

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 149: What if magic didn't exist?](#)

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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 write-in question from a listener named Edison. Edison asks: "What if magic didn't exist and Fred the Dog, Abacus P. Grumbler, and Alabaster Zero saved the day?"

Thank you, Edison, that sounds like a grand adventure. Oh, and thanks to Enda and all of our other listeners who had very similar questions about magic being lost.

Now, we've got one patron question to add on from June.

June: Hi, my name is June and I love you and my question is what if there was [three] people and whenever a queen of frogs looked at them they would turn to frogs?

Mr. Eric: All right, thank you, June and thanks to June's sister, Suzanna.

Abacus: Now, let me do our shout out of the week.

Mr. Eric: Oh, hey, Abacus. Are you sure you've got time? You're supposed to be in this story.

Abacus: Oh, no. It's easy. I can travel between dimensions at will.

Mr. Eric: Oh, cool. As long as you're using magic safely.

Abacus: Oh, Hufflepuff! Of course I am!

Mr. Eric: If you say so.

Abacus: Nina loves ice cream, her mom and dad and her little brother Huxley.

Mr. Eric: Thank you, Nina. And now, let's find out what if there were three people and whenever the queen of frogs looked at them they'd turn into frogs and what if magic didn't exist?

[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Fred the Dog and Alabaster Zero were meeting up in the swamp.

Alabaster Zero: Yeah, Fred? Do you know why we're meeting in the swamp?

Mr. Eric: Said Alabaster Zero, What If World's self-proclaimed greatest detective.

Fred the Dog: I thought this was your idea.

Mr. Eric: Said Fred the Dog. He had trouble pronouncing some words because he was a pug with a tongue way too long for his mouth.

Alabaster Zero: I thought this was your idea.

Fred the Dog: No, way. This swamp is more vines than sticks. Not my style.

Alabaster Zero: Oh. Well. Hey, my New Year's resolution is to drive less.

Fred the Dog: Oh, that's a good one. There's so much traffic these days.

Abacus: Did someone say magic?

Mr. Eric: And Abacus appeared through a portal in the middle of the swamp.

Alabaster Zero: No, Fred said traffic. Is that what you heard?

Abacus: Probably. It's so hard to hear from a parallel dimension full of frogs ribbiting all of the time.

Fred the Dog: You just visited the frog dimension? What was it like?

Abacus: I don't know... loud. Froggy.

Alabaster Zero: Didn't you just like hid in behind a tree?

Abacus: [Mutters and mimics Alabaster's question] of course I could have! But my New Year's resolution is to use magic more often.

Fred the Dog: Ooh, well, good thing my New Year's resolution is to be less judgmental of other people's resolutions or else I'd say that's a pretty bad idea.

Abacus: Oh, you sound just like the Queen of Frogs. [Mimics] You've got to stop using magic so irresponsibly. Interdimensional travel isn't a toy, croak.

Alabaster Zero: Who's the Queen of Frogs?

Mr. Eric: Asked Alabaster.

Abacus: Oh, just this major bummer from the frog dimension. Anyway, who wants to see me conjure a volcano from a lava planet?

Fred the Dog: Oh, sure, I guess.

Alabaster Zero: I could go for some lava.

Mr. Eric: And a murky green pond next to them started to bubble and steam from the center. When... a tiny frog jumped through a tiny portal wearing a regal cape and crown.

Queen of Frogs: Abacus P. Grumbler, you must cease your irresponsible use of magic. Grrriiibbit!

Abacus: What's that? I can't hear you over the sound of this volcano I'm conjuring in the middle of this pond.

Queen of Frogs: I said stop your magic or you and your friends will be punished.

Fred the Dog: Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait, I'm just trying not to be judgmental.

Alabaster Zero: And I'm just trying to save myself a drive to this lava planet.

Queen of Frogs: You're letting your friend put a volcano in the middle of a beautiful, diverse swamp. How would you feel if someone dropped a flaming mountain on your house?

Alabaster Zero: Um, pretty flat, I guess.

Fred the Dog: Hey, that's a pretty good one, Alabaster.

Abacus: Very droll.

Mr. Eric: And the three boys started high fiving each other as the pond started bubbling even more violently.

Queen of Frogs: That's it!

Mr. Eric: Said the Queen of Frogs, fixing them with a bug-eyed stare that only the most regal of frog-kind had mastered. And Abacus, Fred, and Alabaster started turning into frogs, themselves!

Queen of Frogs: If you cannot respect the way of the frog, then you shall live as a... on a log! Until the day that—

Abacus: How dare you transform me?

[Record scratch.]

Now I'm going to have to turn the whole world in the opposite direction in order to turn back time so that we'll be back to normal.

Fred the Dog: No way that could work.

Abacus: Well, we won't know until we try.

Queen of Frogs: Sorry, can I finish my curse?

Alabaster Zero: Ooh, ooh, ooh! If we're traveling back in time, can we go back to the third grade so I can convince myself not to get that haircut.

Abacus: I don't see why not.

Fred the Dog: Oh, and we should probably stop off for some prehistoric oranges, you know, it's flu season and you need a vitamin C boost.

Abacus: Oh, indubitably.

Queen of Frogs: That's it! The three of you do not deserve a world with magic. You cannot cast responsibly so magic-less frogs you will be until the day—

Abacus: You can't use magic to get rid of magic! That's absurd.

Queen of Frogs: Please stop interrupting my curse, it's—

Alabaster Zero: I mean, if spinning the world backwards can change time, I guess magic can get rid of magic.

Fred the Dog: I don't know about that, Alabaster.

Queen of Frogs: You know what? Fine. I was going to tell you how to end the c-ribbit-curse, but I guess you don't care. So, good luck!

[Magic noises!]

Mr. Eric: And the Queen of Frogs disappeared leaving Alabaster[Abacus] as an old warty frog with a pointy hat and Fred as a stinky black and white frog with an even bigger tongue as usual and Alabaster as a grizzled, stubbly frog with a pair of extra dark sunglasses.

Abacus: Oh, ribbit.

Fred the Dog: This croaks.

Alabaster Zero: Yeah, I'm not exactly jumping for joy, either. Let's just hop out of this swamp.

Mr. Eric: And the three frogs started hopping away. But before they could get very far...

Abacus: Oh, what manner of beast is that?

Fred the Dog: It's just our stomachs. You've never been alone on the street, like me.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, I forgot you used to be a stray dog. So how do we survive?

Fred the Dog: Fellas, we gotta do what frogs do and eat some bugs.

Abacus: Just make sure you don't eat any talking bugs, okay.

Mr. Eric: But it seemed the highest concentration of bugs was back by the pond they'd just left. So back they hopped, hungry as could be, until they filled their froggy gullets with a small swarm of bugs.

[Time skip noise.]

Alabaster Zero: Ooh, I really miss my car right now. Traffic or no.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, and I sort of wish I'd spoken up when I thought this magic was a bad idea.

Abacus: And I've realized that living without magic or machines is very difficult. So we should appreciate what we have. I said, so we should appreciate what we haaaave...

Fred the Dog: Why are you just calling out to the swamp like that?

Alabaster Zero: We just ate all the bugs, I don't know who would be listening.

Abacus: I'm showing that we learned our lesson, and that should break the curse. Yes, I can feel myself changing. [Ribbit burp.] Okay, no, that was just a burp.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, I think we should find some shelter for the night.

Alabaster Zero: Maybe we'll solve this curse mystery tomorrow.

Mr. Eric: And the three of them huddled together that night under a little stone outcropping, looking out for owls and snakes and any other predators that might make a meal out of them.

Abacus: [Snoring] Ribbit... ribbit... ribbit...

Fred the Dog: Mm... yummy bugs...

Alabaster Zero: Uhh, solve this mystery and look cool doing it.

[Time skip noise.]

Mr. Eric: The next morning, Abacus leapt out of bed.

Abacus: And with morning's light, they were... exactly the same. I don't get it. We learned our lesson.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, but the Queen of Frogs made there be no magic.

Abacus: I don't see your point.

Alabaster Zero: Well, in a world without magic, learning your lesson might not magically set everything back to normal.

Abacus: Ridiculous!

Fred the Dog: No, Abacus, un-ridiculous.

Abacus: Un-ridiculous?

Mr. Eric: And as they leapt out from their little stone shelter, their stomachs grumbling, their long tongues ready to eat some bugs, they peered through a haze of steam to see...

Abacus: Oh, dear.

Fred the Dog: Abacus, is that your volcano?

Alabaster Zero: I thought we stopped that spell.

Abacus: Well, I guess I already halfway cast it.

Mr. Eric: And indeed, as the haze cleared, they realized that the entire pond had dried up around one fiery little volcano that seemed to be bubbling and trickling lava that slowly burned and sizzled its way through the damp swamp.

Fred the Dog: Oh, great. You scared away all the bugs, Abacus.

Abacus: Oh, great, oh, now I see. We've just got to save the day.

Alabaster Zero: Excuse me?

Abacus: Yes, it was the other part of the what if question, don't you remember?

Alabaster Zero: The what if what?

Fred the Dog: Oh no, um, Professor Grumbler?

Abacus: What?

Fred the Dog: Alabaster doesn't know about the whole what if question thing.

Alabaster Zero: I know about what if questions, I just don't know what you guys are talking about.

Abacus: You don't think we can tell him?

Fred the Dog: I think it would break his brain to know that this is an imaginary world and that the questions that kids ask affect the world around us and we really have very little control over what we say and do.

Alabaster Zero: Aaah! What are you talking about?

Fred the Dog: I should have whispered that.

Alabaster Zero: I'm fiction? [Whimpers]

Abacus: Okay, okay, so now we can save the day by unbreaking Alabaster's brain.

Fred the Dog: I don't know if we have time for that, look!

Mr. Eric: And the bubbling of the little volcano was starting to speed up into an all-out eruption.

Abacus: How are we going to help our friend and save the swamp—

Fred the Dog: And also not get lava-ed.

Abacus: And also not get lava-ed when we're stuck as frogs without magic?

Alabaster Zero: I mean, does it really matter?

Fred the Dog: Come on, Detective Zero, we need your help.

Alabaster Zero: No, you just need a kid to ask a what if question. It doesn't matter what I do [whimpers].

Abacus: That's it!

Mr. Eric: Cried Abacus, even as the heat of the lava caused the whole swamp to smoke and smolder.

Abacus: Even when you feel like you have no control, you can still choose what you do.

Fred the Dog: Oh, that's gotta be the lesson.

Alabaster Zero: You're right, Abacus. And I choose to cower here in fear and wait for some kid's what if question to save me. [Ribbit].

Fred the Dog: Oh, we're gonna croak. Cr-ribbit.

Mr. Eric: And so our three would be heroes waited for your question to help save the day. The end... for now.

[Falling harp scale.]

All right, Edison and June, I hope you enjoyed your story. I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator, Craig Martinson for our theme song, and all you kids at home who know that even without magic, you are capable of amazing things.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]