

## **The Tarasque**

It was a legend of a French dragoness named “Tarasque” who came out of the sea and decided to live in the river Rhone, to be more precise, around Tarascon. Wherever the beast appeared, she brought terror and destruction. All animals fled her. To satisfy her hunger, she destroyed houses, boats and devoured fishermen and people living along the river. Many heroes tried to kill her, and perished. The story of the dragon is now re-enacted by parades in the city of Tarascon.

### **Setting**

The legend started in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. In the years of 1261-1266, Jacques de Voragine wrote in The Golden Legend that the Tarasque’s father was the water dragon Leviathan and her mother, the giant snake Onachus.

She ravaged the southern part of France, the Provence. After seven years, a farmer found the skin of the dragoness and considered her dead. But every seven years the Tarasque had to slough, and the farmer had only found her cast-off skin. Seven years went by. The Tarasque had destroyed all bridges and devoured everyone who wanted to cross the river. At last, the inhabitants of the troubled area tried to lure the dragoness into a trap. Near the town Avignon there was a deep swamp. Whoever got there was lost. So they bound animals to trees near the trail leading to the swamp. The beast followed this line of prey. But when she approached the trap, she turned around and fled back to the river : the swamp belonged to the realm of the devil, and being a creature of the devil herself, the Tarasque was warned.

Again, seven years passed and one day Saint Martha happened to evangelise Tarascon. When she heard of the beast, she went out to catch it –barefooted, in her white dress, with no other weapon than a jar of holy water. Saint Martha led the beast to the town, where it was killed. The citizens erected a new church in honour of Saint Martha, and the town was renamed Tarascon. In 1474 King Rene inaugurated the Tarasque games and races in celebration of this victory over the monster. The town revives the legend on the last weekend in June every year.

### **Characterization**

It was a dragoness, half land mammal, half fish. She outsized twelve elephants, had teeth like swords and a skin like iron. She also had a green tortoise-like shell with red spikes on it, a long tail and a lion-like head. Her breath was flames. Old pictures describe her having six legs.