

Podcast: What If World

[Episode 238: Anti-Fools' Ray](#)

File Length: 00:21:00

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 review question from Emma. Emma asks, what if What If World was normal for an episode?

Thank you, Emma. I was worried for a second, because you know, it's the beginning of April, and that's usually when our April Fools' episode comes out. But no crazy, kooky hijinks this year. Yes!

We've got a similar question from a patron named Gabriel, who asks, what if What If World became What Is World? There we go, extra normal!

And finally, one last question, I'm sure, the most normal of all, what if cactuses shot their thorns? From a patron named Colin. Well, that's not entirely normal. Okay, we're going to have to figure this out when we get into the story.

So, let's find out, What if cactuses shot their thorns? What if What If World became What Is World? And what if What If World was normal for an episode... or at least part of one?

[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Alabaster Zero was celebrating his birthday with his poppa, Dr. Zero. They were at a fancy restaurant, which overlooked a wide expanse of desert dunes, flat rock structures, tall cacti, and colorful shrubbery in bloom after a recent rain.

Dr. Zero: Well, it's your birthday, Alabaster.

Mr. Eric: Said Dr. Zero, adjusting his spectacles with a forefinger.

Dr. Zero: Why you choose to come to the edge of the Sawhora desert, I guess is none of my busines.

Alabaster Zero: Are you kidding? When you've got friends who can teleport you, it's pretty much your responsibility to see the world, and I hear the Arid Isle Restaurant is one of the fanciest places in all of What If World.

Mr. Eric: Said Alabaster Zero, holding up the menu, which was single sheet of aged white parchment covered in a flowing script.

Server: Welcome to the Arid Isles, fanciest restaurant in What If World. Our menu is a prix fixe and costs ten birthday presents per person.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, but I'm only having one birthday today.

Dr. Zero: That's fine, Alabaster, I'll take care of it this time.

Alabaster Zero: Sorry, Poppa. I'll get the next one?

Mr. Eric: Their server was a perfectly pruned desert rose bush with two long, thorny limbs and roses for their hands and face.

Server: Very good. I'll get you all started with extra expensive water that tastes no different than other water.

Alabaster Zero: Okay, and can I just order a veggie cheeseburger, extra cheese, hold the veggie.

Server: You're ordering a cheese sandwich.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, you're the server, I trust you to figure it out.

Server: Charming...

Mr. Eric: And the rosebush server scuttled away on its tiny roots.

Alabaster Zero: Wow, I'm so excited for my cheese sandwich.

Dr. Zero: Son, do you know what a prix fixe menu is?

Alabaster Zero: I assume they've fixed up the food in advance. Pre-fixed, so they've got a bunch of cheese sandwiches back there.

Dr. Zero: No, we're paying for everything listed on this menu. But you're just getting a cheese sandwich.

Mr. Eric: Dr. Zero had held up the paper menu by way of explanation, when suddenly - seven cactus thorns shot through the menu, sticking it to a nearby wooden support beam.

Dr. Zero: Oh, dear.

Mr. Eric: Alabaster Zero sprang into action, flipping over his table for cover and pulling Dr. Zero behind it.

Alabaster Zero: Those thorns were shot from the desert, and they seemed to be aiming at you.

Dr. Zero: Well, my menu, at least.

Alabaster Zero: But I thought you'd never been to the Sawhora desert, Poppa.

Dr. Zero: I never said that.

Alabaster Zero: What's going on.

Dr. Zero: Look, Ally.

Mr. Eric: Dr. Zero pointed up at the menu. The seven thorns had plunked through the menu in a pattern that looked like a little minus sign next to the number one.

Alabaster Zero: Negative one? As in Alabaster Negative-One? Daddy?

Dr. Zero: Okay, Son. You're going to have some big feelings right now and it's okay to express them.

Alabaster Zero: Daddy! Where are you? I haven't seen you in 20 years! I pretend like it's okay but I miss you so much.

Dr. Zero: Okay, so you are comfortable expressing yourself and I am comfortable receiving those emotions. [Whimpers]

Alabaster Zero: I thought Daddy was captured by even eviller pirate robot ninja dragons after escaping the first pirate robot ninja dragons in episode 119, what if kids loved chores?

Dr. Zero: That's true, Alabaster, but your father kept escaping from these fortresses, and so they found a, uh, more permanent place to keep him.

Alabaster Zero: You've known this whole time and you didn't tell me?

Server: Here is your water and cheese sandwich.

Mr. Eric: Said the rose server, holding the waters and sandwich and looking down at the overturned table.

Alabaster Zero: Can't you see we're under attack, possibly?

Server: So I should come back later?

Alabaster Zero: You should get everyone off the balcony and inside into cover.

Mr. Eric: Thorns had kept shooting towards the balcony, spelling out negative one, over and over and over again on every surface they could stick into.

Harrigo: Hey, I may be a wooden tree, but that doesn't mean I want thorns in me!

Alabaster Zero: Sorry, Harrigo. Just follow the server inside, okay?

Server: Everyone follow me in an orderly fashion, a reminder that there are no refunds on the prix fixe dinner.

Abacus: Oh dear.

Others: Oh no.

That stings more than these thorns.

What a rip off.

I spent ten birthday presents on this?

I give you four and a half stars on Whelp.

Mr. Eric: Everyone retreated inside, except for Alabaster and his Poppa, whose table kept getting hit by volley after volley of cactus thorns.

Alabaster Zero: Are you trying to tell me that my dad is somehow a cactus, now?

Dr. Zero: Well, he was always very prickly, Alabaster. But the truth is, you two did not have a very healthy relationship. He and I did not have a very healthy relationship.

Alabaster Zero: What are you saying?

Dr. Zero: He had a lot of trouble dealing with his anger, and that's how he ended up where he is.

Alabaster Zero: I don't believe you.

Dr. Zero: You may be seeing him through rose-colored glasses.

Server: Did someone order rose-colored glasses.

Alabaster Zero: No, wait, stay right there!

Mr. Eric: A barrage of thorns shot towards the rose server, but... they bounced off a space ship that had suddenly appeared.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, come on. What now?

Mr. Eric: The strange craft looked like a tiny silver planet orbited by a wide, spinning ring of metal that changed direction as the vessel floated up and down and a voice sounded from a speaker inside.

Invader Whim: I am Invader Whim, here to conquer What If World once and for all and finally put an end to all of this tomfoolery.

Alabaster Zero: What tomfoolery?

Invader Whim: Cactus people, rose people, evil pirate robot ninja dragon fortresses in the desert. Nothing about this world makes any sense.

Alabaster Zero: Well, if you understand the premise of the world...

Dr. Zero: And you know that what ifs are an important part of the learning process...

Invader Whim: I have heard and seen enough. I shall envelop this world with my anti-fools' ray so that it must follow the rules of reason and logic and physics, much like What Is World.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, come on. And you gotta do this right now? I just found out where my long-lost father is.

Invader Whim: Oh, I am sorry to have interrupted your latest foolishness.

Dr. Zero: Emotions are never foolish.

Invader Whim: Emotions are always foolish! You will see that once you have succumbed to my anti-fools' ray!

Mr. Eric: The little silvery orb started to glow and the wide ring around it started to spin and rotated faster and faster, reflecting light and heat as the little space ship became a warm, glowing blur. Then it zipped off, encircling What If World again and again and again at speeds faster than lightning,

trailing a glowing ray behind itself and encasing What If World in a net of energy.

Alabaster Zero: Wow, this anti-fools' ray is taking forever. [Record scratch.]

Invader Whim: Maybe I cannot make magic happen at the snap of a finger, because real change takes time and effort!

Alabaster Zero: Time and a foot?

Invader Whim: Effort!

Alabaster Zero: And a fort? I was just about to go to a fort.

Invader Whim: I am so sick of bits like this! [CRASH]

Mr. Eric: Dr. Zero threw his body over his son of the anti-fools' ray settled.

Invader Whim: Now, feel the effects of my anti-fools' ray and normalcy!

Alabaster Zero: Hey, Dad?

Dr. Zero: Yes, son.

Alabaster Zero: Do you think anti-fools' ray has an apostrophe, and if so, is it before or after the S?

Dr. Zero: Nobody knows, Son, nobody knows.

Mr. Eric: Alabaster Zero had to squeeze his eyes shut against the blinding light, but when he opened them again, he and his father were simply sitting on the balcony of this quiet restaurant. Their server was human, as were all of the customers, and there weren't thousands of thorns stuck everywhere. Nor was there...

Alabaster Zero: The space ship, it's gone, too.

Dr. Zero: Yes, I assumed there was a fair chance of that. Aliens don't regularly invade What Is World, so in getting rid of our tomfoolery...

Alabaster Zero: They got rid of themselves. Heh heh. Oh, wait, that means the normalcy may not last long.

Dr. Zero: I expect the forces of imagination will reclaim this world by the end of the day.

Alabaster Zero: Then that doesn't leave me much time.

Dr. Zero: Much time for what, Son?

Alabaster Zero: Daddy's out in that desert somewhere and he's not a cactus anymore. That means I can finally talk to him.

Dr. Zero: Talking to him never really turned out that well for you, even as a kid. Just, be careful.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, Poppa, you've got nothing to worry about. I'll just get my friend Sprite Alright to teleport me right to his location... wait... is teleportation magic?

Dr. Zero: I'm afraid so.

Alabaster Zero: So I'm gonna have to... walk?

Dr. Zero: I would come with you, except I already ordered two prix fixe meals for your birthday.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, that's right. I better take my cheese sandwich to go.

Dr. Zero: And some water.

Alabaster Zero: Ugh, Poppa.

Dr. Zero: Now, put on your sunscreen and wait 15 minutes.

Alabaster Zero: But I wanna go now.

Dr. Zero: And keep your fedora on, it's very sunny out in the desert.

Mr. Eric: And 15 minutes later, Alabaster Zero, covered in pasty white sunscreen, set out into the desert.

Alabaster Zero: Ugh, Mr. Eric, I don't know if you can hear me, but if you could just skip ahead to the moment where I find my Dad, I would really appreciate that.

[Scene break.]

Mr. Eric: Three hours of wandering later, Alabaster Zero lay down face first in the desert sand.

Alabaster Zero: Ugh. Three hours feels like an eternity. Mr. Eric, why didn't you just scene-dash me through all of it.

Mr. Eric: But I did, Alabaster, you just had to actually live through it because everything's normal down there.

Alabaster Zero: Ugh, [coughs] I have so much sand in my mouth.

Mr. Eric: Which also means you can't really hear me. You should just gargle and spit with some water if you have any left.

Alabaster Zero: I shouldn't have given myself that bath an hour ago. I'm really thirsty now.

Alabaster -1: I'm thirsty too, but it usually takes me weeks to feel thirsty. It's like I'm not a cactus anymore.

Alabaster Zero: Daddy?

Alabaster -1: Who?

Alabaster Zero: I mean, Mr. Negative-One? It's me, Alabaster Zero.

Alabaster -1: [Grunts]

Alabaster Zero: Your son?

Alabaster -1: Ally?

Alabaster Zero: Yeah, hi Daddy.

Alabaster -1: Oh.

Mr. Eric: Alabaster [Negative-One] was a big man, wearing a well-worn leather jacket and a wide-brimmed cowboy hat. He was sitting on top of a dune, sweaty, and with his knees huddled up close as if trying to hide under the shade of his own hat.

Alabaster -1: Ally, look at you. What are you, a dungaree model?

Alabaster Zero: Uh, private eye.

Alabaster -1: Looking good and keeping the world safe, just like your old man. I'm proud of you, boy.

Alabaster Zero: And look at you, you're, uh...

Alabaster -1: A cactus.



Alabaster Zero: Uh, yeah. Maybe like a werecactus who can talk and shoot thorns and looks entirely human.

Alabaster -1: Yeah, must be it.

Mr. Eric: Said Alabaster Negative-One, holding his forehead.

Alabaster -1: I'm the envy of all the thornless succulents.

Alabaster Zero: I bet you are, yeah.

Alabaster -1: So, what took you so long, boy?

Alabaster Zero: Huh?

Alabaster -1: I've been stuck here for 20 years.

Alabaster Zero: Well, you used to be trapped in a fortress, but then you escaped and apparently escaped a couple more times, so then they made you into a cactus and planted you into the ground. I don't know, it all happened before the anti-fools' ray.

Alabaster -1: You're talking nonsense, boy. Just tell me the plan.

Alabaster Zero: Well, I thought we could talk for a few minutes.

Alabaster -1: No...

Alabaster Zero: Maybe share a cactus cooler. I'll just harvest some water from one of those other cactus-

Alabaster -1: No, no, no, no. The escape plan.

Alabaster Zero: Dad, I just wanted to see you. I thought you'd want to see me.

Alabaster -1: I told your Poppa never to bring you here. I figured that way it'd light a fire under you and you'd make it your life's work to break me out when you grew up.

Alabaster Zero: I tried to find you for years but eventually I just had to try to figure out my own path without you.

Alabaster -1: You sound just like your Poppa.

Alabaster Zero: Well, that's better than sounding like you. Dad, you've had years here to try to reflect and grow.

Alabaster -1: That's true, Son. And I've learned a lot.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, like what?

Alabaster -1: Like how I really hate being a cactus! It's not who I am.

Alabaster Zero: Well, it's kind of how a lot of people see you, you know?

Alabaster -1: Doesn't matter what they think.

Alabaster Zero: It does matter if you hurt them.

Alabaster -1: Huh? I've never hurt anybody. Remember that time I didn't eat the talking chocolate bar?

Alabaster Zero: That was Harrigo, Dad! Why won't you just listen to me?

Alabaster -1: Because you're a kid, Ally. You don't know nothing about me.

Alabaster Zero: I know you blame everyone else for your problems.

Alabaster -1: Oh yeah?

Alabaster Zero: Yeah.

Alabaster -1: Well, I learned that from you.

Alabaster Zero: What? I'm your son!

Alabaster -1: And some son you are. You worked with three presidents. Yeah, we get the newspapers in the desert. And you couldn't ask one of them to set me free?

Alabaster Zero: I risked everything to search the desert the moment I found out that y—

Alabaster -1: But you got here 20 years too late. They turned me into a cactus.

Alabaster Zero: Well, they shouldn't have. Cacti are beautiful plants. You are something worse.

Alabaster -1: A bottle-brush.

Alabaster Zero: A bad person.

Alabaster -1: I'm a hero! Sure, I made a few mistakes, but—

Alabaster Zero: And people can learn from their mistakes but only if they work at it. I don't think you ever really tried.

Alabaster -1: You have no idea what I've been through.

Alabaster Zero: Here we go.

Alabaster -1: To be a cactus in a world of bottle-brushes.

Alabaster Zero: Wait, what have you got against bottle brush.

Alabaster -1: It's a metaphor.

Alabaster Zero: But you're an actual cactus.

Alabaster -1: What's your point?

Alabaster Zero: Well, a metaphor is a form of figurative speech.

Alabaster -1: There you go, lording your fancy education over me.

Alabaster Zero: I went to public schools.

Alabaster -1: Which I paid for!

Alabaster Zero: Stop! Stop. We're just upsetting each other. I don't think you're ready to change.

Alabaster -1: I accept your apology.

Alabaster Zero: Dad?

Alabaster -1: Yeah, Ally?

Alabaster Zero: You know, I mostly remember the good stuff.

Alabaster -1: Me, too.

Alabaster Zero: Why can't we find our way back there?

Alabaster -1: I don't know, Kid. Maybe it's this inescapable prison you're leaving me trapped in!

Alabaster Zero: Yeah, Pops, it's probably that. Hey, listen, um, drink some of this cactus water. Everything should go back to normal in a little while.

Alabaster -1: Okay, yeah, I'm a little more thirsty than usual.

Alabaster Zero: Hey, maybe shoot me a letter some time? Or spell one out with your quills?

Alabaster -1: Maybe I will.

Alabaster Zero: Love you, Pops.

Alabaster -1: I love you, Ally.

Mr. Eric: Alabaster Zero and Alabaster Negative-One sat sipping cactus juice in silence as the sun slowly set over the dunes.

Alabaster Zero: You know, maybe if I wait until the What Ifs come back, one of them can help you change and give us a healthy relationship.

Alabaster -1: Oh, you can't change a man's man of a cactus like me just like that, Alabaster.

Mr. Eric: But as Alabaster Negative-One snapped his fingers, they appeared to be turning thick and green and thorny.

Alabaster -1: Oh, I never thought I'd miss being a cactus.

Alabaster Zero: I never thought I'd miss you being a cactus.

Alabaster -1: What was that?

Alabaster Zero: Uh, nothing! See you later, Dad!

Alabaster -1: Wait, I'm starting to see the error of my ways. Sure, life hasn't been kind to me, but I've made mistakes, too, and I've got to own that. Give me a hug, Son!

Alabaster Zero: Oh, Daddy!

Mr. Eric: Said Alabaster Zero, standing to give his cactus dad a big hug.

Alabaster Zero: Now we can finally start the work of healing, ow! Ooh, ow!

Alabaster -1: Heh heh heh, got ya, boy!

Alabaster Zero: Oh, ha... thorns poking me, that's funny.

Mr. Eric: And the big, thorny cactus froze with two of its limbs encircling Alabaster Zero.

Alabaster Zero: I think I am stuck here. Huh.

Fair Elise: Alabaster, do you need a little help?

Alabaster Zero: Fair Elise? Poppa? Sprite Alright?

Sprite Alright: Yeah, as soon as the imagination was back on, your Dad sent us a message.

Dr. Zero: I thought you might want to be leaving the desert, soon.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, that's pretty good timing, actually.

Dr. Zero: So, how'd things go.

Mr. Eric: Said Dr. Zero, as Sprite Alright and Fair Elise helped Alabaster Zero remove himself from the cactus.

Alabaster Zero: Said he'd write me a letter maybe and he gave me this hug... pretty thorny one, but...

Dr. Zero: That's honestly better than I expected.

Alabaster Zero: Oh, yeah, well, just good to see some friends right now.

Fair Elise: Some family, Alabaster.

Sprite Alright: Yeah, you goof. Now, what do you say to a little birthday dinner?

Dr. Zero: I've got 20 birthday presents worth of leftovers.

Fair Elise: Sounds delightful.

Sprite Alright: Great, I'll teleport us back to the thimble house.

Invader Whim: Not so fast! [Record scratch.] Somehow my anti-fools' ray plan backfired.

Alabaster Zero: No, you actually taught me a lot about how family takes different forms and you can't wait on some people to change.

Invader Whim: I was not simply here in service of the story! I have my own feelings and goals.

Dr. Zero: And those feelings are always valid.

Invader Whim: Stop trying to teach me a lesson!

Mr. Eric: The end.

Invader Whim: Where is my anti-fools' ray?

[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Emma, Gabriel, and Colin, thank you for your questions and I hope you all enjoyed your story.

Stevie: Hey, Stevie Fleasel here to shout out Addy. Addy likes drawing, skating, and softball, and also wants to give a shout-out to their brother, Chip.

Fair Elise: President Fair Elise here to shout out Joey, who is six years old, from Westerville, Ohio. Joey loves LEGOs and his one-year-old sister, Ryan.

JF Kitty: Then there is Freya who is seven years old and likes cats. Thank you very much, Freya!

Whendiana Joan: Whendiana Joan here, traveling through time to shout out Oskar. Oskar lives in Seattle, and their name is spelled with a K, which I happen to think is quite kool. Of course, I'm saying kool with a K.

Mr. Eric: And I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator, Craig Martinson for our theme song, my producer, Miss Lynn, and all you kids at home who know that families take many forms, but are always made up of people who love, value, and respect us.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]