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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR A RELATIONSHIP LOGIC GAME**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system and method is provided for engaging in a relationship creativity game with concept objects. The method includes the operation of supplying a plurality of concept objects for each player to form a player's hand. An additional operation is placing a plurality of concept objects associated with a playing field to form a turn. The concept objects can then be linked in a turn with a creative statement relating associated aspects that are common to the plurality of concept objects. An additional operation is comparing the creative statement against a limited set of concept units to determine if a relationship provided by the creative statement is unique as compared to associated aspects of the limited set of concept units.

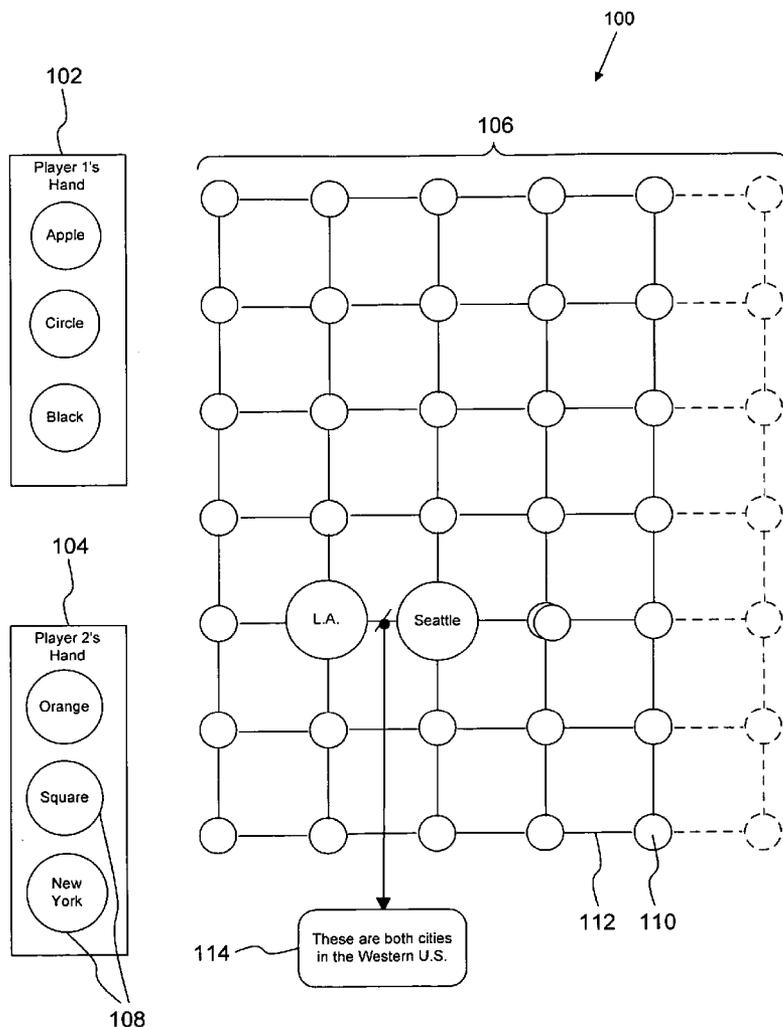
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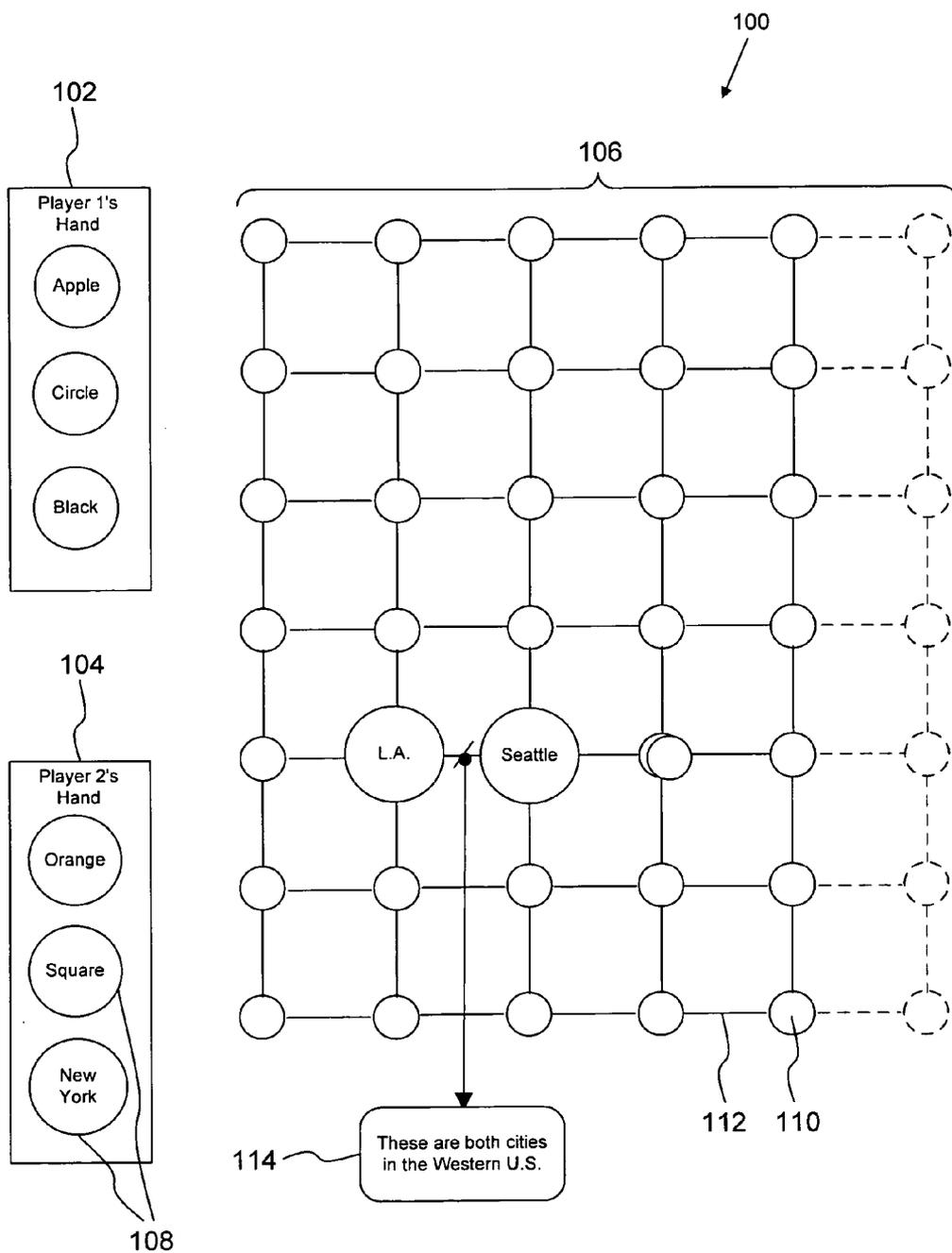


FIG. 1

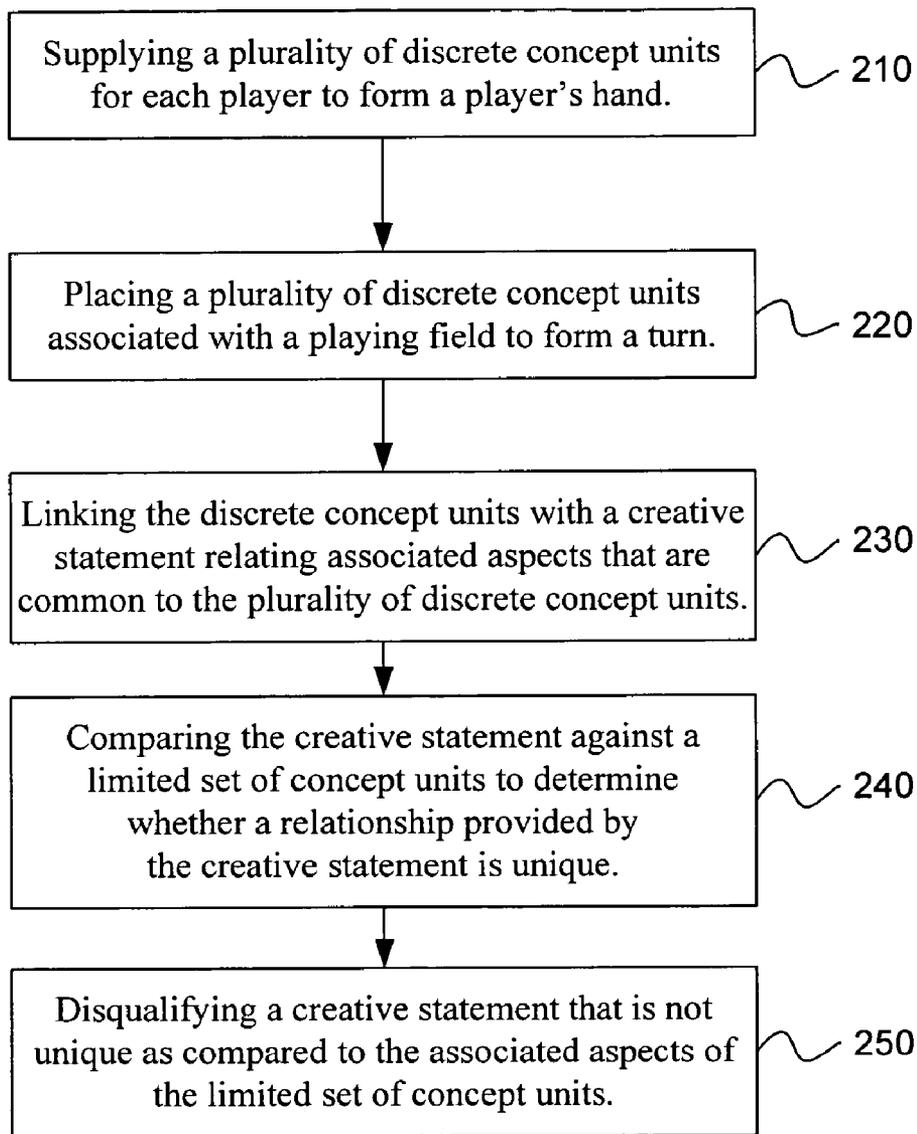


FIG. 2



FIG. 3

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR A RELATIONSHIP LOGIC GAME

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS AND CLAIM OF PRIORITY

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional patent application Ser. No. 60/541,016 filed on Feb. 3, 2004 and U.S. application Ser. No. 11/051,990 filed on Feb. 3, 2005.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Throughout history mankind has created and played games of skill and logic against one another. Some of the earliest known games were created by the Egyptians, Babylonians, Romans, and the Chinese. Many of these games have survived to the present day in the form of games known as Chess, Backgammon, GO (in Japan) and similar logic games.

[0003] The majority of such games have very rigid rules that surround the defined playing pieces and game play. In addition, these games also take a significant amount of time to learn and master. Once individuals have mastered a game, then each game may also take a significant amount of time to play. Many such classic logic games are also limited to just two to four players.

[0004] Playing cards were also developed in the middle ages and have a long and varied history in the number and type of games that currently exist and continue to evolve. Other types of card and board games test a player's knowledge in competition about topics such as language, trivia, music or creativity.

[0005] However, with the advent of computer games, video recorders, DVD players and the Internet, youth and adults have turned to these game mediums for entertainment instead of some of the more rigid games of the past. As a result, games that provide a wide variety or depth of play and tie into the modern world are more likely to retain the current gamer community's interest.

SUMMARY

[0006] A system and method is provided for engaging in a relationship creativity game with concept objects. The method includes the operation of supplying a plurality of concept objects for each player to form a player's hand. An additional operation is placing at least one of the concept objects at a location for a playing field to form a turn. The concept objects can then be linked in a turn with a creative statement relating associated aspects that are common to the plurality of concept objects. An additional operation is comparing the creative statement against a limited set of concept objects to determine if a relationship provided by the creative statement is unique as compared to associated aspects of the limited set of concept objects.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] Additional features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the detailed description which follows, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, which together illustrate, by way of example, features of the invention; and, wherein:

[0008] FIG. 1 is a diagram view of an embodiment of a relationship creativity game with concept objects;

[0009] FIG. 2 is a flow chart illustrating operations in a method of an embodiment of a relationship creativity game with concept objects; and

[0010] FIG. 3 illustrates an electronic version of an embodiment of a relationship creativity game with concept objects.

[0011] Reference will now be made to the exemplary embodiments illustrated, and specific language will be used herein to describe the same. It will nevertheless be understood that no limitation of the scope of the invention is thereby intended.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXAMPLE EMBODIMENT(S)

[0012] The present system and method relates to games played on a computer game system, and/or on a physical board. Playing objects, playing pieces, or concept objects in the present game may represent any concept (person, place, thing, action, abstract idea, etc.), and players may connect playing objects by stating unique relationships between the playing objects.

[0013] FIG. 1 illustrates a relationship logic game 100 with a plurality of concept objects or concept pieces 108. A plurality of player hands 102 and 104 are created and a predetermined number of the concept pieces are divided into each player's hand. The defined concept pieces or playing pieces are used on a playing field 106 having play locations 110 where the defined concept pieces can reside and connector markings 112 are configured to connect the play locations together in a pre-defined pattern. Any number of play locations and connector markings can be used, as illustrated by the dotted lines. In addition, the pattern into which the play locations are organized may take the form of a grid, hex grid, circular arrangement, other geometric designs, or artistic connection configurations. The play locations for a concept piece may be linked to at least one other play location. In one embodiment, the play locations can be linked to from one to six other play locations. However, there is no limit to the number of play locations that might be linked together.

[0014] Players select pieces from their own hand that are desired to be linked together with pieces on the playing field and the pieces from the players hand may be placed on the playing field. A player may then generate a creative statement 114 representing associated aspects that are common to each of the plurality of selected concept pieces. The creative statement can be a generally logical association of the pieces formed as a natural language statement that represents a way in which aspects of each concept object can be linked to allow the concept object to be played on the playing field. Alternatively, the creative statement may use logical constructs, specific vocabulary or a truncated form of natural language. Using a natural language statement makes the game more accessible to a greater number of players and increases players' enjoyment of the game.

[0015] This creative statement is validated against a limited set of discrete concept pieces to determine whether a relationship provided by the creative statement is unique as compared to associated aspects of the limited set of concept

pieces. This validation is performed by the players of the game (or potentially a judge) and validation of creative statements is discussed further below.

[0016] The creative statement or linkage may contain an understandable, verifiable sentence describing a relationship between all of playing pieces being linked. Additional sentences following the initial creative statement may be used to offer supporting evidence. The criteria that governing the creative statement can comprise:

[0017] Inclusion. The linkage of playing pieces can generally refer to ideas that are in a lexicon, or should arguably be found in the lexicon. For example, everything that could be found in an encyclopedia, items that carry ISBN numbers, and their contents (characters and places in books), and so on.

[0018] In an alternative embodiment, the linkages and/or creative statements can use any information that can be verified in a reasonable amount of time from public or private lexicon and publication services. For example, sources can be used that described associated aspects of the playing pieces or concept units being played. However, verification should generally use sources that describe the associated aspects of the playing pieces. For example, linking non-associated aspects of the playing pieces will not result in a valid linkage, such as both playing pieces are referenced within the same encyclopedia.

[0019] Uniqueness. The creative statement or linkage association must be unique for the group of playing pieces being played as compared to a pre-defined group of playing pieces. The pre-defined group of playing pieces can be the playing pieces in play on the playing field. Alternatively, the pre-defined group of playing pieces can be the playing pieces in play on the playing field along with the playing pieces contained within the players' hands. A separate pre-defined group or rotating pool of pieces can be used as the comparing set or as an addition to the comparison set.

[0020] In general, the game play may be more straightforward when the concept units or playing pieces being used for comparison with the playing pieces being linked together with the creative statement are on the game playing field. However, using a pre-defined pool or a combination of what is in a player's hand and what is on the playing field can change the comparisons that can be made and may influence the game dynamic.

[0021] The game rules are enforceable by players who may make objections after a play or when a creative statement is presented. Players may object immediately during or after a play. A player can object on the grounds of validity when the facts are in doubt or evidence exists to the contrary or on the grounds that a relationship is not being described between the playing pieces. An objection of inclusion can be made against an association that refers to obscure ideas or things, for example, "the words Xavier and Charleston both occur on the web page at <http://. . .>" would be illegal, since the URL would not occur as a lexicon entry. Objecting on grounds of uniqueness can be made when a playing piece on the board or in the player's hand fits the same association as the playing pieces being linked. For example, "Harrison

Ford and Hugh Jackman are both actors" may be objected to when the player has Stephen Segal in his hand.

[0022] In the situation where the concept objects are disqualified, the playing pieces can be removed from the playing field unless a substitute valid creative statement can be provided by the player. In other words, a player may be allowed one or more opportunities to refine the creative statement to uniquely link the concept objects the player desires to play. The number of opportunities for refining the creative statement may vary depending on the game rules or the desires of the game players.

[0023] The game may end when one (or more) players has played all of the concept object's in the player's hand. Thus, the player who can provide the largest number of linkages at the fastest rate is likely to win the game. Alternatively, in another game embodiment, a player may electronically collect sets of linked playing pieces that the player has played or grouped together on the playing field. As a result, the player to collect a largest number of playing pieces in sets may be declared a winner.

[0024] Players may choose to not object to a particular game play. There exist many strategic reasons to not object in some situations. For example, the player may desire to link their own playing pieces to the some of the playing pieces currently being played. In addition, players may desire to allow a player extra playing opportunities (e.g., playing with children).

[0025] A minimum turn may include playing a single piece that can be linked to pieces that already exist on the board. In addition, several playing pieces can be used at a single time if a player is skilled enough to link several discrete concepts units together. Each turn is generally defined as a player placing one or more playing pieces from the player's hand to be associated or linked with other playing pieces on the playing field or board to form a turn. If a player cannot play a piece during a turn, then the player may discard a playing piece and draw a new playing piece.

[0026] A method is provided for engaging in a relationship creativity game with concept objects. **FIG. 2** illustrates that the method can include the operation of supplying a plurality of concept objects for each player to form a player's hand as in block **210**. These concept objects can be markers, beads, pictures, tiles or other playing pieces that represent a particular concept that is defined in advance. Examples of tiles may be people, places, things, architecture, art, music, popular culture, science, sports or similar concepts.

[0027] A game player can place a plurality of concept objects associated with a playing field to form a turn as in block **220**. The game may be played by allowing a player to place at least one of the concept objects from a player's hand at a location on a playing field in a turn. Alternatively, concept objects or playing pieces can be played from a separate playing piece pool in conjunction with pieces from the player's hand.

[0028] After the concept objects have been played, then the concept objects in a turn can be linked using a creative statement relating associated aspects that are common to the plurality of concept objects as in block **230** of **FIG. 2**. The associated aspects for the concept objects or playing pieces can be attributes, properties, personalities, traits, directly related ideas, etc.

[0029] The creative statement can then be compared against a limited set of concept objects. This comparison can determine if a relationship provided by the creative statement is unique as compared to the associated aspects of the limited set of concept units as in block 240. The game players who are involved in the game will make the comparison to determine that the creative statement is unique for a given playing field or set of playing pieces in an entire game.

[0030] The limited set of concepts units can be contained in either the group of concept objects on the playing field, concept objects in a predetermined pool, or concept objects contained in an entire game.

[0031] A creative statement that is not unique as compared to the associated aspects of the limited set of concept units can be disqualified by the other players as in block 250. The competitive nature of the game encourages players to fairly qualify or disqualify creative statements that are not unique as compared to associated aspects of other concept objects on the playing field. Employing the game players' opinions to determine whether the natural language statement is valid during game play is an effective way to evaluate creative statements. Using game players' opinions to validate a player's creative statement also encourages players who are not currently taking a turn to be creatively involved in each turn played in a game. When the creative statement is affirmed as being unique when compared to the limited set of concept units, then the concept objects are allowed to remain on the playing field.

[0032] In one embodiment, the game playing field may be a web page upon which the playing field resides and players can participate in the game over the Internet or another computer network. Such an embodiment is illustrated in FIG. 3. The playing pieces or concept pieces can be stored in an electronic database which can be accessed by the players. The playing pieces may be distributed to the players randomly, based on a specific topic, or earned through game play on the website.

[0033] An electronic storage location can be provided for storing the creative statement. In particular, the creative statements can be stored in a database and the creative statement can be stored just during the length of the game or the creative statements can be stored in a database or electronic memory for a longer period of time.

[0034] As an Internet enabled community for playing the present invention grows, a massive database of playing pieces may build-up over time. Some of the playing pieces can be professionally created, while other playing pieces can be contributed by the game community itself and accepted by editors. This database or "lexicon" may be a sophisticated, community-expansive encyclopedia of sorts, organized both lexically and topically. This database allows games to be played with any subject imaginable, and the games may be built from electronic queries or definitions formed across topical and lexical categories. A lexicon browser may also be provided within the community which allows players, subscribers, or visitors to view the expanding database.

[0035] Having a database that contains an expansive variety of concepts and topics has many benefits beyond the game the database serves. Playing pieces and piece collec-

tions may serve as centers for community gatherings, including player web logs, discussions, ratings, links around the web, and so on. In other words, the game network may be the premier interest group location on the web, not only because of the vast information store collected, but because the system has at its center an engrossing game. The network can make the maximum benefit of this organized collection by exploiting it for targeted and unobtrusive advertising, generation of an extensive and optimized web search engine, applying the data for educational value, and implementing a book marking catalog system.

[0036] Each game played within the system may contribute enormous amounts of metadata, web references, and real-world knowledge to a large archive. This game playing data may be used to build detailed ontologies and associative networks over time. And due to the nature of the product, this data comes with social networking and weighting, interests and opinions, URLs, and other useful information "built-in."

[0037] Additional items that can be built into the web sites and related community may be free play with certain types of subject matter and subscriber play with premium subject matter. Live text chat and messaging between participants can be provided to facilitate the game and puzzle variants can be provided for solitaire players.

[0038] Players who subscribe to the game system may be provided with additional amenities in the game environment. For example, subscribers may receive the competitive advantages of playing piece collecting and trading. Competitive ladder games and seasonal prize tournaments can also be hosted. Personalization options can also be provided such as personal web logs, player avatars, player rankings, friend's lists and monitors, team and clan participation, logs of previous games and linkages, player profile matching, and socialization.

[0039] The present system and method includes a real-time game, a social network with messaging, a database of concepts, and tools to facilitate it all. Eventually, individuals may build and maintain their own game variants, game servers (within the distributed network), and communities. In particular, the system web site, lexicon, and related tools may be based on a web server using XML transformation modules. This configuration is easily scalable with replicated data sources to avoid load problems. The lexicon has the ability to represent a complex collection of relationships. Its architecture may take the form of a giant node network, with no limit to the types of pointers that may exist from one data object to another. The game client used for the invention may be a Flash Player, a vector plug-in, an ActiveX control, Java control, wireless client, or some other useful client system.

[0040] In addition, a portal site can be provided with sub-hosts for the major interest groups. These groups can include arts groups, sports groups, technology groups and entertainment groups. Many players will arrive at the portal through premium advertising by linking matched searches to corresponding portals. Alternatively, the player may arrive directly at the portal through word of mouth or conventional advertising.

[0041] Each portal may have sub-portals, such as action movies, which contain more specific information. Like most

portals, each topic area can contain pertinent news feeds, discussion links, and so on. The portal can also include statistics on players and games currently online, lists of games-in-progress for that topic area, player rankings and tournament standings, game news, links to rules and tutorials, recent games and game “plays” being showcased, and links to highlighted playing pieces, including “today in history” articles and items relevant to the news items being displayed.

[0042] Existing users may login through the portal, and visitors are encouraged to register. Registration may be free, and the site can describe the features and benefits gained by joining. These features may include the ability to post to discussions, chat live with other players, maintain a “friends” list of those online, and most notably, watch and participate in games. The registration process can clearly explain the cost and benefits of subscription, and include an optional tour and tutorial on the game and related applications. Website pages may include links to the other portals, organized categorically in a page-wide menu bar.

[0043] Clicking on a featured article or playing piece can open the lexicon browser, while clicking on a listed game can open, for registered players, the game client. The lexicon is a massive conceptual database, including entries for a vast array of concepts and/or objects such as: movies, books, things, places, people, characters, events, and so on. Each concept is a playing piece, with a graphical representation, and a collection of pointer attributes to other concepts.

[0044] The lexicon’s data model may employ a sophisticated combination of topical (music→jazz→artists→etc.) and lexical (entity→living things organism→person→entertainer→musician→etc.) pointers. This organization enables advanced data sets and queries employing a combination of both. For example, a query could be issued for “all people (lexical) involved with movies (topical),” without creating a category specifically for such a group. The lexical data organization may be based on Princeton’s Wordnet database, allowing for multiple parent/child relationships, including “kind-of” (a snake is a kind of reptile) and “has-a” (a snake has a tail), with many attributes, lexical inheritance, and granular sub-categories for many relationships.

[0045] The purpose of such categorical sophistication is several fold. First, it enables the kind of multi-dimensional data organization missing from current web ontologies. Such a model is required for the “unknown” queries that users and the game may need to issue. Second, the ongoing collection of information from the game is to be captured in a comprehensive manner that is useful.

[0046] The lexicon may also store traditional encyclopedia entries, supplied by users and other documentation sources, for each playing piece. The text of entries is in turn hyperlinked to playing piece entries for each concept. This hyper linking is provided for text on the present system including user web logs, discussions, and the games themselves.

[0047] Streamlining the playing piece creation process can make the building of large collections easy. A playing piece editor may be provided to enable a “flat” editing of playing piece entries, which may be saved as XML files used to build the lexicon database. The editor automates the creation of the playing piece images themselves, allowing playing piece creators to use any image from offline or online sources.

[0048] The lexicon is editable by the entire community, with a strict approval and submissions process that leverages the game’s accompanying social networks. Contributions can be rewarded for subscribers in the form of playing piece collecting privileges, discounted pricing, and future approval authority. The lexicon also provides data organization compatible with the semantic web and methodologies such as topic maps. The purpose of the lexicon is many-fold, but it exists primarily to serve the game with content, as “playing pieces” or “playing cards” that can appear in players’ hands.

[0049] A brief overview of the electronic game operation will now be provided. A player may begin a game by challenging a friend (or friends, for many-player games), a user in a chat room, by e-mail invitation, or by an automated player-matching system. Player-matching uses an algorithm of configurable exactness, using the network’s social connections, previous game elements for a player (including topics, grammar and style of play, and ranking) to match compatible players. The same technique is used in an accompanying “friend-matching” process.

[0050] Players can determine the topics for a game by bookmarking playing pieces in the lexicon, which are then loaded into the game client. The players may configure the percentage of playing pieces from each category by dragging sliders. A difficulty level can be set for each category. The “difficulty” of playing pieces in a game is gauged by their general familiarity to most players, which may be a mean of the number of matches returned for that playing piece’s name from search engines. This ends up being a good estimate of familiarity, and familiarity turns out to be a good measure of difficulty of a playing piece within a game.

[0051] In addition to topics, players configure other options before a game. These include:

[0052] Variant. Players agree on a game variant.

[0053] Number of playing pieces. More pieces mean a longer game.

[0054] Number of collected pieces allowed. Players collect pieces for which they have knowledge, giving them an advantage. This setting determines how many of their collected playing pieces they can hold in their hand during a game.

[0055] Length of turns. Turns can last anywhere from 30 seconds (for fast games) to 24 hours (for extended, turn-a-day games where players spend a few minutes each day), to no timer at all (for beginner or casual players).

[0056] Privacy. These include settings for whether players can see the hands of other players (changing the strategy dramatically), whether observers can join and watch games, password protection for private games, and so on.

[0057] Tournament options. Tournament and prize games have additional settings, including playing pieces being wagered on games. These are set by tournament and ladder game organizers.

[0058] All of the described options can be saved and shared with other players as “templates” for subsequent

games, such that topics and rules can be quickly repeated for similar games. Over time, combinations of complimentary (as well as challenging) topics and rules will become popular, be named, and be shared across the community.

[0059] The game may start with a random playing piece being selected and placed on a random location. Alternatively, a random playing piece may be selected and placed by the first player.

[0060] A player may play more than one playing piece during a turn, if all playing pieces are placed adjacent to the playing piece being linked, and associated with the same relationship. Additionally, if a single playing piece can be placed adjacent to two or more other playing pieces (between them, for example), and associated with two or more adjacent playing pieces using the same relationship, the player may receive another immediate turn. However, an additional aspect of the uniqueness rule may be that a player is not allowed to use the same linkage as previous plays in the same game.

[0061] The game is intended to provoke debate over the validity and uniqueness of plays. If debate cannot resolve a dispute, the players vote. If there are only two players, or if a vote does not resolve the matter, an appeal can be activated in the electronic version of the game. Appeals locate highly ranked players, who get rewards for arbitration. In practice, the need for appeals is generally rare, especially in games with more than two players.

[0062] Appeals have a negative impact on the ratings for a game, which in turn has a negative impact on the ratings of the players in that game. This serves as motivation for negotiated resolutions for both players. It corresponds that well-played games contribute positively to the ratings of the players, including the player who loses the game.

[0063] The ratings aspects of the game are valuable to the game regulation. In a nutshell, the members of the website community collectively rate one another, based on games played, the types of plays made, and other factors. Along with wins and losses, these ratings contribute to a player's collective ranking. This means that in order to receive higher rankings, a player will not only play smart, but also "play nice" and be a contributing member of the community. For example, rewards are provided for helping other players to learn, and "playing to the crowd" on occasions that may win favor and affection of the rest of the network.

[0064] Collection and Rarity

[0065] One of the exciting aspects of the network is the ability for subscribers to collect playing pieces. Collected playing pieces give players competitive advantages in games, since they are prone to know and may have already researched more about their pieces than the randomly dealt playing pieces.

[0066] When a player first subscribes, they may be given five "collected playing pieces" slots they can fill. Players paying a higher monthly fee may be allowed to collect more playing pieces. To fill the slots, they visit a "Playing Piece Bag" where they are given a choice of top-level topics (movies, science, etc.). The Playing Piece Bag then gives the player a random selection of five playing pieces for that category, from which they choose one to hold in their hand. This process can happen once for each slot (choosing one of

the five). Thereafter, players may visit the Playing Piece Bag once a month, discard one of their playing pieces, and choose a replacement from the random five to fill the slot.

[0067] Players may give, trade, sell, or buy their collected playing pieces from and with other players. The playing piece store or auction facilitates this process. In the auction and store, players can make bids on playing pieces (whether for sale or not), establishing market values. Each playing piece may have an attached rarity number that represents the number of copies of that playing piece which exist in the network. When a playing piece is first introduced into the lexicon (something that may happen with regularity), this number is determined, and it never changes, in order to preserve the integrity of the economy, as well as the satisfaction of the collectors.

[0068] Potentially, a defined number of copies (e.g. 30-500) of each playing piece may be allowed into the network. Keep in mind that a smaller number will actually be collected by players at any given time, since they are put into collection via a lottery-like process (the Playing Piece Bag). So playing piece rarity can be the number of copies of a playing piece claimed by people, not the number of maximum playing pieces allowed to be distributed into the community. Rarity is thus partly random, and partly player choice due to discarding a playing piece once-a-month to the Playing Piece Bag.

[0069] Consider that serious playing piece collectors may increase the number of slots by paying more per month, in order to collect sets of playing pieces (all the characters from a movie, for example), and try and sell them as a set. Many similar patterns are possible within the game network.

[0070] Players can advertise their collected playing pieces with icons for their web sites. These allow verification and bring web visitors to that playing piece's entry page in the lexicon, where discussions and games are taking place. This is a replacement for "web rings," where there is value for people of similar interests to share connections to their sites, and take pride in their interests through the playing pieces they have bought, traded, or otherwise won. Playing piece collecting brings tremendous depth to the game network, giving players a sense of ownership and achievement, and giving the network huge retention capacity.

[0071] Sponsorship

[0072] The game network sponsorship opportunities are varied, and include the ability to sponsor playing pieces themselves. Knowing the topics that players choose for a game allow for focused ad placement. The info pop-up for a sponsored playing piece includes a logo and link to the sponsor. These are analogous to banner ads, but not nearly as intrusive. Moreover, the game provides a built-in incentive for players to follow the advertising link, because the more a player knows about the playing piece, the better the player will play the game.

[0073] The nature of the lexicon permits mass sponsorship of content. If NetFlix desires to sponsor all movie playing pieces, linking them to the movies on their own site, it can be done quickly. This example would be especially beneficial for the sponsor in an extended-play game: playing pieces get dealt, players rent the movies they represent, and return a week later for the big game.

[0074] A final sponsorship opportunity is the sponsorship of tournaments. By supplying other prizes for a themed tournament, sponsors can encourage education about their products at the same time that they gain exposure for the tournament itself.

[0075] Example Gameplay

[0076] An example method of playing a game will now be described in detail. The game can be played on a computer or using a physical game board, where the player is required to associate concepts, represented by playing objects, by creating or describing a unique relationship between the concepts. When the player has mentally developed a unique relationship between the concepts then the user presents this unique relationship to the other players with a creative statement.

[0077] In one example embodiment, players choose or are dealt a “hand” of playing objects as board playing pieces or playing cards, and go about connecting the playing objects by associating them with one another. For example, a player holding a playing object representing a “drinking glass” may play the object next to a playing object representing a “light bulb,” associating or linking them by explaining that both objects are “made of glass.”

[0078] The game playing objects (board playing objects or cards) represent concepts, and players connect them by association. For example, a player may connect a “banana” playing object to an “apple” playing object by identifying their common relationship: “both are fruits.”

[0079] Additionally, the relationship must be unique to the objects in play. For example, the preceding connection is illegal if another “fruit” object has been played on the playing field, such as “cherry.” Alternatively, the connection described may be illegal if another “fruit” object exists anywhere in the game or exists in a pre-defined group of playing objects. A pre-defined group of objects may include all the playing objects from the playing field and the playing objects in a player's hand or the playing objects contained in a separate group that are not involved in game play.

[0080] In another example game play, a player may add playing objects from a game board after making a more detailed association. For example, the player may add an object for “Joseph Heller” to an already existing “Tom Wolfe” object, associating the objects by explaining that both authors wrote books that have airplane pilots as the main characters (“Heller” in “Catch-22” and “Wolfe” in “The Right Stuff”).

[0081] The abstract nature of these associations is balanced with the requirement that the associations or links are unique to the playing objects currently in play or from a pre-defined group. The first example play would be illegal if another player objected to the play, on the basis that there was another playing object “made of glass” already in play. Similarly, the second example play would be illegal if another playing objects representing author who had written a book with pilots as main characters was in play. In this context, “in play” may be defined differently for each example. “In play” may mean playing objects in the player's hands, playing objects on the game board, and so on. Plays may also be deemed illegal if they are not verifiable and true.

[0082] A collection of playing objects (cards, glass playing pieces, plastic playing pieces, virtual playing pieces, or

other playing pieces) is shuffled and a number is dealt to each player. The object of the game is to “go out” of the game. In other words, a player may be the first with no playing objects left in the player's hand and this may constitute winning the game.

[0083] In each turn, a player may place one or more playing objects from their hand on the board, adjacent to another playing object. If the player is able to associate the playing object with the adjacent playing object, the player does so by stating the association using a creative statement. If another player chooses, they may object to the creative statement on the basis that another playing object, on the board or in the hand, fits the same creative statement or association, and the creative statement is therefore not unique. In this case the playing object is removed.

[0084] In the event that the player is unable to associate playing objects, the player may discard a playing object to anywhere on the board, but must then draw a replacement to the player's hand. Thus, the winner is the player who generates the most associations between playing objects on the board, which also results in avoiding the drawing of additional pieces into the player's hand.

[0085] For one embodiment, players sit at a table around a physical playing board, typically a square grid. The associations can be created relationships between any of the playing objects and new playing objects being played that are directly adjacent to the objects already on the playing board in the grid. Examples of other playing board configurations may include circular, hex or other artistically arranged board configurations.

[0086] In another embodiment, each player has a copy of software for an electronic version of the game on his/her computer, which in turn is connected to a network. This software may be client software. Server software is located on a computer that is in turn connected to the same network. The client software connects to the server software, where the game is maintained and the rules are enforced. The term client software may refer to web-enabled application software and the term server software can refer to a web server or web application server.

[0087] Many copies of the client software exist on many players' computers respectively, which each connect in turn to the same server software. The server software delivers playing objects to each player within a game via the client software, and the playing objects may be chosen randomly and/or by topics using the server software. The players play the game according to the rules of the specific variant they choose.

[0088] The game client is essentially a shell for play and communication. Data is loaded from the game servers, including playing pieces, connections to other players, rule regulation, and authentication data. While the communication may use a centralized model (as opposed to clients connecting to one another directly), game server farms can spread messaging and database load, and additional load can be met with cloned game servers.

[0089] On the network board, the color of nodes may represent the number of connections each space has to adjacent nodes. For example, brown for two connections, red for six, and blue for the center node. In some game variants these colors have special meaning for scoring,

strategy, etc. Playing pieces are played onto the node spaces from a player's hand. The client options can include the ability to toggle on and off playing piece labels, game prompts, help hints, chat time stamps, and "muting" of observer chat.

[0090] Clicking on a playing piece can open a pop-up window with information on that playing piece, including web links, sponsor icons and links (if any), a window to take notes for storage in a personal library, associated media clips (video, image, music, etc.), and a "visit the playing piece" link that jumps directly to that playing piece's record in the lexicon.

[0091] When playing pieces are connected on the board by a player, a similar pop-up prompts for the "linkage" or creative statement associating the connected playing pieces, and the node connecting the playing pieces can be highlighted in that player's color or using a graphic marker. Clicking on the colored connector opens the creative statement (natural language statement) that was used to link or associate the playing pieces.

[0092] When playing objects are placed on a board by a player (or otherwise according to the game variant rules) using the client software, then the client software communicates this information to the server software, which in turn communicates this to the other players' client software. When objects are associated by players, they state or type an association or creative statement for linking those playing objects. This association is also communicated to the client software of other players by the server software. When players object to plays or non-unique associations or creative statement via their client software, this is communicated to the other client software by the game server. To facilitate discussion and debate, the client and server software enables players to text chat or audibly chat with one another.

[0093] The invention of the described association method enables games to entail abstract comparisons between playing objects, but remain regulated and competitive. This "association with uniqueness" method enables the play of conceptual games without strict rules to govern the associations. The result is a game that requires imagination and research from the players, but retains a high degree of entertainment.

[0094] Additionally, since the "uniqueness rule" applies when players invoke it (by objecting to a play move that is not unique), players may socially determine the level of competitiveness in the game. An adult teaching a child to play the game may opt to not require that the child make unique associations, but skilled players competing for a prize will require exacting associations that are unique.

Example Game Using Basic Rules

[0095] This section will give a short example game to illustrate an embodiment of the invention in the context of a simple embodiment of the game rules. Consider that a game board exists, on which a 10-by-10 square grid is printed. Playing objects may consist of small, glass, round playing pieces that each fit in the grid squares on the board. Each playing object includes an image on its face of the thing the object represents: a bird, a house, an action, an adjective, a person, a book, a movie, an event, etc. In

essence, nearly anything may be represented with a playing object. On the backside of each object the text for the concept being represented may be printed.

[0096] Two or more players may play the game. The playing objects (hereafter called playing pieces) are mixed in a bag, and each player draws five playing pieces from the bag. The bag could contain a set of playing pieces that comprise a topic: movies, Europe, literature, etc. Alternatively, the playing pieces may not be centered on a topic. In this example game, no specific topic exists. The object of the game is to be the first player left with no playing pieces in hand.

[0097] Next, assume that player "A" holds the following pieces: "square", "apple", "orange juice", "magazine", and "Albert Einstein." Player "B" holds 5 playing pieces also. The player hides these from the view of the other players.

[0098] The first player to begin discards one of the playing pieces in his hand to anywhere on the game board grid. After doing so, a replacement piece is drawn from the bag to the hand. The next player has two options: play a playing piece from his hand next to the piece already on the board and associate the two pieces, or discard a piece from his hand to anywhere on the board. Whenever a player discards a playing piece to the board without associating it with an adjacent playing piece, he must draw a new piece from the bag. Alternatively, the game rules may allow a player to discard pieces back into the playing piece bag.

[0099] Thus, a discard is usually a wasted turn, since it does not decrease the number of playing pieces in hand. The only way to decrease the number of pieces in hand is to associate them with pieces already on the board.

[0100] In the example game, player "A" is first, and discards the playing piece "orange juice" to a square on the board. The first player does not have the option to associate pieces, since there are none on the board to begin. However, the disadvantage of playing first is partially balanced by being able to choose the piece, as well as the board location. Player "A" draws a new playing piece from the bag, in this case, "Coca-cola", and places it in his hand.

[0101] Next, player "B" decides to play the playing piece "ceviche" on the board next to "orange juice." She associates these two pieces by explaining, "Ceviche" is a fish preparation where raw fish is marinated in acidic juices to cook it, and orange juice is an acidic juice." Because player "B" associated the played playing piece with another piece, she now holds four pieces, and is not required to draw another.

[0102] Player "A" may object to this move by player "B" on the grounds that "orange juice", in this association, is not unique to the pieces in play. In this rule variant, "in play" is defined as a piece either on the board, or in a player's hand. Since there are only two playing pieces on the board, player "A" may object with a piece in his hand. Thus, if player "A" had a piece in hand that was also an acidic juice, such as "lemon juice", he could object to this move by exposing the playing piece. This would alert the other players to one of his playing pieces, and thus may not be strategically wise. In this example, he has no piece with which to object, so play continues.

[0103] Next, player "A" decides to play the playing piece "apple" next to "ceviche", and associates them thus: "Both

apples and ceviche are solid foods.” By describing these pieces as “solid” foods, player “A” intends to avoid an objection with “orange juice”, since it could be considered a food, but is not solid. More specific associations are less likely to be judged invalid on the basis of uniqueness. However, player “B” objects to this play by exposing a playing piece in her hand, “pizza”. Since “pizza” fits the same description of “apple” in this move, the move is invalid, and player “A” must remove the playing piece from the board. In one rule variant, player “A” may lose the turn. But in this case, the players have agreed to not lose turns with objections, and instead require that the same playing piece (“apple”) be either associated or discarded (rather than be allowed to try and play a different playing piece). Player “A” places the “apple” playing piece next to “orange juice”, stating, “apples and orange juice contain significant amounts of vitamin C.”

[0104] This is judged by the players to be valid, and play continues. Play continues as described until a player plays his last playing piece to the board, with an association. In this example game, other moves included:—“Albert Einstein” associated with “United States,” with the statement, “The United States claimed Einstein was a citizen, and was proud to call him an American.” (No player held a playing piece for another country that claimed the citizenship of Einstein, so no objection was raised.)

[0105] Other plays that may have been incorporated into this particular game example may include:

[0106] “magazine” associated with “Albert Einstein”, with the association, “Albert Einstein appeared on the cover of many magazines.” (This was objected to, pointing to another thing that has surely appeared on a magazine.)

[0107] “square” and “magazine”, associated with the statement, “Both squares and magazines have four edges.”

[0108] “ceviche” and “phoenix”, associated with, “Ceviche is a fish preparation, and in Chinese literature the phoenix has the tail of a fish. Both are made in part from fish.”

[0109] It should be clear that the action of association and generating creative statements is broad and abstract, which contributes greatly to the appeal of the game. Such a game would not be possible without the uniqueness rule to enable a simple means of regulating the game. Otherwise, a player could simply associate everything by stating, “both X and Y are things.” While this would be out of the “spirit” of the game, no rule would exist to make it illegal. The uniqueness aspect to the game makes it challenging, self-regulating, and very fun.

[0110] Game Variants

[0111] The core game mechanics are adaptable into many forms and variants. The effect of having playing pieces representing nearly everything, and a framework for playing games with them enables many games to be played. The games may feature several different variants, and over time, players will create their own variants. Each variant carries different levels of difficulty, social value, and fun. The game and social network can be expanded both with expanding playing piece sets and new games. The association game

mechanic, creative statements, and uniqueness test are adaptable to many variants. The discussion below will look at some of the planned game variants.

[0112] Multi-Piece Variant. In one variant, players are allowed to play one or more pieces during each turn, so long as they can all be associated with a common relationship. Thus, a player may find an opportunity to play 2, 3, or more playing pieces from a hand in one turn.

[0113] Rummy. The rummy variant uses no board, and has as its inspiration the games of Gin Rummy and Rummicube®. Hands are dealt, and players create “sets” of playing pieces on the table (or play area), using linkages to define the relationship. For example, a player could put down three “actor” playing pieces in a set, declaring the set “actors in such-and-such a movie.” During subsequent turns, players can add playing pieces to that set if they fit the association criteria, or begin new sets with different linkages. Players can object with the uniqueness rules when a set is created, but often it will be in their better interest to use the set to get rid of their own playing pieces. A player cannot play any playing pieces to the board until he or she has created a set. Two or more playing pieces are needed to create a set. Strategy entails determining the sets early in the game (to avoid uniqueness objections), while waiting to play large numbers of playing pieces until late in the game (to avoid uniqueness objections from players who want to use the defined sets). This is a variant long on strategy and it offers high-value knowledge collection, since players are constantly defining conceptual sets.

[0114] Race. A race game takes place on the same board as the basic game. Playing pieces are dealt, and a random playing piece is placed in the center node. Each player, starting from a corner, builds a chain towards the center, one turn at a time. The first player to reach and link to the center node playing piece wins. Each playing piece played gets replaced with a draw to the hand, keeping all players with the same number of playing pieces. Players have the ability to “block” the other players by sacrificing playing pieces. This variant requires a high degree of planning.

[0115] Web Race. The web race variant pre-fills a circular node board with playing pieces, and allows each player to study the board for a period of time. Each player selects a playing piece (any playing piece) from the lexicon as a “marker”, and places it somewhere on the outer ring. Linking inward one turn at a time, the first player to move their playing piece to the center wins. Short game rounds require fast thinking. In this variant the player piece serves as a player marker. The first player to reach the center square (or to cross the board in another variant) wins. Players can move one space in each turn. Thus, the initial choice of a player piece is creative and strategic, as the player must be confident of being able to best associate each space to the middle, and do so before the other player.

[0116] Puzzle. Every basic game that gets played is archived, and provides a puzzle for this solitaire variant. Playing pieces are displayed with the colored connectors representing the linkages made during the original, basic game. Players drag the playing pieces around, trying to connect them to other playing pieces in their original configuration. Once playing pieces are connected, they drag around the board as a group. Clicking on a playing piece reveals the text from the original linkage, minus the names

of the playing pieces used. This is both a jigsaw puzzle, as well as a crossword puzzle, that populates itself with no work on the part of the system designers. Additionally, this variant offers a great opportunity for players to rate the linkages from the previous game, since these linkages are their clues to completing the puzzle. Thus, the puzzle variant can also serve as a post-processing phase of knowledge accumulation.

[0117] Party! A party variant has an open chat room, with dozens of people constantly coming and going. One will probably exist for each portal topic (movies, music, etc.) The players join a queue for turns to be “it.” The turned player is prompted with a random playing piece from the topic area, and then drags playing pieces out from the lexicon to clue the observers on the “secret playing piece’s” identity. The first observer to guess gets moved up in the turn queue, and scores are kept. The person hinting gets points according to the number of clue playing pieces used (more points for less playing pieces), and related playing pieces are automatically excluded from the usable hints. This variation is casual, quick, creative, and highly entertaining.

[0118] Removal Variant. Consider the variant of the same board and playing pieces as described in the aforementioned rules, but without players placing pieces on the board during their turns. The game begins by players mixing and then randomly placing playing pieces on the board until the grid is filled. Players then take turns removing sets of pieces from the board in pairs or more. The player associates the pieces removed in each turn according to the association uniqueness rule using a creative statement. When all the playing pieces are removed from the board, the player with the most pieces wins.

[0119] Mahjong. This variant of a removal game includes a board pre-populated with random playing pieces, where players remove playing pieces from the board (linking them), rather than placing them on the board. The player with the most playing pieces wins. For example, as in the popular game of matching Mahjong, only pieces that are not enclosed by other pieces may be matched or linked and removed from the playing field. In other words, one or more of the linked playing pieces can be removed from the current outermost edge of the playing pieces on the playing field as part of a turn. The pieces may be layered so that as pieces are removed then other pieces are revealed. Alternatively, just pieces on the axes of the playing field may be removed and then the removal of playing pieces releases playing pieces for matching or linking.

[0120] Poker. Players place bets on which player can create the most linkages between their hands and community playing pieces.

[0121] Territory Variant. This variant is based on Go/Pente; the “King of Glass Playing piece Games.”

[0122] Trivia. Guess the playing piece, guess the linkage.

[0123] Collection variant. This variant is similar to “Authors”, where players try and collect sets of playing pieces, in real time, across the entire network. Not unlike a massive scavenger hunt.

[0124] Cash Play. Instead of playing for rankings, some players on specific servers may play for cash prizes or games may be geared to cash rewards for winners of large group games.

[0125] The network may use its player base to play test new variants, and take suggestions from the community on which variants to develop. The network will evolve with this input from its users.

[0126] The present system and method includes a game of association defined by a limiting uniqueness function. Players compete by establishing, refining and defending unique connections between ideas, people, places, songs, movies, objects, or other concepts. The best connections win and are defensible as creative, knowledgeable, and unique. A small set of rules makes the game not only fun, but also easy to learn, potentially addictive, and highly competitive.

[0127] While the foregoing examples are illustrative of the principles of the present invention in one or more particular applications, it will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that numerous modifications in form, usage and details of implementation can be made without the exercise of inventive faculty, and without departing from the principles and concepts of the invention. Accordingly, it is not intended that the invention be limited, except as by the claims set forth below.

1. A method for engaging in a relationship creativity game with concept objects, comprising:

supplying a plurality of concept objects for each player to form a player’s hand;

placing a plurality of concept objects associated with a playing field to form a turn;

linking the concept objects in a turn with a creative statement relating associated aspects that are common to the plurality of concept objects; and

comparing the creative statement against a limited set of concept units to determine if a relationship provided by the creative statement is unique as compared to associated aspects of the limited set of concept units.

2. A method as in claim 1, further comprising the step of disqualifying a creative statement that is not unique as compared to the associated aspects of the limited set of concept units.

3. A method as in claim 2, further comprising the step of removing the concept objects from the playing field unless a valid creative statement can be provided by the player.

4. A method as in claim 1, wherein the creative statement is affirmed and the concept objects are allowed to remain on the playing field if the creative statement is unique as compared to the limited set of concept units.

5. A method as in claim 1, further comprising the steps of selecting the limited set of concepts units from the group consisting of concept objects on the playing field, concept objects in a predetermined pool, and concept objects contained in an entire game.

6. A method as in claim 1, wherein the step of placing a plurality of concept objects, further comprises the step of placing a plurality of concept objects on a playing field from a player’s hand in a turn.

7. A method for engaging in a relationship logic game, comprising:

supplying a plurality of playing pieces representing defined concepts for each player’s hand;

identifying a plurality of playing pieces associated with a playing field to be included in a turn;

linking the playing pieces with a natural language statement defining aspects of each playing piece that are common to the plurality of playing pieces involved in the turn; and

validating the natural language statement against a set of playing pieces on the playing field to determine if a relationship provided by the natural language statement is unique as compared to aspects of the playing pieces on the playing field.

8. A method as in claim 7, wherein the step of validating the natural language statement further comprises the step of employing game player opinions to determine whether the natural language statement is valid during game play.

9. A method as in claim 7, wherein the step of validating the natural language statement against a set of playing pieces further comprises the step of validating the natural language statement against concept objects selected from the group consisting of concept objects on the playing field, concept objects in a predetermined pool, and concept objects contained in an entire game.

10. A method as in claim 7, wherein the step of identifying a plurality of playing pieces for a playing field to be included in a turn, further comprises the step of placing one or more playing pieces from the player's hand to be associated with playing pieces on the board to form a turn.

11. A method as in claim 7, wherein the step of identifying a plurality of playing pieces for a playing field to be included in a turn, further comprises the step of removing the plurality of linked playing pieces from the playing field as part of a turn.

12. A method as in claim 7, further comprising the step of collecting sets of linked playing pieces, wherein the player to collect a largest number of playing pieces is a winner.

13. A method as in claim 7, further comprising the step of removing only playing pieces that are not enclosed by other pieces on a connection axis.

14. A method as in claim 7, further comprising the step of allowing players to take turns associating a player-selected piece with pieces on the playing field, starting at the outside rows until the player reaches a goal area.

15. A method as in claim 14, further comprising the step of declaring a winner of a player with a piece that reaches a playing field center or crosses the entire playing field.

16. A relationship logic game with defined concept pieces, comprising:

- a plurality of defined concept pieces;
- a plurality of player hands into which the concept pieces are divided;
- a playing field having play locations where the defined concepts can reside and connector markings configured to connect the play locations together in a pre-defined pattern;
- a creative statement representing associated aspects that are common to a plurality of selected discrete concept pieces; and

wherein the creative statement is validated against a limited set of concept pieces to determine if a relationship provided by the creative statement is unique as compared to associated aspects of the limited set of concept pieces.

17. A relationship logic game as in claim 16, further comprising:

- a web page upon which the playing field resides and players can participate in the game over the Internet; and
- a database in which the defined concepts units are stored and can be accessed by the players.

18. A relationship logic game as in claim 16, wherein the playing field contains play locations for a defined concept piece to be placed and each area can be linked to at least one other play location.

19. A relationship logic game as in claim 18, wherein each area is linked to one to six other play locations.

20. A relationship logic game as in claim 16, further comprising a storage location for storing the creative statement.

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