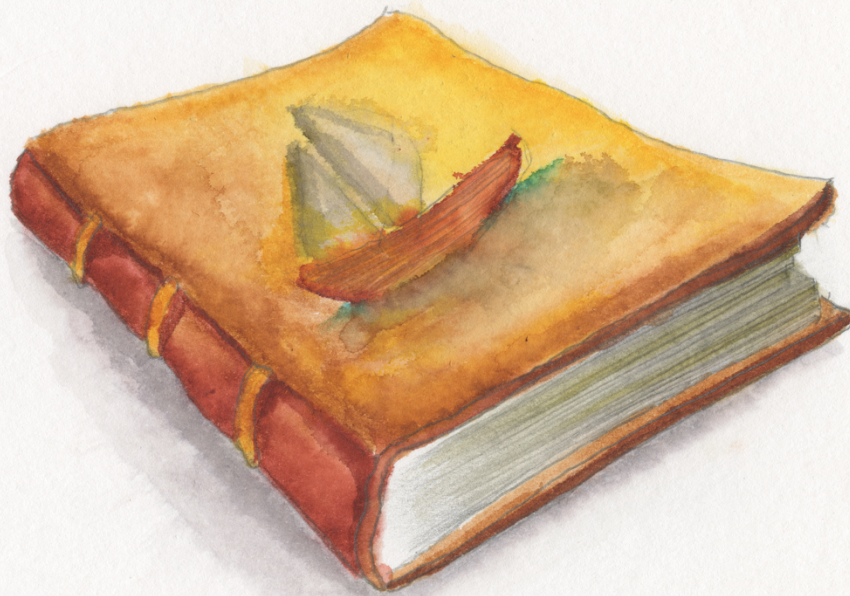


An Essay on the Rivervalan Origin Myth

by Esther, blessed writ edifier



On a single shelf in the library of Rivervale, and nowhere else, there is an untitled book of titled short stories. Some of those stories are clearly fiction. Some are clearly nonfiction. Some lack such clarity.

Among the fictions, *Taxonomy of the Deep* is an alleged record of all marine life. It is not simple sightings that fill its pages, however. Instead, it contains elaborate characterizations of animal behavior and extensive measurements of never-again-seen sea monsters. There is a mighty whale whose blowhole fills the skies with its clouds, there are fish the size of islands, and there are islands that shoal like fish. What is missing is most marine life that is known (and eaten) today. Between those curious absences and the lack of verification of what *does* appear, this story has been relegated to the genre of early seafaring fantasy.

Among the non-fictions, *The Broken Sea* is a factual, though limited, account of a captain's failed attempt to cross the Starless Crossing. Believed to be written by the ship's chandler, and not the captain himself (both of whom survived), it withholds none of its protagonist's follies. It is incomplete, but not inaccurate, in its descriptions of the sea beyond the Connected Continents. What it offers in scholarly spades is a cautionary tale to future captains who are inclined to indulge their grandest ambitions. In disparaging detail, it chronicles an extensive series of navigational strategies and the dire consequences those strategies produced.

Among the works that lack both relegation to fiction *and* authentication of fact, is a three-page narrative (title page aside) called *The Three Sailors*. This is the oldest story in the oldest book on Rivervale's shelves, and the first part of a two-story narrative that, read together, expounds the city's creation myth.

At only 718 words, *The Three Sailors* comprises the full accounts of the three fabled sailors who traversed the intraversable by mastering water, wind, and sky, after which, they founded the port city whose library still contains their words (the founding itself is explained in another chapter appearing later in the book called *House Upon the Waves*).

Although all three accounts are written in the first person, and reveal no identifying traits of their writer, historians attribute each of them to women. The First Sailor is the story of a woman who traversed the Pale Lake into the never-named netherworld. The Second Sailor traversed the Crooked River into Thorn. The Third Sailor traversed the Starless Crossing, referring to the Darklands beyond as The New World.

At the time, so tell our library's tales, the extent of maritime technology in the Connected Continents was the binding of wood to wood. When consigning the most carefully-bound crafts to the seas, one floated without direction; destinations were decisions better left to the plans and the whims of the gods.

Then commenced the voyages of the Three Sailors.

When they returned to the Connected Continents, after visiting their unreachable beyonds, they brought back the nautical technology and techniques we employ today. Maritime's mysteries were unwrapped and the sciences of navigation revealed. It wasn't until the homecomings of the Three Sailors that the natives of the Connected Continents were granted the ability to sail by way of invention and calculation, no longer relying on the vessel or the reckoning of the "Hoodman" (the ferryman of that age).

Although the histories and the manuals that fill the rest of Rivervale's libraries are careful not to completely dismiss this brief assemblage of travel logs, they have all demoted it to footnotes. It is simply not citable as an academic source. Excepting mention of rudders, oars, sails, and masts (the first literary appearance of each in a naval context), its words offered no equation or instruction of their own, only the proclamation of where their origins reside.

A majority of scholars once believed – and a minority of scholars now believe – the manuscript contains a mystery not yet unwrapped, a secret not yet revealed. It is not merely the autobiographical tale of the impossible turned unprovable. Rather, it is the tome, the code, and the key, as in: the text needs only a code to decipher the key to unlock the impassable journeys.

This was a theory of great interest and greater pursuit in the early ages of Rivervale. But after numerous generations had supplanted those old age's wisdoms with more practical navigational techniques and technologies, and still no decoding had ever been completed, no further deciphering was ever considered.

Today, *The Three Sailors* is regarded as a possibly-true tale of possibly-real sailors, but it is not studied for any historical value. It is preserved and passed from generation to generation only to capture the spirit of adventure and discovery, the foundation on which Rivervale was built. Even if its facts are, in fact, fictions, that spirit itself, recounted in the myth, continues to be espoused as the true Rivervalan origin.