

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 121: What if What If World was not real?](#)

File Length: 00:17:13

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.

Abacus: The show where your questions and ideas inspire off the cuff stories.

Mr. Eric: Abacus! You didn't even let me finish my intro bit.

Abacus: Oh, I know. But I needed to give a shout out to Dane who is nine years old and loves magic. A man after my own heart!

Mr. Eric: Oh, hi Dane, thank you.

Cthunkle: And I am here to shout out three siblings: David, who is nine, Andrei, who is seven, and Alli, who is three.

Mr. Eric: Hey, Cthunkle. And thank you David, Andrei, and Alli.

Pipey-O : And I gotta give a shout out to Anna the Super Banana! She's eight years old.

Mr. Eric: Hello Anna, the Super Banana.

Cleocatra: And do not forget about Rosie, her four year old little sister.

Mr. Eric: Okay, Pipey-O and Cleocatra. Thank you Anna and thank you Rosie.

Fred the Dog: Oh, we got a last but not least shout out for Liv. That's L-I-V. I know it's hard for me to say it right, but it's Liv.

Mr. Eric: All right, Liv, Rosie, Anna, Alli, Andrei, David, and Dane, thanks for listening. And now let's get to our first question from a boy named Tolkien.

Tolkien: Um, my name is Tolkien and—

Tolkien's Parent: What do you like?

Tolkien: I like playing with my dungeon at recess.

Tolkien's Parent: And your question is?

Tolkien: The only way to get across What If World is in a hot air balloon!

Tolkien's Parent: So the question is what if the only way to get around What If World was via hot air balloon.

Tolkien: Bye bye!

Mr. Eric: Tolkien, I heard your question for the first time a long while back and I've been hoping to get a chance to answer it ever since. I was always imagining adventures in dungeons and across pirate treasure islands and all kinds of crazy stuff when I was your age.

I think we're gonna get one more question to round this story out from a listener named Trudy.

Trudy: My name is Trudy. I'm eight and my favorite thing sweets and my question is what if What If World was not real?

Mr. Eric: Oh, Trudy, thank you so much for this question. And as I understand it, you like sweets. That's at least what I think you said, so that's what I'm gonna go with.

A lot of kids have asked versions of this question, so William, Sadie, and all you other kids who asked what if there was no What If World, what if Mr. Eric forgot about What If World, and every variation, thank you. When I get a lot of questions with the same theme, I like to work your great ideas into at least one question.

So, let's find out what if What If World was not here and, oddly enough, what if the only way to get around What If World was in a hot air balloon? Huh.

[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: This story's gonna sound a little different because the main character in it is, well, me. But a Mr. Eric before the Mister. I was seven years old and had just moved from the city to the suburbs, and I didn't really know

what to make of the kids around me. I was feeling a little quiet that day so I decided to play with my dungeon.

Eric: Hello... [echoes] hello... hello.

Mr. Eric: My voice echoed so loud that everyone out playing in the recess yard gave me a weird look, but I didn't see them because I was in a deep, dark, dungeon.

Eric: Is anyone there? [echoes] there... there

Mysterious Voice: Nope! [echoes] nope... nope...

Eric: Oh, okay.

Mr. Eric: So I continued exploring, and not just for that recess, but the next one, and the next one, and the next one after that. Every time I got back to the yard, I'd explore a different wing of my imaginary dungeon, looking for, I didn't know what. I found piles of treasure, magic swords and hollowed out armor. Dusty statues, and rooms full of spiderweb.

Boy: What are you looking for?

Mr. Eric: Said another boy. He'd somehow wandered into my dungeon. His name was Craig. I'd seen him in class, but I was still feeling really shy and didn't really talk to kids at recess.

Eric: Oh, I don't know. I think someone lives in this dungeon, but I can't find them.

Craig: Oh, you want me to help you look?

Mr. Eric: What I wanted to say was yeah, I'd love your help! But what I said instead was:

Eric: Um... um... no thanks.

Mr. Eric: And I ran to the other side of the recess yard feeling shy and a little lonely. Just then, a tear seemed to form above all of spacetime, right above my head. Wait, no, that's not how I remember it, but there the crack was! And out of it poured shiny black objects, barely bigger than your hand. They were smart phones, even though smart phones hadn't been invented yet.

Eric: What is going on?

Mr. Eric: I said, as all the kids in the schoolyard picked up these little devices. Even that boy named Craig. He'd been running up to ask me to play again when a smart phone landed right in his hands.

Craig: Whoa, what sort of weird thing is... oh, cool.

Mr. Eric: He started swiping his fingers left and right, up and down, and I walked over to see what he was doing.

Eric: Hey, what's that you've got in your hand?

Craig: I don't know. It's something. It's cool, though. I'm just gonna sit here and play with it, okay?

Mr. Eric: And Craig sat down to play with his phone. And so did Maggie, and Nicole, and Steven, and Chelsea, and Ian! And all the kids in my grade. They'd stopped playing altogether. I looked down to see that strange black device at my feet, too. I picked it up, curiously. There was some kind of video game playing on the screen, bigger and brighter than anything I'd ever seen.

Eric: Wooooow... UGH bleh!

Mr. Eric: My mouth had been gaping open with a drooly, vacant stare and someone had thrown a piece of candy in there.

Eric: Oh, ugh, ow. Oh, caramel! My favorite.

Abacus: Yes, I know, boy. Normally, I wouldn't rely on such mundane practices to distract you but the situation is dire.

Mr. Eric: There, standing in front of me was a wizard I'd never seen before, except maybe just a little bit in my imagination. He had a big gray beard and deep purple robes glittering with stars. An old wooden staff crooked like a question mark, and every moment his skin and his eyes could be a different color. Brown and yellow and red and black and white and blue and green, and...

Eric: Don't I know you?

Abacus: That's just the thing, boy. You're supposed to know me. I'm Abacus P... I forget.

Eric: Abacus Pie Forget? That's a silly name.

Abacus: No, that's not my name. I'm from a place called What If World. You and the children of the future help create it, and it's disappearing because of these.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus gestured over to the smart phones and all the glazed over looks of the children.

Abacus: These devices are even more addictive because they're from What If World and they have our magic.

Mr. Eric: What he was saying didn't make any sense. I'd never heard of What If World, and these weird, black rectangles that fell from the sky, they didn't seem real. But as the kids looked and swiped, their faces slack, their eyelids drooping, creatures and colors started pouring out of the devices.

Abacus: Oh no. We've got to get you to remember.

Mr. Eric: Abacus Pie Forgot gestured with his question mark staff to a hot air balloon idling behind him.

Abacus: We've got to sail around all of What If World together so that you can remember what you're forgetting.

Eric: I can't leave the school at recess time.

Abacus: Oh, of course not. It's just like when you go to your imaginary dungeon. We'll sail around the whole world and never leave this yard.

Mr. Eric: And just like with my dungeon, sometimes the balloon was there and sometimes it wasn't. It just depended on how hard I imagined.

Eric: Wow! I imagined that?

Abacus: Well, technically Tolkien did, but we can't get into that right now, it's too confusing.

Mr. Eric: And so I hopped on the imaginary balloon and took off toward the sky mouth, the crack in all of spacetime, without ever leaving the recess yard or the spaced-out kids around me. But the world I saw was patchy and shadowed.

Eric: I thought you said we'd see the whole world.

Abacus: Oh, it's worse than I thought. Half of it's gone to What Not.

Eric: What's what-not.

Abacus: Well, no one really knows, to be honest. But you are what is and I am what if, and if you're not a what is or a what if...

Eric: Then you're a what not?

Abacus: Indeed, that's what we call it.

Mr. Eric: They flew over what was left of New What City and saw Stevie Fleasel and Marsha Mallow leading everyone into Mr. Business's business building.

Stevie: Come on, come on, people out there are losing their imaginations.

Marsha: All the what ifs are becoming what nots.

Mr. Business: And there's no profit to be made in what not, so get yourselves in here.

Eric: I'm sorry, who are you?

Mr. Business: Me? I'm Mr. B...

Marsha: And I'm Marsh...something.

Stevie: And I'm a weasel that became famous when I invented the something.

Abacus: My boy, they're forgetting. They need more what ifs.

Eric: I don't know what you mean.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus gestured out. Between the big building and a distant shining lake stretched nothing but what not and a few...

Eric: Wait, what are those little sparkly things?

Abacus: [Gasps] You can see them, Mr. Eric? They're ideas!

Eric: What do we do with them?

Abacus: Well, you've got to take them and tell a story.

Mr. Eric: And our hot air balloon was flying through the what not as hundreds and thousands of sparkles danced around us.

Eric: But there's so many... I don't know that many stories.

Mr. Eric: I reached out to one of these little starlings and when it touched my hand, I heard your question. No, not his question or her question. Your question.

Eric: I heard it!

Mr. Eric: And when I did, a bridge of what if spread from our hot air balloon all the way to the distant lake as you and I imagined your story.

Eric: Oh, that was weird.

Mr. Eric: The lake we floated over was drying up, leaving a bunch of squid monsters splashing around in too little water.

Cthunkle: Is it he? The chosen one?

Abacus: No, there's no such thing as chosen ones, Cthunkle. He's just a child with an idea.

Squidarella: We need those ideas. Keep imagining!

Mr. Eric: Said a squid lady, although she didn't look like much of a squid. She only had two tentacles left, and now just one tentacle left.

Eric: What's happening to you?

Squidarella: I'm on my way to what not.

Cthunkle: Don't worry, she'll only ever be a what if away.

Eric: Well, what if you got better?

Mr. Eric: And suddenly, the squid la... Squidarella! That's her name! She stopped fading away altogether.

Eric: Ooh, and what if you had more tentacles.

Abacus: Oh! But how many?

Eric: I don't know. How many do you think?

Abacus: Who, me? I'm a what if. We need someone from what is world to tell us.

Eric: Okay, well... if there's anyone out there listening, how many legs should Squidarella have?

Squidarella: Whoa. I have exactly that many legs. All right, well, who's the joker that said zero. I heard that.

Abacus: Oh, children, you're doing it!

Mr. Eric: Said Abacus. His wizard hat had disappeared and so had his staff and even his robe. He was just standing, shivering on his hot air balloon in a wizard onesie.

Eric: Okay, no, you need to be wearing something more than that, Abacus.

Abacus: Oh, I can't think. What do wizards wear?

Eric: Maybe a polka dot tuxedo?

Abacus: Ooh, this is very sharp.

Eric: Or maybe a...

Mr. Eric: And as your ideas fell from the sky, those little sparkles joined together, getting bigger and brighter, and a splash of water filled Squid Lake and a stretch of what not suddenly became what if, connecting the lake to the Observatorium. Our hot air balloon lifted higher in the sky.

Eric: I can see all the way to the Mohowvie Desert.

Abacus: You remembered the name! It's working, Mr. Eric.

Eric: Why do you keep calling me that, I'm seven years old.

Abacus: You're right. That would be like someone calling me Professor before I was a—I was a Professor! I am one! Professor Abacus P.--

[Bell rings]

Mr. Eric: And the Professor disappeared, and so did the hot air balloon as the school bell rang, marking the end of recess. I looked up and through the sky mouth I saw your ideas shining against the end of imagination. But all the kids in the school yard weren't moving an inch. They were just looking at those smart phones.

Mrs. Ably stepped out into the yard.

Mrs. Ably: Come, children. Recess time is over. Put away those Game Boys.

Mr. Eric: But no one was listening to our teacher.



Eric: Mrs. Ably, we need to distract them or their what ifs will turn to what nots.

Mrs. Ably: Mr. Eric, what are you going on about?

Eric: What If World, it isn't real!

Mrs. Ably: It doesn't sound real to me.

Mr. Eric: I knew I couldn't explain it to my teacher, but I also knew what she kept on her desk in a glass bowl. What might be my only hope to distract these children. I darted into the classroom, grabbed the bowl, and ran over to Craig, unwrapping a crinkly plastic and tossing a candy mint right at him.

Craig: Ow! You hit me in the face.

Eric: I meant, I wanted you to eat it.

Craig: Well, why didn't you just hand me the candy if you wanted me to eat it?

Eric: I don't know, the wizard threw it in my mouth and it...

Craig: There was a wizard throwing candy in your mouth?

Eric: I know, it sounds weird.

Craig: That sounds cool. Let's be, like, candy wizards.

Mr. Eric: Said Craig, grabbing a fistful of sweets from the bowl.

Eric: Oh, and maybe all the other kids are trapped in the dungeon.

Craig: Oh yeah, definitely.

Mr. Eric: And I was back in the underground cavern. Except it wasn't just y dungeon anymore. It was brighter and it smelled like fresh-baked cupcakes. And I could hear a distant song playing.

Craig: Ooh, I like that jam. That's rocking.

Eric: Yeah.

Mr. Eric: And Craig and I went around tossing a candy to every kid in the school yard. And when they let go of their smart phones, they blew away on the wind. Mrs. Ably finally managed to round us all up, but the next day at recess, a whole group of kids were asking me and Craig to play dungeons

and candies. And as we dove back into the dungeon, our bright ideas and yours floated up. The sky was bright. The crack across all spacetime was closed and What If World was as real as ever.

Abacus: Is that a crack at my being imaginary?

Squidarella: I'd rather be a what if than a what not.

Cthunkle: Will you all just let him finish the story.

Abacus: Oh, sorry.

Squidarella: Maybe.

Mr. Eric: The end.

Well, Tolkien and Trudy. I hope you enjoyed your story. I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator. Craig Martinson for his imagination. Mrs. Aply, my first grade teacher, for helping show me that there's a time and a place for make-believe. And all you kids at home who exercise your imaginations, making what nots into what ifs.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]