

# Pinball Wizard

Despite the name, this isn't wizardry. It's just good, honest 24th Century social science, being forced to use primitive 20th Century technology (specifically, seven heavily modified pinball machines). At least, that was what the guy said when the agents burst into his lair; there was also a lot of bluster and sneers about "ignorant fools" and "Cower! Cower before the might of the Chan the Unstoppa..." It was about then that the guy's integral temporal field **finally** overloaded from the strain of accumulated paradox, and sent him wherever people go when they get booted out of the timestream. Don't feel too bad about old Chan, though; the 24th Century seems to be mostly populated by megalomaniacal jerks, judging by how many of them keep showing up here.

Moving on, the Pinball Wizard's setup apparently allows people to predict short-term financial trends, based on which bumpers the pinball hits, and in what order. You apparently need exactly seven of them working the same problem in parallel, with seven separate iterations: assuming that you do everything right (either because Chan beat the process into you with some kind of remote brain stimulator, or because you're trying to read Chan's

notes), you can predict the next day's stock market highlights with 95% accuracy by looking up the results in Chan's handwritten notebook. The whole process takes twelve hours, though, which is why the Pinball Wizard rig came complete with shackles, and more brain stimulators. Seriously: don't cry tears for Chan. With any luck, he's somewhere fairly nasty right now.

Needless to say, the folks down in the lab don't know where to begin when it comes to researching this item. It's like a 17th Century natural philosopher trying to decipher a modern computer language; he could actually make a stab at the logic, but first he's got to realize that computers have programs, and then he's got to actually see the code, and then he can go take a hard look at the whole thing and try to get his head around it. Researchers are currently at stage one, and are now trying to get to a point where they can visualize what the Pinball is in fact doing. It's very slow going, not to mention intensely frustrating. Some researchers mordantly suspect that we won't figure it all out until, well, the 24th Century.

Well, at least now we maybe know how our descendants got that way.

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