

SBR 3.14: Other Sides

Content Warnings

- Static
- Stereo Audio (which sounds different in each ear/headphone)
- Loud Crashes/shattering glass/crockery
- Panic/distress
- Magical gaslighting
- Mentions of blood/nosebleeds
- References to childhood neglect
- References to death
- Mentions of childhood trauma (emotional and physical)
- Mentions of caves and being trapped in caves

Transcript

ANNA: Do you think he's going to come back?

ARLO: Did you see that storm? I'm not very hopeful.

INDI: He's not dead. I'd have felt it if he was dead.

KITTY: Me too, but maybe less.

ANNA: I still can't believe what he did to you.

KITTY: Yeah, well. He unmade the universe or whatever so like. Pick your hills to die on.

INDI: This is a pretty big hill.

ANNA: A very big hill.

KITTY: Has anyone seen Beth?

INDI: Not since the storm. She was there one minute, and then, poof, gone.

ARLO: It does seem like a pretty bad sign.

ANNA: Yes. When we all remembered who we were, it was pretty clear that Beth is, well.

INDI: Dead?

ANNA: Yes.

ARLO: Yeah.

KITTY: So what do we do?

INDI: We carry on as before and look for a way out. What else can we do?

ANNA: We could go to them! Get them to fix whatever's gone wrong. What? Why are you looking at me like that.

ARLO: Anna. Sam's the one that put us here. None of were there when everything went wrong, we don't know what happened, what frame of mind he'll be in if we go to him.

KITTY: Arlo's right. We have to assume something's gone wrong, that Sam's different now. Especially as Oliver's not come back.

INDI: Exactly. We have no idea what they've been getting up to, even if Oliver is alive.

[SPIRIT BOX SKIPPING]

[BIRDSONG]

[LEAVES IN A BREEZE]

SAM: I can't stay here, you know.

OLIVER: Why not?

SAM: Well. If we don't leave, this whole world is going to unravel, isn't it? Because you were right when you said people will wake up and realise it's not reality.

OLIVER: But it's very beautiful and the ground is very soft. I could sleep here forever.

SAM: I would keep you in this garden forever if I could. I'd make the sun soft for you. I'd make the trees bleed honey. I'd do anything for you.

[OLIVER SIGHS]

OLIVER: What happens if we *leave* the garden?

SAM: Honestly? I don't know. I've remembered remembering the past, gosh that's confusing to say, but it always ended here; it always ended with me in the garden, alone. And to be honest I was pretty thin on the details there anyway. I didn't know anything about realities collapsing?

OLIVER: You'll still be like this?

SAM: Like what? A god?

OLIVER: Only *godlike*. You're a monster, too, remember?

SAM: (sighing) Aren't all gods?

OLIVER: Hmm. Maybe. But the question still stands.

[SAM YAWNS]

SAM: I'm pretty sure I'm just this powerful now wherever I go, but. I'm not sure it's permanent?

OLIVER: What does that mean?

SAM: I mean I honestly don't know. You told me that everyone was going to wake up and see this place as it really is, and I don't know what'll happen to it when they do. I'm telling them stories. It only works if they believe them. It's already fracturing, and there's only a handful of you who have woken up, so far. It's not about the details. It's about believing. It's about joining in. The librarian was right; as people start to realise they're part of a story they're being told about themselves then it's only a matter of time before they try to change it. And they can. I can't stop them. Not all of them. I just can't.

And the thing is, I remember things now. I remember being a kid, knowing the future but not understanding it, and the strangest part of it all, when I was still a child when I could remember the End. And I think when you're a kid, everything feels more straightforward. You *think* it's going to happen and then you *make* it happen, because you thought it would. There's only one path to walk. I saw the future, and I thought, 'that's it', and it didn't even occur to me to even think that maybe it wasn't. Maybe it doesn't have to be.

The funny thing about Arcanism is that people say it's about trying to know what can't be known. It's all about trying to put the future into the box of the present. It's about trimming off the possibilities so you know what the future *will be*. It's better for them to know what's coming, even if what's coming is bad; they keep it on the rails they see, even if they know the train is going to mow down everyone they love if they don't change the tracks. Because the unknown is frightening, but, I dunno! Maybe it doesn't have to be. Maybe thinning down the people you share your fears and hopes with to the smallest number possible to try and keep them contained doesn't help.

Maybe sometimes you're trying add more details to a story to try and make it work better because if you pull back and look at the whole thing all together, you know it's not going to work. Maybe trying to pen your fears in with stories about how they work doesn't help. Maybe living like that is designed to keep you safe from the unknown but it doesn't keep you safe from *anything else*. Maybe that way always makes things worse. Maybe it's supposed to. Better the devil you know, they say, but is it? What if you tell him no and find out there doesn't have to be a devil at all?

[SAM TAKES A SHARP BREATH]

I'm not worried that I don't know what happens when I leave the garden, because I know what happens if we don't. And knowing those people will suffer from our inaction is *worse* than not knowing what will happen next.

OLIVER: I suppose you're right. We have to go.

SAM: We? No. Just me. You are not going anywhere.

OLIVER: What?! You-- you can't expect me to stay behind!

SAM: Have you not noticed, sweet creature, that you're different, here? Softer?

OLIVER: I-- my deal. I...I'm not Major Arcana anymore. Sam?

SAM: You never wanted that, it was forced on you. I don't want you to be mine like that, so when I made this place, I just unpicked the knot. You're free.

OLIVER: But. But Sam that means I can *díe*.

SAM: Yeah. It does. So you're staying here.

OLIVER: You can't make me!

SAM: I can, actually. My sweet little mortal. I love you, and I'm coming back. I'll see you soon.

OLIVER: Sam, wait--

[SPIRIT BOX SKIPPING]

[VOICES WHISPER SAM'S NAME]

SAM: Hello?

[VOICES WHISPER SAM'S NAME]

SAM: Hellooo?

VOICES WHISPER SAM'S NAME]

SAM: Hello? Who's there?

[VOICES STOP]

SAM: Well that's just rude, isn't it?! Where'd you all go?

BETH: Sam?

SAM: Beth?!

BETH: Sam!

THEY LAUGH

SAM: Thank gods you're alright!

BETH: You too! I was worried when Oliver went marching up that hill, you know, and-- hang on, hang on I am going to have to back up a bit. You *ended the world*.

SAM: Only a little bit!

BETH: What does that even mean?

SAM: I didn't really end it so much as I just stopped it. I don't know really, it just sort of happened.

BETH: How can you not know?

SAM: I don't know, do I? I just don't.

BETH: Right. And um. Where are we? I was with Anna and Kitty and everyone and then I just... wasn't.

SAM: Hmm. Well, I think we're in the space between spaces. The idea was that I'd make this place so everyone would be happy. Give everyone their own perfect slice of carefully controlled unreality, but that means that those unrealities have borders. There's always going to be a place where one unreality touches another. That place, that junction? It's a *thing*. Uh, maybe like a gutter where the run off goes.

BETH: (*deadpan*) And I'm the run off. Wow, thanks, I'm flattered.

SAM: No, you're not, but you're... because you're a ghost, you're less tethered, some how. I've found this with the others, too. You're liable to drift. Like a leaf on a stream. Living people are more like sprouts, they've got roots which hook them down. Ghosts are a little more, hmm, I

don't know? Liable to drifting, I guess. It's taken a few tweaks to get things to this point and I still don't really---

BETH: A few tweaks.

SAM: I've been by myself a while so it's kind of hard to try and explain it.

BETH: Sam. *Sam*. How long have we been here?

SAM: Technically time doesn't exist in this space.

BETH: But. If it did?

SAM: It doesn't, so don't worry about it.

BETH: How many times have you started this again?

SAM: If I told you I'd lost count, would you believe me?

BETH: Yeah, actually. I would.

SAM: I really was just trying to make everyone happy, you know.

BETH: You're such an idiot.

SAM: Ha. Yeah, thanks.

BETH: So. What are *you* doing here?

SAM: Oh. Well, Oliver came and tried to stab me and pointed out everything was disintegrating again, but actually managed to talk some sense into me. It doesn't seem to matter *how* I make this place, what I do for people, how much I manage the responses they have to it, it doesn't seem to last. And it seems to last less and less every time I try, like the fabric is getting worn or something.

BETH: Is that possible?

SAM: I-- I don't know? The arcane is made of threads, sort of, but they aren't actually *threads*, you know? That's just what I'm calling it. So I don't know that it *can* be exhausted. Theoretically, we can go on existing in this tiny, infinite slice of reality forever. *Theoretically*.

BETH: But?

SAM: Well, nobody knows what will happen if you try that. And theory assumes perfect conditions. And perfect conditions don't exist.

BETH: They sure don't.

SAM: Yeah.

BETH: So what are you going to do?

SAM: I... I don't know. And that's fine, because I'm going to do *something*.

BETH: And what about the Man in the Flat Cap? Didn't he want you to end the world so he could move into a higher plane of existence or whatever?

SAM: Yeah, he did. And I haven't done that. And he's connected to here, somehow.

BETH: What? How?

SAM: Because this place is the arcane and he's a part of it. A weird, abstracted little part but a part of it all the same, right? So. Yes. He's kind of here.

BETH: Are you going to stop him?

SAM: Isn't stopping him exactly what he wants?

BETH: I don't know, is it?

SAM: I don't know either. And like I said, and I don't know what I'm going to do. And that's okay, because it'll be *something*.

BETH: But. What if it's not enough?

SAM: Then it's not enough. It'll still be all I have, it'll still be what I did. And the alternative is doing nothing, or repeating the same mistake over and over until it eventually dissolves into-- *sludge*.

BETH: Is that what's going to happen to this place then?

SAM: If you're asking whether I know for certain that's going to happen, then no, I don't know that, of course I don't, how could I? Nobody could know that, could they? We're in the realms of theory now. We just have to wait and see.

BETH: So those are the options then? Wait around to see if everything melts *or* try to do something you don't understand without any idea as to whether it'll work?

SAM: Pretty much, yeah.

BETH: Cool, just checking.

SAM: Cool.

[SPIRIT BOX SKIPPING]

[OBJECTS CLATTER]

KITTY: Anna, what are you doing?

ANNA: Looking!

KITTY: For what?

[DOOR SLAMS, OBJECTS MOVE]

ANNA: There has to be one somewhere!

KITTY: There has to be what!?

ANNA: A radio!

KITTY: A radio?

ANNA: Yes! The whole time we've been here, Sam's been muttering away, weaving the story of those worlds we were living in. It all felt a little off, maybe because I can sense truth the way I can, but maybe also because, well... Sam, he-- he doesn't really have much of a frame of reference for world building, does he?

KITTY: That sure is one way to put it.

ANNA: Sam was trying to give us what they thought we wanted, I think. You and Indi, far away from problems, living a quiet life. Arlo and I in a world with no arcanism, where we could live together in peace. It seemed he was having trouble with Beth, her reality was changing all the time, she said. And Oliver's world, it was a broken day dream, wasn't it? The thing that was supposed to be his lover but wasn't....

KITTY: So what?

ANNA: So he was trying to do something good, but he completely messed it up!

KITTY: You can say that again.

ANNA: You're missing the point, Kitty. Gods, you really should spend some more time with Rhytidia.

[RUMMAGING SOUNDS]

KITTY: Anna, have you properly lost your mind. I really don't know what you're talking about!

[CLATTER]

ANNA: Aha! I knew there would be one here somewhere.

ANNA: Let's see...

[A CLICK, AND STATIC]

[SPIRIT BOX SKIPPING]

[CLICK]

ANNA: What did you do that for?!?

KITTY: I don't understand how it'll help.

ANNA: Just, think! To make those worlds, those dream places, Sam had to tell the story of what they were, all the time. Even if the radios weren't tuned into the channel, he was always telling the story, always!

KITTY: So what?

ANNA: They were always connected.

KITTY: Which means...?

[ANNA SIGHS]

ANNA: This place, in a lot of ways, is an Arcanist paradise. Everyone lives in their own little bubble, not interacting with anyone else real, and where all unknowns have tried to be accounted for. But you can't account for unknowns you don't know about.

KITTY: Uh. What the hell is that supposed to mean, 'unknowns you don't know about'? You've gone properly M about this.

ANNA: No I haven't! Some unknowns, we might not be able to answer them, but we're aware of their existence. Say, if we plant a seed, we don't know if it will grow or not, but we know that it'll either grow or not grow. But there are so many other unknowns all the time we can't even anticipate. Like, say, you can take an umbrella in case it might rain but you couldn't ever build

contingencies in for, oh, I don't know, a plague of locusts descending from the heavens, because why would you be considering this possibility.

KITTY: Someone should have been paying more attention to Exodus.

ANNA: No, no, you're missing the point, that's a bad example. The point is there are unknowns you can plan for, and unknowns you can't. And the thing with Sam--

KITTY: Sam lived inside and had no memories of his childhood!

ANNA: So there are a lot of unknowns most people would think to plan for that Sam just wouldn't think of because---

KITTY: Because they never left the house!

ANNA: Exactly!

KITTY: Hang on a second. What's this got to do with the radio?

[ANNA SIGHS]

ANNA: Connectivity. This place is an Arcanist paradise, except it can't be for two reasons; Sam can't account for all the unknowns because that's impossible; they're uniquely badly suited to even giving that a go, and also because in order make this place work, Sam needs to be connected to each reality.

KITTY: And if Sam's connected to every bubble---

ANNA: Every bubble is connected too. When Revel showed up and brought us all together, I heard the sound of radio channels skipping, didn't you?

KITTY: Yeah, I did.

ANNA: And when you and Indi used to use your ... uh, 'fast travel' thing before all this happened, it sounded like electrical static, didn't it?

KITTY: I suppose it did, yeah.

ANNA: Which means...?

KITTY: Which means... whatever powers us has something to do with Spirit Box Radio?

ANNA: Yes! And if Sam's still broadcasting!

KITTY: The show is still airing.

ANNA: And if the show is still airing?

KITTY: Sam's still connected to us!

ANNA: Right! So if we tune into a radio, maybe there's a way we can talk back.

KITTY: Like through a Spirit Box!

ANNA: EXACTLY!

[SPIRIT BOX SOUNDS SKIPPING]

SAM: Beth? What's wrong?

BETH: I can't go through there.

SAM: How do you know?

BETH: I can just feel it. Can't you?

SAM: Sort of, yeah. But. I don't want to leave you behind.

BETH: It's okay. I think I'll be able to find my way back to the others. Spirit Box Radio is still connecting everything, here; the forums must exist in some way too. I know my way around, even if things aren't exactly where I expect them to be. Like when they move all the stuff around in the supermarket.

SAM: Beth. You know you're a ghost, don't you?

BETH: Yeah.

SAM: And you know I'm going to end this-- whatever this is. And you won't be like this anymore.

BETH: Yeah, I know.

SAM: And you're okay with that?

BETH: I mean, it's not like I'm dying is it? I'm already dead.

SAM: But. I made it so you felt more alive.

BETH: Hmm. Did you though?

SAM: I-- sorry.

BETH: Look, it's okay. I don't mind being dead. Guess it sucks to not be alive in some ways, yeah, but being dead is fine. I'm a ghost; let me be a ghost.

SAM: You're sure?

BETH: I kind of have to be, don't I?

SAM: What do you mean?

BETH: Loyal Assistant, innit?

SAM: Oh. Right.

BETH: Nah, don't look like that, it's alright. Isn't the point of what you're doing now that you *can't* fix everything?

SAM: I suppose.

BETH: That is the point, though. *You can't fix everything*. It's okay that people die. It's okay.

SAM: Doesn't feel very okay when it's you. I know you, I love you! You're one of my best friends.

BETH: I know! But isn't that what makes it special?

SAM: What is?

BETH: You don't love people because you think it'll never end, do you? Even if you never break up, you know everyone dies eventually. Even the universe will die one day, but you love people any way, and that matters, doesn't it? It matters because we make it matter, Sam.

SAM: Yeah. I guess we do.

BETH: We'll all be ghosts and skeletons in the end. Everyone and everything. It's all going to be okay.

SAM: Yeah?

BETH: Now go. I'll find the others and explain what's going on.

SAM: Thank you.

BETH: No problem, loser. Now go!

[SAM WALKS]

[SAM SIGHS]

SAM: Oh, faithful listeners, we're really in it now.

[SAM'S VOICE ECHOES]

[SAM WALKS]

[A DRIPPING SOUND GETS LOUDER]

[THE ARCANE SHIMMERS QUIETLY]

SAM: What... what is this place? It's like a cave? I think? I recognise it. I've been here before. Or somewhere like it? It's the harbinger's place which was connected to the Impossible House, through the trap door. Kind of. Eh. Grey area, connected. That makes sense doesn't it? We're all made of the arcane.

[THE ARCANE SHIMMERS MORE BRIGHTLY]

[SAM COMES TO AN ABRUPT HALT]

SAM: Oh my gods. *Bliss*.

BLISS: Oh. I wondered how long it'd take for you to find me.

SAM: Bliss!? Oh my gods, I'm so happy to see you! What are you doing down here? Wait-- *how* are you here? This is nothing, it's the space between things. You can't be here!

BLISS: I don't know how I'm here, I just am.

SAM: What's the last thing you remember?

BLISS: I stepped onto that altar.

SAM: It's.... it's been a long time since that happened.

BLISS: I figured. Don't worry though. Time passes differently down here.

[SAM SIGHS]

SAM: It does, doesn't it.

BLISS: You've lived a thousand lifetimes since we last spoke, haven't you?

SAM: Maybe not quite a thousand *lifetimes*, but yeah. I've... I've done some things.

BLISS: You ended the world.

SAM: Not really?

BLISS: Hmm. That's interesting.

SAM: Is it?

BLISS: Yeah. The prophecy said you'd end the world and you seemed pretty intent on doing it once you found out.

SAM: But, you were dead by then.

BLISS: Not entirely dead. You never let me go, but stepping onto that altar meant I was sacrificing myself to the One Who Walks Here and There. I'm dead in some ways, but in others, not.

SAM: I need to get you out of here.

BLISS: You can't. There is no way out of this place, not for me. I'm stuck in the middle..

SAM: Yeah... when I look at you in the arcane, you're on both sides of the line, but-- but that's impossible.

BLISS: You made it possible. Like you made this whole place possible. It's halfway between an end and carrying on, isn't it? That's what you've done, here.

SAM: It's supposed to be a middle ground! It's supposed to-- it's supposed to be different.

BLISS: You can't have a middle ground between stopping and carrying on, can you?

SAM: No. I guess not. Except, that's you right now, isn't it? Stuck carrying on after you're supposed to stop.

BLISS: Isn't that what all ghosts are?

SAM: Are you a ghost?

BLISS: No. I'm not a ghost, but I'm not alive, either. I'm something else

SAM: I'm going to find a way to get you out of here.

BLISS: No you're not.

SAM: What? Why?

BLISS: I told you. I'm stuck in the middle of it. My threads, this place. It's all the same.

SAM: But-- but that's impossible. Let me just--

[THE ARCANE SHIMMERS]

SAM: This place isn't part of my arcane, it's its own place, its own moment, within a moment, and it's tied to— to him.

The Man in the Flat Cap.

You're really caught between us, in all the knots that bind me and him, that's what this is. This whole place is one giant knot in the thread.

BLISS: One giant Blood Rose.

[THE ARCANE SHIMMERS BRIGHTLY]

SAM: This is what he does, isn't it? When he claims someone. All this time, I've been thinking about it like he's eating their souls but he's not, is he? Not really. He's like a spider, wrapping them in his web, holding onto them, saving them. For what?

BLISS: Well, what were you doing when you trapped all the faithful listeners in your dream world?

SAM: That's different.

BLISS: Is it?

SAM: I hope so.

[SAM SIGHS]

SAM: It doesn't matter how far away I send him or how cut off I try to make him. Our threads are intertwined. I'll never be free of him.

[THE ARCANE SHIMMERS]

BLISS: I think I know what happened to me before I made my deal.

SAM: You do?

BLISS: Only the outline of it, really. The shape of what it was. I can't remember the details but I don't think that's what matters.

SAM: So what was it? What made you sell your soul the way you did?

BLISS: Knowledge changes and shapes us. I think what I wanted more than anything was to never know, to never understand, so I never had to face what I had seen. Knowledge is power, but power doesn't come without consequences. That's why ignorance is bliss. If you don't know about it, it's not your responsibility.

SAM: That's why I can never make it feel right when I try to live the first episodes of the show again, isn't it? Because I always know how it really went, now. It doesn't matter how hard I try to imagine it going differently, it didn't. Madame Marie did awful things and I worshipped her because I just didn't know.

BLISS: She deliberately made it so you wouldn't.

SAM: Arcanists.

BLISS: Arcanists. But the problem is, to stay ignorant, you also need to be isolated. The more people you know, the more likely it is you'll learn something that will eat away at that carefully cultivated state of bliss you're living in. Ignorance can be violent about how it defends its borders.

SAM: You're telling me; you stabbed me.

BLISS: I did, yes.

[THEY LAUGH]

SAM: I miss you.

BLISS: That's nice.

SAM: Is it?

BLISS: Yes, to be missed is to be loved in a way, isn't it?

SAM: I guess.

BLISS: What are you going to do now?

SAM: Honestly? I don't know. I keep heading towards where I think the Man in the Flat Cap is but when I get there, it's always something else.

BLISS: Well, that's not how you find him, is it?

SAM: What do you mean?

BLISS: Seek but don't search.

SAM: You're right! I can't find him because I've been *looking* for him.

BLISS: Exactly. And he comes for people who have given up on the chance that they'll ever get to him.

SAM: But. I don't want to surrender. I don't want to give up.

BLISS: I think you're looking at this the wrong way.

SAM: How should I look at it then?

BLISS: I don't know, do I! Damn, I spend an undisclosed amount of time in weird cave purgatory and suddenly I'm expected to be the font of all knowledge?! I might not be the embodiment of ignorance anymore but I'm still just a random person.

SAM: Yeah, you're right, I'm sorry.

BLISS: I am right! Thank you.

SAM: I really have missed you.

BLISS: I know. But do you think, when you tear this place down, you could miss me in a way that involves letting me *out* of the cave?

[SAM SIGHS]

SAM: I can try.

BLISS: Thanks. You're a good guy, Sam.

SAM: So are you, Bliss.

BLISS: Yeah, well. It took a lot to get here. Thanks for missing me.

SAM: You're welcome.

BLISS: Now get out of here.

SAM: Okay. Goodbye.

[SAM WALKS]

[THE CAVE DRIPPING GETS QUIETER THEN IS GONE]

[A LOW DRONE RISES]

[STONES CLATTER]

SAM: Oh. It's a cliff.

[SAM'S VOICE ECHOES]

SAM: I-- There's nowhere else to go I--

[SAM WALKS, THEN SOMETHING HITS A HARD SURFACE]

SAM: The wall's solid! I can't get out, I-- I can't go back.

[SAM STEPS CLOSE TO THE EDGE. RUBBLE CRUNCHES UNDER FOOT]

SAM: The fall is so long and dark. There's nowhere I can go.

[THE LOW DRONE IS LOUDER]

SAM: The only way is down. I can't stay here.

Okay, on the count of three.

One.

Two.

[SAM TAKES TWO STEPS, RUBBLE CRUNCHES, AND THERE'S A HUGE WHOOSH]

[END]