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AN INCENTIVE-BASED VIDEO GAMING SYSTEM

5 FIELD OF INVENTION

This invention relates to a video game incorporated with at least one interactive information element. The invention also relates to a method of incorporating the at least one interactive information element into a video game.

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BACKGROUND

Video games are now generally acknowledged to be a means of entertaining the masses and are no longer perceived to appeal to only people of a younger age group/demographic. The success of standalone gaming consoles like the various iterations of Xbox from Microsoft, and the various iterations of Playstation from Sony provides evidence of the growing acceptance of video games by the mainstream. This successful proliferation of video games into the mainstream has given rise to a multi-million dollar video game industry which is set to grow as the industry is still in its infancy.

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Many companies have embraced opportunities offered by in-game advertising to "capture" eyeballs. Soft-drinks, cars, food, IT, media and sporting goods companies are some of the companies that invest substantial sums of money to have their marks, logos, digital representations of their products, and brands included in video games to capture the attention of the mainstream that has grown increasingly jaded of conventional forms of advertising like print and media advertisements.

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However, current forms of advertising in video games are restricted to in-game billboards, in-game signages, in-game product placements and other forms of non-interactive in-game elements. A major disadvantage of the current forms of advertising is the fact that a video game player would probably gloss over all the different types of advertising when the player is engrossed by the proceedings of the game during gameplay. There is currently no impetus for the player to pay more attention to the static advertisements while playing the video game. Similarly, the existing forms of advertising do not engage the player during the course of gameplay.

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There are currently also no methods available to incorporate interactive and update-able advertisements into existing video games without a major revision of the source code of the video game.

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SUMMARY

In a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of playing a video game with at least one interactive information element incorporated within the game. The method includes: a player manipulating a control unit to play the game in a preferred mode; and the player having an option to engage the at least one interactive information element when playing the game in the preferred mode. It is advantageous that gameplay is not disrupted when the at least one interactive information element is engaged. Preferably, engagement of the at least one interactive information element is not mandatory for continuation of gameplay. Preferably, the information element may be either advertisements or public announcement services.

Preferably the at least one interactive information element may be, for example, an icon in the game, a character in the game or an item in the game. The manipulation of the control unit may be done either physically or neurologically. Engaging the at least one interactive information element may be by, for example, clicking on the interactive information element, highlighting the interactive information element or interacting with the interactive information element. The at least one interactive element may be located at a juncture in the game such as either a specific event in the course of the game or a specific location in the game. It is advantageous that the at least one interactive element is able to be updated.

The video game may be run on a device such as, for example, a personal entertainment system, a video games console, a mobile telephone, a personal digital assistant, a notebook or a desktop computer. The video game may be run either online or offline. In the video game, engagement of the at least one interactive information element may activates an action such as, for example, an on-screen presentation, an electronic token generation system and a combination of the aforementioned. The on-screen presentation may be either within the course of gameplay or in a sub-screen in the game. The electronic tokens may be stored either locally or on a network. It is advantageous that an incidence of interactive information element engagement is countable. The number of counts of the incidence of interactive information element engagement may be stored either locally or on a network.

In another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a video game including at least one interactive information element, where gameplay is preferably not disrupted when the at least one interactive information element is engaged.

There is also provided a method of incorporating at least one interactive information element into a video game, including: adding an engageable module into the video game; updating the engageable module with the at least one interactive information element; and locating the at least one interactive information element at a juncture in the video game. It is preferable that

gameplay is not disrupted when the at least one interactive information element is engaged. Preferably, the engageable module may be updated either locally or from a remote source via a network. The juncture in the video game may be either a specific event in the course of the game or a specific location in the game.

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The at least one interactive information element in the video game may be, for example, an icon in the game, a character in the game or an item in the game. Engaging the at least one interactive information element may be by means selected from the group comprising: clicking on the interactive information element, highlighting the interactive information element and
10 interacting with the interactive information element. It is preferable that engagement of the at least one interactive information element is not mandatory for continuation of gameplay. Engagement of the at least one interactive information element may activate an action such as, for example, an on-screen presentation, an electronic token generation system and a combination of the aforementioned. The on-screen presentation may be either within the
15 course of gameplay or in a sub-screen in the game. Electronic tokens may also be stored either locally or on a network.

Advantageously, an incidence of interactive information element engagement is countable. The number of counts of the incidence of interactive information element engagement may be
20 stored either locally or on a network. It is preferable that the information element is either advertisements or public announcement services. It is also preferable that the at least one interactive element is able to be updated.

DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

25 In order that the present invention may be fully understood and readily put into practical effect, there shall now be described by way of non-limitative example only preferred embodiments of the present invention, the description being with reference to the accompanying illustrative drawings.

30 Figure 1 shows a flow chart of a preferred method of the present invention.

Figure 2 shows a control unit used in the preferred method of the present invention.

Figure 3 shows an example of a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4 shows a flow chart of another preferred method of the present invention.

Figure 5 shows a flow chart of a client end and server interaction process in the preferred
35 embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 6 shows a screen capture of a specific juncture of the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 7 shows a screen capture of another specific juncture of the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 8 shows a screen capture of yet another specific juncture of the preferred embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

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In a first aspect of the present invention, Figure 1 shows a flow chart of a method 20 of playing a video game with at least one interactive information element incorporated within the game. The video game may be of any conceivable genre. The example that is presented in a subsequent section of the description is not meant to limit the application of the present invention to video games of that genre. The video game may be run on a device such as, for example, a personal entertainment system, a video games console, a mobile telephone, a personal digital assistant, a notebook and a desktop computer. The personal entertainment system may include entertainment systems installed in the passenger seats of commercial airliners, and long haul buses. The method 20 firstly includes a player manipulating a control unit to play the game in a preferred mode (22). The control unit employed may be similar to the multi-button controller 50 shown in Figure 2 or it may be any other type of control unit such as, for example, a joystick, a keypad, a keyboard and so forth. The control unit may be manipulated either physically or neurologically, where control units that may be manipulated by neurological commands may also be employed to play the video game. Basically, selecting the preferred mode in the video game means that the player selects a manner that the video game is played. Certain video games may have the option of playing games either on a network or offline.

In the course of gameplay in the preferred mode at a certain juncture, the player may encounter an option to engage the at least one interactive information element (24). The at least one interactive element may be located at the certain juncture in the game, wherein the juncture is either a specific event in the course of the game or a specific location in the game. The specific event may be at a point along a timeline of the game. The engagement of the at least one interactive information element may not be mandatory for the continuation of gameplay. The at least one interactive information element may be an icon in the game, a character in the game or an item in the game. Referring to Figure 6, the specific juncture of the game is during character selection, such as in an instance of a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG). A representation 200 of a character is shown, with the character's background and capabilities described in a background box 202 and a capabilities box 204 respectively. The interactive information element may be seen in a supplementary box 206. Figure 7 shows another specific juncture of the game. That juncture is a log-in page to log into the MMORPG. The title 208 is shown and the log-in console 210 is also shown. The interactive information elements may be seen in icons 212. Figure 8 shows yet another specific juncture of the game where the game is loading data to proceed. The screen

basically shows a scene which is congruent to the game, with a title 214 shown, a progress bar 216 showing the progress of game loading and the interactive information element 218.

Figure 3 shows examples of the interactive information elements being incorporated in a MMORPG. At a particular juncture in gameplay, a character 52 in the MMORPG controlled by the player may encounter some interactive information elements like a "wings" button 54 to enable the character 52 to fly (an example of an icon in the game), a hamburger monster 56 (an example of a character in the game) and a car 58 (an example of an item in the game). Each interactive information element 54, 56, 58 may be linked/related to a particular advertiser. The interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 may be engaged in different ways. The way of engaging the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 may depend on the type of element being engaged. For example, the hamburger monster 56 may be engaged only when the character 52 fights and successfully slays the hamburger monster 56. Similarly, the car 58 may be engaged when the character 52 enters the car 58. The "wings" button 54 may be engaged (for example when the character 52 wishes to fly) by clicking on the icon 54 using a pointer, or using an enclosure moving between different icons to highlight the icon 54 to engage the icon 54. A more detailed description of events that occur when the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 are engaged will be provided in a subsequent section of the description. If the player chooses not to engage any of the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58, the player then continues to play the game (26) without any interruption, although there may be a possibility of detriment to a conclusion/completion of the game if the player does not engage any of the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58. The detriment to the conclusion/completion of the game may result from not getting "rewarded" for engaging the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58. Rewards may be for example, electronic tokens/credits that will be described later or information that may be provided by engaging the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 that may aid the player in subsequent portions of the video game. The player may be informed of the reward prior to engaging the at least one interactive information element.

If the player chooses to engage any of the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 in one of a number of ways (28), an action may be activated (30). For example, highlighting the icon 54 may activate an on-screen presentation that may be within the course of gameplay or in a sub-screen in the game. The on-screen presentation may be, for example, an airliner with a particular airline's (an advertiser) paint scheme flying across the screen (overlaid on the game environment and does not disrupt gameplay) trailing a catchphrase of the airline like "A great way to fly". In another example, making the character 52 enter the car 58 may activate the generation of a roar of an engine starting and revving recorded from an engine of an actual car depicted by the car 58. Similarly, making the character 52 slay the hamburger monster 56 may generate a sub-screen showing an advertisement of a chain of fast food restaurants. The

sub-screen may also be overlaid on the game environment and may not be disruptive to gameplay.

The player may continue playing the game (32) after cessation of the on-screen presentation.

5 Engaging the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 may also enable electronic tokens/credits to be earned if the player does not disrupt the on-screen presentation at any juncture (34). The electronic tokens/credits may be stored either locally or on a separate server connected in a network (36). The stored electronic tokens/credits should be verifiable to ascertain their authenticity. The electronic tokens/credits may be accumulated and usable
10 in loyalty programmes (either administered by the advertisers or the game publishers) or may be usable for the game being played to bolster the strength/abilities/weapons/prowess of the character 52. An example of a loyalty programme is when the video game is played on entertainment systems installed in the passenger seats of commercial airliners. Passengers on the airliner may earn electronic tokens/credits that may be converted to either frequent
15 flyer points or inflight meal upgrades.

The advertisers may also be able to count the incidence of interactive information element engagement by monitoring the issuance of the electronic tokens/credits (37). The advertisers may still be able to count the incidence of interactive information element engagement without
20 the issuance of the electronic tokens/credits if engagement of the interactive information element causes a count to be sent to a counter either locally or on a separate server connected in a network (31). The local counter may send the counts of incidence of interactive information element engagement to a separate server connected in a network when the player goes online whether when playing the video game or not. The count for the
25 incidence of interactive information element engagement may enable an advertiser to ascertain a value for placing interactive information elements in a particular video game.

However, it should be noted that the interactive information elements are not only for advertising. The interactive information elements may be used for the propagation of public
30 announcement services, such as emergency announcements like warnings for hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, mobilisation of armed forces and the like. For video games that are played in an online mode, the interactive information elements may be updated by automatically downloading and replacing relevant sub-modules controlling the interactive information elements in the video game. This facilitates the instant transmittal of emergency
35 warnings to players of video games (preferably in a particular state/country/affected area only). For video games that are not played online, the interactive information elements may be updated by automatically downloading and replacing relevant sub-modules controlling the interactive information elements in the video game when the player goes online whether when playing the video game or not.

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The player may continue playing the game (38) after cessation of the on-screen presentation with the issuance of tokens/credits either completed or on-going. The player may be notified of the number of tokens/credits being issued at any juncture after the cessation of the on-screen presentation.

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There is also disclosed a video game that enables the aforementioned method to be conducted. The video game may be of any conceivable genre. The example that is presented in the description is not meant to limit the application of the present invention to video games of that genre. The video game may be run on a device such as, for example, a personal entertainment system, a video games console, a mobile telephone, a personal digital assistant, a notebook and a desktop computer. The personal entertainment system may include entertainment systems installed in the passenger seats of commercial airliners, and long haul buses. A control unit employed for the video game may be similar to the multi-button controller 50 shown in Figure 2 or it may be any other type of control unit such as, for example, a joystick, a keypad, a keyboard and so forth. The control unit may be manipulated either physically or neurologically, where control units that may be manipulated by neurological commands may also be employed to play the video game. The video game may have the option of playing games in several modes, such as either on a network or offline.

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While playing the video game, the player may encounter an option to engage at least one interactive information element in the video game. The at least one interactive element may be located at a juncture in the game, wherein the juncture is either a specific event in the course of the game or a specific location in the game. The specific event may be at a point along a timeline of the game. The engagement of the at least one interactive information element may not be mandatory for the continuation of gameplay. The at least one interactive information element may be an icon in the game, a character in the game or an item in the game. Figure 3 shows examples of the interactive information elements being incorporated in a massively multiplayer online role playing game (MMORPG). At a particular juncture in gameplay, a character 52 in the MMORPG controlled by the player may encounter some interactive information elements like a "wings" button 54 to enable the character 52 to fly (an example of an icon in the game), a hamburger monster 56 (an example of a character in the game) and a car 58 (an example of an item in the game). Each interactive information element 54, 56, 58 may be linked/related to a particular advertiser. The interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 may be engaged in different ways. The way of engaging the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 may depend on the type of element being engaged. For example, the hamburger monster 56 may be engaged when the character 52 fights and successfully slays the hamburger monster 56. Similarly, the car 58 may be engaged when the character 52 enters the car 58. The "wings" icon 54 may be engaged (for example when the character 52 wishes to fly) by clicking on the icon 54 using a pointer, or using an enclosure moving between different icons to highlight the icon 54 to engage the icon 54. A more detailed

description of events that occur when the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 are engaged will be provided in a subsequent section of the description. If the player chooses not to engage any of the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58, the player then continues to play the game without any interruption, although there may be a possibility of detriment to a conclusion/completion of the game if the player does not engage any of the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58. The detriment to the conclusion/completion of the game may result from not getting "rewarded" for engaging the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58. Rewards may be for example, electronic tokens/credits that will be described later or information that may be provided by engaging the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 that may aid the player in subsequent portions of the video game. The player may be informed of the reward prior to engaging the at least one interactive information element.

If the player chooses to engage any of the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58, an action may be activated. For example, highlighting the icon 54 may activate an on-screen presentation that may be within the course of gameplay or in a sub-screen in the game. The on-screen presentation may be, for example, an airliner with a particular airline's (an advertiser) paint scheme flying across the screen (overlaid on the game environment and does not disrupt gameplay) trailing a catchphrase of the airline like "A great way to fly". In another example, making the character 52 enter the car 58 may activate the generation of a roar of an engine starting and revving recorded from an engine of an actual car depicted by the car 58. Similarly, making the character 52 slay the hamburger monster 56 would generate a sub-screen showing an advertisement of a chain of fast food restaurants. The sub-screen may also be overlaid on the game environment and may not be disruptive to gameplay.

The player may continue playing the game after cessation of the on-screen presentation. Engaging the interactive information elements 54, 56, 58 may enable electronic tokens/credits to be earned if the player does not disrupt the on-screen presentation at any juncture. The electronic tokens/credits may be stored either locally or on a separate server connected in a network. The stored electronic tokens/credits should be verifiable to ascertain their authenticity. The electronic tokens/credits may be accumulated and usable in loyalty programmes (either administered by the advertisers or the game publishers) or may be usable for the game being played to bolster the strength/abilities/weapons/prowess of the character 52. An example of a loyalty programme is when the video game is played on entertainment systems installed in the passenger seats of commercial airliners. Passengers on the airliner may earn electronic tokens/credits that may be converted to either frequent flyer points or inflight meal upgrades.

The advertisers may be able to count the incidence of interactive information element engagement by monitoring the issuance of the electronic tokens/credits. The advertisers may still be able to count the incidence of interactive information element engagement without the

issuance of the electronic tokens/credits if engagement of the interactive information element causes a count to be sent to a counter either locally or on a separate server connected in a network. The local counter may send the counts of incidence of interactive information element engagement to a separate server connected in a network when the player goes
5 online whether when playing the video game or not. The count for the incidence of interactive information element engagement may enable an advertiser to ascertain a value for placing interactive information elements in a particular video game.

However, it should be noted that the interactive information elements are not only for
10 advertising. The interactive information elements may be used for the propagation of public announcement services, such as emergency announcements like warnings for hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, mobilisation of armed forces and the like. For video games that are played in an online mode, the interactive information elements may be updated by
15 automatically downloading and replacing relevant sub-modules controlling the interactive information elements in the video game. This facilitates the instant transmittal of emergency warnings to players of video games (preferably in a particular state/country/affected area only). For video games that are not played online, the interactive information elements may be updated by automatically downloading and replacing relevant sub-modules controlling the
20 interactive information elements in the video game when the player goes online whether when playing the video game or not.

The player may continue playing the game after cessation of the on-screen presentation with the issuance of tokens/credits either completed or on-going. The player may be notified of the number of tokens/credits being issued at any juncture after the cessation of the on-screen
25 presentation.

In another aspect of the present invention, there is also provided a method of incorporating at least one interactive information element into a video game. Referring to Figure 4, there may be a video game that has been published or in the midst of development (80). A module may
30 be added to the video game that may either be published or in the midst of development (82). The module may enable the at least one interactive information element to be added such that the at least one interactive information element appears in the video game and is engageable. The module may allow the at least one interactive information element to be updated by automatically downloading and replacing relevant sub-modules of the interactive
35 information elements in the video game whenever the player goes online. The module may also enable the location of the at least one interactive information element at a juncture in the video game (84). With the incorporation of the module in the video game (86), gameplay is still not disrupted when the at least one interactive information element is engaged. The video game with the incorporated module would be similar to the video game as described in prior
40 sections of the description.

Referring to Figure 5, there is shown a preferred method of client end and server interaction for the present invention. Firstly, the client end device, such as, for example, a personal entertainment system, a video games console, a mobile telephone, a personal digital assistant, a notebook and a desktop computer may be activated and subsequently connected to a server via a network (100). The server may then obtain data from the client end device and determine whether the interactive information element(s) is legitimate (102) as the interactive information element(s) may be illegally modified. If the interactive information element(s) is found to be not legitimate, the interactive information element(s) is then removed from the client end device (104). If the interactive information element(s) is found to be legitimate, the server check information on the client end device relating to the interactive information element(s) (106) and may include the downloading of the incidence of interactive information element(s) activation for processing as described in an earlier portion of the description. Subsequently, the server then determines whether the interactive information element(s) needs to be changed/renewed (108). If the interactive information element(s) needs to be changed/renewed, then new interactive information element(s) are sent to the client end device (112). If change/renewal of the interactive information element(s) is not required, then the interactive information element(s) remains the same in the client end device (110). It should be noted that if the client end device is constantly connected to the server via a network, this method may be carried out at periodic intervals or at the user's preference. If the client end device is not constantly connected to the server via a network, the client end device may automatically connect to the server to carry out this method whenever the client end device is connected to the server via a network, or the method may be carried out at the user's preference whenever the client end device is connected to the server via a network.

Whilst there has been described in the foregoing description preferred embodiments of the present invention, it will be understood by those skilled in the technology concerned that many variations or modifications in details of design or construction may be made without departing from the present invention.

CLAIMS

1. A method of playing a video game with at least one interactive information element in a form of either an advertisement, or a public announcement service, incorporated within the game, the at least one interactive information element being able to be updated, the method including:

a player manipulating a control unit to play the game in a preferred mode; and

the player having an option to engage the at least one interactive information element when playing the game in the preferred mode, an incidence of interactive information element engagement being countable, the incidence being counted on a local counter when the video game is played offline and the incidence being sent to a separate server for subsequent counting when the video game is played online;

wherein gameplay is not disrupted when the at least one interactive information element is engaged, and a total incidence of engagement is obtainable when the video game is played both offline and online.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one interactive information element is selected from a group comprising: an icon in the game, a character in the game and an item in the game.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein engaging the at least one interactive information element is by means selected from the group comprising: clicking on the interactive information element, highlighting the interactive information element and interacting with the interactive information element.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein engagement of the at least one interactive information element is not mandatory for continuation of gameplay.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein engagement of the at least one interactive information element activates an action selected from the group comprising: an on-screen presentation, an electronic token generation system and a combination of the aforementioned.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the on-screen presentation is either within the course of gameplay or in a sub-screen in the game.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein the electronic tokens are stored either locally or on a network.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the total incidence of interactive information element engagement is stored either locally or on a network.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the at least one interactive element is located at a juncture in the game, wherein the juncture is either a specific event in the course of the game or a specific location in the game.

10. A video game including at least one interactive information element in a form of either an advertisement, or a public announcement service, the at least one interactive information element being able to be updated, where gameplay is not disrupted when the at least one interactive information element is engaged, wherein an incidence of interactive information element engagement being countable, the incidence being counted on a local counter when the video game is played offline and the incidence being sent to a separate server for subsequent counting when the video game is played online, and a total incidence of engagement is obtainable when the video game is played both offline and online.

11. The video game of claim 10, wherein the at least one interactive information element is selected from a group comprising: an icon in the game, a character in the game and an item in the game.

12. The video game of claim 10, wherein engaging the at least one interactive information element is by means selected from the group comprising: clicking on the interactive information element, highlighting the interactive information element and interacting with the interactive information element.

13. The video game of claim 10, wherein engagement of the at least one interactive information element is not mandatory for continuation of gameplay.

14. The video game of claim 10, wherein engagement of the at least one interactive information element activates an action selected from the group comprising: an on-screen presentation, an electronic token generation system and a combination of the aforementioned.

15. The video game of claim 14, wherein the on-screen presentation is either within the course of gameplay or in a sub-screen in the game.

16. The video game of claim 14, wherein the electronic tokens are stored either locally or on a network.

17. The video game of claim 10, wherein the total incidence of interactive information element engagement is stored either locally or on a network.

18. The video game of claim 10, wherein the at least one interactive element is located at a juncture in the game, wherein the juncture is either a specific event in the course of the game or a specific location in the game.

19. A method of incorporating at least one interactive information element in a form of either an advertisement, or a public announcement service, into a video game, the at least one interactive information element being able to be updated, the method including:

adding an engageable module into the video game;

updating the engageable module with the at least one interactive information element;

and

locating the at least one interactive information element at a juncture in the video game, an incidence of engaging the at least one interactive information element being countable, the incidence being counted on a local counter when the video game is played offline and the incidence being sent to a separate server for subsequent counting when the video game is played online;

wherein gameplay is not disrupted when the at least one interactive information element is engaged, and a total incidence of engagement is obtainable when the video game is played both offline and online.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the engageable module is updated either locally or from a remote source via a network.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein the juncture in the video game is either a specific event in the course of the game or a specific location in the game.

22. The method of claim 19, wherein the at least one interactive information element is selected from a group comprising: an icon in the game, a character in the game and an item in the game.

23. The method of claim 19, wherein engaging the at least one interactive information element is by means selected from the group comprising: clicking on the interactive information element, highlighting the interactive information element and interacting with the interactive information element.

24. The method of claim 19, wherein engagement of the at least one interactive information element is not mandatory for continuation of gameplay.

25. The method of claim 19, wherein engagement of the at least one interactive information element activates an action selected from the group comprising: an on-screen

presentation, an electronic token generation system and a combination of the
aforementioned.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein the on-screen presentation is either within the
5 course of gameplay or in a sub-screen in the game.

27. The method of claim 25, wherein the electronic tokens are stored either locally or on
a network.

10 28. The method of claim 19, wherein the total incidence of interactive information element
engagement is stored either locally or on a network.

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