

Podcast: What If World

[Episode 248: What if "The Beatles" were actual beetles?](#)

File Length: 00:23:08

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 Stevie.

Stevie: It is Stevie and I'm seven years old. I'm a gymnast and I like bugs. I have a pet tarantula, her name is Scarlet. My what if question is what if bugs could do gymnastics? Thank you.

Mr. Eric: Oh, thank you, Stevie. Some of you may know I used to teach gymnastics and that I've always loved bugs. Now, we've got another write-in question from a patron named Elijah. Elijah writes, what if The Beatles, meaning the band, were actually beetles and were called The Humans? Elijah, just about everybody my age also loves The Beatles, and I am so excited to tell this story that I want to jump right in. So let's find out what if The Beatles were actual beetles called The Humans, and what if bugs could do gymnastics?

[Rising harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Pixicato was feeling proud of herself today. She was the first non-bug player on the bugsketball team, and she was holding her own at practice, even without using magic. In bugsketball, there is one big basket-style net, standing 50 feet in the air on either side of the field. There are also three giant spiderwebs stretching all the way across the field at different heights on the way down. That way crawling and flying creatures alike can be part of the team, and it makes falling a lot safer, too. But, I digress.

Dug: You'll never get past me, newbie! [Laughing]

Mr. Eric: Said Dug the Bug. Dug the Bug was a hercules beetle, a type of rhinoceros beetle and one of the biggest flying insects in the world. Of course, being in What If World, that meant Dug was even bigger than Pixicato.

These spiderwebs weren't the sticky kind, which is why Dug the Bug was able to launch his body into the sky, doing a kind of flying logroll towards little Pixicato. But she'd been swinging from her parents' wands since she was a baby, and so she grabbed Dug the Bug's horn and flung around it as if it were a parallel bar, while holding the game ball—a very sturdy and adventurous roly-polly bug—between her tucked knees!

Then, with one, last spin around Dug's horn, she launched herself up and through a gap in the next layer of web.

Dug: Ooh, that was a pretty good move.

Mr. Eric: Said Dug, shaking his head and looking legitimately impressed. Of course, Pixicato still had to get by Flyona Apple. Some small-minded bugs grumbled that flies had an unfair advantage in the game of bugsketball, but Pixicato knew the truth. Flyona was the best because she lived and buzzed bugsketball. She was the best because she practiced the most.

Flyona: Oh, look. The pixie thinks she can score a goal on me?

Mr. Eric: Said Flyona. Pixicato didn't really think she could, but she figured she'd make a good show of it. The little pixie fluttered forward, holding the roly-polly bugsketball in one hand, and, using her other to help her maneuver and flip and twist and turn, she thought for a second she might fake out Flyona with a last minute flick to the left, but—

Flyona: Nice try, new kid.

Mr. Eric: Said Flyona, buzzing directly into her path, reaching out for the ball and grabbing nothing but air.

Pxicato: What just happened?

Mr. Eric: Said Pixicato, feeling shocked and a little woozy.

[Whistle]

Mr. Eric: A whistle blew.

Flyona: Foul. No magic, Pixicato.

Pixicato: I'm sorry. That's never happened before.

Dug: You can only use magic to help you fly, or climb, or prevent injury.

Pixicato: I know, I know! I mean, I literally didn't even know that I can teleport.

Flyona: Oh, calm down, it's just practice.

Mr. Eric: Said Flyona, gently patting Pixicato's shoulder with a wing.

Dug: It's a safe place to make mistakes. I guess there's things we don't know about pixies.

Mr. Eric: Added Dug the Bug. Practice wrapped up about an hour later but the first one had left her feeling pretty tired to be fair. The roly polly bug they'd been using as a ball unrolled.

Coach Olly: Good practice, everyone.

Mr. Eric: Said Coach Olly, the roly polly. They always seemed to sound a little dizzy.

Coach Olly: I think we'll be in good shape this weekend. Just remember, Pixicato, no teleporting during the game.

Pixicato: I'll remember, Coach Olly. See you then.

Mr. Eric: And Coach Olly, the roly polly scooted themself back into a ball and rolled their way off the field. Pixicato packed up her pads and wing-guards quietly, still feeling embarrassed by her accidental magic. But on her way home, Flyona Apple and Dug the Bug caught up with her.

Dug: I think we've been a little hard on you, kiddo.

Mr. Eric: Said Dug. He was a kid, himself. But hercules beetles were so big they tended to talk this way to anyone who wasn't a giant.

Dug: Let us make it up to you.

Mr. Eric: Flyona Apple pulled a paper ticket out of her gear bag. It was for an eight o'clock show happening tonight, starring some band called—

Pixicato: The Humans? I've never heard of them.

Dug: They're only the most popular, buzz 'n' hole band of all time?

Pixicato: Buzz and hole?

Flyona: Oh, please don't say it like that. Buzz 'n' hole. It was music started by bugs, but lots of people listen to it.

Dug: We figure we can learn a little about pixies and you can learn a little about bugs.

Pixicato: That is so kind, but this ticket is for tonight at eight o'clock and it's a school night.

Flyona: Just ask your grown ups. How could they say no to you seeing The Humans.

Dug: It'd be pretty unbuglievable. Pick you up at seven.

Mr. Eric: So Pixicato thanked her friends and zipped home as fast as she could, feeling so excited and energized that she actually managed another short teleportation on the way home. Of course, that second one left her feeling...

Pixicato: Hello, Mother... hello Mom...

Mr. Eric: Said Pixicato to Fair Elise and Sprite Alright, respectively.

Sprite Alright: Oh, you seem exhausted.

Mr. Eric: Said Sprite Alright, zooming up to her daughter.

Fair Elise: You have been pushing yourself too hard at this bugsketball.

Mr. Eric: Fussed Fair Elise, taking Pixicato's heavy bag of gear.

Sprite Alright: You know, if you quit now, we can still get half back on all these pads?

Pixicato: No, I don't want to quit. [Yawns] I've just been going through a lot lately.

Fair Elise: Well, tell us all about it over dinner.

Pixicato: No time, I've got to take a quick nap before the show.

[Record scratch.]

Sprite Alright: Oh, what show was that?

Mr. Eric: Asked Sprite Alright, raising an eyebrow.

Pixicato: Flyona and Dug invited me to a show. It's the first time I've been invited to anything by these kids.

Fair Elise: And that show is... tonight?

Pixicato: But Dug the Bug is flying us there and back. He's a hercules beetle, we'll be very safe.

Sprite Alright: Whoa, there aren't any adults going?

Pixicato: I don't think there are any tickets left, Mom. The Humans are the most popular buzz 'n' hole band in the world.

Fair Elise: Buzz... and... hole?

Pixicato: Ugh, please don't say it like that, Mother. It's buzz 'n' hole and maybe you would know that if you had any bug friends.

Fair Elise: Pixicato, look at yourself? You're exhausted. You want to skip dinner so you can take a nap so you can go see a band we've never heard of with friends of yours we've never met.

Sprite Alright: Not to mention, no adult, and you're just telling us about it, now!

Pixicato: Mother, Mom, I'll be fine!

Fair Elise: Yes, you will, after a hot meal and a good night's sleep.

Pixicato: Mother!

Fair Elise: We can all go the next buzz 'n' hole show together.

Pixicato: Ugh!

Mr. Eric: Cried Pixicato, fleeing to her bedroom and slamming the door behind her. Before too long, a soft knock came on her door.

Sprite Alright: Normally I'd teleport your dinner right in to you, but I thought maybe you might want a little space so I'll just leave it right here.

Mr. Eric: Said Sprite Alright. It was usually the parent she was least mad at that came knocking at her door. But that only seemed to make her madder as if she didn't realize what they were doing.

Pixicato: Go away, Mom. I've only got an hour to rest.

Sprite Alright: It's just you said you were going through a lot and you know we're always here.

Pixicato: Yes, except when something's really important to me.

Mr. Eric: Said Pixicato, pointedly leaving her dinner outside of her room to get cold, despite starting to feel kind of hungry.

Sprite Alright: Okay, you are feeling angry at us right now, and I understand. I'm around when you're ready to talk. Good night, honey fly.

Pixicato: And I wish you'd stop calling me that!

Sprite Alright: Good night, Pixicato.

Mr. Eric: And Sprite Alright teleported away from her daughter's door. Now, fairies don't need smart phones to write to their friends. Pixicato simply drew her wand, thought about Dug the Bug and Flyona Apple, then started writing on her window curtains in glittery letters. It took her some drafting and erasing and redrafting, but when her message was ready, she made the curtains flutter with a flourish of her wand and the words disappeared. And then reappeared in front of Dug and Flyona. The message read, "Change of plans. You can pick me up on the underside of my cloud. That way we'll get to the show even faster."

A response quickly wrote itself on Pixicato's curtain. It looked like a fly's face, but one eye appeared to be winking, which was not something Pixicato thought flies could do, but she took it as confirmation and instead of trying to rest, Pixicato spent the next half hour trying to figure out how to teleport.

[Scene break.]

When Dug and Flyona arrived at the underside of Pixicato's cloud, the little fairy was waiting for them, looking a little peaked and sweaty and tired, but wearing a Humans t-shirt she'd magicked herself.

Flyona: Oh, hand-made merch. Very resourceful, Pixicato.

Pixicato: You have no idea.

Mr. Eric: Mumbled Pixicato, climbing onto Dug the Bug's back. Well, more specifically, his pronotum, which is like the head-back region, but before the wings come out. Anyway, that's where she climbed, holding onto his horn for dear life as he flew off like a shot.

Dug: Sorry for the hustle, but our tickets are general admission so the earlier we get there, the better our view.

[Scene break.]

Mr. Eric: When they arrived at the venue for the show, Pixicato looked up in awe.

Pixicato: This is Flyaway Park, the oldest bugsketball field still standing.

Dug: Lying.

Pixicato: Right.

Flyona: See here?

Mr. Eric: Said Flyona, gesturing to a point just above the stadium where they could see bug roadies flying around doing a sound check.

Flyona: The Humans will be in the top of the stadium, flying around with wireless instruments.

Dug: And a rad electric drumset.

Flyona: While we watch from below.

Mr. Eric: Pixicato saw that most of the non-bug people rested in chairs around the edges of the stadium. The field itself was reserved for general admission and the crowd was using the three layers of horizontal web, classic to a bugsketball field, to sit, stand, and even crawl around and over each other, vying for the best view.

Pixicato: Um, general admission looks like it's mostly bugs and big creatures.

Mr. Eric: Said Pixicato, trying not to sound as nervous and tired as she felt.

Dug: Sure, but for a bugsketball team like us, we can get around them, no problem.

Pixicato: But there's so many...

Mr. Eric: And many was practically an understatement. Granted, Dug was still one of the biggest creatures there, but just barely. He and Flyona looked at Pixicato expectantly.

Pixicato: What?

Flyona: You know, if we got up to the top, Dug could block us out our own little corner. We'd have the best view in the house, and no one would... bug... you all night.

Mr. Eric: Pixicato didn't like the way Flyona had said "bug."

Pixicato: It's not that I mind bugs. I love them. Every fairy is said to be part bug, you know.

Dug: That's horse hair. You think we're icky!

Pixicato: No! I just, I wasn't prepared for this. I'm not sure it's safe.

Mr. Eric: Dug and Flyona gave each other a look.

Dug: You could always teleport us to the top.

Pixicato: But I've only ever done it three times.

Dug: Once at practice...

Pixicato: Then again on the way home.

Flyona: And when you snuck out to meet us.

Pixicato: You knew?

Flyona: "Change of plans, meet me on the other side of the cloud." We weren't born yesterday.

Dug: Yeah, I'm three months old.

[Record scratch.]

Pixicato: What?

Dug: That's full grown in beetle age. But they say I still need to finish school.

Pixicato: But you talk like an old man.

Dug: You try talking with a giant horn weighing down your mouth.

Pixicato: It's just, I thought you two were responsible.

Flyona: And we are. That's why we brought you. You can get us up there safely, and we can see the best show ever together.

Mr. Eric: They were at the bottom of the field, now, three layers of web hung between them and the sky where the band would be playing any minute.

Pixicato: Did you just invite me because I had magic?

Dug: No, no, no no no no. It's also because you're old.

Flyona: See, Scarlet the tarantula was supposed to be our chaperone. She's a big, hairy, scary, grown up, no one messes with her.

Dug: But then she got sick and our grown ups said we couldn't go.

Flyona: Until we told them about you being 51 years old.

Pixicato: But 51 is still a kid in fairy years. Didn't you think it was weird that I played on a kids' team with you.

Flyona: Kinda, you're a hundred times my age.

Pixicato: But I still live with my parents!

Dug: I thought maybe they lived with you.

Pixicato: But you knew I snuck out--You know what? Never mind. I'm taking you both home, right now.

Mr. Eric: Pixicato grabbed each of her bug teammates by a leg, knowing that if she took them out of this stadium, she'd never get another chance to be their friend. But she was so angry and embarrassed and worn out that she tried her best to teleport them away, only to find herself flying right below The Humans as they started up a song.

Flyona: Wow, you really had us going there, Pixicato!

Dug: But these are the best seats in the house.

Mr. Eric: And Pixicato couldn't argue with that, because they were flying right below four beetles, each playing musical instruments.

Pixicato: Wait, The Humans are beetles.

Flyona: Yeah, they spelled their name that way because their songs are so hummable.

Dug: But they misspelled Hummin' because they're just weird and clever that way.

Pixicato: Oh, I get it.

Mr. Eric: Said Pixicato, very much not getting it at all.

The Humans: This next one's your favorite song.

Mr. Eric: Said one of The Humans as they zipped by.

Pixicato: I think it's a little presumptuous for them to say this is my favorite song.

Flyona: It's the title of the song. "Your Favorite S—" Just listen.

The Humans: [Singing in a style kind of like The Beatles]

This is your favorite song,
not the one we sing,
but the one you're remembering.

This is the perfect song,
not the one we sing,
but the one that taught you that thing.

Might be a glad song,
might be a sad song.
Might be a song that you're hummin' on and on.
Might have a lesson, keep you from stressin'.
Might help you get right out of a mess, you're in.

This is your favorite song,
not the one you hear,
but from earlier this year.

This is a relevant song,
not the one we play,
but the one that'll save the day.

[Spoken] So just take a minute to think about that other tune and do whatever it's telling you to do before it's too late.

[Singing] So stop your waiting, anticipating,
'cuz this next part is kind of just frustrating.

Pixicato: I think this song is telling me that I've got to get us out of here.

Flyona: No, the song's not saying anything. That's the whole part.

Dug: You really don't get buzz 'n' hole.

Pixicato: Probably not, but it reminded me of a song about responsibility and I really think I've got to get us out of here right now.

Mr. Eric: And even as Pixicato spoke, the crowd started climbing and flying upwards. They weren't happy about Pixicato and her friends blocking their view.

The Humans: [Continue singing in the background.]

Bugs: Get out of our way.
We waited in line all day for these seats.
Just who do you think you are?

Flyona: You know, on second thought, maybe it is you teleport us out of here.

Pixicato: I can't. I only brought us here by accident.

Dug: But those other bugs look like they want to eat us alive!

Flyona: And like they probably could.

Mr. Eric: Pixicato was scared, but as she looked at her friends, she saw that they were terrified. And being 50 years their elder, she thought maybe she should do something before a swarm of bugs was on top of them.
The Humans flew up even higher and security bugs started coming out, bracing for this rising, roaring, crowd.

Pixicato: All right, listen. We got ourselves into this mess, and we're going to get ourselves out. It's just like bugsketball practice, right?

Dug: Sure, if we're facing every team at once!

Pixicato: And we're going to need a big defender to help push past them.

Dug: Hey, I'm big!

Pixicato: And if anyone gets by Dug, we need our all-star to fake them out. Can you do that, Flyona?

Flyona: I can fake out anybody, but there's so many.

Pixicato: I know, I know. But practices is a safe place to make mistakes, right? Maybe my magic mistakenly makes those webs into the sticky kind, huh?

Flyona: Okay, yeah. So as long as we stick together and don't touch the webs...

Pixicato: You've got it. Let's go, team.

Mr. Eric: And off they went, dodging and weaving through the surge of insects. Dug was big enough to brush most of them aside and Flyona flipped and flew circles around the rest, leaving them so off balance that a little

nudge from Pixicato was all it took to stick them to the spiderweb. The magic drained her, and her wings started feeling like weights strapped to her back, but she kept going. They made it through one web, then another.

- Dug: Last web!
- Mr. Eric: Shouted Dug the Bug, but as he looked back...
- Dug: I think we're gonna pull this oo...ooh.
- Mr. Eric: His wings got stuck in the last web.
- Pixicato: No no no no no!
- Mr. Eric: Pixicato tried to undo her spell, but her rainbow wand had lost its color. Her magic was spent.
- Flyona: Just get out of here, Pixicato. I'll stay with Dug.
- Dug: Flyona!
- Pixicato: Then, I'm staying, too!
- Dug: Pixicato!
- Flyona: We're not leaving you, Dug. So you can just drop it.
- Dug: Would you two just look!
- Mr. Eric: They'd been twisting and turning in acrobatic twirls for so long that they kind of lost track of their surroundings. Yes, they were stuck on the last web, but the very last bug had just finished swarming past them, a lady bug, no bigger than Pixicato's pinkie.
- Lady Bug: That was some pretty sweet gymnastics, you three.
- Mr. Eric: Said the lady bug.
- Lady Bug: You all should play bugsketball.
- Flyona: We do!
- Mr. Eric: Said Flyona, looking at Dug and Pixicato.
- Dug: And we make a pretty great team. They already left, didn't they?

Pixicato: Oh, that lady bug left immediately, yeah.

Sprite Alright: Pixicato ElivieSpellright!

[Record scratch.]

Pixicato: I didn't know I had a middle and last name.

Sprite Alright: You don't, but I'm so angry I just imagined them.

Dug: Are we in trouble?

Sprite Alright: I don't know who you are, but probably!

Pixicato: Mom, I can explain.

Sprite Alright: How you snuck out with an untrained teleportation spell, nearly got yourself and your friends trampled by bugs, then stuck up half a concert in spiderwebs.

Flyona: Yeah, that just about sums it up.

Sprite Alright: Pixicato, we can undo this web spell, but we could not undo it if you or someone else got hurt.

Pixicato: I'm sorry, Mom. I messed everything up.

Dug: Yeah, but she was downright heroic at the end. We almost got away with it, really.

Sprite Alright: I'm not sure what point you're trying to make.

Flyona: Neither is he.

Pixicato: I promise, Mom. I'll never teleport again.

Sprite Alright: Oh ho ho! Fat chance! No, no. What you need is practice. And lots of it.

Pixicato: Really?

Sprite Alright: Yep, yep. For the rest of the summer, you're the official unpaid teleportation intern for Fred the Dog.

Pixicato: ... Really?

Sprite Alright: J.F. Kat, too. Here's your day planner, intern. Go ahead and look where Fred wants to go tomorrow.

Pixicato: What is the Museum of Really Old Eggs?

Sprite Alright: You'll see... well, you'll smell, first, really. [Laughs]

Mr. Eric: The end.

Pixicato: Can't you just ground me?

Sprite Alright: [More laughing] You wish, kiddo.
[Falling harp scale.]

Mr. Eric: Well, Stevie and Elijah, thank you for your questions and for lending your names to give us Pixicato's middle name of Elivie.

I'd like to thank Karen O'Keeffe, my co-creator, Miss Lynn, my producer, who pitched this story, Craig Martinson for our theme song, and all you kids at home who know that your grown ups want to hear about your life, mistakes and all. You might find out that we've made a lot of the same mistakes, ourselves.

And until we meet again, keep wondering.

[What If World theme plays.]