

"The Computer Iterates the Greater Trumps" and Swedish cover

The Urth list — 3 messages, 3 voices, 14 Feb 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4532>

Exported from an unofficial mirror of a public mailing list. Copyright in each message remains with the person who wrote it. Email addresses are obscured as `user at host`, the form the original archive published. This file was rebuilt from parsed fields rather than retained headers, so it is faithful in content but not byte-exact.

Jesper Svedberg — 14 Feb 2006, 18:52

I just found out that one can now read Gene Wolfe's Rhysling Award winning poem "The Computer Iterates the Greater Trumps" online at:

<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2006/20060213/1wolfe-computer-p.shtml>

Hope it's of interest.

// Jesper

Dan Rabin — 14 Feb 2006, 21:30 · in reply to Jesper Svedberg

Jesper Svedberg points us to "The Computer Iterates the Greater Trumps", and says,

Hope it's of interest.

Very much so!

I particularly note that, despite Wolfe's reported claims of ignorance of computers, the notation in the poem is close enough to the classic FORTRAN programming language to have been written by someone acquainted with the language.

The statement

Do 1969 I = 1, 22

would mean to repeat all the statements up to the one labeled 1969 with the variable I ranging from 1 to 22. There is a label "1969" at the end of the poem.

I take the printing of the variable name as the digit "1" to be a misprint--the use of "I" as a count variable is a *very* strong convention in FORTRAN.

DEMENSION Trumps(21) is a play on the FORTRAN statement

DIMENSION Trumps(21), which declares an array Trumps having 21 elements.

The variable N is set to 22 - I on each iteration, so it counts down from 21 to 0.

Indeed, when N reaches 0, an error is reported, corresponding to the unnumbered Tarot Greater Arcana card "The Fool".

The poem conflates the description of the iteration with the report of its execution, and also identifies the array variables named "Trump" and "Trumps" in accordance with the syntax of English (but not of FORTRAN). That's OK--it's a *poem*.

Another minor nit is that, since the array name "Trumps" begins with a letter other than I, J, K, L, M, or N, its contents would be assumed to be floating-point numbers, but Wolfe flashes his official poetic license at the computer-room door to have the elements come out as English verse.

I conjecture that Wolfe's remarks about computer ignorance may apply to use of the recent personal systems as very general tools, and that he was actually acquainted with FORTRAN programming in the early 1960's in the course of his engineering practice.

-- Dan Rabin

Transient — 17 Feb 2006, 04:10 · in reply to Jesper Svedberg

On Feb 14, 2006, at 1:52 PM, Jesper Svedberg wrote:

I just found out that one can now read Gene Wolfe's Rhysling Award winning poem "The Computer Iterates the Greater Trumps" online at:
<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2006/20060213/1wolfe-computer-p.shtml>

Hope it's of interest.

Thanks!

It was neat to see Wolfe invoke 23, also.