

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 220: Why can't we throw pepper in the air to make clouds sneeze?](#)

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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 Frankie. Frankie wrote in their question and asked, what if all houses were stuck together? I have not heard that one before.

Now, we've got one more what if from a listener named Stella. She wrote in to ask, why can't we throw pepper into the air to make clouds sneeze and then drop the raindrops they're holding to make it rain? Well, what a thoughtful question, Stella. So, let's put our imaginations together and find out what if all houses were stuck together and why we can't throw pepper into the air to make clouds sneeze?

[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: What If World might seem like a perfect place, but people living there have problems just like you and me. For instance, last week, the world exploded into a thousand pieces and got put back together by outer space jungle vines. I can see you nodding along. We've all been there. But what you might not know is that when a planet gets blown up by an opera singer, it tends to lose some of its atmosphere. And while the space vines have been making oxygen for people to breathe, the thing What If World really needs right now is some good, old-fashioned rain.

Alabaster Zero: I think the rain, rain, went away to come again another day.

Mr. Eric: Says Alabaster Zero, currently What If World's only detective.

Alabaster Zero: And that makes me the best by default. So I'll find your rain, Mr. Eric, or dry trying.

Mr. Eric: Well, you would be dry, yes.

Mamma Jamma: Well, I must say it's an honor to advise on housing for What If World.

Mr. Eric: Said Mamma Jamma.

Mamma Jamma: Now that our houses are stuck together by vines, we're gonna need some infrastructure and good sharing practices in order to prevent catastrophic—

Petey the Pirate: And I'm Petey the Pirate, A.K.A. Peter the Realtor. I'm an expert in all things related to water, as a pirate, and houses, as a realtor. So, naturally I was assigned to this team. Also my pirate ship is now smooshed between Mamma Jamma's house and Alabaster Zero's apartment building and we're all sort of sharing this one, single, outdoor space.

Mamma Jamma: It used to be my she shed.

Alabaster Zero: And my closet, which I called my he shed.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr y'arr y'arr, he shed, she shed. Anyway, it's where I used to grow my peonies, so it's more of he she peony shed/garden bed.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, that's catchy.

Alabaster Zero: So it's settled. We'll skip past all this arguing and get to the part where we come up with an awesome plan that solves all of our problems.

Mr. Eric: And so the three of them planned and planned and planned and six, long, hours later.

Petey the Pirate: Nyarr, we've got nothing.

[Record scratch.]

Mr. Eric: What? But what have you been doing this whole time?

Alabaster Zero: Well, it turns out this little shared space used to be a golf course on a private jungle that grew on Fire Snail's back. You know, before the space vines smooshed all our homes together.

Mamma Jamma: But we did come up with a name for our little space.

Petey the Pirate: The he she peony tea shed and mulligarden bed.

Fire Snail: Copyright Fire Snail, 2021.

Mr. Eric: So you came up with a name but you still have no plan, whatsoever?

Mamma Jamma: Well, I suggested um, chocolate catapult, but I think I was just getting hungry.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr, isn't there a what if question that will solve all of our problems and also give us pizza.

Mamma Jamma: Ahem.

Petey the Pirate: And a chocolate catapult.

Mr. Eric: Well, there is Stella's idea, but...

Alabaster Zero: And you've been holding out on us? Spill it, Mr. Eric.

Mr. Eric: Well, yeah, Stella asked why we can't throw pepper into the air to make the clouds sneeze and then drop the raindrops they're holding onto.

Petey the Pirate: I thought you said this question had pizza?

Mamma Jamma: And chocolate.

Mr. Eric: I never said that.

Petey the Pirate: Well, it's fine. Despite Mr. Eric's blatant deceit, everything will be better after Stella's question and then we can have chocolate pizza.

Alabaster Zero: Um. You know, I hate being the voice of reason, but maybe things won't just magically get better because we stopped trying.

Mr. Eric: But Petey the Pirate had already grabbed a handful of pepper from a nearby pepper shaker and thrown it up in the air toward the thin clouds gathered over their smooshed together house.

Cloud: [ACHOOOO!]

Mr. Eric: Roared the clouds overhead, and their sneeze swept across What If World, spreading pepper to every other cloud in the sky.

Clouds: [Aggressive sneezing]

Mr. Eric: It was an answering thunder of distant sneezes and all at once it started raining everywhere.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr, we did it.

Mamma Jamma: We solved all our problems in record time. Now, let's build that chocolate catapult.

Petey the Pirate: That delivers pizza.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, of course.

Alabaster Zero: Sorry, Mamma Jamma? Petey the Pirate? I hate to rain on your parade, but—

Mamma Jamma: It's already raining, don't worry about it.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr, it must be a parade in our honor anyway, for saving What If World.

Alabaster Zero: Ugh, just look up.

Mr. Eric: Alabaster Zero pointed to the sky. The vines that had helped heal What If World were thirstily soaking up every drop of rain. And as they did, they grew, and curled in on themselves, bringing every home in What If World close together in a great circle that spread around the he she peony tea shed and mulligarden bed. And that shared space grew, too. The little bed of green becoming a vast park even as a towering nest of houses and buildings grew taller and taller around the park, stacking up and spreading out in a huge circle. This sudden city was all held together by a tangle of growing vine and the park the city shared was breath-taking.

With stretched of jungle and wildlife, rolling hills, and lush lakes, and sunny stretches of grass and rock just welcoming you to stretch out on them.

Mamma Jamma: Wow, would you look at that?

Petey the Pirate: A simple question and a bit of hard work could turn drought and disaster into this wonderf—

Alabaster Zero: Uh, we haven't really done any work, yet.

Mamma Jamma: You're right! We gotta figure out how millions of people stacked on top of each other in an actual jungle can happy and healthy lives. Well, sharing this beautiful new park should help.

Fire Snail: Who said anything about sharing?

[Record scratch.]

Mr. Eric: The little fire snail had a tiny bag with golf clubs in it slung around their shell and was slowly making their way deeper into the park.

Fire Snail: No, Mr. Eric, not a park. A golf course. My golf course.

Alabaster Zero: Your golf course? But we all live here.

Fire Snail: Did any of you call dibs?

Petey the Pirate: Nyarr, I didn't realize we had to call—

Fire Snail: Dibs!

Mamma Jamma: That can't possibly be legal.

Fire Snail: Oh, no? Feel free to check my paperwork.

Mr. Eric: And Fire Snail's eyestalk quickly pulled out a slimy piece of paper from their shell. It read:

Alabaster Zero: D-I-B-S. Oh, no. It's even got a slimature. It's legally binding for snails.

Mamma Jamma: But that's not a fair way to share the—

Fire Snail: No, that is the fairway. That's why the grass is shorter. [rimshot] Now, please step off of it. I want to play a quick nine holes. I should be back in a month. Just in time to collect rent.

Petey the Pirate: Rent? But I own me pirate ship.

Fire Snail: Which is tangled in my vines. But at least you get to enjoy the lovely view of my golf course.

Mamma Jamma: You know, I have always wanted to try playing golf.

Fire Snail: Of course. You've just got to apply for a membership.

Mamma Jamma: No problem.

Fire Snail: Membership denied, hahahaha!

Alabaster Zero: I guess you haven't left us any choice.

Fire Snail: Don't pretend like this is my fault. If you don't like it, my vines can just fling you back into outer space. I hear the rents there are reasonable.

Mr. Eric: And Fire Snail slowly slinked out of view.

Petey the Pirate: Nyarr, I can still see him.

Mamma Jamma: Yeah, he hasn't even gotten over my shoe, yet.

Alabaster Zero: So it's settled. We'll skip ahead to when Fire Snail's finally out of sight and we've all come up with a great plan to save—

Mr. Eric: Two weeks later.

Mamma Jamma: So it turns out chocolate catapults can't actually launch pizza.

Alabaster Zero: Or anything else.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr. I blame our lack of rope. And spring. And chocolate.

Mamma Jamma: Yeah, I don't know what happened to it all. Chocolate must have chocolated it.

Mr. Eric: So what you're saying is...

Petey the Pirate: We've got nothing.

Alabaster Zero: Not nothing, Petey. I said we ought to wait until next time it rains outside the course, then call dibs on whatever grows.

Mamma Jamma: But then Fire Snail called dibs on the clouds and now it's only raining over the golf course.

Mr. Eric: And indeed, after two weeks, the golf course was still as lush and vibrant as ever while the thick vines that held the city together were as dry and tough as stone.

Petey the Pirate: You know how Fire Snail just got out of sight? Well, now he's headed back. We've only got two more weeks to come up with the rent.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, why'd we spend all our money on chocolate? Also has anyone seen my kids?

Zach: Yeah, Mom, we're right here. You've been taking great care of us every time Mr. Eric isn't narrating.

Mamma Jamma: Oh, good. Bye, Zach!

Zach: I feel closer to you than ever!

Mamma Jamma: Mommy's working, honey.

Mr. Eric: And in fact, the whole city had gone to work. They tapped the thickest vines so everyone had a trickle of water to share. And they trained the thinner vines to curl and uncurl so that everyone could travel safely about the city. But all of that just caused the city to dry up even more quickly as the Fire Snail drew closer and closer, a steady steam coming off of their fire shell as clouds continued to sneeze over the golf course.

[Time skip noise.]

Mr. Eric: Two weeks passed and Fire Snail had nearly reached Mamma Jamma, Petey the Pirate, and Alabaster Zero, just as the rain finally stopped and the sun started drying off the golf course.

Alabaster Zero: I'm really starting to lose it here. I haven't been able to leave this place in a month.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr, but I do enjoy the convenience of having all me friends so close by.

Mamma Jamma: And lovely new businesses popping up every day. I can finally walk my kids to school.

Fire Snail: You see?

Mr. Eric: Said Fire Snail, who was back at Mamma Jamma's feet.

Fire Snail: I've made all of your lives better and you can kindly thank me with your rent. Heh heh heh.

Alabaster Zero: Listen, we all love New New What City and we built it into a place we're proud of. But not all of us want to actually live here.

Fire Snail: Excuse me?

Mamma Jamma: Especially not when you have the whole park to yourself.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr and all the clouds, too. I've used up all me black pepper and I haven't been sneezed on in a month.

Mamma Jamma: It's a real tragedy.

Fire Snail: That's why it stopped raining? Oh, my people need a steady supply of cloud sneeze to stay slimy.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr, otherwise you have to use magic to stay slimy, everyone knows that about fire snails.

Fire Snail: So, make it rain again and you three will get... golf memberships and free rent.

Alabaster Zero: You know how much I hate being the voice of reason, but all we have left is this white pepper and we have no idea what kind of catastrophic effects it may have on the clouds or the world at large.

Mr. Eric: But Petey the Pirate was already throwing the white pepper up in the air.

Clouds: [Uhhh guhhh CHONK!] [CLONK] [CHUNK]

Mr. Eric: And the clouds over What If World started sneezing out something different. Can you guess what it was?

Petey the Pirate: It's sugar! The sky is raining fluffy, wet, strangely unsweetened sugar.

Mamma Jamma: It's snow, Petey.

Petey the Pirate: Y'arr, it sounded wrong what I was saying.

Mr. Eric: Sneeze after sneeze of snow buried the golf course and blew around New New What City in icy swirls.

Fire Snail: No, no, no, this is worse than the moon of Whopiter!

Alabaster Zero: Of course. Snow is your greatest weakness, everyone knows that about Whopitarian fire snails.

Fire Snail: Please make it stop, oooh, I'll do anything.

Mamma Jamma: Even let us turn your golf course into a park that everyone enjoys happily ever after until next week?

Alabaster Zero: But some of us don't want to live there because we have different lifestyles?

Petey the Pirate: And that's important because we can't all want the same things?

Fire Snail: I'm sorry, are those actual questions? Or are we just at the end of the story, oh... I said the end.

[Falling harp scale.]

Fire Snail: That's on me.

Mr. Eric: Well, Stella and Frankie, I hope you enjoyed your story.



Fred the Dog: Now it's Fred the Dog time. And I've got a shout out for Remy, age ten, Juliet, age eight, and Gabriel, age five and a half from Austin, Texas. They all love dogs, especially me, Fred.

Dracomax: Dracomax here to shout out Charlie, age nine. He loves gems and rocks and wants to be a gemologist when he grows up. He has three dogs named Henry, Rider, and Apollo. Those are good names for dogs or dragons.

Fred the Dog: Then I got another shout out for Corbin, age eight. He loves listening to What If World in the car on his way to school with his sister Annabel, age six. And they're from Conifer, Colorado.

Cthunkle: Finally, there is Melanie, from Marietta, Georgia. She loves me, Cthunkle, as well as listening to What If World, reading, drawing, and playing video games with friends and family. She is nine years old. Just old enough to conquer the universe.

Mr. Eric: And I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, our co-creator, Craig Martinson for our theme song, my helper, Miss Lynn, and all you kids at home who share and take care of your parks and playgrounds.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme song plays.]