

Thoughts on Dovelems:

Dovelems is a great achievement, but having played through it all now, I see it has many flaws, and I wanted to record my complete thoughts on the matter. I have referred to: Roundthewheel's Let's Play, Dodo's solutions, Ichotolot's solutions, and occasionally Flopsy's playthrough for information on intended solutions, and changes made in different versions and between the original Lemmini pack and the Neolemmix version (which I was playing).

Also, I have not yet finished Pimolems; my understanding is that while these two seminal packs may have been in development around the same time, and there could be some cross pollination involved, Pimolems does basically predate Dovelems to some degree. Thus I find it hard to really come to a decision on whether I think the Dovelems levels that are most obviously inspired by Pieuw's levels really stand on their own - they are never identical, but for the pairs I have come across so far, my feeling is that Pieuw's levels edge out Dodo's, they feel more solid, whereas Dodo's feel more like tributes. Don't know whether anyone agrees with me, and of course there's nothing morally wrong with such high quality tributes!

Disclaimer: I do speculate below about design choices I feel Dodo could have made differently, but certainly make no recommendation that anyone but he should change them at this point!

I am currently (as well as trying to finish Pimolems) playing concurrently through Geoff Lems and Lemmings Reunion - it seems to me that Ichotolot really is some kind of Lemmings fiend! Can't wait to see what his really nasty creations have in store!

Level by level:

Plain 1: "Again our Famous Lemmings !": Nice mining level to start out with, and it's always nice to have foreshadowing of later specific tricks!

Plain 2: "Critical Temperature" I really like DoveLems' training levels (I would even potentially say that they are superior to PimoLems'), although I must say I find this only a luke warm level, although the combination of horizontal bashing creating a vertical destruction effect in layers is certainly worthwhile to observe, and becomes relevant again later.

Plain 3: "Crazy Marble": Perfectly fine Digging level, although given the repeat was quite disappointing, this does not gain any foreshadowing points...

Plain 4: "For the Honour": Nice bombing level, good to be forced to look ahead to learn to see this criss-crossing pathways, and how to force lemmings into certain forks...also clearly while not the most challenging use of walking bombers, this level is significantly easier in NeoLemmix.

Plain 5: "Swallow Me": I think, the first real gem of the pack. Not very complicated, but even to an experienced player, makes one think a tiny bit, and the design itself is really beautiful,

harking forwards (if one can hark in that direction) to the wonderful world of "Valley of Chameleons". Dodo has a real talent with the rock tileset seemingly.

Plain 6: "The Plant Lemmings": A great builder introduction, trickier than might first appear, and made meaningful (in a way that "Crazy Marble" wasn't) by its wonderful out-of-the-box repeat.

Plain 7: "Face the Wall": Great level, one which was a welcome sight in its subsequent variation. Nice classic tileset design too, the column "button" in the middle of the wall is really striking.

Plain 8: "The Snowy Base": A nice level, but nothing special, mostly building. Although watching Dodo's solution is much more interesting than the lower route I took, which involved digging to stop them walking off the edge, then blocking only at the bottom while one lemming built to the exit. This gives me a premonition of my "backroute feelings" that I encountered throughout playing this pack, but I have to question even here whether the existence of a perfectly reasonable but less interesting alternate solution is really a good thing. It seems to me that sometimes there is an expectation that a player will automatically see the most obvious use of skills and then try to make it work with whatever means necessary, whereas I tend to try and find the "path of least resistance" through a level, which I've noticed sometimes results in breaking it in ways that no one else (I think) has yet noticed. This seems to me an important psychological distinction to keep in mind when designing.

Plain 9: "Through the Bubbles": Very nice level, although I am a sucker for the bubble tileset. Great introduction to turning and mining, although having the arrows go not the way you'd expect is a nice touch.

Plain 10: "The Woodrock Temple": Nice simple level, though not a trivial solution. I found the building-mining meetup a bit finicky in NeoLemmix, but perhaps I am missing something subtle about the combination of those skills

Plain 11: "Concentration Camp": The first of several levels with bizarrely morbid titles! Great level though, I love the cut-and-dried nature of it which of course is thoroughly broken in its future incarnation!

Plain 12: "Don't Let Them Leave the Way": Tremendous level later on, but I see that I solved it by ignoring the leftmost hatch, and letting them all die. Dodo's solution much more humane (lemmane?) but I consider mine totally legitimate.

Plain 13: "The World Stem": An iconic level, extremely memorable in design (what is it with the Rock tileset?). Ultimately though, at least in this rating, a relatively undistinctive scout-build-bash affair.

Plain 14: "Simple Life": Again iconic, Dodo has these two very beautiful modes it seems, a Rock tileset sense of adventure and wonder, and a laconic, minimalist, almost Scandinavian

sense of design with the Crystal tileset, nicely juxtaposed in sequence here. Still, ultimately another build-bash affair, but slightly more pleasing than the previous. Not sure why my NeoLemmix version has a bit of wall missing?

Plain 15: "Ground Floor, Please": Nice level, nice solution, although I just committed to losing around half of them instead of the nice reacharound that Dodo intended (but obviously solutions still have a bit of leeway at this point in the pack - I know this applies to level 8 too, which I was critical of, but I like this more because the leeway is amusing: let a bunch of them die, rather than tedious and obvious: build a big staircase because I've given you lots more skills than needed.

Plain 16: "Disappearance" Probably a reasonable trick to learn for new players, but once you know it, not an interesting level at all.

Plain 17: "The Heat of Action": I see there's a buildy solution and a climby one - I think I prefer the climby one! Not sure why there's a skill discrepancy between versions...

Plain 18: "Lemming's Brains": Another cool bubble level (I like them!). Having said that, I don't find this level or its repeat very interesting, except it's cool they both seem to have a bunch of equivalent solutions.

Plain 19: "Yours Diabolically": I kinda like that the solution is a bit backrouty, because presumably most people would try the rightward route first (as I did), the later level has such a good solution that I like that this one lulls you into a false sense of security, but given that I believe (?) that a rightward solution might actually be possible here as well, it's a slight shame that one isn't forced to try it out, given that the rightward (legitimate) solution in the later level is somewhat distinct from this one, given the lower skill count.

Plain 20: "Wooden House": Not, I think, a particularly interesting level. Again, my solution and Dodo's seem equivalent, but Dodo's perhaps more interesting, in which case maybe more could be done to enforce it?

Plain 21: "Flack and White": A level with a nice design, but I think a fairly obvious solution.

Plain 22: "Trapped Exit": The first of what I think are maybe the biggest weakness of the pack: gimmick levels. I really don't get at all why these levels are here, they are generally trivial, in that their solutions are entirely obvious, so once you know them, there is rarely any satisfaction in pulling them off. In NeoLemmix obviously the mechanics are sometimes easier, but I'm not sure this makes such a difference. Are these levels there for some kind of strange comedy? Because sometimes I do find them amusing, but not this one.

Plain 23: "Can You Bomb It": This is a really iconic level, extremely memorable design, it's terrific also how the solution here and upon repetition are so different, you really have to treat them as separate puzzles requiring a change in perspective which I think is a wonderful design choice. It's also the introduction of a maze element, which for some reason is entirely

novel if you, like me, are coming to this pack directly after having only ever played the original games. It's also fun having many different ways to make it through the maze.

Plain 24: "Sapphire Mine": Nice enough level design, using everyone's favourite crystal tileset. I don't really understand Dodo's recorded solution, there seems no reason why one would use so many blockers for such a circuitous route - unless he's just showing off in this video? If he had something like that in mind, a solution requiring the island on the left, perhaps this should have been more enforced; as it is, the level is not particularly interesting, but something which required you to use a piece of "scenery", as well as engaging in a multi-stage solution with blockers destroyed at every stage, now that could have been quite interesting, although, maybe better suited for a higher rating.

Plain 25: "Scrub": A very nice classic style scout-landscape level, Dodo seems good at creating these deceptively forgiving long levels, where the solution requires more precision than you might think, even here where you have 10 of everything, one must plan a little in terms of when to turn around and bash/mine through the one way wall. A nice pre-taste of his magnum opus in this vein, Valley of Chameleons.

Plain 26: "Stalactites or Shortcut": Very entertaining level, requiring some thought about how to make the timing work out. I like how it's kind of a reader's digest version of "The Race Against Cliches".

Plain 27: "Lemmings on the Spot": So here's the first level that I feel is a significant disappointment (such levels will keep popping up). Levels that have an "obvious" solution which is not possible are terrific. The problem is that with precise building (which to be fair, NeoLemmix helps you to persevere with in a way that less forgiving engines may not) the "obvious" solution is actually possible! And the timing is not even as tight as some actual solutions to later time-precious levels! When I saw the actual solution, which is extremely clever and quite subtle in how it uses multitasking to save time, I had the feeling of great disappointment that I was not forced to find this solution myself. This feeling recurred multiple times throughout playing this pack.

Plain 28: "Here's the Final Flourish": One may think that I would be less than positive about this level, given my thoughts on "gimmick" levels above. However, I do like this level, I'm not rapturous about it, but beyond the gimmick, which is definitely a gimmick, the solution requires more than just recognizing the trick, you actually have to do a tiny bit of thought to position the lemmings correctly. It actually seems very well placed in the pack to be a head scratcher in terms of the nuke trick, but also have enough skill to be a nice puzzle, without being too precise or subtle, given it's only the first rank.

Plain 29: "Papuan Mask": This seems to be a somewhat famous level, I'm not sure exactly why? The design is nice and the "face" is cute, certainly. Dodo's actual solution, involving using a bridge as a tool for forcing the lemmings into a certain direction seems to me a more interesting insight to want to have at this point than my solution, which was just plug up the gap with a builder. Anyway, not a bad level, just a slightly confused one in my opinion.

Plain 30: "Cisterns, Chains and Bricks": Another one of Dodo's maze triumphs, and a fantastic send off to the plain rating, which overall is quite a lot of fun. I love how specific the solution is here, although it seems from what I hear that there is a way to use the left maze instead of the right one?? I have not managed to find this solution yet. This level stumped me for a little while but the nuances of it (like realizing that you don't need to bash through the chain) are just delightful to nut out, and who doesn't love a long bash to free all the prisoners! One of the strongest of the whole pack for sure.

Coward 1: " Caution, Work in Progress !": Very attractive design, the marble "cranes" in the scenery are a lovely creative touch. Great level to start off the Coward rating as well, requiring precise order and placement of skills to achieve the solution. A very solid level.

Coward 2: "Toes of the Earth": A delightfully strange image in the title, but not a very interesting level, in my opinion, probably only because NeoLemmix makes the precise mining after building somewhat trivial.

Coward 3: "Impolite Climbers": A level which I seem to have found an overly complicated alternate solution to. I quite like it, as it involves recognizing a very specific place to bomb, but strangely I don't think it would be possible without that weird wall removal, is this an Ichotolot change? Because I do prefer Dodo's solution...

Coward 4: "Use Something to Turn": Obviously another famous and iconic level. Seems incredibly finicky in Lemmini, not quite so in NeoLemmix. Great trick to learn though, and not just a gimmick level, as the subtlety in how the grass gets thinner at each level is a masterful touch. I actually used the builder "stack" method rather than the "wall", not sure this changes the solution too much that it misses the educational point of the exercise, but obviously the stacking method is heaps harder without NeoLemmix precision.

Coward 5: "Avoid the FlameThrower": Tremendously good level. Stumped me for a little while, but a wonderful tight solution, my favourite kind of design.

Coward 6: "Under the Floor": Nice little level. Kind of obvious, but not trivial to execute.

Coward 7: "City Machines Lemmings": A truly wonderful "out of the box" level, and a nice restricted skillset. One of my favourites. Another great pair of levels where the first attempt is "legitimate" but the second one breaks it, letting you see the multifaceted nature of the design.

Coward 8: "Break the Wall": Speaking of which! Finally we get to show that wall who's boss! Digging precisely so that there's a piece of wall thin enough to bomb through is a lovely trick (though not the very hardest to figure out).

Coward 9: "Where a Lemming Has Never Gone": Nice! An officially sanctioned ceiling route! What fun. Also a very nice puzzle! The forced removal of the blocker, which has to be placed precisely, is a wonderfully non-obvious lynchpin, with delicately balanced skill count in other areas to subtly trap you into this method. I have a query though: I assume in the NeoLemmix

version that steel block at the top of the "stem" was added by Icho for backroute related reasons? I wonder whether it doesn't make the intended solution a very slight bit too obvious given that it provides a neat spot to place the blocker, and it's then easier to free because of the steel stopping the miner?

Coward 10: "Bashers are Back !": Very disappointing. The first incarnation was a decent though not spectacular tutorial, this is just a completely obvious bash fest. I suppose the initial double-basher trick is not immediately obvious, but beyond that I expect more.

Coward 11: "Every Lem for Himself !": A solution that is great fun, and intricate enough to be satisfying, regarding the delaying tactics on the left. And then popping through both sides of that column from the inside is just delicious. A unique Dodo creation.

Coward 12: "To Infinity and BEYOND ! ! !": As mentioned, not my favourite level, and therefore weaker for being repeated thrice...Nice to go through the ceiling, "Bomb Squad" style, but as such, it's hardly original, and I find bomb squad type levels annoyingly fiddly if that's the whole point to them. (Having said that, I did take the rightward route, which seems a perfectly viable alternative.)

Coward 13: "Seesaw": A very nice level indeed. The precision of turning around and building, and then the final touch of digging and bashing instead of mining, which is more fun but not too annoying. Good fun. Not too hard to work out, but good fun.

Coward 14: "The Labyrinth of the Lemmynotaur": Not really a great level in my opinion, although understandably admired for its twisting columns. Also a clear homage to "The Strange Relics of Lemnos" from PimoLems, which to my mind wins out for being simpler (this is often my thought comparing the two creators' styles), though the design there is not as pleasingly intricate.

Coward 15: "Strato and Cumulus": Ah this level. I'm not sure I fully grasp the complexities of it. Understandably seen as something of a roadblock in DoveLems for its difficulty, although leaving that admittedly reasonable concern aside, it's a really overwhelmingly interesting level. I seem to have solved it slightly differently from Dodo...I understand Icho made some alterations to remove certain backroutes, but not at all sure how this changes things.

Coward 16: "Trident of Fire": A nice level, with a little more precision to it than you might expect going in. However, the solution falls out pretty cleanly from initial expectations otherwise, and I suppose this is intended as a breather after the intricacies of "Strato and Cumulus", and as such fulfills its ambition very nicely. A pleasing level.

Coward 17: "Lost in the Canyon": Geographical features really make such imposing and picturesque levels! Zigzagging is always fun, so that's a plus. I like this level, and do admire the pair it makes with its quite significantly altered later cousin. Nice too that one is starting to have to count one's builders carefully: precision is ramping up!

Coward 18: "The Broken Tower": Cool idea, but unless I'm underestimating how difficult it is to place that builder step precisely in Lemmini, it's an idea that could have used further development I think, especially given that it's not hard at all to see what needs to be done.

Coward 19: "Observation Posts": This seems like a half-finished concept. It seems either Dodo updated the level since his video, or Icho has altered it in the current NeoLemmix version: either way, the new version is a much better puzzle, which did actually give me pause for a little while. I ended up freeing the blocker with a digger right out of the hatch (keeping release rate slow), always a nice trick to pull off, although I wonder in the context of the pack whether it's a bit arbitrary, if it is indeed the intended solution...ah I've just checked Icho's recorded solution, which is just the usual blocker miner trick - that's nice, I kind of wish I'd seen that, it's a nice subtlety that you can solve the problem of stopping the miner by altering the terrain so that he can't continue. I prefer that insight to my brute-force trickery - I wonder if a puzzle more tailored to something specific like that might be better served here at this point in the pack...?

Coward 20: "It's Not an Illusion !": This is very clearly a gimmick level, and worse, one which NeoLemmix control renders completely without any sense of challenge. I really don't get it. It's marginally more amusing than "Trapped Exit", but for me, only just. I genuinely am at a loss to understand why Roundthewheel was so excited by this.

Coward 21: "Death Camp": Again with the very dark title...however, one of the very best puzzles in the pack. I guess compared to more modern tricks and designs, it's nothing outrageously innovative, but I love how the set of skills which seems so tailored to one solution has to be shoehorned into a completely different one. Really terrifically efficient as well in that every skill has its dedicated place.

Coward 22: "The Giant Stairway": Another gimmick level, and I remain unmoved. I don't get how this is supposed to be at all challenging or interesting. A curiosity I suppose in that 8 hatches must have been a slightly unusual sight back then...but still, you could be fiendish with 8 hatches!

Coward 23: "Ask the Oracle": I said most of what I needed to about this level earlier, in the review of "Can You Bomb It?". What can I say, It's another great "out of the box" experience. I mean, if you can't solve the maze, just bypass it!

Coward 24: "Lemmings-Digging Iron Plates": Steel-destroying levels are understandably controversial, and while I don't mind the idea, given that there's a not entirely trivial solution, and also that Dodo has given a hint as to where the path might be, I do also appreciate the ingenuity of Icho in transferring these puzzles into a more "NeoLemmix-style" design, even if this doesn't entirely reflect the intention of Dodo (or Pieuw, if we're talking the other such level) and also may arguably harm the pacing of variety given the place in the rank was earmarked for a pathfinding experience rather than a more traditional puzzle experience.

Coward 25: "Academy of Eight" I really wish he'd kept the useless hatch with the doomed lemming! Not least because the title now makes absolutely no sense. Anyway, a nice little (breather?) level, satisfying to work out what order to do things in.

Coward 26: "Let Him Go Alone...": Ah yes, the infamous. The crowd control method intended really is truly remarkable, although I wouldn't heap the praise on it that Akseli did in the review thread...but maybe I just don't know what it was like to see such tricks for the first time back in the day. There is a known backroute, which I believe I found? And a solution considered to be unintended, and inferior because of how precise it is. This, helped by NeoLemmix, is the solution I believe I found. I have to say, it seems to me not entirely clear that this is a backroute, at the least it's a grey area. Certainly, it's more fiddly, and less elegant. But to my mind, in broad concept it is the same as intended. The only difference I can see between this and the solution shown in Dodo's video, is that the rightmost diggers are not stopped by the basher, rather the first digger is the builder, and the last digger becomes the basher. It's not at all clear to me that one of these solutions offers greater insight than the other, but clearly the intended one is much more elegant and "proper" as a solution to this level, particularly at this point in the pack. It's unfortunate that the consensus seems to be that there's no way of removing the real backroute, which certainly is less interesting for a level this far along. Tragically, a flawed creation.

Coward 27: "Molotov Cocktail and Co": A nice level, although nothing groundbreaking (except literally! I'll see myself out). Perhaps more interesting, although more difficult, although maybe not too difficult for its placement in the rank, is to have to save 100% and use diggers to get through the middle section instead of bombing. I was a little disappointed that it seemed like it was possible to take the easy way out, I almost expected this level to be repeated later with a more stringent requirement! Anyway, perhaps it is good the way it is, as you can take that challenge if you need to, and it's just a nice fun breather before the next monster...

Coward 28: "Valley of Chameleons": What a level. Anyone who has a knee-jerk reaction that long levels are less precise or interesting in their solutions will have a nasty shock here. This really is Dodo's masterpiece in DoveLems I think. A really beautiful experience to play through, and punishing in the specificity of it, but not unfair. Clearly it's that Rock tileset that fires his imagination! And, as Akseli again pointed out in the review thread (which I was sorry to see die) it's all the more impressive an achievement that the level seems to have one unique solution with no backroute ever having been found.

Coward 29: "Sky Won't Help You": A striking level with the ceiling water, but not, in my opinion, a great puzzle. Slightly tricky in the initial crowd containment, and maybe in that way a good breather, alongside "Molotov Cocktail and Co", with which to sandwich the epic Valley. No real complaints then, although it did make me fantasize about a pair of levels which were the same but upside-down versions of each other!

Coward 30: "A Perfect Symmetry": I am simply in love with this level. To solve it was an incredible feeling. I was surprised that Roundthewheel solved it without having the climber be caught by the builder at the right side: to me, that was the crowning subtlety, and I would



be disappointed if that wasn't strictly required...but otherwise the final timing of the digger and basher meeting just puts the icing on the cake. Coward as a whole I feel is potentially the strongest rank in DoveLems from a level design and puzzle perspective, although I have to grant the possibility that as the pack wore on I simply became more jaded to the various tricks and skills employed because I had become a better player along the way, so the first blush of recognition was lost later on. But I still feel this rank could be the strongest in a more objective sense as well.

Devilish 1: "Welcome to the Jungle !": A pretty much perfect start to Devilish, reasonably hard puzzle, precise solution, gives a definite feeling of a jump in difficulty without ruining the difficulty curve. One of the most impressive levels in the pack, in my opinion.

Devilish 2: "Integrated Circuit": A less remarkable level, but nice looking, in Dodo's newfangled (although thinking back, not entirely unprecedented) maze style. A nice exercise in "where-to-build", and good foreshadowing for the later challenging version.

Devilish 3: "Bubble Bath": I was significantly disappointed by this level, as I seem to have found the same backroute for both this and it's later version. After the later repeat I was left feeling, I think for the first time, truly confused about what the takeaway lesson was. I just don't see these two levels as being very well designed, and I'm not entirely certain the actual solutions are really interesting enough that they both need to be here.

Devilish 4: "Lake Shore Paradise": A nice level, not earth-shattering, but a satisfying basher race, and a nice simple way to introduce this concept.

Devilish 5: "Brick-a-Brack": I am a bit ambivalent about this level. I seem to have found an alternate solution, and while I believe it is in the spirit of the intended one, it feels messy. I have a suspicion that Dodo came up with a cool idea for a symmetric visual solution, but then assumed that the sheer aesthetic beauty of it would enforce it in people's minds. Here the culprit seems to be the two bombers, which are there for the purposes of the two-blocker trap, but (unintentionally?) allow for a splat height mitigation, and then a less beautiful asymmetric solution.

Devilish 6: "In the Heart of the Pyramid": Ah things could not be more different here! A wonderful puzzle based around the lynchpin of a falling bomber - I guess it took me longer to think of than it should have, but I really admire levels like this which just feel so well put together - it's this sort of puzzle which make DoveLems really feel like a worthy successor to the original games, which makes levels like the previous (although there are worse examples later on) all the more unfortunate.

Devilish 7: "Steampunk": Not a hard level, in fact, despite breather levels being entirely legitimate, I still would have expected this to have less leeway than it does...but it's such fun, I love this level conceptually, the little gym area where the climbers all enjoy themselves is just utterly delightful.

Devilish 8: "Stacked Lemmings": A wonderful level, one-of-every-skill is such an interesting constraint, and then the realisation that you can stop the horde by making and freeing a blocker with the same miner as you use to dig the main tunnel, it was a sweet moment when I figured that out. Again, a breather-ish level, but a tighter one.

Devilish 9: "The Gravity Zero": A controversial level! I guess "Zemmings" and this are the only two really controversial levels, and Maso 8 definitely more so, as far as I can tell. This one here, I must confess I really like, I just adore the concept of distributing the lemmings a certain way while in the air, and the solution is something that comes upon one organically as one surveys the constraints of the architecture and the skillset - the exact quality I feel is lacking from the levels I am most critical of. I can fully understand people not being pleased with the difficulty of performing this trick in Lemmini, but with NeoLemmings, it's pleasingly challenging without being frustrating for the same reasons. When I first imagined what the key to the level was, my brain just about melted, it was so good.

Devilish 10: "The Eighth Wonder of the World": I found this level particularly annoying as I just couldn't get what seemed like the obvious solution to work, there was always a lemming or two who just somehow did whatever they wanted, it didn't matter which exact pixel I tried to place the blocker on. But it does seem like I missed the trick with the bomber coming from below. This is so counterintuitive that I wish I'd thought of it myself! Which makes my hacky solution technically a backroute. Not sure what's to be done about it, it's a pity, but not at least a fundamental design flaw in the level.

Devilish 11: "Across the Blizzard": I think probably the worst level in the game, in terms of its uninterestingness and also its strange placement in the middle of Devilish: to my mind, this doesn't count as a breather, this counts as a hugely misplaced level for its lack of challenge.

Devilish 12: "It's a Ruin World": Followed by one of the best levels in the pack, also I enjoy very much Dodo's charmingly wrong English (which for all I know might be deliberate). Not much to say though, no special tricks, just a very solid level of the classical sort, careful planning, use of skills, and delay tactics. A great return to form, and the start of what I would say is probably the golden section of the game.

Devilish 13: "Art of Mining": I like this level a lot, for two reasons: 1: the trick (one could even unkindly call it a gimmick, although I wouldn't say this is a gimmick *level* in the same way some others are) is delightful and truly surprising, and 2: the simplicity of the level design, which also harks back to the very start of the game in a very satisfying way, leads you to the inescapable conclusion that it must be possible, and to investigate how to achieve it. That's truly great design right there. I also love the fact that this trick shows up in an unexpected place not too far in the future!

Devilish 14: "Chernobyl Survivors": Again a rather shocking title for a lighthearted puzzle game, especially for a level previously known as "Bubble Bath"; I mean, what kind of apocalyptic bubble bath led to nuclear meltdown!? Anyway, my thoughts on this pair of levels is adequately expressed above. But what makes Dodo's two solutions even more infuriating is that my backroute, clearly a backroute, works on both levels.

Devilish 15: "Devil's Horns" Nothing groundbreaking, but a puzzle which I had to think about for a little while before it coalesced.

Devilish 16: "Lems Play Hide and Seek": Another great puzzle, I love blocker release puzzles, and the timing in this level is very satisfying. I was aghast at Roundthewheel's backroute here, but I believe this is no longer possible in the NeoLemmings version? Ah yes, have not analysed in depth (would be a shame if still possible) but it seems you can't pull it off if the rightmost thing you have to bash through is not so big as to be able to turn both of the other lemmings around.

Devilish 17: "Maze in a Clepsydra": This level is memorable even if only for the wonderful mystique of the word (and object) clepsydra. And I absolutely love that you need the mining trick seemingly out of the blue. The whole choreography of the two-lemming-ballet is just divine! And the final bit of timing being some delay-by-climbing is the cherry on top.

Devilish 18: "It's an Evil Symphony": This level I must say I didn't really like because of how obvious the solution seemed. It's a nice solution, but I wish it had been harder to see. It seems like the admittedly wonderful machine Dodo thought up is the point of the level's existence, rather than the figuring out of its logistics. I do like these timing based digger/basher staircases, so there's that. Thank goodness at least that Icho removed those terrible backroutes so that it doesn't suffer so terribly as before.

Devilish 19: "Poor Scapegoat !": A wonderful level, with some nice subtleties of order of assignment in order to get the right timing, and I love the little labyrinths the lemmings have to walk. Just great, a feeling of inevitability without being too bluntly obvious (as with previous).

Devilish 20: "Stratum": This level as Dodo solved it has a very beautiful and subtle solution. My way seems very hacky, and requiring of pixel precision mining and use of the exact geography of that hanging root. Can I assume that the top platform was shaved by Icho for backroute-related reasons? I'm not sure what it prevents, but it doesn't make a difference to my solution anyway. Overall this level just seems a bit messy to me, and ironically that hanging root which I assume was meant to help the builder hit his head seems to create a new but precise backroute. I would say it is a slight backroute because the lynchpin of the puzzle seems to be the digging-then-building-while-leaving-a-gap trick, which works to sublime effect in the intended solution. Don't know if there's a way to make this watertight...?

Devilish 21: "Lem Pipe": A great level which seems absolutely impossible at first. I really appreciate the intended solution, although I think I broke it slightly? My solution I think is equivalent, but I was confused because you can save a few more lemmings than required, and also have some skills left over. I think I prefer the intended solution because of how neat it is that you have to rescue the lemmings straight out of the hatch, and also turn around anyone who wanders too far to the left.

Devilish 22: "One-Way Traffic": A great fun breather maze, not trivial to predict the right path, but never unfairly frustrating.

Devilish 23: "They're the Best Among the Best": A solution of an always fun type which is pretty obvious, but relatively precise, another nice breather level. My only complaint would be that in NeoLemmings terms this level is not at all hard in execution.

Devilish 24: "Staircase to the Bottom": A deceptively simple level where you have to be careful with skill use, freeing a blocker from the staircase is a great trick to cap off the solution.

Devilish 25: "The Way to Go Up": I'm very confused here, Roundthewheel, who I know was playing an earlier version (to his detriment at times) had a level which looked similar to mine, but then I see that Dodo changed this level very significantly. Icho must have thought that the original level was better, and fixed it with pickup skills? I mean that's all by the by I guess. My biggest complaint is that I found an extremely pixel-precise and random solution that lets one lemming splat and then frees a blocker, leaving one blocker left over, and causing me to miss the zigzag staircase solution. There are more important tricks that I've missed earlier on, so this is less bad, but still seems like a lingering flaw. Icho's opinion on this would be more authoritative though I feel.

Devilish 26: "The Triangular Prison": A truly spectacular level, it was just incredible to piece together! One can see a fairly obvious backroute towards the end (which if I recall RTW did find) but which Icho fixed simply with a well-placed trap!

Devilish 27: "Don't Choose": An incredible remake which really pushes an original design into new spaces of puzzle solving. This level had me stumped I think for the longest time of any, I so nearly had it, but it took Proxima's comment on the relevant RTW episode (who found the more obvious solution with the earlier more forgiving skill count) to alert me to the fact that a builder turning around without completely plugging a gap can be made useful under the right circumstances. This blew me away, I know I was almost there, but I really wish I'd thought of this myself! To me this was one of the high points in the game in terms of puzzle solving. I would like to report, for what it's worth, that I wasted a builder turning the rightmost scout around on the boulder at the end, finding a perfect pixel to build from under the left gap so that it still works, which means that combining the intended solution and mine, this level can be done with only 11 builders!

Devilish 28: "Assault Course": I like this level, no tricks, just a very tight solution that's not immediately obvious to see. Icho has presumably fixed a backroute with the pickup skills, however this did not occur to me (presumably because of this discouragement!). I love to think that you could do this level with the art of mining trick again, but I eventually gave up on making that work.

Devilish 29: "La France": Architecture finesse aside, this is a really silly level to have here, although granted walking bombers make it significantly harder. I guess symbolic levels (like the later "Tunnel Under Channel") are fine to have though, and the France shape texture really is terrific. And I love France so really I shouldn't complain.

Devilish 30: "Make the Big 8": There is so much going on here, it was a real pleasure to work out, and to try to find everywhere to shave off those frames that just caused the timing to fail. A great end to Devilish, but I have to say, having played Pieuw's "Nick of Time !" first, that level edges this one out for me (as the clear inspiration). This one may possibly be more complicated and difficult, but nothing will beat the heart in mouth sensation of seeing that walker just so barely get past the basher at the first moment possible, as the ground is just beginning to be torn away. Truly magnificent. This level is good too though, but I'm not in love with it like I am "A Perfect Symmetry" or "Nick of Time".

Devilish is a mixed bag I feel. I would say that as a relatively contiguous clump of levels, "It's a Ruin World", "Devil's Horns", "Lems Play Hide and Seek", "Maze in a Clepsydra", "Poor Scapegoat", "Lem Pipe", "Staircase to the Bottom", "The Way to Go Up", "The Triangular Prison", "Don't Choose", "Assault Course", and "Make the Big 8" are a really amazing achievement in terms of consistency of puzzle design. While Devilish is too uneven for me to want to knock Coward off its pedestal in terms of overall consistency, I have to say these levels, at this crucial point in the game's difficulty curve, really made me feel the most tested and engaged with DoveLems. As per my reviews above, they're not all 100% perfect, but with them you truly get a glimpse of Dodo's real creative talent for puzzle design, which the best of Maso will continue.

But onwards!

Maso 1: "Like a Ski Slope !": Every other rank begins with a very strong level (except arguably Plain, but the arc of that level introducing the mining trick makes it even more memorable). This is clearly a breather of some kind, in any case less memorable. Proxima claimed in another YouTube comment that you were supposed to build in the gap to make an extra bit of terrain to mine through, but Dodo seems to have not done this in his solution, and there is indeed one very precise place to mine where this isn't necessary, and would seem on first glance to be prohibited by the number of builders given...curious.

Maso 2: "In the Lemming's Cold": From here, I found these first few levels of Maso really very challenging, a sensation which strangely let up towards the middle. Maso really seems a highly imperfect rank in many way, especially for one of maximum difficulty. These first few levels made me think that this level of challenge was going to continue, and with the obvious exception of Maso 8 (which is anomalous in many ways) it didn't until the end, which was flawed again for other reasons I'll come to. This particular level was great with its complicated mining, although I'm not sure I understand the reasons for Icho's (?) alterations and increased lemming count. Anyway, I seem to have done the level differently from strictly intended, but I like my solution too, I'm not sure it should be counted entirely as a backroute, it uses timing instead of containment and then bombing/the extra miner to free. Actually, the extra miner was probably crucial to making my unintended solution work, I kinda like Dodo's better, and wish I'd thought of, or had to think of, the miners not actually meeting in the middle until such time as it became necessary...

Maso 3: "Half Stone, Half Metal": I stared at this level for a very long time without solving it, it seems like one of the hardest levels in the game, or maybe I'm just an idiot (could be the latter). Anyway, very nice level, needs systematic work to piece together the solution.

Maso 4: "I am A.T. II": I mean, it's cute to extend the original idea to bashers and later miners, but neither of these I feel are as hard as the original level, although miners certainly need more finesse later on. I have no problem with these levels as tributes and fun exercises, and they (just) don't overstay their welcome. I think I'd be a lot more bitter about their presence if they'd been more frustrating to solve or execute.

Maso 5: "Mined the Step !": A great level, obvious what you have to do, but not entirely obvious how to set it up, and the choreography required to solve was satisfying but not mean, using so many bashers in very specific places was also a nice touch. Such a thrill to use only one miner to such effect, I especially enjoyed seeing that long twisting NeoLemmings shadow!

Maso 6: "A Kind of Camel": I've no idea what the title refers to. This is a nice level though, requiring two scouts and some decent precision. Not terrifyingly hard, but I feel a good authentic Maso-breather.

Maso 7: "A Twisting Road": I like that this comes late enough in the game that you've almost forgotten about the previous version of it. I like the fact that you have to go the other direction from the first one. Having said that, I'm not sure I really "love" this level, the solution is satisfyingly complex, and much forward planning is needed, but ultimately I might feel that it's just not quite that interesting.

Maso 8: "A Z That Stands for Zemmings": This title also makes no frickin' sense, but clearly that's not the least of it. There's a reason so many people have strong feelings about this level, it really is a chore to execute once you figure out, fairly readily, what the main solution is to be. I actually solved it without using the staircase wall, you have just enough builders to do this, I'm not sure if this should count as a backroute - if anything it seems to require more careful resource management (as if one didn't have enough to think about already!) but also it means I failed to register that the builder wall trick was necessary - something that should have been better signalled if that was the intended method. I was very much not sorry to see the back of this level when I solved it, which I had to use Icho's video to do for the finer points of technique. Obviously with NeoLemmings this isn't quite the frustrating behemoth that it must have been with Lemmini, but it's still an unpleasant-feeling design, and it was not fun to work away at for longer than I wanted or expected to. I also don't like that you can't set it up all at once, as in "Mined the Step". Having said all this, I like the fact that I have such specific knowledge of how the blocker and miner skills interact with each other, which I wouldn't have if it hadn't been critical to solving a level, and as frustrating as that was, this is valuable knowledge for someone like me, who really wants to reach the highest heights of lemmings play. So I have very mixed feelings. Given that this game seems designed not entirely as a special challenge for experts but for theoretically anyone, even if they probably should have played the original games first, this level seems out of place in that context. Whether the interaction of the miner with the staircases and the blocker's trigger areas could

have been shown in a more forgiving, even if equally precise, way, I don't know, or maybe this should have been near the very end of the game or in the bonus rank with a warning of some kind. I can't say.

Maso 9: "Live from the Pentagon": One always wonders whether a level following one like Maso 8 will continue the same kind of unfair challenge, and this one doesn't. Having said that, I managed to be more stumped by this level I think than any other, even though it's not I think that hard to figure out the elements at play. Maybe I was just shellshocked by Maso 8 and intimidated at the thought of the rest of the rank being that hard on average. Another bad effect of that level! It seems to me that Ichotolot's (?) alteration of the second hanging wall gives a solution that is slightly easier and less interesting than Dodo's descent by multiple bridges?

Maso 10: "Two in One": Here again, I think I have a backroute, because I found a solution where you only have to do the "two in one" bash once, and thus don't have to climb the wall using the nice basher/digger interaction. My solution still uses the skills in interesting ways I think, but made me wonder at the end why I had three climbers left. Also I don't understand why the wall traps don't kill lemmings when I built the bridge right up to the wall...anyway, great level apart from that.

Maso 11: "Hard Nut Level": I love this tough little thing! Really was a challenge to figure out, although again I have an alternate solution which requires a bit of silly pixel precision. I would consider it a real alternate solution, although it leaves one builder, I think Dodo's solution is far more elegant though, I toyed with this solution for a while, but I can't remember what made me give up on it...

Maso 12: "Connect Four": I think this is a clear backroute from me, pretty much breaks all the intended mechanics and realisations. Don't know what other peoples' opinion might be, but seems like more work is necessary on this design to really lock in the full zig zag, just seems like an oversight.

Maso 13: "A Search for Treasure": A stunning level, although again I am reminded of a level from PimoLems, "The Hiking Tour", which I think might again be the stronger design. This is great though, and obviously is not a mere clone, but introduces more complexity. It certainly stands on its own in my mind more than "Make the Big 8" did against "Nick of Time". However! I am baffled as to why Icho (again I apologise if it wasn't Icho!) widened the corridor in the middle of the map, thus not requiring the digging to happen from the other side to bridge this gap! This seems very integral, unless there's a worse backroute that this change would fix?

Maso 14: "Windy Coast": A stunningly picturesque level, with a nice solution, although nothing very tricky to a seasoned player. A beautiful evocative breather level (if indeed that was the intention in terms of difficulty). I built over the exit and used a different mining pattern from Dodo, but these solutions I feel are substantively exactly the same.

Maso 15 "Tunnel Under Channel": A cute idea, but I think I'm right in saying that NeoLemmix makes this level not at all a challenge to execute, and the solution is staring you in the face.

Maso 16: "Complete Autarky": I bruteforced this level a bit I think, not quite sure how I feel about it? In concept and design I like this level a great deal. I think the end is as intended (and very clever as climber management goes!) but the beginning I used crazy random timing in order to get the distribution of lemmings I wanted to set up the right (east) part of the solution. Not sure. Also without Icho's (?) extra trap there would seem to be more obvious backroutes so thank goodness for that.

Maso 17: "The Crossing (Part III)": What happened to parts 1 and 2? I'm disappointed by this level because Dodo took away all the nice scenery I saw in RTW's playthrough, but more importantly, I found a solution which doesn't require the crossing bridge trick. My solution is, I think you'll agree, disappointing in comparison, just aesthetically, although it does rely interestingly on the asymmetry of the two groups being different permanent skills.

Maso 18: "Take a Step Ahead": A really great puzzle, requiring several different forks in the solution space to finally arrive at. Marvellous, although we're now well in the dip in difficulty of Maso, which I felt as an overall weakness by the end of the pack. I thought Maso 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 were the representatives of what seemed like good Maso level difficulty (8 of course an outlier), which was not seen for a while thereafter, to the detriment of the momentum of the rank. Furthermore the extremely high number of levels which were backroutable to every degree really coloured my overall perception of Maso itself, and DoveLems as a whole.

Maso 19: "Quarry of Jewels": Again, a not as difficult level, although fun. I must say though, having played already Pieuw's "X Marks NOTHING", which I was so delighted at, this seemed less novel. Does have Dodo's patented mystic rock tileset vibe though.

Maso 20: "The Hatch": I think my solution is again a backroute, as I see now that this was meant to be a timing level, but you can dig in the right spot and then it isn't, and also isn't very hard...although to come up with that solution took some thought.

Maso 21: "Be the One !": Another great remake, although it pales in comparison to "Don't Choose". This was tough to figure out (almost but not quite reaching back to the beginning of Maso in perceived difficulty). My solution has the blocker on the bottom, but otherwise seems to be Icho's intended solution, as I see from his recently uploaded video.

Maso 22: "The Horizontal Barbarous Bars": Great concept, slightly tricky to execute, but slightly fell flat for me, as it seemed a little too obvious, although was a decent breather I guess (and of course harder with timed bombers). Maybe this idea has more potential that could have been worked out a little more creatively.

Maso 23: "The Motor Show": Great, great level. Not much more to say than that. Pure classic lemmings puzzle. Still less hard than the early Masos though, in my opinion.



Maso 24: "Smash Your Button": A pure gimmick level which I found particularly annoying, and I can't really understand why RTW felt was so impressive. I mean it is a cute idea, but beyond that, the solution becomes entirely obvious and uninteresting for me.

Maso 25: "I am A.T. III": Like I said before, better than the bashing one, but also still not at the difficulty I'd expect for this late in the game.

Maso 26: "Sharin; the Fuel": Here we go! This is one of the greatest levels in this pack. Thank goodness Icho (?) added the arrows, because RTW's backroute was truly truly horrendous.

Maso 27: "The Spring": It all boils down to a tragically simple observation. This level has a trivially easy backroute, digging through each one way wall platform and then bashing, which will hit the OWW and thus turn the lemming around. It is all the more tragic because it's clear from the positioning that this level was meant to be some kind of crowning jewell of Dodo's level design and difficulty. Which it could have been with the original solution, which really is a spectacularly beautiful machine. But it fails for the two reasons I have most harshly criticised previous levels: 1: Dodo had a lovely idea for a machine (truly lovely on this occasion) and then failed to design enough to enforce that machine, and 2: because of this, an obvious (if thinking in a certain way) workaround can be found which trivialises the puzzle. I obviously can't blame him or anyone for missing something, but it does seem to me that if one takes a "path of least resistance" type approach, then the trivial solution appears. This level is the one that most disappointed me, given its placement.

Maso 28: "Imposing Block": This level, which admittedly is kinda fun, but slightly gimmicky, coming after for me subjectively a level which it was immediately obvious I broke in a very upsetting way for its position on this rank of this pack, did not have a very good effect at all. The whole end of Maso after "Sharin' the Fuel" felt so weak because of this. Anyway, nothing really against Maso 28 I guess, although again RTW and I are clearly very different people, as he was much more impressed by this.

Maso 29: "All Turns Around the Time": A nice little nugget of a level, very elegant, clearly not meant to be the world's hardest puzzle, but very nice. I overcomplicated my solution, but not sure how to feel about that.

Maso 30: "Pole Vaulting in Labyrinth Zone": To end the series with a glitch is controversial. It certainly, after I found out, didn't help my disappointment at the middle and end of Maso more generally. I like what Icho did to it, adding a glider, keeping the puzzle basically the same. But it seems like a large part of the difficulty of this level was figuring out to use the glitch, without that it just seems like a nice puzzle, but not one that really deserves to close out the entire game. I have no philosophical objection to glitches at all, as long as the player is told specifically that the level uses a glitch. But, upsettingly, given all I've recounted already, a disappointing end to a disappointing rank.

Bonus 1: "Pletorah's Temple": The Bonus rank is very interesting, and it's curious to think why these levels didn't make it into the main game. "Pletorah's Temple" is a fiendishly hard

level, it takes a long time to even work out the basics of what's going on, and Icho's presumably backroute destroying pickup skills make it even tighter and more satisfying to solve, if maybe a little restrictive. I would venture that it is harder than any other level in the main game. Perhaps it might actually have made a better final or close to final level for Maso!

Bonus 2: "Only in the Footsteps of God": Thank goodness for NeoLemmix's clear physics mode, because it has been too long since I watched this movie to recognise the reference. Obviously it would be unfair to include a level in the main game that required specific cultural knowledge to solve.

Bonus 3: "Just my Pretty Remake": Not sure I see the point of this, just seems like a less interesting version of the original "Lemmings' Ark".

Bonus 4: "Desert of Molten Rocks": I really love this level. I can see it might have sat strangely in the main pack, and has a weird between-Devilish-and-Maso difficulty to it. I had a lot of fun solving this one, feels like a spelunking adventure!

Bonus 5: "Lemmings' Ark": Obviously the same as in the Genesis version. Seems weird to end with a level from the original game, or even to include it at all, especially as the remake was so underwhelming, but these are bonus levels so whatever.

Here end my thoughts.