

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 173: The Wholympics!](#)

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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've got a question from a patron named Kanen.
- Kanen: Hello, my name is Kanen. I'm eight years old, I like sea creatures, and my What If question is what if narwhals could fly and had flying jousting tournaments?
- Mr. Eric: Kanen, I love narwhals. I want to thank you and your sister Pompeiia and I also want to get one more question for you all. This one's for a listener named Charlotte, and it involves mermaids. But I think it's best if we leave this question to the end.
- JF Kitty: You're leaving us more time for our meow outs!
- Mr. Eric: Hey, J.F. Kat. Who do we have, today?
- JF Kitty: First we've got Hamish. I'm his favorite character. And then there's Kellan, who is nine!
- Fair Elise: Fair Elise here to shout out Maribel.
- Fred the Dog: Ooh, ooh, ooh, and I've got a big woof woof for Elliott and his little brother named Crosby. Then I got a shout out for Toven, who is eight years old.
- Dracomax: And one final shout out for Sunny. Thank you for being so patient, Sunny.
- Mr. Eric: Thank you Sunny, Toven, Crosby, Elliott, Maribel, Kellan, and Hamish.

Now let's find out what if narwhals could fly and had flying jousting tournaments as well as Charlotte's secret question about mermaids.

[Rising harp scale.]

- Poppa Loo: Well, hi and howdy everybody. It's Poppa Loo, welcoming you to a very special edition of Poppa Loo's News: Wholympics edition!
- Mamma Jamma: Oh, Poppa Loo, they don't know what the Wholympics are.
- Poppa Loo: Frankly, I don't know, either.
- Mamma Jamma: Okay, hi. I'm Mamma Jamma, your cohost, and we really wanted to have some sporting events in What If World where people could properly social distance.
- Poppa Loo: So we decided to do the Wholympics under the sea.
- Mamma Jamma: So everyone can wear masks and SCUBA gear...
- Poppa Loo: And take turns competing one at a time.
- Mamma Jamma: I know sports look a little different these days, and so do the Wholympics. I don't know any of these people.
- Mr. Eric: Mamma Jamma and Poppa Loo were sitting in a booth together far under the sea. Each of them was wearing a pressurized suit with a big globe over their head so they could see all the action of the Wholympics.
- Poppa Loo: Poppa Loo here interrupting Mr. Eric [Record scratch.] to remind him that we don't need a third announcer today, thank you very much.
- Mr. Eric: Oh, I'm sorry. Is this one of those stories where I don't narrate?
- Mamma Jamma: Mr. Eric, shush! This is a big opportunity for Poppa Loo.
- Poppa Loo: Now, we've got dozens of events taking place over the next several weeks, but today we're gonna focus on the three, flying jousts, hide and seek, and of course, ninja star throwing.
- Mamma Jamma: Now, Poppa Loo, would you mind telling the folks at home some of the events that they won't be seeing today?
- Poppa Loo: Uh, sure, yeah. Sure thing. There's synchronized swimming, and then there's ice hockey.
- Mamma Jamma: Underwater ice hockey?

Poppa Loo: Yeah, well, the puck is ice and you gotta score before it floats to the... can we not talk about this right now?

Mamma Jamma: Oh, I'm sorry. I was just trying to give you a chance to show off all your knowledge.

Poppa Loo: Well, I haven't read about the rest of the events yet. But I promise you folks, I will when we get to them.

Mamma Jamma: You had the whole submarine ride to study but instead you took a nap.

Poppa Loo: Haha! Well, let's stay focused!

Mr. Eric: While Mamma Jamma and Poppa Loo—

Mamma Jamma: Of course I'm focused!

Mr. Eric: Work out whatever's happening in the booth, I'm going to tell you about something the announcers can't see, and that's Mariah Caring, who's having a video call on her shell phone with her father, King Whiton and her best friend, Cindy Crawdad.

Mariah: I think the Wholympics are a great idea.

Mr. Eric: Said Mariah, seeing Cindy Crawdad nod along.

King Whiton: Oh, sure, it's great to give people something to watch, but who's to stop one of these competitors from sneaking into a different event by wearing a costume or a mask?

Mr. Eric: Objected King Whiton.

Cindy: I don't know, that sounds really fun to me.

Mr. Eric: Said Cindy Crawdad.

Mariah: And people should get to compete in any event they can qualify for, Dad.

King Whiton: Why bother? An octopus is always going to win ninja star throwing, and a plankton's always gonna win hide and seek, and a narwhal's always gonna—

Cindy: No, I disagree. I think that's a silly tradition and maybe the Wholympics will mean a little bit of change for the better.

Mariah: I agree with Cindy.

Mr. Eric: Said Mariah, but she sounded kind of far away. And Cindy and King Whiton couldn't see her on the shell phone anymore.

King Whiton: Daughter, where have you gone to? The first event's about to start.

Mariah: I'm just working on my dinner. But I've got it on the eelovision, so don't worry. I won't miss a thing.

Mr. Eric: King Whiton and Cindy Crawdad shrugged and turned to watch their own eelovisions in their own homes. A big electric eel rested on each of their walls in a roughly ovular shape. And when it lit up its electricity just so, they could catch the broadcast from Poppa Loo and Mamma Jamma.

Poppa Loo: So, let's enjoy our first Wholympic event, hide and seek.

Mamma Jamma: Oh yeah. You know, so many undersea creatures are really good at camouflage.

Poppa Loo: And some of them are just plain microscopic, but no one hides from the judge Sharkgator forever.

Mamma Jamma: No, that shark's got a nose on him. He can sniff you out anywhere in the galaxy.

Poppa Loo: Sharkgator slapped his tail fins over his eyes and is starting the count down.

Sharkgator: [Very slowly counting.] Ten... nine... eight... seven... did I say eight yet?

Poppa Loo: Folks at home, it's important to remember that Sharkgator is an extremely old megalodon.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, he's prehistoric.

Poppa Loo: And he may have the greatest nose under the sea but he still does things on his own time.

Sharkgator: [Breathing] Nine...

Mamma Jamma: Oh, he's counting back up.

Mr. Eric: All the tiniest creatures with the best camouflage under the sea went and hid under rocks and shells, within reefs...

Poppa Loo: Mr. Eric, I'm doing the commentary here!

Mr. Eric: Ooh, yep, oh, I'm sorry.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, there's some little plankton, or krill or something. I don't know. They're really tiny.

Poppa Loo: Yes, and some tiny crabs scuttling away, too.

Mamma Jamma: There's an octopus changing colors to blend into the rocks.

Poppa Loo: And a giant lobster appears to be burying herself. Really seems like too big of a lobster to be competing in this event.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, you've got to be world-class hider in order to qualify.

Poppa Loo: Sure, sure. But just look at the cloud of seadust that's rising where the lobster.

Mamma Jamma: Sea... dust? Is that what really what you call it?

Poppa Loo: I don't know. It's like a cloud of sand in the air, it looks like. Dust in the—

Sharkgator: Two and a half... one... ready or not... here I come.

Poppa Loo: In a surprise move, Sharkgator skipped both two and one and a half.

Mamma Jamma: Trying to catch our Wholympics competitors off guard, no doubt.

Poppa Loo: But will it work? Uh-oh, Sharkgator is sniffing towards the cloud of undersea dust.

Mamma Jamma: We really should work on a better term for that.

Sharkgator: I find your lack of hiding place disturbing.

Poppa Loo: And with that, the lobster lady pops up. She's coming in dead last.

Mamma Jamma: But wait... that's not a lobster lady at all.

Poppa Loo: My goodness. Mamma Jamma, you're right. Her red crustaceous tail has slipped off to reveal what appears to be something akin to a mermaid's tail?

Mamma Jamma: Have mermaids ever competed in hide and seek?

Poppa Loo: Not to my knowledge, no. These Wholympic events are truly something for the history books.

Mamma Jamma: There she goes, swimming off before the rest of her lobster disguise can fall.

[Time skip noise.]

- King Whiton: Did you see that, daughter? A merfolk competing in hide and seek. How... untraditional.
- Mr. Eric: Mariah Caring shook her head.
- Mariah: Well, she came in dead last, so... I suppose she didn't prove anything.
- Cindy: Shh! The next event's gonna start.
- King Whiton: Mariah, where'd you head off, too.
- Mariah: Oh, I'm just using the restroom. I can hear the whole event, don't worry.
- Poppa Loo: Now here's an event that dates back to the middle ages.
- Mamma Jamma: Oh, but those narwhal jousts were so unsafe.
- Poppa Loo: Well, that's why these narwhals wear heavily fortified armor and they cork their horns to boot.
- Mamma Jamma: Now, Poppa Loo, can these narwhals actually fly or is it that they're just shooting way way way up in the sky and falling down while they joust?
- Poppa Loo: No, it says here, according to Kanen's what if question that these narwhals can, in fact, fly. They just can't fly for very long, so... half of the joust happens while they fall back down toward the sea.
- Mamma Jamma: Okay, folks, get out our binoculars, unless you're watching from home...
- Poppa Loo: They're all watching from home, Mamma Jamma, that's like the whole point of the Wholympics.
- Mamma Jamma: Oh, you.
- Poppa Loo: And off they go, our two jousters. Norman Narwhal, our reigning champion...
- Mamma Jamma: And a presumably fresh-faced newcomer, though we can't see their face because they're wearing black knight armor from head to toe.
- Poppa Loo: The narwhals are zooming towards the surface at lightning speed.
- Mamma Jamma: Whoever's able to fly up the highest into the sky has a big advantage in an aerial narwhal joust.

Poppa Loo: Oh, huge.

Mamma Jamma: Uh-oh... our black narwhal knight seems to be losing some of the lower half of their armor.

Poppa Loo: Revealing a fishy fin... sort of like that of a merperson!

Mamma Jamma: [Gasps] You don't think it could be the mermaid from hide and seek?

Poppa Loo: I don't know... traditionally merfolk have only competed in the karaoke portion of the competition.

Mamma Jamma: But these are the Wholympics. Who knows what could happen.

Poppa Loo: And they're flying up into the sky. Higher and higher they go.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, but not so high for our merknight.

Poppa Loo: Merfolk can't fly as high as narwhals, that's for sure. And as Normal Narwhal descends upon our dark knight, mysterious knight is defending themselves with a lance that looks a lot like a narwhal tooth.

Mamma Jamma: It must have been part of their disguise.

Poppa Loo: Oh, and there goes the lance...

Mamma Jamma: And there goes the merperson.

Poppa Loo: I can't imagine the judges are gonna give them a very good rank.

Mamma Jamma: I still think it's amazing. That person must be one of the greatest merfolk swimmers in the whole ocean to even qualify for this event.

Poppa Loo: Folks at home, what do you think? Are you impressed by a merperson who can practically fly out of the water?

Mamma Jamma: Or do you think they've got no business jousting with narwhals?

[Time skip noise.]

King Whiton: They've got no business jousting with narwhals.

Mr. Eric: Exclaimed King Whiton.

King Whiton: In the olden days, we would ride narwhals into battle. Now we're losing to them in the Wholympics? It's an embarrassment to all of merfolk. Don't you agree, Mariah.

Mariah: Ah, yeah, they probably didn't have much of a chance.

Mr. Eric: Sighed Mariah Caring.

Cindy: I'll tell you what. You two are being a couple of old fuddy-duddies! One of your own people just did something that no merfolk has ever done and all you can do is complain.

Mr. Eric: Cindy Crawdad scolded the two merpeople, who did, in fact, look ashamed for a moment.

Mariah: I'll admit, I think the disguises are pretty cool.

King Whiton: Oh, no. The disguises are the worst part for me. Who does this merfolk think they are? Some kind of merninja?

Mariah: Well, Dad, I used to want to be a merninja.

King Whiton: You are merroyalty, and we merpeople aren't meant to be sneaking about like ninjas.

Cindy: Oh hush, King Whiton. Can't believe you talk that way to your own daughter.

King Whiton: What way? I know what's best for my own daughter. Daughter? Where'd she go off to, again?

Mariah: Oh, nowhere, Dad. I'm just dusting. But don't worry. I can still see the next event.

King Whiton: Dusting... what has gotten into you?

[Time skip noise.]

Mamma Jamma: What's gotten into me? What's gotten into you? I'm just excited for the next event.

Poppa Loo: And indeed, our final competition for the day is about to commence.

Mamma Jamma: Ninja starfish throwing. And here comes five time gold medal thrower, Squidarella.

Poppa Loo: Squidarella, can I please get an autograph?

Mamma Jamma: Oh, she's turning toward the booth. I think she heard you.

Poppa Loo: Finally, some fringe benefits to this gig–

Mamma Jamma: And she threw a starfish on your face.

Poppa Loo: I've just had my brush with greatness. I'll never wash this glass globe over my head again.

Mamma Jamma: Can you see anything at all?

Poppa Loo: No, I certainly cannot.

Mamma Jamma: Okay, while you work on that, various cephalopods from all over the ocean are taking turns picking up their starfish and tossing them.

Poppa Loo: Ninja starfish throwing is judged on three criteria.

Mamma Jamma: Number of starfish thrown, accuracy, and originality. That's why it's always a squid or an octopus who wins.

Poppa Loo: Now, people have been complaining this year that the starfish are weighted differently.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, they must have been eating a lot of coral this year. They're so fluffy and squishy-looking.

Poppa Loo: Let's see if it affects Squidarella's performance. Oh, it doesn't look like it. She's thrown 80 sea stars, drawing a picture of her own face right around the bullseye.

Mamma Jamma: Did you just call them sea stars?

Poppa Loo: Well, they technically aren't fish. I was just mixing things up.

Mamma Jamma: No, I like it. Sea stars. It's so glamorous.

Poppa Loo: And what kind of tentacled creature is this?

Mamma Jamma: Well, the answer to this question is usually Cthunkle, but the—oh, who is that?

Poppa Loo: A mysterious masked cephalopod is picking up their starfish.

Mamma Jamma: Sea stars.

Poppa Loo: Whatever.

Mamma Jamma: Strangely, they only picked up two sea stars.

Poppa Loo: And even stranger, it looks like they just have two arms, with three tentacles attached by string to each arm.

Mamma Jamma: Oh my goodness. That is no squid-o-pus, and there they go!

Poppa Loo: Amazing. With only two arms, they managed to throw 20 starfish.

Mamma Jamma: Or sea stars.

Poppa Loo: Spiraling out in from the bullseye in a perfect swirly pattern. I gotta say, I don't think I've ever been so impressed.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, an octopus just threw 100 starfish writing a haiku around the bullseye.

Poppa Loo: "I can throw starfish with pinpoint accuracy. I am the winner." That's young Octavia Octopus, sure to win the gold.

Mamma Jamma: If not the Nobel Prize for poetry.

Poppa Loo: Ah, boy. Our mysterious competitor appears frustrated.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, they're ripping off their squid-o-pus costume.

Poppa Loo: Revealing a mermaid underneath. You don't think—

Mamma Jamma: Could it be?

Poppa Loo: It's the same mermaid.

Mamma Jamma: It's the same merperson-maid.

Poppa Loo: She's still wearing a ninja mask beneath her disguise so there's no way to know who she might be.

Mr. Eric: And while a dozen other tentacled creatures competed in ninja sea star throwing, at the end of the day, it was Octavia, Squidarella, and our mysterious mermaid...

Poppa Loo: For the last time, Mr. Eric. Let me do my job! [Record scratch.]

Mamma Jamma: Mr. Eric, you're being so rude!

Mr. Eric: I am so sorry. I was just trying to get us to the end.

[Falling harp scale.]

Poppa Loo: Oh, no no no no no no! Hey. He didn't say the end as in the end of the story, he just happened to be saying those two words together.

Mamma Jamma: Please don't ruin this for Poppa Loo.

Mr. Eric: I totally take it back. Today, you can say the—

Poppa Loo: [Stammers]

Mr. Eric: That the story is over when it happens to come to a conclusion.

Mamma Jamma: Well said, Mr. Eric.

Poppa Loo: And as we predicted, Octavia Octopus wins the gold.

Mamma Jamma: Squidarella walks away with silver.

Poppa Loo: And defying all expectations, our first vertebrate competitor in this category wins the bronze.

Mamma Jamma: Her family must be so proud.

[Time skip noise.]

King Whiton: I am so not proud of whoever that merlady is. What must her parents be thinking?

Cindy: But if they're supportive.

Mr. Eric: Said Cindy Crawdad, clacking her pincers at King Whiton through the shell phone.

Cindy: Then I'm sure her parents are quite amazed.

Mariah: No, I'm sure they're not. Third place...

Mr. Eric: And Mariah Caring plunked down in front of the shell phone screen in a huff.

Cindy: Mariah... I think you've got something on your face.

Mariah: Oh, it's just my mask.

King Whiton: Mariah...

Mr. Eric: King Whiton and Cindy Crawdad were staring at their shell phones, wide-eyed. Mariah was still wearing her ninja mask!

King Whiton: It was you?

Mr. Eric: Said King Whiton in disbelief.

Mariah: I've told you I always wanted to be a ninja. Well, now you know I'm a failure.

King Whiton: I'm afraid that I have been a failure. I should have supported you and seen why this was important.

Poppa Loo: King Whiton, having a reconciliation scene over a shell phone.

Mamma Jamma: A very difficult maneuver.

Mr. Eric: Hey, wait. How are you two seeing this? This isn't part of the Wholympics.

Mamma Jamma: Shh, Mr. Eric.

Poppa Loo: You owe me this one, Bubbo.

Mr. Eric: Okay, okay.

King Whiton: You managed to qualify for and compete in three Wholympic events without your father or best friends suspecting a thing.

Cindy: Well, I actually suspected from the very beginning. You know, I mean, a mermaid was appearing at the Wholympics every time Mariah suddenly stepped away from the screen.

Poppa Loo: Cindy Crawdad dunking on King Whiton.

Mamma Jamma: I mean, really he was pretty oblivious this whole story.

Mariah: Are you saying I could be a ninja?

King Whiton: I'm saying... you clearly already are a ninja.

Mr. Eric: And while Mariah Caring didn't win any gold medals that day—

Mamma Jamma: Ch-ch-ch-ch-ch!

Mr. Eric: Oh, I hear it. Go ahead, Poppa Loo. You got it.

Poppa Loo: And while Mariah Caring didn't win any gold medals that day, she proved to all the people under the sea—

Mamma Jamma: That merpeople—

Poppa Loo: But all sea creatures, really...

Mamma Jamma: That they don't have to feel limited by traditions or expectations.

Poppa Loo: I was gonna say it's just really hard to fly while wearing armor. That wasn't the point of this story?

Mamma Jamma: Poppa Loo... maybe it's time to say uh, those two words?

Poppa Loo: Those two words?

Mamma Jamma: No, remember the words, the two words that you didn't want Mr. Eric to say earlier.

Poppa Loo: Oh, right, right, right. Keep wondering.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, boy.

Poppa Loo: Oh, no no no no. Be wondering. No. Keep ending! That's it.

[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: All right Charlotte and Kanen, I hope you enjoyed your story. And let's play Charlotte's question for you real quick.

Charlotte: This is Charlotte and I like mermaids and unicorns and what if a mermaid was a ninja but no one else thought she could be a ninja? Thank you, bye!

Mr. Eric: Well, Mariah turned out to be an excellent ninja.

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 persistence is a lot more impressive than perfection. Next time you work really hard at something, I hope you can think back on it and feel good about yourself.

And until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]