

Revelation

Ronnie Kreegar carefully weighed the intrinsic benefits of obliterating the ant's life against the obvious effort of moving his thumb to do so. By the time he decided it wasn't worth the muscular movement, the insect had already disappeared into the grass.

Absolutely nothing appealed to him in these final few minutes of a too-damn-short lunch break. The sun was getting unbearably hot for lawn work and they still had half a football field left to mow on this old fart's Pacific Ocean of a front lawn.

Fifteen feet from his chlorophyll-stained tennis shoes, Sandy Dennison leaned against a tree, blankly enjoying the last of his slack time in similar enthusiastic inactivity. Drowsing in place, Dennison didn't look like he had the motivation to pick his nose.

Wendell Smith, aka Wendell the Wimp, however, looked far too wide awake under a tree of his own, bookworm nose buried as usual in a massive hardbound volume that made *War And Peace* look like a coin laundry brochure. The title made Kreegar cringe.

Applied Fundamentals of a Constructionist Philosophy.

Whatta jerk. What t'hell was he expecting to get out of that crap? Meaning of Life in fifty thousand words or less? It was all an act. Kreegar felt a familiar urge to punch Wendell just on general principle. Like he had done dozens of times before.

Damn weasel acting so superior and—

“Ohmigod.” As if reading Ronnie's thoughts, Wendell's face suddenly turned up from the pages, eyes staring behind cokebottle glasses, almost hidden by a stringy fall of thin, flyaway hair. He looked like a junior mad scientist twenty miles from home who had just remembered the Bunsen burner was left on.

Vince Moravek

Kreegar did not like that look. Squinted murderously. *If he comes up with some stupid quote on the cosmic truth of lawn mowing, I'll rip his...*

The Wimp, wisely but far too late in Kreegar's opinion, lost that impaling look. But the usual fear didn't replace it. Something was wrong. Wendell stared... *glared* in fact, boldly, right into Kreegar's scowl. Just begging to get pulverized. Kreegar could hardly believe it, yet welcomed the suicidal insolence. Gave 'em all more the reason.

Dennison watched in lax curiosity as Kreegar got to his feet. Then saw his expression and snapped to full attention. Slack-jawed smirk. Wendell was gonna get mashed.

When the Wimp spoke though, it was strangely calm statement with a peculiar absence of the routine whining pleas for mercy: "I think, therefore I am."

"Not for long." Kreegar began to roll up his sleeves. "Why're you staring at me like that?"

"Because." Wendell smirked like the demon spirit of a cheap dollar con had somehow possessed his skinny self. "The phrase is more than that. I really *do* think and I really... uh, *am*."

"Whatever you think you are, let's see if you can say the same about your teeth in about five seconds." Kreegar stalked forward.

"So I *thought*." Stunningly, the Wimp didn't twitch from his sitting-duck stance. "Therefore, you *aren't*."

Ronnie Kreegar promptly vanished.

With a dull, lingering stare at a very-disturbing pair of tennis shoe-sized lawn indentations (briefly compressed grass blades already springing back up), Sandy Dennison found himself bolt upright without recalling the movement. Jaw brushed his waistline. Had he seen... ?

"H-h-how... ?" Sandy couldn't get his tongue to work right.

Wendell fairly beamed. He seemed very satisfied with himself. Smug. He slapped *Applied Fundamentals of a Constructionist Philosophy* closed with a thick thud and stood, grunting slightly but

still smiling.

Dennison coped with the impossibility his eyes insisted on by reacting with base instincts. Wimp had pulled some kind of nasty trick. Maybe Ronnie, unlikely as the scenario was to believe, was a cohort, cooperating with Wendell to make him, Sandy, out to be a fool. *Well, I ain't laughing.* Dennison stepped over and grabbed shirt collar and armpit, bodily lifting Wendell up nearly a foot off the ground. The book dropped. Dennison thumped Wendell against tree trunk hard enough to chatter teeth. Oddly, the Wimp continued a strangely squintless smile even as his massive glasses slid off his face to be very-deliberately crushed under heel.

“You tell me right now.” Dennison snarled with vapid breath. “Where's Ronnie?”

“Sandy,” Wendell continued that smarmy wiseass tone. “Have you ever considered the complementary relationship between facial features and certain edible perennial herbs?”

With that, Sandy Dennison's nose became a huge, foot-long asparagus stalk.

“Aaaaaa!” Dennison screamed hollowly with a nasal twang. Which was not too surprising when one considered half his nasopharynx just became vegetable matter. He grabbed his transformed appendage, actually tugging the leafy stalk as if he could pull it out of his face. He couldn't. It was part of him now.

“I'd be inclined to help,” Wendell explained dead calmly into unheard blind hysteria. “Assuming, of course, there was anybody around to help in the first place.”

Wendell barely finished his sentence and he was alone beneath the trees. Whistling happily, he stepped over an *Applied Fundamentals of a Constructionist Philosophy* he no longer needed.

The battered, primer-gray 1973 Ford pickup of Georgetown Lawn Masters parked at the curb held Wendell's attention for less than three seconds. He scoffed in disgust, sadly shaking his head.

“Hmmm.” Wendell sighed happily. “Not only is existence the essence of thought, but thought is the essence of existence.”

Vince Moravek

The old truck blinked away in a single scintillating flash of emerald light. Sitting in its place was a sleek, frost-white Cadillac convertible of indeterminate model. Wendell, after all, had rarely gotten close to such fine vehicles, much less ridden in one. Nevertheless, the wax job was flawless and precise. Tanned steer hide upholstery. Pounds and pounds of thick, dazzling chrome trim. Even witty personalized license plates, misspelling deliberate and, to Wendell, quite witty:

I NO.

Nodding approval, he slipped behind the wheel.

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Gads, he always knew he'd look good in a Caddy!

Cruising along, freshening wind mitigating the hot sun, Wendell waved at pedestrians, hit the main County Road and headed east. Despite his vanity plates, Wendell didn't really know where he was going and really didn't care. Washington D.C. and the White House seemed the obvious ultimate destinations in these cheery new-found circumstances, but there was no hurry. Who knew what fun could be had on the way to claiming total control over the country and eventually, he supposed, the world?

Such grandiose plans were the main reason Wendell was preoccupied enough not to notice the Georgetown Sheriff patrol car as he streaked past the speed trap at about 45 mph over the posted limit. Deputy Marty Rawlings fumbled the radar gun out of the way and burst out after the weird-looking white Cadillac with the goofy, crazy-haired driver.

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Wendell noted the flashing blue and white lights far behind him in the gold-rimmed rear view mirror, marveling at the bright colors. The sheriff's car must have been at a complete standstill on the shoulder. It wouldn't catch up for a while. Wendell decided he would wait until the copper caught up before doing anything about it. Now or later didn't matter and, with his new confidence, it might be

rather amusing to see the expression on any hard-nosed cop faces when their guns dissolved to sand and their upper torsos were replaced with those of plucked chickens.

Warm slipstreams blasted back Wendell's hair as he renewed his song-less whistling tune. There was so much to consider now! Such as... deciding how to deal with all the rest of the creeps and troublemakers on earth today. Russians. The Chinese. Al Sharpton. That threatening loudmouth down in South America. North Korea. Half the Middle East. Kardashians, reality shows and certainly the entire lineup on MTV. Ordinarily a daunting chore! But not for a man-slash-god... a “Mod”? *Yes!* That's what he could call his new self. Oh, my Mod! He tittered deliciously.

Although Wendell was certain he could merely whisk any annoying parties into instant oblivion, he instinctively felt the world's first Mod should be more merciful. Perhaps he need only to conceive of a new artificial planet for it to become real, along with the transport there of seven or so billion meddling, obstructive miscreants.

Wendell did not slow for the upcoming curve. Not with his own brand of frictional coefficient boosting tire traction. But maybe an alternate “exile planet” wasn't the best idea. Suppose the angry peasants there developed a sneaky weapons-based space program or—

Approaching faster than expected, the sheriff car's wailing siren became abruptly, infuriatingly distracting. Time to do something about that. Wendell easily handled his big new car into the sweeping port curve, grin widening, imagining the cop thinking he was chasing the best NASCAR champion, regardless that physics shouldn't allow it for anybody.

But a Mod wasn't just *anybody*. That damn distracting siren! How should he deal with this particular annoyance? “I thought I thought a thought,” Wendell snarled at the wordplay, hesitating, trailing off with a frown. *Ohshit.*

“Until I forgot?”

Deputy Marty Rawlings whipped out of that nasty turn at Mile Marker 17 and lifted his foot off the gas pedal. Far ahead, County Road was stark, empty, miles-long flat between cornfields and pastureland. No turnoffs. Exactly what he expected after seeing that Caddy go into the curve at such idiotic speed.

He braked hard, scanning the bare gully embankment off the right and spotting the steaming, overturned wreckage almost immediately. Rawlings stopped his patrol car as close to pavement's edge as possible without slipping off himself.

Rawlings finished the ambulance call and got out. No fresh skid marks. Standing atop the twenty-yard incline, he could see how the Caddy had simply left the road without slowing, ending up in a smashed wreck clear up on the other side of the barrow pit. But something was wrong. Instead of a gleaming Cadillac, Rawlings' eyes almost hurt as he recognized a crumpled gray pickup truck lying upside-down. The truck was totaled, having rolled multiple times. The two wheels which had not snapped off axles still spun senselessly at the sky.

The deputy struggled down through scattered debris, including a couple of small gas cans, a slew of energy drinks and a bent lawn trimmer, up the opposite incline and leaned for a view inside the crushed cab. He steeled himself for the grisly expectations.

But the cab was empty. Both doors were crushed closed, windshield frame compressed. A quick search revealed no thrown occupants. Rawlings could not figure out what happened to the driver, the only alternative being the wreckage must have somehow ended up on top of the poor unfortunate, although there wasn't a sign of that whatsoever.

And he'd been chasing a shiny white Caddy, not an old pickup!

The faint siren of an ambulance broke into the background birdsong. For the first time in his law enforcement career, Deputy Rawlings anxiously considered the specifics of what he was going to report.

Vince Moravek

“But I *did* see a Caddy with a wild-haired skinny driver!” Rawlings declared to the open field, wondering about his own mental faculties. “Hell, at least I *thought* I did!”

Very faintly at first over the rising wail of the ambulance, a low, bubbling moan rose somewhere behind him.

Shocked still before turning, Rawlings was horrified to discover he was standing in a spreading pool of blood that he somehow hadn't seen before.

[END]