*The following documents were recovered from the Santa Fe municipal archives early Sunday morning following an anonymous report of a break in. Police found not one, but two entrances destroyed, and evidence of a struggle deep within the archives. These documents are being released to the public in pursuit of any information regarding who they might belong to. Please direct any information to detectives AC Murph and PM Valente at murph290@gmail.com.*

“Who had ever heard of a land-locked pirate?”

The first time I heard someone say that it was an innocuous chuff, the second and third time a frustration, a dozen or so times later it was eerie, and now each time it happens it’s like a drop behind the failing floodgates of my sanity. The thing that sticks – beyond the erudite condescension of my academic peers and the poo-pooing of my friends and family – is the word-for-word repetition. It’s never “that’s ridiculous,” or “I thought that was some silly urban legend,” it's always:

“Who had ever heard of a land-locked pirate?”

Sometimes I hadn’t even mentioned that he was a pirate.

It’s like the world is an echo chamber that has drowned out any other potential response, or any reasoned approach to what can only be a reality: Admiral Brooksbank did exist. He did disappear with all his wealth. And someone – or something – wants no one to remember him.

The epidemic fever-speak of my peers persists despite evidence, and oh is there evidence. An entire indigenous community in Espanola was violently liberated from what was thinly-veiled servitude – and their bosses liberated from their money and their lives. History reports (perhaps unsurprisingly) called it a mob riot, but the spoken histories of this community kept the name of their liberator: “Admiral Brooksbank.”

Rare and strange vehicles continue to show up in auction houses in Santa Fe and Albuquerque. Large jeeps with harpoons soldered to their fronts, wheels replaced by tank treads with spiked exteriors. An old school bus with its roof replaced by a utility pool hoists large basket that can only be described as a crow’s nest. A Frankenstein wire-bound amalgam of three side-by-side SUVs hoisting a large metal deck with a single steering wheel on top. I went to each of these auctions, partly to marvel at the Mad-Max imagination that created these monstrosities and mostly to confirm that each had the same engraved metal plate beneath their fuel tanks: “Of the fleet of Admiral Brooksbank.”

The point where my research truly crossed the line from academic curiosity to life-consuming obsession was when I began to receive the letters. Their frequency was aperiodic, and initially I believed that there was no pattern to when they would show up on my front porch. The letters were all identical to a cartesian precision, wrapped neatly in black lace ribbons. They each contained terse palimpsests in a messy script, like brief admonishes on an exam from an exasperated schoolteacher. This was appropriate, since I quickly realized that there *was* a pattern, and that they *were* admonishes. Notes of “There is nothing in the Santa Fe library.” and “Check the ledgers in the historic district.” nudged me along in the moments I felt like I would never uncover the truth. It did not occur to me at the time that this meant in these moments, and likely at all times, I was being watched.

It was one of the letters that brought me here tonight: to the Santa Fe archives. My mysterious benefactor claims there are misfiled documents in the landownership records: documents that might be the definitive proof I’ll need to pull Admiral Brooksbank from suppressed folk hero to important historical figure. As I wedge my crowbar between the locked door and frame, my mind is racked by a pernicious thought: Why lead me here? This additional player – this person or persons – clearly knows about the Admiral. They clearly know where the evidence is. Why not get it themselves? Don’t they stand to reap all the glory of putting the Admiral in the history books without having to share it with me? I realize that maybe I am being maneuvered not by some benefactor, but by some puppeteer who wishes to place me here tonight. If this is truly the case, when will they reach *their* goal? Now that I am lured here, when will it be time to cut the strings?

Even knowing this, I proceed. I simply must know. There is no version of myself that can put down this bar and this investigation and go home. The Admiral has stolen me just as thoroughly as he stole his treasure; I just hope we don’t both end up buried.

I’ve found my way through the archives, dear reader, and I’ve found my plunder: Maps! MAPS! But to what? They are clearly of the Santa Fe area, and they clearly lead to something but to wha….

…there are people here. Late night archivists? No. At such a late hour and in a building that I’ve spied on for days? These archives never receive late-night guests. I can hear their mummers, their hurried searches. They must be here for me.

If you are reading this, then you’ve found where I hid my notes and the maps. I’m leaving them here and making a run for it. Hopefully I can get past these hounds, but even if I can’t at least I can lead them away from this hiding spot. Dear reader, you must finish my work. You must follow these maps and uncover the truth of the land-locked pirate. Do not tell anyone of your searches, and do not mention the Admiral to anyone until you are certain you’ve collected the definitive evidence needed to prove he exists. I am verklempt that I may not see you break our world’s collective delusion, but I must trust that it’ll be you. I have no other choice.

-D.O.

A drawing of a building and a map

Description automatically generated