***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 27 – Knights and Squires***

***Summary:***

* Yes, this chapter has the same title as Chapter 26, if you were wondering about that. It has different content, though, so you do have to read it.
* Ishmael (or possibly Melville or an unnamed narrator) describes the second mate, Stubb, who is basically the ultimate laid-back chill guy.
* Stubb is from Cape Cod, and he’s a cheerful, "happy-go-lucky" (27.1) individual who never seems to worry about anything. Even in dangerous, stressful situations Stubb remains calm and relaxed and likes to hum little tunes.
* Ishmael suggests that Stubb is able to be so mellow all the time because he smokes so much—the first thing he does in the morning, before he even gets dressed, is to put his pipe in his mouth, and before he goes to bed he smokes a whole row of pipes. (And yes, he's smoking *tobacco*.)
* All this tobacco smoke seems to ward off anxiety for him... although we don’t recommend it as a general strategy.
* Next up is the third mate, Flask, who is from Martha’s Vineyard. Flask is Stubb’s opposite; instead of being mellow, he’s aggro.
* Flask seems to have a serious grudge against whales and doesn’t have any sense of them being beautiful or awesome or dangerous.
* Flask’s nickname is "King-Post" because he’s like the timber brace of a ship that’s called by that name.
* Ishmael explains that, if they do find a whale, each of these three mates, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, will be in charge of a boat, sort of like being the captain of a military company.
* Each mate has a harpooneer to assist him. So, the mates are sort of like knights, and the harpooneers like squires. (That’s why the title of the chapter is ...oh, you get it.)
* Starbuck’s harpooneer is Queequeg, whom we know already.
* Stubb’s harpooneer is Tashtego. Tashtego is a pureblooded Native American from Martha’s Vineyard, and Ishmael sees him as having inherited a warrior and a hunter’s spirit. Instead of taking that prowess and hunting beasts on land, though, Tashtego pursues whales. Hmm, stereotype much?
* Flask’s harpooneer is Daggoo, an African tribesman who chose to join a whaling ship that landed on the coast of his native country when he was young. Daggoo isn’t very acculturated; he’s only been in Africa, Nantucket, and different whaling ports, so he retains most of his tribal customs. He’s tall and proud and makes Flask look "like a chess-man beside him" (27.9).
* The rest of the crew of the *Pequod*, Ishmael (or perhaps Melville) tells us, is equally diverse.
* In whaling, just as in the military and in construction crews, only about half the workers are white Americans. (These are the numbers the text gives, but we’d have to check our history to know if they’re accurate.)
* Most of the *Pequod*’s crew are South Sea Islanders like Queequeg.
* Ishmael or Melville hints that most of these crewmembers aren’t going to return from this voyage— "Black Little Pip" never did. (This is the first we’ve heard of Pip, but apparently he has a tragic end. So don’t get too attached.)

***Synopsis***:

This chapter introduces the rest of the Pequod’s officers. The pipe-smoking second mate, Stubb, a native of Cape Cod, is always cool under pressure and possesses “impious good humor.” The third mate, Flask, a native of Tisbury on Martha’s Vineyard, is a short, stocky fellow with a confrontational attitude and no reverence for the dignity of the whale. He is nicknamed “King-Post” because he resembles the short, square timber known by that name in Arctic whalers. Each mate commands one of the small harpoon boats that are sent out after whales, and each has a “squire,” his harpooner: Queequeg is Starbuck’s harpooner; Tashtego, “an unmixed Indian from Gay Head,” on Martha’s Vineyard, is Stubb’s harpooner; and Daggoo, “a gigantic, coal-black negro-savage” from Africa with an imperial bearing, is Flask’s harpooner.

***Brief Analysis(26-27):***

Ishmael introduces some of the crew, beginning, in descending order under Ahab, with those in command. Chief mate is Starbuck, a thirty-year-old Quaker whose father and brother were killed in whaling accidents. Second mate is Stubb, "[g]ood-humored, easy, and careless," rarely seen awake without a pipe in his mouth. Third mate is Flask — short, stumpy, and pugnacious. Each will command an open boat when in pursuit of whales and have his own harpooner. The rest of the crew is a widely varied mix representing many parts of the world.

One of Melville's consistent literary devices is the use of contrast. Here he employs it to distinguish character. The first mate is a devout Quaker, no hypocrite like the Pequod's co-owner Bildad. He is calm, prudent, steady, and courageous, but he tempers his courage with a healthy respect for danger and an allowance for fear. As the novel progresses, Starbuck will contrast strikingly with Ahab, who is volatile, obsessed, wildly mad at times, and irreverent. Having first choice of harpooners, Starbuck takes Queequeg.

In a different light, Stubb and Flask also contrast with Starbuck and each other. Second mate Stubb is carefree, even careless. He loves a good joke and can be insensitive or deceitful, but he is a reliable seaman and whaler. Tashtego, an American Indian, will be his harpooner. Third mate Flask is stumpy and unattractive (while Starbuck is tall and handsome); more importantly, Flask lacks Starbuck's intelligence and elevation of character. The third mate is an adequate seaman but possesses none of Stubb's imagination or humor. Flask thinks whales are his personal enemies, contrasting with Starbuck who simply sees them as a means to a livelihood, but anticipating Ahab's more complicated hatred of Moby Dick. Flask's harpooner will be Daggoo, a huge (six feet, five inches tall) native of Africa. All the harpooners are especially proud men, understandably so because of their prestigious positions aboard ship.

Isolated as it is, and carrying a crew representing many parts of the globe, the Pequod serves as a microcosm of our planet. Ishmael observes that many of the crew are ignorant or even evil men, but he recognizes that each also has the capacity for exceptional valor, dignity, or democratic nobility. Most are not stereotypes; their virtues contrast with their vices just as they do in real people in the real world.

Glossary

squire an attendant, especially to a medieval knight; here a reference to a harpooner.

staid sober, sedate, settled.

steadfast firm, fixed, established.

pugnacious combative, quarrelsome, ready for a fight.

momentous very important.

august here, imposing, magnificent, inspiring awe.

***Analysis:***

[Stubb](https://www.gradesaver.com/moby-dick/study-guide/character-list#stubb) is the second mate of the voyage, a native of Cape Cod and a happy-go-lucky man. He is good-humored, easy and careless. There is no telling what he thought of death, and Ishmael wonders how he can remain so easy-going and unfearing. Ishmael attributes it in part to his smoking. The third mate of the ship is [Flask](https://www.gradesaver.com/moby-dick/study-guide/character-list#flask), a native of Martha's Vineyard who is very pugnacious concerning whales. Starbuck, Flask and Stubb are momentous men. Queequeg is selected as Starbuck's harpooner. [Tashtego](https://www.gradesaver.com/moby-dick/study-guide/character-list" \l "tashtego), an Indian from Martha's Vineyard, is the harpooner for Stubb. The third harpooner is [Daggoo](https://www.gradesaver.com/moby-dick/study-guide/character-list" \l "daggoo), a gigantic black man from Africa who still retains his barbaric virtues. According to Ishmael, islanders make the best whale men; he dubs them Isolatoes, not acknowledging the common continent of men but living on a separate continent of one's own.

Melville adds greater depth to the characters who make up the crew of the Pequod in this chapter, in which he portrays Stubb as a jovial and good-humored person who remains undaunted by the events around him, and Flask as an aggressive New Englander. The division of labor among the ship seems significant; while all of the officers are from the eastern United States, specifically New England, their assistants are drawn strictly from less civilized cultures: American Indian, African and Aboriginal. Yet Ishmael seems to indicate that there is an order to the ship apart from race or national identity despite the hierarchy of the ship; the men who are the superior whalers are those who are "isolatoes," not bound to particular allegiances and instead living as independent persons separate from their culture. This further continues the theme of Moby Dick concerning the whale voyage as an escape from the normal confines of civilization; on the whale ship men need not be concerned with their identities and become an independent part of their particular crew.

***Significance(Ch 26-27):***

[Ishmael](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Ishmael) describes [Starbuck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Starbuck), a Quaker and first mate of the *Pequod*, as a hardy, tight-skinned man whose life at sea has made him a little superstitious. [Stubb](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/" \l "Stubb), the second mate, calls Starbuck "careful," but Ishmael points out that this word may have a different meaning among whale hunters than it does for other people. Starbuck is brave yet practical, and Ishmael implies that even in the events to come in his story, Starbuck will maintain his courage.

Then beginning in Chapter 27, Ishmael describes Stubb, a native of Cape Cod, as a pleasant, imperturbable man. He often hums while working, even when in the midst of a whale hunt. Stubb is never seen without a short, black pipe in his mouth. He has several so he never has to be without one—one is always filled and ready to go. Ishmael wonders if the smoke acts as a disinfecting agent, because Stubb seems to always be feeling fine. Next Ishmael describes [Flask](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Flask), the third mate, who is from Martha's Vineyard. Flask takes his hunting personally, as if he has a grudge against whales in general and doesn't have much respect for the grandeur of the creatures.

Each of the mates—Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask—has a harpooner who accompanies him on the whaleboat when they are deployed in the hunt. They are [Queequeg](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/" \l "Queequeg), Tashtego, and Daggoo, respectively.

[Ishmael](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Ishmael) describes [Starbuck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Starbuck) at length, focusing on his great courage and steadfastness. This helps prepare readers for events later in the novel when Starbuck's morality and courage must face off against the absolute madness of [Captain Ahab](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Captain_Ahab).

On a whaling ship, small boats are lowered and deployed when a whale is sighted. Each of these boats has a mate to command it, a harpooner who must be ready to kill the whale, and a crew of other oarsmen to help row. The harpooner has a challenging job on the boat, as he must be both oarsman and harpooner. The *Pequod* has three such teams.

The hierarchy of the mates (the "knights") and their harpooners (the "squires") introduces the idea that the *Pequod* is a microcosm of humanity. The knights Starbuck, [Stubb](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/" \l "Stubb), and [Flask](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/#Flask) are all Christians and white men. Their squires [Queequeg](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Moby-Dick/character-analysis/" \l "Queequeg), Tashtego, and Daggoo are all members of various non-European or American peoples—Tashtego is a Native American, Daggoo is a black man, and Queequeg is the "savage" cannibal.

***Analysis in detail:***A look at the second and third mates of the ship (including Starbuck, the “knights”) along with their harpooners (their squires)—Second mate =  Stubb—native of Cape Cod—”Good-humored, easy, and careless, he presided over his whale-boat as if the deadliest encounter were but a dinner, and his crew all invited guests.”—(but his whaleboat has to be set-up just so)—while in fights with a whale, Stubb heard humming—who does that? —Ever to Stubb’s mouth is attached a pipe—”like his nose, his short. black little was one of the regular features of his face”—the air over the ocean is filled with disease, and Stubb had his continual smoking in lieu of a handkerchief—Third mate = Flask—native of Tisbury—a mindless fiend, attacking whales as a cat would attack a rat—Flask was that guy who goes into a bad situation and not realizing his mistake until it is too late—King Post is Flask’s nickname, given his likeness to a piece of timber used to buffer the ship from iceberg hits at sea—in other words, Flask is unintelligent; he is a buffer between the other mates and the crews—”Now these three mates—Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask, were momentous men.”—all three of the mates have harpooners who are of a different race—Starbuck and Queegee—Stubb and Tashtego—Flask and Daggoo—Tashtego is a Gay Head Indian who had known nothing but harpooning and is well known for his abilities—Daggoo is “a negro-savage” who is six feet five inches tall and towers over his white counterpart Flask—The section emphasizes that white men were typically  cast in commanding roles aboard whalers—all others were simply the muscle—Pip’s passing is mentioned at the end—”called a coward here” (in life), “hailed a hero there!” (in death).

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) goes on to describe the other two mates. [Stubb](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), the second mate, is “calm and cool” in the face of danger—even when the whale is about to strike, as happens later in the narrative. A native of Cape Cod, Stubb is “inseparable” from his pipe, a feature as natural to him “as his nose.” Stubb is joined by [Flask](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), the third mate, a native of Martha’s Vineyard, and a man who seems “personally affronted” by the whale, and whose courage in the fight takes a headlong form different both from Stubb’s coolness and from Starbuck’s reserve.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Stubb’s pipe is a symbol of his ability to “multitask” while whaling. While Starbuck is out to make a living as a whaler, Stubb enjoys whaling so much that he does not feel it necessary to separate it from other activities he likes, including smoking his pipe, Interestingly, as a counterpoint to this, Melville will soon detail how Ahab throws his own pipe overboard—symbolizing Ahab’s own desire to rid himself of enjoyable activities, and to focus entirely on hunting Moby Dick.

***Summary Part 2:***[Ishmael](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) names [Starbuck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/starbuck), [Stubb](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), and [Flask](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) the three “knights” of the Pequod, under the command of [Ahab](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ahab), and states that each knight takes out a whaling boat, when the whale is being tracked, and brings with him a harpooneer as a “squire,” or assistant, to hook the whale. Starbuck’s harpooneer is [Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg); Stubb’s is [Tashtego](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), a Native American from Martha’s Vineyard; and Flask’s is [Daggoo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), an African “savage.” Ishmael says that it is strange and worth remarking upon that Americans appear to provide the “brains” on the Pequod, and on many similar whaling ships, and non-whites the “brawn.” Ishmael calls men like Tashtego and Daggoo “isolatoes,” or men “of their own continent,” and says that another young boy on the ship, a black boy named Pip, is also of the company of the isolatoes, and will be described later in the story.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The harpooneers will be of extreme importance in the novel, but not necessarily for their words—far more for their actions, for the extent to which they aid in the sighting and catching of whales. Queequeg, in particular, is indispensible to the crew of the vessel, and when it appears that Queequeg might die, of a flu toward the end of the novel, the crew not only mourns him but laments that they might not survive without Queequeg as their protector. That these men are described and knights and squires implies both their courage and valor, but also that they are bound to follow their "king"—Ahab.