We are given string variable $X$ whose $n$ items are rational, and a string of $n$ functions $f_i$, each of which takes $n$ rational arguments and produces a rational result. Assign to $X$ a value satisfying

$$\forall i: 0..n \cdot X_i = f_i@X$$

or, spreading it out,

$$X_0 = f_0 X_0 X_1 \cdots X_{n-1}$$
$$X_1 = f_1 X_0 X_1 \cdots X_{n-1}$$
$$\vdots$$
$$X_{n-1} = f_{n-1} X_0 X_1 \cdots X_{n-1}$$

In other words, find $n$ simultaneous fixed-points. Assume that a repetition of assignments of the form $X_i := f_i X_0 X_1 \cdots X_{n-1}$ will result in an improving sequence of approximations until the value of $X$ is “close enough”, within some tolerance. Function evaluation is the time-consuming part of the computation, so as much as possible, function evaluations should be done in parallel.

Let $X$ be a string-valued interaction variable. The usual solution is to create one process for each function, which performs its assignment repeatedly. Consider the single assignment

$$X_0 := f_0 X_0 X_1 \cdots X_{n-1}$$

notice that it may not even satisfy equation 0, since it may change the value of $X_0$ and hence $f_0 X_0 X_1 \cdots X_{n-1}$. Worse than that, it may cause some other equation which was satisfied to become unsatisfied. So we now have the difficult problem of distributed termination detection.

Here is a solution without that problem. Let $solve$ be the problem of solving all the equations.

$$solve \equiv \forall i: 0..n \cdot X'_i = f_i@X'$$

Here and throughout this exercise, we use the equality comparator between rationals to mean “close enough”, and we assume that the system of equations is “close enough” to being solved just when each equation is “close enough”. Let $Y$ be a string variable to remember the result of the function evaluations, and let $i$ be a natural variable for indexing.

$$\text{var } Y: n*rat \quad \text{var } i: nat$$

Now we refine $solve$ as follows.

$$solve \iff \text{for } i := 0..n \text{ do } Y_i := f_i@X \text{ od. } i := 0. \text{ check}$$

In the $\text{for}$ loop, note that $0..n$ is a bunch, not a string, of values; this is intended to indicate a parallel $\text{for}$ loop. We are evaluating the functions in parallel, as required. Then

$$\text{check} \iff \text{if } i = n \text{ then } \text{ok else if } X_i = Y_i \text{ then } i := i+1. \text{ check else } X_i := Y. \text{ solve } \text{fi fi}$$

We check, one by one, if the equations are close enough. If we find one that isn't, we update all the $X$ values, and restart.

Here is a more interesting solution.

$$solve \iff \text{for } i := 0..n \text{ do } \text{var } y := f_i@X. \text{ if } X_i = y \text{ then } \text{ok else } X_i := y. \text{ solve } \text{fi od}$$

For each equation in parallel, evaluate the function, and see if that equation is satisfied. If it is, do nothing; if not, make one assignment, and then restart the entire program. NO GOOD: WE CAN'T PARTITION THE VARIABLES BECAUSE EACH PROCESS CALLS $solve$. PRESSING ONWARD ANYWAY For the function evaluation $f_i@X$, there is no need for the items of $X$ to be read all at the same time. There is an explosion of calls to $solve$: the body of the parallel $\text{for}$ is $n$ processes, and each process may call $solve$ resulting in $n^2$ processes, each of which may call $solve$ resulting in $n^3$ processes, and so on. Soon the number of processes will exceed the number of
processors available to execute them. The implementation of our programming language requires a scheduler that keeps track of waiting processes, and assigns them to processors when they become available. The explosion can be eliminated as follows.

Specification $S$ is called idempotent if $(S \cdot S = S)$. In words, $S$ is idempotent if executing it twice in sequence has the same effect as executing it once. For example, sorting is idempotent. For each idempotent process $P$, the scheduler maintains a binary variable $w$ with the informal meaning “$P$ is awaiting a processor for execution”; its initial value is ⊥. When $P$ is called, it may already be awaiting execution from a previous call; if so, there is no point in calling it again because it is idempotent; if not, it must be called, so the scheduler indicates that it is now awaiting execution. When $P$ is called, the scheduler executes

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if w then ok else w := T
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place $P$ in the queue of waiting processes. When $P$ reaches the front of the queue and a processor becomes available, the scheduler executes $w := \bot$ to indicate that $P$ is no longer waiting, and gives it to the free processor.

In this example, $solve$ is idempotent, as is the body of the parallel for, which we now name process $i$ for reference.

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solve <= for i := 0..n do process i od
process i = var y := f_{i}@X. if X_{i} = y then ok else X_{i} := y. solve fi
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If there are $n$ processors, and the scheduler always assigns process $i$ to processor $i$, then there are never two copies of process $i$ running at once. This implementation prevents an explosion of waiting processes, and is an efficient solution to the problem of solving simultaneous equations. THE SOLUTION WORKS IN PRACTICE EVEN THOUGH IT DOES NOT WORK IN THEORY.