

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 150: What if imagination was good?](#)

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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 if you haven't listened to episode 149, this story might make a little less sense than usual. But to catch you up quickly: Fred, Alabaster, and Abacus got turned into frogs who are stuck in a swamp without any magic.

Fred the Dog: Oh, and it's tough being a frog, I've got to say. But not so tough that I can't give a shout out to Sunny and Vinny of Mesa, Arizona.

Mr. Eric: Oh, thank you, Fred. But, you'd better get back to the story.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, I'm going, I'm going. Ribbbit.

Randall Radbot: Excuse me, Mr. Eric, boop.

Mr. Eric: Randall Radbot, I hardly ever see you in the studio.

Randall Radbot: Well, I'm really psyched today because I get to give an electric shout out to River. He loves to play beep boop baseball and he's from Minneapolis.

Mr. Eric: Well, thank you, River and Sunny and Vinny. Now we got lots of question called in that applied to today's story and we're going to play the first half of Elle's question right now.

Elle: Hi, my name is Elle and I like horses. My what if question is what if Fred the Dog convinced Alabaster Zero that imagination is good? Thank you, I love your show.

Mr. Eric: Well, thank you, Elle. And another friend Ellis wrote a question about unicorns which are a kind of horse, I think. So thanks to Ellis for the unicorns and cowfolk you'll meet in this story. And a final thanks to a patron named Silas, who basically imagined the entire end of the tale. But I don't want to spoil it for you. So let's just find out what if Fred the Dog convinced Alabaster Zero that imagination is good.

Fred the Dog: Oh, geez, I gotta get going.

Mr. Eric: Seeya, Fred.

Fred the Dog: Bye!

[Rising harp scale.]

[Intense lava noises!]

Mr. Eric: The volcano continued to erupt in the middle of the swamp.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, what if question make me do what I do and nothing I do matters.

Fred the Dog: That's not true, Alabaster.

Abacus: Well, it's partly true but you can still control what you do.

Alabaster Zero: But what does it even matter?

Mr. Eric: Lamented Alabaster as a bubble of lava popped, sending a splash of the deadly stuff toward them.

Alabaster Zero: Look out!

Mr. Eric: Cried the detective. And despite being transformed into a frog, he was able to grab Fred and Abacus with his little froggy arms and leap away at the last second before lava burnt up the log they'd been sitting on.

Fred the Dog: See, you just saved us from that lava without anyone asking a what if question.

Alabaster Zero: Yeah, I just did that because I'm afraid of being melted.

Abacus: Oh, speaking of which, that lava river, it's steering itself toward a burrow.

Mr. Eric: And the three frogs leapt over to evacuate the burrow.

[Knocking]

Alabaster Zero: Hello, anyone in there? Well, if you are, you shouldn't be.

Mr. Eric: And a lady snake slithered her way halfway out the hole.

Snake: Sorry, snack time is over. I'm not hungry for frog delivery.

Fred the Dog: What, do you think we're coming here because we want you to eat us?

Snake: Sounds like a typical frog move.

Abacus: No, we're here because there's a volcano erupting in the swamp so you've got to get yourself and your family out of here.

Snake: Volcano in the swamp? Impossible. Haven't you heard? Magic doesn't exist anymore.

Mr. Eric: And the little snake slithered its way backwards into its burrow.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, for crying out loud. We can't even save a snake!

Fred the Dog: Maybe we can if we try.

Mr. Eric: And Fred stretched out his long tongue and scooped out a pathway full of dirt, diverting the little stream of lava away from the burrow.

Abacus: Oh, it won't last long but it bought us some time. Now if we could just find some magic...

Fred the Dog: Listen, you two. I'm from What IS World originally, and in What Is World, we accomplish magical things without any magic all the time.

Alabaster Zero: I can't imagine that's true.

Fred the Dog: Well, that's just how they do it. With imagination and hard work.

Abacus: Are you trying to say imagination can be stronger than magic? Please.

Fred the Dog: They've explained the mysteries of the universe with math.

Alabaster Zero: Ugh, boring.

Fred the Dog: They can cure diseases, build skyscrapers. Make 40 seasons of *Survivor* in only 20 years.

Alabaster Zero: Impossible!

Abacus: Impossible!

Fred the Dog: And no matter how bad their world gets, the people of What Is World can get together and make a difference.

Alabaster Zero: Can they also argue among themselves while their home is literally burning around them?

Fred the Dog: I mean, yeah, but you can't listen to those people.

Abacus: I think what he's saying is our home is pretty on fire right now.

Mr. Eric: Lava was flooding in all around them. They were standing atop a cluster of rocks where the little snake lived, so they were safe for now. But even it was starting to sizzle, and farther off, the heat of the lava was causing trees and vegetation to smoke and sputter and set on fire.

Alabaster Zero: Come on, Fred. You think we can really imagine our way out of this?

Fred the Dog: Even as we speak, families all over What Is World are imagining thousands of ways we could get out of this.

Abacus: And hundreds of ways we could all get melted by lava.

Fred the Dog: That's really not helpful right now, Abacus.

Snake: Still here, you three? Listen, I'm trying to watch my cave wall in peace. It's the premier of season 40 of *Perfect Stillness*.

Abacus: 40 seasons you say? I suppose it must be worth watching, then.

Alabaster Zero: How can you watch your cave wall at a time like this?

Mr. Eric: The two frogs and the snake bickered amongst themselves while Fred the frog looked around at the burning swamp.

Fred the Dog: Okay, you three. It's time you see the power of imagination.

Mr. Eric: And Fred stretched out his tongue, a tongue that thousands of children had imagined getting longer and longer over the years and so even without magic, his tongue was long and strong enough to stretch itself between two trees, grab Alabaster Zero, pull itself back like a pink, slimy sling shot.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, Fred, what are you doing?

Fred the Dog: I'm saving your life, Alabaster.

Mr. Eric: Said Fred, having even more trouble talking than usual, and-[TWANG]--Fred flung the frog detective far, far off. Then Fred scooped up Abacus.

Abacus: Now, see here. I will not be used as ammunition for a tongue sling-shot!

Fred the Dog: Too late!

Mr. Eric: And off flew Abacus the frog.

Snake: Serves them right, disturbing my peaceful-

Fred the Dog: Yeah, sorry. I gotta save you, too.

Snake: A snake saved by a frog? I'll never live it down.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, but at least you'll live!

Mr. Eric: And Fred watched the snake fly off into the distance.

Fred the Dog: Okay, [coughs] who else needs saving? President Fred the Frog here, at your service.

Mr. Eric: Fred hopped around, slingshotting every little swamp creature to safety. His eyes stung, his tongue was scorched at the edges, the smoke and the fire were just getting worse.

Fred the Dog: Oh, I wish I could slingshot myself.

Mr. Eric: As the old dog of a frog coughed and hacked, he heard the distant thundering of hooves and he saw something impossible. Letters written in the sky, spelling out...

Fred the Dog: Hold... on... Fred... [coughs]. I'll try.

[Time skip noise.]

Alabaster Zero: EEEEWWWWWW...

Mr. Eric: Cried Alabaster as he was flung out of the swamp and landed in a soft, billowy sweater?

Lola: Hey, Dracomax, you caught a frog! Look, it's a pretty cute frog with really nice dark sunglasses and a trenchcoat. Do frogs really need to wear sunglasses and trenchcoats?

Mr. Eric: Alabaster the frog had landed in the sweaters, soft wings of Dracomax, who seemed to be half hopping, half flying alongside his little friend Lola Rabbit.

Alabaster Zero: Dracomax, thank goodness I found you. I need you to use your magic breath to put out all the fire.

Lola: Dracomax's magic breath doesn't actually work anymore.

Dracomax: That is not entirely true. I still have my original breath weapon.

Alabaster Zero: What's the original breath weapon?

Dracomax: Well, spit, of course.

Alabaster Zero: Ooh... we can work with that.

Lola: I can spit, too! [Spitting noises]

Alabaster Zero: Save it for the swamp, Lola Rabbit.

Dracomax: Yes! Everyone shall need our spit.

Mr. Eric: And the dragon, the rabbit, and the frog, hopped toward the swamp.

[Time skip noise.]

Abacus P. Grumbler spoke to no one in particular as his froggy form flew through the skies.

Abacus: How could he think that launching me thousands of feet into the air would do anything other than smooch me?

Mr. Eric: But just before the frog hit the ground a lasso snatched him out of the air.

Abacus: Candy the Kid? Whendiana Joan?

Candy the Kid: That's right.

Mr. Eric: Said Candy the Kid.

Candy the Kid: We're riding to save the swamp.

Mr. Eric: The cotton candy cowboy and What If World's most daring explorer were riding a pair of unicorns full tilt towards the swamp.

Abacus: But how are you supposed to save the swamp without magic.

Whendiana Joan: Well, everything that was ever imagined for us still has some of its power.

Mr. Eric: Said Whendiana Joan.

Hernosity: Yes, our unicorn horns still have a little magic left.

Mr. Eric: Offered Hernosity the unicorn.

Candy the Kid: And our stick shooters still have plenty of ammo.

Mr. Eric: Said Candy the Kid.

Abacus: Well, you know what they say. Sticks and horn can break and be torn... especially by a volcano!

[Record scratch.]

Mr. Eric: Said Abacus, but the cowfolk rode on on their unicorns.

Whendiana Joan: Well, we also have our spell lassos.

Mr. Eric: Said Whendiana, swinging her lasso with great competence.

Abacus: Oh, what spells?

Candy the Kid: Well, the lasso spell.

Abacus: Yes, but which spells.

Whendiana Joan: Oh, they can spell anything you like.

Abacus: Oh, I think I can see where this is going...

Mr. Eric: And the two lassos whipped into the air spelling "Oh, I see where this is going."

Abacus: That's not the kind of spell I was hoping for, but it does give me an idea.

[Time skip noise.]

Mr. Eric: Fred the Dog was practically sizzling on his rock, too tired to hop away. And as those words "Hold on Fred" seemed to get closer, he saw that they were being spelled in the sky by some kind of rope.

[Unicorns galloping]

Fred the Dog: I'm here...

Mr. Eric: Fred the Frog tried to say, but it came out as only a croak.

Fred the Dog: Oooh...

Mr. Eric: A chunk of fiery stone rocketed toward Fred, who couldn't even bring himself to move, when...

Dracomax: I've got you, little president!

Mr. Eric: A massive dragon with sweaters for wings stepped in front of the flaming stone, blocking it with his body.

Dracomax: Ouch.

Alabaster Zero: Way to go, Dracomax.

Lola: You did it! You did it! You did it! Oh... your wings are on fire.

Mr. Eric: Alabaster Zero and Lola Rabbit helped the dragon take off its sweater wings before they could burn up.

Alabaster Zero: All right, Fred. It's time to get you out of here.

Mr. Eric: And the thundering hooves finally arrived, Abacus riding double behind Whendiana Joan.

Fred the Dog: Why are you all here? I just saved you. Now your gonna get burnt up by lava.

Whendiana Joan: Why don't you let us save you this time, Fred.

Mr. Eric: And Whendiana and Candy the Kid raised their stick shooters and blasted a whole tree's worth of sticks at Fred the Frog.

Fred the Dog: I've been eating bugs for so long I forgot how much I love sticks...

Mr. Eric: And Fred the Frog started gumming up the sticks with gusto as Dracomax curled around the big cluster of rock, protecting them all from fire. And Candy the Kid and Whendiana flung out their lassos toward the volcano, spelling out, "Cease and desist!"

Candy the Kid: I don't think this volcano can read.

Mr. Eric: And so the lassos spelled out, "Oh, forget it!" And then the ropes tried to tighten over the mouth of the volcano.

Lola: Okay, Dracomax, it's time!

Mr. Eric: Said Lola Rabbit, and she and the great dragon [spitting noises] spat out the kind of spit you're never supposed to make at home, or really anywhere. I mean, it was gross. But the great dragon spat out so, so much that it started cooling the lava.

Alabaster Zero: Wow, I can't believe that worked.

Abacus: Me, neither. It was like magic.

Mr. Eric: And as the steam of the cooling lava dispersed, they saw Fred the Frog standing straight and tall, having somehow eaten the entire pile of sticks.

Whendiana Joan: Well, you're safe, Fred.

Mr. Eric: Said Whendiana Joan.

Whendiana Joan: But I gotta say, this swamp's seen better days. And they looked around to see blackened trees, scorched vines, and nothing but volcanic rock where the pond used to stretch.

Abacus: Well, we saved the day... so that should finally reverse this curse? Turn us back to normal. Restore magic to What If World. Oh, come on, Queen of Frogs, help us out here.

Alabaster Zero: I don't even think she can get here until magic is restored.

Fred the Dog: Listen, Abacus, Alabaster, Whendiana, Lola, and Candy the Kid. You may have saved me, but the people of this swamp still need our help so come lick some of this volcanic rock candy with us.

[Record scratch.]

Candy the Kid: Volcanic rock candy?

Mr. Eric: Asked Candy the Kid.

Fred the Dog: Oh yes, but it can't talk and it's not cotton candy, so you can eat it.

Dracomax: I think he is just surprised that it is candy at all.

Mr. Eric: Said Dracomax.

Abacus: What, do you think I was going to summon a volcano and not have its lava taste like candy when it cools?

Lola: But there's just so much of it and there's only a handful of us.

Mr. Eric: Just then, they heard the hiss of a den of snakes approaching, led by that little snake they'd saved from her burrow. The vast gathering of snakes spread out over the volcanic rock candy and started licking it away.

Snake: You saved our lives, but we can help save our swamp.

Mr. Eric: And people from all across What If World gathered over the course of the next week, licking, chewing, and biting away that volcanic rock candy one chunk at a time. Of course, Fred the Frog was their best licker by far.

[Time skip noise.]

Fred the Dog: Oh, my stomach hurts, and my tongue hurts, which I never even thought was possible.

Mr. Eric: And Fred the Frog licked up the very last piece of lava candy from the now hollowed out volcano.

Fred the Dog: Oh, I never thought I could get sick of candy...

Abacus: Fred, look!

Alabaster Zero: Whoa....

Mr. Eric: Under the last bit of cooled lava, they saw what looked like a little frog-headed Pez dispenser.

Abacus: That is the magic wand of the Queen of Frogs!

Mr. Eric: Said Abacus, hopping over to pick it up.

Alabaster Zero: Finally we can set everything back to normal.

Fred the Dog: And maybe help me lose some of this candy weight, ooh.

Mr. Eric: But Abacus's frown grew even deeper than usual when he picked up the wand.

Abacus: Oh, dear.

Whendiana Joan: What is it, Abacus?

Candy the Kid: Yeah, don't sugarcoat it.

Abacus: This wand might be the only true magic left in What If World and it's only enough for one spell.

Fred the Dog: Oh, of course.

Dracomax: Well, you do not have to use it to get me unstuck from this volcano.

Mr. Eric: Said Dracomax.

Dracomax: Because I am sure I would just get stuck here, again.

Fred the Dog: Well, you should turn yourself back, Abacus. Because you're a wizard so then maybe you'll have some magic.

Abacus: I don't think it works that way.

Alabaster Zero: You know what, Professor Grumbler?

Mr. Eric: Said Alabaster.

Alabaster Zero: You just use that magic however you want because it wasn't magic that saved the day, here. It was imagination and hard work.

Candy the Kid: And eating lots of candy.

Lola: And eating so much candy, oh my gosh, I'm never gonna come down from this sugar high! That was a really bad idea! I need a carrot. I really, really need a carrot.

Mr. Eric: Dracomax lifted them all up so they could leave the hollowed out volcano and look around the swamp, free of lava, but still in really rough shape.

Fred the Dog: Are you thinking what I'm thinking, Professor?

Abacus: Indubitably, Fred.

Mr. Eric: And the old wizardly frog raised the wand up high. That night, everyone who'd worked so hard finally got to celebrate in a lush swamp that had magically regrown. You could hear the sounds of cowfolk, dragons, rabbits, snakes, and unicorns all celebrating, along with their three little friends who were still frogs sitting on a log.

Abacus: What!

Fred the Dog: If!

Alabaster Zero: World!

Mr. Eric: The end.

[Falling harp scale.]

All right, Elle, Silas, and Ellis, I hope you enjoyed your story. And thank you to Helen, Olivia, Holden, and Katherine, who all submitted volcano-related ideas that helped us shape it. I know three of our most popular characters are still frogs, and magic is still technically not around so stick with us through the next few stories.

I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator, Craig Martinson for our theme song, my mother-in-law Liz, for watching baby Callum while I edited this story, and all you kids at home who know that it's possible to help others, no matter how small you are, just as long as you don't go running towards a volcano.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]