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(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **KONINKLIJKE PHILIPS ELECTRONICS N.V.** [NL/NL]; Groenewoudseweg 1, NL-5621 BA Eindhoven (NL).

(71) Applicant (for AE only): **U.S. PHILIPS CORPORATION** [US/US]; 1251 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020 (US).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **DECRE, Michel, M.J.** [NL/NL]; Groenewoudseweg 1, NL-5621 BA Eindhoven (NL). **DIEDERIKS, Elmo, M.A.** [NL/NL]; Groenewoudseweg 1, NL-5621 BA Eindhoven (NL). **BERGMAN, Anthonie, H.** [NL/NL]; Groenewoudseweg

1, NL-5621 BA Eindhoven (NL). **CORTENRAAD, Huibertus, M.R.** [NL/NL]; Groenewoudseweg 1, NL-5621 BA Eindhoven (NL).

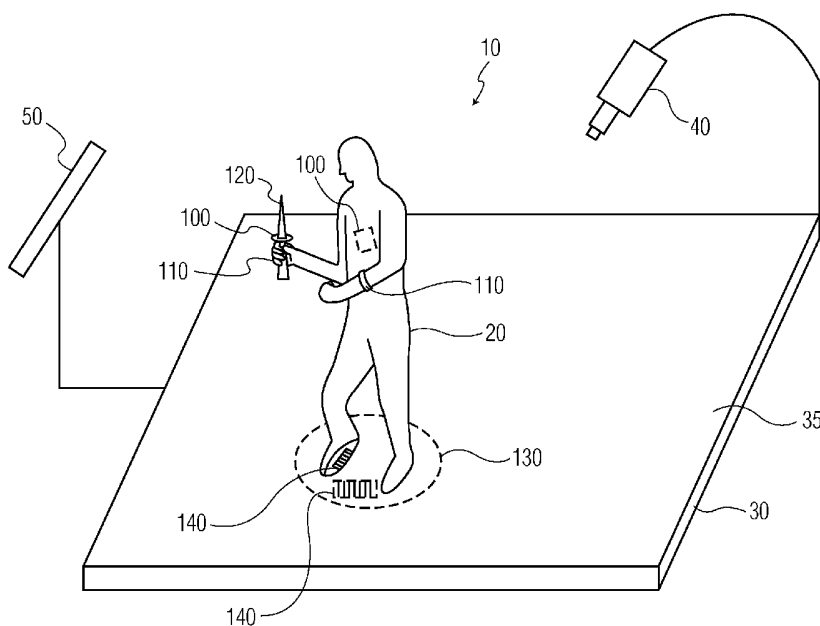
(74) Common Representative: **KONINKLIJKE PHILIPS ELECTRONICS N.V.**; c/o LIBERCHUK, Larry P.O. Box 3001, Briarcliff Manor, NY 10510-8001 (US).

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(54) Title: GAME SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AUGMENTING GAME CAPABILITIES



(57) Abstract: A game system (10) includes a memory (210) capable of maintaining a history (270) associated with a game piece (20). The game piece (20) is used in a game having rules of play, and the game piece (20) has an associated identification code. The game system (10) also includes a processor (200) capable of updating the history (270) with a current performance level of the game piece (20). The processor (200) is also capable of comparing the current performance level with a threshold performance level and awarding an augmented capability to the game piece (20) based on the comparison. The augmented capability could represent an accessory (120) used with the game piece (20) and/or a second game piece (20) used in conjunction with the game piece (20).

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GAME SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR
AUGMENTING GAME CAPABILITIES

This disclosure is generally directed to game
5 systems and, more specifically, to a game system and method
for augmenting game capabilities.

Conventional "tin soldiers" tabletop games
typically include game pieces (such as soldiers) that are
physically moved on a game board. Conventional tabletop
10 games have recently been augmented with computing
technologies to create enhanced tabletop game systems. For
example, computing technologies have been embedded into the
game board itself to sense the relative positions of the game
pieces to each other and to the gaming environment. As
15 another example, cameras, displays, speakers, and other
external computing devices have been added to tabletop games
to provide sound and animation, track the positions of the
game pieces, and maintain the rules of the game.

Each game piece is usually endowed with certain
20 characteristics, such as strength abilities and defense
abilities. These characteristics are used to determine the
outcome of an event, such as a battle between game pieces.
As a particular game piece gains experience, the game piece
may be augmented, such as when the game piece is allowed to
25 use an accessory or when one game piece is allowed to be used
in conjunction with another game piece. Examples of

accessories include offensive weapons and defensive shields. In most games, the augmented capabilities available to each game piece change throughout the game.

Tracking of accessories and other augmented
5 capabilities available to each game piece is typically performed manually by the players in the game. A list of game pieces and available accessories may be recorded on a piece of paper or entered into a computer. Alternatively, each game piece can be provided with a manual record-keeping
10 device to keep track of variable information relating to that game piece.

Manual recording of augmented capabilities is error-prone and time intensive. Moreover, manual recording of augmented capabilities allows for cheating and other
15 illicit behavior. For example, unknown players may meet at conventions or other events, and the unknown players may or may not accurately record the history of their own game pieces.

This disclosure provides an improved game system
20 and method for augmenting game capabilities.

In one embodiment, a game system includes a memory capable of maintaining a history associated with a game piece. The game piece is used in a game having rules of play, and the game piece has an associated identification
25 code. The game system also includes a processor capable of

updating the history with a current performance level of the game piece. The processor is also capable of comparing the current performance level with a threshold performance level and awarding an augmented capability to the game piece based
5 on the comparison. The augmented capability could represent an accessory used with the game piece and/or a second game piece used in conjunction with the game piece.

For a more complete understanding of this disclosure and its advantages, reference is made to the
10 following description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIGURE 1 illustrates a tabletop game system according to one embodiment of this disclosure;

FIGURE 2 illustrates components of a tabletop game
15 system according to one embodiment of this disclosure;

FIGURE 3 illustrates a distributed network for implementing the tabletop game system according to one embodiment of this disclosure; and

FIGURES 4-6 illustrate example processes for
20 augmenting the capabilities of game pieces in a tabletop game system according to one embodiment of this disclosure.

FIGURES 1 through 6 and the various embodiments described in this patent document are by way of illustration only and should not be construed in any way as limiting.

25 Those skilled in the art will understand that the principles

of this disclosure may be implemented in any suitably arranged game system or game device.

FIGURE 1 illustrates a tabletop game system 10 according to one embodiment of this disclosure. A game piece 20, such as an action figure, is positioned over a tabletop 30 to engage in play of a game. The game piece 20 is moveable relative to a surface 35 of the tabletop 30, either manually or electronically. For example, in some embodiments, the game piece 20 can be animated, such that movement of arms, legs, weapons, or other parts of the game piece 20 can be motorized or controlled electronically.

In some embodiments, the tabletop 30 is an interactive table with an embedded touch screen display, such as a plasma display or liquid crystal display (LCD), on the surface 35. The display is used for displaying contents of the game, such as scenery, rules, current status of game pieces 20, movement range and weapon range, visual effects, and other information. The display is also used for controlling interaction between objects and game pieces 20 in the game.

Above the tabletop 30, an overhead camera 40 tracks the position of the game piece 20 relative to other game pieces and other objects in the game. In other embodiments, the positions of the game pieces 20 can be tracked using relative positioning technology that measures an object's

position relative to another object. The system 10 could use any other or additional types of location systems.

One or more displays 50 can be provided in communication with the tabletop 30 and the camera 40 to display information related to one or more games. Each player can use a separate display 50 to display information related to only the particular game piece(s) 20 associated with that player, or a single display 50 can be provided to display public information to all players. Each display 50 can be any type of display.

The game piece 20 includes a radio frequency identification (RF-ID) tag 100 that identifies the game piece 20 to the game system 10. The RF-ID tag 100 could, for example, uniquely identify the game piece 20 or a type of game piece 20. A radio frequency identification (RF-ID) antenna is embedded within the tabletop 30 to detect RF-ID tags 100 placed on the tabletop 30. The RF-ID tag 100 can be used to initiate and terminate games and/or to introduce new game pieces 20 to a current game.

In addition to or instead of the RF-ID tag 100, the game piece 20 could include a barcode 140 that identifies the game piece 20. The barcode 140 could, for example, uniquely identify the game piece 20 or the type of game piece. The game system 10 could include a bar code scanner over which a player drags the barcode 140 on the game piece 20 prior to

introducing the game piece 20 to the game. The barcode 140 can be placed on the surface of the game piece 20, such as on the bottom of the foot of an action figure or on the bottom of a base 130 of the game piece 20.

5 While this has described the use of RF-ID tags 100 and barcodes 140 in the tabletop game system 10, these are for illustration only. Other mechanisms could be used to identify and/or track the game pieces and other components of the tabletop game system 10. For example, any other
10 mechanism capable of providing identification codes could be used in the tabletop game system 10.

 The game piece 20 further includes one or more slots 110 for receiving accessories 120, such as offensive weapons or defensive shields. Accessories 120 for the game
15 piece 20 can either be provided with the game piece 20 or purchased separately. For example, based on the performance of the game piece 20, the game piece 20 may be allowed to add certain accessories, such as an arm shield, knife, gun, or other weapon. Each accessory 120 can be provided with an RF-
20 ID tag 100, barcode 140, or other identifier to identify the accessory 120 to the game system 10.

 The game piece 20 could be augmented in other ways instead of or in addition to receiving accessories 120. For example, a game piece 20 could be augmented with one or more
25 additional game pieces. As a particular example, a game

piece 20 that represents a military unit could include a higher ranking military officer when the military unit has a specified amount of experience. In this case, the game piece 20 representing the military unit could be augmented with another game piece 20 representing the military officer. In this document, the phrase "augmented capability" refers to any capability that is provided to a game piece, including tangible capabilities such as accessories 120 or associated additional game pieces and intangible capabilities such as experience, performance level, or software/firmware instructions that can be downloaded or stored on a game piece, computer, or other device.

In addition, although not specifically shown, the game system 10 can be augmented with audio devices, such as speakers and headsets, to emit sounds during play of the game. For example, the sounds could include verbal sounds associated with the game pieces 20, battle noises, background music, and other relevant sounds. Also, the game system 10 can be augmented with speech recognition technology to enable players to provide verbal commands to the game system 10.

FIGURE 2 illustrates components of a tabletop game system 10 according to one embodiment of this disclosure. In this example, the tabletop game system 10 includes a processor 200 connected to a camera 40, tabletop display 35, and other peripherals 50 such as external displays. The

tabletop game system 10 further includes a memory 210, RF scanner 220, and communications interface 230.

The processor 200 is operable to receive input from the tabletop display 35 and provide output to the tabletop display 35 and peripherals 50. The processor 200 is also operable to receive image data from the camera 40 and process the image data to determine the position of a game piece on the tabletop display 35. The processor 200 could identify the location of a game piece in any other suitable manner, such as using the output of the RF-ID tag 100. The processor 200 includes any hardware, software, firmware, or combination thereof for controlling the game system 10. For example, the processor 200 may include one or more microprocessors, microcontrollers, programmable logic devices, digital signal processors, or other type(s) of processing devices that are configured to execute instructions of a computer program. One or more memories (such as cache memory) that store the instructions and other data used by the processor 200 could also be used. In some embodiments, an image processor (separate from processor 200) is used to process images from the camera 40. It should be understood that other embodiments of the processor 200 may be used, such as when the processor 200 is distributed across a network.

The memory 210 includes one or more software programs 240 executable by the processor 200 to play a game.

The memory 210 further stores data 250 related to one or more games. For example, the data 250 may include game rules, game statistics, current status of one or more games, and information related to one or more game pieces. As shown in
5 FIGURE 2, the information about the game pieces may include a game piece identification code, such as an RF-ID code or barcode, a history 270 associated with the game piece, and one or more accessory identification codes 280 identifying one or more accessories that the game piece is allowed to
10 use. The history 270 tracks the experience and evolution of the game piece in one or more games. The history 270 includes the current performance level of the game piece for use in determining whether the game piece qualifies for augmented capabilities, such as one or more accessories or
15 related game pieces. For example, if the game piece wins a battle, the game piece can obtain experience points that can be recorded in the history 270 and increase the current performance level in the history 270.

The memory 210 represents any type of data storage
20 device or devices, including but not limited to a hard drive, random access memory (RAM), read only memory (ROM), compact disc, floppy disc, ZIP® drive, tape drive, database, or other type of storage device or storage medium.

The RF scanner 220 includes an antenna capable of
25 detecting RF-ID tags associated with game pieces or

accessories placed on the tabletop display 35. The RF scanner 220 is connected to provide RF-ID codes to the processor 200 to initiate and terminate games and/or to introduce new game pieces to a current game.

5 The communications interface 230 connects the processor 200 to any type of transmission medium, such as digital or analog communication links, to transmit data to other components of the game system 10. For example, in some embodiments, the communications interface 230 includes one or
10 more buses for transmitting data between the processor 200, the memory 210, the RF scanner 220, the display 35, the camera 40, and other peripherals 50. In other embodiments, the communications interface 230 includes a modem or other type of device for connecting to an external network to
15 transmit data between the processor 200 and the external network. Thus, game system 10 can be implemented either within a stand-alone game device, on a server coupled to game device via an external network, or in distributed fashion (such as client-server or peer-to-peer) on both the game
20 device and server.

FIGURE 3 illustrates a distributed network for implementing the tabletop game system 10 according to one embodiment of this disclosure. A game device 300, which includes the tabletop, camera, and other peripherals, is
25 connected to a communications network 310 via the

communications interface 230. The communications network 310 includes any type of communications system, such as the Internet, a telephone network (which may include a public switched telephone network, or a wireless network for voice communications, pages, and/or text messages), or some combination of networks.

Distributed game system 10 also includes, in the example embodiment, a server 320 connected to the communications network 310 to manage the distributed game system 10 and track players (individual users 350) and their associated game pieces and accessories. The server 320 interfaces with a database 330 to maintain data relevant to the game system 10.

The game device 300 provides to the server 320 via communications interface 230 and communications network 310 any type of information that may be necessary or requested for management of the game system 10. For example, in some embodiments, the game device 300 uploads game piece identification codes 260 and/or user identities 370 to the server 320 for storage in the database 330. The game device 300 may also upload game piece history information to the server 320 for storage in the database 330. The server 320 can process the game piece history information and determine if the particular game piece is entitled to any augmented capabilities. The game device 300 could further upload

accessory identifier codes 280 identifying accessories able to be used by particular game pieces or a game piece related to an augmented game piece to the server 320 for storage in the database 330.

5 In some embodiments, vendors using points of sale (POS) 340 from which the user 350 makes purchases include facilities such as telephone banks or Internet servers (not specifically shown) coupled to the communications network 310 to communicate with the server 320. A POS 340 can be a
10 physical store location or an on-line POS 340. For example, when a user 350 purchases a game piece at a particular POS 340, the POS 340 registers the user 350 (with, for example, a user ID and password) and the game piece with the game system
10 by providing the user identification 370 and game piece
15 identification code 260 to the server 320.

 When the game piece has acquired a sufficient performance level to qualify for an augmented capability, such as an accessory 120 or additional game piece, either the game device 300 informs the server 320 or the server 320
20 makes the determination based on the stored game piece history. The game system 10 notifies the user 350 that the game piece is entitled to use a particular accessory or other game piece to enable the user 350 to purchase and/or use the particular accessory or other game piece during play of the
25 game.

In some embodiments, the user 350 may purchase an accessory 120 at any time, but is only allowed to use the accessory 120 when the game piece performance level reaches a threshold performance level associated with that accessory 120. When the user 350 places the accessory 120 on the game piece, the game device 300 detects the presence of the accessory (such as with an RF-ID tag or barcode) and determines if the accessory 120 is allowed.

In particular embodiments, the game device 300 makes the determination based on the current performance level of the game piece, and if allowed, transmits the accessory identification code 380 to the server 320 for storage in the database 330. If the game device 300 determines that the current performance level of the game piece does not exceed the threshold performance level for the accessory 120, the game device 300 signals to the user 350 (via sound or other mechanism) that the accessory 120 is not allowed.

In other embodiments, the game device 300 transmits the accessory identification code 380 to the server 320 and requests the server 320 to determine if the accessory 120 is allowed. The server 320 accesses the database 330 to compare the current performance level of the game piece with a threshold performance level for the accessory, and if the current performance level exceeds the threshold performance

level, the server 320 transmits a message back to the game device 300 indicating that the game piece is allowed to use the accessory 120. Otherwise, the server 320 transmits a message back to the game device 300 indicating the game piece
5 is not allowed to use the accessory 120, and the game device 300 signals to the user 350 (via sound or other mechanism) that the accessory 120 is not allowed.

As another example, the user 350 may only be allowed to purchase the accessory 120 once the current
10 performance level of the game piece exceeds the threshold performance level associated with the accessory. Once the threshold performance level is reached, the user 350 is provided a sales code 360 for use in purchasing the accessory 120 at the POS 340. In some embodiments, the sales code 380
15 is provided to the user 350 from the server 320. In other embodiments, the sales code 380 is provided directly by the game device 300. For example, the game device 300 can be programmed with the sales codes 380 for each potential accessory 120, and/or the game device 300 can access the
20 server 320 to determine the sales code 380 for a particular accessory. In addition, the game device 300 may be programmed to periodically update available sales codes 380 by accessing the server 320.

In some embodiments, the sales code 380 is simply
25 the user identity 370 and/or the game piece identifier code

260, and the server 320 maintains in the database 330 a list of accessories that a particular user 350 is allowed to purchase. In other embodiments, the sales code 380 is a separate code provided to the user 350. The sales code 360
5 can be provided to the user 350 using any type of notification method. For example, the sales code 380 can be verbally provided to the user 350 via the game device 300 or telephone. As another example, the sales code 380 can be e-mailed or mailed to the user 350, such as when a swipe card
10 with a magnetic strip containing the sales code 380 or a certificate 360 containing the sales code 380 is mailed to the user 350.

The user takes the sales code 380 to the POS 340 for the accessory 120 and provides the sales code 380, along
15 with the user identity 370 (such as user name and password) to the POS 340. If the sales code 380 is simply the user identity 370 and/or game piece identifier code 260, the user 350 provides this instead. The POS 340 transmits the sales code 380 and user identity 370 to the server 320 via the
20 communications network 310 to verify that the user 350 is allowed to purchase the accessory 120. If so, the POS 340 sells the accessory 120 to the user 350 and registers the accessory identification code 280 with the server 320 for storage in a record associated with the user identity 370
25 and/or game piece identity 260 in the database 330. When the

user 350 mounts the accessory 120 on the game piece during play of the game, the game device 300 can authenticate the accessory 120 by transmitting the accessory identification code 280 to the server 320 for verification that the game
5 piece is allowed to use the accessory 120 during play of the game.

In other embodiments, a POS 340 could monitor a game and determine when a user is entitled to buy an accessory. If the accessory 120 represents a physical
10 accessory, the POS 340 could mail the accessory to the user. If the accessory 120 represents an intangible accessory such as software, the POS 340 could provide the accessory to a game piece, computer, or other device used by the user. The POS 340 could require that the user pay for the accessory
15 before mailing or providing it, such as by asking if the user wishes to purchase the accessory and charge a credit card. The POS 340 could represent a generic POS or a specific POS associated with a particular game, a particular event, or other entity.

20 FIGURES 4-6 illustrate example processes for augmenting the capabilities of game pieces in a tabletop game system according to one embodiment of this disclosure. FIGURE 4 illustrates an example process 400 for determining whether a particular game piece is entitled to a particular
25 augmented capability, such as an accessory, another game

piece, or other augmented feature. At step 410, the game piece is provided with an identification code, such as a unique identification code. At step 420, the performance of the game piece during play of one or more games is

5 electronically tracked using the identification code. At step 430, if the current performance level of the game piece exceeds a threshold performance level associated with the augmented capability, the game piece is awarded the augmented capability at step 440.

10 FIGURE 5 illustrates an example process 500 for verifying the ability of a particular game piece to utilize a particular accessory during play of a game. At step 510, the accessory is affixed or mounted on the game piece. At step 520, the accessory identification code is obtained by the
15 game system. At step 530, the game system 530 determines whether the game piece is allowed to use the accessory using the accessory identification code. For example, the game system can compare the accessory identification code to a list of one or more allowed accessory identification codes
20 associated with the game piece and/or user. If the accessory identification code is not allowed, at step 540, the game piece is not allowed to use the accessory during play of the game. Otherwise, at step 550, the accessory identification code is recorded, and at step 560 the game piece is allowed
25 to use the accessory during play of the game.

A similar method could be used to determine if one game piece may be augmented with another game piece. For example, the game system can compare the identification code of a second game piece to a list of one or more allowed
5 identification codes associated with the original game piece and/or user. If a match is found, the game system allows the user to use the second game piece in conjunction with the original game piece.

Any suitable mechanism may be used to identify the
10 accessory identification code in FIGURE 5. For example, the accessory could include an RF-ID tag 100 or barcode 140 that can be read by the system. As another example, the game piece could detect the presence of the accessory and report the detected accessory to the system. As a particular
15 example, inserting an accessory in a slot in the game piece could activate an additional RF-ID tag or programmable chip in the game piece itself. As another particular example, inserting an accessory in a slot in the game piece could close a switch to an identification or slot activation
20 circuit in the game piece that identifies the accessory.

FIGURE 6 illustrates an example process 600 for purchasing an accessory for a game piece. At step 610, the game system enables a game piece to use an accessory based on the performance level of the game piece. At step 620, the
25 game system provides a sales code to the user for use in

purchasing the accessory. At step 630, the user selects an accessory to purchase at a point of sale, and at step 640 the user provides the sales code to the point of sale. At step 650, the game system authenticates the sales code to
5 determine whether the user is allowed to purchase the accessory. If the sales code is allowed, the point of sale sells the accessory to the user at step 660. Otherwise, the point of sale refuses to sell the accessory to the user at step 670. A similar method could be used to purchase a game
10 piece that can augment another game piece.

It may be advantageous to set forth definitions of certain words and phrases that have been used in this patent document. The terms "include" and "comprise," as well as derivatives thereof, mean inclusion without limitation. The
15 term "or" is inclusive, meaning and/or. The phrases "associated with" and "associated therewith," as well as derivatives thereof, may mean to include, be included within, interconnect with, contain, be contained within, connect to or with, couple to or with, be communicable with, cooperate
20 with, interleave, juxtapose, be proximate to, be bound to or with, have, have a property of, or the like. The term "controller" means any device, system, or part thereof that controls at least one operation. A controller may be implemented in hardware, firmware, or software, or a
25 combination of at least two of the same. It should be noted

that the functionality associated with any particular controller may be centralized or distributed, whether locally or remotely.

While this disclosure has described certain
5 embodiments and generally associated methods, alterations and permutations of these embodiments and methods will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, the above description of example embodiments does not define or constrain this disclosure. Other changes, substitutions, and
10 alterations are also possible without departing from the spirit and scope of this disclosure, as defined by the following claims.

CLAIMS:

1. A game system (10), comprising:

a memory (210) capable of maintaining a history (270) associated with a game piece (20), the game piece (20) used in a game having rules of play, the game piece (20) having an associated identification code; and

a processor (200) capable of:

updating the history (270) with a current performance level of the game piece (20);

comparing the current performance level with a threshold performance level; and

awarding an augmented capability to the game piece (20) based on the comparison.

2. The game system (10) of Claim 1, wherein:

the augmented capability comprises an accessory (120) used with the game piece (20); and

the game piece (20) comprises a slot (110) capable of receiving the accessory (120).

3. The game system (10) of Claim 2, wherein:
the accessory (120) is associated with a second
identification code; and
the processor (200) is further capable of:
determining if a match exists between the second
identification code and an allowed identification code of an
allowed accessory associated with the game piece (20); and
enabling the game piece (20) to utilize the
accessory (120) during play of the game when the match
exists.

4. The game system (10) of Claim 1, wherein the
augmented capability comprises a second game piece (20) used
in conjunction with the game piece (20).

5. The game system (10) of Claim 1, wherein the
identification code comprises at least one of: a radio
frequency identification code and a barcode.

6. The game system (10) of Claim 1, further comprising
a game device (300), the memory (210) and the processor (200)
being at least partially included within the game device
(300).

7. The game system (10) of Claim 6, wherein the game
device (300) comprises a tabletop gaming area (35) having a
touchscreen function.

8. The game system (10) of Claim 7, wherein the game device (300) further comprises a camera and an image processor capable of detecting a position of the game piece (20) on the tabletop gaming area (35).

9. The game system (10) of Claim 1, wherein:
a game device (300) comprises a communications interface (230); and

the memory (210) and processor (200) reside in a server coupled to the game device (300) by a distributed network connected to the communications interface (230).

10. A method, comprising:
updating a history (270) of a game piece (20) with a current performance level of the game piece (20) in a memory (210), the game piece (20) used in a game having rules of play, the game piece (20) having an associated identification code;

comparing the current performance level with a threshold performance level; and

awarding an augmented capability to the game piece (20) based on the comparison.

11. The method of Claim 10, wherein the augmented capability comprises at least one of:

an accessory (120) used with the game piece (20),
wherein the game piece (20) comprises a slot (110) capable of
receiving the accessory (120); and

a second game piece (20) used in conjunction with the
game piece (20).

12. The method of Claim 11, wherein at least one of the
accessory (120) and the second game piece (20) is associated
with a second identification code; and

further comprising:

determining if a match exists between the second
identification code and an allowed identification code
associated with the game piece (20); and

enabling the game piece (20) to utilize at least
one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20)
during play of the game when the match exists.

13. A computer program embodied on a computer readable
medium and capable of being executed by a processor, the
computer program comprising computer readable program code
for:

tracking a performance of a game piece (20) in a game
having rules of play using an identification code associated
with the game piece (20);

updating a history (270) of the game piece (20) with a
current performance level of the game piece (20);

comparing the current performance level with a threshold performance level; and

awarding an augmented capability to the game piece (20) based on the comparison.

14. A game system (10), comprising:

a memory (210) capable of maintaining, for a first game piece (20) used in a game having rules of play, an allowed identification code identifying at least one of: an allowed accessory and an allowed second game piece associated with the first game piece (20); and

a processor (200) capable of:

determining if a match exists between the allowed identification code and an identification code associated with at least one of: an accessory (120) mountable on the first game piece (20) and a second game piece (20) used in conjunction with the first game piece (20); and

enabling the first game piece (20) to utilize at least one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20) during play of the game when the match exists.

15. The game system (10) of Claim 14, wherein the identification code comprises at least one of: a radio frequency identification code and a barcode.

16. The game system (10) of Claim 14, further comprising a game device (300), the memory (210) and the processor (200) being at least partially included within the game device (300).

17. The game system (10) of Claim 16, wherein the game device (300) comprises a tabletop gaming area (35) having a touchscreen function.

18. The game system (10) of Claim 17, wherein the game device (300) further comprises a camera and an image processor capable of detecting a position of the first game piece (20) on the tabletop gaming area (35).

19. The game system (10) of Claim 16, wherein:

a game device (300) comprises a communications interface (230); and

the memory (210) and processor (200) reside in a server coupled to the game device (300) by a distributed network connected to the communications interface (230).

20. A method, comprising:

maintaining, for a first game piece (20) used in a game having rules of play, an allowed identification code, the allowed identification code identifying at least one of: an allowed accessory and an allowed second game piece associated with the first game piece (20);

determining if a match exists between the allowed identification code and an identification code associated with at least one of: an accessory (120) mountable on the first game piece (20) and a second game piece (20) used in conjunction with the first game piece (20); and

enabling the first game piece (20) to utilize at least one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20) during play of the game when the match exists.

21. A computer program embodied on a computer readable medium and capable of being executed by a processor, the computer program comprising computer readable program code for:

maintaining, for a first game piece (20) used in a game having rules of play, an allowed identification code, the allowed identification code identifying at least one of: an allowed accessory and an allowed second game piece associated with the first game piece (20);

determining if a match exists between the allowed identification code and an identification code associated with at least one of: an accessory (120) mountable on the first game piece (20) and a second game piece (20) used in conjunction with the first game piece (20); and

enabling the first game piece (20) to utilize at least one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20)

during play of the game when the match exists.

22. A game system (10), comprising:

a memory (210) capable of maintaining a sales code for a first game piece (20) used in a game having rules of play, the sales code identifying at least one of: an accessory (120) mountable on the first game piece (20) and a second game piece (20) used in conjunction with the first game piece (20), the first game piece (20) associated with a user identity; and

a processor (200) capable of determining if a user is allowed to purchase at least one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20) for the first game piece (20) based on the sales code and the user identity.

23. The game system (10) of Claim 22, wherein the sales code and the user identity are retrieved from a swipe card, the swipe card comprising a magnetic strip identifying the sales code and the user identity.

24. The game system (10) of Claim 22, wherein the sales code is provided by a certificate provided to the user.

25. The game system (10) of Claim 22, wherein the memory (210) and the processor (200) form a server coupled to a distributed network, the distributed network connected to a point of sale (340) of at least one of the accessory (120)

and the second game piece (20).

26. The game system (10) of Claim 22, wherein the processor (200) is further capable of:

tracking a performance of the first game piece (20) in the game;

comparing a current performance level with a threshold performance level; and

providing the sales code to the user based on the comparison.

27. A method, comprising:

associating a first game piece (20) with a user identity, the first game piece (20) used in a game having rules of play;

providing a sales code associated with at least one of: an accessory (120) mountable on the first game piece (20) and a second game piece (20) used in conjunction with the first game piece (20); and

enabling a user to purchase at least one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20) for the first game piece (20) when the user provides the sales code and the user identity.

28. The method of Claim 27, further comprising:

receiving the sales code and the user identity at a

point of sale (340) of at least one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20); and

transmitting the sales code and the user identity over a distributed network to a server to determine if the user is allowed to purchase at least one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20) at the point of sale.

29. The method of Claim 27, further comprising:

tracking a performance of the first game piece (20) in the game;

comparing a current performance level with a threshold performance level; and

providing the sales code to the user based on the comparison.

30. A computer program embodied on a computer readable medium and capable of being executed by a processor, the computer program comprising computer readable program code for:

maintaining a sales code for a first game piece (20) used in a game having rules of play, the sales code identifying at least one of: an accessory (120) mountable on the first game piece (20) and a second game piece (20) used in conjunction with the first game piece (20), the first game piece (20) associated with a user identity; and

determining if a user is allowed to purchase at least

one of the accessory (120) and the second game piece (20) for the first game piece (20) based on the sales code and the user identity.

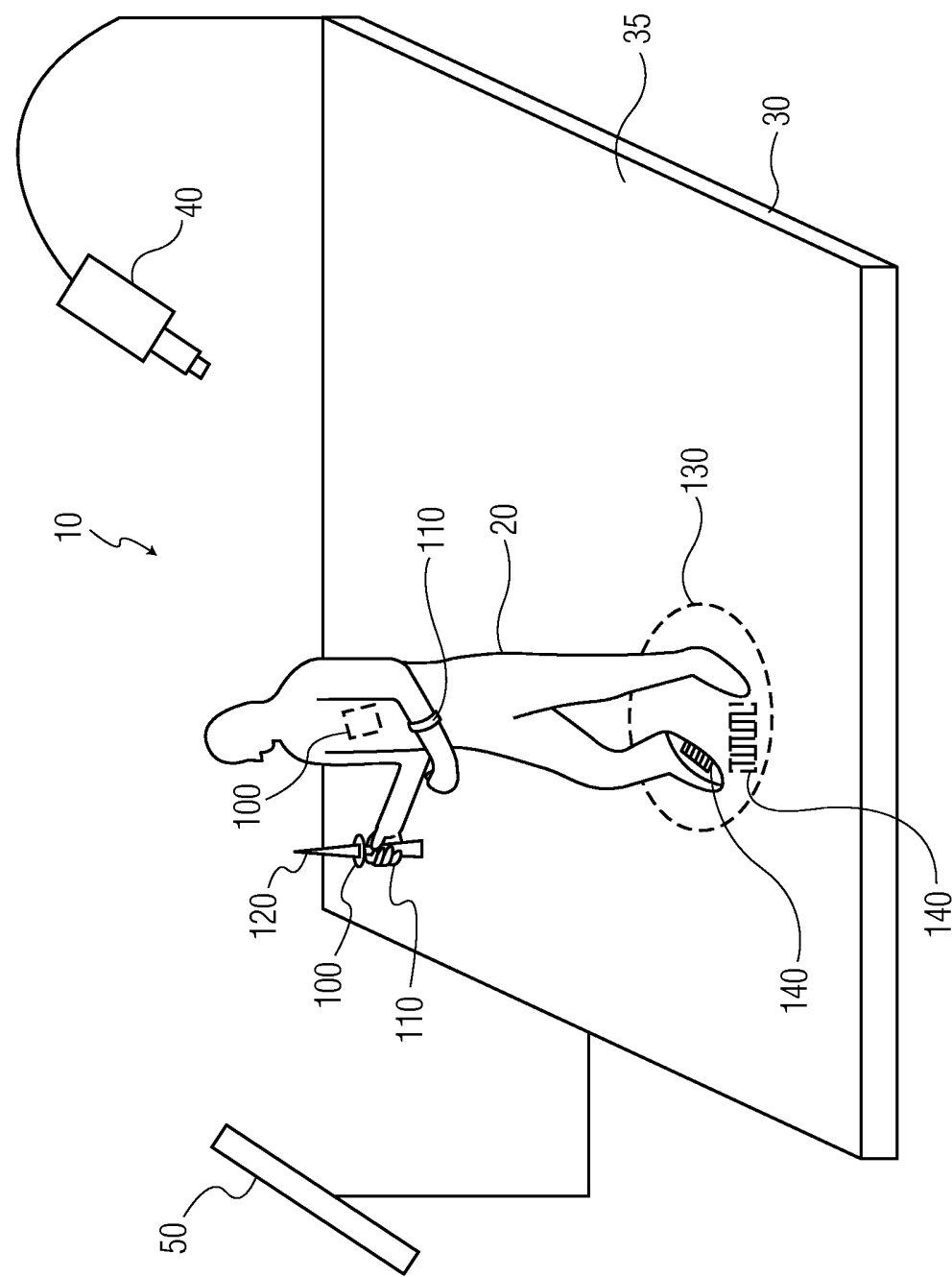


FIG. 1

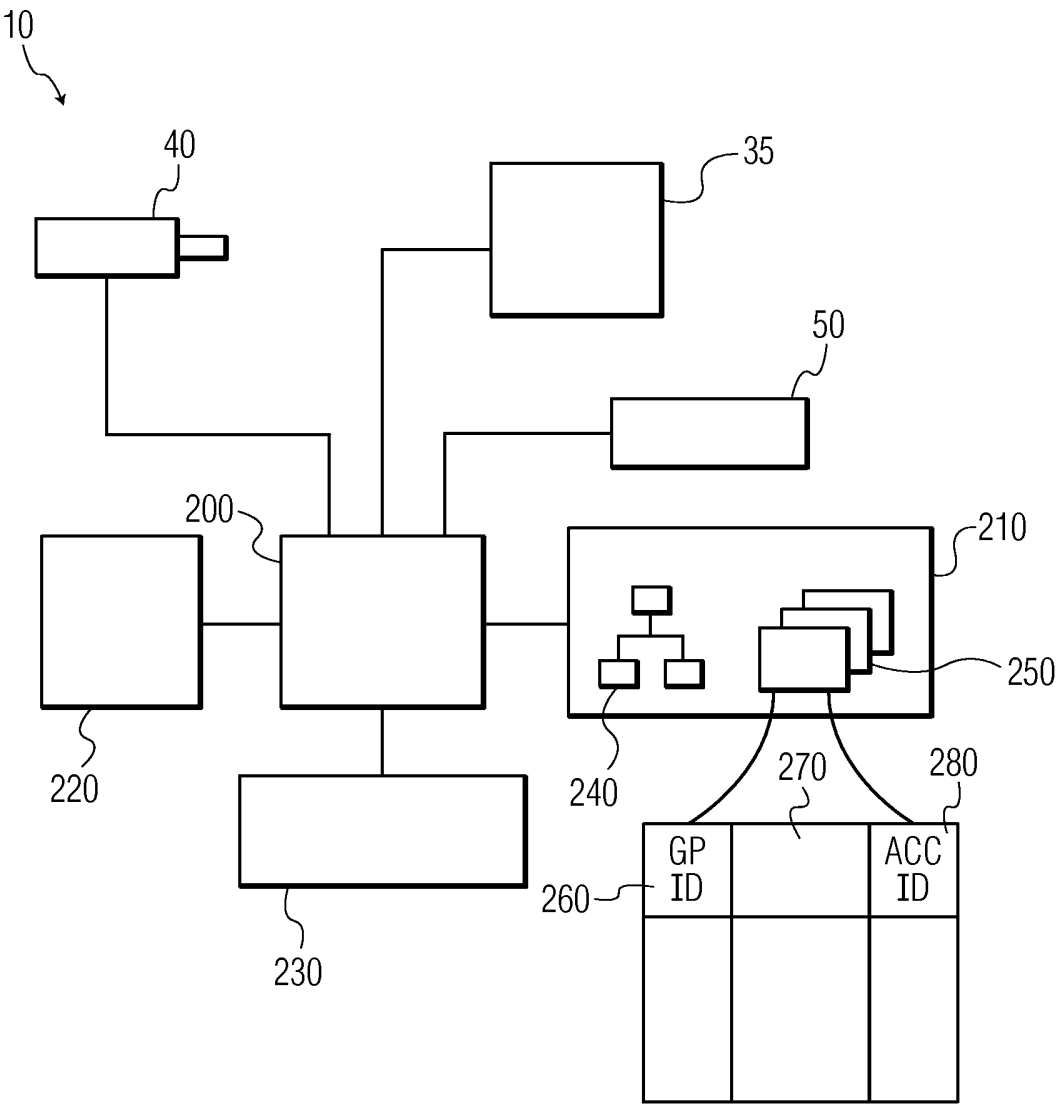


FIG. 2

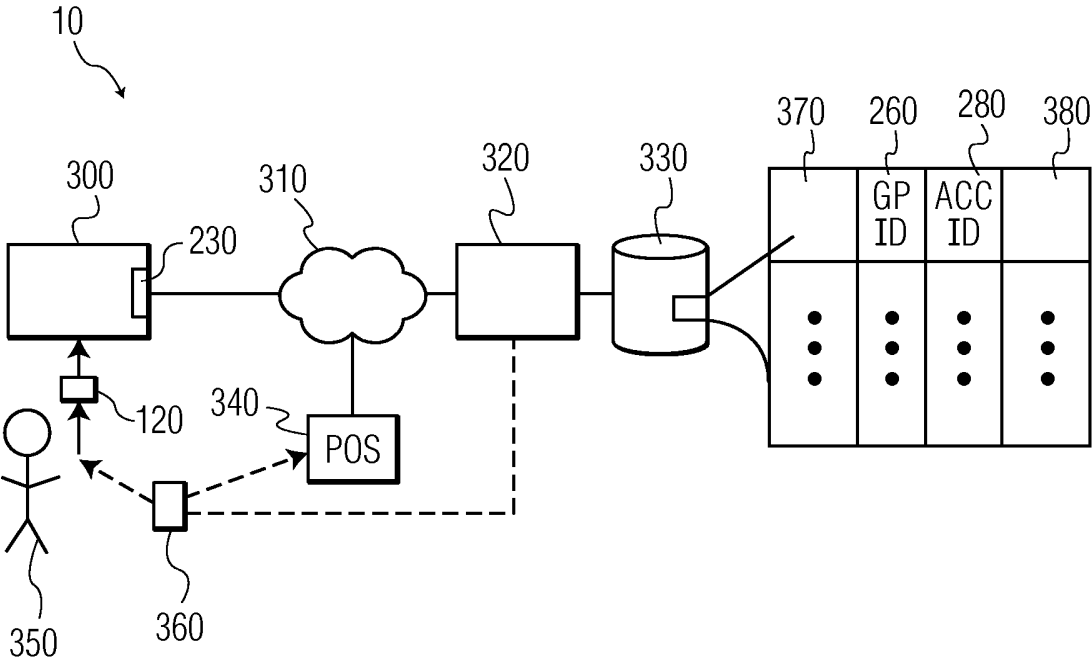


FIG. 3

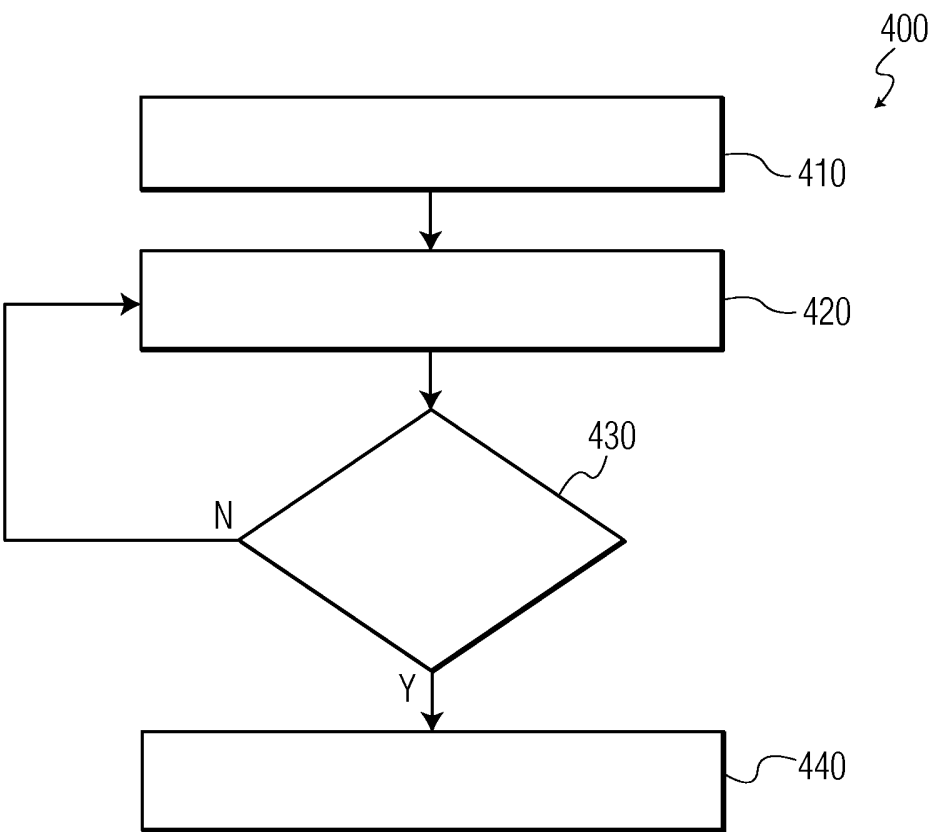


FIG. 4

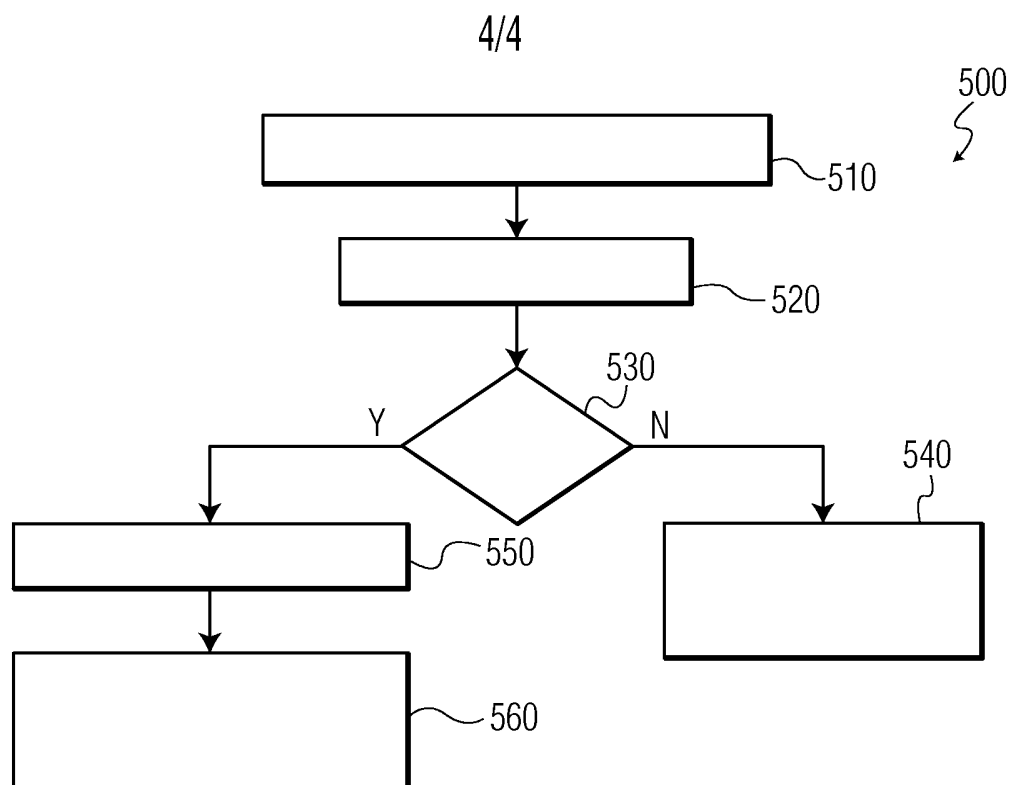


FIG. 5

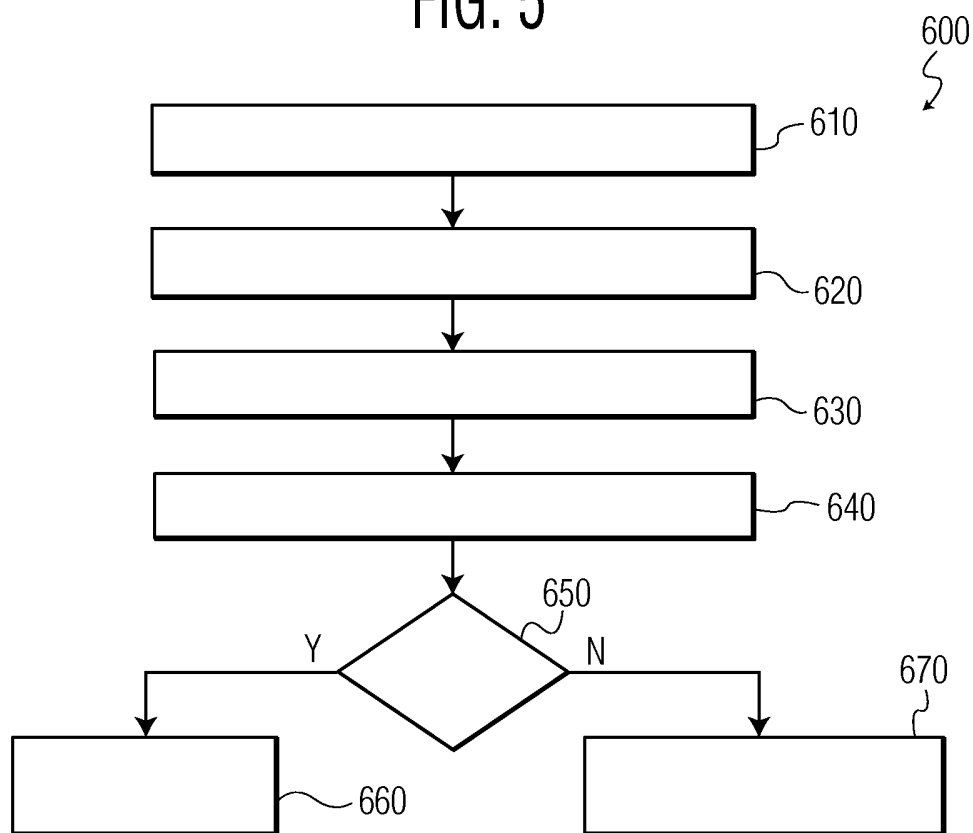


FIG. 6