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In this competition, Thien won the Encouragement Award, which is an important milestone for him because it was the first time he had participated in a computer science competition after three months of self-learning programming.



Thien started getting into programming in March of this year, when his father bought him a used laptop for nearly 6 million VND. From then on, Thien began searching online and self-learning about programming to fulfill his dream of becoming a programmer like in action movies, those who can "change the world with a single keystroke."

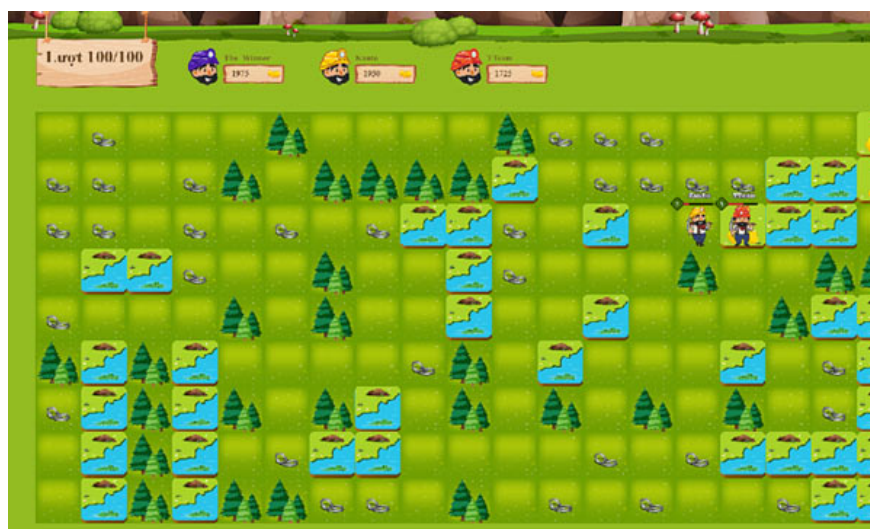
HackerRank – a website specializing in ranking skill levels and creating an environment for programmers to exchange and improve their knowledge – was the first place Thien chose to learn programming. Initially, due to his limited English, Thien had to use Google Translate whenever he studied, which often meant he didn't fully understand the lessons. When his code had errors, he didn't know who to ask for help. Once, his program crashed

because of an extra space in the code, and it took Thien a whole week to figure out the error.

Thien's first successful lines of code were typed on a 2015 computer with 4GB of RAM, which ran sluggishly, but that didn't affect his passion for learning at all.

Every day, Thien spends about 3 hours learning programming on his own, sometimes more on weekends. Not only does he love programming, but this student is also passionate about games. Combining these two hobbies, he eventually found a solution: learning game programming, so he could learn and play at the same time. This passion led him to CodeLearn – a platform for learning programming with the popular gold mining game.

In early September, Thien registered to participate in the RL Comp competition organized by FPT Software to challenge himself. In this competition, programmers need to create a virtual gold miner with sufficient intelligence to overcome the game's traps and compete against opponents' gold miners.



In the group stage, gold miner The_Winner (Thien's nickname) surpassed nearly a thousand other contestants to rank 50th. Thien became the youngest contestant to advance from the group stage of this competition, surprising Cao Van Viet - the founder of CodeLearn and a judge of RL Comp.

Viet said that RL Comp is a competition on Reinforcement Learning, a sub-branch of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning. He was surprised that an 11th-grade student like Thien could pass the group stage. Thien's ability to overcome the difficult challenges of the rules shows that he has a basic understanding of Reinforcement Learning, something that many final-year IT students may not even have.

However, facing formidable and experienced competitors, Thien's gold miner, The_Winner, had to stop at the next round. The 11th-grade student from Hung Yen affirmed that he is still doing well in his schoolwork and is also dedicating time to improving his English skills.

Thien shared that he plans to create his own game and hopes to one day have a job where he can program every day.

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