



# CURSE OF THE RUSTY WALRUS

A web enhancement  
for *Frostburn*

A Short Adventure for Four  
8th-Level Player Characters

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*Frostburn* introduces a wealth of information for players and Dungeon Masters whose campaigns happen to be set in frozen lands such as the north pole, a high mountain pass, a frozen outer plane, or somewhere equally inhospitable. While these dangerous realms are rife with adventure and would make excellent locations for any number of exciting campaigns, it's not a simple matter to abandon a current campaign and start up a new one. Of course, you could just have the PCs go on one or two adventures set in such a region, eventually to return to warmer climates and the main campaign.

Yet you don't have to make the PCs travel to the distant glaciers or frozen outer planes just to get some use out of this book. Nor do you need to start up a brand new campaign set in the Land of Black Ice, or the Great Glacier, or even Stygia. You can bring the frost to the PCs!

*Curse of the Rusty Walrus* is a short adventure for 8th-level player characters (PCs). You can use it as inspiration or as a starting point for adventures that utilize the new rules and options presented in *Frostburn*. As always, feel free to adapt the material presented here as you see fit to make it work with your campaign.

## PREPARATION


You (the DM) need the D&D core rulebooks—the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual* as well as *Frostburn*—to run this adventure. This scenario utilizes the D&D v.3.5 rules.

To get started, print out the adventure. Read through the scenario at least once to familiarize yourself with the situation, threats, and major NPCs (particularly their motivations). You must decide where the action takes place, but any port city in your campaign world will do. The adventure includes some suggestions for encounter areas, but no map is provided, and the area descriptions are left to you.

Finally, review the information on the icegaunts and the frostfell ghost in *Frostburn*. Monster and NPC statistics are provided with each encounter in abbreviated form or, where appropriate, the proper page in *Frostburn* is referenced.

## ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Several decades ago, a down-on-his-luck half-elf known as Captain Kerakes lost his ship after a run of bad luck in a game of dice. So when an investor approached him with an offer of a new ship and three-month mission, he jumped at the chance.



His new employer was a rich but somewhat miserly nobleman named Jarren Skein. Having heard rumors of the glacier dwarves and their amazing weaponcraft, he had become obsessed with obtaining some of their weapons as trophies. Skein made Kerakes the captain of a ship called the *Rusty Walrus* and promised him a sizeable commission upon his return with the desired glacier dwarf weapons.

### THE FATE OF THE *RUSTY WALRUS*

When Captain Kerakes put to sea, he had no idea where to find the glacier dwarves, but the captain of a whaling vessel in a faraway port told him to seek the dwarves in a glacier called the Glittering Gnasher. Armed with that information, he sailed north into a frosty reach of sea where icebergs made the going treacherous. But it soon became apparent that Skein had cut corners wherever he could when preparing the *Rusty Walrus* for departure, though he had managed to hide the ship's sorry state well. The food stores rotted early because they were of low quality, the sails ripped easily, and the ropes frayed and snapped. Even the timbers from which the ship's hull was built showed signs of early wear and needed constant repair. Yet Kerakes was a popular captain, and the members of his crew were devoted to him, so they pressed on.

A month after it left port, the *Rusty Walrus* entered a particularly dangerous sea choked with icebergs and ice floes. The Glittering Gnasher lay near the center of this sea on a sizable island. Shortly after entering this frozen sea, the *Rusty Walrus* came upon another ship frozen in the ice. Kerakes decided to see whether his crew could salvage anything from the derelict ship. If they could restock their dwindling supplies, they could continue their voyage; otherwise, they would have to turn back in defeat. Captain Kerakes quickly set off with a few crew members to investigate the icelocked ship.

As Kerakes and his men explored the derelict vessel, which was called the *Blue Puffin*, they noticed disturbing similarities between it and their own ship. The *Blue Puffin*'s stores were frozen and rotted, its sails were low quality, and its hull was shabby and leaky. The evidence was clear the *Rusty Walrus* wasn't the first expedition Skein had funded, and his policy of cutting corners had likely sealed both ships' doom. Enraged and more than a little ashamed of himself for failing to notice his ship's condition earlier, Kerakes gathered his men and announced that they would be returning home. Just then, however, the crew of the *Blue Puffin* appeared.

Dozens of frozen undead creatures known as icegaunts suddenly burst from the surrounding ice

and swarmed over the ship. They tore through the boarding party with a terrible glee, but Kerakes managed to escape the slaughter and stage a hasty retreat in the skiff. Meanwhile, the icegaunts had spotted other prey. By leaping from one ice floe to another, they managed to board the *Rusty Walrus* and attack the rest of its crew.

Overcome with despair and horror, Captain Kerakes rowed the skiff back to his ship, but he was too late to save his loyal crew. Just as he arrived, the undead withdrew, perhaps sensing that it was the cruelest action they could take.

Unable to sail the *Rusty Walrus* alone, Kerakes was stranded in the unforgiving ice. Rowing the skiff to the glacier offered a slim chance for survival, but he opted to remain with his ship and use it as a base from which to hunt the icegaunts. He pursued them over the ice floes, but they always evaded and taunted him. Eventually succumbing to rage and frustration, Kerakes slashed his wrists and died, still thirsting for revenge. Because of the circumstances of his death, Captain Kerakes returned from the dead as a frostfell ghost.

### SKEIN'S INVESTMENTS

When the three months allotted for the mission had come and gone, Skein assumed that Captain Kerakes had abandoned the mission. Enraged, the merchant spared no expense trying to track the *Rusty Walrus* down. After two years of failed attempts to locate it by magic and by expedition, he gave up his investment as a loss.


Eventually, Jarren Skein passed away, and his heirs turned their attention to more local matters. The fate of the *Rusty Walrus* remained unknown, but plenty of old salts were willing to speculate in seaside taverns about what had happened to it. Soon the *Rusty Walrus* joined innumerable other lost ships and missing expeditions in the folklore of the sea.

### THE RETURN OF THE *RUSTY WALRUS*

After several decades, an unnaturally warm summer caused the section of ice holding the *Rusty Walrus* to break free. Whether by the will of Kerakes's ghost or merely the turn of the tides, it floated steadily south toward the town where Skein had lived.

For weeks it floated on the current, its hull still encased in its icy prison. Finally, it reached the coast from which its ill-fated mission had been launched. When the sun rose after a savage, night-long storm, incredulous townsfolk marveled at the ship afloat in their harbor a frost-covered galley with a rusted metal





walrus for a figurehead. The *Rusty Walrus* had, at long last, returned to its home port.

## ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The PCs must board the wreck of the *Rusty Walrus* and defeat the undead that infest it. Later, the ghost of Captain Kerakes begins to wreak vengeance on Jarren Skein's heirs. The PCs must determine the reason for the string of murders and track down the perpetrator.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

As DM, you know best how to involve your PCs in an adventure. You can use the following hooks to spur your imagination, modifying them as necessary to fit your campaign or the characters.

- The PCs are traveling by ship when a furious storm overtakes their vessel one evening. Throughout the night, they catch glimpses of a ghost ship locked in an ice floe (the *Rusty Walrus*). At their next port of call, the PCs find the *Rusty Walrus*, still locked in its ice floe, sitting in the harbor and blocking shipping. Officials from the port (or perhaps their own ship's captain) ask the PCs to investigate.
- Shortly before the reappearance of the *Rusty Walrus*, the PCs hear a sea tale claiming that the ill-fated vessel had a fortune in glacier dwarf goods aboard when it was lost.
- One of Jarren Skein's heirs the titular owner of the *Rusty Walrus* contacts the PCs and requests that they investigate the newly returned ship.

## BEGINNING THE ADVENTURE

The *Curse of the Rusty Walrus* is an event-driven scenario that takes place aboard a wrecked ship in the port to which it has returned. The adventure begins with encounter A, but the other encounters may be used in any order that the PCs' actions dictate. In most cases, the PCs should explore the *Rusty Walrus* first (encounter B), but if they don't board it right away, Kerakes begins his attacks on Jarren Skein's heirs first (encounter D).

### A. THE RUSTY WALRUS RETURNS

Read or paraphrase the following on the morning after the storm, when the PCs look out into the harbor.

Explorers' ships often arrive in port with cargo holds full of strange and exotic goods and crews ready to tell of their high adventures and new discoveries. But such ships usually arrive intact and occupied, unlike the one now floating in the harbor.

A ragged galley with a rusty iron walrus for a figurehead floats just at the mouth of the harbor, blocking shipping channels. Its hull is encased in an ice floe about 200 feet across. Ice and snow coat its decks and tattered rigging, and no one seems to be aboard.

If the characters don't offer to investigate on their own, the harbormaster asks around in the dockside taverns for adventurers willing to board the ghost ship for a fee. None of the city's guards can be spared, and the ships' crews are too superstitious to approach an obvious ghost ship.

### B. BOARDING THE RUSTY WALRUS

Kerakes's supernatural wrath keeps the wreck of the *Rusty Walrus* locked in perpetual winter. The temperature within a 100-foot radius of the ship remains cold (about 10° Fahrenheit) regardless of the ambient temperature in the harbor. The cold keeps the ice floe surrounding the ship and the icy coating on the rigging from melting, no matter what the climate or season. For each hour spent within 100 feet of the *Rusty Walrus*, each unprotected character must make a Fortitude save (DC 15, +1 per previous check) or take 1d6 points of nonlethal damage from the cold. Further details on the effects of cold can be found on page 9 in *Frostburn*.

A character can walk across the ice to board the ship, but movement is at half speed on the slippery surface. A DC 10 Balance check is required to run or charge across the ice.


Characters who cannot fly must climb up the side of the trapped ship to reach its deck. Clambering up the ice-slick hull requires a successful DC 15 Climb check (or a DC 10 Climb check if a rope is used).

#### B1. The Rusty Walrus

The *Rusty Walrus* is no longer seaworthy. Over the years, its lower hull has been crushed by the ice entombing it, but paradoxically, that 20-foot-thick, 200-foot-diameter chunk of ice is what now keeps it afloat.

#### B2. The Upper Decks

Despite the damage to the ship, most of the upper decks are still in fairly good shape. The main deck is about 60 feet long and 40 feet wide, and the forecabin and sterncabin are each about 8 feet high and 40 feet square.



The upper decks show signs of a massive, bloody battle. Swaths of frozen blood stain the planks, and the ship lists at a noticeable angle toward the starboard side. Moving along this icy surface requires a successful DC 15 Balance check. Any character who doesn't have at least 5 ranks in Balance is considered flat-footed while balancing and must make a Balance check to remain standing if she takes any damage, as noted in the Balance skill description.

### B3. The Lower Decks (EL 6, 8, or 9)

Below the main deck are the remains of the ship's hold, which now has an uneven ice floor strewn with broken timbers, shattered crates and barrels, and even a few stones that once served as ballast for the ship. Under the forecabin and the sterncabin are the captain's cabin, some small cabins and berthing areas for the crew, plus the ship's galley. The lower decks have been sheltered from the elements, and while they are still cold, the DC for the Balance check to move along these floors is only 10.

The situation quickly becomes dangerous once the PCs start investigating the lower decks, since the remaining undead crew members lurk here.

**Creatures:** Transformed into icegaunts by the cursed crew of the *Blue Puffin*, ten former members of the *Rusty Walrus*'s crew lurk in the ruined ship and in the ice below it. They are led by Perrin Mandath, the one-time first mate of the *Rusty Walrus*.

☛ **Icegaunts (9):** hp 68 each; see *Frostburn*, page 141.

☛ **Perrin Mandath (Icegaunt):** hp 80; see *Frostburn*, page 141.

**Tactics:** Although the icegaunts have no use for treasure, they understand its value to the living. In several places, they have used equipment scavenged from their own dead bodies to create lures with which to lead greedy PCs into ambushes.

Since each icegaunt is a CR 6 monster, the creatures should attack the party either singly or in pairs. Perrin Mandath should be the last one encountered, and he may have up to two other icegaunts with him if the PCs have been having too easy a time with his fellows.

**Treasure:** The PCs find treasure appropriate for the encounters they have faced throughout the lower decks. In Captain Kerakes's cabin is an unlocked sea chest that contains his ship's log. His notes are written in Common, and the book contains an account of the *Rusty Walrus*'s voyage, at least up to the sighting of the *Blue Puffin*.

Go to encounter C when the PCs have finished aboard the ship.

### C. THE RUSTY WALRUS SALVAGED

The PCs can gain little information from the ruined ship, aside from the fact that the crew members seem to have turned into undead creatures, but their patron (if any) rewards them nevertheless. Once the icegaunts have been cleared from the *Rusty Walrus*, the ship and its block of ice are towed to an abandoned pier and moored there for later investigation.

Go to encounter D when the ship is moored, or 24 hours after it reaches port if the PCs have not yet begun to investigate it.

### D. DEATH ON THE DOCKS

The night after the *Rusty Walrus* arrives, a terrible fate befalls a prominent local merchant. The following morning, his body is found in his home, frozen solid and wearing an expression of abject terror. Over the next several days, more and more citizens die in a similar manner, including the owner of an inn, a local politician, and other well-known individuals. Curiously, beggars and other slum-dwellers also seem to be succumbing to the strange frozen death in equal numbers, although the government and the city watch seem less interested in those deaths than in the demise of more important citizens.

If the PCs do not take notice of these events and investigate them on their own, the leader of the watch requests their aid after the third important citizen dies.

#### D1. Investigation


The citizens cooperate fully with the investigation and answer all questions put to them. A few interviews or a visit to the local Hall of Records should reveal that all the important citizens who died are related to one another in some way. (In fact, they are all scions of the Skein family.) A bit more research reveals that Jarren Skein, a now-deceased merchant, was the owner of the *Rusty Walrus*. If they present their findings to their patron (or to any civic official), that individual becomes quite nervous and asks for their aid in stopping this string of frozen deaths, since he too is a descendent of Jarren Skein.

If you're feeling particularly devious, you can introduce a new complication into this plot. After the PCs realize that many of the victims are related, they might do some research to find the names of all those who share the Skein bloodline. Imagine their shock at finding one of their own names on this family tree!

#### D2. The Truth

The murders are the work of Captain Kerakes's ghost. Robbed of the chance to kill his nemesis, Kerakes has





instead decided to stalk and kill Jarren Skein's descendants. The night after the *Rusty Walrus* arrived in town, Kerakes entered the slums, possessed a diseased beggar, and sought out Jarren Skein's old home. After determining that a Skein still lived there, he abandoned and killed the beggar, then killed the current owner of the house.

Now the ghost wanders the streets by day in the guise of a beggar to research and locate his next victim. At night, he abandons and kills the beggar, then seeks out and slays his new victim. He repeats the process, possessing a new beggar each day and killing a new Skein descendant each night, until the PCs stop him or until all twenty-one local Skeins are slain.

### D3. Ending the Killing Spree (CR 9)

The PCs can learn of the ghost by using spells such as *speak with dead* on his victims. Alternatively, they may simply encounter him if they patrol the slums in the early mornings, or if they gather the surviving Skeins together for protection.

**Creature:** The PCs can encounter Captain Kerakes either accidentally while investigating the murders or purposely at a time and place of their own choosing.

✦ **Captain Yengi Kerakes:** hp 45; see Appendix for statistics.

**Tactics:** The ghost of Captain Kerakes is intent on slaying the descendants of Jarren Skein, but he does not hesitate to kill anyone who stands in his way either. He may use his malevolence ability to possess one of them and attack the others, or he may simply use his frigid touch against as many opponents as possible.

**Development:** Destroying the ghost doesn't necessarily end its threat, since he simply rejuvenates in 2d4 days and returns to finish the job. Only by burning the ruined *Rusty Walrus* (and thereby destroying the ghost's link to the living realm) can the frostfell menace be ended before all the Skeins are dead.

## APPENDIX: THE MONSTERS

This adventure features two monsters from *Frostburn*: icegaunts and a frostfell ghost.

### THE ICEGAUNTS

Over long winters or on high mountain peaks, corpses eventually become freeze-dried husks. When animated by supernatural effects (usually as the result of sacrifices to mountain gods), these desiccated frozen bodies become icegaunts.

Icegaunts are normally encountered only in the highest mountain peaks, but the crew of the *Blue Puffin* recovered an ancient icegaunt from a block of ice while searching for replacement supplies after their ship was stranded in the icy waste. This creature turned the crew of the derelict ship into icegaunts, and it still haunts the distant wreck of the *Blue Puffin* today.

### CAPTAIN YENGI KERAKES


When he manifests, Captain Kerakes appears as a once-handsome half-elf with frozen skin and flesh and an expression of cruelty and hatred. His forearms still bear the deep slashes of his suicide, and glittering, razor-sharp icicles of blood hang from his wrists. When he attacks in his manifested form using his frigid touch, he does so with these razor-sharp, ghostly bloodcicles. These are also the weapons he uses against ethereal opponents, though in that case they function as daggers.

A frostfell ghost is usually bound to the site of its demise the *Rusty Walrus*, in Kerakes's case. But since he is a seafarer, Kerakes is also free to roam the *Rusty Walrus*'s home port.

✦ **Captain Yengi Kerakes (against ethereal opponents):** Male half-elf frostfell ghost rogue 7; CR 9; Medium undead (augmented humanoid); HD 7d12; hp 45; Init +7 (+8 when on a ship); Spd 30 ft.; AC 13, touch 13, flat-footed 13; Base Atk +5; Grp +6; Atk or Full Atk +6 melee (1d4+1/19—20, bloodcicle); SA chill ray, frigid touch, malevolence, sneak attack +4d6; SQ dark-vision 60 ft., evasion, half-elf traits, immunity to cold, low-light vision, manifestation, rejuvenation, trap sense +2, trapfinding, turn resistance +4, uncanny dodge, undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +1 (+3 against enchantments); Str 12, Dex 16, Con , Int 14, Wis 8, Cha 17.

**Skills and Feats:** Balance +15 (+17 when on a ship), Bluff +13, Climb +11, Diplomacy +7, Gather Information +15, Hide +11, Intimidate +15, Jump +3, Listen +8, Profession (sailor) +9, Search +21, Spot +8, Swim +11, Tumble +13 (+15 when on a ship), Use Magic Device +13; Combat Expertise, Improved Initiative, Sea Legs\*.

**Captain Yengi Kerakes (against nonethereal opponents):** Male half-elf frostfell ghost rogue 7; CR 9; Medium undead (augmented humanoid, incorporeal); HD 7d12; hp 45; Init +7 (+8 when on a ship); Spd fly 30 ft. (perfect); AC 16, touch 16, flat-footed 16; Base Atk +5; Grp ; Atk +8 melee touch (2d6 points of frostburn damage, frigid touch); SA chill ray, frigid touch, malevolence, sneak attack +4d6; SQ darkvision 60 ft., evasion, half-elf traits, immunity to cold, incorporeal



traits, low-light vision, manifestation, rejuvenation, trap sense +2, trapfinding, turn resistance +4, uncanny dodge, undead traits; AL CE; SV Fort +2, Ref +8, Will +1; Str , Dex 16, Con , Int 14, Wis 8, Cha 17.

**Skills and Feats:** Balance +15 (+17 when on a ship), Bluff +13, Climb +10, Diplomacy +7, Gather Information +15, Hide +11, Intimidate +15, Jump +2, Listen +8, Profession (sailor) +9, Search +21, Spot +8, Swim +10, Tumble +13 (+15 when on a ship), Use Magic Device +13; Combat Expertise, Improved Initiative, Sea Legs\*.

**Languages:** Aquan, Common, Elven.

\*Feat described in *Frostburn*.

**Chill Ray (Su):** Captain Kerakes can attack with a ray of cold light to a range of 90 feet. He must make a ranged touch attack to hit with the ray. On a successful hit, the chill ray deals 1d8 points of Constitution damage. In addition, the target must make a DC 16 Will save or be affected as if by a *slow* spell for 5 rounds. Kerakes must wait 1d4 rounds between uses of this ability.

**Frigid Touch (Su):** If Captain Kerakes hits with his frigid touch attack, he deals 2d6 points of frostburn damage. Frostburn damage (detailed in full on page 17 of *Frostburn*) is difficult to heal. Against ethereal opponents, the freezing touch deals no damage.

**Malevolence (Su):** Once per round, Captain Kerakes can merge his body with that of a creature on the Material Plane. This ability is similar to a *magic jar* spell (caster level 10th), except that it does not require a receptacle. To use this ability, Captain Kerakes must be manifested and move into the target's space. Moving into the target's space to use the malevolence ability does not provoke attacks of opportunity. The target can resist the attack with a successful DC 16 Will save. A creature that successfully saves is immune to Kerakes's malevolence for 24 hours, and he cannot enter its space. If the save fails, Kerakes vanishes into the target's body.

**Sneak Attack (Ex):** Captain Kerakes deals 4d6 extra points of damage on any successful attack against flat-footed or flanked targets, or against a target that has been denied its Dexterity bonus for any reason. This damage also applies to ranged attacks against targets up to 30 feet away. Creatures with concealment, creatures without discernible anatomies, and creatures immune to extra damage from critical hits are all immune to sneak attacks. Captain Kerakes may choose to deliver nonlethal damage with his sneak attack, but only when using a weapon designed for that purpose, such as a sap (blackjack).

**Evasion (Ex):** If Captain Kerakes is exposed to any effect that normally allows him to attempt a Reflex saving throw for half damage, he takes no damage with a successful saving throw.

**Half-Elf Traits:** Captain Kerakes has immunity to magic sleep effects. For all effects related to race, he is considered an elf.

**Manifestation (Su):** Captain Kerakes dwells on the Ethereal Plane and cannot affect or be affected by anything in the material world. When he manifests, he partially enters the Material Plane and becomes visible but incorporeal on the Material Plane. While manifested, he remains partially on the Ethereal Plane, where he is not incorporeal. His incorporeality helps protect him from foes on the Material Plane, but not from foes on the Ethereal Plane.

**Rejuvenation (Su):** If destroyed, Captain Kerakes returns in 2d4 days with a successful DC 16 level check (1d20+7). Only the deaths of all of Jarren Skein's descendants or the total destruction of the *Rusty Walrus* will lay him to rest.

**Trapfinding (Ex):** Captain Kerakes can find, disarm, or bypass traps with a DC of 20 or higher. He can use the Search skill to find, and the Disable Device skill to disarm, magic traps (DC 25 + the level of the spell used to create it). If his Disable Device result exceeds the trap's DC by 10 or more, he discovers how to bypass the trap without triggering or disarming it.


**Uncanny Dodge (Ex):** Captain Kerakes retains his Dexterity bonus to Armor Class even when flat-footed or targeted by an unseen foe (he still loses his Dexterity bonus if paralyzed or otherwise immobile).

**Undead Traits:** Captain Kerakes is immune to mind-affecting effects, poison, sleep effects, paralysis, stunning, disease, death effects, and any effect that requires a Fortitude save unless it also works on objects or is harmless. He is not subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage to his physical ability scores, ability drain, energy drain, fatigue, exhaustion, or death from massive damage. He cannot be raised, and resurrection does not work because he is unwilling. Darkvision 60 ft.

## CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

Once the PCs permanently lay Captain Kerakes's ghost to rest, the adventure is over. The ice floe that once





supported the ship quickly breaks up and melts. Any icegaunts left alive continue to terrorize the town until they too are destroyed.

## FURTHER ADVENTURES

After dealing with Captain Kerakes's ghost, the PCs might want to seek out the wreck of the *Blue Puffin* or visit the dwarves of the Glittering Gnasher, or both. They can find references to both the glacier and the *Blue Puffin* in the ship's log of the *Rusty Walrus*.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Jacobs works at Paizo Publishing as the associate editor for *Dungeon Magazine*. He's written several adventures and articles for both *Dungeon* and *Dragon* and has contributed to several Wizards of the Coast publications, including *Monster Manual II*, *Races of Faerûn*, *Fiend Folio*, and *Frostburn*. He also writes the monthly *Far Corners of the World* column for the Wizards of the Coast website. When he's not scrambling to finish freelance projects, James spends his time watching DVDs and playing in one of seven (soon to be eight) ongoing d20 campaigns.