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(54) **GAMING MACHINE WITH A HOLD SYMBOL FUNCTION**

Publication Classification

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A gaming machine and associated method. Symbols are selected and presented on a display in a first random selection process. Each symbol is selected independently of each other symbol and the plurality of symbols are separated into at least three distinct groups of symbols, each group containing at least two symbol. A player of the gaming machine selects one or more of the groups of symbols to be held. In a second random selection process any symbols that are not held are reselected. A prize is paid according to a pay table and the symbols presented following the second random selection process.

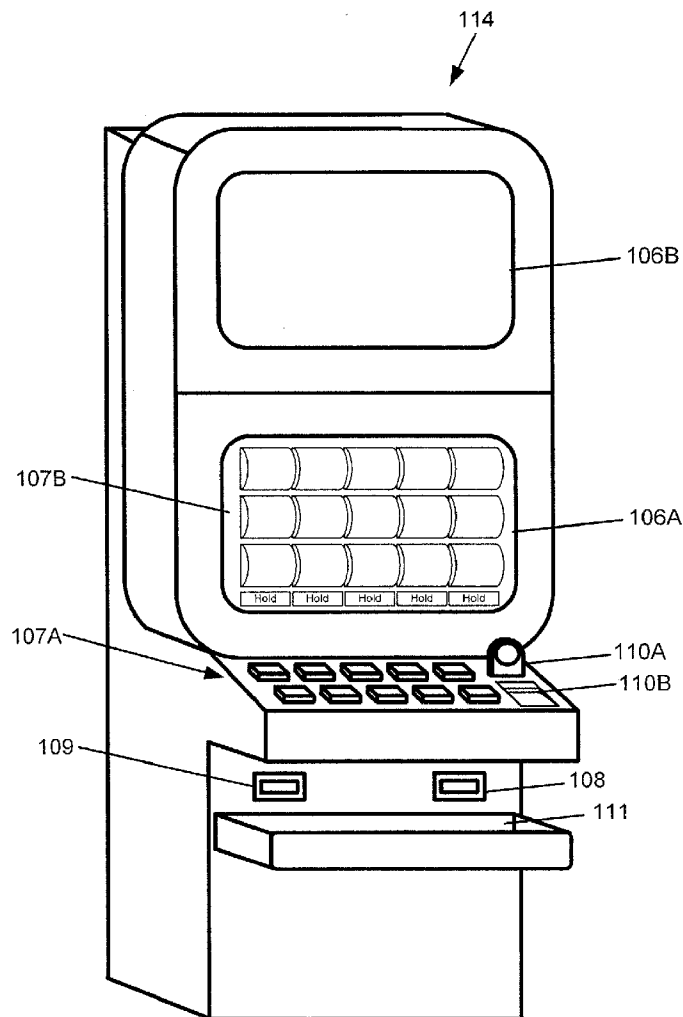
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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 61/060,016, filed on Jun. 9, 2008.



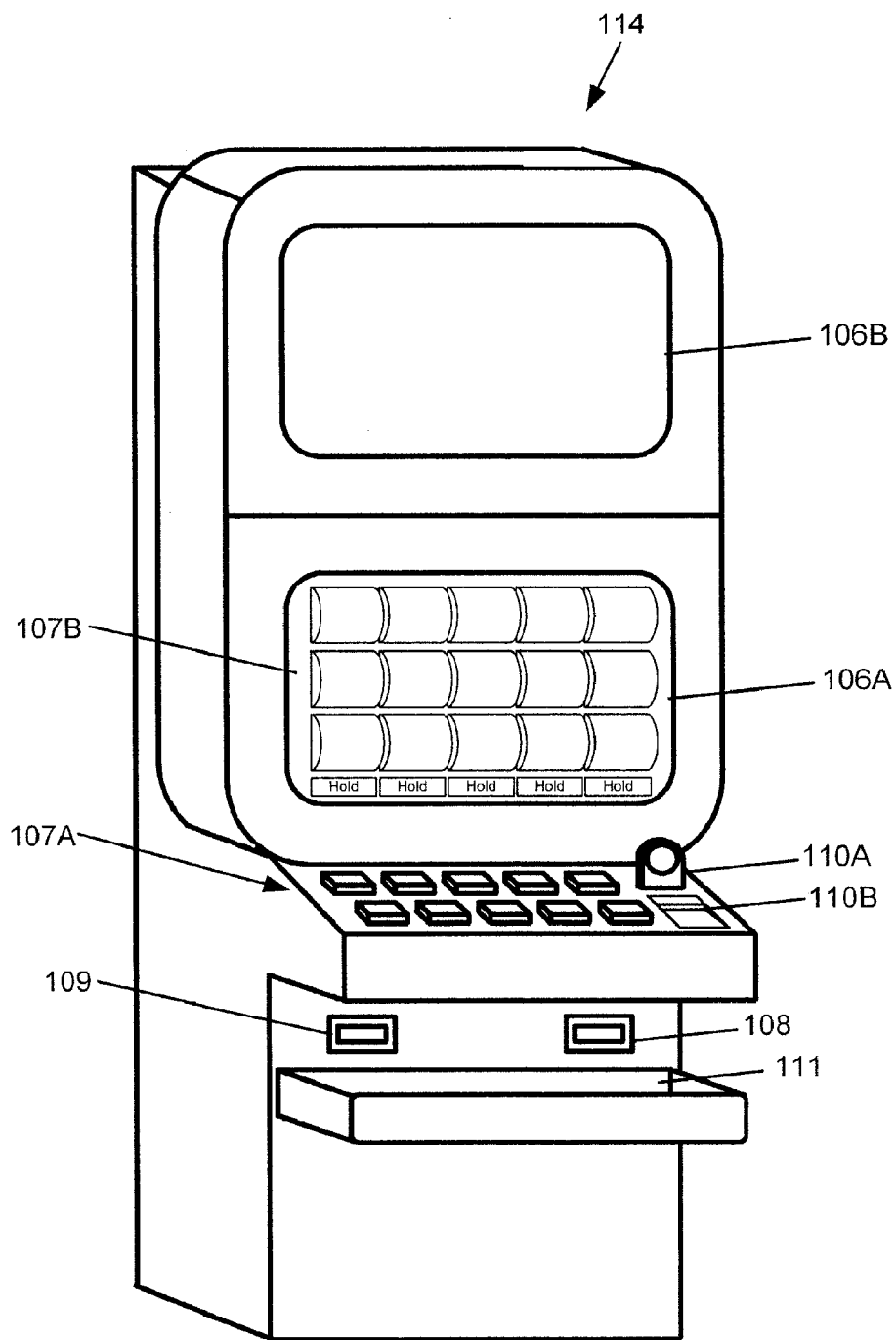


Figure 1

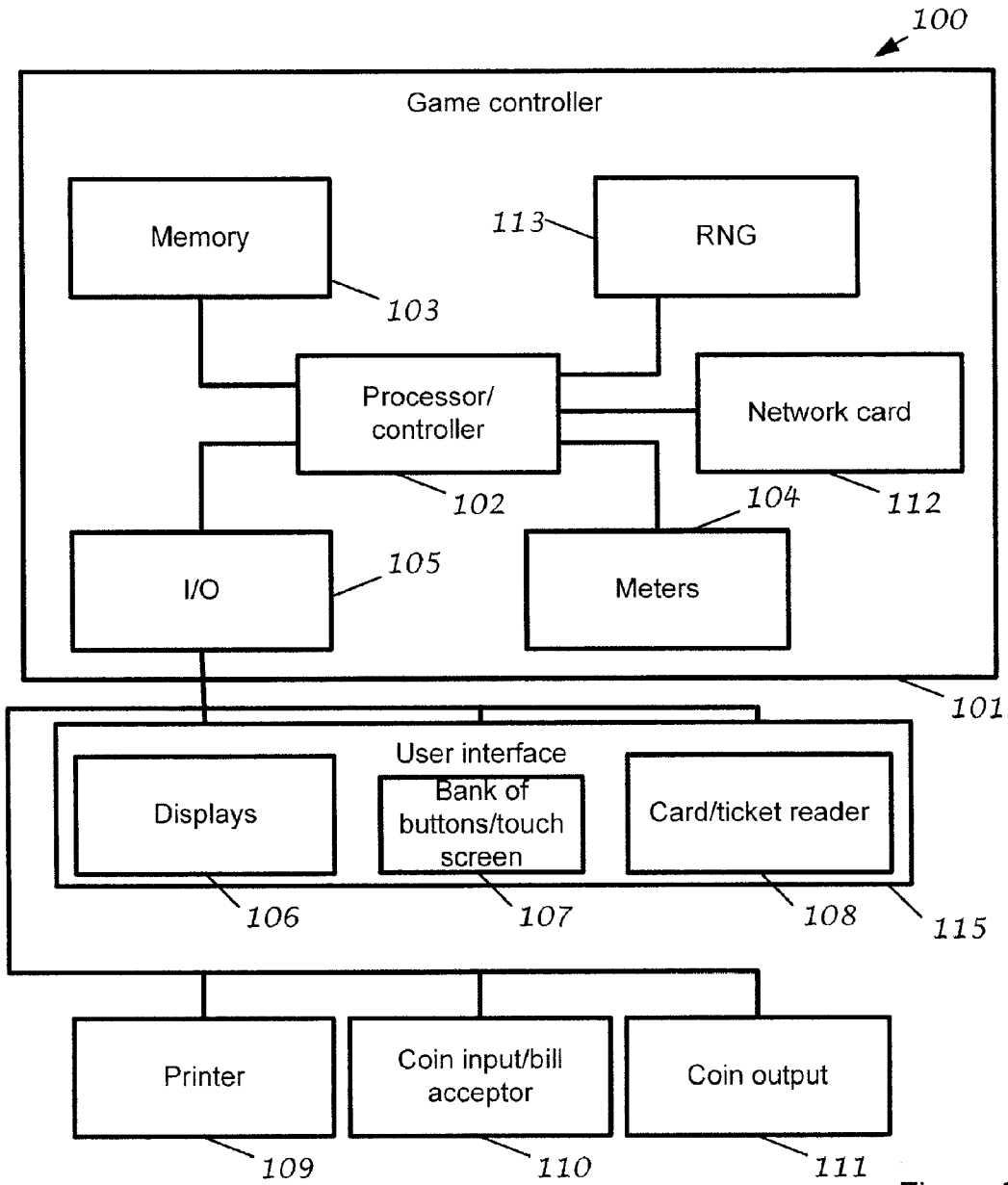


Figure 2

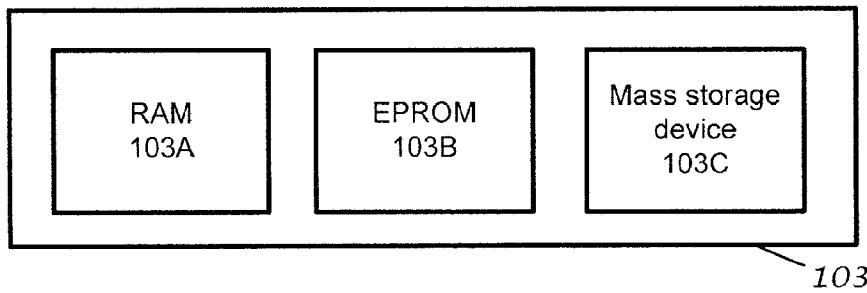


Figure 3

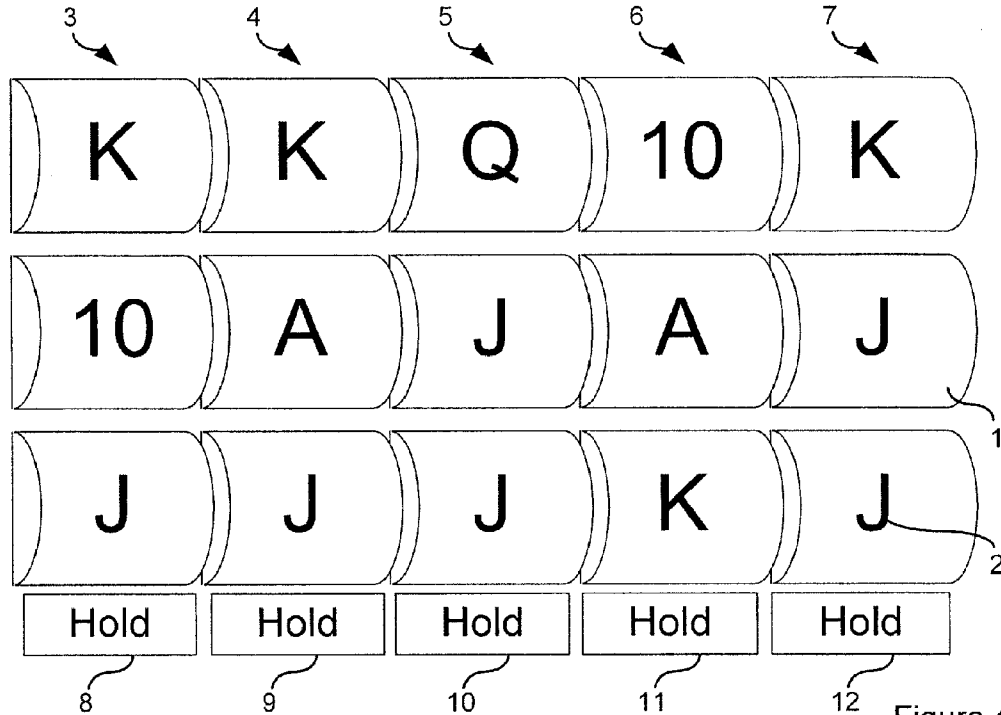


Figure 4

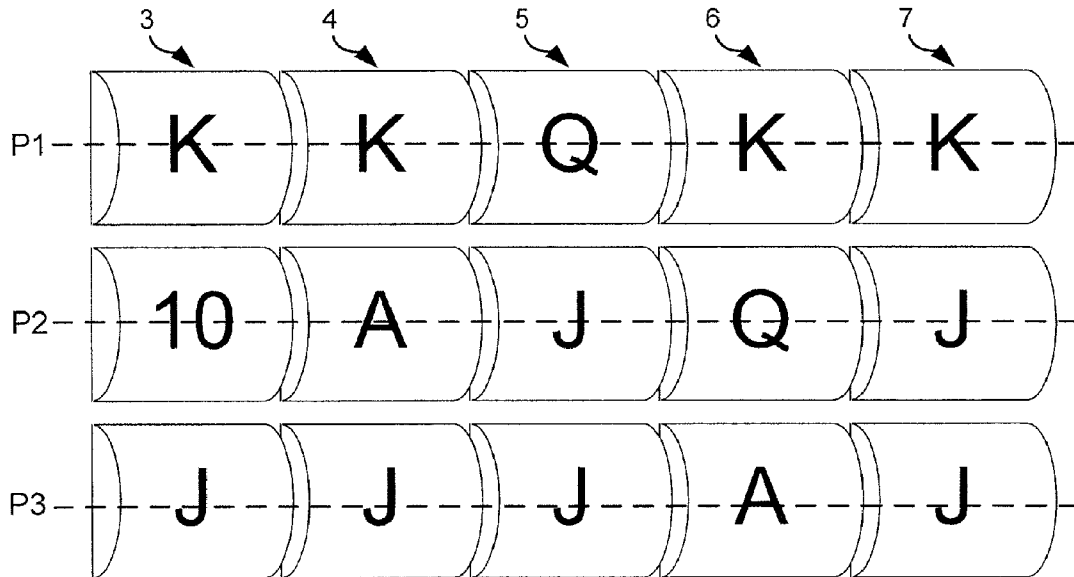


Figure 5

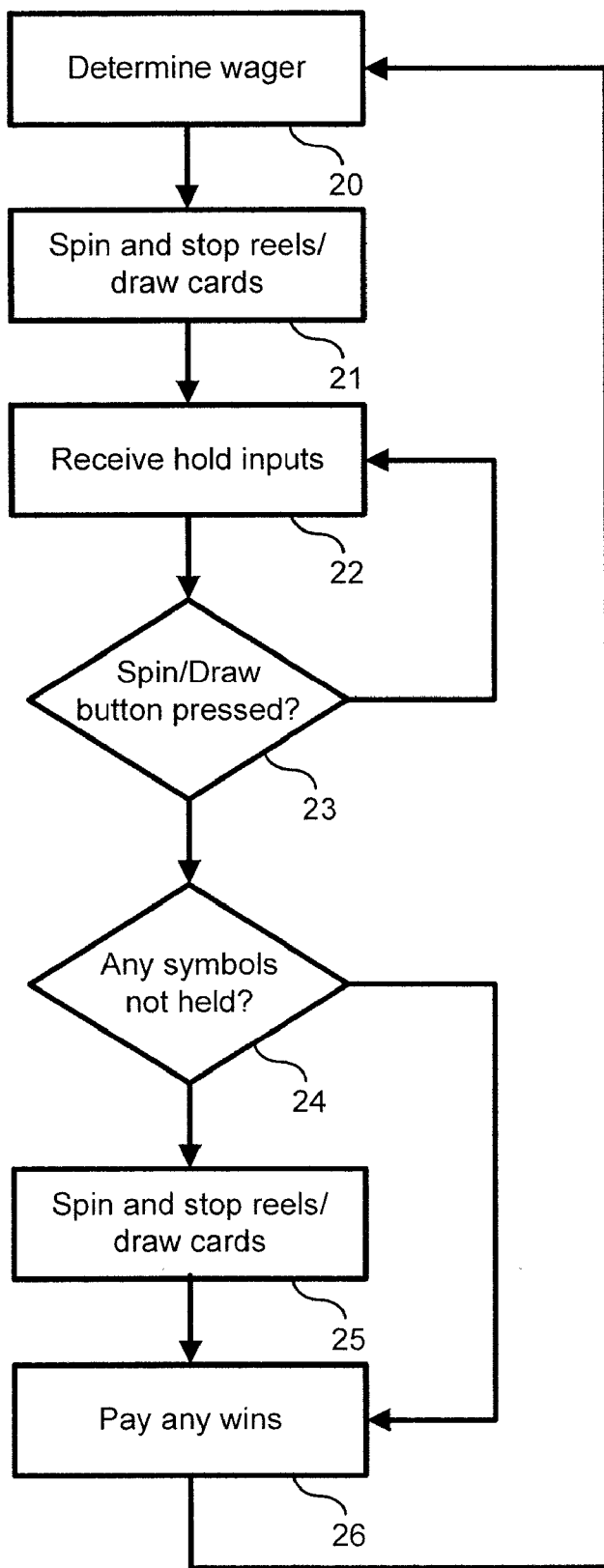


Figure 6

Figure 7

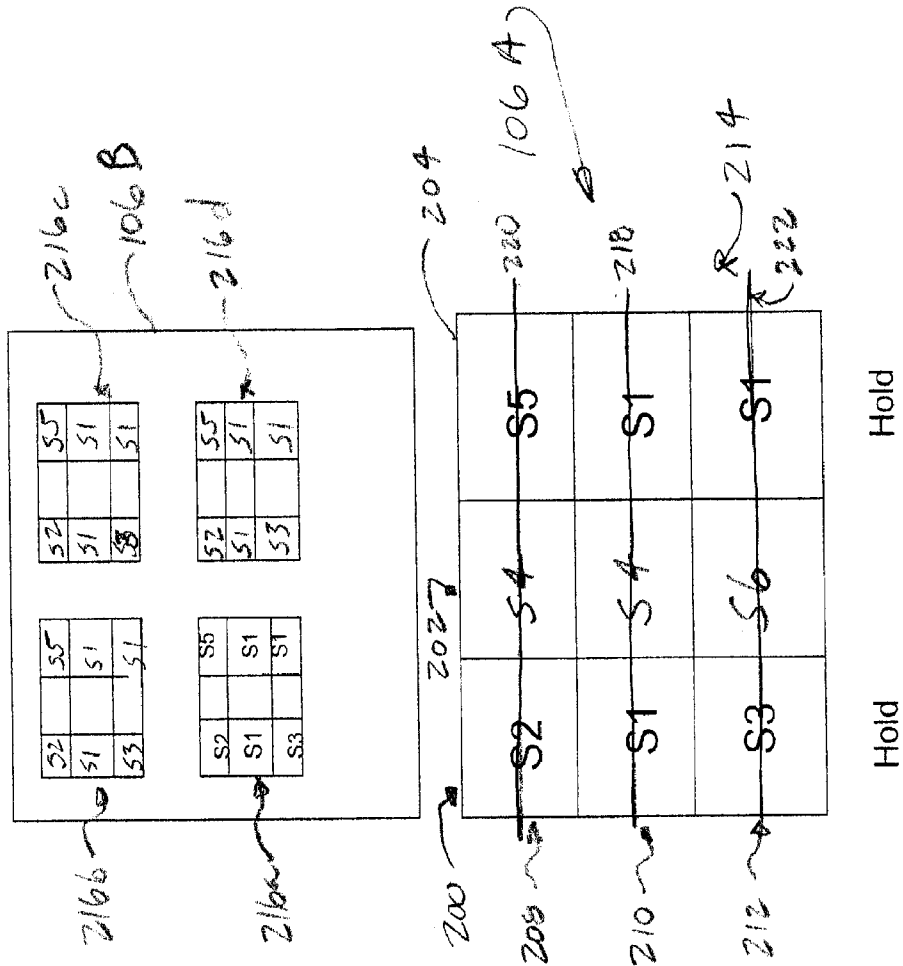


Figure 8

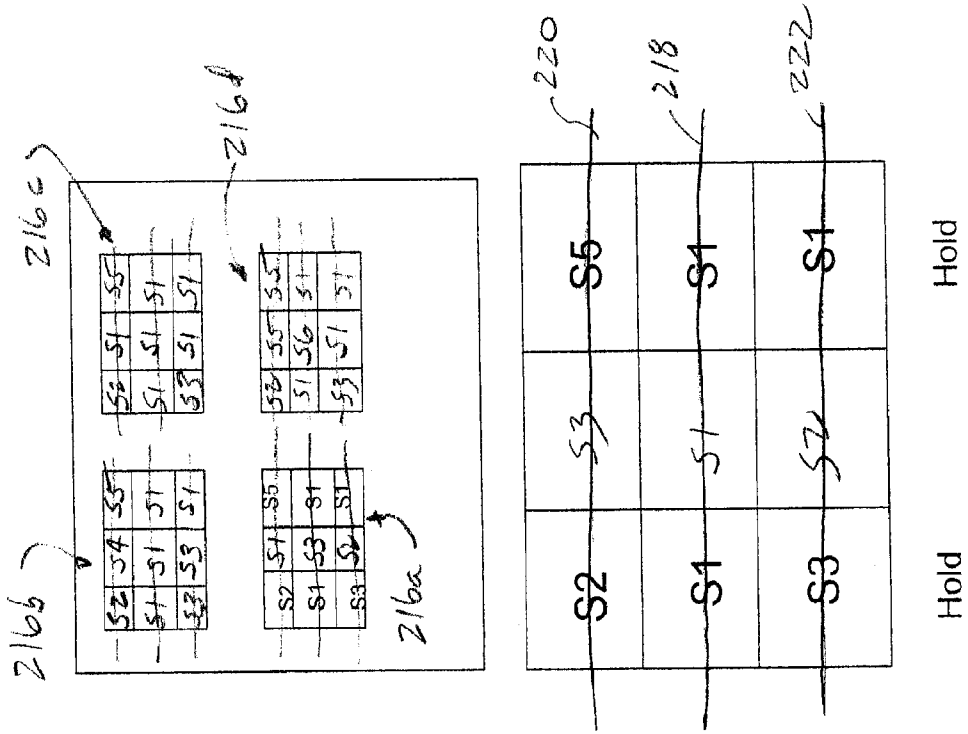


Figure 9

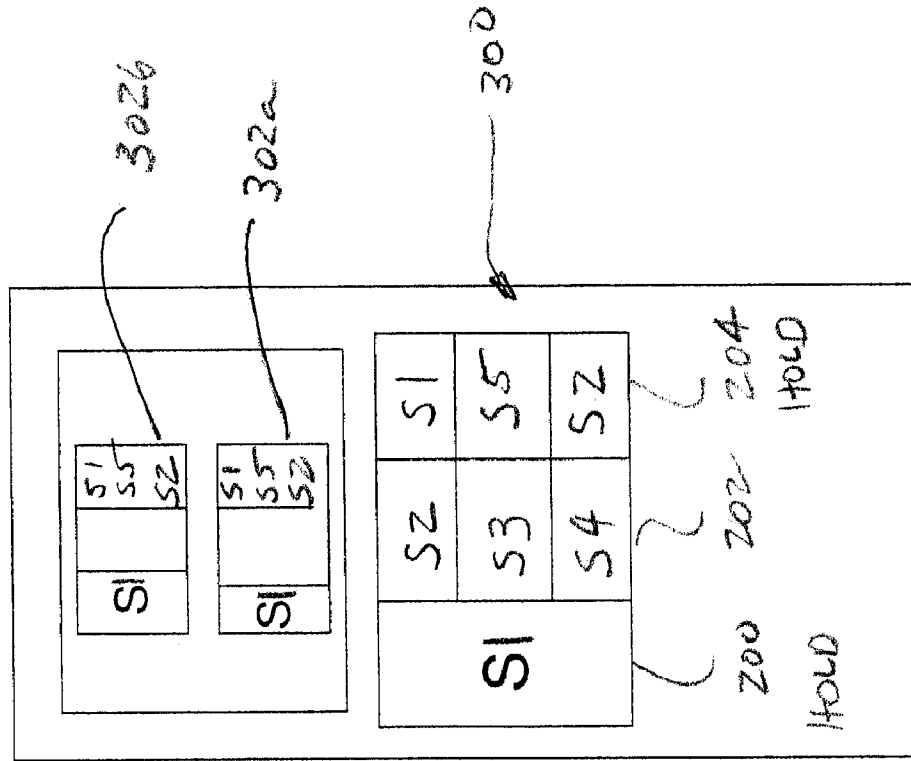
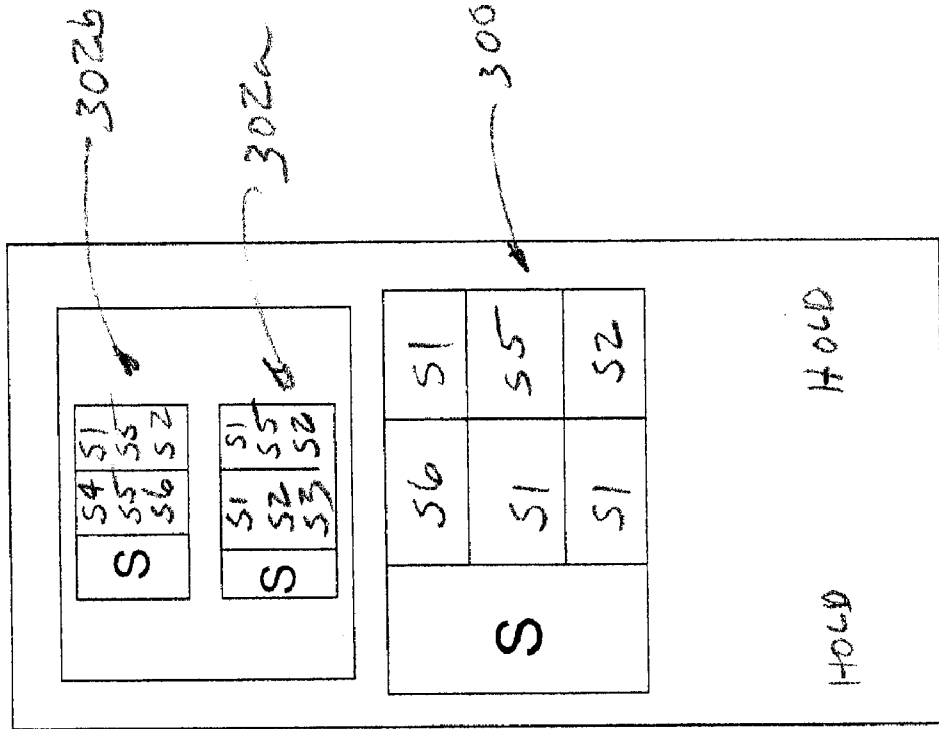


Figure 10



GAMING MACHINE WITH A HOLD SYMBOL FUNCTION

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/060,016 having a filing date of Jun. 9, 2008, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] [Not Applicable]

MICROFICHE/COPYRIGHT REFERENCE

[0003] [Not Applicable]

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The present invention generally relates to gaming machines and methods of gaming. A particular embodiment of the present invention relates to gaming machines that select and present a plurality of game outcomes on which the player may stake a wager.

[0005] With the increase of gambling at gaming venues has come increased competition between gaming venues to obtain a larger share of the total gambling spend. Gaming venue operators have therefore continuously looked for new variations and types of games in order to attract both new and return customers to their venues.

[0006] In response to this need, suppliers of gaming devices and systems have attempted to provide the sought after variety, while still developing games that comply with the relevant regulations in the jurisdiction of the gaming venue operator. Suppliers therefore are faced with restrictions on the types of games and gaming machines that are allowable, both in terms of the prevailing regulations and in terms of providing a return on investment to the gaming venue operators.

[0007] One way in which suppliers have provided increased variety and interest is to provide multi-line spinning reel gaming machines and other games with a plurality of outcomes, such as poker-style card games with multiple hands. The increased number of game outcomes that result (one outcome per pay line in a spinning reel game and one outcome per hand in a card game), provides for increased wager options. For example, the player may select to wager on one pay line or hand, or may select to wager on a plurality of pay lines or hands. In addition, the player may select to wager a variable amount on each outcome. For example, in a spinning reel game, in one game play the player may wager 1 credit per pay line selected and in another game play may wager 10 credits per pay line selected.

[0008] In addition to the demand for new games, there continues to be a demand for traditional types of games. For example, gaming machines with mechanical reels driven by stepper motors continue to be popular with many players. There is therefore also a demand for gaming machines that may be of interest to these players.

[0009] With regards to gaming machines players often look to games where they have a degree of input and control over the outcome. Games such as video Poker give players a chance to select, from an initial display of typically five playing cards, which cards to hold and which to discard in the hopes of improving the hand ranking (and award) on the draw where discarded cards are replaced.

[0010] Still a further aspect of gaming is the desire of players to be able to increase their odds for receiving a winning outcome. This can be done by providing, more wager options as described above such as providing players with the ability to wager on multiple pay lines or arrangements. Providing more wagering propositions increases the odds for a player to receive a winning outcome and, for the casino, increases the amounts wagered and hence their expected profits.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] According to a first aspect of the invention, there is provided a method for use with a gaming machine that is arranged to select symbols, present the selected symbols on a display and award an award if a winning outcome occurs, the method comprising:

[0012] in a first random selection process selecting a plurality of symbols and presenting the selected symbols on a display of the gaming machine, wherein each symbol is selected independently of each other symbol and the plurality of symbols are separated into at least three distinct groups of symbols, each group containing at least two symbols;

[0013] receiving a selection from a player of the gaming machine of one or more of the groups of symbols to be held;

[0014] in a second random selection process reselecting any symbols that are not selected by the player to be held and presenting the reselected symbols on the display; and

[0015] paying a prize according to a pay table and the symbols presented following the second random selection process.

[0016] In one embodiment, the symbols are presented in a matrix having n rows and m columns, wherein m is at least 3 and n is at least 2 and wherein the at least three distinct groups of symbols are the symbols in each column of the matrix.

[0017] In one embodiment, the method further includes providing the option to select none of the groups of symbols to be held.

[0018] In one embodiment, the method further includes providing the option to select all of the groups of symbols to be held.

[0019] In one embodiment, the display is the visible portion of a plurality of physical spinning reels, one reel for each said presented symbol on the display.

[0020] According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for use with a gaming machine that is arranged to, in response to the staking of a wager, select symbols, present the selected symbols on a display to represent a plurality of outcomes and award an award if a winning outcome occurs, the method comprising:

[0021] receiving a selection of a plurality of outcomes on which to stake a wager;

[0022] in a first random selection process selecting a plurality of symbols and presenting the selected symbols on a display of the gaming machine in manner so that a plurality of initial outcomes are visually determinable, wherein each symbol is selected independently of each other symbol and the plurality of symbols are separated into at least three distinct groups of symbols, each group containing at least two symbols and wherein each of the plurality of outcomes includes one and only one member of each group of symbols;

[0023] receiving a selection from a player of the gaming machine of one or more of the groups of symbols to be held;

[0024] in a second random selection process reselecting any symbols that are not selected by the player to be held and

presenting the reselected symbols on the display so that a plurality of final outcomes are visually determinable; and

[0025] following the second random selection process either paying a prize or not according to a pay table and the final outcomes.

[0026] In one embodiment, the selection of a plurality of outcomes on which to stake a wager is a selection of three outcomes. In one embodiment, there are five said groups of symbols.

[0027] According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a gaming machine that is arranged to select symbols, present the selected symbols on a display to represent a plurality of game outcomes and award an award if a winning outcome occurs in the plurality of game outcomes, the gaming machine comprising:

[0028] a game controller in communication with a display, the game controller including a random number generator, the game controller adapted to use numbers generated by the random number generator to select symbols for presentation on the display in a process including two stages, wherein

[0029] in a first stage of the process, a first selection of a plurality of symbols is presented on the display to form a plurality of initial outcomes, wherein each symbol is selected independently of each other symbol;

[0030] in a second stage of the process, one or more subsets of symbols are reselected and presented on the display to form a plurality of final outcomes, wherein each subset includes one and only one symbol from each of the plurality of outcomes;

[0031] following the second stage paying a prize according to a pay table and the final outcomes.

[0032] In one embodiment, the gaming machine includes a user interface adapted to allow a player of the gaming machine to select the number of said subsets of the first selection of symbols to be reselected.

[0033] In one embodiment, the symbols are presented in a matrix having n rows and m columns, wherein n is at least 2 and m is at least 3 and wherein subsets of the first selection of symbols available for selection consist of at least two of the columns of symbols in the matrix. In this embodiment, the gaming machine and user interface may be adapted so that the player can select any of the m columns to be reselected. The gaming machine and user interface may also be adapted so that the player can select all or none of the m columns to be reselected.

[0034] In one embodiment, the display is the visible portion of a plurality of physical spinning reels, one reel for each said presented symbol on the display.

[0035] Further aspects of the present invention and further embodiments of the aspects described in the preceding paragraphs will become apparent from the following description, given by way of example and with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

[0036] FIG. 1: shows diagrammatically, a view of a gaming console suitable for implementing the present invention.

[0037] FIG. 2: shows a block diagram of gaming machine suitable for implementing the present invention.

[0038] FIG. 3: shows a block diagram of components of the memory of the gaming machine represented in FIG. 2.

[0039] FIG. 4: shows diagrammatically, a first game screen according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0040] FIG. 5: shows diagrammatically, a second game screen according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0041] FIG. 6: shows a flow diagram of a process performed in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0042] FIGS. 7 and 8: show a further embodiment of the present invention; and

[0043] FIGS. 9 and 10: show yet another embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0044] In FIG. 1 of the accompanying drawings, one example of a gaming console that is suitable to implement the present invention is generally referenced by arrow 114.

[0045] The gaming console 114 includes two displays 106A, 106B on one or both of which is displayed representations of a game that can be played by a player and a bank of buttons 107A and/or a touch screen 107B to enable a player to play the game. The displays 106 may be video display units, such as a cathode ray tube screen device, a liquid crystal display, plasma screen, any other suitable video display unit, or the visible portion of an electromechanical device. In one particular embodiment of the invention, the display 106A is an array of physical spinning reels, which are rotated by stepper motors. The display 106B may display artwork, including for example, pay tables and details of bonus awards and other information or images relating to the game. In alternative gaming consoles the display 106B may be omitted, optionally replaced by a static display. Where a single game is played, as hereinafter described, only display 106A need be a processor controlled display such as an LCD, plasma, OLED or other video display. Where multiple games are played display 106A may be configured to handle the display of the games or additionally or alternatively the top display 106B may be a processor controlled video display displaying one or more games to the player.

[0046] A credit input including a coin input 110A and/or bill collector 110B allows a player to provide credit for wagering and a coin output 111 is provided for cash payouts from the gaming console 114. A card and/or ticket reader 108 and a printer 109 may be provided to provide player tracking, cashless game play or other gaming and non-gaming related functions.

[0047] FIG. 2 shows a block diagram of a gaming machine, generally referenced by arrow 100, suitable for implementing the present invention. The gaming machine 100 may include the gaming console 114 shown in FIG. 1 and accordingly like reference numerals have been used to describe like components in FIGS. 1 and 2.

[0048] The gaming machine 100 includes a game controller 101, which in the illustrated example includes a computational device 102, which may be a microprocessor, microcontroller, programmable logic device or other suitable device. Instructions and data to control operation of the computational device 102 are stored in a memory 103, which is in data communication with, or forms part of, the computational device 102. Typically, the gaming machine 100 will include both volatile and non-volatile memory and more than one of each type of memory, with such memories being collectively represented by the memory 103. The instructions to cause the game controller 101 to implement the present invention will be stored in the memory 103. The instructions and data for controlling operation of the computational device 102 may be stored on a computer readable medium from which they are

loaded into the gaming machine memory 103. The instructions and data may be conveyed to the gaming machine by means of a data signal in a transmission channel. Examples of such transmission channels include network connections, the Internet or an intranet and wireless communication channels. [0049] The game controller 101 may include hardware credit meters 104 for the purposes of regulatory compliance and also include an input/output (I/O) interface 105 for communicating with the peripheral devices of the gaming machine 100. The input/output interface 105 and/or the peripheral devices may be intelligent devices with their own memory for instructions and data.

[0050] In the example shown in FIG. 2, the peripheral devices that communicate with the controller are the displays 106, bank of buttons/touch screen 107, the card and/or ticket reader 108, the printer 109, a bill acceptor and/or coin input 110 and a coin output 111. Additional devices may be included as part of the gaming machine 100, or devices omitted as required for the specific implementation.

[0051] The bank of buttons 107A and/or touch screen 107B together with one or both of the displays 106 may provide a user interface 115 through which the gaming machine 100 and player communicate. If a card/ticket reader 108 is provided, this may also form part of the user interface 115.

[0052] In addition, the gaming machine 100 may include a communications interface, for example a network card 112. The network card 112, may for example, send status information, accounting information or other information to a central controller, server or database and receive data or commands from the central controller, server or database. The network card 112 may also enable communication with a central player account, allowing cashless gaming. One or more of the peripheral devices, for example the card/ticket reader 108 may be able to communicate directly with the network card 112. The network card 112 and the I/O interface 105 may be suitably implemented as a single machine communications interface.

[0053] The game controller 101 may also include a random number generator (RNG) 113, which generates a series of random numbers that are used by the computational device 102 to determine the outcomes of games played on the gaming machine 100. In particular, the RNG 113 determines the displayed stopping position of each of the reels 1 (see FIG. 4). Reels 1 may be either electro-mechanical stepper reels or video generated representations of reels.

[0054] The game controller 101 may have distributed hardware and software components that communicate with each other directly or through a network or other communication channel. The game controller 101 may also be located in part or in its entirety remote from the user interface 115. Also, the computational device 102 may comprise a plurality of devices, which may be local or remote from each other and may incorporate jackpot servers and other devices that determine game play of games on the gaming console 114. Instructions and data for controlling the operation of the user interface 115 may be conveyed to the user interface 115 by means of a data signal in a transmission channel. The user interface 115 may be a computational device, for example a personal computer, used by a person to play a game provided from a remote game controller 101.

[0055] FIG. 3 shows an exemplary block diagram of the main components of the memory 103. The RAM 103A typically temporarily holds instructions and data related to the execution of game programs and communication functions

performed by the computational controller 102. The EPROM 103B may be a boot ROM device and/or may contain system and game related code. The mass storage device 103C may be used to store game programs, the integrity of which may be verified and/or authenticated by the computational controller 102 using protected code from the EPROM 103B or elsewhere.

[0056] FIG. 4 shows a screen display that may be displayed on the display 106A that includes a touch screen 107B. The screen display in this embodiment shows a game that displays on the display 106A fifteen reels 1 (one only indicated by a reference numeral), each of which presents a symbol 2 (one only indicated). In the embodiment shown, the reels 1 are arranged in an array in the form of a matrix having three rows and five columns 3-7. Below the columns 3-7 is displayed 'Hold' icons 8-12, which represent the location of touch panels on the touch screen 107B.

[0057] Each of the fifteen reels 1 has a plurality of symbols on it and in this embodiment displays a single symbol when stopped. The number of symbols on each of the reels 1 is a matter of design choice. For example, each reel may have between 15 to 25 symbols, with either all reels having the same number of symbols or different reels having differing numbers of symbols, depending on the specific implementation. The symbols sets on the reels 1 may all be the same or may differ between the reels.

[0058] When the game is played, the stopping position of each of the reels 1 is individually randomly determined. Accordingly the symbols 2 displayed by each reel 1 is randomly determined independently of the stopping position of the other reels 1. By way of example only, the reels may display the symbols as shown in FIG. 4.

[0059] The player then selects between zero and all of the columns 3-7 to 'Hold'. Equivalently, the player may select between zero and all of the columns 3-7 to reselect or discard.

[0060] For example, the pay table of the game may specify that three, four or five 'J' symbols along a pay line pay prizes. If the symbols shown in FIG. 4 are displayed in the initial display or "deal", the player may choose to hold columns 3, 4, 5 and 7, both to preserve the winning combination of three 'J' symbols and in the hope that the reel on the third row of column 6, when re-spun, will reveal a 'J' symbol to provide five 'J' symbols along the pay line P3 (see FIG. 5). Assuming that this choice is made, then all three reels 1 in column 6 are re-spun on the "draw", which may result in the screen display shown in FIG. 5. This screen display indicates whether a win has occurred.

[0061] In this embodiment, the game has three pay line P1-P3 that extend across each of the three rows of reels 1. If the rules of the game require combinations of symbols to occur from left to right along a pay line, and three or more 'J', 'Q', 'K' or 'A' symbols along a pay line to win a prize, then the result of the game play indicated by FIG. 5 is the awarding of the prize specified in the pay table for three 'J' symbols.

[0062] The two-stage selection process of the initial deal and the draw therefore provides a plurality of initial outcomes (the symbols shown in FIG. 4 along the pay lines P1-P3) and a plurality of final outcomes as a result of the draw (the symbols shown in FIG. 5 along the pay lines P1-P3). In some embodiments, the player may be given two or more opportunities to hold or reselect symbols, meaning that there would be one or more intermediate outcomes and a three or more stage selection process. Of course, the more opportunities to reselect symbols, the higher the chance of the total game play

resulting in a winning outcome in one or more of the outcomes and therefore the wager required and/or the prizes payable will need to reflect this to achieve a required expected return to player for the gaming machine 100.

[0063] As is apparent from FIGS. 4 and 5, conflicting hold strategies may result. For example, instead of preserving the three 'J' symbols on pay line P3, the player may choose to hold the reels in columns 3, 4 and 7, in the hope of achieving three, four or five 'K' symbols along pay line P1. Which option is preferred depends on the chance of achieving each of these winning outcomes and the size of the prize associated with each outcome, as specified by the pay table for the gaming machine 100. By way of simplified example, if every symbol had a 1 in 5 chance of occurring on a reel 1, then if reels 3-5 and 7 were held, there would be an 80% chance of achieving a win for three 'J' symbols and a 20% chance of achieving a win for five 'J' symbols. If instead reels 3, 4 and 7 were held, there would be a 16% chance of achieving a win for three 'K' symbols, a 4% chance of winning the prize for five 'K' symbols, a 16% chance for winning the prize for three 'J' symbols and a 4% chance of winning the prize for five 'J' symbols.

[0064] If the prizes had values as follows:

[0065] Three 'J' symbols pays 5 credits;

[0066] Five 'J' symbols pays 25 credits;

[0067] Three 'K' symbols pays 20 credits; and

[0068] Five 'K' symbols pays 50 credits;

then the expected return for holding reels 8-10 and 12 is 9 credits and the expected average return for holding reels 8-9 and 12 would be 7 credits. Therefore, statistically the better strategy is to hold reels 3-5 and 7. However if the prize for five 'K' symbols paid 250 credits, then the expected average return for holding reels 3-4 and 7 would increase to 15, making the better strategy the holding of reels 3-4. The game could therefore involve a skill element, requiring the player to choose the correct hold strategy, or the gaming machine could recommend or require the best hold strategy for the player.

[0069] Prizes other than prizes in credits may be offered. For example, a prize may be an award of a feature game or the award of a physical item, such as a car. Each of these prizes will have a value or expected average value that can be used to determine the expected overall return of the game and the expected return of each hold strategy in a game.

[0070] In the screen shot shown in FIG. 5, the Hold icons 8-12 are not displayed, as the player no longer has the option to hold some symbols and reselect others. Alternatively, the Hold icons 8-12 may still be displayed. When still displayed, the icons 8-12 may be lit brightly when they can be selected to hold symbols in their respective column 3-7 and dulled when the final outcome is displayed. When selected the icons 8-12 may be dulled, or may flash or otherwise represent that they have been selected.

[0071] While the description of FIGS. 4 and 5 has been provided with reference to an electronic gaming machine where a video display displays representations of reels, cards or other symbol carrying devices, in one embodiment the symbols are carried on physical reels. In this case, the Hold icons 8-12 are replaced by Hold buttons, which may be part of the bank of buttons 107A, or provided separate to the bank of buttons 107A, for example immediately below the physical reels to in a similar configuration to that shown in FIGS. 1, 4 and 5. The Hold buttons may be illuminated to show when they can be used to hold symbols.

[0072] FIG. 6 shows a process flow diagram of a process performed in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The process may be performed by any of the versions of the gaming machine 100 described previously herein.

[0073] In step 20, the game controller 101 monitors the bill acceptor and/or coin input 110 and/or information received by the card/ticket reader 108 or network card 112 for a deposit of credit and in response causes the hardware meters 104 to increment according to the denomination of the game. The game controller 101 then monitors the user interface 107 for the input of a wager. The input of the wager may specify whether player wishes to wager on pay line P2 alone, on pay lines P1 and P2, or on all three pay lines P1-P3. The input may also specify the amount to be wagered on each pay line. In alternative embodiments, the number of pay lines may be fixed at three and/or the amount to be wagered per pay line may be fixed.

[0074] If there is sufficient credits in the meters 104 to support the wager, a game play is commenced in step 21 by the game controller 101 receiving random numbers from the RNG 113, spinning the reels 1 and causing the reels 1 to stop according to the received random numbers. As previously described, the stopping position of each reel is independently determined.

[0075] In step 22 the game controller monitors the bank of buttons and/or touch screen 107 for a player input of reels to be held. The player may select columns of reels to hold by touching the touch screen 107B at the location of between zero and all five of the 'Hold' icons 8-12. Repeated presses of the same 'Hold' icon may cycle between selecting and deselecting a column to be held. As discussed previously, the gaming machine may indicate a recommended hold strategy, for example by illuminating the appropriate columns and/or the appropriate 'Hold' icons and may require selection of the recommended hold strategy. This may be achieved by preventing continued play until the appropriate columns have been held.

[0076] The player may indicate completion of the selection of a hold strategy by pressing a 'spin' or 'draw' button (step 23). This may be button in the bank of buttons 107A. The game controller 101 then determines if any symbols have not been held. If all five columns have been held, then the process proceeds to step 26.

[0077] If there are reels that have not been held, then these reels are re-spun and stopped to reveal the game outcome (step 25). In step 26 any prizes are awarded to the win meter. These prizes may be transferred to the credit meter automatically, or after the completion of further optional game processes, such as a double or nothing gamble feature.

[0078] The embodiment described above had a total of fifteen reels, each presenting one symbol. In other embodiments other numbers of reels may be provided. For example, an alternative embodiment may involve a game having three columns and two rows so as to present six symbols. Another embodiment may have three columns and three rows of reels. A still further embodiment may have six columns and four rows.

[0079] In addition, the reels need not be presented in a matrix. All that is required is the presentation of a plurality of symbols in three or more groups, to allow a hold strategy to be determined and selected. In certain embodiments of the invention, including the embodiments described herein previously, each group of symbols may include one and only one symbol from each outcome that indicates whether a winning

outcome has occurred (i.e. each group includes only one symbol from each pay line P1-P3). Alternatively, larger groups may be provided. For example, a player may be required to select either both of columns 3 and 4 to be held or select none of the symbols in these two columns to be held. The option could still be provided to select columns 5-7 individually, or these columns may be split into a group of two columns and a single column.

[0080] In another embodiment, and with reference to FIGS. 7 and 8, the display 106A displays a primary game display with three vertically arranged reels 200, 202, 204 each displaying three symbols in rows 208, 210, 212. Each reel 200-204 may be an electro-mechanical stepper reel or may be a reel displayed on a video display as is known in the art. Each reel 200-204 defines a set of symbols such as symbols S1-SN as is known in the art. There may be, for example, twenty-two stops for each reel with each stop defining a position for a symbol (including graphic symbols such as “7s”, “Bar”, “Cherry” or blanks or a partial symbol where there may be more stops than symbols. Under control of the processor 102 the reels 200-204 are controlled spin and stop to randomly position symbols in the 3x3 game matrix 214 defined by the three reels 200-204 and the three rows 208-212 to define, at least initially, a primary game initial display.

[0081] In addition to the primary game display at display 106A the player can enable one or more second games 216a-d which are also, in this example, 3x3 display matrices. These second games 216a-d can be displayed at display 106B or, in the alternative, may share real estate with the primary game display at the display 106a.

[0082] The primary game display 106A has one or more pay lines. While there may be numerous pay lines, for purposes of explanation it will be assumed that the primary game as well as the second games have only three horizontal pay lines 218, 220, 222. It should be understood that there may be more or fewer pay lines.

[0083] To play the game of FIGS. 7 and 8, the player makes a wager to enable one or more pay lines for the primary game and for one or more second games 216a-d. A wager protocol is preferably adopted such that the player’s wagers first enable the pay lines of the primary game before enabling pay lines in any second game 216a-d. Alternatively, through a touch screen input, the layer may be able to allocate some of the wagers. For purposes of this example it will be assumed the player has wagered the maximum amount to enable the primary and the four second games 216a-d.

[0084] When the player has made their wager game play is prompted and the processor 102 and RNG 113 randomly select and display at the display 106A a primary game initial display or “deal”. The player then has the option to hold none, one or more reels 200-204 in the hopes of improving the outcome in relation to a predetermined pay table. In the example of FIG. 7 the player has elected to hold reels 200 and 204 and re-spin reel 202 in the hopes, for example, of receiving three S1 symbols on pay line 218. The held reels 200 and 204 are replicated into each enabled second game as shown. The player then commands a “draw” whereupon the processor 102 and RND 113 random select a stop position for and display for each of the primary game and second games 216a-d for the center reels 202. FIG. 8 shows the displays after the draw. As can be seen in FIG. 8, for each of the primary and second games 216a-d the stop positions for each of the primary and secondary games middle row on the draw each randomly positioned producing in most cases different

winning or losing outcome. With reference to FIG. 8 the primary game has a winning outcome on payline 218 of three S1 symbols on payline 218. Winning outcomes also appear in second games 216b and 216c of also three S1 symbols on the center payline. The payer would receive an award for each winning outcome. For the next “hand” the player would wager to enable the paylines and second games as discussed above.

[0085] Turning to FIG. 9 still a further embodiment of the present invention is shown. In this embodiment a primary game 300 is shown defined by a game matrix having three reels 200, 202, 204 and rows 208, 210, 212. The leftmost reel 200 may be configured to display a single symbol as shown or “stacked” versions of the same symbol such that reel 200 always displays a single symbol. Since most pays are from left to right by providing a single symbol (or stacked copies of the same symbol) at reel 200 confusion over symbol combinations and which reels to hold is diminished. The game of FIG. 9 may be a payline game as described above or may be a pay arrangement game such as that described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,093,102 owned by the assignee of this application, such games sold under the mark REEL POWER®, the disclose of which is incorporated by reference. In such games the player wagers on reels and symbol arrangements. For example, with reference to the primary game 300 a first wager would enable the leftmost reel 200 and the center row for reels 202 and 204 defining a single pay arrangement. A player may, for example, be able to wager five credits on the first arrangement. Wagering more would enable not only the first arrangement but a second arrangement including all of the symbols of the second reel 202 and the center row of reel 204 now defining three symbol arrangements. Again the player may be able to wager more on the second arrangement up to a maximum permitted by the game. Wager still more the player would enable all reels defining nine symbol arrangements. The available symbol arrangements are defined by the equation: $N1M \times N2M \times N3M$ where N1 is the leftmost reel 200, N2 is the center reel 202 and N3 is reel 204 and “M” is the number of rows of different symbols displayed for the reel for the game. Thus for the primary game there are $1 \times 3 \times 3$ possible arrangements for the player to wager upon. To simplify wagering a protocol may be adopted for player wagering. For example the first five credits wagered would be applied to the first pay arrangement with the sixth-tenth credits wagered adding the second arrangement and so forth. Thus the player could wager a maximum of forty-five credits for the primary game.

[0086] In addition to the primary game one or more secondary games 302a, b games are provided in the display 106B or share real estate with the primary game at display 106A. The player may enable the one or more secondary games 302a, b by selecting and/or wagering. For example, the credits may be wagered and allocated as follows:

TABLE 1

Credit Wagered	Game	Pay Arrangement
1	Primary	1st
2	Second game 302a	1st
3	Second game 302b	1st
4	Primary Game	1 st and 2nd
5	Second game 302a	1 st and 2nd
6	Second game 302b	1 st and 2nd
7	Primary game	1 st , 2 nd and 3rd
8	Second game 302a	1 st , 2 nd and 3rd
9	Second game 302b	1 st , 2 nd and 3rd

TABLE 1-continued

Credit Wagered	Game	Pay Arrangement
10	Primary game	2 credits on 1 st , 1 credit on 2 nd and 3rd

[0087] And so forth. According to this example the player could wager a maximum amount for the primary and two second games 302a,b of 9 arrangements x5 credits per arrangement x3 games=135 credits. Other wagering schemes may be adopted.

[0088] The pay arrangements of Table 1 are:



[0089] After the player has made their wager game play is prompted and the processor 102 and RNG 113 randomly select and display at the display 106A a primary game initial display or “deal”. According to this embodiment the reel 200 is automatically “held”. Accordingly reel 200 should have a symbol set such that no initial deal is a “dead hand”. i.e. cannot possibly result in a winning outcome. The automatic holding of reel 200 simplifies the player’s decisions and is believed to help speed play. It should be understood that the game may randomly select which reel(s) 200, 202, 204 to hold or, where all reels are similarly populated with symbols the processor may select the reel(s) to hold for the best possible outcome for the player. Held reel 200 is duplicated into any enable second games 302a,b. The player next has the option of additionally holding one or both of reels 202, 204 in the hopes of obtaining a winning outcome. In the example of FIG. 7 the player would hold reel 204 (assuming the player has enabled the third pay arrangement, i.e. all possible none ways of winning) hoping to get one or more combinations of S1 symbols for a winning outcome. The held reels 202,204 are replicated into each of the enabled second games 302a, b.

[0090] The player then prompts a “draw” whereupon the processor randomly selects and displays the symbols for reel 202 for the primary and any second games 302a,b to complete play and produce an outcome for each game. Each outcome is then compared to a schedule of winning outcomes and the player receives an award for all winning outcomes. For example, with reference to FIG. 10 and assuming three S1 symbols are a winning outcome the player has obtained two winning outcomes in the primary game 300 and one winning outcome ins the second game 302a.

[0091] The foregoing game can be played on any suitable game matrix of N reels and M rows and can be played as an arrangement game such as that described above and with reference to the '102 patent cited above or can be based upon paylines. The game can also be played with either electro-mechanical stepper reels or video reels.

[0092] While the foregoing description has primarily focussed on a spinning reel game, the invention may be implemented in other forms, such as a card game where cards are selected and displayed on the display 106A, or a dice game.

[0093] While the foregoing description has been provided by way of example of the preferred embodiments of the present invention as presently contemplated, which utilise

gaming machines of the type found in casinos, those skilled in the relevant arts will appreciate that the present invention also may have application to internet gaming and/or have application to gaming over a telecommunications network, where handsets are used to display game outcomes and receive player inputs.

[0094] Where in the foregoing description reference has been made to integers having known equivalents, then those equivalents are hereby incorporated herein as if individually set forth.

[0095] Those skilled in the relevant arts will appreciate that modifications and additions to the embodiments of the present invention may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0096] It will be understood that the invention disclosed and defined in this specification extends to all alternative combinations of two or more of the individual features mentioned or evident from the text or drawings. All of these different combinations constitute various alternative aspects of the invention.

1. A method for use with a gaming machine that is arranged to select symbols, present the selected symbols on a display and award an award if a winning outcome occurs, the method comprising:

- providing for a player to make a wager to enable one or more hands of plays;
- selecting and displaying symbols in a game matrix at a game display defining a primary game display;
- receiving a selection from a player of the gaming machine of one or more rows of the matrix including of the groups of symbols to be held;
- in a second random selection process reselecting any symbols that are not selected by the player to be held and presenting the reselected symbols on the display; and
- paying a prize according to a pay table and the symbols presented following the second random selection process.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the symbols are presented in a matrix having n rows and m columns, wherein m is at least 3 and n is at least 2 and wherein the at least three distinct groups of symbols are the symbols in each column of the matrix.

3. The method of claim 1, further including providing the option to select none of the groups of symbols to be held.

4. The method of claim 1, including providing the option to select all of the groups of symbols to be held.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the display is the visible portion of a plurality of physical spinning reels, one reel for each said presented symbol on the display.

6. A method for use with a gaming machine that is arranged to, in response to the staking of a wager, select symbols, present the selected symbols on a display to represent a plurality of outcomes and award an award if a winning outcome occurs, the method comprising:

- receiving a selection of a plurality of outcomes on which to stake a wager;
- in a first random selection process selecting a plurality of symbols and presenting the selected symbols on a display of the gaming machine in manner so that a plurality of initial outcomes are visually determinable, wherein each symbol is selected independently of each other symbol and the plurality of symbols are separated into at least three distinct groups of symbols, each group con-

taining at least two symbols and wherein each of the plurality of outcomes includes one and only one member of each group of symbols;

receiving a selection from a player of the gaming machine of one or more of the groups of symbols to be held;

in a second random selection process reselecting any symbols that are not selected by the player to be held and presenting the reselected symbols on the display so that a plurality of final outcomes are visually determinable; and

following the second random selection process either paying a prize or not according to a pay table and the final outcomes.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the selection of a plurality of outcomes on which to stake a wager is a selection of three outcomes.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein there are five said groups of symbols.

9. A gaming machine that is arranged to select symbols, present the selected symbols on a display to represent a plurality of game outcomes and award an award if a winning outcome occurs in the plurality of game outcomes, the gaming machine comprising:

- a game controller in communication with a display, the game controller including a random number generator, the game controller adapted to use numbers generated by the random number generator to select symbols for presentation on the display in a process including two stages, wherein
- in a first stage of the process, a first selection of a plurality of symbols is presented on the display to form a plurality of initial outcomes, wherein each symbol is selected independently of each other symbol;
- in a second stage of the process, one or more subsets of symbols are reselected and presented on the display to form a plurality of final outcomes, wherein each subset includes one and only one symbol from each of the plurality of outcomes;

following the second stage paying a prize according to a pay table and the final outcomes.

10. The gaming machine of claim 9, wherein the gaming machine includes a user interface adapted to allow a player of the gaming machine to select the number of said subsets of the first selection of symbols to be reselected.

11. The gaming machine of claim 10, wherein the symbols are presented in a matrix having n rows and m columns, wherein n is at least 2 and m is at least 3 and wherein subsets of the first selection of symbols available for selection consist of at least two of the columns of symbols in the matrix.

12. The gaming machine of claim 11, wherein the gaming machine and user interface is adapted so that the player can select any of the m columns to be reselected.

13. The gaming machine of claim 12, wherein the gaming machine and user interface is adapted so that the player can select all or none of the m columns to be reselected.

14. The gaming machine of claim 11, wherein the display is the visible portion of a plurality of physical spinning reels, one reel for each said presented symbol on the display.

15. A gaming machine for play by a player comprising:

- a primary and at least one second game display matrices defined by N1-X columns and M rows;

- a device for prompting play a processor to randomly select and to control the display to display symbols in the primary game matrix, to hold at least one of the columns NH of the primary game and replicate the held column NH into the second game;

- an input device for the player to hold remaining columns, any held columns replicated into said second game;

- a device to prompt a draw, said processor in response to said prompt configured to select and display symbols for any column N1-X not held to define final outcomes for the primary and said second game and to compare the outcomes to a schedule of winning outcomes and to issue an award for any winning outcomes.

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