

Introduction

Hi!

This book is a collection of strips from *xkcd*, a free webcomic. I want to get that out of the way so you don't feel betrayed later when you realize you paid for a book of things that you could get for free on the Internet. I like books a lot, so I've put this one together from my webcomic (and added some annotations and other tidbits), but that's really no excuse for poor economic sense on your part. Still, if you've purchased this book, I suppose it's too late for regrets. Let's gloss over this incident and move on to the story of *xkcd*.

I remember thinking, sometime around age ten, that being a cartoonist must be wonderful. You get to draw things, people think you're clever, you can do your work whenever you want, and you can hang around at home all day in your underwear. But I had two problems: I couldn't draw and I didn't know how to write jokes. With that career choice obviously out of reach, I went for my second choice: awkward science nerd.

I was never a great student—I knew the “you're not performing up to your potential” speech by heart. I never got in the habit of taking notes. Instead, I filled my notebooks with charts, lists, and stick figure drawings. Despite my academic mediocrity, I managed to get a degree in physics and a job at a nearby NASA research center. The people were very nice to me but I gradually realized I wasn't happy there. There wasn't a lot of nerd culture in the area, even at NASA, and my job consisted of getting poorly documented software libraries to talk to each other, which I wasn't very good at.

One evening I decided to go through my notebooks and scan a few drawings that I thought were funny or pretty. I had a four-character domain name that I wasn't using for much, so I uploaded the comics there to show to some friends. Someone sent one of them on to a friend, who sent it to another friend, who sent it to a friend of his