Although in a conventional game, "Exit" might take you directly to the next level, Randomware is not quite as straightforward...

RANDOMWARE

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S everal common attributes of the current game industry include established genres, sequels and copies of popular games, constantly increasing graphical power, and larger and more realistic game 'worlds.' In turn, this has fed our expectations as to what a game is and what it should be. There is a common system nowadays, where video game players apparently know what they want, and tight development budgets and the desire for efficient development encourage 'new' games to be similar, on the whole, to previous ones – few risks are taken.

Recently, however, the trend for more unique and quirky games has grown, encouraged in a large way by the Nintendo DS and its focus on innovative accessible gameplay.

A Game That Designs Itself?

Randomware is a game that assertively tries to oppose the old system and explores the possibilities of where new ideas could take us. Everything you expect from a computer game, albeit the very most fundamental aspects, you can forget when playing this. Yes, there is a score; yes, there are graphics; yes, there is movement of a character - then again, what would a video game be without these things? Arguably it would merely be a video or a picture on a screen. The unique aspect of this game is that it was designed to design itself.

How Random?

Each level, inspired by Wario-Ware games, lasts only for several seconds. The goal of each level is trivial, when you think about it *how you think you are expected to think about it*. It simply involves one movable object having to collect and avoid the other two types of object, respectively. The real challenge of each level, though, is to work out exactly *what does what*.

The graphics are wide in variety and theme, and change every level. Due to the random nature of the game, there is nothing to limit a particular type of object to a particular appearance. Interesting combinations include: one object having to collect the same type of object as itself, deceiving exit signs which are in fact obstacles, and collectible and non-collectible objects with the same appearance – the latter giving you the task of guessing which is which. This is an example of where randomness can completely change gameplay without making the game too complex to still be fun to play.

Although the control keys don't change from level to level, the effect they have on the movement of the 'character' does change. This is also a successful implementation of randomness in the game – for example, driving a car (one type of movement) can completely change the feel of the game compared to a platform movement (another type). The different types of movement are all suitable in the game, yet the fact that they can change makes the game a lot more varied.

The other random aspects of the game are sizes and positions of the objects. Interestingly, these factors are the most graphical, which might make you wonder why you didn't notice these aspects sooner. Yet, they don't have as much of an affect on the game as the other variables. This must just go to show that *graphics are in fact less significant than gameplay mechanics* in computer games.

Because of the way the game does vary from level to level, you can find that the apparent goal of one level may be the opposite to the last. In fact, the fact that it changes from level to level is what creates the biggest challenge, and arguably the whole purpose of the game.

There is no penalisation for not completing a particular level; it simply skips to the next once the timer runs out. However your score will end up lower and you will feel like the five seconds of your life spent playing the level was a lot longer when you real-ise you gained nothing for it.
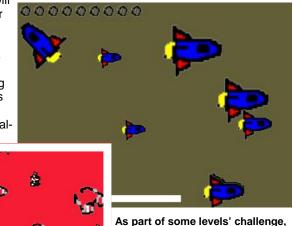
Does It Work?

Although the concept is obviously ambitious, perhaps it was somewhat too ambitious in practice. *Totally new* gameplay mechanics are not automatically generated, which limits the number of possibilities within it. Thus, if you are expecting innovation forever, you will be disappointed.

Yet, the concept doesn't entirely fail at creating something new – there is a sense of repetition between levels – however as a whole, the game is surprisingly original. So it seems as though taking an original concept can have the potential to result in success, even if the success doesn't come directly from where it was expected.

The Future of Randomisation

Still, perhaps in the future, if randomisation becomes more understood and more used within games, there may not only be the possibility for bigger and better sequels to this particular 'genre' of game – which is almost certainly possible – but also new genres of game based on randomisation, and hopefully, games which do in fact create and contain new genres within themselves. It definitely shows that randomness can be used to add to computer game design successfully, in more ways than the traditional 'randomly generated dungeon' implementation.

As part of some levels' challenge, you may recognise the well-known "Spot-the difference" theme—with a time limit