



What If?: Serious Scientific Answers to Absurd Hypothetical Questions

By Randall Munroe

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From the creator of the wildly popular webcomic xkcd, hilarious and informative answers to important questions you probably never thought to ask.

Millions of people visit xkcd.com each week to read Randall Munroe's iconic webcomic. His stick-figure drawings about science, technology, language, and love have a large and passionate following.

Fans of xkcd ask Munroe a lot of strange questions. What if you tried to hit a baseball pitched at 90 percent the speed of light? How fast can you hit a speed bump while driving and live? If there was a robot apocalypse, how long would humanity last?

In pursuit of answers, Munroe runs computer simulations, pores over stacks of declassified military research memos, solves differential equations, and consults with nuclear reactor operators. His responses are masterpieces of clarity and hilarity, complemented by signature xkcd comics. They often predict the complete annihilation of humankind, or at least a really big explosion.

The book features new and never-before-answered questions, along with updated and expanded versions of the most popular answers from the xkcd website. What If? will be required reading for xkcd fans and anyone who loves to ponder the hypothetical.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, September 2014: What if everyone on earth aimed a laser pointer at the moon at the same time? What if you could drain all the water from the oceans? What if all the lightning in the world struck the same place? What if there were a book that considered weird, sometimes ridiculous questions, and it was so compelling that you found yourself skimming its pages to find out what would happen if you threw a baseball at light speed? With *What If*, Randall Munroe has written such a book. As he does in his extraordinarily popular *xkcd* webcomic, Munroe applies reason and research to hypothetical conundrums ranging from the philosophical to the scientific (often absurd, but never pseudo) that probably seemed awesome in your elementary school days—but were never sufficiently answered. It's the rare combination of edifying and fun. —*Jon Foro*

Review

“What If? is one of my Internet must-reads, and I look forward to each new installment, and always read it with delight.” —Cory Doctorow, BoingBoing

“Randall Munroe is a national treasure.” —Phil Plait

“For scientists, the price of progress is specialization. When the goal of any researcher is to lay claim to a tiny niche in a crowded discipline, it's hard for laypeople to find answers to the really important interdisciplinary questions. Questions like, 'Is it possible to build a jetpack using downward-firing machine guns?' Fortunately, such people can turn to Randall Munroe, the author of the XKCD comic strip loved by fans of internet culture. . . . For Munroe, who writes with a clarity and wit honed over eight years of writing captions for his webcomic, the fact that a question might be impossible to solve is no deterrent to pursuing it.” —Wall Street Journal Speakeasy blog

“By speaking the language of geeks. . . while dealing with relationships and the meaning of a computer-centric life, *xkcd* has become required reading for techies across the world....The Internet has also created a bond between Mr. Munroe and his readers that is exceptional. They reenact in real life the odd ideas he puts forward in his strip.” —The New York Times

“With his steady regimen of math jokes, physics jokes, and antisocial optimism, *xkcd* creator Randall Munroe, a former NASA roboticist, scores traffic numbers in NBC.com or Oprah.com territory. One key to the strip's success may be that it doesn't just comment on nerd culture, it embodies nerd culture.” —Wired, in an issue featuring “the people who have shaped the planet's past 20 years”

“Sometimes the beloved geek-chic webcomic *xkcd* is funny in a broadly accessible way. Sometimes it's achingly poignant, sometimes it's socially intelligent, and sometimes it's esoteric humor that programmers or scientists have to explain to the rest of us. But at its most ambitious, it either packs massive amounts of interesting information into a small space, or engages in breathtaking experiments with the medium....[A]t its best [*xkcd*] isn't a strip comic so much as an idea factory and a shared experience.” —Onion AV Club

About the Author

Randall Munroe is the author of the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *What If?*, the science question-and-answer blog *What If*, and the popular webcomic *xkcd*. A former NASA roboticist, he left the agency in 2006 to draw comics on the Internet full-time, supporting himself through the sale of *xkcd* t-shirts, prints, posters, and books. He likes candlelight dinners and long walks on the beach. Very long walks. Lots of people *say* they like long walks on the beach, but then they get out on the beach and after just an hour or two, they *say* they're getting tired. Bring a tent. He lives in Massachusetts.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

William McClanahan:

With this era which is the greater individual or who has ability in doing something more are more treasured than other. Do you want to become one of it? It is just simple solution to have that. What you must do is just spending your time very little but quite enough to get a look at some books. Among the books in the top record in your reading list is *What If?: Serious Scientific Answers to Absurd Hypothetical Questions*. This book that is qualified as *The Hungry Slopes* can get you closer in turning out to be precious person. By looking upwards and review this publication you can get many advantages.

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