

Arch of Bone

Jane Yolen

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Set in the world of *Moby-Dick*, whose whaling towns were brutal, Jane Yolen's novel *Arch of Bone* is about grief, coming-of-age, and survival.

Josiah, the fourteen-year-old son of *Pequod's* first mate, longs to follow his father to sea, though his age, and his pledge to care for his mother, stop him from doing so. Then a sailor, Ishmael, arrives at Starbucks's door with devastating news: the *Pequod*, captained by obsessive Captain Ahab, has gone down. There are no survivors, save him. As Ishmael elects to stay for supper—and maybe longer—his presence unsettles Josiah, who runs from his home, seeks out a small boat, and sets off into the storm, his small dog at his side.

Quaker faith regulates life on Nantucket Island, where the residents lead interconnected lives. Rounded scenes capture the weather, which dominates many of the islanders' decisions, and which leads to disasters within families; whales, their bodies, and the search for whales are present in most conversations. And something is always lost in this tale, whether it be a sailor, a fish, or a ship. The realities of such tenuous living are rendered through stark details.

For Josiah: the desire to live competes with the need to understand his father's last days. He battles storms in barren landscapes and has strange, surreal dreams that evoke Herman Melville's source material. He takes dynamic action, though, and comes of age despite it all.

Arch of Bone is a historical novel that reanimates Nantucket's whaling history. In it, the aftermath of the *Pequod's* sinking is imagined on behalf of the families of those lost at sea. The result is a daring story in which a grieving son becomes his own kind of survivor.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (November / December 2021)

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