Brain Jam Help Index

This index lists all main Brain Jam topics.

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Acknowledgements

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Initial playtesting: Sandy, Kato, Andrew and David

How to Play Brain Jam

The game tableau consists of three areas:
- the four **Build Stacks** at the top left
- the four **Scratch Spaces** at the top right
- eight card columns

Initially a deck is dealt face up into the card columns.

The object of the game is to move all cards onto the **Build Stacks**, starting from Aces and progressing to Kings.

You move a card by pointing to it and clicking with the left mouse button.   If there is no legal destination for the card the system will beep.   If there is more than one legal destination the system will select one. You can select an alternate destination by holding down either the Shift or Ctrl key while clicking the left mouse button.

You can move a card if it has a legal destination and:
- it is in the **Scratch Zone,** or
- it is the lowermost card in its column

A card can be legally moved:
- to an unoccupied **Scratch Space**
- to a **Build Stack** if the card is an Ace
- to a **Build Stack** if the next lowest card of the same suit is already there
- to an empty column
- below the next highest card of the same suit if that card is the lowermost in its column.

Clicking the right mouse button or selecting the Backtrack menu option will run the game in reverse, one move at a time.

This game cannot be played using the keyboard only.

Games are indexed by numbers ranging from 0 through 999.   Not all games are winnable, and games are not arranged in order of difficulty.   The Game menu contains built in selections for six winnable games - 0, 1, 2, 4, 6, and 7.   The Deal option chooses a new game at random.   The Game... option allows you to select any game by typing its number.   See Commands for more information.

When you win a game, the sequence of moves is stored in the BRAINJAM.INI file in the BRAINJAM directory, unless you have already won that game using a shorter sequence.   See Best Scores for more information.

Commands

       Game...   Prompts you for a game number between 0 and 999

       Deal   Chooses a new game at random

       Restart Game Restarts current game

       Game 0   Selects Game 0 (hard)

       Game 1   Selects Game 1 (harder)

       Game 2   Selects Game 2 (harder)

       Game 4   Selects Game 4 (easy)

       Game 6   Selects Game 6 (easy)

       Game 7   Selects Game 7 (less hard)

       Exit   Ends this session of Brain Jam

Backtrack!   Undoes the most recent move (same as right mouse button)

Layout Menu

In some circumstances the card tableau will overflow the Brain Jam window and make it impossible to select certain cards.   If you can't fix this by resizing the Brain Jam window, you can use the Squeeze and Cram layout settings

       Normal   Normal layout

       Squeeze   Eliminates vertical spaces and moves cards closer together

       Cram   Like Squeeze, but moves entire tableau up by a half card height

Strategy

Brain Jam isn't easy.   Many games are not winnable, but perhaps the most satisfying experience you can have in Brain Jam is cracking a really tough game.   Often you will win a game only to come back a few days later and find that it is "impossible": but the BRAINJAM.INI file will prove the contrary.

In learning Brain Jam you first have to "unlearn" some of the rules from conventional "Solitaire".   Cards may be played only on cards of the same suit, not cards of the opposite color.   When there is an open column, ANY card can be placed in it, not just a King.   Finally, you cannot move runs of cards; you may only move one card at a time.

You <u>can</u> move runs of cards if there are enough scratch spaces to do so.   For example, suppose that one column has a 9-8-7 sequence of a suit at the bottom, while another column has a 10 of the same suit at the bottom.   Further suppose that there are two empty scratch spaces, or two empty columns, or an empty scratch space and an empty column.   Then the 7 and 8 can be moved into the free spaces, the 9 can go on the 10, and then the 8 and 7 can be moved onto the 9, leaving a 10-9-8-7.   This type of maneuver is reminiscent of the famous Towers of Hanoi puzzle, especially if the run is several cards long.

When you click on a card the program moves it for you.   Remember that you can choose an alternate destination by pressing the Shift or Ctrl key.   Also, when you think you have run out of moves, it doesn't hurt to click on all the columns and scratch cards.   Sometimes you will have missed a possible move.

A beginning player will often try to free the Aces and low cards and put them on the Build Piles.   The result is often that the scratch spaces are filled up and there are no more moves.

A sounder approach is to start sorting cards to create runs of the same suit, "harvesting" the Aces and lower cards as the opportunity arises.   But you can't overdo this either, because eventually the tableau clogs up with most columns having runs at the bottom.

One strategy that often works is to try to eliminate one column of cards altogether by placing all of its cards on other columns, or in the scratch spaces or build piles.   The free column not only acts as an extra scratch space, but also as a place to put a run that has been built up elsewhere, as long as there are sufficient free spaces to transfer the run.

Successful play in Brain Jam appears to result not from any one doctrine, but from an ability to balance several strategies.   Often you must play a game several times before you get a sense of where the affiliations and bottlenecks are.   Only then can you work out a winning series of moves.

The opening and middle moves in a game are the most important.   Usually there is a "turning point" after which the game is finish as long as you are paying attention.   In analysing a successful game you will usually see that everything almost trivially hinges on building up one or two runs and clearing out one or two columns until they are empty; the hard part is figuring out which runs and columns to concentrate on.

For more information on strategy, see <u>Brain Jam Newsletter</u>.

Best Scores

The BRAINJAM.INI file keeps a record of all the games you have won.   You are encouraged to send in your BRAINJAM.INI file.   Best overall solutions will be published in the <u>Brain Jam Newsletter</u>.

For each won game BRAINJAM.INI contains a line of the form

```
<game number>=<handicap><move sequence>(<number of moves>)
```

corresponding to your best solution for that game (that is, the one with the least number of moves).

For example, the following line is a solution for Game 0:

```
0=000dbdbeegdbbbbbddladddffffiaaalaaahhhhkffcccccccbbbiklfheccccGGglkgggheeggddb
bbhhejfffffcccklieaa(91)
```

The number to the left of the "=" sign is the game number -- in this case 0.

The 3-digit number to the right of the "=" sign is the handicap.   In this version of Brain Jam the handicap is always "000".

The number enclosed in brackets at the end of the line is the number of moves in this solution.

The string of letters between the handicap and the number of moves is the actual move sequence.   Each letter corresponds to one move.   The letters correspond to columns and scratch spaces, and denote which card was moved.   The letters 'a' through 'h' correspond to the eight card columns, going from left to right.   The letters 'i' through 'l' correspond to the Scratch Spaces, from left to right.   Upper case letters have the same meaning as the lower case letters, except that the "alternate move" was selected by using the Shift or Ctrl keys.

Since BRAINJAM.INI is an ordinary text file you can review it and print it using any text editor, including DOS EDIT and Windows Notepad.   However, please do not attempt to modify this file; results will be unpredictable if you do.

Here are sample solutions for the other games built into the Games menu (you can use these as "hints" if you are stumped):

```
1=000fffdfdddeggjlikhhlfflhhlhjaabblbkbbbbbeAAalkaaajfffffbbbkaacccccafjkccgg
ggbcchhahgeeeecdddddaiedlbffj(101)
2=000bgccccccclejieeeeddhheaaelffkaaaaaaccaddadidbbbbkbbiFfifffccddddjiclkfeg
gggggggegggbbbbbbgccccgdhhhhdcbhhhchhhggggbddchhfffijkleaaa(129)
4=000cbbbfbjgaaadbkddddhhhdccegaajccdCcjkieeeeeilFFFflkifffeeeeikfhhhgggggfhhb
jhdddhcccbgaaaei(88)
6=000ehgbbbffffffaaaailgcciccccccijgggkaaaaakcckjbbbkjddeeeeebbbaaagggeediddal
hhhhhhhhhhdjhkbdffhcccc(95)
7=000gccicbgggcccddbcgjffkfffffijhhhjihaaccjihhikhaaffhbhbbbbigggggaeeeeeeeeeeb
bghijcccccaakladdddddddddddffbaceghij(108)
```

The Brain Jam Newsletter

The Brain Jam Newsletter is published periodically, at least four times per year.

It contains articles on subjects relating to Brain Jam, such as history, new versions, and strategy. Players are welcome to submit articles to the newsletter.

The Newsletter is the "journal of record" of best scores for the 1000 games in Brain Jam.   Players are encouraged to send in their BRAINJAM.INI files.   Best solutions for each game will be published.

If you plan to send in your solutions, it is suggested that you maximize your chances of having an overall best score by choosing a range of games somewhere between Games 50 and 999, because it is anticipated that competition will be heaviest in the 0-49 range.   You might choose a range that corresponds to the position of your last initial in the alphabet.   For example, if your last initial is in the middle of the alphabet you might concentrate on games 500 through 550.   Remember, not all games are winnable, although probably more are winnable than you think.   The current estimate is that approximately 5 games in 10 are winnable.   In the range 0 to 49, at least 26 games can be solved.   The list of currently known solvable games in the first 50 is as follows:

0,1,2,4,6,7,

10,11,13,14,

22,23,24,25,

30,31,33,36,37,39,

42,43,44,45,48,49

Registration and Ordering

Orders, registrations, BRAINJAM.INI files, fan mail, hate mail, article submissions, bug reports, suggestions, and all other correspondence should be addressed to:

Brain Jam Publications
P.O. Box 62024
1448 Lawrence Ave. East, #19
North York, Ontario
Canada M4A 2W1

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NOTE   if you are submitting a BRAINJAM.INI file, simply send either a 3.5" or 5.25" diskette.   A 3.5" diskette is preferable because it is more robust and can be sent in an ordinary envelope.   There is no need to register or order the newsletter.   If any of your solutions are the best submitted they will be published in the Brain Jam Newsletter, along with your name which, if you like, can be a pseudonym, nickname, the name of a group, or anonymous.   If the name you want published is different from the name you entered above, please specify it here:

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