

Thom's first imaginary friend was a normal part of growing up. His parents didn't think much of the boy playing by himself. He was--after all--different. There weren't many gnomes, and his parents, (humans,) worked hard to make sure the house had adjustments so that he could move about and interact.

When he started talking to several imaginary friends and recounting the stories they told, his parents became worried. After visiting a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a Rabbi, Thom's parents received a diagnosis from an unlikely source: an Aztechnology representative offering a limited SIN opportunity and a scholarship to a sponsored university.

His parents declined; they worked for UCAS, and were proud of being part of a national government instead of a corporate one, but their understanding of their child morphed with the offer.

Despite Thom having a loving, supportive home, his school experience wasn't as smooth. He was very smart, he was very small, and he talked to people no one else could see. This left every kid who wanted to deflect attention away from themselves three large openings. He spent much of elementary school reading or on the swings, as far from dangerous multiplayer games like tag or--god forbid--anything that used a ball.

His experience changed almost instantaneously in middle school. He shared Ms. Nelson's math class with a girl named Emily. She said nice things to him and about him when he was teased. She was really tough, and she was smart to boot. They could have conversations about math and magic and spirits and--well--being weird.

She didn't try to pick him up when he couldn't reach something; Emily would bring over the step stool. Emily didn't tell him he was adorable or teeny tiny or little or pinch his cheeks or pat his head. She shared sandwiches and talked about how much of an ass the gym teacher was. They were quickly inseparable, and began scheming for the future.

Emily was going to earn a Pulitzer and then settle down. Thom would become a professor and become famous for his research into the different planes of existence, finally expanding on metahumanity's very new, very raw understanding of our newfound spiritual neighbors. They'd write the forewords for each other's books, and they'd have vacation homes outside the city.

They went to the University of Washington together, and they were excited. They had plans. They were driven. And then she was gone.

Emily disappeared without a trace. She went to work, and just never returned. Thom searched the city and scoured the astral for a trace of her signature. He knew what she looked like, and he was going to find her.

He went from talking to spirits to summoning them. He'd go to class, learn what he could, write his papers, but he never went out.

Instead, he'd conjure up a new spirit each week. He'd tell them all about his friend and bargain for that spirit to go look for her. He'd give them little trinkets, and he'd promise that if they helped, he'd never bind a spirit or send a spirit ally into a situation they weren't prepared and capable of. He'd treat them as trusted allies, and not as tools. Like they should be treated.

It took 61 weeks of bartering and--in some instances--begging. It took 51 weeks before a spirit returned to Thom, having seen her essence mingled in the essence of someone much, much darker. She was being fed upon.

There was a barrier, and the spirit couldn't tell if she was alive or dead inside the protected building, but Thom still had hope. He cut a deal with one of the most frustrating professors ever to exist: he'd accept the graduate school slot with Dr. Wells instead of with Aztechnology; he'd run the lab and he'd do the field work. He'd get papers published for the lunatic as long as Dr. Wells would put him into contact with someone who could get Emily out.

And so Dr. Wells got Rose of Sharon Howlett on the phone.

A little over one year has passed since Emily came back. She's not the same person; her aura is ragged, and she's clearly struggling with PTSD and--well--everything. But she's alive, and for now that's enough. Thom now works in the Wells Lab as a graduate student and Lab Manager. Realizing that almost all of the non-corporate mages in Seattle were running in the shadows, Thom had an excuse to follow Emily into the shadows to keep an eye on her and help keep her safe.

Their motivations are different, but they still work well as a pair. Thom tempers Emily's more impulsive side somewhat, and Thom will spring into action to help Emily in a way he wouldn't otherwise.