

What's the best way to kill a dragon? You might think it's a gun or a sword, but no, it's a... sheep? Meh! Hmm. Find out more in today's episode.

[intro]

Hello my Lovely Learners, and welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great. I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's pre-intermediate-level story is called *The Dragon of Kraków*. As always, the transcript and PDF are available at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com), and you can find the link in the description.

Now, just now, I said The Dragon of Kraków. Kraków is a city in Poland and that is, I believe, the correct pronunciation of the name, but it's a bit annoying to have to say a Polish word in the middle of an English sentence every time I want to talk about the city. So, for the rest of the episode, I will be using the normal English pronunciation, Krakow.

So, The Dragon of Kraków. This is a story that several listeners have sent in over the years, but particularly recently Marcjan, a listener from Poland, sent in his version of the story, and I based my version on that. So, thank you again so much, Marcjan. As always, I added details, I changed things, I put a bit of my own spice on it, so if it looks nothing like what you wrote, Marcjan, sorry, I can't stop myself.

Anyway, Kraków is a beautiful city in the south of Poland. I haven't been there yet myself, but Google Images tells me it's lovely. And I've also heard great things about it from people who have visited it. If you want to know one particular tourist attraction you can enjoy in the city of Kraków, well, you'll just have to wait until it appears at the end of the story, but yes, this is a legend that is very well known in Kraków about the origins of the city and Polish history, so I'm so excited to share this part of Polish folklore with you today.

OK then, I'll just explain some words that are in today's story.

When you **prove yourself**, you show people that you are good at something, usually when they doubted you. For example, if you join a sports team you will need to prove yourself, you will need to show the other players that you are good at the game. You know, at the beginning, everyone's like, who's this new person? I don't trust them. Can they even play? We shouldn't be nice to them. So you have to prove yourself to show that, yeah, you're good at the game, and yeah, you deserve to be in the team.

When someone **terrorises** a place, they make that place feel very unsafe. For example, gangs might terrorise a city, making people feel like they can't walk outside at night. Or someone might terrorise a cake shop by ringing them every day and saying, 'I'm going to eat all your chocolate cakes! I'm going to eat all your chocolate cakes and you can't stop me!!' Just a hypothetical situation.

Flames, F L A M E S, are the parts of a fire that move around. Flames are red or orange, and they move around in the air. If a fire is left for a long time, it will get very small and the flames will disappear. There is a weapon you might know about called a flamethrower because it shoots flames, prah! A dragon also shoots flames from its mouth.

Flesh, F L E S H, is the parts of our body under our skin. You know, all those soft bits. Usually, flesh includes muscle and fat. We also use flesh to talk about kinds of animal muscle and fat that we eat. For example, pork is pig flesh, beef is cow flesh and mutton is sheep flesh. Though I'm vegetarian, so the only 'flesh' I'm eating is tofu flesh!

Wisdom, W I S D O M, means being wise, being able to make good judgements and understand difficult ideas. Many people can be intelligent, but wisdom is different: wisdom means you are also good at judging people and situations. For example, Mufasa from *The Lion King* is very wise. He teaches Simba many lessons about the world. That is wisdom. The teeth at the back of your mouth that only come up when you're an adult are called

wisdom teeth, because you get wiser as you get older... usually. Anyway, wisdom teeth often cause problems and have to be removed, so that's not very clever!

Strength, S T R E N G T H, means being strong. Strength is also one of the hardest words to pronounce in the English language. Go on, try. Strength, strength, strength. Everyone has their strengths and weaknesses, things that they are strong or weak at. Your weakness might be pronouncing the word strength, for example. Sometimes in job interviews, people ask, 'What do you think your biggest strength is?' And it's usually a horrible question to answer. Ugh, ugh, ugh, hate answering that question! Puh!

Wander, W A N D E R, means to walk around slowly, relaxed, without a clear goal. For example, when I travel to a new city, I often like to wander around, because I know I'll find interesting things. If you wander too far, though, you might get lost!

A **cobbler**, C O B B L E R, is a person who repairs shoes, who mends shoes. These days, most people don't go to cobblers. They just buy a new pair of shoes. But in the old days, cobblers were very important, and people often took boots to the cobbler to be fixed.

A **device** is something that has been invented for a specific purpose. For example, iPhones, TVs and laptops are electronic devices. A computer mouse is a device that helps you use a computer. And so on...

Sulphur, S U L P H U R, is a yellow chemical element. Sulphur smells strongly of eggs. Sulphur is usually found near volcanoes and hot springs.

Many things come in **powders**, P O W D E R S. For example, you can buy cocoa, curry and chilli as a powder. Powders are made of many small, dry pieces. To make powder, you grind something for a long time until the pieces are very small. People also use make-up powder to make foundation stay on their face. You might also put powdered sugar on desserts to make them pretty and delicious. Mm. I'm particularly thinking of a certain chocolate cake shop which definitely wasn't attacked earlier today.

OK, so listen and enjoy!

The Dragon of Kraków

See, there, the city of Kraków. The castle sits on Wawel Hill. Do you know who built it? It was King Krak, of course, the Polish prince. The city's name comes from this great man. But Krak did much more than build a castle. First, he had to **prove himself**. Most men prove themselves by winning wars, or winning the hearts of the people. But Krak had a much harder job.

You see, at that time, a dragon **terrorised** the people of Kraków. The city had a different name then, but it has been lost to time. So have the dragons, which is fortunate for us all – great men like Krak killed them. But let me remind you what these creatures were. Dragons had skin as hard as rock, teeth as sharp as knives, eyes as red as fire – and their breath turned to **flames**! As if that weren't enough, these monsters had wings that let them fly like the fittest birds, and they could talk just like humans, and, as you well know, with the power of speech come tricks and lies.

So the dragon made its home in a cave by the Vistula River, the longest river in Poland that flows through Kraków, and there the dragon terrorised the poor people of the city. Each week, it flew to the top of Wawel Hill and gave its demand.

'I hunger!' **roared** the dragon. 'Bring me **flesh**! Be it sheep or cow or chicken or man, I do not care, but BRING ME FLESH!'

And to prove it meant what it said, the dragon breathed out fire all over the city, so that any birds that flew above it were burned and fell to the ground, and so that every person in the city would feel the heat of the dragon's flames.

The people of Kraków kissed goodbye to their sheep and cows and chickens and delivered them to the monster, but never did they give it human flesh, because no human was cruel enough to send another to such a horrible death.

It was to such a scene that Krak arrived. At this time, he was not a prince, but just an ordinary man. He had come from the forests, and nobody knew much about his past, and nobody cared to know, because he had not yet proven himself. Krak saw what was happening, and knew it could not go on this way. Eventually, the sheep and cows and chickens would run out, and it wouldn't take long for the people to choose each other as meat. Those who tried to escape the city were hunted by the dragon, and it was clear that the monster enjoyed human flesh just as much as animal flesh.

Krak knew that it was **wisdom**, not **strength**, that would defeat the dragon. Already many men of great strength, knights and soldiers, had come to attack the monster, and in every case, the dragon was stronger. Krak was strong himself, and he had the wisdom to know that his strength was not enough.

So Krak **wandered** the city, looking for wisdom. He searched in all the obvious places: he went to schools and the houses of great men, he searched through libraries, he asked people who were the **wisest** in Kraków. But while he found many men and women who were clever, none showed true wisdom. They knew all about the world, all about God and the night sky, but none of them were wise enough to defeat the dragon.

Krak began to wander at night. He found his mind worked more freely at night, when the dragon was asleep. But as much as he thought about it, he could not think of a solution, a way to kill the dragon.

One night, Krak wandered past a house where a man was working. He stopped for a moment and looked through the window. He was confused. Outside the house, there was a sign for a **cobbler's**, but inside, rather than shoes, he saw all kinds of strange **devices**. The devices hung from the ceiling, they sat on shelves, they covered the floor. As long as Krak looked at them, he could not understand what these devices were for. In the corner of the room stood the old cobbler, working on one of these strange objects.

'Hey there!' called Krak.

It is at this moment that I should mention that the young Krak, for as handsome and wise as he was, did not have the prettiest of voices. In fact, his voice was so ugly that when he spoke to women, he avoided speaking as much as possible. He would kiss their hand, look into their eyes, laugh at their jokes, but never say a word himself. The moment Krak did speak, the magic was broken, and the girls quickly found a reason to stop talking to him.

Fortunately, the old cobbler did not do the same, but he was certainly surprised to hear such a horrible voice calling to him in the night.

'Young man, you do not have to scream like that.'

'I am sorry,' said Krak.

'Oh, that is just your voice. Well, it's late and I'm closed, but we live in a city terrorised by a dragon, so I suppose the normal rules don't work anymore. Can I help you with anything?' He looked down at Krak's shoes. 'Those are nice boots. Want another pair?'

'No,' said Krak, trying very hard to speak pleasantly. 'What are those devices?'

'Oh, my inventions. It's just a hobby,' explained the old cobbler. 'These days, people don't have much money for shoes. They hide their money in socks under their bed. So I've had more time to invent. Don't touch that!'

Krak froze. He had been about to touch a big round black device hanging from the ceiling.

'Some of them explode,' said the old man, slightly embarrassed. 'I get bored.'

'In this time of fear, inventing things is a wise way to pass the time,' said Krak. 'In fact, that gives me an idea... What is your name?'

'Skuba,' said the cobbler.

'Skuba,' said Krak with a smile, 'I think I could use your help. Tell me, how does this thing explode?'

'It's quite simple really,' said the old man. He went and took the device down from the ceiling. He'd told Krak to be careful with it, but he held it like it was nothing. 'It's full of sulphur powder. If you add fire and air – BOOM! It explodes.'

'Sulphur powder...' said Krak quietly. 'Why would you invent such a thing?'

'I was angry at my son,' said the cobbler, and he pointed at a smaller device in the corner. 'That was the original one. I just wanted to scare him a bit. He had been behaving so badly. But then when it exploded, it flew right into the air. He thought it was so fun, and asked me to make a bigger one. He thought it would be great fun. Like a big party for everyone.'

'How sweet,' said Krak. 'Not many fathers would make dangerous explosives for their son.'

The cobbler smiled, but his eyes were sad. 'I didn't make it for him, at first. He asked me to, and I told him it was dangerous. But it didn't matter in the end. The dragon got him.'

A silence that smelled like sulphur hung in the air. The old man slowly put the device down, and for a moment they both looked at it.

'Old cobbler, I have an idea.'

They were the last sheep in the city – just four. Three of the sheep shook as the dragon looked down at them, but the fourth sheep stayed strangely still.

'THIS is all you have to offer me?' said the dragon. 'I want FLESH!'

'This is all we have left!' said Krak, acting like a scared villager.

'Huh!' said the dragon. 'Your voice sounds like mine. I don't like that.'

The dragon looked at him with flames in his eyes, and Krak turned and ran. Flames poured out of the dragon's mouth, but Krak had already jumped in the Vistula. He swam quickly under the water, and found a place to hide and watch the dragon.

'Next time, next time, I will eat *you*, human!'

And the monster opened its mouth wide and ate the four sheep.

For a moment, it looked like it would fly back to its cave to rest. But then it stopped. Of course, most of the people hid in their homes, but a few brave men – including Skuba the cobbler – watched through the windows.

The dragon stopped. Something was wrong. It didn't like something about its food.

'Come on...' said Krak quietly.

The dragon coughed, but no flames came out of its mouth. It coughed again, and then it started to shake.

'What have you...'

Suddenly, the dragon ran to the river. It went down to drink the water, but it was too slow – the fire inside its stomach had mixed with the sulphur powder inside the 'sheep', and—
BOOM!

Like a firework on New Year's Eve, the dragon exploded. Its horrible black flesh broke into pieces which landed all over the town. For a few minutes, the people were too shocked to speak.

Then, they came to their windows. They looked out and saw all those pieces of red flesh, which smelled strongly of sulphur. Finally, they understood. The dragon was dead.

The people ran out and **cheered**. They started celebrating, unable to believe what was happening, and the party lasted for days. At first, they burned the dragon flesh, but then they quickly realised that they could clean it and eat it, and after losing all their cows and sheep to the dragon, they needed it.

What happened to Krak and the cobbler? Well, you already know. He didn't want to tell people what he'd done – he was a simple man – but the people soon found out it was him. They wanted to make him king for his strength and wisdom. Krak said that the cobbler had done the real work, but he *looked* like a hero, like a king, and so finally he let them make him one.

'I may have made the invention,' said Skuba, one night at dinner with the king, 'but I wasn't stupid enough to dress it up like a sheep and put it in front of a dragon. Only you could do that.'

'Some would say I was wise,' said Krak.

'No, "stupid" is more accurate.'

The two friends laughed, and Krak poured Skuba another drink.

Krak was a good king, although he never felt comfortable being so rich. Also, he avoided talking as much as possible, because he didn't really sound like a king. Of course, he made sure that Skuba had a good life, although the old man was happy as long as he could make shoes and work on his inventions. And King Krak made sure to keep plenty of sulphur powder, just in case another dragon ever came to Kraków...

If you are brave, like Krak, and perhaps a little bit stupid, you can still see the dragon today. There is a statue of it on Wawel Hill, and real fire comes out of its mouth. But be careful. It is a statue today, but who knows about tomorrow?

THE END

Woo! Thank you for listening to this episode. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Water break! If you're not watching on YouTube, that was just me drinking some water.

Oh, I'm in such a good mood. Do you want to know why I'm in such a good mood? Yesterday I went to a very intense yoga class. It was a strength yoga class. I tired myself out so much that after the class I was shaking.

And then I went to a storytelling night. Ah, it's a storytelling open mic night that I go to in London called Tales at the Tavern. Now this was the first time I went in months, so it was lovely to catch up with friends, see some amazing stories and tell a story of my own.

Actually, I performed The Freezer Door, which, if you're a loyal podcast listener, a truly Lovely Learner, you will know that The Freezer Door is an episode of the podcast I did a few months ago, I think. So I took the story The Freezer Door from the podcast, and I adapted it to perform it on stage. And I had a great time. So I'm just in a fabulous mood.

Honestly, so far 2025 is going superb for me, so wonderful. I'm just having a great year. Oh God, this probably sounds really annoying if you're suffering from some winter blues, so just know that if you're not having a great year so far, I'm sending all my love and energy in your direction.

There it goes, it's flying through the air, through the tunnels of, um, digital information, through the internet, under the sea, over the mountains, through the earth, up a tree, down a tree, through a garden, up a brick wall, into your window, and it's hit you. Ah! Joy and happiness. When you feel it, you know it's me. Hee hee hee.

Okay, hmm. I think now is the time for me to stop recording because I'm going a little bit crazy. And if someone is listening to the podcast for the first time, they may be thinking, what the hell is going on? What is this person and what are they doing?

So on that note, thank you again for listening to Easy Stories in English. And yes, the statue of the dragon of Kraków really exists and you can visit it. Another thing that really exists is, hold on a second! My books. Yes. I have some physical books I have released of... I'm hitting my head with them. That's how you know they're real. Oh!

I released these physical books. They're stories from the podcast. They're in four different levels. They're super fun. They come with vocabulary descriptions. Even if you've listened to all of the podcast these stories are updated with new details and it's a fantastic way to improve your English. So I really recommend you get these. Just go to EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Book. You can get it on all the usual places as well, like Amazon, Apple Books, Kobo, all of those places.

Just go. Just go. Get yourself a present. Get yourself a Valentine's Day present of one of my books. Because I love you, random person who I probably have never met. Wow, now you know I'm really being sincere. Ha ha ha ha ha. Okay, bye!