

A FREE CREATURE KEEPER · LONG ISLAND DUNGEON MASTER

RIMEJAW

A free CR 3 monster that lives under the ice of the lake the road crosses. It sees you through the black ice, and it reaches you only through the thin.

CR 3 · levels 3 to 5 · one stat block and a d12 · fifth edition (SRD 5.1)

The road over the pass crosses Skelder Water on the ice from the first hard frost to the thaw. The lake is a mile across and the way round it is two days through drifts, so the carriers cross it every week of the winter. The rimejaw lives in the deep water under the middle of the lake. It is the reason the carriers walk the white ice and not the black.

A rimejaw is a Large cold-water hunter, eel-bodied, flat-headed, the length of two men, with a jaw that opens wider than its skull. It sees shapes through clear ice the way a pike sees a duck. It cannot break ice a hand thick. It can break ice a finger thick, and it knows where that is, because it has swum under this lake every winter of its life.

In 30+ years of running games, the crossings my tables still talk about are the ones where the ground was the monster.



THE LAKE

There are three kinds of ice on Skelder Water, and all three can be told apart from the shore.

White ice is snow-covered and a hand thick or more. The rimejaw cannot see through it and cannot break it. The carriers' route runs over white ice the whole way, marked with a stake and a rag every hundred yards, and it bends a long way east to stay on it. The route is a mile longer than the straight line.

Black ice is wind-scoured, clear, and as thick as the white. The rimejaw cannot break it. It can see through it. A creature standing on black ice is a shape against the sky, and the rimejaw follows the shape from two feet down, keeping pace. From above it is a long dark bar under the surface, and the ice knocks when it turns.

Thin ice is grey, wet-looking, and bare of snow in a ring. It lies over the inlet at the north end, over the outflow at the south, and over three springs out in the middle of the lake where the water comes up warm enough to hold the ice at a finger's thickness all winter. A Medium creature's weight does not break it. The rimejaw's does. Thin ice is the only ice it can come through.

The knock. When the rimejaw moves under the ice the lake rings like a struck pipe, one long low note, and it carries a mile on a still day. On a windy day there is no sound at all.

HOW IT HUNTS

The rimejaw eats elk, which come down to the inlet to drink at the one place the ice is open. In a hard winter the elk stay in the trees and the rimejaw goes hungry, and a hungry rimejaw follows anything that walks on the black ice. It cannot reach a creature on black ice. It shadows the creature, two feet down, until the creature crosses thin ice, and then it breaches: it drives upward, the ice goes, and whatever stood on that ice is in the water with it.

In the water it is fast and everything else is slow. It bites what is in the water and leaves what is on the ice alone unless that ice is thin. It never leaves the water: its walking speed is five feet, and it has no reason to use it.

It withdraws when it has pulled a body under, or when it has been reduced to 24 hit points without biting anything. It does not come back the same day.

HOW TO RUN IT

1. Put the three kinds of ice on the table before anybody steps off the shore. The staked route over the white, bending east. The black patches where the wind has scoured the snow off. The grey rings over the inlet, the outflow and the springs. The carriers know all of this and will say it to anyone who asks at the inn.

2. Let the knock be the first sign of it. One note, from under the ice, somewhere out on the lake. Then nothing for a while.

3. On black ice, show it and keep it there. A character on black ice who looks down sees the rimejaw under the ice, keeping pace. It cannot come through. It does not try. It follows.

4. Breach only on thin ice. The thin ice is where it was described, and nowhere else. A creature that crosses a grey ring crosses the only place on the lake where the rimejaw can reach it, and the Breach comes up under that creature on the rimejaw's next turn.

5. Run the water by the three lines below. A character in the water is in the fight; a character on thick ice is out of it, and can get the swimmer out.

6. Let it leave. It withdraws at 24 hit points, or with a body. Either way the lake goes quiet.

THE STAT BLOCK

RIMEJAW

Large monstrosity, unaligned. A cold-water hunter that lives under the ice. Challenge 3 (700 XP).

AC 14 (natural armor)

HP 60 (8d10+16)

Speed 5 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR 17 (+3) DEX 12 (+1) CON 15 (+2)

INT 3 (-4) WIS 12 (+1) CHA 5 (-3)

Darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11.

DRAWN TO

Anything that walks on the black ice in a hard winter.

UNDER THE ICE

The rimejaw sees creatures on clear ice above it as if the ice were not there. It cannot break ice a hand thick or more; it surfaces only through thin ice or open water, and it breathes water.

COLD BLOOD

The rimejaw is immune to cold damage.

MULTIATTACK

The rimejaw makes one Bite attack and one Tail attack.

BITE

Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 14 (2d10+3) piercing damage.

TAIL

Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 7 (1d8+3) bludgeoning damage, and a target in the water is pushed up to 10 feet in a direction of the rimejaw's choosing.

BREACH (RECHARGE 5-6)

The rimejaw drives upward through thin ice within 5 feet of it. The ice breaks in a 10-foot square, and each creature standing on that ice makes a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure the creature takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and falls into the water. On a success it takes half as much damage and moves 5 feet onto the nearest ice that holds.

TACTICS

It follows under the black ice and breaches under the thin. In the water it bites what is in the water, and the Tail puts the swimmer under thick ice, away from the hole. It withdraws at 24 hit points or with a body.

THE WATER

Three rules, each stated once.

Cold. A creature that ends its turn in the water takes 3 (1d6) cold damage. The rimejaw does not.

Breath. A creature in the water can breathe only at a hole in the ice. The book's rule on holding breath applies as written: 1 + Constitution modifier minutes, then Constitution modifier rounds, then 0 hit points.

Out. Climbing out of the water onto ice that holds costs 10 feet of movement and both hands. A creature in the water that is more than 10 feet from a hole has to swim to one first, and swimming without a swim speed costs 2 feet of movement for every foot.



WHO IT'S FOR

Levels 3 to 5. The budget line, run at the encounter calculator: target band levels 3-5; one rimejaw is raw 700 and adjusted 700 at the single-monster multiplier.

One rimejaw against four 3rd-level characters is 700 adjusted against thresholds of 300, 600, 900 and 1,600, a **Medium** encounter (encounter_xp.py --party 4x3 --cr 3). It is under the ice from the first round and nothing arrives later, so that tier is the whole fight. Against four 4th-level characters the same 700 is **Easy** on paper, against 500, 1,000, 1,500 and 2,000, and the water does the rest. Against four 5th-level characters, run two, because a pair hunts the inlet in a hard winter: 1,400 raw at the two-monster multiplier of 1.5, so 2,100 adjusted against 1,000, 2,000, 3,000 and 4,400, which is **Medium**, and both are under the ice from the first round.

It needs no new subsystem. The Breach is a Dexterity save, the water is three lines, and the rest is the book. It works on any frozen crossing where the party can see the ice: a river at a ford, a moat in midwinter, a flooded quarry, a tarn on a pass.



WHAT THE PARTY REACHES FOR

The standard kit against a thing under the ice, and the ruling on each.

Walking round. Two days through drifts, no roll. The lake is the road, and it is not the only road.

The stakes. The carriers' route is white ice all the way and the rimejaw never comes through it. A party that follows the rags adds a mile and meets nothing. The table below puts things on the black ice; where the party walks is its own business.

A pole. A character who walks at half speed and sounds the ice ahead with a pole or a spear butt finds thin ice before stepping on it. No check.

A rope. Fifty feet of rope tied between two characters before the ice breaks, with a piton in the thick ice if they have one: the one on thick ice pulls the one in the water to the hole in one action, no roll. A rope thrown after the ice breaks is a rope the swimmer still has to reach.

Fire. A fire built on the ice melts a ring around itself in an hour, and the ring is thin ice.

Arrows and bolts. A creature under thick ice has total cover from everything above it. A rimejaw in a hole is an ordinary target. A ranged weapon attack made underwater misses automatically beyond the weapon's normal range, unless the weapon is a crossbow, a net or a thrown weapon such as a javelin.

A sword in the water. Underwater, a melee weapon attack has disadvantage unless the weapon is a dagger, javelin, shortsword, spear or trident. The rimejaw's bite is not a weapon and takes no penalty.

Shatter. Ten feet of thunder that damages objects. Cast on thick ice, the ice in the radius is thin ice now, and the rimejaw can Breach through it. Cast on the ice the party is standing on, every creature in the radius makes the Breach's Dexterity save.

Fire bolt and burning hands. A hole a foot across per casting. The rimejaw does not fit.

Fly. Sixty feet a round for ten minutes is six thousand feet, which crosses the mile with about seven hundred feet of spell to spare, for one creature, in a straight line.

Levitate. Lifts a character off the ice and holds it over the hole for ten minutes with no way to move sideways. It saves the character and ends the crossing.

Misty step. Takes a character from the water to any ice within thirty feet, wet and standing, with no climbing.

Water walk. A character who goes through the ice stands up on the open water in the hole. The rimejaw cannot pull the character under, and can bite the character's feet.

Water breathing. The breath rule goes away. The cold rule does not.

A familiar. An owl over the lake sees the shadow through black ice from above.

Speak with animals. The elk at the inlet know exactly what is under the ice, and say so.

A ranger or a druid. Survival reads the three kinds of ice from the shore without a check, and so does anyone who has read this page. The skill buys the knock's meaning: one creature, and how big.

Detect magic and divine sense. Nothing to find. It is an animal.



THE WITNESS

Kester Bowyer walks the staked route every morning of the winter with a pole, sounding the ice and moving the stakes. He has done it for nineteen years and he has moved the route eleven times. He knows the rimejaw by the note it makes, he has seen it twice, and he does not talk about either time. He will tell a party where the route goes, and he will not go with them.

His line, to anyone who asks about the straight way across: *"The straight way is the quick way for one of you."*

WHAT IS IN THE ICE

Things seen on the crossing. Roll once per crossing, or pick one.

D12	WHAT IS IN THE ICE
1	An elk, head down, the antlers through the ice from below and the rest of it under.
2	A sledge with its runners up and a load of cut peat still roped on.
3	A hole the width of a cart, refrozen grey, with a ring of older white ice around it.
4	A rope frozen into the surface, running forty feet in a straight line and then going down.
5	Fish, hundreds of them, small and silver, a foot under the clear ice, all facing the same way.
6	A boot, upright, laces tied, two inches under the ice.
7	A line of wolf tracks that walks out from the shore, stops, and walks back on top of itself.
8	A column of bubbles held in the ice like a string of white beads from the bottom up.
9	A man's hand, flat against the underside of the clear ice, white, the rest of him in the dark.
10	A flat-bottomed boat frozen in level with the surface, its oars shipped.
11	A cart horse, whole, standing on the bottom of the lake in clear water forty feet down.
12	A bar of open black water ten feet wide, running straight across the way, with steam on it.

The monsters are mine. 30+ years of real tables.

LONG ISLAND DUNGEON MASTER

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