

# THE LIGHT OF ISHRAM



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# 1

**Rakell** Taznakie pounded on the elf's door loud enough to wake the dead and then ran off, blithering like the imbecile everyone knew him to be.

In fact, the racket *had* woken the dead. That damnable skeleton clan, the one Grig had taken such pains to tuck under the stairway, refused to go back into their closet no matter what he did. "I only keep you thieving blokes about to help with chores," he yelled. "So, do what you're told!"

About the time Grig thought he had the blighters rounded up, Taznakie came back, screeching more gibberish.

"Go away!" The elf launched a searing bolt of blue flame toward the village moron. "Just rewards to you." He shook his fist in the air.

But Grig's aim went astray and his skeleton clan ignited on the spot. They ran hither and yon like torches with legs. He managed to douse the whole lot of them with a shower of conjured rain, but not before they set his beautiful tree house on fire.

"You buggers are useless, no more than a mess of stinking ashes." With a sigh, Grig swept them away in a magical blast of hot air.

He spied Taznakie lurking by the well and shook his fist again. "Thanks to you, I must journey to Grecolix's bone yard straight away to find another clan. You know as well as I the skeletons are the only ones who can enter the Mutant Forest without losing their skins."

Neither did the corrosive vapors of the Nemrak trees affect their nonexistent brains. The long barbs that poisoned humans glanced off the skeletons without effect. "Lucky for them! And it's your fault, Taznakie," he shouted for good measure.

Taznakie blew a raspberry and ran into the woods.

Too irritated to wait for breakfast, Grig donned his leather jerkin

with more zeal than necessary, drew his hair back and wrapped it with a thong, grabbed his staff and set out for the bone yard.

"Foul tempered, evil smelling, cantankerous old troll," he grumbled. "Wouldn't you know Grecolix has the only decent pickings within two day's walk?"

The last time Grig had the misfortune to conduct business with Grecolix, the coward had tried to steal the eyeballs right out of his head.

Grecolix specialized in performing thievery on his very own rock-stoop. Eyes were always high on the list of ingredients for the bone yard's patrons. If the supply ran short, the first body, dead or alive, to come along sufficed to replenish his supply.

It had taken all of Grig's stealth and cunning to escape the snare set by the double-crossing troll. A healthy dose of magic conjured at the last possible moment had laid the brute low with a giant headache. No doubt about it, Grecolix would be waiting for him with open arms and deviltry in his minuscule brain and even smaller heart.