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(54) **CELEBRITY VOICES IN A VIDEO GAME**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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Virtual environments in which players are able to select synthetic voices for their characters are described. The voices may be celebrity voices or impersonations of celebrity voices. A player may provide a spoken message to the game server, which converts the spoken message into a text message and then outputs the text message in audible form using a celebrity voice.

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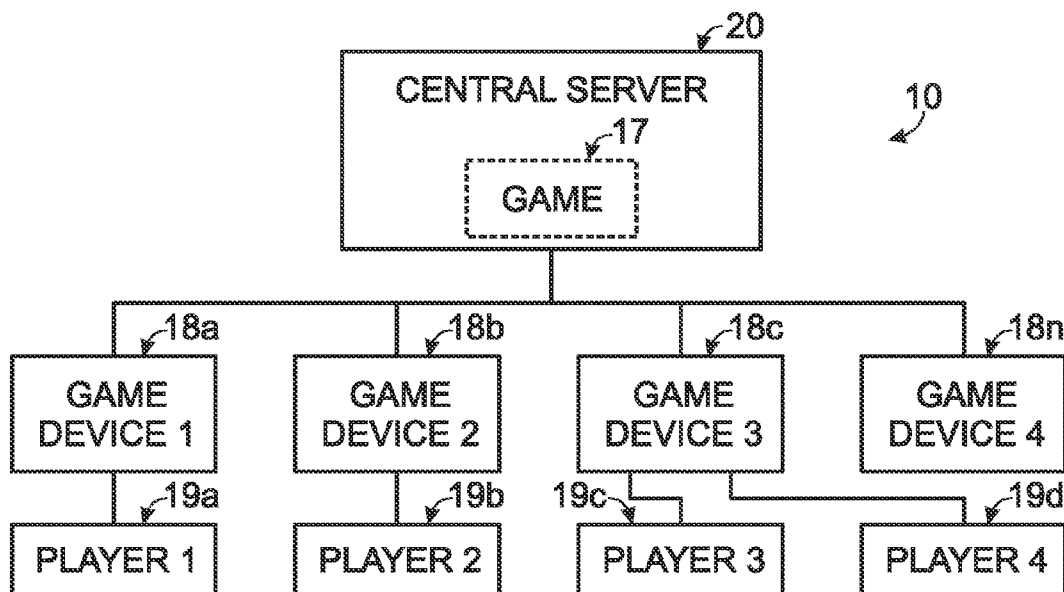
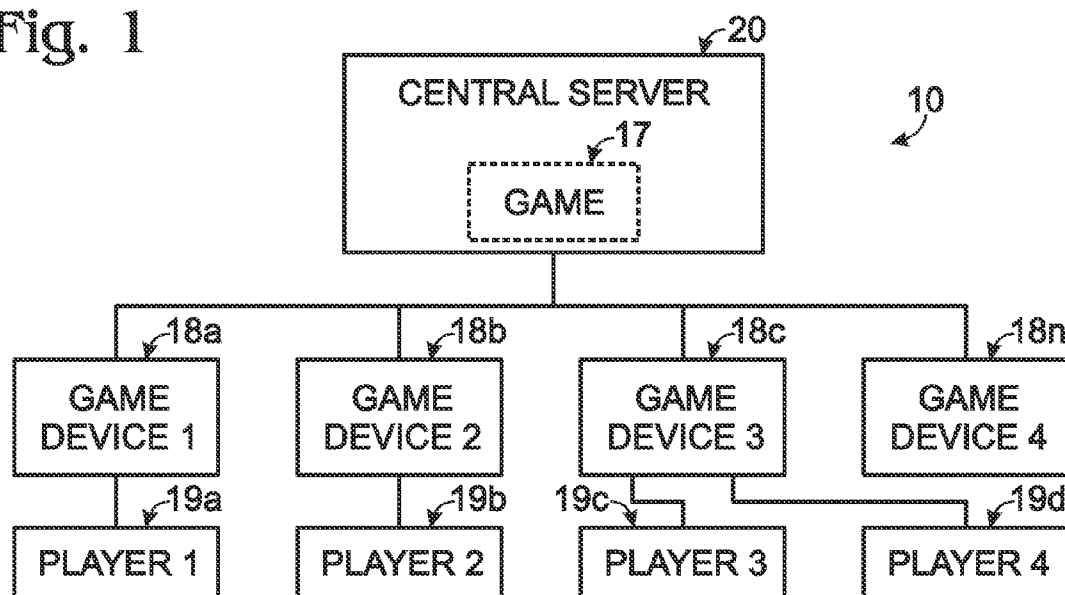


Fig. 1



CELEBRITY VOICES IN A VIDEO GAME

PRIORITY CLAIM

[0001] The following application is a continuation in part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/421,026 "Video Game Environment that Tracks Help and Advice Provided to Other Player Characters," filed May 30, 2006, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/727,121 "Methods, Processes, and Systems to Enhance a Player Experience of a Video Game," filed Oct. 14, 2005, each of which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Virtual Environments which are accessible to multiple subscribers via a server are well known. For example, hundreds of thousands of players access games known as massive multi player online games (MMOGs). Players of these games customarily access a game repeatedly (for durations typically ranging from a few minutes to several days) over given period of time, which may be days, weeks, months or even years. The games are often constructed such that players pay a periodic subscription price (e.g., \$15 per month) rather than, or in addition to, paying a one time purchase price for the game. Often, though not necessarily, these games have no ultimate "winner" or "winning goal," but instead attempt to create an enjoyable playing environment and a strong player community. Virtual communities like Linden Lab's "Second Life" provide a three-dimensional metaverse in which people (who may or may not pay a fee for the right to access the metaverse) create avatars that are able to interact with other avatars as well as the local environment. It would be advantageous to provide improved methods and apparatus for increasing the enjoyment and/or longevity of these virtual environments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0003] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a system according to an embodiment of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0004] Massive multi player online games (MMOGs) or massive multi-player role-playing games (MMORPGs) are computer game which are capable of supporting hundreds, thousands, or millions of players simultaneously. Typically, this type of game is played in a giant persistent world where the game continues playing regardless of whether or not real players are logged in. Players commonly access these games through a network such as the Internet, and may or may not be required to purchase additional software or hardware in order to play the game. Such networks allow for people all over the world to participate and interact with each other in a virtual environment. The present disclosure provides systems and methods which contribute to the evolution and longevity of such a game.

[0005] According to one or more embodiments, the present invention provides a voice recognition system for use in a gaming environment. In a massive multi player online gaming experience, players are able to select a synthetic voice for their characters in the game. Any words that are spoken by the character are then spoken using the synthetic voice. According to one embodiment, when the player speaks into a headset, his voice is converted into text

using voice recognition software. The text can then be converted into messages spoken by the synthetic voice selected by the user.

[0006] Referring to FIG. 1, a network system 10 according to one embodiment includes a central server 20 in communication with a plurality of video game playing units 18. Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that any number of video game playing units may be in communication with the central server. Typically, the number of video game playing units changes at various times as players join games and as players stop playing games. Similarly, more than one server may operate to coordinate the activities of the video game playing units, as is well known in the art.

[0007] Central server 20 may comprise any computing device (e.g., one or more computers) capable of communicating with other computing devices. The server 20 typically comprises a processor which is in communication with a storage device, such as an appropriate combination of RAM, ROM, hard disk, and other well known storage media. Central server 20 may comprise one or more personal computers, web servers, dedicated game servers, video game consoles, any combination of the foregoing, or the like.

[0008] Each video game device 18 may comprise any device capable of communicating with central server 20, providing video game information to a player, and transmitting the player's desired actions to the central server. Each video game device typically comprises a processor which is in communication with a storage device, such as an appropriate combination of RAM, ROM, hard disk, and other well known storage media. Suitable video game devices include, but are not limited to, personal computers, video game consoles, mobile phones, and personal data assistants (PDAs).

[0009] Some or all of video game 17 can be stored on central server 20. Alternatively, some or all of video game 17 may be stored on the individual video game devices 18. Typically, the video game devices are able to communicate with one another. Such communication may or may not be facilitated by central server 20. Accordingly, a player 19a accessing video game 17 via game device 18a may be able to play with a player 19b accessing video game 17 via game device 18b. As shown, it may be possible for multiple players (e.g. 19c, 19d) to access central server 20 via the same game device (e.g. 18c).

[0010] Regardless of whether video game 17 is stored on central server 20 or video game devices 18, server 20 is typically configured to facilitate play of the game between multiple game players.

[0011] Accordingly, the present disclosure provides various methods and systems which are suitable for use in a virtual metaverse. As used herein, the term "virtual" includes the concept "in a computer-generated environment or other intangible space." Further more, a "metaverse" includes a collection of online virtual environments which are accessible to one or more players of one or more online games or communities. In some embodiments, certain areas in a metaverse may be restricted to some players. Examples of metaverses include Massive Multi Player Online Video Game (MMPOVGs) such as World of Warcraft and virtual communities such as Second Life.

[0012] MMPOVGs (sometimes referred to as Massive Multi Player Online Role Playing Games MMPORPGs) include video games and virtual environments that are provided by and accessed via at least two video game consoles connected to a Video Game Central Server via a network such as an internet or intranet, or as part of a peer-to-peer network including at least two Video Game Consoles. In some embodiments, players create and/or control characters that may interact with each and their surrounding virtual environment in a Metaverse that is stored on the Video Game Central Server and/or the Video Game Consoles.

[0013] The games and metaverses wherein these games take place are typically accessible to player via a video game console. For the purposes of the present disclosure, "video game consoles" include devices comprising a CPU, memory, and optional permanent storage residing at a player location that can allow for the playing of video games. Examples include, home PCs, Microsoft Xbox, and Sony Playstation, Wii, Playstation portable, etc. Dedicated video game consoles may be useful for only playing video games, while multifunctional video game consoles, such as personal computers, PDA's and the like may be useful for performing multiple tasks including, but not limited to playing video games.

[0014] According to numerous embodiments, in order to access a particular, metaverse, virtual environment, or game, a video game console Video Game Central may be in electronic communication with a video game server. A video game server may include a CPU, memory, and permanent or temporary storage and be in electronic communication with multiple players via multiple video game consoles. As such, the plurality of players are able to interact with each other as well as the metaverse by accessing the video game server via their video game consoles.

[0015] As stated above, a particular metaverse may include one or more virtual or game environments. For the purposes of the present disclosure the terms "virtual environment," "game environment" and the like include a region, sub-region or area of a metaverse such as a country, city, era, building, etc., which is in some way recognizably different from another region, sub-region, or area of the metaverse.

[0016] It will be understood that a "game" as used herein need not be a "game" in the traditional sense of a competition in which a winner and/or loser is determined, but rather that the term "game" incorporates the idea of the metaverse regardless of the intended purpose. Accordingly, both World of Warcraft and Second Life would be referred to as games for the purposes of the present disclosure. Moreover, a person or entity who enters the metaverse in order to conduct business, tour the metaverse, or simply interact with others or the virtual environment, with or without competing against another entity is still considered to be "playing a game."

[0017] Furthermore, the term "player" includes any entity that accesses the metaverse, regardless of whether or not the player intends to or is capable of competing against other players. Typically, a player will register an account with a Video Game Central Server or within a peer-to-peer network and create Characters that can interact with other Characters in a Video Game Environment. The term "character"

includes persona created by a player in a metaverse, while an avatar" includes the physical embodiment of a character in the metaverse.

[0018] According to one or more embodiments, the game server may be configured to maintain a character account for each character that accesses the metaverse. A character account includes information related to a particular character. Accordingly, a character account may be a program and/or database that tracks various character related data including, but not necessarily limited to, character attributes.

[0019] For the purposes of the present disclosure, a character attribute may include any quality, trait, feature or characteristic a particular Character can have. Examples of character attributes include, but are not limited to:

[0020] 1. A score

[0021] 2. Possession, ownership, control, etc. of a virtual object

[0022] 3. Character Skills and abilities—which may be inherent or acquired, and include but are not limited to: the ability to cast certain spells, foretell the future, read minds, use certain weapons, cook, hunt, find herbs, assemble herbs into potions, mine, assemble objects into other objects, fly, and/or enchant other player characters.

[0023] 4. Physical appearance

[0024] 5. An emblem or mark

[0025] 6. A synthetic voice, which an audible signal that is recognized as speech or song. A synthetic voice may be a recording of a real person speaking, or may be generated electronically. In some embodiments, a synthetic voice may be a celebrity voice. In some embodiments, a celebrity voice may be a voice, the sound of which is or would be recognizable by a statistically significant percentage of the target audience. Examples of celebrity voices include the voices of real life celebrities such as famous actors, politicians, singers and other celebrities (e.g. James Earl Jones, Richard Nixon, Ellen DeGeneres) as well as famous characters such as Bart Simpson, and Bugs Bunny. A Celebrity Voice may be spoken by a real life celebrity, spoken by a celebrity voice impersonator, or created or enhanced using electronic means.

[0026] 7. Possession, ownership, control, etc. of virtual tangible or intangible assets such as virtual money

[0027] 8. Virtual help points or credits

[0028] 9. The ability to join groups of other players at a later time

[0029] 10. A score for subsequent matching of later game parameters

[0030] 11. A relationship with another character

[0031] 12. A genetic profile or makeup

[0032] These character attributes may or may not change during a character life. The term "character life" may include the fixed period of virtual or real world time that a player character can exist in a game environment.

[0033] The games described herein frequently make use of Non-Player Characters (NPC) or Computer Generated Characters (CGC). The terms NPCs and CGCs may include any character that is controlled by the system rather than being controlled by a player. However, under certain conditions NPCs or CGCs may be controlled by one or more players.

[0034] According to many embodiments, avatars in a metaverse attempt to complete, negotiate, beat, or experience one or more game parameters. Examples of game parameters include, but are not limited to:

- [0035] 1. Completing all or part of a mission in a game
- [0036] 2. Playing for a certain period of time
- [0037] 3. Winning a match against another player character or computer generated character
- [0038] 4. Reaching a certain level or score
- [0039] 5. using or obtaining an ability or technology
- [0040] 6. kill/death ratios
- [0041] 7. obtaining an object
- [0042] 8. solving a puzzle
- [0043] 9. accuracy with weapons
- [0044] 10. effective use of the proper weapon
- [0045] 11. killing a certain character/creature
- [0046] 12. getting through or to a certain geographic area
- [0047] 13. decreasing or increasing Karma Points
- [0048] 14. getting, buying, exchanging or learning a new skill or player attribute
- [0049] 15. having a child
- [0050] 16. getting married
- [0051] 17. obtaining, buying, trading, producing or developing raw materials
- [0052] 18. producing goods or services
- [0053] 19. earning income
- [0054] 20. earning a higher rank in an army
- [0055] 21. winning an election among two or more player characters
- [0056] 22. achieving deity status
- [0057] 23. improving player character status or caste
- [0058] 24. assisting other player characters with any of the above
- [0059] 25. speed of accomplishing any of the above
- [0060] 26. and/or any part of a metaverse experience by which characters can be measured.

[0061] According to some embodiments, two or more characters, players, entities, etc. may decide to enter into an enforceable agreement such as a virtual contract. Some examples of virtual contracts and methods by which they may be created and enforced are provided in U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/652,036, and U.S.

patent application Ser. Nos. 11/355,232, 11/624,662, 11/611,050, and 11/279,991 which hereby incorporated by reference.

[0062] One example of a virtual contract may be a player to player Contract which may be a binding contract between player characters that allows the players to provide or exchange game attributes to one another. In some embodiments, once a player-to-player contract is established, the game server or peer-to-peer network automatically distributes game attributes between the player characters based on the contract conditions.

[0063] According to various embodiments, players may desire to trade, sell, loan, etc. various in-game items. Accordingly, a particular metaverse or game environment may include an in-game Marketplace wherein players and characters can exchange goods and services including, but not limited to, items, attributes, contracts, etc.

[0064] According to some embodiments, distinctions may be made between players of different experience levels. In such an embodiment, a novice Player may be a player who has spent less than a certain amount of playing time in a given metaverse or game environment and/or who has been flagged or otherwise identified as requiring the help of a more experienced player, such as an expert, to complete a Game Parameter.

[0065] Player Account—includes an account on the Video Game Central Server or within a peer-to-peer network that contains a Player profile including personal, billing, and character account information.

[0066] Billing Information—any information pertaining to billing a player including, but not limited to, a billing address, credit card account, bank account, pay pal account or other payment information.

[0067] Player Attribute—shall mean any attribute that can be applied to a player account. Player Attributes shall include, but not be limited to:

- [0068] 1. Real Money
- [0069] 2. Discount of monthly fees for playing game
- [0070] 3. Monthly fee for playing a game
- [0071] 4. Global character attribute settings for all characters created by player across multiple games.
- [0072] 5. Rewards for encouraging another player to signup to play

[0073] According to various embodiments, a particular voice (or any voice at all) may be available only if the character has reached a certain level or acquired a certain attribute in the game.

[0074] According to yet another embodiment, the game can be saved along with the converted text and synthetic voice of players, so that the saved game result can be edited and turned into a product such as a movie or comic book.

[0075] According to yet another embodiment, the voice used could be a famous voice, such as a voice of a famous character or celebrity or an impersonation thereof.

[0076] Various fee structures could be available. For example, celebrities could charge a different fee for allowing a player to use his or her voice, while celebrity imperson-

ations could have a reduced fee. A billing system could keep track of fees for various celebrities and pay a percentage to the celebrities based, for example, on demand or player usage. Moreover, fees for using the speech in the game could be different than fees for using the speech in a saved game result, such as a movie.

[0077] According to another embodiment, certain words could be spoken in different celebrity voices by the same character. For instance, certain slogans could be spoken in one voice, while the rest of the speech is spoken in another voice. Certain words, spoken by the synthetic voice of certain celebrities could only be available to characters once they have acquired certain attributes in the game. For example, a player might choose a voice like Julia Childs' for any situations involving cooking, except when the player chooses to say the word "bam" in which instances the system might substitute Emeril Legasse's voice for such word(s).

[0078] According to one embodiment, an administrative tool may allow a player to specify what voice he wants to use for particular slogans and catch phrases. The tool may further allow the player to agree to a licensing fee to use the voice. Such tool may also permit the player to select different voices for different times of the day, day of the week, etc., and/or under different circumstances. For example, the player may wish to use one voice when conducting business, another voice when waging war and yet another voice when speaking with players or player characters designated as being of the opposite sex.

[0079] According to another embodiment, rather than the character needing to speak into a headset, the system can convert text that is typed into a virtual world chat window into audible voice files. In addition, or in the alternate, players can create voice files of their spoken voice and/or pre-translated celebrity or other synthetic or recorded voices and such players can invoke or otherwise cause such pre-recorded or pre-translated voice/text to be spoken upon request, command or other indication provided by such player and/or automatically based upon one or more rules or predefined situations. Using such pre-recorded voices, previously entered and/or translated text, players can create short phrases and/or complete sentences/paragraphs or entire conversations ahead of time. Such features could prove useful in myriad situations and provide benefits for players that are unable to speak or speak clearly and/or can save valuable time in providing messages to players that may be offline or otherwise unavailable. For example, a player might wish to deliver the same voice mail message to many other players or player characters, whether or not such player or player character is presently available. For example, a player may record the phrase "pay your bills" and translate such phrase into a celebrity voice, such as Mr. T, and then deliver the message via e-mail, voice mail, or other communications, such as via an NPC or anytime such player comes into contact with any other player that owes such first player money or is overdue in paying such amounts when due. Voice Phrases can also be hyperlinked to keyboard keys. A player can press the key to have the phrase spoken in the game environment.

[0080] As stated above, a saved game result may be used to create a movie. The movie may or may not use text, spoken audio, or both. When creating a movie out of or from

part or all of a saved game result, the player can convert text entries used in the saved game into audible voice files. A license fee to use the synthetic voice files created from the real voice files of a celebrity can be charged the player, for example, as a flat fee, a monthly fee, an upfront fee, or based on the amount of language that is created and/or the situations or frequency that the voice is used. In the case more than one player is making use of the same celebrity voice, such fees could be based in whole or in part upon the total amount of usage. The fee can be charged when the file is created or when it is heard by third parties or a combination of these factors.

[0081] According to another embodiment, players can also assign voices to other players and thereby alter the sounds made by those players, either as they hear themselves and/or as others hear them. For example, when other players speak to the player, they speak in voices specified by the player on his video game console, or, in some embodiments, on all player consoles.

[0082] The voice to text and text to voice software and/or synthesized voices or other data can be stored on the game server or on the video game consoles or on any other suitable computing device and/or storage device(s). If the voice software and/or voices are stored on the game server, that server may convert some or all the files and transmits them to the game consoles or where and when needed. If the voice software, voices and/or data is stored on the game consoles, the game server can transmit, for example, the original text and or voice files to the consoles where they are converted to new voice files and played for the player.

[0083] For purposes of this disclosure, the game console may include or be in the form of a headset (or any combination of hardware) capable of receiving and transmitting voice files generated from players.

[0084] According to various embodiments, exemplary character attributes that could allow the character to speak in a certain synthetic voices include, but are not limited to:

- [0085] 1. Obtaining or failing to obtain a certain score in the game
- [0086] 2. Solving or failing to solve a certain puzzle in the game
- [0087] 3. Obtaining or failing to obtain a certain level in the game
- [0088] 4. Acquiring or failing to acquire a certain virtual item in the game
- [0089] 5. Obtaining or failing to obtain a certain peer score in the game.
- [0090] 6. Paying or failing to pay an extra fee for the right to have access to certain synthetic voices
- [0091] 7. Having a player account for a certain period of time
- [0092] 8. Purchasing a character expansion pack for the game.
- [0093] 9. Helping or failing to help other player's in the game obtain certain attributes for their characters
- [0094] 10. Being or not being a member of a certain group of players

[0095] 11. Fulfilling a virtual obligation

[0096] 12. Failing to fulfill a virtual obligation

[0097] 13. Any combination of the forgoing and/or achieving or failing to achieve a game objective and/or within a prescribed time.

[0098] According to one or more embodiments, some voices may be offered on a limited or exclusive basis. For example, a particular game may only allow a certain number of players (e.g. 1, 5, 10, 50, 100, etc.) to use a particular voice. Players may bid against each other for the right to use high demand voices.

[0099] According to an embodiment, once purchased, the voice may be used by the player's character until the player character stops playing the game. Alternatively, the voice may be purchased for only a set period of time, for example, until the character dies or is killed, finished the game or a level of the game, completes a task, or upon expiration of a given time period, such as a certain number of play-time minutes or hours, or a day, week, or month.

[0100] If the voice is only purchased for a set period of time, a player may be able to renew his or her subscription to the voice for a lower, higher or the same fee. The player may or may not have to bid against other players in order to renew his or her voice subscription. A subscription service may or may not relate to the exclusivity of the voice. For example, some voices may be available for subscription and usable only by players who subscribe while other voices may be available to anyone.

[0101] According to some embodiments, voice owners or subscribers may be able to resell their voices.

[0102] According to yet another embodiment, players may have the right to bid or make offers for voices that are not offered in the game. The bids could be guaranteed, for example, by a credit card, so that the demand reflected by the bids is real and actionable. Accordingly, player may be able to coax a celebrity into doing celebrity voice offers by presenting a quantified offer. For example, a particular game may be able to show the availability of 2 million dollars in offered payments towards the use of Julia Roberts, James Earl Jones, or Bart Simpson's voice. The game designer could offer all or a percentage of the guaranteed funds to celebrities or voice impersonators for performing voice over work.

[0103] According to a further embodiment, players who sign up for a not yet available voice and back up their request with a credit card or other guaranteed source, may be provided with incentives such as reduced fees or other perks once the voice becomes available.

[0104] According to another embodiment, certain words could be spoken in different celebrity voices by the same character. For instance certain slogans could be spoken in one voice, while the rest of the speech is spoken in another voice. Certain words, spoken by the synthetic voice of certain celebrities could only be available to characters once they have acquired certain attributes in the game.

[0105] Various character attributes that could allow the character to speak in a certain synthetic voices include, but are not limited to:

[0106] 1. Obtaining a certain score in the game

[0107] 2. Solving a certain puzzle in the game

[0108] 3. Obtaining a certain level in the game

[0109] 4. Acquiring a certain virtual item in the game

[0110] 5. Obtaining a certain peer score in the game.

[0111] 6. Paying an extra fee for the right to have access to certain synthetic voices

[0112] 7. Having a player account for a certain period of time

[0113] 8. Purchasing a character expansion pack for the game.

[0114] 9. Helping other player's in the game obtain certain attributes for their characters

[0115] Those having skill in the art will recognize that there is little distinction between hardware and software implementations. The use of hardware or software is generally a choice of convenience or design based on the relative importance of speed, accuracy, flexibility and predictability. There are therefore various vehicles by which processes and/or systems described herein can be effected (e.g., hardware, software, and/or firmware) and that the preferred vehicle will vary with the context in which the technologies are deployed.

[0116] At least a portion of the devices and/or processes described herein can be integrated into a data processing system with a reasonable amount of experimentation. Those having skill in the art will recognize that a typical data processing system generally includes one or more of a system unit housing, a video display device, memory, processors, operating systems, drivers, graphical user interfaces, and application programs, interaction devices such as a touch pad or screen, and/or control systems including feedback loops and control motors. A typical data processing system may be implemented utilizing any suitable commercially available components to create the gaming environment described herein.

[0117] Accordingly, the presently described system may comprise a plurality of various hardware and/or software components such as those described below. It will be appreciated that for ease of description, the variously described hardware and software components are described and named according to various functions that it is contemplated may be performed by one or more software or hardware components within the system. However, it will be understood that the system may incorporate any number of programs configured to perform any number of functions including, but in no way limited to those described below. Furthermore, it should be understood that while, for ease of description, multiple programs and multiple databases are described, the various functions and/or databases may, in fact, be part of a single program or multiple programs running in one or more locations.

[0118] Exemplary programs include:

[0119] 1. Central Server

[0120] a. Game Program

[0121] b. Voice to Text Program

- [0122] c. Text to Voice Program
- [0123] d. Game Databases
- [0124] e. Saved Game Editor Program
- [0125] f. Billing Program
- [0126] 2. Game Console (PC or Xbox, or Playstation)
- [0127] a. Game Program
- [0128] Exemplary databases include
 - [0129] 1. Player Database
 - [0130] a. Player ID
 - [0131] b. Player Name
 - [0132] c. Player Address
 - [0133] d. Player Billing Information
 - [0134] e. Player Character ID(s) 1-N
 - [0135] f. Account Setting(s) for Voice-to-Text option(s)
 - [0136] 2. Character Database
 - [0137] a. Character ID
 - [0138] b. Character Attributes 1-N
 - [0139] c. Character Setting(s) for Voice-to-Text option(s)
 - [0140] d. Saved Game Result(s) 1-N
 - [0141] 3. Available Synthetic Voice Database
 - [0142] a. Synthetic Voice ID
 - [0143] b. Synthetic Voice Description
 - [0144] c. Synthetic Voice Alphabet and Sample Words
 - [0145] 4. Saved Game Result Database
 - [0146] a. Saved Game ID Number
 - [0147] b. Saved Game File
 - [0148] c. Saved Game Status (raw, recompiled, edited)

[0149] It will be appreciated that the various software and hardware components described above will be configured to perform a variety of functions and methods. Listed below are some exemplary methods that might be performed by the systems as described herein:

[0150] Voice-Text

- [0151] 1. Receive voice recording
- [0152] 2. Convert voice recording into text
- [0153] 3. Display text in game
- [0154] 4. Save text in game result

[0155] Text-Voice

- [0156] 1. Receive text (either typed or spoken text)
- [0157] 2. Retrieve synthetic voice selection
- [0158] 3. Convert text into synthetic voice selection
- [0159] 4. Output text using synthetic voice selection

[0160] Voice-Text-Voice

- [0161] 1. Receive voice recording
- [0162] 2. Convert voice recording into text
- [0163] 3. Retrieve synthetic voice selection
- [0164] 4. Convert text into synthetic voice selection
- [0165] 5. Output text using synthetic voice selection

[0166] Voice-Text-Editor

- [0167] 1. Receive voice recording
- [0168] 2. Convert voice recording into text
- [0169] 3. Save text with saved game result
- [0170] 4. Retrieve saved game result in game editor
- [0171] 5. Receive edited text from game editor
- [0172] 6. Output saved game with edited text (in poster or comic book format)

[0173] Text-Voice-Editor

- [0174] 1. Receive text of dialogue
- [0175] 2. Retrieve synthetic voice selection
- [0176] 3. Convert text into synthetic voice selection
- [0177] 4. Output text using synthetic voice selection
- [0178] 5. Save game result with synthetic voice selection
- [0179] 6. Retrieve saved game result in editor
- [0180] 7. Receive edited synthetic voice from game editor
- [0181] 8. Output saved game result with edited synthetic voice (in movie format)

[0182] Synthetic Voice Selection

- [0183] 1. Receive Player Log in
- [0184] 2. Determine character attributes
- [0185] 3. Determine Synthetic Voices Available for those character attributes
- [0186] 4. Output Available Voices
- [0187] 5. Receive Player Synthetic Voice Selection
- [0188] 6. Save Player Synthetic Voice Selection

[0189] Synthetic Voice Obtained Upon Successful Completion of Game Criteria

- [0190] 1. Receive indication that Player completed Game Criteria
- [0191] 2. Determine if a Synthetic Voice is available for that Game Criteria
- [0192] 3. If Synthetic Voice is available, flag player account with access to Synthetic Voice.

[0193] Synthetic Voice Upsell

- [0194] 1. Receive player log in
- [0195] 2. Determine if synthetic voice is available for that player

- [0196] 3. Output offer to use synthetic voice
- [0197] 4. If offer is accepted store offer acceptance in player account
- [0198] 5. Activate Synthetic voice for that player account.
- [0199] Billing System For Using Synthetic Voice in Game
- [0200] 1. Determine if Player account used (or signed up for) synthetic voice
- [0201] 2. Retrieve fee for using synthetic voice
- [0202] 3. Retrieve player account information
- [0203] 4. Apply fee to player account
- [0204] Billing System For Using Voice to Text editor
- [0205] 1. Determine if player used editor to alter Voice to Text saved game results
- [0206] 2. Retrieve fees for using editor
- [0207] 3. Retrieve player account information
- [0208] 4. Apply fee to player account
- [0209] Billing System For Using Synthetic Voice in Editor
- [0210] 1. Determine if player used Text to Voice in Editor
- [0211] 2. Retrieve fees for using editor
- [0212] 3. Retrieve player account information
- [0213] 4. Apply fee to player account
- [0214] Of course it will be appreciated that the systems methods described herein are provided for the purposes of example only and that none of the above systems methods should be interpreted as necessarily requiring any of the disclosed components or steps nor should they be interpreted as necessarily excluding any additional components or steps.
- [0215] The invention is described with reference to several embodiments. However, the invention is not limited to the embodiments disclosed, and those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that the invention is readily applicable to many other diverse embodiments and applications. Accordingly, the subject matter of the present disclosure includes all novel and nonobvious combinations and subcombinations of the various systems, methods and configurations, and other features, functions, and/or properties disclosed herein.
- [0216] The term “product” means any machine, manufacture and/or composition of matter, unless expressly specified otherwise.
- [0217] The term “process” means any process, algorithm, method or the like, unless expressly specified otherwise.
- [0218] Each process (whether called a method, algorithm or otherwise) inherently includes one or more steps, and therefore all references to a “step” or “steps” of a process have an inherent antecedent basis in the mere recitation of the term ‘process’ or a like term. Accordingly, any reference in a claim to a ‘step’ or ‘steps’ of a process has sufficient antecedent basis.
- [0219] The terms “an embodiment”, “embodiment”, “embodiments”, “the embodiment”, “the embodiments”, “one or more embodiments”, “some embodiments”, “certain

embodiments”, “one embodiment”, “another embodiment” and the like mean “one or more (but not all) embodiments of the disclosed invention(s)”, unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0220] The term “variation” of an invention means an embodiment of the invention, unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0221] A reference to “another embodiment” in describing an embodiment does not imply that the referenced embodiment is mutually exclusive with another embodiment (e.g., an embodiment described before the referenced embodiment), unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0222] The terms “including”, “comprising” and variations thereof mean “including but not limited to”, unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0223] The term “consisting of” and variations thereof mean “including and limited to”, unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0224] The terms “a”, “an” and “the” mean “one or more”, unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0225] The term “plurality” means “two or more”, unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0226] The term “herein” means “in this patent application, including anything which may be incorporated by reference”, unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0227] The phrase “at least one of”, when such phrase modifies a plurality of things (such as an enumerated list of things) means any combination of one or more of those things, unless expressly specified otherwise. For example, the phrase “at least one of a widget, a car and a wheel” means either (i) a widget, (ii) a car, (iii) a wheel, (iv) a widget and a car, (v) a widget and a wheel, (vi) a car and a wheel, or (vii) a widget, a car and a wheel.

[0228] Numerical terms such as “one”, “two”, etc. when used as cardinal numbers to indicate quantity of something (e.g., one widget, two widgets), mean the quantity indicated by that numerical term, but do not mean at least the quantity indicated by that numerical term. For example, the phrase “one widget” does not mean “at least one widget”, and therefore the phrase “one widget” does not cover, e.g., two widgets.

[0229] The phrase “based on” does not mean “based only on”, unless expressly specified otherwise. In other words, the phrase “based on” describes both “based only on” and “based at least on”.

[0230] The term “represent” and like terms are not exclusive, unless expressly specified otherwise. For example, the term “represents” do not mean “represents only”, unless expressly specified otherwise. In other words, the phrase “the data represents a credit card number” describes both “the data represents only a credit card number” and “the data represents a credit card number and the data also represents something else”.

[0231] The term “whereby” is used herein only to precede a clause or other set of words that express only the intended result, objective or consequence of something that is previously and explicitly recited. Thus, when the term “whereby” is used in a claim, the clause or other words that the term

“whereby” modifies do not establish specific further limitations of the claim or otherwise restricts the meaning or scope of the claim.

[0232] The term “e.g.” and like terms means “for example”, and thus does not limit the term or phrase it explains. For example, in the sentence “the computer sends data (e.g., instructions, a data structure) over the Internet”, the term “e.g.” explains that “instructions” are an example of “data” that the computer may send over the Internet, and also explains that “a data structure” is an example of “data” that the computer may send over the Internet. However, both “instructions” and “a data structure” are merely examples of “data”, and other things besides “instructions” and “a data structure” can be “data”.

[0233] The term “determining” and grammatical variants thereof (e.g., to determine a price, determining a value, determine an object which meets a certain criterion) is used in an extremely broad sense. The term “determining” encompasses a wide variety of actions and therefore “determining” can include calculating, computing, processing, deriving, investigating, looking up (e.g., looking up in a table, a database or another data structure), ascertaining and the like. Also, “determining” can include receiving (e.g., receiving information), accessing (e.g., accessing data in a memory) and the like. Also, “determining” can include resolving, selecting, choosing, establishing, and the like.

[0234] The term “determining” does not imply certainty or absolute precision, and therefore “determining” can include estimating, predicting, guessing and the like.

[0235] The term “determining” does not imply that mathematical processing must be performed, and does not imply that numerical methods must be used, and does not imply that an algorithm or process is used.

[0236] The term “determining” does not imply that any particular device must be used. For example, a computer need not necessarily perform the determining.

[0237] It will be readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art that the various processes described herein may be implemented by, e.g., appropriately programmed general purpose computers and computing devices. Typically a processor (e.g., one or more microprocessors, one or more microcontrollers, one or more digital signal processors) will receive instructions (e.g., from a memory or like device), and execute those instructions, thereby performing one or more processes defined by those instructions.

[0238] A “processor” means one or more microprocessors, central processing units (CPUs), computing devices, microcontrollers, digital signal processors, or like devices or any combination thereof.

[0239] Where a limitation of a first claim would cover one of a feature as well as more than one of a feature (e.g., a limitation such as “at least one widget” covers one widget as well as more than one widget), and where in a second claim that depends on the first claim, the second claim uses a definite article “the” to refer to the limitation (e.g., “the widget”), this does not imply that the first claim covers only one of the feature, and this does not imply that the second claim covers only one of the feature (e.g., “the widget” can cover both one widget and more than one widget).

[0240] Each claim in a set of claims has a different scope. Therefore, for example, where a limitation is explicitly recited in a dependent claim, but not explicitly recited in any claim from which the dependent claim depends (directly or indirectly), that limitation is not to be read into any claim from which the dependent claim depends.

[0241] When an ordinal number (such as “first”, “second”, “third” and so on) is used as an adjective before a term, that ordinal number is used (unless expressly specified otherwise) merely to indicate a particular feature, such as to distinguish that particular feature from another feature that is described by the same term or by a similar term. For example, a “first widget” may be so named merely to distinguish it from, e.g., a “second widget”. Thus, the mere usage of the ordinal numbers “first” and “second” before the term “widget” does not indicate any other relationship between the two widgets, and likewise does not indicate any other characteristics of either or both widgets. For example, the mere usage of the ordinal numbers “first” and “second” before the term “widget” (1) does not indicate that either widget comes before or after any other in order or location; (2) does not indicate that either widget occurs or acts before or after any other in time; and (3) does not indicate that either widget ranks above or below any other, as in importance or quality. In addition, the mere usage of ordinal numbers does not define a numerical limit to the features identified with the ordinal numbers. For example, the mere usage of the ordinal numbers “first” and “second” before the term “widget” does not indicate that there must be no more than two widgets.

[0242] When a single device or article is described herein, more than one device/article (whether or not they cooperate) may alternatively be used in place of the single device/article that is described. Accordingly, the functionality that is described as being possessed by a device may alternatively be possessed by more than one device/article (whether or not they cooperate).

[0243] Similarly, where more than one device or article is described herein (whether or not they cooperate), a single device/article may alternatively be used in place of the more than one device or article that is described. For example, a plurality of computer-based devices may be substituted with a single computer-based device. Accordingly, the various functionality that is described as being possessed by more than one device or article may alternatively be possessed by a single device/article.

[0244] The functionality and/or the features of a single device that is described may be alternatively embodied by one or more other devices which are described but are not explicitly described as having such functionality/features. Thus, other embodiments need not include the described device itself, but rather can include the one or more other devices which would, in those other embodiments, have such functionality/features.

[0245] Numerous embodiments are described in this patent application, and are presented for illustrative purposes only. The described embodiments are not, and are not intended to be, limiting in any sense. The presently disclosed invention(s) are widely applicable to numerous embodiments, as is readily apparent from the disclosure. One of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that the disclosed invention(s) may be practiced with various modifications

and alterations, such as structural, logical, software, and electrical modifications. Although particular features of the disclosed invention(s) may be described with reference to one or more particular embodiments and/or drawings, it should be understood that such features are not limited to usage in the one or more particular embodiments or drawings with reference to which they are described, unless expressly specified otherwise.

[0246] The present disclosure is neither a literal description of all embodiments of the invention nor a listing of features of the invention which must be present in all embodiments.

[0247] Neither the Title (set forth at the beginning of the first page of this patent application) nor the Abstract (set forth at the end of this patent application) is to be taken as limiting in any way as the scope of the disclosed invention(s). An Abstract has been included in this application merely because an Abstract of not more than 150 words is required under 37 C.F.R. §1.72(b).

[0248] The title of this patent application and headings of sections provided in this patent application are for convenience only, and are not to be taken as limiting the disclosure in any way.

[0249] Devices that are described as in communication with each other need not be in continuous communication with each other, unless expressly specified otherwise. On the contrary, such devices need only transmit to each other as necessary or desirable, and may actually refrain from exchanging data most of the time. For example, a machine in communication with another machine via the Internet may not transmit data to the other machine for long period of time (e.g. weeks at a time). In addition, devices that are in communication with each other may communicate directly or indirectly through one or more intermediaries.

[0250] A description of an embodiment with several components or features does not imply that all or even any of such components/features are required. On the contrary, a variety of optional components are described to illustrate the wide variety of possible embodiments of the present invention(s). Unless otherwise specified explicitly, no component/feature is essential or required.

[0251] Although process steps, algorithms or the like may be described in a sequential order, such processes may be configured to work in different orders. In other words, any sequence or order of steps that may be explicitly described does not necessarily indicate a requirement that the steps be performed in that order. On the contrary, the steps of processes described herein may be performed in any order practical. Further, some steps may be performed simultaneously despite being described or implied as occurring non-simultaneously (e.g., because one step is described after the other step). Moreover, the illustration of a process by its depiction in a drawing does not imply that the illustrated process is exclusive of other variations and modifications thereto, does not imply that the illustrated process or any of its steps are necessary to the invention, and does not imply that the illustrated process is preferred.

[0252] Although a process may be described as including a plurality of steps, that does not imply that all or any of the steps are essential or required. Various other embodiments within the scope of the described invention(s) include other

processes that omit some or all of the described steps. Unless otherwise specified explicitly, no step is essential or required.

[0253] Although a product may be described as including a plurality of components, aspects, qualities, characteristics and/or features, that does not indicate that all of the plurality are essential or required. Various other embodiments within the scope of the described invention(s) include other products that omit some or all of the described plurality.

[0254] Unless expressly specified otherwise, an enumerated list of items (which may or may not be numbered) does not imply that any or all of the items are mutually exclusive. Therefore it is possible, but not necessarily true, that something can be considered to be, or fit the definition of, two or more of the items in an enumerated list. Also, an item in the enumerated list can be a subset (a specific type of) of another item in the enumerated list. For example, the enumerated list “a computer, a laptop, a PDA” does not imply that any or all of the three items of that list are mutually exclusive—e.g., an item can be both a laptop and a computer, and a “laptop” can be a subset of (a specific type of) a “computer”.

[0255] Likewise, unless expressly specified otherwise, an enumerated list of items (which may or may not be numbered) does not imply that any or all of the items are collectively exhaustive or otherwise comprehensive of any category. For example, the enumerated list “a computer, a laptop, a PDA” does not imply that any or all of the three items of that list are comprehensive of any category.

[0256] Further, an enumerated listing of items does not imply that the items are ordered in any manner according to the order in which they are enumerated.

[0257] In a claim, a limitation of the claim which includes the phrase “means for” or the phrase “step for” means that 35 U.S.C. §112, paragraph 6, applies to that limitation.

[0258] In a claim, a limitation of the claim which does not include the phrase “means for” or the phrase “step for” means that 35 U.S.C. §112, paragraph 6 does not apply to that limitation, regardless of whether that limitation recites a function without recitation of structure, material or acts for performing that function. For example, in a claim, the mere use of the phrase “step of” or the phrase “steps of” in referring to one or more steps of the claim or of another claim does not mean that 35 U.S.C. §112, paragraph 6, applies to that step(s).

[0259] With respect to a means or a step for performing a specified function in accordance with 35 U.S.C. §112, paragraph 6, the corresponding structure, material or acts described in the specification, and equivalents thereof, may perform additional functions as well as the specified function.

[0260] Computers, processors, computing devices and like products are structures that can perform a wide variety of functions. Such products can be operable to perform a specified function by executing one or more programs, such as a program stored in a memory device of that product or in a memory device which that product accesses. Unless expressly specified otherwise, such a program need not be based on any particular algorithm, such as any particular algorithm that might be disclosed in this patent application. It is well known to one of ordinary skill in the art that a

specified function may be implemented via different algorithms, and any of a number of different algorithms would be a mere design choice for carrying out the specified function.

[0261] Therefore, with respect to a means or a step for performing a specified function in accordance with 35 U.S.C. §112, paragraph 6, structure corresponding to a specified function includes any product programmed to perform the specified function. Such structure includes programmed products which perform the function, regardless of whether such product is programmed with (i) a disclosed algorithm for performing the function, (ii) an algorithm that is similar to a disclosed algorithm, or (iii) a different algorithm for performing the function.

[0262] Thus a description of a process is likewise a description of an apparatus for performing the process. The apparatus can include, e.g., a processor and those input devices and output devices that are appropriate to perform the method.

[0263] Further, programs that implement such methods (as well as other types of data) may be stored and transmitted using a variety of media (e.g., computer readable media) in a number of manners. In some embodiments, hard-wired circuitry or custom hardware may be used in place of, or in combination with, some or all of the software instructions that can implement the processes of various embodiments. Thus, various combinations of hardware and software may be used instead of software only.

[0264] The term “computer-readable medium” refers to any medium that participates in providing data (e.g., instructions, data structures) which may be read by a computer, a processor or a like device. Such a medium may take many forms, including but not limited to, non-volatile media, volatile media, and transmission media. Non-volatile media include, for example, optical or magnetic disks and other persistent memory. Volatile media include dynamic random access memory (DRAM), which typically constitutes the main memory. Transmission media include coaxial cables, copper wire and fiber optics, including the wires that comprise a system bus coupled to the processor. Transmission media may include or convey acoustic waves, light waves and electromagnetic emissions, such as those generated during radio frequency (RF) and infrared (IR) data communications. Common forms of computer-readable media include, for example, a floppy disk, a flexible disk, hard disk, magnetic tape, any other magnetic medium, a CD-ROM, DVD, any other optical medium, punch cards, paper tape, any other physical medium with patterns of holes, a RAM, a PROM, an EPROM, a FLASH-EEPROM, any other memory chip or cartridge, a carrier wave as described hereinafter, or any other medium from which a computer can read.

[0265] Various forms of computer readable media may be involved in carrying data (e.g. sequences of instructions) to a processor. For example, data may be (i) delivered from RAM to a processor; (ii) carried over a wireless transmission medium; (iii) formatted and/or transmitted according to numerous formats, standards or protocols, such as Ethernet (or IEEE 802.3), SAP, ATP, Bluetooth™, and TCP/IP, TDMA, CDMA, and 3G; and/or (iv) encrypted to ensure privacy or prevent fraud in any of a variety of ways well known in the art.

[0266] Thus a description of a process is likewise a description of a computer-readable medium storing a program for performing the process. The computer-readable medium can store (in any appropriate format) those program elements which are appropriate to perform the method.

[0267] Just as the description of various steps in a process does not indicate that all the described steps are required, embodiments of an apparatus include a computer/computing device operable to perform some (but not necessarily all) of the described process.

[0268] Likewise, just as the description of various steps in a process does not indicate that all the described steps are required, embodiments of a computer-readable medium storing a program or data structure include a computer-readable medium storing a program that, when executed, can cause a processor to perform some (but not necessarily all) of the described process.

[0269] Where databases are described, it will be understood by one of ordinary skill in the art that (i) alternative database structures to those described may be readily employed, and (ii) other memory structures besides databases may be readily employed. Any illustrations or descriptions of any sample databases presented herein are illustrative arrangements for stored representations of information. Any number of other arrangements may be employed besides those suggested by, e.g., tables illustrated in drawings or elsewhere. Similarly, any illustrated entries of the databases represent exemplary information only; one of ordinary skill in the art will understand that the number and content of the entries can be different from those described herein. Further, despite any depiction of the databases as tables, other formats (including relational databases, object-based models and/or distributed databases) are well known and could be used to store and manipulate the data types described herein. Likewise, object methods or behaviors of a database can be used to implement various processes, such as the described herein. In addition, the databases may, in a known manner, be stored locally or remotely from any device(s) which access data in the database.

[0270] Various embodiments can be configured to work in a network environment including a computer that is in communication (e.g., via a communications network) with one or more devices. The computer may communicate with the devices directly or indirectly, via any wired or wireless medium (e.g. the Internet, LAN, WAN or Ethernet, Token Ring, a telephone line, a cable line, a radio channel, an optical communications line, commercial on-line service providers, bulletin board systems, a satellite communications link, a combination of any of the above). Each of the devices may themselves comprise computers or other computing devices, such as those based on the Intel® Pentium® or Centrino™ processor, that are adapted to communicate with the computer. Any number and type of devices may be in communication with the computer.

[0271] In an embodiment, a server computer or centralized authority may not be necessary or desirable. For example, the present invention may, in an embodiment, be practiced on one or more devices without a central authority. In such an embodiment, any functions described herein as performed by the server computer or data described as stored on the server computer may instead be performed by or stored on one or more such devices.

[0272] The present disclosure provides, to one of ordinary skill in the art, an enabling description of several embodiments and/or inventions. Some of these embodiments and/or inventions may not be claimed in this patent application, but may nevertheless be claimed in one or more continuing applications that claim the benefit of priority of this patent application. Applicants intend to file additional applications to pursue patents for subject matter that has been disclosed and enabled but not claimed in this patent application.

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:
 - providing a virtual environment accessible by a plurality of players, wherein the players are able to interact with the virtual environment and each other via avatars;
 - receiving a text message from a first player;
 - associating the text message with a synthetic voice message;
 - outputting the synthetic voice message to a second player.
2. The method of claim 1 further comprising
 - receiving a voice message from the first player and
 - converting the voice message into a text message.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the synthetic voice message is a recording of a celebrity voice.
4. The method of claim 1 further comprising providing a plurality of synthetic voices.
5. The method of claim 4 further comprising receiving a synthetic voice selection from the first player.
6. The method of claim 5 wherein receiving a synthetic voice selection comprises receiving a fee from the first player in return for the ability of have the selected synthetic voice associated with text messages provided by the first player.
7. The method of claim 6 wherein the synthetic voice selection is for a limited period of time.
8. The method of claim 6 further comprising:
 - receiving an offer from the first player of a fee in return for the ability of have the selected synthetic voice associated with text messages provided by the first player;
 - receiving an offer from a second player of a fee in return for the ability of have the selected synthetic voice associated with text messages provided by the second player; and
 - associating the synthetic voice with only one of the first and second players, based on the offers.

9. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
 - recording game related messages in a plurality of different voices; and
 - identifying each different voice as a different synthetic voice.
10. The method of claim 9 wherein at least one of the voices is a voice that is a celebrity voice.
11. A method comprising:
 - providing a virtual environment accessible by a plurality of players, wherein the players are able to interact and play games with the virtual environment and each other via avatars;
 - receiving a text message from a first player;
 - displaying the text message in a game;
 - storing the text message;
 - outputting the text message in the form of a fixed media presentation.
12. The method of claim 11 wherein the fixed media presentation is a literary work.
13. The method of claim 12 wherein the literary work is a comic book.
14. The method of claim 13 wherein the comic book contains screen capture images from the game.
15. The method of claim 11 wherein the fixed media presentation is a movie.
16. The method of claim 11 further comprising:
 - associating the text message with a synthetic voice message; and
 - outputting the synthetic voice message to a second player.
17. The method of claim 16 further comprising:
 - receiving a voice message from the first player; and
 - converting the voice message into a text message.
18. The method of claim 16 further comprising providing a plurality of synthetic voices.
19. The method of claim 18 further comprising receiving a synthetic voice selection from the first player.
20. The method of claim 19 wherein receiving a synthetic voice selection comprises receiving a fee from the first player in return for the ability of have the selected synthetic voice associated with text messages provided by the first player.

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