

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 114: What if rhinoceroses took over Egypt?](#)

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Transcription by Keffy

[Rising harp scales followed by the What If World theme song.]

Lyrics: What if kittens played the glockenspiel? And what if unicorns were real? What if you could fly or travel back in time, we welcome you to What If World. What If World. This is What If World.

[Gentle bell music.]

Mr. Eric: Hey there folks and welcome back to *What If World*, the show where your questions and ideas inspire off-the-cuff stories. I'm Mr. Eric, your host, and today we've got a question from a patron named Harper.

Harper: Hi, my name is Harper, and I like reading and colorful things. My what if question is what if giant rhinoceroses took over Egypt and Cleocatra had to live in a giant chocolate chip cookie?

Mr. Eric: Wow, Harper. That is a very imaginative question, thank you. We have one more question from a listener named Sophia. She asked three questions all at once so we're just gonna play the first one. But I talked to Sophia and her mother, Shawna, and let them know that I might not incorporate all three of these questions, but they will still have an influence on the story.

Sophia: Hi, my name is Sophia, and I like lions and my school and nature. And my what if world question is what if lions were kings and they act nicely? Thank you.

Mr. Eric: Thank you! What if lions were kings but they act nicely? And I'll give you folks at home a hint, her other questions did have to do with her school and nature, some of her favorite things, so. I wonder if you'll be able to pick out what parts of the story come from this question.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, that's so mysterious, Mr. Eric. Very exciting.

Mr. Eric: Hi, Mamma Jamma. Thank you for the compliment.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, you're very welcome. And I'm also here to give a big shout out to Moshe and Asher, along with a big kiss through the speakers.

Mr. Eric: Oh, Mamma Jamma, I'm not sure that that's something—
[Loud kiss noise]

Mr. Eric: Oh boy. Everyone still with us?
We have one more shout out to give to Everett from Portland, Oregon. I've been to your city once before and I loved it.

Mamma Jamma: Well, thank you, Moshe, Asher, and Everett.

Mr. Eric: Now, let's find out what if giant rhinoceroses took over Egypt and Cleocatra had to live in a giant chocolate chip cookie? And lions were kings but they act nicely?
[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Abacus P. Grumbler was a very old wizard. However, when this story starts, he was quite young. In fact, this was Abacus's first job as a tutor in Ancient Whygypt. He was presiding over a class of lions, although one of the lions seemed particularly tiny. Really, more cat-sized than lion-cub sized.

Cleocatra: Abacus, will you please stop teaching for one minute so I can finish my nap?

Mr. Eric: It was Cleocatra, one of Abacus's very first students.

Abacus: Well, you know, I have been waiting for all of you lions and cats to finish your nap for the last three hours, so.

Cleocatra: Well, just give us three more hours, then, and we should be fine.

Abacus: But that's... six hours is like the entire school day.

Cleocatra: Oh, fine.

Mr. Eric: And Cleocatra gave a big stretch and all the other long lions followed her cue.
[Lions and cats stretching noises.]

Mr. Eric: And finally came to attention so Abacus could teach his class.

Abacus: Oh, very well, students. Please take out your tablets and read your whyroglyphics.

Mr. Eric: The lions took out their magical stone tablets and started reading along with Abacus.

Abacus: All right, we've had our fire drill, our flood drill, our tornado drill, our earthquake drill, our stranger drill, our reunification drill—

Cleocatra: Ugh, you're never going to teach us anything if we're always running drills.

Abacus: I know, I know, but you are the future kings and queens of Whygypt so we need to keep you safe from any possible harm.

Mr. Eric: And he scrolled down to the very bottom line of whyroglyphics.

Abacus: Oh, wonderful. Only one last drill to do. The what if giant rhinoceroses took over drill.

[Record scratch.]

Mr. Eric: Just then, they heard a sound as if all of Whygypt was rolling and rumbling in a wave towards them.

Abacus: Oh, goody, an earthquake. We're prepared for this.

Mr. Eric: And then [crunch!] a horde of giant rhinoceroses busted through the side of the school.

Abacus: I should have moved this drill up a little bit. Hmm.

Cleocatra: Excuse me?

Mr. Eric: Sniffed Cleocatra haughtily.

Cleocatra: You rhinoceroses must listen to your kings and queens. We have treated you nicely.

Mr. Eric: All the giant rhinoceroses stood as still as statues. One rhinoceros, much smaller than the rest, barely bigger than a lion, in fact, pushed through the crowd. He was rainbow-colored and his horns were very small, barely more than nubs on his nose.

Rhino: Hey, I'm sorry. My aunts and uncles really don't want to talk to you. They know you're nice, but they don't think it's fair that you're all the kings and queens, and we're just the rhinos.

Abacus: Okay, okay. So we have a simple misunderstanding, here. Next week we were going to start a whole new series of drills on simple misunderstandings, um.

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra's claws came out and all the lions behind her arched their backs and bared their teeth.

[Lions growling.]

Mr. Eric: The wall of solid gray rhinoceroses stomped their hooves and shook their horns.

Rhino: I'm sorry, but we outnumber you and we're much, much bigger.

Cleocatra: I'll show you big.

Mr. Eric: And Cleocatra jumped on the rainbow rhinoceros's nose!

Cleocatra: Mrow!

Rhino: Ow, hey!

Mr. Eric: Her claws couldn't do much more than pinch his rainbow rhino hide, but it still didn't feel very nice.

Rhino: Hey, hey! Get off of me.

Mr. Eric: The rainbow rhino jumped up and down, shaking its head around, but Cleocatra hung on tightly.

Abacus: Uh, Cleocatra? Maybe you don't want to, ooh...

Mr. Eric: All the lions moved in to save her, but [CRUNCH!] a solid wall of gray rhinoceroses stepped in front.

Abacus: Oh, don't worry, Cleocatra! As soon as I figure out the drill for this emergency, I'll come get you.

Mr. Eric: The rainbow rhino ran into the desert desert all the while trying to shake Cleocatra off his horn.

Cleocatra: It's no use! You should give up.

Rhino: I don't mean to be mean, but I think you should give up. We're very far away from all your friends, now.

Cleocatra: Hmm... then let us have a temporary truce.

Rhino: Okay, just climb off of my nose. I brought you to my secret favorite place inside the whole dessert desert.

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra let go of the rainbow rhino's nose and jumped down, not onto sand, but onto a giant chocolate chip cookie. And when I say giant, I mean, it was big enough for a rainbow rhino and a kitty cat to live inside.

Cleocatra: This is incredible. I did not know that rhinos could build such wonders.

Rhino: Well, it's really a naturally occurring chocolate chip cookie that I just chewed some tunnels through. I like to come here when I need to get away from the other rhinos.

Cleocatra: Why would you need to get away from them? They are your people.

Rhino: Well, not quite. See, they call me rhinobow because I was born a rainbow rhino and the other rhinos don't like me being so colorful.

Cleocatra: Well, I was adopted by the lions of Whygypt so I know that I must be lion royalty. You should accept your place.

Rhino: Easy for you to say. You're a beautiful golden cat. You fit right in among royalty.

Mr. Eric: They arrived at a little lake of melted chocolate inside this cavernous cookie. This deep in the darkness, Rhinobow's skin lit up bright blues and neon pinks, and warm reds. Cleocatra lapped up a little chocolate from the pool and saw their reflections staring back at them.

Cleocatra: I have never seen a creature so strange and wild and wondrous.

Mr. Eric: Said Cleocatra with a smile.

Rhino: I bet you say that every time you look in the mirror.

Cleocatra: I do, yes. But I was talking about you.

Rhino: Me? This is not how I'm supposed to be. I'm supposed to be a gray rhino. As we speak, the rhinos are taking over Whygypt and they probably think I chickened out.

Cleocatra: First of all, I have met some very brave chickens. They do not like to be ridden like chariots.

Rhino: Okay.

Cleocatra: And secondly, I think it is very brave that you speak your mind to me.

Rhino: Really?

Cleocatra: Yes. I am a future queen. Most lions do not even look me in the eye. It makes me lonely sometimes.

[Time skip noise.]

Mr. Eric: Meanwhile, back at the school.

Abacus: All right, lions, just keep flipping through your tablets. Has anyone come up with a coup d'état drill? No? Hmm.

Mr. Eric: The giant gray rhinos were ploddingly knocking down every wall of the school. No matter how loud the other lions roared or how high they pounced, they couldn't distract these unstoppable rhinoceroses.

Finally, a big, old lion showed up. He was wearing a heavy crown of carved stone scrawled over in whyroglyphics.

Abacus: Oh, King Leo, it's so good to seeo.

King Leo: This is no time for rhyme...s. Explain the situation.

Abacus: Well, I was just about to get to my rhinos taking over drill, but now they've already taken over, so I'm not sure what drill to use.

King Leo: There is not a drill for everything.

Abacus: Not a drill for... how else do we prepare?

King Leo: Hmm...

Mr. Eric: King Leo climbed to the top of a cracked tower, the only one left standing in the whole school.

King Leo: Rhinos, it is King Leo. You know that we feed you and let you live on our land. We are nice lion kings and queens. I do not understand your fury.

Mr. Eric: The rhinos paused in their wanton destruction and looked up at King Leo.

Abacus: There was a rainbow one that used to speak for them. Um, but I think their general complaint is that treating them nicely isn't the same as treating them equally.

King Leo: I do not understand. We lions are simply the kings and queens of Whygypt. That is how it has always been.

Mr. Eric: And upon hearing this, the giant rhinos shook their horns and stomped their feet and started charging toward the broken tower.

Abacus: Oh, oh, oh, imminent squishing. There's a drill for this. King Leo, roll yourself into a ball and try to look like a porcupine.

[Time skip noise.]

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra had dozed off inside the giant chocolate cookie cave and Rhinobow woke her up with a gentle nudge from his glowing horn.

Cleocatra: What? I just need to nap for one more minute.

Rhino: You've been napping for 19 hours, so...

Cleocatra: Then another 19 hours should just about do it.

Rhino: Cleo, there's something I have to tell you.

Cleocatra: No, no no. I don't want to know. I have enjoyed my time living inside of this chocolate chip cookie.

Rhino: Well yeah, but your father, King Leo, he got hurt.

Cleocatra: Excuse me?

Mr. Eric: Suddenly, Cleo's eyes narrowed and she stood, looking poised and dangerous.

Rhino: It's okay. Abacus is taking care of him, but he broke some bones and it might be a long time before you—hey, where are you going?

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra was running out of the cave as fast as she could and Rhinobow darted after her.

Cleocatra: I will make these rhinos pay.

Rhino: Cleocatra, slow down! Be careful!

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra was forced to stop. She'd come to a wall of thorny red and white striped cactus canes.

Cleocatra: What is this?

Cactus Cane: I could be asking you the same question. What is this? A future queen finally decides to come see the little cactus cane people?

Cleocatra: Show some respect and make way.

Mr. Eric: A bunch of sharp, sugary thorns shot out of the cactus canes and landed right next to Cleocatra.

Cactus Cane: We don't move for little princesses with attitudes, thinking you rule the whole world.

Cleocatra: But the lions are nice.

Cactus Cane: Oh yeah, you're sure nice. Every time we see you, you're all, hi, how's it going? But we got real problems out here in the desert.

Cleocatra: I didn't know.

Cactus Cane: There's a sugar water shortage, first of all.

Cleocatra: I will make sure my father gets more sugar water to you.

Cactus Cane: And I tried running to be Duchess of the Cactus Cane People but y'all wouldn't even give me a chance.

Cleocatra: I hear you, but you must part for me. The rhinos are taking over.

Cactus Cane: Rhinos or lions, it's not going to make one lick of difference for us cactus canes.

Mr. Eric: But the would-be Duchess of the Cactus Cane People did pull aside ever so slightly, and Cleocatra was able to just barely slip through, sugary thorns snagging at her fur all the way.

[Time skip noise.]

Abacus: All right, we've set your broken leg, um... and I'm sorry I had to shave some of your mane to give you stitches.

King Leo: And I am grateful for your help, but now you must find my daughter, Cleocatra.

Abacus: I've been trying to locate her with magic, but I just don't know the right spells.

King Leo: Did you not have a reunification drill?

Abacus: Oh, you're right! It was a little corner outside the school where we were all supposed to gather in case the school itself were damaged.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus took off for the ruins of the school, dodging between the legs of giant rhinos, who seemed to be wrestling horns with each other, now. They couldn't agree which giant rhino should be in charge of Whygypt.

Abacus: Excuse me, please don't stomp on me, ha ha...

Mr. Eric: And he finally found his way to the schoolyard, or what was left of it, where he saw Cleocatra, her fur matted with melted chocolate and torn by spiny cactus cane thorns. But she wasn't even trying to take them out, she seemed to be reading one of the magic stone tablets.

Cleocatra: Where is it? Where is it?

Abacus: Cleocatra! I'm so glad you're safe. Listen, I have your father, but he's been hurt.

Cleocatra: I know.

Mr. Eric: Said the cat, not looking up from her tablet.

Abacus: Well, then come with me, I can heal you up, too.

Cleocatra: I know your healing drills, Abacus. I am looking for your revenge drill.

Abacus: I'm afraid you're not going to find one, young lady...

Mr. Eric: Someone was charging up to them. Abacus drew his wand and turned to face— [Record scratch.]

Abacus: You're that rainbow rhino.

Rhino: Cleo, I know you're mad, but just remember that rhinos have been mad for a long time, and cactus canes, too.

Abacus: Oh, and the ice cream trees. They've been melting for decades.

Rhino: Swedish fish populations are in decline...

Cleocatra: We've been nice to all the people and all of nature.

Abacus: Cleo, maybe I should have started with this lesson before all of the drills, but being nice to someone without trying to understand their feelings can actually be cruel.

Cleocatra: They have hurt my father. That is cruel.

Mr. Eric: She gestured at the candy thorns in her fur.

Cleocatra: The cactus canes wounded me. I was never anything but nice to any of them, so now they must be punished.

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra's voice had been rising and she'd drawn the attention of many monolithic rhinoceroses. The rhinos were closing in. Everything fell into shadow.

Rhino: That's enough!

Mr. Eric: Cried Rhinobow, lighting up so bright that all the rhinos looked away.

Rhino: Aunts and uncles, we've got to stop hurting each other and start understanding each other!

Mr. Eric: And the rhinos closed in further.

Abacus: Oh dear, oh dear.

Mr. Eric: Rhinobow's light started to dim and the rhinos kept closing in. Their towering horns were only a few feet from Abacus, Rhinobow, and Cleocatra.

Abacus: I've tried to teach you about every possible thing that could go wrong.

Cleocatra: Is it time for another drill, Professor?

Abacus: No. Now, you just need to be smart, try to stay calm, and keep yourself safe.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus raised his wand.

Cleocatra: What are you doing?

Abacus: I'm winging it, Cleo. Ala-ka-SAFE!

Mr. Eric: And suddenly, she was in the middle of a different desert. There wasn't even any dessert in this desert, just distant patches of dried up trees and shrubbery. She was standing on a big red button that was glowing warmly. But it didn't make her feel alarmed. In fact, she felt safe and strong. As she stood on the button, pressing it down lightly with her weight, all of the candy cane thorns melted away and the chocolate cleaned itself from her fur. She felt full and strong.

Cleocatra: What kind of sorcery is this, Abacus? Where is my family?

Mr. Eric: And right when she finished speaking, the red button turned clear blue. She scrambled off of it as images appeared. She could see Abacus and Rhinobow still surrounded by giant rhinos. She could even hear them.

Rhino: They want to know where you sent Cleocatra.

Abacus: Somewhere safe, although lonely. She can stay there as long as she likes.

Mr. Eric: And he seemed to look up at her, as if he knew that she was watching them through the red button.

Abacus: Though I hope, given time, she chooses people over power.

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra couldn't figure out what the wizard meant, but the scene she was seeing through the button somehow zoomed out and she could see cactus cane people marching towards the rhinos. And a massive pack of lions stalking in from the other direction, led by her limping father, King Leo. He and the other lions bowed before the rhinos, and then, pivoting on their paws, bowed before the cactus canes.

Cleocatra: Father, what are you doing!?

Mr. Eric: Cleo shouted through the button where she watched, but no one seemed to hear her.

King Leo: Stay safe, my daughter. Come back to us some day.

Cleocatra: [Growls]

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra had heard enough. She didn't like seeing her father work beside the people who had taken away her power.

Cleocatra: It seems they all need to be taught a lesson, so I will nap here on this magic button and grow stronger until the day comes when the world is ready for a true queen.

Mr. Eric: Cleocatra said... to no one in particular. And then she stretched out on the big, red button for a very, very long nap.

[Time skip noise.]

Abacus: So, I don't get it. Rhinobow's king, now?

Rhino: No, an election's where you vote for your leaders.

Abacus: Oh, will there be reading involved.

King Leo: Abacus, you love reading.

Abacus: I know, I was afraid there wouldn't be reading.

Rhino: And we can make the voting ballots really colorful.

Mr. Eric: The end.

Cactus Cane: Now, what's a voting ballot?

King Leo: We don't know, we just made it up.

Abacus: It sounds delicious.

[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Well, Harper and Sophia, I hope you enjoyed your story.

I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator, Craig Martinson for our theme song, my 6th grade teacher, Mrs. Watts, for encouraging me to write stories. And all you kids at home who know we can't fix our mistakes until we acknowledge them.

Have you ever upset someone without realizing it? I wonder how you might make it better.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]