Claims:

1. A loan item management system, including:

a shelf unit having shelves for loan items, at least one shelf including a respective antenna for communicating with RFID tags of items placed on the shelf; and

a returns computer system including:

(i) a read controller for controlling reading of the tag data of the tags of items in said at least one shelf and associating location data representing the location of the items with the tag data;

(ii) a returns controller for invoking a check in process for an item in said shelf unit; and

(iii) an item controller for accessing item data and location data to present for a patron which shelf holds an item reserved for a patron.

2. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 1, including a returns controller for invoking a check in process for a reserved item in said shelf unit when a reserved period expires for said reserved item.

3. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 2, wherein the item controller indentifies, following the check in process, the reserved item is to be retained in the shelf as it is reserved for another patron.

4. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 2, wherein the item controller indentifies, following the check in process, the reserved item is to be removed from the shelf as no longer reserved for any patron.

5. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 1, wherein said at least one shelf is for short term loan items, and said system notifies a patron of return of said item.

6. A loan item management system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, including a item data management system maintaining a database of item data for each

item, including status data representing an expected location for the item, and wherein the returns computer system communicates with the item data management system to identify items on the shelf unit that should be removed from the shelf unit.

7. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 6, wherein the returns computer system identifies items of the same title in close proximity which need to relocated.

8. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the returns computer system identifies items expected to be on the shelf and are not detected on the shelf.

9. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the shelf unit includes an exception shelf for exception items and a RFID reader for said exception items.

10. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the returns computer system generates a display to advise a user to place items in a predetermined location.

11. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 1 or 10, wherein the item data includes a predetermined physical location for the item, and the location data associated with tag data is compared by the returns computer with the predetermined location.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A loan item management system, including:

a shelf unit having shelves for returned items, at least one shelf including a respective antenna for communicating with RFID tags of items placed on the shelf; and

a returns computer system including:

(i) a read controller for controlling reading of the tag data of the tags of items in said at least one shelf and associating location data representing the location of the items with the tag data; and

(ii) an item controller for accessing reserved item data and location data to present for a patron which shelf holds an item reserved for a patron.

2. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 1, including a returns controller for invoking a check in process for a reserved item in said shelf unit when a reserved period expires for said reserved item.

3. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 2, wherein the item controller indentifies, following the check in process, the reserved item is to be retained in the shelf as it is reserved for another patron.

4. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 2, wherein the item controller indentifies, following the check in process, the reserved item is to be removed from the shelf as no longer reserved for any patron.

5. A loan item management system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, including a item data management system maintaining a database of item data for each item, including status data and whether the item is reserved by one or more patrons, and wherein the returns computer system communicates with the item data management system to identify items on the shelf unit that should be removed from the shelf unit.

6. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 5, wherein the returns computer system identifies items of the same title in close proximity which need to relocated.

7. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the returns computer system identifies items expected to be on the shelf and are not detected on the shelf.

8. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the shelf unit includes an exception shelf for exception items and a RFID reader for said exception items.

9. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the returns computer system generates a display to advise a user to place items in a predetermined location.

10. A loan item management system, including:

a shelf unit having shelves for loan items, at least one shelf including a respective antenna for communicating with RFID tags of items placed on the shelf; and

a returns computer system including:

(i) a read controller for controlling reading of the tag data of the tags of items in said at least one shelf and associating location data representing the location of the items with the tag data; and

(ii) a returns controller for invoking a check in process for an item in said shelf unit.

11. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 10, including an item controller for accessing item data and location data to present for a patron which shelf holds an item reserved for a patron.

12. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 10 or 11, wherein said shelf is

for short term loan items, and said system notifies a patron of return of said item.

13. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 10, 11 or 12, including a item data management system maintaining a database of item data for each item, including status data representing an expected location for the item, and wherein the returns computer system communicates with the item data management system to identify items on the shelf unit that should be removed from the shelf unit.

14. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 10, wherein the returns computer system identifies items of the same title in close proximity which need to relocated.

15. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the returns computer system identifies items expected to be on the shelf and are not detected on the shelf.

16. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the shelf unit includes an exception shelf for exception items and a RFID reader for said exception items.

17. A loan item management system as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein the returns computer system generates a display to advise a user to place items in a predetermined location.

18. A loan item management system as claimed in claim 11 or 17, wherein the item data includes a predetermined physical location for the item, and the location data associated with tag data is compared by the returns computer with the predetermined location.

19. A loan item management system, substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.