

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 129: What if Abacus' parents came to visit and he accidentally turned them both into tomatoes?](#)

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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're starting off with a question from a listener named Carter.

Carter: Hi, What If World, my name is Carter. I have a question. What if people lived on the sun? Oof!

Mr. Eric: Thank you, Carter. If you heard that thud at the end, that was him face-planting onto the ground. Don't worry, it was carpeted and I think he did it on purpose. Carter sent his question as a video and a tweet, which I'd never gotten before. So just remember that there's no wrong way to share your ideas.

Speaking of which, our second question is a write-in from a patron named Alani and she asks, what if Abacus's parents came to visit and he accidentally turned them both into tomatoes. Wow, thank you Alani. We've never met Abacus's parents.

Okay, since we're doing Abacus lore today, we're going to add in one more question from Gracie.

Gracie: Hello, my name is Gracie and I love dogs and cats and my What If World question is what if Abacus P. Grumbler's real name was Abacus Pretty Grumbler and whenever someone sees him, they laugh at him? Thank you. Bye-bye!

Mr. Eric: Oh my goodness, I've got so many questions today, I need to get right into the story. So let's find out what if Abacus's real name was Abacus

Pretty Grumbler and whenever somebody saw him they laughed at him?  
And what if Abacus's parents came to visit and he accidentally turned  
them both into tomatoes? And finally, what if people lived on the sun?

[Rising harp scale.]

- Mr. Eric: One sunny afternoon, Abacus P. Grumbler was hanging out with his friends Fred the Dog and JF Kat.
- Fred the Dog: You know, Abacus?
- Mr. Eric: Said Fred.
- Fred the Dog: We've known you such a long time, but we never met your parents.
- Abacus: Well, I've never met your parents, either.
- JF Kitty: Purr, uh... that's because Fred and I are orphans. Thanks for bringing that up.
- Abacus: Well, we really only see each other once a year and thankfully, they never pop by unannounced.
- [Knocking]
- Mr. Eric: A knock sounded on the door of Abacus's study within the Observatorium.
- Abacus: I wonder who that could be?
- Fred the Dog: It's like he doesn't even listen to the What If questions.
- AbaDad: Hello, son!
- Phantasma: Abacus, what a pleasure to see you.
- Abacus: Uhhhh... tomato!
- Mr. Eric: And Abacus, shocked at seeing his parents so suddenly, turned them both into tomatoes.
- Arithmometer: I thought we could try to go one dinner without a transformation, Abacus.
- Abacus: Sorry, Father. Um, better luck next time!
- Mr. Eric: And Abacus shut the door on them.

JF Kitty: Meow I'm confused.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, who doesn't like a surprise visit from their parents?

Abacus: Oh, I'm sure everyone in the entire world loves nothing more than a surprise visit from their parents, but my father, Arithmometer has fallen under the spell of my mother's evil half, Phantasma.

Arithmometer: No, I haven't, Abacus! We've explained this to you many times.

Phantasma: If you'd simply turn us back from tomatoes, we could all have a nice visit.

Abacus: Even if I could turn you back from tomatoes, which I'm not entirely sure I can, I would never turn my mother's evil wizard half back.

Fred the Dog: What are you talking about, Abacus.

Abacus: Legend has it... [THUNDER].

Mr. Eric: Lightning struck and the sun darkened.

Abacus: That after my parents separated, my mother Pascaline became such a powerful wizard that an evil double sprung from her who doesn't look like my mother or sound like my mother and she cast a spell upon my father so that he would marry her and call her my stepmother.

[Record scratch.]

Fred the Dog: Legend has it...?

JF Kitty: All that exposition to say that your father got remarried.

Abacus: Remarried to my mother's evil half.

Fred the Dog: No, that's your stepmother.

Abacus: [Splutters] Stepmother? That's highly implausible. Surely she's just my mother's evil double.

Arithmometer: Abacus Pretty Grumbler, you let us inside this instant!

Fred the Dog: Did he just call you Abacus Pretty Grumbler?

JF Kitty: Is that the secret middle name you've been hiding from us for all these years?

Abacus: No, it's not. Stop laughing at me.

Fred the Dog: Oh no, we're not laughing at you. That's a great middle name.

JF Kitty: Purr... I love pretty things like flowers and butterflies.

Abacus: You're making fun of me, I know it.

Fred the Dog: Oh, Abacus, I sorry I laughed. I just never heard your name before.

Abacus: I know, boys aren't supposed to like pretty things.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus, tears in his eyes, tried to run to his secret passageway, but he bumped into a potion case and half of them broke on him.

Abacus: Well, I had something in my eye.

Mr. Eric: And when Abacus looked back at Fred and JF Kat...

JF Kitty: Oh, ho ho... Abacus... [laughing]

Fred the Dog: Oh, buddy... [laughing] you got a little...

Abacus: Oh, I said stop laughing at me!

Arithmometer: What's going on in there?

Phantasma: Do you need our help?

Abacus: No, I don't need anyone's help.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus zapped himself as far away from What If World as he'd ever gone, which is to say, the sun.

Abacus: Oh, Sunny, everyone's laughing at me.

Sun: Sorry, Abacus, that's terrible. Do you want to come be alone on my surface for a while?

Abacus: It's all because they found out my name was Abacus Pretty Grumbler.

Mr. Eric: Said Abacus, turning toward the sun.

Sun: [Giggles]

Abacus: Oh, now you're laughing, too.

Sun: No, it's not that.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus shielded himself in protective magic and flew down toward the surface of the sun where Sunny, herself, couldn't see him anymore.

Sun: Can't see you when you fly that close to me. Um, just look out for—

Abacus: Solar flares, I know. I've been here before.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus landed on the surface of the sun to sulk.

Abacus: It's not fair. Who has a middle name like "Pretty." Boys aren't supposed to be pretty or like pretty things, like silky smooth robes, and beautiful, shiny crystal balls.

Molamo: Oh no, please stop talking. I don't like to hear feelings in my ears.

Abacus: Oh, you're telling me there's people on the sun? I came here to be alone.

Mr. Eric: Abacus turned around to see a massive creature of bubbling lava towering over him. And as a cascade of lava rolled forward off its frowning face, Abacus found himself being suddenly drawn away by some sort of mechanical arm.

Abacus: Oh, I suppose there's robot people living on the sun, too.

Pascaline: Not quite, little Abby.

Mr. Eric: Said a familiar voice as the mechanical arm slowly lowered Abacus back down, far, far out of sight of the lava monster.

Abacus: Mother? Is that you?

Mr. Eric: Abacus turned to see none other than Pascaline, his mathematician mother.

Abacus: What are all these people doing on the surface of the sun?

Pascaline: Your father, Phantasma and I are working together on a solar stabilizer?

Abacus: You're all working together? Does that mean that...

Mr. Eric: And there was Arithmometer and Phantasma. They were all sheltered together in a big, high tech lab, which was surrounded by an even bigger magical sphere of protection.

Abacus: Oh, how did you two get here? You're tomatoes.

Phantasma: When you get powerful enough at magic, you can cast spells no matter what shape you take.

Arithmometer: And for an experiment, I wanted to see if we could survive as sun-dried tomatoes.

Pascaline: That is a foolish experiment, Arith... we have very important work to do.

Arithmometer: As if I can't solve math equations while shaped as a tomato. Ha!

Abacus: Oh, Mother, Phantasma has cast her evil enchantment over you, too.

Pascaline: No, Abacus.

Abacus: Your evil side is trying to take you over once and for all. Get behind me. I shall protect you.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus stood between his mathematician mother and his tomato stepmother. And that's when Phantasma and Arithmometer finally got a good look at Abacus.

[Laughter]

Abacus: You two can't laugh at my middle name, you gave it to me.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus turned toward Pascaline and hugged his mother.

Abacus: Oh, why would you give me a middle name like pretty.

Pascaline: We did not give you that middle name, little Abby.

Mr. Eric: And as she gently drew away from the hug, she saw what everyone had been laughing at.

Pascaline: Abby, have you been playing with potions, again?

Abacus: Maybe a little.

Pascaline: Do you know your nose is now a big, purple crayon?

Abacus: Well, I like purple crayons.

Pascaline: And your wizard hat has turned into a sack of cuddly hamsters?

Abacus: Well, I like cuddly hamsters, too.

Pascaline: And your beard has gotten slightly shorter.

Abacus: My beard!? No! How will anyone know that I'm a wise wizard? Oh, Mommy, you've got to turn me back with your magic!

Pascaline: I do not know magic, Abacus. But I'm sure Phantasma, your stepmother will help.

Abacus: No, I don't want help from her.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus ran past his tomato father and tomato stepmother, raising his own protective bubble again as he headed out onto the lonely hot surface of the sun.

Abacus: I just want to be left alone for ever and ever and—

Molamo: Oh no! He's back.

[Record scratch.]

Molamo: The one with all the feelings. Shoo! Shoo! Get away! I just want to be alone forever.

Abacus: Me, too! We have so much in common, molten lava monster. Oh, I think I'll call you Molamo! For molten lava mo—

Molamo: Good guess. That's my name.

Abacus: Well, hello, Molamo! My name is Aba—

Molamo: Get out of here!

Abacus: No... I guess I'm better at guessing names but you can call me GetOutOfHere if you'd like. I've always wanted a nickname.

Molamo: Leave me alone or I'll melt you!

Mr. Eric: And Molamo flung molten flecks of lava right onto Abacus's protective magic bubble.

Abacus: Oh, careful with that lava. I'm going to make like my nickname and get out of here, haha.

Molamo: Please leave!

Abacus: Okay, see you soon!

Mr. Eric: And Abacus strolled away until he found himself all alone again.

Abacus: Finally, peace and quiet—

Arithmometer: Son, we need to have a talk.

Abacus: I'm centuries old, Father. It's too late for any of the talks.

Arithmometer: It's never too late to talk to your family.

Mr. Eric: Arithmometer, still a tomato, had rolled out onto the hot surface of the sun to find his sun. Fortunately, he had a protective bubble of his own.

Abacus: Well, I don't need family anymore. I've got a brand new family. His name is Molamo and we have a play date for tomorrow.

Arithmometer: Son, you should stay away from that one. He's dangerous.

Abacus: Nonsense! I found him to be a very amicable horrifying alien.

Arithmometer: Abby, listen to me. I know you've never liked your stepmother.

Abacus: She's not my stepmother. Mommy split after you two separated, into Pascaline and Phantasma. But that's okay because Phantasma's kind of like Mom, and—

Arithmometer: But have you ever wondered why they don't look alike?

Abacus: I figured that one out. Magic.

Arithmometer: Why they don't sound alike?

Abacus: Um... magic?

Arithmometer: Why they've been tell you for years that they're different people and it's not magic?

Abacus: Oh, um, sorcery.

Molamo: That's it! I just wanted a nice, quiet eternity where I wouldn't have to deal with feelings!

Abacus: Hello Molamo. Are we still on for tomorrow?

Molamo: Now I have to destroy this star and go find another one.

Abacus: So... rain check?



Mr. Eric: And Molamo turned into a lava spike and started burrowing into the sun itself.

Arithmometer: This is exactly what we were worried about.

Abacus: I know... I lost another friend. It's so tragic.

Arithmometer: No, son... without the sun, this entire solar system is doomed.

Abacus: Your son is not that important, but I appreciate the sentiment.

Arithmometer: Not you! The actual star in the sky that we're standing on!

Abacus: Oh, right. I guess we do need the sun. Okay, let's go.

Mr. Eric: Abacus picked up his tomato father and rushed back to the laboratory, but the surface of the sun was already rumbling and little solar flares seemed to be bending and winding off even more often than usual.

Pascaline: What has happened.

Arithmometer: Molamo happened.

Phantasma: Then we must finish the solar stabilizer this instant.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus's family scrambled over a big machine at the center of the lab.

Pascaline: But there were at least three months left of calculations.

Arithmometer: Well, I think we've got about three minutes.

Abacus: Oh, that's no problem. Just speed up time. Phantasma's a very powerful sorceress.

Phantasma: But all my power goes to maintaining the force field around us.

Abacus: Well, I suppose I could hold up the force field myself.

Pascaline: No, Abby. It's too dangerous.

Arithmometer: I won't allow it. Son, you've got to get out of here.

Phantasma: I agree. Go get as many people off of What If World as you can.

Abacus: Mom, Dad, Phantasma, I'll hold the force field.

Mr. Eric: And Abacus, whose magic had never been very reliable, extended his own force field farther and farther until it wrapped around the entire laboratory.

Phantasma: I can only speed up time for you two. You'll have to work quickly.

Mr. Eric: And Arithmometer and Pascaline were moving so fast the eye could hardly track them. Their 43,800 minutes in a month so Abacus and Phantasma were watching half a day pass every second. Arithmometer and Pascaline used tiny wands to scrawl numbers and symbols right into the air in front of them and it looked from the outside like a cascade of mathematics filled the laboratory in an instant.

Abacus: Do you understand any of this, Phantasma?

Phantasma: I've picked up a little. Um, the last digit of pi plus the square root of negative one, divided by the cosine of algebra, yes, yes.

Abacus: Wow! I used to doubt how cool math was but seeing this!

Phantasma: I know! Anyone who can't see this must really be kicking themselves right now.

Abacus: It's so... pretty.

Mr. Eric: And Phantasma looked down from her spell at her stepson.

Phantasma: It is pretty, Abacus, just like you. I remember when you picked out that middle name for yourself.

Abacus: It was so many centuries ago, I'd forgotten.

Phantasma: It used to be Abacus Pythagoras Grumbler.

Abacus: But you helped me work up the nerve to ask Mom and Dad if I could change it.

Mr. Eric: The sun shook all around them. Abacus's protective bubble contracted in closer and closer. Phantasma's magic seemed to be slowing down.

Abacus: Because I like pretty things.

Phantasma: Like starlight.

Abacus: And purple robes.

Phantasma: And magic.

Abacus: And math. Well if the entire solar system is destroyed, at least I learned to appreciate my stepmother.

Phantasma: Thank you, yes, but we should really probably stay focused on the magic right now.

[Record scratch.]

Abacus: Right, right, right.

Mr. Eric: And as a massive solar flare seemed to be rising up through the protective bubble, Phantasma had to stop her magic to strengthen their protective spell just as Pascaline and Arithmometer pushed down on the button on either side of the solar stabilizer. A column of something that wasn't quite light seemed to rise up from the solar stabilizer before driving into the sun itself and—

Molamo: Oh no, I've been launched into outer space. It looks like I won't be destroying the solar system this week!

Abacus: Oh, better luck next time, Molamo.

Molamo: Provided there is a next time.

Abacus: Yes, okay! Good luck floating around in outer space.

Molamo: I mean, who knows. If I made a positive impression on any listeners out there...

Pascaline: We get it, Molamo... good bye.

Molamo: But just in case they don't ask any questions about me, byeeeeee.

Phantasma: Wow, he really can't take a hint.

Abacus: Mom, Dad, Phantasma. That was the coolest math and magic I've ever seen.

Arithmometer: And now that our solar stabilizer is complete we can use it to save other solar systems.

Pascaline: What a wonderful idea, Arithmometer.

Phantasma: Then we will rule them slowly reshape the universe in our image.

Abacus: Oh, that's what this is all about?

Arithmometer: Yes, making the universe a better place.

Phantasma: With absolute power.

Abacus: Ooh, I guess I see why you two are such a good fit, after all.

Pascaline: Oui. Your father always wanted to make the world a better place by ruling it.

Phantasma: And Pascaline thinks it can be done by teaching people things.

Arithmometer: Thanks for the help with the invention. You're welcome for saving your solar system.

Mr. Eric: And their entire lab started to fly up off the surface of the sun.

Phantasma: Let's not all wait too long before seeing each other again.

Mr. Eric: And the star ship started flying off toward another solar system.

Abacus: Oh, sorry. Could you just drop me and Mom off on What If World?

Arithmometer: Oh, fine, fine. So, Thanksgiving?

Phantasma: I've learned to clone turkey meat with humane dark magic.

Abacus: And what's so dark about it if it's humane?

Arithmometer: It's dark meat. Haven't gotten the hang of white meat, yet.

Mr. Eric: The end.

Pascaline: I prefer dark meat.

Abacus: Oh, me too.

Phantasma: Then it's settled.

[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: All right Alani, Carter, and Gracie. I hope you enjoyed your story. I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator. Craig Martinson for our theme song. My parents Ronnie and Donna and my stepdad Dickie, and all you kids at home who know that your true family, the folks who are there for you through thick and thin, they will always love you, even if the shape of that family changes.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]

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