



# Prologue

A young boy trudges alone down a long, dusty road, each step stirring the dry earth beneath his feet. The sun sets behind him, casting long shadows on the ground as if even the light itself is reluctant to follow him. The silence of the evening is shattered by a sudden, heart-wrenching cry.

"No, Mother! Father!"

His voice, raw with desperation, echoes in the air, but it is drowned out by the roar of flames and the harrowing screams that pierce the night. Ahead, a band of thieves set his home ablaze, their laughter twisted by the crackling inferno. The boy's eyes, wide with horror, are locked on the scene before him.

His father lies motionless on the ground, a broken man with an arrow lodged in his leg and a knife buried deep in his back. Through the haze of pain and death, the father's fading eyes catch sight of his son, their final moment shared in agonized silence. As his life ebbs away, the father watches helplessly as the thieves drag his wife into the bushes. The last breath leaves his body, his eyes rolling back as darkness claims him.

The boy could still hear his mother's screams, but they were fading, slipping away like echoes in a vast, empty canyon. Soon, the cries vanished altogether, leaving only the crackling of the fire and the hollow wind in their wake. The thieves gathered all that was valuable, and mounted their horses, preparing to ride off. But then, one of them spotted the boy—a small, trembling figure kneeling on the dirt road, his eyes wide with shock.

The man's gaze narrowed as he dismounted, pulling from his bag what looked like the handle of an axe, the blade long gone. Without hesitation, he began to march toward the boy, his eyes glinting with cruel intent. The boy was paralyzed, rooted to the spot as ash from his burning home fell softly onto his head, dusting his hair like snow. Somehow, he willed himself to stand, but his legs refused to obey. Every step felt like dragging weights through quicksand, and the ground beneath him might as well have been a prison.

The man drew closer, raising the heavy club over his head. Time slowed for the boy. His heartbeat thundered in his ears, louder than any drum. He could no longer see the other thieves—only shadows in the periphery—but the man with the club was painfully clear, every detail of his face etched into the boy's mind.

"This is the one," the boy thought, clenching his fists so hard his nails bit into his palms. "This is the one who will lead me back to them all."

He studied the man's face—the greasy black hair, the unkempt beard—and then, there it was: a half-moon scar, starting at the man's left eye and curving down toward the corner of his mouth. The sight of it ignited a blaze within the boy, hotter than the flames consuming his home.

"That scar!" he shouted, his voice cracking with hatred. "I will never forget that scar!" the boy shouted, his voice raw with fury. But before he could even comprehend what was happening, the club came down with a whoosh. Darkness engulfed him, swallowing his senses whole.

The next thing he knew, a gruff but gentle voice was calling him back to the world. "Wake, boy! Wake up! You'll be just fine, I promise."

Blinking through the haze, the boy looked up to see an old man kneeling beside him, a piece of cloth tied around his eyes like a blindfold. The man's face was lined with age, his beard white and long. Despite his sightless eyes, he seemed to see the boy perfectly.

"It's okay, lad," the old man said softly, his voice full of reassurance. "They're gone now. They're all gone..."

The boy felt a rough but steady hand grasp his own, and with a surprising strength, he was pulled to his feet. His legs wobbled, still unsure of their place in this new, horrifying reality. The old man brushed the dirt, tears, and blood from the boy's face with a rough but caring hand.

"I was on a quest," the old man continued, his tone lightening as if trying to lift the boy's spirits, "a quest to find something of great value. That's when I caught the smell of smoke from your house. Did you know, lad, that all smoke has its own smell? Each one is unique. Trees, grass, houses, and... well, even people. None of it's the same. I knew there was trouble, so I came as quick as I could. I'm sorry I wasn't fast enough."

"It was a band of thieves!" The boy's voice cracked as fresh tears streamed down his cheeks. "They took everything! They took my family!"

The grief that had been simmering under the surface now boiled over, and the boy's body shook with sobs. "If I were bigger, I could have stopped them! I could have done something!"

"Now, now, lad," the old man soothed, his voice as soft as a blanket on a cold night. "It's not your fault. There, there... Ol' Laglock will watch over you. Just come with me, and I promise, we'll make sure those who did this to you are brought to justice."

With no other place to go, no other hand to hold onto, the boy nodded and followed Laglock. The day passed in silence; the weight of the boy's grief was too heavy for words. As night fell, they set up camp under a canopy of stars. The old man worked efficiently, his hands moving with the confidence of someone who had done this a thousand times.

"Ahh! Everything is done! Done indeed!" Laglock said, his voice filled with a satisfaction that seemed strange after such a tragic day.

"But we still need a fire," the boy mumbled, his voice small and uncertain. "And we have no wood."

"Wood? No wood?" Laglock chuckled, a sound that was warm and full of life. "I may be an old washed-up wizard, but I still have enough meta in me to spark a campfire, lad! Now, stand back a bit and give this old man some room to work."

Laglock raised his staff over the fire pit, tilting the top half slightly as he took a deep breath and held it for a moment. Then, with a sharp, commanding voice, he called out, "Fira!"

A ball of fire shot into the air, then descended into the pit, where it flared into a gentle, pinkish flame that danced merrily. The warmth washed over the boy, chasing away the chill that had settled into his bones.

"There you go, lad," Laglock said with a satisfied nod. "Nothing to it. Nothing at all."

"Wow! Is... is that magic? I've never seen magic before," Korba said, his eyes wide with awe.

"Never, boy?" Laglock asked with a hint of surprise in his voice.

“Never! I only know of it from the stories Dad tells me. Can you show me more?” Korba asked, a spark of joy lighting up his face.

“Sure, boy! Sure!” Laglock chuckled warmly. “But first, tell me your name!”

“Oh! My name is Korba, sir.”

“Well, Korba, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Meet you indeed,” Laglock said, stroking his long, white beard as he pondered for a moment, considering where to begin.

“The first thing you must know about magic, Korba, is that you can’t have magic without Meta. Meta is the energy within everyone and everything. It’s what allows us to perform spells, wield skills, and shape the world around us to our will. But it’s not limitless—it comes with its own rules and boundaries.” Laglock explained while forming a ball of water that hovered just above his outstretched hand. The water shimmered in the dim light of the campfire, droplets swirling in a mesmerizing dance. Korba watched, his eyes wide with wonder, as Laglock skillfully manipulated the liquid, making it twirl and spin in midair.

"Now," Laglock continued, his voice steady and patient, "not everyone is born with the same amount of Meta. Some people have more, some less. But it is possible to increase one’s Meta through training, potions, and with the help of magical objects—if you can find them, of course. The more Meta you have, the more powerful you become, and the more spells you can cast."

"Does it ever run out?" Korba asked, his curiosity getting the better of him as he leaned in closer.

"Well," Laglock said, smiling at the boy’s eagerness, "think of yourself as a glass, and the water within is your Meta. The more Meta you use, the less water you have until, eventually, it’s gone. And when it’s gone," his voice took on a grave tone, "you start dipping into something much more dangerous—your Lifeforce."

With a quick flick of his wrist, Laglock sent the ball of water hurtling towards Korba. The boy instinctively raised his hands to shield his face, but instead of splashing over him, the water halted in midair, hovering just above his head. It then broke apart into fine droplets, falling like a gentle, glowing rain upon Korba’s upturned face.

Korba's eyes widened in awe as he felt the cool droplets sprinkle down on him, his hands instinctively reaching up, palms open, to catch the tiny streams. "Lifeforce?" he asked, the word hanging in the air like a whispered secret.

"Aye," Laglock nodded, his expression serious as he watched Korba. "Your Lifeforce is the essence of your being, lad. When your Meta runs dry, your magic starts drawing on your Lifeforce to keep going. But it's dangerous—terribly dangerous. Unlike Meta, which replenishes with rest and potions, your Lifeforce, once used, is almost impossible to regain. Too many wizards, hungry for power, have lost themselves to it, drained their very souls dry, and met their end."

Laglock waved his hand, and the remaining droplets above Korba's head vanished into the air with a soft hiss. "That's why you must always be careful, Korba. Always know your limits," Laglock reached through the neck of his shirt and pulled out a small silver chain, a glimmering crystal shard dangling from it. "And to truly understand one's limits, a mage needs a shard like this," he said, holding it up so that it caught the light of the fire, casting a soft, green glow.

Korba's eyes were wide with the incoming light. "What's that?" he asked, his gaze fixed on the crystal as it shimmered.

"This," Laglock replied, tapping the shard gently, "is a piece of the Codex of Eldoria." As he spoke, the crystal emitted a soft hum, and a greenish projection sprang to life in the air before them. It revealed a complex web of hexagons adorned with symbols and tiny inscriptions. Laglock waved his hand, and the hexagons shifted and scrolled effortlessly, revealing even more symbols and knowledge.

"This," Laglock continued, his voice reverent, "is called the Skill Tree. When you bond with a shard, you gain access to the Skill Tree, which grants you the knowledge and techniques of other shard holders. These could be wizards alive today or those who lived a thousand years ago when The Codex was first created. It's a powerful magic, powerful indeed."

Korba watched in awe as Laglock's fingers danced through the air, manipulating the glowing hexagons as if they were part of some great, invisible tapestry. Despite the cloth covering Laglock's eyes, he seemed to navigate the projection perfectly, his connection to the shard guiding him.

"With a shard like this," Laglock added, his voice filled with a quiet intensity, "a mage can learn from the greatest mages and warriors in history, mastering spells and skills that would take a lifetime to discover on your own in mere seconds. But remember, Korba, the shard can teach you much, but it is up to you to use that knowledge wisely." Laglock flicks the back of his hand from the side and then downwards and the projection disappears.

"If you stick with me boy, one day you will have a shard of your own". Laglock reaches into a small pouch of his belt and pulls out a shard of a similar shape and color to his own. "I've held on to this one to pass down to my apprentice. Should I ever take one. That could be you Korba. That could be you." He then places the shard back into his pouch. "Well, I think that's enough for tonight," Laglock said with a gentle smile. "You've had a long day, and you need your rest. Here, lad, perhaps this will help you sleep."

From his sack, Laglock pulled out a small metal box, intricately shaped like a heart but with the eerie appearance of a skull etched onto its surface. The craftsmanship was exquisite, the skull's hollow eyes gleaming faintly in the firelight. With a practiced hand, Laglock inserted a tiny key into the right eye socket and wound it several times, the mechanism inside clicking softly.

He placed the box beside Korba, and as soon as he did, it began to play a slow, haunting melody. Though there were no words, the music seemed to tell a story all its own—a tale of love and tragedy, of longing and loss. The notes hung in the air, wrapping around Korba like a comforting blanket, filling his mind with images of distant lands and forgotten times.

"Now, lad, get some rest," Laglock murmured, his voice barely above a whisper. "I'll teach you more about Magic and Meta tomorrow. Until then, good night, Korba."

"Good night to you too, Laglock," Korba replied, his voice heavy with the weariness of the day. "And thank you."

With that, Korba lay on his side, closing his eyes as the soothing melody continued to play. The soft, melancholic tune lulled him into a deep sleep, where the worries of the day melted away, leaving only the gentle promise of dreams yet to be dreamt.

WEEKS PASS-

Korba yells out in frustration, hurling a water ball from his hand into a nearby tree. The water exploded on impact, splashing in all directions. “I want to learn Fira spells now! I can’t hurt anything with these Watra and Wind spells!”

“Calm yourself, lad!” Laglock barked, striking the log he was sitting on with his staff, creating a loud thump. “Calm yourself and sit down.” His voice was firm but not unkind. Korba, still bristling with energy, hesitated before sinking onto the ground, his frustration evident.

Laglock sighed, watching the boy’s impatience with a mix of understanding and concern. “We’re learning control, Korba,” he continued, his tone softening. “Without control, you could end up hurting the wrong people—or even yourself. Do you understand? Hurting those men isn’t everything. There’s a bigger picture that you will see in due time. Soon I will teach you how to see your path.”

Laglock lowered himself to the ground, folding his legs one over the other. He rubbed a hand across his bald head before letting it rest in his lap. His demeanor grew more serious, the weight of his words hanging in the air.

“Now, let me tell you something about myself, and about what we’re doing here, really doing here” he began, his voice taking on a somber tone. “I was once a very powerful wizard, long ago. But like you, I was blinded by revenge and rushed headlong into action without thinking. And because of that one careless act, I am the man you see before you.”

Korba’s eyes widened slightly as Laglock continued, revealing a part of his past the boy had never imagined. “There was a Sorcerer by the name of Ozindel, and he possessed a gem called ‘The Vampearl.’ It was used on me, and it took away most of my Meta and my sight. Why? Because I did not prepare, and I did not think.”

Laglock’s voice grew softer, tinged with a sadness that Korba hadn’t heard before. “You see, I was in love. In love with the greatest woman, I would ever know, and she loved me in return. But she was promised to be married to Ozindel by her father, and she even bore a child to him. After the child was born, we crossed paths again and began seeing each other in secret. For weeks, we made plans to run away and be together. But Ozindel found out, somehow. He poisoned her.”



Korba listened, wide-eyed, as Laglock's tale unfolded like a tragic story from old legends.

"Ozindel, being a respected man in the Kingdom of Altaire, accused me of the murder, saying I had planned to kill him as well. When I learned what had happened, I was consumed by rage. I went after him, determined to make him pay for his sins. But I was reckless. When I confronted him, I tried to cast a spell without knowing the true power of the Vampearl. The stone began to suck the Meta right out of me, like a vortex. Before it could drain the very life out of me, Ozindel covered it, sparing me from death. But he did not show mercy. He left me blind, with only a fraction of my magic, alone and on the run."

Laglock paused, his expression grave as he let his words sink in. "That is why you see me as I am now, with no more magic than the warriors possess in the stories you've been told. Do you remember when I said I was on a quest when I found you?"

"Yeah," Korba said, recalling that moment.

"Well, it's a quest to find something of great value—a dark gem known as the 'Darken Stone.' They say it can reverse the effects of the Vampearl with just a touch. That's all I want—to hold the gem long enough to gain my sight and power back. And I'll need you, lad. I'll need you. Once we find it, we'll get those who killed your family, and we'll deal with the sorcerer who did this to me."

Korba stared at Laglock, a mixture of determination and uncertainty in his eyes.

"Though I'm blind, I can still see things by the aura of their Meta," Laglock explained. "But there are some creatures I cannot see, for their aura is blocked from my sight. That's why I need your help, boy. Because I won't be able to fight what I can't see, and I will need you and your sight to get us through. I'm afraid they will be protecting the very thing that creates them..."

Korba's voice trembled slightly as he asked, "What are the creatures, Laglock?"

"These creatures are called the Darken," Laglock said, his voice tinged with a hint of fear. The very mention of their name seemed to darken the air around them.

Korba leaned in closer, listening intently as Laglock continued, his tone grave. “The Darken have black, eel-like skin that covers their bodies, slick and unnatural. Their hair and eyes are as dark as the night itself, and their mouths are filled with sharp, jagged teeth. Their claws... well, they’re as hard and sharp as any sword you’ve ever seen. And their legs, lad, they’re faster than anything you can imagine, and they can leap higher than a jackrabbit.”

“Darken?!” Korba exclaimed, his voice rising with a mix of fear and fascination. “I’ve never heard of them.”

Laglock nodded, his expression grim. “Most haven’t. The Darken were once men—men who met their deaths in unnatural ways. When they died, their souls left this world, but a dark spell was cast upon their bodies, filling them with dark Meta from the stone. They were reanimated, twisted into something terrible, something that serves only the one who controls the gem.”

Korba sat up straighter, hanging on to Laglock’s every word. He wanted to know everything—every detail, every bit of information that could help him understand what they were up against.

“The gem itself,” Laglock continued, “does more than just command an undead army. It grants immense power to its master, corrupting them with its dark energy. Legend has it that the gem lies deep within a cave in the mountains, near the border of Lith and Pinnacle. Within that cave are countless traps, and it is guarded by the Darken—those that remain from Ereve, the last person to wield the gem.”

“Ereve?” Korba asked, his curiosity piqued.

“Aye, Ereve,” Laglock confirmed. “He was a warrior, chosen to protect the gem during a great war long ago. Ereve was selected for his pure heart, and he used the gem to create the Darken out of the enemies of his king. He did this not out of cruelty, but to ensure that no one else could possess the gem’s power. Ereve knew he wouldn’t live forever, but he counted on the Darken to guard the gem until they were destroyed or commanded by the gem itself to do otherwise.”

Korba’s heart pounded in his chest as he absorbed Laglock’s tale. The idea of facing an army of these creatures—these Darken—was terrifying, but the thought of the power they protected was equally mesmerizing.

“No one knows how many Darken Ereve created to protect the gem,” Laglock said, his voice dropping to a whisper. “And that’s why we must prepare, lad. We have a lot of training ahead of us, indeed. And let’s hope Ereve didn’t make too many of them.”

Laglock finished speaking and let out a long breath. He then began to hum softly, closing his eyes as he sank into meditation. “Join me now, boy. Clear your mind.”

Korba, still reeling from the weight of Laglock’s words, nodded and quickly sat beside him. He mimicked Laglock’s actions, folding his legs beneath him and closing his eyes. The world around him seemed to fade away as he focused on his breathing, letting the tension slowly drain from his body.

As the two of them sat in silence, Korba’s mind began to settle. The fear and excitement that had gripped him started to ebb, replaced by a calm determination. He didn’t know what the future held, but he knew one thing for certain—he was ready to face whatever lay ahead, with Laglock by his side.

The night deepened around them, the fire crackling softly as the stars twinkled overhead. In that quiet moment, Korba felt the first stirrings of something new—a connection to the world of magic that Laglock had opened up to him, a sense of purpose that was beginning to take root deep within his heart.

As they meditated together, the boy who had once been lost in despair started to find his path, guided by the old wizard who had seen too much and lost too much, but who still had hope for the future

-THE NEXT DAY

The morning light filtered through the dense canopy, casting a golden hue over the forest floor. Korba sat by the remnants of their campfire, staring at the Shard strapped to his wrist. It pulsed with a soft, greenish glow, a fragment of ancient power that had become a part of him. He could feel its warmth, a gentle reminder of the magic it held within.

Laglock approached, his staff thudding softly against the ground. “Morning, lad,” he greeted, settling down on a log opposite Korba. His eyes, hidden behind the cloth that covered them, seemed to focus directly on the boy’s wrist. “I see the Shard is already starting to bond with you.”

Korba nodded, his gaze never leaving the crystal. “It feels... alive. Like it’s trying to tell me something.”

“Aye,” Laglock replied, a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. “The Shard is more than just a tool. It’s a piece of the Codex of Eldoria, a powerful artifact that holds the collective knowledge of every mage, warrior, and craftsman who ever lived and connected to the Shards. When you bond with a Shard, it opens a gateway—a pathway to power that’s uniquely yours.”

Korba’s eyes widened as he looked up at Laglock. “How do I use it? How do I see these pathways?”

“Focus on the Shard,” Laglock instructed, his voice calm and steady. “Close your eyes, let its energy flow through you, and the Skill Tree will reveal itself.”

Korba took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and concentrated on the warmth of the Shard against his skin. At first, there was only darkness, but then he felt a surge of energy, like a current running through his veins. When he opened his eyes again, he gasped in amazement.

Hovering just above the Shard was a holographic projection—a Skill Tree made up of glowing hexagons, each adorned with intricate symbols and tiny inscriptions. The branches of the tree extended outwards, some leading to familiar skills like Watra and Wind, while others branched off into unknown territory, their glow faint but alluring.

“This... this is incredible,” Korba whispered, mesmerized by the intricate display. “It’s like a map of everything I can learn.”

“Aye, and more,” Laglock said, his tone filled with reverence. “This Skill Tree is your guide to mastery. It shows you the paths you can take, the skills you can learn, and the spells you can master. The Shard connects you to the Codex, and through it, you can access the knowledge of mages who lived a thousand years ago.”

Korba reached out, his fingers brushing the glowing hexagons. As he touched one, the projection shifted, revealing more details about the skill it represented. He felt a pull, an instinctive understanding of the power within each branch.

“There are so many choices,” Korba said, his voice tinged with both excitement and uncertainty. “How do I know which one to choose?”

“That’s part of the journey,” Laglock replied, his voice steady. “The Shard will guide you, but the decisions are yours to make. Some paths will make you a formidable warrior, others a master of the elements. Each branch represents a different aspect of who you could become.”

Korba’s gaze traveled across the tree, stopping at a branch that glowed more brightly than the others. He touched it, and the projection expanded to reveal the skill: Fira, an elemental spell that could unleash fire.

“Fira,” Korba murmured. “Here is where I want to start. I’ll use my experience on Fira.”

Laglock nodded approvingly. “For those who want to control the elements, a good choice indeed. Fira is a powerful spell, but it requires control. Fire can be a friend or a foe, depending on how you wield it. But remember, Korba, the Shard can teach you much, but it’s up to you to use that knowledge wisely. Every elemental caster learns Watra first, from its ability to cool air it leads to the learning of Wind, Wind moves the air that feeds the Fira spells. Without air, there is no fire. This is the basic path.”

As Korba focused on the Fira branch, he felt a rush of information flood his mind—techniques, strategies, the very muscle memory needed to cast the spell. It was as if the knowledge was being woven into his very being, becoming a part of him.

“That’s the Codex at work,” Laglock explained, seeing the wonder on Korba’s face. “The Shard connects you to the vast repository of knowledge within the Codex of Eldoria. It’s not just about learning—it’s about becoming. Each skill you master, each branch you explore, will shape you into the mage you’re destined to be.”

Korba nodded, feeling a sense of purpose welling up inside him. “What about this one?” he asked, pointing to a branch that was shrouded in mist, its edges undefined.

Laglock's expression grew serious. "That's Umbra, the path of shadows. It's a powerful but dangerous path. It can grant you abilities few can anticipate, but the darkness is seductive. You must follow a dark path to reach it."

Korba hesitated, sensing the weight of Laglock's words. "I think I'll stick with Elements," he decided, his voice steady with determination.

"A wise decision," Laglock said with a nod. "Master the basics before venturing into the unknown. As you grow stronger, the Shard will reveal more of the tree, offering new branches and greater power."

The knowledge gives Korba a sense of anticipation—of the journey ahead and its possibilities.

"Well," Laglock said, with a gentle smile, "I think that's enough for today. You've had a long one, and you need your rest. But tomorrow, we continue your training. Train indeed"

Korba nodded, feeling a new resolve settle in his heart. As he lay down to sleep that night, the Shard on his wrist pulsed softly, its light a beacon of the potential within him. The road ahead was long, but for the first time, Korba felt ready to walk it, guided by the ancient power of the Codex of Eldoria and the wisdom of the old wizard by his side.