

SWAMP THING—An Outline for the Series

written by Darko Macan

The poor, poor child.

Tefé, that is.

To begin with, she was conceived for a bunch of wrong reasons: Her father wanted to atone for his mistakes, so his sense of duty and guilt kicked in and gave life to the Sprout, while her mother wanted nothing more than to please Swampie. It's no wonder that Swampie kept running around after Tefé was born, and that Abby left Tefé to the elemental nanny (Lady Jane) as soon as the opportunity presented itself and did so with apparent ease (relief?).

Not even her biological father has shown a smidgen of interest in his daughter as a person—well, since it's John Constantine we are talking about, that comes as no surprise—though he might've counted on her as a pawn in one scheme of his or another. Actually, the only interest Tefé ever produced in someone was as a fodder for some grand plans (the Parliament of Trees had its plans, Anton Arcane wanted to use her to get him a new body...). Rarely, perhaps never, she's found love.

As I said: the poor child.

And she has tried her best. Of course, she killed everybody in a 22-mile radius once, but she was a baby—and morality is not in our genes, no matter what they tell you. She did other bad things later—the flower people and smaller killer outbursts—but she was playing, and it could be argued that she knew no better. After all, was her father there to teach her? Was her mother all that interested in her, or perhaps just scared of her?

She's tried her best: She put up with the nanny and separation from the family without a word of protest, and she's tried hard to learn everything they (the Parliament, Lady Jane, Swampie) wanted her to. Even when her education was brutally interrupted, she wanted nothing more than to help her father—and she did...she annulled the primeval threat that came to claim him, she saved Swampie's life. And how did he repay her?

He killed the poor thing.

No wonder he thinks she's holding a grudge!

I mean, she does. She's angry and hurting and sulking and vindictive and...and, above all, she's alone. Imagine, for a moment, you are a child of seven (or so) and that you've tried very, very hard to please everybody, and all you got in return was a shunning, a rejection, a royal screwing-over. You would feel all that she feels, and you would crave revenge and justice and all those things. But you would crave one thing more than all those:

You'd really be hurting for some love.

It's a better world out there, everybody seems to say and think. The Swampie's final revelation was shared by all, and the globe was nudged forward a notch, got a baby-step closer to redemption. Every living thing experienced a moment of bliss and everybody remembers it with a smile. Everybody, of course, but Tefé—for she was dead at that moment.

Of course, for a flesh elemental, death is a temporary state, and Tefé did rebuild herself later, but too late for The Moment. In the happier world, she's the only one who did not experience the joy shared by all; she's the sore eye in the face of the bright future.

Still, she would forget all the pain and all the injustice if only her father loved her. If only.

But Swamp Thing has grown too big to understand the details; he's too full of love for everybody to bestow special love on anyone. They say there's a special bond between fathers and daughters but—alas!—the father has parted with his human half, and the bond does not lead to his heart any more. He remembers Tefé with fondness, and he occasionally checks to see what she's doing, but he's the planet now, and there are billions of his sons and daughters around—walking, buzzing, diving, roaring, flying, flowering—and Tefé is just one of them.

She, however, wants to be noticed. Needs to be noticed. She throws temper tantrums. She grows herself an adult body and has sex with an industrialist (throwing all the plants out of the house first—she knows her father has other means now, but still she associates him with flora mostly) and makes him hurt the woods, the Green. She can't do it herself, and hurting the Green hurts her, too, but she's willing to go through it—anything to get Swampie's attention!

It doesn't work. Whatever damage Tefé causes, Swampie is able to heal. At her monsters and outbursts, he just smiles benevolently: She'll come to her senses, she'll

calm down. Even if you are a planet, even if you are a god, nothing prevents you from being stupid.

After realizing that she can't hurt Swampie, that she can't make him hate her any more than she can make him love her, Tefé punishes the industrialist for her failure and sets a secondary objective for herself: She'd prefer Swampie, but Abby will have to do.

Unfortunately, Abby's been carving a new life for herself out there. There was no room for her at Swampie's side either and, besides, she got a bit tired of the horror and excitement and convinced herself that what she wanted was a normal life, a normal family (that may be delusional thinking for an Arcane, but let us not go into this now). That's why she has a new live-in partner (it might be Reynauld, I'm not sure about his current status, but it could be someone more comfortably boring) and—a new baby.

The new baby comes as a terrible shock to Tefé. However, She swallows the initial bitterness and disappointment and approaches Abby anyway. Abby's not too pleased to see her (and if her new boyfriend is someone normal, he's certainly out of himself by now) and, while she offers Tefé hospitality, Tefé senses the coldness and the rejection and goes wild. She uses her flesh-molding ability to attack the baby and turn her into a series of animals or creatures. Through this trial and temptation, Abby holds on in her devotion to the baby and Tefé finally breaks, restores the baby (even if Abby's relationship might be destroyed in the process) and flees, defeated again.

(As an aside, the baby's body might be able to remember, on the cell-level, the metamorphoses she went through and subsequently develop the body-shaping ability of her own. A subplot to pursue, perhaps.)

Her options diminishing, Tefé goes to London to see John Constantine, who tries his best but ultimately proves he's not suited to be a father, both to his regret and relief. It's a half-comedic episode, with Tefé embarrassing John with the variety of flesh-disguises she shows herself in, and there's also some half-serious case he has to solve in the process (the details to be filled in later...I'm just sketching a general outline here). Their parting is not as tearful as the previous two, perhaps because Tefé didn't hope for much in the first place, but also because Constantine actually tried. What's more, from him Tefé learns about the Nergal blood she inherited and goes to Hell to seek the patronage of the demon.

Well, I'm not completely up-to-date on Nergal's personal history but whatever the details might be, one thing is for certain: He's a demon, and while he might be delighted for a chance to shape a creature this powerful at his will, it's impossible for him to really

love Tefé. She senses it, and after a brief apprenticeship in Hell, she leaves, probably after doing something to ensure that Nergal remembers the time he tried to manipulate an elemental.

Suddenly, things start to go for the better. Or so it seems. While Tefé wanders aimlessly, Anton Arcane appears in her life. It's the new and improved Anton Arcane, you'll remember—the one who has found God, the one who wants to use his second chance to do good. Therefore he adopts his grand-niece and takes her back to his homeland (an unnamed Balkan country) where he plans to atone for the sins that generations of Arcanes have done throughout the ages.

(Incidentally, this move brings the series into my part of the world—whatta unbelievable coincidence! [grin])

Anton's scheme backfires. The folks are first terrified (or at least wary) because of the return of an Arcane, but when they see that this one's a wuss and a milquetoast, they start taking advantage of him and of Tefé's healing (good for deformities and other fleshly dysfunctions) powers. While Anton might agree to the abuse—all in the name of the atonement—Tefé won't, so she leaves.

(A note: This, I believe, takes care of rounding up the important players of our previous cast. In #1, we touch base with Swampy; in #2, with Abby; in #3, with JC; in #4, with Nergal; and in #5, with Anton. With #6, we are ready to introduce some new players and a fresh direction.)

Tefé won't, we said, so she leaves. She does not, however, go far, because she's found by Anton's sister Aniela (it was her I had in mind, Joan, not the mother; she's listed as presumed deceased in Abby's entry in Who's Who, and since even the really deceased come back very often in comics, presumed deceased sounds like being ripe for re-introducing). Aniela has been living a low-profile life (unless research proves differently) in the very same unnamed Balkan country we mentioned before. There, she's been running an old-fashioned boarding school for girls. How old-fashioned? Well, Tefé is to find out very soon, when her grand-aunt greets her with a question:

"How would you like, Tefé, to become a witch?"

* * *

The above rough synopsis summarizes my ideas about the introductory arc. It, I hope, touches on enough points to satisfy the old readers, and introduces the back story in

unobtrusive bits via reintroducing the key players of the past. From that point on, Tefé's story becomes a sort of a Bildungsroman, the story of a very powerful, very confused and very lonely girl who can grow herself an older or wilder body but can't grow in spirit without help—a girl who can reshape almost anything but her fortune.

In other words: a poor, poor girl.

The strong influence at this early stage will be her grand-aunt and friends (and enemies?), natural or supernatural, she'd make at the school. There'd be limited contact with the other early players, though we'd occasionally check to see how's Abby coping with her baby, or what's Swampie up to (not much, I'm afraid, though we might get to see him dreaming about his early, monster self, and even see this dream come alive for an issue or so). But the main focus, and our protagonist, will remain the white-haired and green-eyed little monster in search of love and acceptance—Tefé.

Maybe we should change the series title to Poor Thing? [grin]