

Unseen Chapter

the Argyll Co-Op

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The Argyll Co-Op was a sad, empty building the day I first saw it. It has stood for years, ***the doors always closed and the parking lot always empty*** every time I passed by. A large, ugly concrete building resembling a warehouse, I had no idea what was inside of it, but I was intrigued because of its size and apparent abandoned-ness. On the exterior, the only sign of its former purpose were some big letters proclaiming "Co-Op" fixed on the side of the building. Eventually, these letters were removed, and were replaced by large pieces of graffiti. The property became more decrepit; the front doors were boarded up, more graffiti appeared, the large industrial garbage compactor vanished, and an adjacent vehicle garage was torn down.

Then one day, I noticed a hole had been knocked through one of the loading dock doors. This was the opportunity I'd been waiting for, and I returned under the cover of darkness to find out what was inside this mysterious building.



"The floors were carpeted with smashed glass"



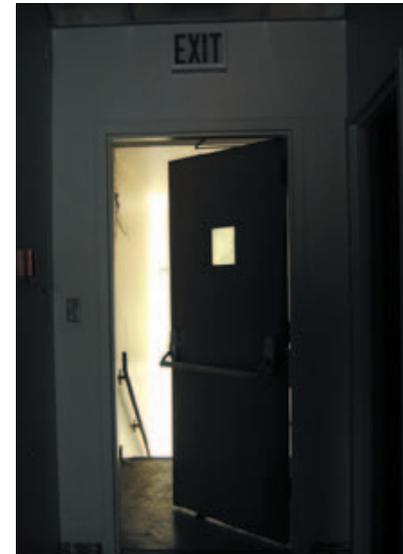
Squeezing through the hole, I was greeted by **the deafening sound of fire alarms.**



I was inside a mostly empty loading dock at the back of the building, and though I couldn't possibly have set off an alarm already, I had to fight an urge to panic and turn tail. There were lights on, and it was obvious the building still had electricity. I advanced slowly, yet didn't see the motion detector until I was almost underneath it. I was ready to run, but the detector didn't light up- in fact, it didn't seem to be working. I peered through a doorway into a huge, empty area, where the clattering from the fire alarms reverberated. The space seemed vast, empty and dirty; overhead, some letters on a wall near the ceiling proclaimed "Thank You for Shopping at Co-Op".

Despite the deafening fire alarms that kept my nerves on edge, the mysterious building drew me in, and I strayed further inside.

It turned out that someone had pulled a fire alarm upstairs, and no one had yet responded to shut it off. I couldn't figure out how to shut it off either, despite having located the main fire panel and an instruction booklet. The motion detectors seemed equally useless; there were several of them scattered through the main floor, a couple of which were working, but all the alarm panels seemed unarmed and deactivated. Bizarre, but **I was able to explore the entire building** without any authorities ever showing up. In retrospect, this was good because escape routes out of the building were few; most of the exterior doors were either boarded up or chained shut. The interior doors, however, were all unlocked, allowing me to wander into every room.





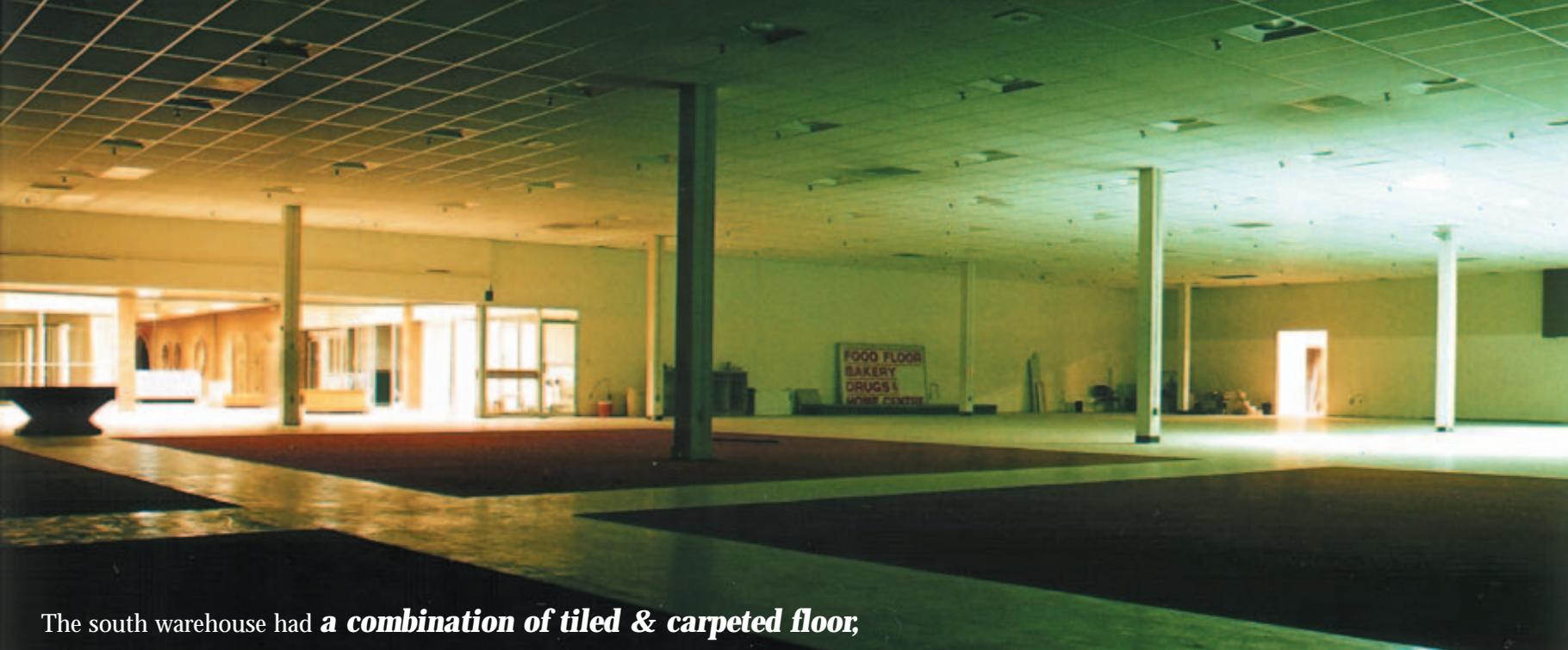
The Argyl Co-Op is (**was**) a large, symmetrical building. Two warehouse-sized areas sit at either end of the building (North and South), with a mall area in between. A small second storey sits above this mall area, and I never found any indication of a basement.

The north warehouse looks to have been **a Co-op grocery store**, judging from the heavily worn tile floors and small surrounding rooms. The check-out registers and shelving were gone, but there were marks left on the floor from where they'd been. Along another wall, there were still some large red letters that proclaimed "Meats". Closer to the rear of the building, there were some rooms with tiled walls that were probably used for meat cutting or produce.



There was
a trail of blood
on the floor; probably from a
vandal who cut his hand punching
through a glass window. It led from
the "Meats" area, across the floor tiles in
scattered droplets, to the nearest exit door.





The south warehouse had **a combination of tiled & carpeted floor;**

and probably had been a department store that sold clothes, small electronics and appliances. There were some small bits of junk left lying around, and a big box full of amusing styrofoam hats. At the southern-most end, there were some office and maintenance rooms. Here, I found a set of blueprints for the building and a bunch of Medeco keys for the door locks, and I remember seeing the building identified once as the "Argyll Mall". As with the north warehouse, this one also had a loading dock area at the back, plus a large featureless space, with cinder block walls, for storage.





The centre of the Argyll mall

was definitely the most interesting area of the building. Larger than either of the end warehouses, it was made up of a central hallway with glass-fronted shops on either side. On return trips, I was dismayed to see the progress of vandals who managed to completely trash this wonderful area.

**Then, and
Before Then**



On the east side of the main hall were the cafeteria, a lounge of sorts, and some small shops. Behind these, at the rear of the building, were several offices, storage rooms, and small mechanical rooms. The cafeteria was amazing: **the front wall was made of brick**, with nice round doors and windows. Inside, there were still many cafeteria artifacts to be found: menu boards, some pots & dishes, even some china cups & plates! Storage rooms behind the cafeteria held even more dust-covered items. The lounge was next door to the cafeteria, and shared the wonderful brick entranceway. A hallway ran at the back of the building, connecting the cafeteria and lounge to the loading dock. Some back rooms held water tanks, the main electrical panels, and fire alarm box.

The other shops on the east side of the hall were empty, with large plate glass windows. A hallway led from the mall to some more back administrative-type areas; that held cleaning supplies, odd junk items, and a desk with a variety of locks, keys, and some old security incident reports.

On the west side of the main hall were some more glass-fronted shops; most notably a former branch of the "Co-Operators" Insurance company, which still bore a sign above the windows. The only elevator in the building was also on this side of the mall, and I never did find out if it was working. **One of the shops had a bank vault** at the back, with a massive, heavy door; interestingly, there was an escape handle mechanism on the inside of the door so you couldn't get locked inside. A small hallway ran the length of the front of the building behind the shops; passing into several small rooms before emerging back into the mall. There was a large freezer in one of these back rooms, like the kind you'd find in your basement. Ever time I went, I always felt compelled to check the freezer, to see if there was a body inside; but thankfully I never found one.



The Argyll Co-Op's central area was topped by a small second storey, accessed by stairs just off either of the two main ground floor entrances (or by the elevator, back in the day!). The second level mirrors the ground floor, with offices and rooms arranged around a large U-shaped hallway. In the bowl of the "U" was a large, carpeted, open office area. A room here had faux wood paneled walls, **decorated with several "Herman" cartoon posters**. The other offices were also carpeted and had faux wood walls, and they were all empty as well. There were two mechanical rooms at either end of the second level, both seemingly identical. Each contained a small boiler/furnace unit, and a huge air ventilation/conditioning duct. Each mech room also contained a door to the roof.

Strangely, the only time I went on the roof of the Co-Op was by climbing up the back (thanks to the garbage compactor), and I never did use the roof doors. The large, flat roof was only interesting because of the graffiti that had been painted onto the second storey of the building. I will always associate a particular piece of graffiti with the Co-Op: An artist going by **“DEMER”** had managed to paint a mural on the side of the second storey. At least ten feet high and over twenty feet long, it was an amazingly massive piece of work.

I returned to the Co-Op several times with different explorers, and was dismayed by the decay of the building every visit. The glass windows inside quickly got smashed, as did anything else that could shatter or be thrown. The floor soon became coated with glass fragments, from smashed windows and fluorescent bulbs. The fire alarm was turned off the second time I visited, and I knew that change was on the horizon for the building. A big real estate sign appeared on the lot; workmen's tools were left lying around, back doors were left open, and the front facades were torn off the main entrances. One day, some dumpsters appeared out back, and an asbestos abatement crew began working inside. Soon after, a temporary fence was erected around the building. Then, one day, I heard the news I'd been dreading: some large machines were tearing down the building. Some other explorers and myself managed to get inside, for a final mission, with two thirds of the Co-Op still standing.

Our timing was perfect, because the entire building was ripped down days later.

I doubt I'll ever know the whole story of the Argyll Co-Op Mall, but I'm glad I was able to see and record it through its final months.

