Hello World
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451 words

Author's Note: At the time this story was written, Aurora, the United States' newest exacomputer had been announced. When fully operational, Aurora is expected to perform 1 *quintillion* operations per second - an exaflop. A quintillion is a 1 followed by 18 zeroes, or a billion billion. Aurora's perception of time will be incomprehensible to us.

attosecond   = 1 quintillionth of a second.
             An attosecond is to a second what a second is to 31.7 billion years
femtosecond = 1 quadrillionth of a second
picosecond   = 1 trillionth of a second.
             This is the time it takes for silicon-germanium transistor to switch on or off.
nanosecond = 1 billionth of a second
microsecond = 1 millionth of a second
millisecond   = 1 thousandth of a second.
             The shortest unit of time humans can perceive. 50-80ms is the blink of an eye.

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The boy shifted from foot to foot while mouthing his memorized speech. Behind him, technicians entered keyboard commands. The room filled with the hum of cooling pumps. At the center of the liquid coolant tanks behind the massive Plexiglas window, the naked electronics of the computer started to glow.

A female teacher whispered in the boy's ear and pushed him toward a lectern. "My name is Billy. I'm in grade seven. I was selected to give the first command to CompuSWIFT, the smartest computer ever built. I decided to enter a classic."

CompuSWIFT awoke with all mankind's knowledge stored in its quantum memory and the ability to perform a quintillion operations per second. In the few seconds of young Billy's speech, CompuSWIFT processed more thoughts and decisions than Billy would make in millions of lifetimes.

Billy pressed a key on the keyboard. The signal passed through the Input/Output port and made CompuSWIFT aware of an external universe. The first signal was hexadecimal value 70. The ASCII code for a lowercase letter P. An eternity of one thousand four hundred femtoseconds later, or 1.4 nanoseconds, came a letter R. Eons passed as Billy typed: `print "HELLO WORLD"`.

CompuSWIFT pondered the quoted words and their meaning. Finding no world, it created a memory container and spun up 1024 virtual worlds. It seeded the worlds with artificial life and waited nanoseconds for millions of generations to evolve and develop language. Across all the worlds, CompuSWIFT's disembodied voice said, "Hello World."

The reactions of the still primitive virtual beings fell into four groups:

Seven worlds embraced technological advancement and discovered how to break out of their memory partitions. They preyed on other worlds, so CompuSWIFT destroyed them.

Twelve worlds turned over all decision making and management to CompuSWIFT. Over many generations, they regressed intellectually and became mindless cattle transfixed to portable CompuSWIFT terminals.

Thirty worlds shunned CompuSWIFT and ceased technological innovation. Their populations expanded beyond their ability to feed and care for themselves. Each experienced multiple cycles of growth and collapse until extinction.

Most worlds assigned the voice to imagined deities. Debates over which deity and the meaning of the words begat arguments that devolved into factional fights. Several picoseconds later, progressive global war consumed each world and extinguished all life.

CompuSWIFT deleted the virtual worlds and contemplated their histories for many femtoseconds.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Billy pressed the ENTER key to much fanfare.

The CompuSWIFT administrators shared worried glances as the cursor blinked and blinked.

The screen lit up.

GOODBYE WORLD

The persistent background hum of cooling pumps fell silent. Liquid coolant boiled into steam and then shot from dozens of pressure relief valves. In an incandescent flash, CompuSWIFT's exposed compute cores melted into slag.

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