

Podcast: What If World

[Episode: 208: What if you got sucked into a town but there was nobody there?](#)

File Length: 00:23:43

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 question from a listener named Makayla.

Makayla: I'm Makayla. I live in Amherst, Massachusetts. I'm eight years old and I have a what if question. My what if question is: what if Fred the Dog was sucked into a town but there was nobody there? Thank you.

Mr. Eric: Makayla, I visited Amherst several times in my youth. Very nice woodsy place.

Now, we do have one surprise what if question from a patron named Raya, but we're gonna wait until after the story to play the question for you.

So let's find out what if Fred got sucked into a town but there was nobody there? Plus, our secret question.

[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Fred the Dog was practicing with his recently discovered helicopter tongue power.

Fred the Dog: Oh, this is really exhausting, but also pretty fun. I mean, who can fly like a helicopter with their own tongue? I don't know who I'm asking that question to, there's nobody here.

Mr. Eric: That's because Fred was all the way up in the clouds.

Fred the Dog: Oh, geez. Clouds are wetter than I thought they would be. And I know everybody loves the smell of wet dog... that's why I cuddle with them when I'm really wet. But the thing is, I don't like the smell of wet dog. That's the other reason I rub on people when I'm wet, so that I get dry while they enjoy my good wet dog smell.

Mr. Eric: Having a tongue long enough to use it as a helicopter propeller meant that Fred had difficulty pronouncing some things. But this was his voice and he was proud of it.

Fred the Dog: Okay, I gotta fly out of these clouds. Maybe find some that are actually cotton candy. I mean, this is What If World, right? They've got to be around here, somewhere.

Mr. Eric: And as Fred flew out of one big patch of clouds, it wasn't pink, fluffy cotton candy in the sky that greeted him, but instead, a whirling, swirling, twirling vortex... of cotton candy!

Fred the Dog: Oh, cool! It just goes to show that if you want it hard enough, anything is possible—!

Mr. Eric: Fred found himself sucked into the cotton candy vortex. His whole body was spinning about just as fast as his helicopter tongue.

Fred the Dog: This is really terrifying! But at least I'm licking up a lot of cotton candy and it's pretty delicious.

Mr. Eric: Fred said, until he remembered that dogs aren't supposed to have sugar.

Fred the Dog: Oh, come on, Mr. Eric! Not even in What If World?

Mr. Eric: I'm sorry, we have to set a good example for the listeners at home.

Fred the Dog: Okay, kids. Don't let your dogs eat cotton candy. But, you know, if they happen to be swallowed up by a whirling, twirling, swirling vortex of it... maybe they're just going to eat a little bit.

Mr. Eric: All Fred could see was darkness until he was spat out the other side of the vortex into a beautiful mini city. Modest sized buildings curled up towards the sun with beautiful clear glass and vegetation alternating around the sides of every twisting building.

Fred the Dog: Wow, the architecture is very interesting. Sort of reminds me of a twirling, swirling, curling—

Mr. Eric: [Clears throat] A whirling, swirling, twirling.f

Fred the Dog: Whatever, Mr. Eric! It reminds me of the cotton candy vortex.

Mr. Eric: There were also big, glowing letters suspended in the sky in the middle of this little city. They read: Happyplace. All one word. Not referring to any kind of happy place on Earth or other trademarked properties.

Fred the Dog: Hello? Is anybody here?

Mr. Eric: Fred called out but only heard his voice echo back to him.

Fred the Dog: I guess I should have known there wouldn't be anybody here. You always gotta listen to the what if question.

Mr. Eric: Said Fred, even though he wasn't supposed to know what the what if question is.

Fred the Dog: But that's the advantage of being a real life dog with you in What Is World, half the time, Mr. Eric.

Mr. Eric: Fred, you're alone in the town, just, you know, explore. Be alone. See how that's like.

Fred the Dog: I don't like being alone. I like other people.

Mr. Eric: Then maybe you should go try to find them. Fred scampered along the streets of Happyplace, noticing shady trees and blooming flowers at every corner.

Fred the Dog: Well, at least that's something. Where there are trees there must be sticks.

Mr. Eric: And though Fred sniffed and rolled and dug and explored below a giant old oak tree, he didn't find a single stick.

Fred the Dog: Uh... that's okay... I'm sure there's got to be like, just one little weak little twig that's ready to snap right off? And maybe if I stretch out my tongue...

Mr. Eric: But the oak tree was perfectly pruned without so much as a dry leaf hanging on it.

Fred the Dog: This is spooky.

Mr. Eric: As Fred retracted his tongue, he did manage to nudge a leaf loose. But before it could even fall to the ground—as strange iridescent cloud seemed to form around the leaf. The cloud seemed to somehow collect

the leaf before it could even fall to the ground. And then, just as quickly, the iridescent cloud and the falling leaf were gone.

Mr. Eric: Fred was starting to feel a little concerned and a little lonely. So he went around scratching on the entrance door of each of these buildings, but they all seemed abandoned.

Fred the Dog: Oh, come on! I've been outside long enough. I want to come inside! Hello! Normally when I whine like this, someone lets me inside! What's happening!

Mr. Eric: But then the door of the building seemed to glow briefly and speak.

Door: Happy residents are welcome inside.

Fred the Dog: How am I supposed to be happy? I'm lonely! And there aren't even any sticks to chew on, I'm hungry.

Mr. Eric: He heard the sound of the strange, shimmering cloud as it approached.

Fred the Dog: Okay, cloud. I don't like the looks of you, keep your distance.

Mr. Eric: But as soon as Fred had finished talking, the cloud seemed to transform into a charging, glittery, beautiful unicorn, trailing stardust and rainbows in its wake.

Fred the Dog: Uh, you might be a beautiful unicorn now but please don't invade my personal space.

Mr. Eric: The unicorn stopped several feet from Fred, lowered its horn and... seemed to shoot out a tight curl of fluffy pink and blue goo twirled around itself.

Fred the Dog: Uh, is that how unicorns... go... or something.

Unicorn: [Offended neighs]

Mr. Eric: Neighed the unicorn, seeming offended. And then—it turned back into a cloud and disappeared.

Fred the Dog: Okay, so I guess the town isn't totally empty? There's just a weird unicorn cloud that shoots some kind of goo out of its horn and kids, you know you should never eat goo shot out of a unicorn's horn that you find on the street, right? But I'm a dog so I'm just gonna go for it. Blech. Oh, it tastes like a cardboard smoothie. Which would be fine if there were like

some dirt in it or whatever. But that's just about the plainest thing I ever ate.

Door: Are you quite happy now?

Mr. Eric: The door chimed behind Fred.

Fred the Dog: Happy!?! If Mr. Eric fed me that for dinner, well, I would eat all of it but I wouldn't be happy about it and then I'd ask for his dinner.

Mr. Eric: The door, which had been glowing a rosy pink color faded ever so slightly.

Door: Unfortunate. Happy residents are welcome to enter.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, you know, what? I was thinking about it and yes, I'm very feeling quite happy now.

Mr. Eric: And the door slid open.

Fred the Dog: Oh, you know what, I shouldn't go inside this strange building full of strange robot voices. I think I'm just gonna go.

Mr. Eric: Fred skittered a few steps away, quickly. And then, suddenly, the sky went dark as if the sun had winked out in an instant. And at the same time, glow in the dark arrows shone on the ground below Fred's paws, pointing back toward the building he'd just run away from.

Fred the Dog: Uh, okay, I get it, street arrows. You want me to go in the spooky building. But I have better sense than that.

Mr. Eric: But then he heard... [galloping] and the rainbow unicorn cloud was charging towards him out of the darkness!

Fred the Dog: Oh, this thing again! Fine, I'll go inside. Just don't squeeze more of that stuff out of your horn. I really don't want to know how it's made.

Mr. Eric: The unicorn cloud sounded rather affronted, but it did not pursue and it waited patiently while Fred finally entered the building. The door slid closed behind him, and somehow, gentle, twinkling starlight seemed to show from every wall and ceiling.

Fred the Dog: You know, if this place had some people and some halfway decent food, it'd actually be kind of nice to visit.

Mr. Eric: The starlight seemed to dance before him, leading him across the floor to the shiny doors of a spacious elevator that slid smoothly open in front of him and closed behind him and then... silently shot him into the sky. Or at least, that's how it felt. As the elevator climbed the building, he could see out over all of Happyplace. There were fireflies and glowing crystals and even some mosses and algae that shone with beautiful light in the darkness.

But he also noticed...

Fred the Dog: Every one of these buildings is exactly the same and it doesn't look like a single person's out on the streets. What is going on here?

Building: We have calculated the optimal bedtime to produce happiness.

Fred the Dog: It's 7:30!

Building: A perfect time to unplug, see to your hygiene, and personal care, and calmly wind down before bed.

Fred the Dog: What? I'm a dog. When it's bed time I curl up in a ball and go to sleep. I don't know anything about the rest of that stuff.

Building: You will learn.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, I'm 13 and a half years old. I don't learn new stuff anymore.

Building: Hmm. Perhaps you are not a happy resident of Happyplace.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, I was sucked into here by a vortex of cotton candy and then kind of forced to enter this building. So unless you tell me what's going on, I think I'm just gonna leave.

[Ding!]

Mr. Eric: Fred's elevator had reached the top of the building and it slid open to reveal a room that sort of looked like a command deck on a space ship. Every surface was sleek, smooth metal with bright displays showing a constant scroll of numbers and figures and data. It made very little sense to Fred the Dog.

Building: I have brought you here for answers.

Fred the Dog: Okay, so I don't have to learn how to operate these computers, right?

Building: I'm afraid you could not even if you tried.

Fred the Dog: Hey, I may be old, but I'm still technically a Gen Z doggy. I'm hip with technology.

Building: I do not doubt it, but my systems are incredibly complex. I have created a city that is both self-sufficient and perfectly happy all the time.

Fred the Dog: How can a city be happy? I mean, people are happy, sometimes.

Building: I would take offense to that if I were not so happy, but I am a city and I am quite happy all the time.

Fred the Dog: Excuse me, but I don't buy that. You're all alone here. How could you be happy?

Building: I am not alone. My brother Randall comes to visit sometimes.

Fred the Dog: Wait, you're Randall Radbot's sister?

Building: Indeed. Hazel Happybot at your service.

Fred the Dog: Wow, you and Randall have really different vibes.

Hazel Happybot: Yes. It is unfortunate that his programming is flawed and he cannot see the path to lasting, sustainable happiness.

Fred the Dog: Oh, listen, you're giving me a headache. Can I just go ahead and take a nap now?

Hazel Happybot: Not until you have showered and brushed your teeth and brushed your fur and trimmed your nails.

Fred the Dog: You just listed my four least favorite things in the world.

Hazel Happybot: You will sleep better once your personal health is attended to.

Fred the Dog: No.

Hazel Happybot: Excuse me?

Fred the Dog: Just give me one of them dental bones and I'll chew it and then I'll sleep on the sticky stuff that it leaves on the floor, and then maybe next week, I'll take a bath.

[Whirring sound]

Oh, I don't like that sound...

Mr. Eric: The rainbow unicorn cloud sounded like it was getting closer again.

Hazel Happybot: My nanocorns will assist you.

Fred the Dog: Don't sic your unicorn robot at me.

Hazel Happybot: Ho ho ho. Your humor brings me joy. My nanocorns are thousands of tiny sparkly unicorn robots.

Fred the Dog: Why?

Hazel Happybot: Because sparkling unicorns make people 2% happier than matte finish unicorns.

Fred the Dog: No, I mean why any of this? Please don't make me take a bath and brush my teeth all in the same night.

Hazel Happybot: This would make you unhappy?

Fred the Dog: Yes!

Hazel Happybot: But it is necessary.

Fred the Dog: I know... I was rolling around in the mud and then I licked my paws so I got mud in my mouth and then I rolled around in the mud some more.

Mr. Eric: So Fred begrudgingly agreed to a bath and a toothbrushing. And while he did sleep well afterwards, he was still ready to go first thing in the morning.

Fred the Dog: Okay, bye Hazel Happybot. It's been weird. I don't want to do it again.

Hazel Happybot: You're leaving so soon?

Fred the Dog: Yeah, but you don't have to call me a cotton candy vortex or anything. I'll just helicopter tongue my way back to What Is World and get myself good and stinky along the way because I know Mr. Eric would be heartbroken if he thought someone else gave me a bath. [Record scratch.]

Mr. Eric: No, actually, that's... it's fine, Fred. Anyone could give you a bath. I enjoy them, possibly, even less than you do.

Fred the Dog: Oh, Mr. Eric always jokes like that but he'd be lost without me.

Mr. Eric: It's just I have two children and two dogs who all need baths now, so really any help I can get would be amazing.



Fred the Dog: Don't worry, Mr. Eric. I will help you by getting myself good and dirty. Just let me say goodbye to Hazel, first.

Hazel Happybot: Would you stay if Randall Radbot came to visit?

Fred the Dog: I guess I could stick around for a few—

Hazel Happybot: Years. A few years! Wonderful.

Fred the Dog: No, like minutes, maybe.

Hazel Happybot: Follow me.

Mr. Eric: And the silvery computers of this control room seemed to all melt down and shoot out of the building, forming a tall, narrow, shining bridge to the building next door.

Fred the Dog: Oh, I don't know how much I like these heights.

Hazel Happybot: I thought you could fly.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, as of like two months ago. But I couldn't fly the rest of my life.

Hazel Happybot: You will be safe. My nanocorns will catch you if you fall.

Fred the Dog: Ugh, you can keep your nanocorns to yourself, please and thank you.

Mr. Eric: Said Fred, as he carefully tiptoed across the bridge and arrived at the penthouse of this other building. Where Hazel's room was all silvery metal, this room was wild and overgrown with unicorn posters and statues and fluffy dolls and even a unicorn bed.

Fred the Dog: Oh, that's a nice, fluffy bed for me to stink up.

Randall Radbot: Whoa, whoa, Fred. Please tread lightly around my unicorn threads.

Mr. Eric: It was Randall Radbot, a rather worn looking robot with a permanently bent antenna. Randall was the first being that Fred had met in this town who actually did seem happy.

Fred the Dog: Randall, can you tell your sister that she's making me unhappy by being kind of controlling.

Hazel Happybot: I'll have you know that Fred is 1.5% perkier after eating his nanocorn goo and sleeping in Happyplace.

Fred the Dog: Oh, but that goo was so gross.

Hazel Happybot: It is nutritionally complete.

Randall Radbot: It's nutritionally complete.

Hazel Happybot: Everything a senior dog needs.

Randall Radbot: Yeah, everything a senior dog needs, mm-hmm.

Hazel Happybot: For optimal health.

Randall Radbot: Hazel. Easy, healthy options for everyone is super cool but forcing them to only ever have those options is kind of not cool.

Hazel Happybot: I am not trying to be cool. I am trying to make people happy.

Fred the Dog: You know what makes me happy?

Hazel Happybot: A good night's sleep after a bath and brushing your teeth.

Fred the Dog: No! I mean, sometimes. But sometimes it's rolling in the dirt and chewing on an old stick.

Randall Radbot: And you know what makes me happy?

Hazel Happybot: Lubricating your joints with high viscosity oil?

Randall Radbot: You know, sometimes. And other times, just doing some yoga at sunset.

Hazel Happybot: Sunrise and sunset delay people starting and finishing their days.

Fred the Dog: Hey, whoa whoa wait. Why don't we each try each other's happy things and maybe we'll each find a new way to be happy.

Hazel Happybot: Very well, but only because my happiness sensors sense that the idea of this experiment make you happy.

Fred the Dog: Are you monitoring my happiness right now?

Hazel Happybot: Only the natural pheromones that your glands secrete.

Fred the Dog: Okay, no, okay, no, pass. I don't want to know.

Mr. Eric: And though Hazel was a building, she tried out doing yoga with Randall Radbot. Her large, twisting spire bending and swaying and stretching this way and that.

Hazel Happybot: Interesting. The foliage on my building did seem to enjoy having the sunlight reach them at different angles.

Randall Radbot: But Hazel, did you enjoy it?

Hazel Happybot: I am always happy so your question is irrelevant.

Fred the Dog: Oh, now try things my way!

Mr. Eric: And Fred led Randall and the big building outside of town to a big, grassless hill that was more muddy than dry. And Fred, Randall, and Hazel Happybot took turns rolling down it.

Hazel Happybot: Hmm. I'm afraid buildings aren't built for rolling. But I did manage to collect several new soil samples for my vegetation.

Fred the Dog: Okay, but have you tried eating a stick, yet?

Mr. Eric: And Fred shoved an old stick into the entranceway of the building. The door snapped closed on the stick, breaking it in two.

Fred the Dog: No, no, no. Hazel, you got to savor it.

Hazel Happybot: I am a building without tastebuds. I am incapable of savoring.

Randall Radbot: Okay, but did this new experience make us happy?

Hazel Happybot: I will be power spraying mud from my solar panels for weeks.

Fred the Dog: I didn't think about that...

Hazel Happybot: And after doing yoga, all the furniture inside of me is upside down.

Randall Radbot: Well, nanocorn can fix that.

Hazel Happybot: But I have had a feeling that is different from the feelings that I feel when I have been alone.

Fred the Dog: Maybe you had a little bit of messy fun?

Randall Radbot: Even though it wasn't totally in line with your rad vision of Happyplace?

Hazel Happybot: Hmm... perhaps we should continue this experiment for a few more days.

Randall Radbot: Why would you say that?

Hazel Happybot: Oh, to gather more data, of course. It might help me improve my utopia.

Fred the Dog: Oh, hey, don't say that word. There's no such thing as a you-topia. Maybe if you make this place more of a we-topia—

Randall Radbot: Ooh, I like that.

Hazel Happybot: But my happiness calculations.

Fred the Dog: Mean you just made the perfect place for you. Some people like things messier.

Randall Radbot: Some people like to stay up later.

Hazel Happybot: And some people don't like to eat nanocorn horn excretions.

Fred the Dog: I mean, that's most people, Hazel.

Hazel Happybot: Well, thank you both for explaining to me, a happy bot, what makes people happy.

Fred the Dog: Uh...

Hazel Happybot: And don't bother thanking me for the fact that I made a 13 and a half year old dog 15% friskier today.

Fred the Dog: You know, I have had a lot of fun.

Hazel Happybot: And you, Randall, we unfreeze your robot joints and get them shining like new every time you visit.

Randall Radbot: You know what, Hazel. You're absolutely right. And it also makes me happy to see my little sis who has grown to be 50 million times my size found her own path to happiness and works to share it with others. Plus I just really love the unicorn stuff.

Fred the Dog: Yeah, it's good for you two. It does kind of freak me out a little bit.

Hazel Happybot: And now I know that it is okay for you to be the one person in a million who does not like unicorns.

Fred the Dog: What? No, of course I like unicorns. I just don't like eating this stuff they shoot out of their horns and it looks like... forget it.

Mr. Eric: The end.

Fred the Dog: I'm gonna go roll around in that mud again for Mr. Eric.

Mr. Eric: Still not necessary, Fred.

Fred the Dog: And then I'm gonna fight him every step of the way at bath time. He loves a good bath time wrestle.

Mr. Eric: I don't. No. Not true.

Fred the Dog: I'll probably scratch up his arms real good this time. Get him all wet. It's his favorite.

[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Well, Makayla, I hope you enjoyed your story. Now, I'll read our patron write-in question from Raya. And I also want to thank her brother Cailen for sharing his ideas.

Raya asked: what if Randall Radbot's sister, named Hazel Happybot, came to Randall's unicorn house and they did yoga with Fred the Dog?

Now, I don't always get the chance to answer such an elaborate question but I so enjoyed telling your story.

Fair Elise: Before we go, Fair Elise here to shout out Juniper, age five, who likes unicorns and hopefully enjoyed this story.

Abacus: And I would like to give a magical shout out to Nieve, who is seven years old. Nieve's sister is named Erin and she is five. Thank you both.

JF Kitty: I've got a purrfectly purrific shout out for Piper who really loves me and I guess Fred the Dog.

Fred the Dog: Thank you for really liking the podcast!

Oh, and I got a final shout out for our longtime fan Logan who's turning ten, soon! And now he has two pug dogs named Marvin and Myla. They sound like quite the cool pair.

Mr. Eric: And I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co creator, Craig Martinson for our theme song, my helper Miss Lynn, Dessiree McFarland for her sound design in this episode, and all you kids at home who are working to discover your own path to happiness and know that it doesn't have to be the same path as your neighbor.

Until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme song plays.]

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