

*Take Care*

Ace-Cross Hospital, located at the corner of Brooklyn Street and Maplewood Avenue, despite being the only medical facility in the entire city, still has trouble getting itself under control. Obnoxious neon lettering, half of which has never shone out due to various punctures in the glass, flickers with epilepsy-inducing strokes of gibberish morse-code on the Hospital's visage. The parking lot, far larger in area than the building itself, is riddled with as many potholes as you'd expect to find bullet holes puncturing a stop sign out in the boonies of any gun-toting state. Ace-Cross takes to being the simultaneous attraction and blemish of the town's far from pristine face—a sort of mole that, depending on the way light dances over it, can appear as a beauty mark or a witch's wart.

The interior of the place does not betray any disturbance outside, as it's well-kept and, to be quite frank, a bit boring. The sterile innards of such a wretched beast, a liar of a building—that's what Ace-Cross Hospital is. Regardless of how often the entire place is cleaned; the floors could be washed multiple times a day, the beds and sheets changed, and the instruments disinfected, the place still stinks to high heaven. Granted, the town deserves little better than this contradictory mess of sensory assault, and the Hospital continued to serve its function well. No one had any right to complain about the service, not that they could file their complaints anywhere above the Hospital's head—the place ran itself! One of the world's first fully-autonomous buildings, and one of the very few left over after some less-than ideal incidents involving the world's first autonomous gas-station and the world's first autonomous bank.

An out-of-the-way town like this was never the chief concern of politicians and those that controlled the infrastructure of the area, and so Ace-Cross slid well under the radar of potential enemies, but then again, so did the town. Time continued to batter and bruise the town as well as the exterior of the Hospital, slowly devouring what little charm the town could claim. Erosion of a natural sort, exacerbated by the unnatural quality of the Hospital and the increasing pleasantness of its interior, drove people farther away, or much farther inside.

Walking through the shining white linoleum halls feels like entering a new-age garden of Eden. The stereotypically harsh fluorescent tube-lights balanced in such a way as to never drive away the eye, I think as time went on, those lights became something close to pleasant to look at. Staring off into the ceiling won't stop the Hospital from getting you to where you need to go; however, as the pristine tiles come equipped with whatever technology came after the common conveyer belt and escalator. Moving automatically with the smooth ease necessary to preserve the captive state of mind you fall into, but still strong enough to transfer the heaviest of patients, the tiles whisk immobile forms to and fro, even up and down floors.

The first real patients of Ace-Cross Hospital were quite unnerved at the lack of a reception area, replaced with a featureless white room that allowed the building's eyes to look over the new occupants with zero obstruction, something that the Hospital finds harder and harder to do in the sparsely decorated halls and individual rooms. Apparently, the original "draft" of the building was entirely composed of those stark, blinding, white rooms. That caused a bit

too much unease with test cases, so it was gussied up with the odd plastic plant here or reproduction *Kandinsky* or *Mondrian* there, all of which were housed in pots or frames of that same white material—fighting to take up as much space as possible. The Hospital’s engineers were ferociously insistent that as much of the walls and floor be made up of this material, any less was like “sending a blind surgeon into the operating room”.

After the Hospital looks over the patients, it could diagnose them properly and send them to the correct wings, and from there the correct rooms, of the building. Early on, the Hospital would also broadcast directions in various applicable languages for patients to follow in order to get the treatment they needed—somewhat abrasive, unnatural fabrications of human speech shot out from that “reception” room. Ace-Cross became a bit impatient as more and more people would make their way inside, eventually replacing the attempts at speaking with “soothing” music from the public domain.

Patients would find themselves under anesthetics in most cases, regardless of how severe their afflictions might’ve been. The Hospital only rarely would let anyone see it at work, and those lucky few conscious patients never spilled the details of their visits. It was a shy building, after all. Everything from minor bruises and headaches to broken bones and infectious diseases would be cured or alleviated enough to keep people going about their daily lives. Local hypochondriacs would even report their exaggerated ailments vanished after a visit to Ace-Cross. The most reassuring part ended up being a tie between the receipt of treatment that detailed the exact sickness that was cured, or the fact that treatment was entirely free.

The miraculous Ace-Cross Hospital, still active to this day. Unfortunately, the town was not so lucky. People from far and wide came seeking treatment; patients on a pilgrimage to medicinal salvation. As the Hospital increased in popularity, the number of patients went up, necessitating a more streamlined service, a more streamlined architecture—everything about the way the Hospital ran evolved to suit the needs of its patients. The number of reception rooms increased, the number of languages it spoke went up, the excess decorations began to slowly disappear, the floors became faster, some people swore the building got a story taller, and the lights, coupled with the music of increasingly high audio quality, became technological lullabies for expediting the process of diagnosis and delivery.

The town suffered under the strain of an exploding population, all willing to camp out or find residence just to be near the Hospital. Some religious societies started up and had small squabbles with other factions of belief regarding what Ace-Cross meant for humanity’s cosmic position and spiritual future. This continued series of conflicts finally forced any semblance of police force in the town to abandon it entirely, and while the Hospital could not cure death, it was getting awfully close.

Ace-Cross Hospital got bigger and bigger, better and better; there was very little that the building could not provide to abate any issue facing the human form. Eventually, the people that went in simply refused to leave, starting with the more fanatical groups that sought to become closer to the structure itself, hailing it as a diety, and spreading out across the newcomers to the

town, until finally convincing all the original occupants left over to permanently move in. The Hospital remains as efficient as possible, not letting the halls or rooms clutter with people. The internal patients remain within the walls, floors, and ceilings, kept in a comatose lull of dim lights and ethereal elevator music—functionally immortal. Despite their sustained life, not all the effects of aging can be avoided, hence the smell of the place. An empty town and an obelisk of life.

Ace-Cross Hospital breathes in, waiting for patients to help.