

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 115: What if popcorn could talk \(plus Hotwheels\)?](#)

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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's first question comes from a listener named Leah.

Leah: I am Leah and I am six years old and I really like trains and what if cars riding on train tracks, thank you.

Mr. Eric: Very cool, Leah. What if cars were riding on train tracks and you like trains. Okay. Hearing your question reminded me of a patron's question. So let's listen to Patrick.

Patrick: Hi, my name is Patrick. I like Hotwheels and my what if question is what if popcorn came to life.

Mr. Eric: Oh, what if popcorn came to life and you like Hotwheels. Okay, see the connection? And remember, I won't have actual Hotwheels in my story, but I hope you'll like what your question inspired.

Fred the Dog: Oh, Mr. Eric, you never done a good story with cars before.

JF Kitty: Oh, that's not true, he did a question about Pintopio, the old jalopy.

Mr. Eric: Oh, hey Fred, JF Kat. What are you guys doing here?

Fred the Dog: I really just came to give a big woof woof to Felicity.

Mr. Eric: Do you mean a shout out?

Fred the Dog: I mean a woof woof, Mr. Eric. Felicity deserve a special woof.

Mr. Eric: Yeah, but I still haven't heard an actual bark from you.

Fred the Dog: I don't want to bark, that's uncivilized.

Mr. Eric: Okay, well, JF Kat, do you have some shout outs?

JF Kitty: I do! And I have more this week, ahahaha!

Mr. Eric: Okay, yes. Let's hear them.

JF Kitty: The first one goes out to Malachi!

Mr. Eric: Hi, Malachi.

JF Kitty: And then I've got another for sisters Astrid and Izzy, who attend something called a forest school.

Fred the Dog: Oh, I would like to go to a school in the forest. There'd be lots of sticks.

Mr. Eric: Well, Malachi and Felicity, thank you for listening. Astrid and Izzy, so good to hear from you. And now, let's find out what if popcorn came to life and what if cars were riding on train tracks?

[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Now if you noticed that I haven't done many stories about cars, well, it's because What If World's greatest drivers are the popcorn people, and to be honest, they're a little reckless. Popcorn people thought that they were basically invincible.

Poprick: Hey, let's race our cars into each other?

Cornia: Okay, sure.

[Motors revving and crashing noises.] POP! POP!

Mr. Eric: You see, every time a particular piece of popcorn gets carsploded, another seed from the same ear of corn suddenly pops and the popcorn person is back again.

Popcorn 3: So wait, why are we driving our cars off of the rocketship orbiting earth?

Poprick: Well, we gotta get onto these train tracks and there isn't any other way.

Popcorn 3: What if we took a train?

Poprick: Too late! Time to drive out of the rocketship!

Popcorn 3: Uuummm... okay.

[Revvng engines and a falling sound.] POP! POP!

Mr. Eric: No matter what kind of crazy popwheels stunts these drivers pulled, they'd just come back when the next seed popped.

Copcorn: Hey, you're under arrest for reckless driving.

Poprick: Well, if you want to arrest me, you're gonna have to catch me.

Copcorn: By driving recklessly?

Poprick: Exactly.

[More revving engines]

Copcorn: Hey, watch out for that building!

Poprick: Don't worry, I'll just drive through it.

Copcorn: Okay, me, too.

Mr. Eric: You might have figured that cats would have nine lives in What If World. Well, popcorn people have about 800 lives apiece, depending on how many kernels grow on their ear of corn. But this story is about just a few of those people.

There's the leader, Poprick.

Poprick: So this mission's easy. We just drive off the cliff into the cave on the side of the volcano. Then we drive to a lava flow and ride it into the ocean.

Mr. Eric: Then there was his best friend, Cornia.

Cornia: I don't remember anything you said because I've got amnesia.

Poprick: Oh yeah.

Mr. Eric: There was a police officer named Copcorn.

Copcorn: Tell me again, what are we after this time?

Mr. Eric: And then there was their arch nemesis, James E. Staypopped.

James E. S.: Doesn't matter what you're after because I'm just gonna drive in at the last minute and take it, heh heh heh.

[Car driving off noises.]

Poprick: We've got to stop inviting him to the meetings.

Cornia: Oh, I remembeare what we're after. It's the SITOPY COOWAC AINEWYE.

Copcorn: A sit-on pie quack anyway?

Poprick: It's an acronym. It stands for Super Important Thing Or Person You Can Only Obtain With A Car And It's Never Exactly What You Expect.

Copcorn: Oh. Can we just call it a COOWAC or a quack for short?

Poprick: That can only obtain with a car. That's crazy.

Cornia: Just crazy enough to work.

Mr. Eric: So Poprick, Copcorn, and Cornia got in their three shiny popwheels and drove off on one mission.

James E. S.: Heh heh! I got COOWAC this time!

Poprick: Oh, we thought it would be something little but it's something big.

Cornia: Wow!

Copcorn: Wow!

[Cars crash.] POP! POP! POP! POP!

Mr. Eric: After another mission...

Poprick: We got the COOWAC first, this time, Staypopped!

Cornia: We thought it'd be a guy, but it turned out to be a girl.

James E. S.: Hey, watch out for that tree!

[Creak, crash!] POP! POP! POP! POP!

Mr. Eric: After another mission...

Copcorn: I got the COOWAC and you're all going to jail.

Cornia: Yeah, but what was it?

Poprick: Was it a robot or a dinosaur?

James E. S.: Was it a super car that can fly?

Copcorn: No, it's something we all thought we had to get, but it turns out it was inside us all along.

Poprick: I don't get it.

Cornia: I think I used to get it, but then I forgot.

James E. S.: Oi, maybe we should hold this conversation off of the train tracks for once?

[CRASH] POP! POP! POP! POP!

Mr. Eric: But this time, when the four of them popped back from brand new kernels and went to the old toy chest that once held all of their popwheel cars... there was only car remaining.

All: I call dibs!

Cornia: Well, I called dibs before I got amnesia. At least, I'm pretty sure.

Poprick: I don't get it. This thing used to be full of popwheels.

Copcorn: I don't get what you're saying, could you just open your mouth a little wider when you talk?

Poprick: [Even less coherently] I said I don't get it this thing used to be full of popwheels.

Cornia: Is that so hard to understand.

James E. S.: Listen, I know I'm usually the bad guy, so you're probably not gonna want to hear more bad news from me, but, uh...

Mr. Eric: And James E. Staypopped pointed to the dried up old corn cobs lying in the middle of the field they called home.

Cornia: Am I forgetting something, or are our seeds missing?

Copcorn: Someone's stolen the rest of our kernels!

Poprick: Actually, I've been keeping count. We're on our last kernels.

Cornia: What do you... what do you mean, last kernels?

James E. S.: It's like, we're on our last car, so next time we pop, we're gonna have to go find a new car.

Copcorn: No, I think the's saying we just popped for the last time.

Poprick: Bingo.

Mr. Eric: The four popcorn people stood in stunned silence. Working together, they pushed the last popwheels car out of the little crack in the side of the toybox.

Cornia: That means we're gonna have to do the unthinkable.

James E. S.: No, you don't mean—

Copcorn: Anything but—

Poprick: Carpool.

Mr. Eric: And the four of them squeezed into the tiny popwheels car together.

Poprick: So for this mission...

[Car engine dies]

[Record scratch.]

Poprick: So for this—

[Car engine dies.]

[Record scratch.]

Poprick: So for this mission, the quack's on four separate helicopters that we're going to have to drive onto, one after another, and then push a button at the same time to get it.

Cornia: That sounds really dangerous.

Copcorn: Yeah, it's probably too illegal for us to do, so, we should just drop it.

James E. S.: Come on, we can drive one car onto four helicopters! We're the popwheelers, for crying out loud.

Poprick: I know a shortcut to the helicopter pad.

Mr. Eric: And Poprick drove onto the train tracks yet again.

Cornia: I thought we agreed that being on the train tracks was a dangerous idea.

James E. S.: How do you suddenly remember details like that when you've constantly got amnesia?

Mr. Eric: James E. Staypopped and Cornia argued in the back seat.

Cornia: I heard there's a train station and we can just catch a ride there without having to drive at all.

James E. S.: But we drive cars! It's like, our whole thing.

Cornia: You think I don't know that? Would just think about safety for one second, here?

Copcorn: Or better yet, maybe we just walk.

Poprick: Everybody quiet.

Other three: What? Huh? Huh?

Poprick: I said, everybody, quiet. I've got to focus on driving.

James E. S.: Focus on driving? I've seen you drive while talking on a walkie talkie, shifting gears, wrestling a robot, and delivering a cool catch phrase.

Poprick: It's time to signal. [Car signal clicking noise.]

Cornia: Sig... signal?

Copcorn: A seagull?

James E. S.: No, he's making the car blink on the right side, somehow.

Mr. Eric: Poprick had flipped up the right turn signal as he slowly crossed into the train station.

Poprick: Okay. We're gonna do this mission, but first, anybody need a potty break?

Cornia: You come here and say that to my face. I mean, sorry. Yeah, yes. I need to go. I'm just used to us fighting by this point.

Mr. Eric: Cornia, Copcorn, and Poprick all got out of the car while James E. Staypopped stayed in and stewed.

James E. S.: I don't know what happened to us. We used to be bold, daring. They were my best friends and my worst enemies. And now they're having a potty break and I'm talking to myself in a car!

Mr. Eric: Staypopped squirmed his way into the driver's seat just as Poprick came out of a convenience store.

Poprick: I don't know what popcorn eats, so I got us all buttered raisins.

Cornia: We've never stayed popped long enough to get hungry, but I know I'm not hungry for that.

Copcorn: I'll try a buttered raisin. [Eats] Okay, that... no, this was wrong. This was a bad idea.

[Car engine revs.]

Poprick: James E., you shouldn't rev the engine like that. You could overheat it.

James E. S.: You've all gone soft and fluffy, moreso than usual for popcorn!

Poprick: Hold on a second.

Mr. Eric: But James E. Staypopped was already driving their car onto the train tracks, straight toward the helicopter pad.

Cornia: How are we ever gonna catch up with him?

Poprick: I don't know, nothing's faster than a car.

Copcorn: Okay, I haven't wanted to say this all the other times we popped, but cars aren't that fast.

[STING!]

Poprick: Wow, what?

Cornia: Oh, man. This is really triggering my amnesia.

Mr. Eric: They all got tickets to the train as Copcorn explained.

Copcorn: Uh, helicopters, planes, trains, drones, I mean anything that can fly is gonna be faster.

Poprick: But my car had lightning bolts on it. So it was at least as fast as lightning.

Copcorn: No, lightning travels at the speed of light.

Poprick: Uh... thunder?

Copcorn: Speed of sound.

Mr. Eric: The train took off, getting faster and faster. The popcorn people ran to the front to see if they could spy James E. Staypopped, and indeed, his tiny popwheel car wasn't going nearly as fast as this train.

Poprick: I don't get it. Why don't we make cars faster?

Copcorn: Because it would be dangerous for everyone.

Mr. Eric: The train was gaining on James E. Staypopped who revved the engine and tried to drive even faster.

James E. S.: You're never gonna catch me!

Mr. Eric: The giant train drove right over him as... smoke started rising from the hood of his car.

James E. S.: Oh, it's overheating... oh, come on!

Cornia: We just drove over Staypopped! We've got to parachute down under the train, skid down the electrified third rail for extra speed and then—

Poprick: I think you're forgetting that we can't pop again.

Copcorn: Those things are incredibly dangerous.

Cornia: Oh yeah. Then what are we supposed to do?

Mr. Eric: About 30 minutes later, James E. Staypopped finally finished pushing his smoking car down to the next station.

James E. S.: It's all their fault, anyway, being afraid of a little carspllosion, phf.

Mr. Eric: From this train station, James E. could see a distant helicopter pad with four choppers just starting to spin their blades, ready to take off.

James E. S.: Gah! hopefully this has cooled down enough!

Mr. Eric: He dove back into the car and started it up.

James E. S.: Come on, come on!

Mr. Eric: The popwheels car sputtered but finally started.

James E. S.: All right, I'm going to beat the rest of the popwheels team to the quack, this time! And then, boy will they be sorry.

Mr. Eric: And was he went to turn his car off of the train tracks, he forgot to use his left turn signal.

Young Popcorns: Hey, watch it! You're bad at driving! Yeah, grandpa! Hey, there's a race happening here!

Mr. Eric: A bunch of younger popcorn people were also driving on the tracks. They clipped James E.'s car, and he turned and rolled and flipped, landing upside-down on top of the first rail of the train track.

James E. S.: Oh, no big deal, looks like I'm just gonna have to just pop again—oh, boy.
[Train coming]

Mr. Eric: Another train was approaching. James E. and his popwheel could be flattened in a minute.

James E. S.: Maybe I shoulda driven a little more safely.

Mr. Eric: And then there was Cornia.

Cornia: Did you forget to signal?

Mr. Eric: She said, reaching in to undo his seatbelt.

Cornia: Did you forget to put your seatbelt on, too?

James E. S.: A sea bell? Why would you need a bell underwater? Who could hear it?

Cornia: No, your seat—oh, no!

Mr. Eric: Cornia tried to pull him out the window but the car was too crumpled.
[Train noise]

James E. S.: Just get out of here. Aren't you forgetting you won't pop again?

Cornia: Well, neither will you!

Poprick: I think she's forgetting that she won't pop again.

Mr. Eric: Said Poprick from the train's platform.

Copcorn: I don't think she's forgetting. I think she's risking her last pop.

Poprick: I don't know how to help.

Mr. Eric: He was fiddling with his walkie talkie nervously. A nearby human was spraying down the platform with a hose.

Copcorn: I've got to commandeer this hose! Don't worry, I'm a copcorn.

Mr. Eric: Copcorn threw the hose down to Cornia, who tied it through the car and she and Copcorn tried to heave the popwheels car off the track. Poprick looked at his walkie talkie, and then over at the four helicopters that were starting to take off, then over at the speeding train still approaching.

Poprick: Uhhh...

Mr. Eric: He played with the frequency for half a second.

Poprick: There's only one thing for me to do.

Copcorn: You can't just go jumping onto the tracks.

Poprick: [Walkie Talkie clicks on] Hello, train engineer? Stop the train, right away. There's someone on the platform.

Engineer: Okay, you betcha. [Train screeching to a halt.]

Mr. Eric: The train screeched down the platform as Copcorn and Cornia yanked at the hose attached to the car with all their might, nudging it just far enough... that the train just spun it off the railing rather than crushing it like a tin can.

James E. S.: Oh, I think I broke my starch.

Cornia: Yeah, I think you broke all of whatever passes for limbs on popcorn people.

Copcorn: But you should thank your salty starch, you're alive.

Poprick: Yeah, and thank goodness I'm good at walkie talkies.

Cornia: Maybe the popwheelers don't need to drive fast to solve all their problems.

Mr. Eric: Just then, an ambulance sped into the train station, crashing through a hall and two young popcorn paramedics leapt out of the ambulance.

Cornia: Oh, wow. I did not see a one of you unbuckle a seatbelt.

Poprick: They didn't use their turn signal, either.

Copcorn: And crashing through that wall could have hurt someone.

Corny EMT: Oh, no. It's no problem, they'd just pop again.

Corny EMT 2: Yeah, we do it all the time.

Poprick: Not anymore.

James E. S.: Yeah, the popwheelers are gonna teach you a thing or two.

Corny EMTs: [Whimper]

Cornia: About safety.

Corny EMTs: Huh?

Mr. Eric: The end.

[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: All right Leah and Patrick, I hope you enjoyed your story. I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator, Craig Martinson for our theme song, my mom for teaching me how to drive, and all you future drivers out there. And current drivers, who use seatbelts and turn signals and encourage others to do the same. Stay safe out there.

And until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]