K-Mart's OUT, Wal-Mart's IN), a picture frame store, a Beall's clothing store, a Kash n Karry supermarket, a Karate studio, an ice cream parlor, a pizza joint named Sans, and a dozen other shops, most of which are closed at main movie times, leaving even more room in the parking lot.

And it always shows the latest films, sometimes running the expected popular ones in two or three auditoriums at once.

Plus the seating is tiered and the seats are pushily cushioned with armrests you can raise up so you can snuggle with your companion if you are so inclined. I have wondered what would happen if I plopped down next to someone and looked directly at him or her as I raised the armrest between us. Since I am always with Maria, we always raise the armrest between us, and I don't think she would appreciate it if I raised the armrest between me and another person. So I still wonder. Anyway, there is often plenty of room to sit without being next to someone else, and you never have to stretch to see over the people in front of you because their heads are just above the level of your knees. Furthermore, the armrests have a cup hole that is just the right size to hold a small paper cup without it's falling through, as well as the biggest cup you can get at the concession stand.

Speaking of which, you still cannot buy hamburgers or ice cream at the concession stand, but it is loaded with the standard overpriced popcorn, soft drinks, candy, and hot dogs. I like to get a cup of water, a wad of napkins, and a bag of pop corn, put a little butter on it for Maria, a little extra salt for me, and half a cup of sliced jalapeno peppers with juice - the popcorn has a real "pop" to it, just what you need on a hot-mouth date with a succulent babe like Maria.

On top of all that, the restrooms are beautiful and modern. Toilets and urinals are self-flushing, water faucets self-activating. Tile floors are clean, countertops elegant, and of course, I look handsome and manly in the mirrors. There are boxes of Kleenex on the counters, and paper towel holders let you grab a piece without pushing a button or winding a crank. There are no blow-driers to stir up the bacteria in the place. Potted plants add green to the softly lit room. Floors, counters, and toilets are kept almost miraculously clean by the large teen-age crew that mans the theater in uniforms. All we need now is an automatic door opener so we don't have to catch the germs of others who did not wash their hands on the way out. Well, I guess an automatic hand to shake the dew off our dicks and wipe our butts would help us to keep our hands clean, but I am guessing the automatic hands would get a lot of abuse like our own do. Besides, I don't want just \*any\* hand on my private parts. So, aside from the door handle, I would say the restrooms are perfect.

And, don't let me forget to mention the central overriding benefit of this fabulous 20-plex theater: there are no movie cops patrolling to detect sneak-cheats who visit one film after another. There are, I am sure, plenty of sneak-cheat movie watchers. How do I know? Well, the movies that sell out do cause a problem to those who arrive "Just In Time" (JIT). Since it is popular enough to sell out, many other sneak-cheats will sneak in to watch it too. So when the JITs arrive, they are always too late. As the late Vince Lombardi repeatedly said, if you're not 15 minutes early, you're LATE! And it is fun to stand outside an auditorium and watch people leave. Usually, the sneaks are among the first out the door, and they often have a "hunted" look as their eyes fall on the teenage cleaning crew just outside the door waiting eagerly to go in and clean up the mess.

Speaking of being late, I have been late or JIT a few times, but normally we just go to the theater when the mood strikes us, with no prior planning or timing, and in that case it is impossible for us to be late. So if we want to see a film that doesn't start for an hour, and we find out about this after we arrive, we go inside anyway and sneak into another movie while waiting for ours to start seating. Maria hates being late for anything, and if she knew when our film was to start, she would have us there an hour or so early anyway, just to be sure we beat the sneaks and JITs

So on this glorious Friday afternoon we arrived early (we are always early), about 3:30 PM, and there was no crowd there at all. The attendants at the window looked really bored sitting there with the afternoon beaming in on them through their smoky green plate glass. Maria approached the window behind which was an old man with his jaw propped on his fist, asked for two senior tickets to Ghosts, and plunked her moviewatcher.com points card through the arched hole in the window just above the counter top. As he slid the card into the opening, he informed her dryly that the price for seniors, five bucks, was the same for everybody else at matinee showings, meaning anything before 6 PM. That didn't make Maria feel so good. She likes to get her senior discount, and she does not feel that she is getting it if the price is the same for seniors as for everybody else, as at a matinee. If it costs others 5 bucks, it ought to cost us seniors only four bucks, right?

Frankly, now that I am 58, I am an old salt at senior discounts. I started asking for them when I turned 50, and getting them. I have an AAA automobile club card, AARP retired person card, and Geico insurance card, and I always am ready to flash them when I don't get my expected senior discount immediately. You would think people would just go ahead and give us the discount anyway. I even ask for discounts at grocery stores and department stores, and I try to do it BEFORE checking out. I often do it expectantly, like "You are going to include my senior discount, right???" as I bob my head and grin bigly. Surprisingly, I sometimes get discounts when none are offered and I have no reason to expect them. I have found that most clerks really WANT to give a discount and will if they can and IF I ask.

While Maria was extracting information from the man behind the glass, my attention drifted up to the red L.E.D. marquee and the various movies showing. I wondered lazily what some of them were, particularly the one we were going to see, some sci-fi thing about ghosts. Maria asked the man how many points she got on her moviewatcher card, and he said four. She asked what she could get for the points and he said nothing, but when she got ten, she could get a free bag of popcorn. My ears perked up, and I started fishing my moviewatcher card out of my wallet.



Popcorn was two-fifty for small bag, and since it costs only a dime to make a bag, I generally object to buying it. But since Maria and I go to movies so often at AMC20, I thought we had just hit a gold mine.

I flipped my movie card and my platinum business visa through the arched hole. I figured since we were going to an early movie on what would normally be company time, the company might as well pay for it, even though the company is pretty much fictitious and I am pretty much retired. The window man looked at me like I was a loser and informed me that he had already put my two points on Maria's card and he could not take them off her card to put them on mine. Hmm. Maria had four points and I had none. That had possibilities, but the vision of my taking in a couple of solo flicks to rack up a matching four points of my own was quickly rejected by my pussy-whipped mind, and we sauntered through the glass doors to see the ticket-ripper man at the rope barricade. I figured Maria would probably share her points with me.

After the ripper handed us our stubs and pointed our bodies to auditorium 19 on the right, I looked at the concession stand. Several mostly idle uniformed clerks were there to serve us. The popcorn smelled good. Its waft sucked both of us in its direction.

I thought about the moviewatcher points. That was a good deal. When we later grabbed a brochure on it we learned that you have to get points in increments of 6, then 10, 10 more, and so with each visit to the movie, and each time your incentive award gets bigger till you win the 100-point grand finale of free movie, free popcorn, and free soda, admittedly a fabulous freebee. Let's see. 2 points per visit, divided into 100 points for the grand finale is 50 visits, times 5 bucks per entrance fee, is \$250, times two of us is \$500, and we get a total incentive award payout worth about 50 bucks retail. Granted, all the concessions are overpriced, but that is a nice deal. And given that Maria and I go at least once and sometimes two or three times a week anyway, those moviewatcher points are like a big fat superbonus, and will pay us a dividend every couple or three weeks.

Talk about creaming the competition. As if cushy seats with flip-up cup-holding armrests, poshly clean restrooms, beaming and gripeless uniformed teenager attendants, and 20 copless auditoriums to choose from aren't enough, Moviewatcher and AMC are out for blood. They aren't satisfied with stealing the business from all the movies in 15-mile radius. They want to steal people away from bowling, movieless meals out, tv at home watching year-old reruns, little league baseball, high school football games, and walks on the beach. Those seats are so good for snuggling that you can actually lie down in them and watch the movie propped on an elbow, and you can do some serious snuggling and necking. They are so cool, they could be seen as a new foreplay forum.

At the concession stand, I grabbed a bag of popcorn and half a cup of sliced jalapeno peppers as a garnish, drizzled some pseudo-butter on the popcorn for Maria, and headed for 19. Meeting up with Maria I looked at the ticket she was holding up in front of her consternate face. It was 3:40. The movie was to start at 5:40. Two hours. That was enough to catch a whole 'nother flick.

We ducked into an auditorium showing a comedy. We ducked back out in about 5 minutes, after we realized we had seen it and remembered that it ended with contestants in a race for \$250,000 gave the money away from the stage of a rock concert to raise money for needy children. Then we found another that started at 4.

We ducked into the auditorim and grabbed seats right in front. I set my backpack on the floor beside me and adjusted the oxygen flow to two liters. Maria flipped up the armrest while I grabbed a bottle of pure "Rainsoft" reverse osmosis water bottle from the side pocket on the pack. The water in "Clearwater" Florida is loaded with calcium, magnesium, chlorine, and phosphates to reduce the acidity. It tastes nasty, so we are loath to drink even a cup of it from the concession stand. We bring our own from our water filter at home. We carry half a dozen 24-oz bottles in the car at all times. Nobody gripes when we bring it into the movie. Maria and I snuggled and lunched down on the popcorn and peppers while waiting for the movie to start. We like the peppers with the popcorn because it heats up our mouths, and makes suckface in the movies that much more fun. Makes me turgid just to think about it. Presently, the movie started.

The film, not what we had planned to see, was about a mandolin-playing Italian artillery captain (Nicholas Cage) who was billeted in the home of a Greek doctor (John Hurt) and his daughter (Penelope Cruz) who was learning medicine. The setting was their village on a picturesque and mountainous island off the coast of Greece during World War II in 1943 or thereabouts. The Italians, aided by the Germans, had just occupied the island, and the island officials, with little conflict, had surrendered. A romance blossomed between the captain and the girl, who had written a Dear John letter to her betrothed, a Greek army volunteer who had gone away to fight for the fatherland and had not responded to her dozens of letters. The ex returned, badly torn up from the war, and was nursed back to health by the girl. However, he did not get her back, for she was stuck on her Italian captain who composed a haunting mandolin melody for her, the theme song of the movie. After Italy had surrendered to the Allies, all hell broke loose when the Germans demanded the Italians give up their arms. Fighting seriously injured the captain, nearly killing him, before the girl's ex-boyfriend, now a Greek resistance fighter, helped him sail away in the moonlight for Italy, never to return again. I won't go any further, but the movie had an ending worth the wait.

I give the movie a 7.5 on the 1-10 scale. It really was entertaining. The war scenes with tanks and planes were realistic, the sound explosive, and the island setting gorgeous. It contained some gratuitous nudity in a beach scene where the captain took his troops with a bunch of town girls for semi-clothed skinny-dipping and music. We heard sketches of famous Italian arias that

the men sang together. It was impossible not to be emotionally gripped as we are when witnessing any real-to-life romance that is threatened by the misfortunes of war. Penelope Cruz looks so slender that she nearly seems frail. Nicholas Cage is robust and well muscled - women are sure to enjoy the scenes in which his upper torso is bared. John Hurt's performance was brilliant.

The only negatives were the casting of Cage and Cruz. Cage's Italian accent is not very convincing, and Cruz seemed somewhat out of place and a little too frail. Maria and I both thought they could and should have cast a real Italian man for the captain (don't tell me there isn't a single Italian native who could have admirably played the role), and a real Greek woman for the leading lady. We have seen so many magnificent native Italian and Greek films with highly talented actors that it seemed to me the film was forced to have Cage and Cruz so their names alone would flood the box office with moviegoers. What a shame.

Our two water bottles empty, Maria and I trod out of the auditorium gratified with the film. We weren't in the mood to go to the Ghost film, so we headed out the door to the parking lot. The sun was low but still bright in the early evening sky, so we walked 40 meters to San's pizza parlor for dinner.

San's is new. The owner has smartly staffed it with a dozen teenagers who don't cost him much. The reason there are so many is simple. The place is flooded with moviegoers, most of whom get food there before going into the theater. There is a take-out pizza counter to the left, but we wanted to eat in. We managed to get a seat near the door. Maria ordered baked ziti and I ordered chicken Marsala. Then I noticed that on the specials menu I could get chicken picatta for the same price and got to thinking how good chicken picatta would be.



The marsala sauce is made with marsala wine and mushrooms; the picatta with lemon and capers. I had a yearning for something a little more piquant than marsala. So I excused myself to Maria with an explanation, got up to track down our waiter, a young man with goatee and 3-day whisker growth on the rest of his face. No problem, he would change it. On second thought, the veal picatta is only a dollar more, so I'll take that. I headed off to the men's room. Later, back at my seat, Maria proudly announced she

had changed the order to chicken picatta, and I said no, I had changed it. She said no, the waiter had gotten confused (amnesia was more like it) and returned to verify, whereupon she told him what I really wanted had been chicken. I explained that I had told him veal, so she got up and tracked the waiter down and changed it back to veal. Mmmmm, I could just imagine sinking my teeth into that tender veal with that juicy, tangy lemon/caper sauce. Mmmmm.



We started with simple garden salads. Maria had her Italian dressing on the side as I did my oil and vinegar, which, being more of a purist than I ought to be, I think is *really* Italian. Both came in small cups. I shook a generous  
**Eve of AMC**



dose of salt into the vinegar/oil mix and stirred to give the salt a chance to dissolve. Salad tastes so much better when you dissolve the salt in the vinegar before putting it on the salad, and after administering the vinegar /salt/ herb (if any) mix to the salad and stirring, you slather it with extra virgin olive oil, tricks I learned in Italy. My oil and vinegar were premixed, but what the heck, it tasted great.

As for the main course, I should have stuck to the chicken. The veal was tough, squared, and way too salty. Maria reminded me that this was not a high-class restaurant and what did I expect, anyway? I said yes she was right, and that was no excuse, but even so, how would the cook know whether the veal were tender or not? My side of spaghetti was bland, though the marinara sauce was tasty, and not the mouth-puckering acidic mud that most American restaurants seem to think is what real Italians serve. I spooned a taste of her baked ziti. Her sauce was a bit soupy, but blessed with the hot milkiness of molten mozzarella - Oh God, was it good!

I stoically but with hungry vigor masticated my way through the meal, catching an occasional taste of the ziti that Maria was all too glad to give (naturally she wanted nothing to do with the veal), and ended up satisfied. I reasoned that I had been drinking a lot of water lately, and that much is likely to leech the electrolytes out of my body, so I needed a little more sodium, and what better way to get it than on oversalted veal picatta. Maria reminded our goateed waiter that the cook should be told not to pour caper juice into the picatta sauce, as it is too salty. She couldn't have learned that from Emerill - it must have come from hard experience. Maria headed for the door and I gave the waiter a reasonable tip (I am normally lavish, but reasonable was all he deserved for messing up my veal order) as I paid the bill.



On the way out I stopped to snap a picture of the girls at the reservation stand. The three teenagers were hanging out there with nothing apparent to do, even though the place was packed with the pre-movie crowd. Maria waited just outside the door. I thought the girls looked kind of cute, but a little daffy and confused. Maybe they were thinking, "Wow, and we actually get paid for this". I thought "Yeah, and if they think this is a good job, they will love getting crazy rich working in a strip club." Then I reassured myself that these girls would never set foot in such a place and would be good students, become good college girls, and someday, with luck, marry above their stations.



Eve of AMC

It was about 6:30 to 7 PM. I looked out through the glass and marveled at the transformation that had taken place. The parking lot was now jammed, with people walking nearly a quarter of a mile from available slots at the far corner. People were streaming on foot toward the ticket counter and loitering area outside the AMC20, and a lot of loitering was going on. Cars were in a semblance of a line, dropping off passengers at or near the front of the theater. Most of the loiterers were teenagers.

We had struck gold. This was the time of the week when teens and workers alike shucked off the mantle of work and responsibility, let their hair down, and took in the Friday night movies. This was the place where teens for miles around gathered to yak and gab, and show off their movie garb. Quite a few wore sequined or other flashy tops with ordinary pants or shorts. Few dresses or skirts were in evidence. Kids hung in their inevitable clumps of similar-looking 2's, 3's, or 4's. Girls hung together, and boys hung together, for the most part. Many were strutting their stuff as a show that they were footloose and fancy free and could do anything they pleased. The air around them seemed to be saying, "We're out and free and available for excitement - bring it on!"



I walked out the door and gathered Maria. We were in no hurry as we ambled toward the car in valet parking a few rows from the theatre. Since I have a handicap tag, we usually get parking up close. Maria refers to that as "valet" parking.

We listened to the excited buzz of the kids. We mused at the security guard chatting with a passerby at

the curb in front of a shop a few doors down from Sans. He was taking in the activity just as we were. We overheard snatches of seemingly meaningless, mindless conversation from passing teen clumps, and headed for the car, enjoying the early evening ambiance. The weather was wonderfully



warm without being sweaty. The sun had already lowered itself beneath the rooftops of the buildings in the shopping center. It was a lovely way to end a day.



As we walked south over the end curbs of the aisles of cars, we passed cars heading for the dump-off spot. One car that caught out attention was a white coupe with New York plates that had two teenage boys in the front and two in the back. A clump of girls and smaller clump of boys walked up to the car to chat up the kid on the passenger side of the car. His right hand was in a cast. Aside from that we could see no reason why such a t-shirted twerp would be so popular. The girls seemed a little nervous, anxious, and intent. They left the car to walk back to the theater. Then they turned around and gaggled back to the car. Maria and I stood nearby trying to understand what was going on. What self-imposed crisis could have caused this commotion?



Then Maria noticed they were talking about scoring weed. She chimed into the conversation and began to chide the boy in the car, telling him he was going to get in trouble. I snapped pics as she harangued him. She told him he was going to be on the evening news. He



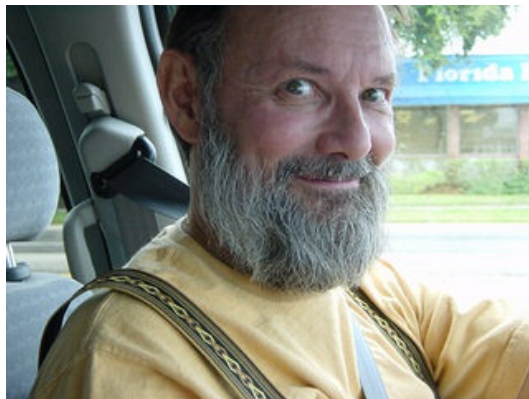
told her to shut the hell up. The kids did not at all seem concerned that they might get caught or have trouble. Apparently their business got transacted, and presently the car drove away and the clumps drifted to the next leg of their evening's adventure.



Maria and I walked back across the roadway to the sidewalk in front of stores to take an after-dinner walk. We stopped in front of the Karate studio and watched as different instructors showed technique to their students. We headed down to Kmart and went in to walk the aisles and note the differences to Wal-Mart. They seemed remarkably similar. It seemed like house wares are on the left, groceries on the far left, hunting / fishing in the back, clothing and furniture on the right. Why do they organize those stores that way? Are they that way in your area? We bought a large coffee mug as a way of saying thanks for the look-see.

Having had enough of the walk, we went directly to the car. The crowds and clumps were still building in front of the movies. It would be that way all night, and get even bigger later in the evening when movies let out. There is no smoking in the theater, so a lot of people hang around outside to smoke, chat, and gawk. Teen clumps seemed to circulate randomly, most eventuating themselves into and later out of the theater.

I opened the car for Maria and we climbed in. I flipped up the hanging blue and white wheelchair tag that says it expires in May of 2003, and my mind blitzed back to the day in 1993 when the doctor had prescribed it so I wouldn't have to make long treks from the back of the parking lots while low on oxygen. The sky darkened quickly into evening as I started the car. Stars were twinkling in the cloudless sky as we pulled out of the parking lot. As I turned onto Curlew westbound I could see the faint pink on the western horizon signaling another day well done for our sun.



Maria slid her left hand over toward me and I snuggled her tiny fist into my palm, loving its warmth, and loving the marvelous woman attached to it. I thanked God silently to myself for the life I have and the magnificent blessings showered on me by the love of our Heavenly Father. I stole a glance at Maria. I told her I loved her and that she was precious to me. She lifted my hand and nuzzled it to her cheek in answer. Her cheeks were flushed and her heat soaked into me. I smiled in my beard, stepped on the gas, and headed for home.

And we were glad for our Friday eve adventure to AMC20.

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