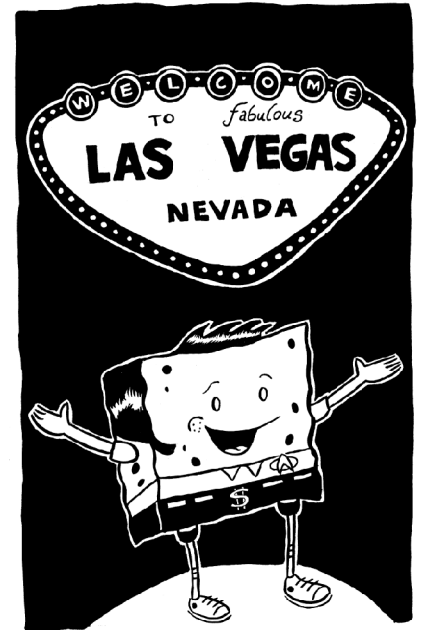


# Selections from *Dancing Barefoot*

by Wil Wheaton

Illustrations by Ben Claassen III



## Excerpted From *The Saga Of SpongeBob Vegas Pants* (or, how I learned to stop worrying and love Star Trek)

I check my watch: 4:55 p.m. I'm supposed to go on at 5 p.m. and talk for about 50 minutes. I usually talk for 90 minutes, which gives me time to let the audience warm up to me, tell some involved stories, take lots of questions, and make some jokes. With just 50 minutes, I can't waste any time: I have to go out there and nail 'em with a good joke right away, so the audience is on my side.

Well, I've got three things working against me before I even walk into the room:

1. I'm the last speaker of the day. The fans are tired and a little burned out.
2. I'm following Michael Dorn and Marina Sirtis. They do conventions together all the time, have a set routine that never fails, and the fans *adore* them.
3. I was Wesley Crusher.

Performing well at a convention is extremely important to me. I care about what the fans think. I don't write them off or take them for granted. I know that they've spent a large portion of their disposable income on this show, and I want to make sure they get their money's worth.

I remember how I felt when William Shatner dismissed me on the set of *Star Trek V*.<sup>1</sup> That feeling of humiliation and disenchantment is easy for me to recall, and I do everything I can to ensure that I don't inflict it on another person.

When I am on stage, the only real difference between me and the people I'm talking to is that I got paid to wear the spacesuit. I'm a huge science fiction geek. I've been attending conventions since I was in the fifth grade, and I know what it's like when a guest is only there to take the fans' money.

I pace backstage, checking my watch every 40 seconds. Michael and Marina are really working this crowd, and the fans don't want to let them get offstage. At 5:15, they finish.

My mouth and throat get dry. My hands sweat and tremble. I've got the *Mind Meld* cast, my parents and my wife in the audience. The last thing I want is to have a whole room of Trekkies hate me in front of them.

Michael and Marina come offstage, and smile at me. Marina gives me a warm hug, and kisses my cheek.

"You look great, Teen Idol." She turns to Michael. "Doesn't he look great?"

"If you say so," Michael teases me.

I love these two. I'm terrified about going on stage, but a smile that starts in my feet spreads across my face.

"The fans loved you guys," I say. "I have a lot to live up to."

"You're going to be great, Wil." It's Dave Scott. "Are you ready?"

I take a deep breath. "Yeah. Let's do it."

Michael and Marina wish me luck, and leave. I wonder if any of us have ever stayed around to watch each other on stage. I've watched Patrick a few times, hoping that he'll break into some spontaneous Shakespeare, but nobody's ever watched me, as far as I know.

Dave pats my shoulder, and takes the stage.

"Oh, ladies and gentlemen! Our next speaker is going to really surprise you!" The crowd begins to applaud.

*That was nice. Surprising people is cool.*

"He did a show for me in Waterbury, Connecticut, and he was the funniest, most entertaining, and charming guest I've ever had!" The applause is joined by some whistling.

*Woah, Dave! Let's not build me up too much.*

"You are going to have the time of your life in the next 50 minutes!"

I can hear some screams of "WESLEY!" join the cacophony.

*Oh Christ. "The time of your life?!" Stop now, please.*

"Please welcome to the stage, all the way from Los Angeles, the man, the myth, the legend, Wesley Crusher himself, WIL WHEATON!"

The crowd explodes. They cheer. They stomp their feet. They whistle. The stage is littered with panties.

Well, maybe not the panties part, but everything else is true. I swear. I take a deep breath, and walk through the curtain.



I burst out onto the stage, and they jump to their feet. In this moment, I understand the appeal of living a rock and roll lifestyle.

I walk around the stage, waving, throwing the goat, and enjoying the positive response.

When the crowd settles down, I hit them with my funny:

It's hot in Vegas. Tenth Circle of Hell hot. Fortunately, TNN has shown up and, in a humanitarian and self-promotional effort, has handed out bottles of "Altair Water." It's plain old bottled water, but it's in a nifty green bottle with some Star Trek graphics on it, and a friendly reminder to "Watch TNG on The New TNN!" They are handing them out by the hundreds, because those spacesuits really make you sweat, if I remember correctly.

So I hold up the bottle of water and I say, "I've been drinking this 'Altair Water' all morning . . . and you know what I'm thinking? This isn't actually from the planet Altair. It's just regular water! So if you paid for it, I think you got ripped off."

*Oh yeah, baby. It's comedy gold.*

The applause and cheering of moments before is replaced by the hum of fluorescent lights, as the first surly heckler shouts, (with the appropriate mix of condescension and contempt), "It's free, Wil!"

Self-preservation speaks up. "Get off the stage, Wil. You had your chance and you blew it."

He's right. I've been on stage for 15 seconds, and they already hate me.



## Praise for *Dancing Barefoot*:

*“The legions of Trek fans who have rediscovered Wheaton as a guy much like themselves, as well as those weblog readers who enjoy Wil's humor but don't know the difference between trilithium and tribbles, will find Barefoot irresistible . . . the author's humility is an effective antidote for the feeling that one might be about to read the memoirs of yet another self-indulgent celebrity blowhard -- which Mr. Wheaton certainly is not.”*

**- Christopher Holland**

*B-Movies Quarterly*

<http://www.b-movies.org>

*“Wil Wheaton accomplishes something in his new book, *Dancing Barefoot*, that is genuinely astonishing. He weaves true life tales that are both geeky and emotional at the same time . . . It's funny, it's poignant, and it's real.”*

**- Monte Cook**

*D&D Writer/Geek*

<http://www.montecook.com>

*“Wil has mastered the art of being funny while being serious, and being serious while being funny. I came here expecting to read some book about space dork Wesley Crusher, and instead I got this funny, touching book by this charming cool guy named Wil Wheaton.”*

**- James “Kibo” Parry**

*Internet Icon*

<http://www.kibology.com>

*“This is a real guy, with a real life, and he tells good stories . . . you should read [*Dancing Barefoot*]. There are a lot of bad books out there. This is a good one.”*

**- Steve Jackson**

*Steve Jackson Games*

<http://www.sjgames.com>

*“Full of humor and humanity . . . touching, genuine and funny. Deeply impressive, I can't wait for his next book!”*

**- John Kovalic**

*Creator of Dork Tower*

<http://www.dorktower.com>

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