

My thoughts and feelings about Bricks and Bricks competitions with the emphasis on Bricks IV

by Igor Vukomanovic

Hmm....hard to begin such an article. But, I'm still under the impressions from the competition, still motivated, so instead of playing I'll try to put all that motivation into this article ☺

My bricks history

...started around November 2000 when a friend of mine gave me the link to the bricks homepage thinking I would like the game. I downloaded it and was blown away! Finding perfects at Bricks 1 was just incredibly fun and challenging. I played a lot and finally got myself into top 25 – my first goal. After 2 months of playing I got 46181, and after three months I found myself into top 10 with 46225 ☺

During that time, I was browsing through all the histories and top tables. The name of Alan Chan I remembered very quickly, since it's almost everywhere ☺ and although he wasn't first at Bricks 1, it seemed he ruled this world.

Bubble Fun competition was taking place then, and I was stunned at its complexity and all the strange bricks I saw for the first time (antimagnets, holes,...) - but I decided to take a shot at it. Finished badly at +21, 14th place. But looking at it now, maybe quite a good achievement finishing in front of some great players like Wilson, Erick or Ruben.

After that, Bricks 2 just didn't cut it for me. Levels were much larger, more complex and after a quick glance it became obvious that it's impossible to find most perfects and have so much fun doing it as in Bricks 1. So I haven't played it at all. I was having a sort of a break because I didn't like hovers at **Flip Flop** and **Octagon** was just too packed for my liking.

Then finally **Foxy Four** took place. A puzzle I fell in love with the first time I saw it ☺ I was very motivated there and worked very hard. Took a lead for a short period of time, only to be beaten by Erick who was one move ahead all the time. During this time I was already familiar with the amazing skill of the top players like Alan, Wilson, Marco and was very proud to finish side by side with them, at 80 moves. The names of Erick, Kurt, Fabrice and Nolan who finished better I remembered from then on. ☺ Congratulations again guys. I will never forget that competition.

Somewhere during or after that competition Andreas posted info about Bricks 4! Wow, I could even design my own level! But...oh no...I needed to play all of Bricks 2 and Bricks 3!! And only about 4-5 months left to do that...and so much work and exams at the uni then ☹

But I managed. No time for **Swordfish** or **Dice** though. Designed Silmarils, tested it, played Bricks 2 for 1,5 months, sent in the score file, played Bricks 3 for about a month and managed to send in the score file maybe a week before b4 comp started! And Silmarils got in! What a joy !

Quick story about *Silmarils* level

Many people have asked me what are the 'Silmarils' ?! I think it's worth mentioning the story behind it here.

J.R.R. Tolkien's 'The Silmarillion' book is behind all that. It is a story of the beginnings of the world, thousands of years before the recent happenings in 'The lord of the rings'. *Quenta Silmarillion*, or, translated from elvish tongue: 'The History Of The Silmarils', is it's full name. It speaks of many great happenings in those days of old, which are all somehow connected to the mysterious and powerful Silmarils. In the beginnings, Gods created the first race, the Elves. Those elves were the offspring of God's thoughts, and were immensely beautiful and powerful. **Galadriel**, from the Lord of the rings, is one of those firstborn elves. The most powerful of all those, **Feanor**, put all of his power, and much of his life, in crafting those three perfect jewels – **The Silmarils**. Back in those days, before even the Sun or the Moon were created, the world was illuminated by the two great Trees, who were one of the grandest creations of Gods back from the time when they were making the world. Feanor, crafting the Silmarils, captured some of that light within them; Later on, the dark enemy destroyed the Trees and the world was in darkness; the Gods then called upon Feanor, saying that they could rebuild the trees only with some of their light, which resides in the Silmarils. But that meant the Silmarils had to be broken in order to take the light from within; Feanor declined, and waged a war against Gods themselves... So in this level, it is quite the same – it is needed to break open the three Silmarils and take the light from within....

Bricks IV

Well this is the thing I've been waiting for a long time to begin! The great happening itself. I was thinking a lot about that competition. I was already familiar with the skill of many good players, but still I set my goal to finish at top 5. I wanted to make a surprise, since my feeling was I was yet a relatively unknown player. I knew it would be extremely hard but I was hoping I could do it. But oh no! My Greece vacation with uni takes place the first 10 days of the competition !! Will I be able to catch up?

First month

The night before we set sail, the competition started. Took a glance. The levels look so hard!!! Solved Silmarils in 114 moves initially, tried to optimize and was amazed to find 107. It's so hard to test in the editor! Much easier this way. Solved Rei, Demon and Impossible and went to sleep, thinking of my trip tomorrow.

After I got back, I was amazed at the progress of all players, especially Alan and Wilson. I had to play fast!! But I found myself skipping a lot of levels I couldn't solve in 15-30 minutes. Oh no! This thing is harder than I ever expected ☹

I wasn't very familiar with the scoring system, bonus and penalty points. Haven't had a feeling what's important and what's not. I figured I will try to solve as much levels as I can, and then optimize later. I was doing pretty good with 41 levels in 41 hours of play (9 hours of trying Levate, TTT and Pigpen included!), but after that it started going slow. Found Nightmare rather quickly, but TTT and especially PigPen caused me immense problems. I just couldn't find the right packing. Finally I got them, 2 days before 33%.

I was feeling excellent with 44 levels, but I was left with only 2 days to at least cut the initials. But I didn't make it. I was afraid of not making even top 10, with 30+ initial scores and others semi-optimized.

Second month

I was glad, I kind of reached my goals for 33%. I was top 10, and 5th by the number of levels solved, which could mean I might finish in top 5 if I optimize fast. I was surprised Nolan ranked so high, with 2 levels less. Are his levels that good? During the first 10 days of November again I lost pace. Played Diamond for a few days, had an exam, just tried Levate for an hour per day perhaps. 10 days of no progress at all. So again I will have to catch up, am I fast enough?? I was determined to solve all levels in November. But Levate caused me amazing problems. I was desperate, trying out all possible combinations for the right chamber. Unfortunately I made some incorrect initial assumptions about it and I wasted much, much time trying to find what wasn't possible to find. After a week I finally solved it, but spent waaay too much time. Total about 19 hours. For the first time I was beginning to wonder if my top 5 is reachable. Got San after a struggle too. I found a most complicated path which was 400+ moves optimized. I was feeling very lousy about it, as well as with my 400+ optimized Triathlon and optimized 190 Helios path. I lost motivation for Thunder too. I tried it couple of times for 15 minutes and quickly gave up. Again I was late to optimize, with just 10 days till December. Found about 2000 moves in those 10 days, but still left a few initials. In spite all, again I was feeling excellent with 47 levels and I really thought I might reach 5th or 6th place.

Third month

I was not that glad this time. I was 4th by the number of levels solved but only 8th overall. That meant my levels are really bad and that I am far behind optimal scores. I continued to optimize, finding 350 moves in the first 5 days of December. Then finally Dec 6th some voice in my head was telling me 'try Thunder tonight'. I listened to it, without any hope of solving it. But it happened ☺ Played it for 4,5 hours during the night and finally solved it, with (again) an extremely complicated 480 moves optimized path. But I was too glad for solving it to be upset by a horrible number of moves. The day before I found a point in Silmarils, which was just amazing, I was browsing through levels finding which one will I try, and (I don't know really why) I replayed my 100 moves solution and I noticed something strange. In 10 minutes I found 99!! I was blown away ☺ The rest of the days I spent optimizing, here I will mention only 2 significant days, 14th when I found a better path at Triathlon which saved me 150 moves, and 26th, when I found much better path at San, which saved me 270 moves. Optimizing was going great, I was amazed at how bad my levels really were. At 29th it occurred to me I just had to find a better Thunder. I was avoiding Thunder because not enough time had passed since I solved it, and I couldn't bare to look at it yet ☺ The time was running out very quickly. I was on 42000 then with a lot of not-completely-optimized levels but Thunder had to be the worst. The quest began. It was awful. I couldn't optimize my old path, I had to solve Thunder all over again. That's something I wouldn't recommend to anyone! After 4 hours that night, I found an alternative solution which saved me about 200 moves. But I wasn't satisfied, I continued the search and Dec 30th I made a great mistake of playing Thunder almost all day, just to find one other alternative solution which in the end required the same number of moves (296). I was very disappointed at spending that much time and not finding a satisfactory score. Time ran out, I was near 42200 which I knew wasn't

enough. Last day I had almost no time to play, I just found a few moves in Shi to make it above 42200.

In the end, I finished 6th as expected. I was somewhat surprised at Wilson's 5th place (after the amazing start), and Marco's 2nd place with 47 levels (but a fantastic 47 levels they were 😊)

But I was not very disappointed. I failed at my top 5 goal, however I don't think I was very far of it, (Erick why did you find a good TTT instead of a good Thunder!! 😊)

...next time I will consider carrying a laptop on my vacations 😊

Overview of levels:

Rei

Time spent on optimizing: 2 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 45 (+1)

Seemed easy, and I never thought it would be that tricky to optimize.

Very amazed at Marco's 44!

Ichi

Time spent on optimizing: 3 hours in 4 sessions

Score: 107 (+28)

I'm disappointed in my score here. I think I should have visited this level at least once more, since I had a nasty feeling it could be done in less than 100. But this much below 100? Wow!

Ni

Time spent on optimizing: 6 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 134 (+22)

I worked very hard on this one. But unfortunately chose the 1 barrier solution to work on, must be 2 barriers are used in the optimal. Anyone better using just 1 barrier?? 😊

San

Time spent on solving: 8 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 7 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 177 (+30) – 3rd

Ah! One of the most hated ones. I had to solve it all over again to find another, easier solution. Ugly. It seems so easy now! I gave it 10 difficulty, based on my first, very complex solution which was 440 moves optimized. It seems like a difficulty of 6 now 😊

Anyway, the perfect is amazing. Probably an odd and not obvious path to stumble on. Lucky guy, Nolan 😊

Shi

Time spent on optimizing: 2 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 134 (+34)

A bad score, as expected. I worked very little on this level, first time cutting the initial to 150 a day before 66%, second time on final day played until I found 16 moves which would give me 42201 score. After that I sent in ☹

Semi Inversion

Time spent on optimizing: 1-2 hours in 4 sessions

Score: 65 (+8)

Finally a 'nice' level ☺ The first 5 levels were just the type of levels I seriously dislike! Here, actually a surprise for me I was this far from optimal.. I didn't work very hard at it though, but it seemed easy. Hmm...

Dragon Tears

Time spent on optimizing: 4 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 108 (+18)

Never liked this level. Too packed for my likings...I needed much time to get motivated enough to begin optimizing it.

Well my guess was it could be done in <100, but I probably chose the wrong path to work on – again ☹. Worked pretty hard on it, so a little bit disappointed here too.

Raising Star

Time spent on optimizing: 1,5 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 79 (+19)

Nice level, but not enough work on it ☹. I think I underestimated this level. I guess no big surprise of a bad score here.

Corona

Time spent on solving: 2 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 2 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 178 (+67)

Very awkward level, and my worst level at the end ☹.. I never liked optimizing it because every attempt meant solving it all over again. So I quit after my 2nd solution...a bad mistake. No problems at solving it though. Another level not enough worked on.

Burocracy

Time spent on optimizing: less than 2 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 87 (+0) – 1st

What a surprise!! After I played for 10 minutes to cut the initial (to 167), I visited it only twice again. First time in less than 90 minutes I found 88. Second time only 12 minutes to find 87. I guess I was lucky there, for the first time chose a good path first ☺

PigPen

Time spent on solving: 9 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 5 hours in 1 session

Score: 142 (+43)

Well. The level that gave me the most frustration of them all I think! The outmost randomless in finding the packing drove me crazy. I couldn't find it for a long time, I don't even know how I did it at all! My solution was very weird, the very last brick below the barrier doesn't come last into the box at the end! I needed to, and managed to switch the last brick with one other, which later on comes last into the box. I knew it cannot be the optimal way, but I just couldn't find the strength to look for other packings. I forced myself 5 hours in 1 session to optimize it and that was it as far as this abomination is concerned 😊

The Mixer

Time spent on optimizing: 2,5 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 106 (+11)

Hmm, a weird level this is. I remember it took me a while to solve it, and I disliked it. Haven't touched it for a long time, I cut the initial the day before 66% and visited it once more on Christmas, having a breakthrough (changed the path, of course) which gave me 173 ->106. I thought it was a good score, and I had many other levels to attend to, so I left it there.

Thunder

Time spent on solving: less than 5 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 15 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 296 (+77) – 4th

The thing is, after all that time spent on it, I began to like this level! Seriously, I felt like starting to notice some subtle things about it, I began to 'feel' how it really works, how it reacts on various things I try...last 2 days of the competition I played mainly this level, desperately wanting at least <250. But no. My first path was 480 moves optimized. I knew there was no sense in trying something there so I set myself a task of solving it once more all over again, differently! A gruesome task it was. I was so happy when I did it, after many hours of trying. I needed about 400 moves initially for it. I was certain this was it. But disappointment again. It was 297 optimized. Nooooo!! Not again!! I felt really good about this path and didn't want to abandon it yet. So in the middle, somewhere about move 160, I noticed I could change something...and I found a whole another variation. I was happy again, but only for a short while... when I finally solved it, and optimized it...296. Arrrg!!

Helios

Time spent on solving: 2 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 3,5 hours in 4 sessions

Score: 88 (+9) – 4th

I had some problems solving this level, as I (of course) found the most complicated path which was 191 moves optimized. Naturally, I knew it was very bad but I had no strength to face it for a long time. I never liked these kind of levels. Finally in December I started playing it again in 12 days intervals...183 on 4th (same path), 154

on 16th (different path but still bad), and 88 on 28th (yes, much better, much easier path). I felt really good with it. I still do. 😊

Whichway

Time spent on optimizing: 5 hours in 5 sessions

Score: 70 (+4) – 4th

From the beginning I liked this level. A charming one. 😊 That must be the reason I played it that much, never really satisfied with my score....I had multiple breakthroughs here, finding <80 and finding <75...it seems I needed one more to get <70 😊 😊

...much fun at this level. Thanks Erick, sorry you didn't make top 4 here. 😊

E-magination

Time spent on optimizing: 3,5 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 84 (+12) – 2nd

Very imaginative level, yes. Many many ways of solving it, my first solution of 130 moves (optimized just a day before 66%) looked ok, but I just had to revisit this level at least once. I did it on Dec 28th, having a major breakthrough which earned me this nice score.

Backbone

Time spent on optimizing: 1 hour in 2 sessions

Score: 82 (+10)

Hmm it seems I completely underestimated and under-worked this level. I felt very good with 82 I found very quickly, I never considered visiting it again...a bad decision.

Miranda

Time spent on optimizing: 4 hours in 4 sessions

Score: 75 (+15)

Very hard to optimize in my opinion. I never really liked all those switches that keep ending up the way I wouldn't like them to 😊 Spice it all up with magnets and antimagnets and you get an extremely difficult to optimize level. I worked pretty hard on this one, but never really satisfied with my score. All the time I had a bad feeling about various parts of my solution. Yet, I somehow hoped I would be in +10 range. Not. 😊

Cronos

Time spent on optimizing: 1,5 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 89 (+6)

I have liked, but completely underestimated this level. It seemed perfect, I found it rather quickly and was satisfied. But alas! I have missed something. Very, very surprised I'm that far off.

Nightmare

Time spent on solving: 2 hours
Time spent on optimizing: 2 hours in 2 sessions
Score: 139 (+33)

Another surprise for me! I never spent much time here, since my path looked optimized all the time. Again...you know. 😊
No problems in solving it though.

Islands

Time spent on solving: 2 hours
Time spent on optimizing: 5,5 hours in 3 sessions
Score: 98 (+10)

I liked this level. Tricky to solve, even trickier to optimize. I played it much, I wanted <100 badly, my first optimization was 119. I never felt good with my beginning nor with my ending, but most moves I gained in the middle. Improved the ending too, which gave me <100. I stopped playing then, although I wasn't at least satisfied with the beginning which remained almost the same. I expected to be in +10 range though, so no surprises or disappointments here.

Hover

Time spent on optimizing: 2:45 in 4 sessions
Score: 55 (+4)

A level I knew would be hard to optimize, due to a lots of hovers everywhere and a peculiar ending. I was stuck at 70 for a long time, until my last visit when I noticed I'm doing the ending very wrong and saved a lots of moves there. Found couple of more moves in the middle and was very satisfied with 55, I actually thought it would be in +5 range so I'm ok with it.

Binah

Time spent on optimizing: 2 hours in 4 sessions
Score: 90 (+7) – 3rd

I remember having some problems solving this level, it is a quite awkward one. I was never feeling good with my 147 score so I searched little by little, couple of times, reducing it by 5-10 moves a time, until at my last visit I had a breakthrough and stumbled across this score. Actually I thought I would be closer, or at, a perfect. Little bit disappointed here.

Silmarils

Time spent on optimizing during the competition: 1 hour in 3 sessions
Score: 99 (+0) – 1st

Well, what to say here.

As is surely the case with most level designers, I know my level 'by heart'. I know its heartbeats, I know it's central nervous system, its internal organs and its limbs. So I guess it wasn't hard for me to find 100, although I was kind of surprised there because my initial perfect before the comp started was 114. Very quickly I found 107 the first day of comp, and Oct 16th I took another look and found 100. I was sure it

was perfect this time, so I kept this score for a long time. Yet for some unknown reason I replayed this solution at Dec 5th, noticed something, and in 10 minutes found 99!! I was totally shocked. This was the only level I was sure I had the perfect from the start until the end of the competition. Later when I saw other player's solutions, I was amazed at the difference of them! I never thought the level could be that complex while I was designing it. Marco's solution amazed me and intrigued me incredibly! Actually I think he deserved a record here. Congratulations again!

Maxwell's Demon

Time spent on optimizing: 2 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 21(+0) – 1st, tied with Nolan

Very interesting and not easy to optimize level. When I first solved it, I never had thought I could reach perfect, with so many possible ideas. In my first visit I got 34 and kept it for long time since I had more important levels to play. I wanted <30, so I revisited it in December, and found 23 very quickly, after I got the best idea, it took about an hour to get there. It just kept getting smaller and smaller! I was amazed. Took another look the day after and in 20 minutes got 21. In the end, I have to say I'm surprised at this record, but really glad I got the smallest one! ☺

Smiley

Time spent on solving: 2,5 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 4,5 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 216 (+39)

Excellent level, this one I enjoyed solving, and optimizing. Very imaginative design. I had problems solving it, so once I did I stuck with my original idea until the end. Which proved to be a mistake, the perfect seems amazing. My first optimizing was 290, and I haven't played it Oct 30. – Dec 27 because I felt there's nothing much to do there. When I tried it finally on Dec 27th, (night) I was shocked to find 233, and later on that afternoon 216! Never imagined it could still be this bad ☹

Heads and Hats

Time spent on optimizing: 3,5 hours in 1 session

Score: 118 (+26)

Phewww...the first time I solved this level (after a too many steps struggle too) I knew it will be a pain to optimize. I disliked it very much and disliked the idea of optimizing it. I forced myself couple of days before 66% I should at least cut the initial, but that night once I sat down and got into it, I couldn't stop for 3,5 hours. I found 118, and never tried it again since I thought it was a decent score, in +10 range. What an illusion!! This is to teach me never to visit levels only once.

Tak

Time spent on optimizing: 5,5 hours in 5 sessions

Score: 189 (+50)

Now... I knew it was bad, but this bad?? No! I spent much time here, all the way surprised at how much secrets this level holds. Now it seems there's even more secrets than I managed to find. All the time I disliked the thought of optimizing it, but

once I began, it went pretty smoothly. Once I got <190 I thought it was a decent score (+20 at most) so I quit playing. What a bad estimate!!!

Rune

Time spent on optimizing: 2,5 hours in 1 session

Score: 119 (+23)

Now this level is the same thing as Heads and Hats. Exactly the same. Disliked it, visited in only once, before 66%, played for 2,5 hours until I reached a 'decent' score which I thought 119 was. ☹ Another lesson for me to visit and work on levels more often.

Front Nine

Time spent on optimizing: 6 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 178 (+23) – 3rd

One more level I disliked, then started to like after spending much time on it ☺
First I had problems solving it because of the bricks memory limitations (too many steps thing) but after a while got the initial 444 score. My first visit happened the day before 66%, when I spent 4 hours to reach a satisfactory score of 228. I knew it could easily be brought to <200 but I had no time left that day. Finally I played it again Dec 28th, when I needed 2 hours to reach a very good 178 score. I quit playing because I didn't want to spend much more time there. Again, I knew it could surely be improved, and I had a good feeling perfect was around 160. So all in all I'm ok with it, no surprises, pleasant or unpleasant.

Triathlon

Time spent on solving: 2 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 4 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 265 (+63)

I was afraid of this level. I was really scared there. I had much problems solving it, and after more than 2 hours I solved it in a most complicated way. It involved touching the barrier on one side, going all around, touching it on the other side, then moving some bricks below the barrier, then again up, with lots of switchings...it was just *scary*. 660 initially (the worst initial by far) and 405 moves optimized, it looked awful, just horrible. I knew I had to solve it all over again, but remembering how it was the first time, I was avoiding it, running away from it like rats from a sinking ship. Finally I got the strength to face it Dec 14th (last time I played was Oct. 28th) and I surprised myself by finding much, much easier way to solve it. I optimized this path to 265 and felt really good, thinking perfect would be around 250 maybe. No need to say how surprised I was at the perfect, I think most people were just as amazed as me.

Fabrice really did the job well here. Well done Fab!

L-evate

Time spent on solving: 19 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 10 hours in 8 sessions

Score: 297 (+30)

<sigh>. The hardest level of them all, without any single piece of doubt there. The level that might have costed me ranks. Everything I did in this level, I did wrong. First I spent way too much time on solving the right chamber. I made some wrong initial assumptions on it, and spent hours and hours trying to solve it, I have even drawn over 100 different positions on paper (sometimes I prefer paper over editor) which took many hours, only to find out I have been thinking along the wrong path all the time. (Similar thing happened to me on PigPen.) Once I found the mistake and solved it, my optimization was going terribly. And terribly slow too. People who have tried it know what am I talking about. Actually I think this is Alan's greatest achievement. Every time some new idea arises, the level has got to be solved all over again which takes *time*. I have made a great mistake in trying out all the initial magnet combinations. I have even solved left chamber with just 1 magnet in the switch!!! And with different bricks in the trap! I was wasting my time in incredible amounts. At last, after finally finding <300 (which required a lot of playing around with various magnets in both chambers) I stopped playing thinking it's a decent score. D'oh!!!

Traffic

Time spent on solving: 2 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 1,5 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 73 (+16)

I remember I had fun playing this level, and I got it fairly quickly I think. The problem was I was kind of satisfied with my first score of 98 I made on Oct 26th. (I wanted <100 then). So I haven't played it at all, thinking it was ok, until Dec. 23rd, when I decided to check it out, since I haven't seen it in almost 2 months. Good thing I did, I found 25 easy moves quickly, retaining my initial path. I thought it was very good now, in +5 range. So I'm pretty surprised by this record. Congratulations Erick!!

Perikles

Time spent on optimizing: 2 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 96 (+32)

Very imaginative design, I liked this level, played not very much but reached what I had thought a decent score (+10 range?). Never had I thought I was so far off perfect! I think Kurt surprised everybody with his amazing solution, so I have nothing else to say here except – great work Kurt! Maybe the greatest surprise of the whole competition 😊

Calypso

Time spent on optimizing: 1,5 hours in 1 session

Score: 143 (+22)

Perhaps one of the most under-played levels, I never gave Calypso a chance. Played for 1,5 hours on Nov. 26th, and left it at 143 thinking I stumbled across a nice solution. Another lesson for me.

Barrier

Time spent on optimizing: 2,5 hours in 1 session

Score: 139 (+19)

An interesting level, which unfortunately never received a second visit from me. For a long time I kept it at initial, optimized it only on Nov. 25th and left it that way until the end. But this one, unlike others which I played only once, I really wanted to visit once again (to reach <130, since I felt like it's quite possible and because I enjoyed optimizing it, once I got 'deeply' in it) but never found the time to do it. All the time I had some more important levels with more moves to win on the 'playing queue' 😊

Tic-Tac-Toe

Time spent on solving: 10,5 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 7 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 174 (+7) – 2nd

😊 there's a lot to say about this level. I had problems solving it, of course, but I really really liked it. My favourite level of them all. It is exactly 'my' type of level and I was greatly motivated. After 4 hours spent trying out various paths, I found the correct one. I found it by going backwards – I tried to clear the area around the target as much as I could. Playing around that way, I came to the conclusion I just had to use the switch. It was the most logical way from that point of view. Then I started to look on how to do that. Once I saw there's just one way to do it, the correct path for the master became very obvious. A few hours more and I got it! I was so happy. It felt really like moving a mountain! Alan, Oct 29th should be noted as the first time TTT was solved using the switch! 😊

Oct 30th I spent about an hour cutting the initial (361) to the score of 226.

I was utterly shocked, amazed and blown away when realized that score was a record at 33%, and a record with the greatest difference from the 2nd (57 moves)!!!

Alan's level at that! What magic have I done? 😊 Of course I found out eventually the trick was in using the switch instead of the key...I never even gave the key a chance.

And I will always regret I haven't spent more time optimizing it back then (with my current score the difference would be over 100 moves 😊)

I began seriously optimizing it only in December, motivated again, spent a lot of time there (the switches are really hard to get optimal), finally settled at the score of 174, hoping it would be in +5 range. Well, almost there 😊

Hypnos

Time spent on optimizing: 1,5 hours in 1 session

Score: 76 (+18)

Cute level, at first I disliked the switches but later, when I thought I became proficient with them (after many hours optimizing Tic-Tac-Toe 😊) I began to like it. Anyway, I think this is the same thing as Calypso. Very under-played level, once I found 76 I thought I was lucky to have stumbled across a good path quickly, estimated it was maybe in +5 range so I left it that way. A bad estimate 😊

Quickshot

Time spent on solving: 1,5 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 3 hours in 3 sessions

Score: 143 (+20)

I remember I had some problems solving this one, but once I did, I learned to respect it. Very imaginative level, I liked optimizing it, and I'm very surprised I'm this far off perfect. I worked hard there, and I'm quite disappointed in my score. Well done Alan, Fab, Marco...

Catapult

Time spent on optimizing: 3,5 hours in 4 sessions

Score: 64 (+6)

Can you imagine I was afraid of this level?! When I saw it for the first time I thought it would be extremely difficult to solve. I was very relieved when realized it was quite simple actually. But so so difficult to optimize! I cut my initial of 173 to 99 (wanted <100 back then in October) and left it that way until December. Tried it again, and once I got deeply into it, this thing just kept getting smaller! I was very surprised to reach this score. I had expected perfect to be a bit closer (≥ 60).

Circus

Time spent on optimizing: 2 hours in 1 session

Score: 161 (+44)

I knew I was bad here, but this bad?! Oh my! I completely underplayed this level, but unlike H&H or Rune, I'm much farther away...I'm extremely surprised by this. I must've been doing something very wrong here. And I've had a feeling I found some decent ways to do all three chambers! Hah...silly me.

Mischmasch

Time spent on optimizing: 3:45 in 5 sessions

Score: 72 (+1) – 2nd, tied by many

Excellent level. Seems so easy to optimize, but holds so many secrets! I thought my 83 at 33% was perfect! ☺ I had multiple breakthroughs at this level, as I worked many times and spent a lot of time. Finally I stopped at 72, being absolutely sure it was a perfect. (And I can see I wasn't the only one thinking so).

Wilson, you magician!

Artemis

Time spent on optimizing: 1,5 hours in 1 session

Score: 98 (+12)

This is a level I never liked. The first glance upon it promised a level hard to solve and hard to optimize. Luckily, it proved easy to solve. I forced myself into optimizing it a few days before 66%, I wanted <100. After 1,5 hours I got into it, began to like it. Got 98 which I thought was in +10 range so I left it that way until the end. All in all, this level turned out to be as I expected so I'm ok with it. Maybe I should have given it a second chance though.

Open Sesame

Time spent on solving: 1,5 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 1 hour in 1 session

Score: 174 (+38)

The most underplayed level of them all. I remember having difficulties in solving it, so I never quite liked it. I optimized it quickly for the 33% on Oct 30th, never to return to it again. I'm very sorry I haven't done that, as I was planning to, but time just ran out... No surprise of a bad score here. I'm sorry, Sesame!!!

Hurdles

Time spent on solving: 2 hours

Time spent on optimizing: 1,5 hours in 1 session

Score: 95 (+12)

The same thing as Open Sesame, I played it only once (until I got <100), promising I would return, but failed to deliver that promise. I had much difficulties in solving it, I remember, my initial was much more complicated than final solution. I enjoyed optimizing it and once I reached 95 I felt good with it. All in all, I think I did a good job considering time invested.

Sena

Time spent on optimizing: 3:40 in 1 session

Score: 168 (+20)

This was a surprise actually. I liked this level from the beginning, and although I visited in only once, I tried really hard that time and thought I was near perfect. I noticed many subtle things about it during optimization, I noticed how timing was important, I noticed many many threads there and I tried most of them, and I was really satisfied with what have I done. That is the main reason I never tried it again, I never thought I could find anything more here, and maybe I really reached my best then. Or maybe it's just one more lesson for me never to play levels only once. At the end, I'm very disappointed ☹️

Impossible

Time spent on optimizing: 2,5 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 67 (+11)

Excellent level, very nice design in my opinion. I've grown very fond of it, first optimization I got it under 100 and second time I tried it I was surprised, it behaved just like Catapult, kept getting surprisingly smaller, and I even reached similar score as in Catapult. And again, I thought I was very near perfect. In my opinion, this is Nolan's greatest achievement. Congrats Nolan!

One more thing – it seems Alan was very prophetic when he made a mistake in the excel diary before the competition started, typing '54' for the best solution 😊... I laughed when a friend of mine (Robert, also a competitor) asked me in October, while I was on 117: 'what's that, Alan solved Impossible in 54? That's crazy!!'

I replied 'Yeah, that would really be crazy, it's just a typo'..

😊

Teleportation

Time spent on optimizing: 1,5 hours in 2 sessions

Score: 26(+2) – 4th, tied by many

A level extremely fun to optimize, but also harder than I expected. In November I finally got it after solving L-évate, in 15 minutes found 33 and I was really feeling good with it, thought it was near (or at) a perfect. 😊 On Christmas eve I gave it a shot, got a bit deeper into it and after a while got 26, again thinking it must be perfect. Definitely a surprise for me less was possible 😊

Some final thoughts...

I think I've learned a great deal in this competition. First of all, I've learned I've got to set myself a decent strategy. I have had no strategy whatsoever during the whole competition. When I played, I played levels I liked, and those I didn't like I used to set aside. Only the last week of the competition I forced myself to play. I think the thing is, I play most efficiently when I like the level, and therefore shouldn't push myself; but then again, I made great improvements during the last week, and that's because once I start playing a level for a while, when I get more deeply into it, I grow to like it! And then I make good improvements. I never expected it to work that way 😊

Second of all, I have learned good scores can't be obtained by playing a level only once. No matter how hard I played a level that one time, the score wasn't satisfactory. It seems various good and different ideas come during various visits to a level, and it's extremely rare that I get much different ideas in the same visit. Levels I have visited many times (Mischmasch, Whichway, Catapult, Binah, Hover, Helios...) all proved very good scores at the end. With my average of 2,6 visits per level, (including a visit to solve a level !!), 206 lines in the best solutions history, for 48 levels - it's easy to see I where have I failed.

Third thing I've learned is I must always question my path. In most cases I have stumbled on wrong paths first, and wasted a lot of time optimizing them, losing time and missing much points.

Fourth thing I've learned is the feeling about bonus points and penalty points. Now that I see I have had less penalty than Nolan and Marco for an example, and still ranked a few places lower, I can realize the importance of perfect levels and bonus points.

The conclusion I may draw then is - it's very important to play at big levels, as big levels proved to gain most bonus points. (I know it's not that simple, but still 😊)

Another good thing from this competition was – I've met and discussed with a lot of nice players, and got to know them a little bit better, in some way I can say I made some friends in the previous three months. **Fabrice** and **Marco** on top 😊

I discussed mostly with them, I suppose the same time zone helps? Or is the trick in the addiction to the internet 😊

I'm happy for Fabrice he ended up 3rd, he was so afraid he will be out of top 3, pushed out by someone...I believed in his place among top 3 all the way from the beginning when he started solving all those levels so quickly, no matter how hard I tried I couldn't keep up that pace! And Marco and his amazing levels, and his amazing Silmarils solution, I think he deserved that 2nd place 😊

I'm sorry I don't know other players enough to write something about them, I can only say a few words about: **Alan**, the absolute ruler and perfectionist, I discussed with you somewhat too, and enjoyed every single discussion we've had; I can hardly wait for all the statistics which couldn't be possible without your excellent Diary template, great work there too; **Wilson**, our discussions were always short since you never had the time for anything, yet you made a stunning score at the competition (again with very little time spent)...I'm surprised you ended up in 5th place, with such an amazing

start and a great score in the end; ☺ **Nolan**, a somewhat quiet yet a great player, very hardworking it seems, a perfectionist too; Congratulations on your success, my only chance for top 5 was that you don't solve those last 2 levels, which you did....**Ruben**, I met you just a few times in the chat but I can see your love for bricks in your *Thread-o-matic* program, and your great article, which inspired me to write this one. Only when I read it I realized you ended up 2nd in Bricks 3 competition and so I'm surprised I finished in front of you, I must have been very lucky you haven't found those last 2 levels; And...Ruben...please make Thread-o-matic work under Win XP! ☺ **Erick**, only a few discussions too, seems like a quiet but great player too...your name will always come up when I think of Foxy Four ☺ And last but not least, **Kurt**; Only a few e-mails but enough to recognize a wonderful soul there; And a superb player, who found 38 in Diamond in just a few hours, when I was struggling to get 39; I have no doubts you could've finished at least 2nd had you played the same amount of time I have. Make sure your dreams last longer than the night, Kurt! To all other players I haven't mentioned who are reading: congratulations on your ranks, and on participating in this competition; It wasn't easy to qualify, and it was ... fun.
See you around ☺

Special thanks to [Andreas Rottler](#), the mind behind all of this, without who none of this would be possible and nothing of this would have ever happened