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(54) **GAMING MACHINE WITH
PLAYING-BOARD BONUS GAME
AFFECTED BY FREE SPINS OF THE REELS**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **463/17**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

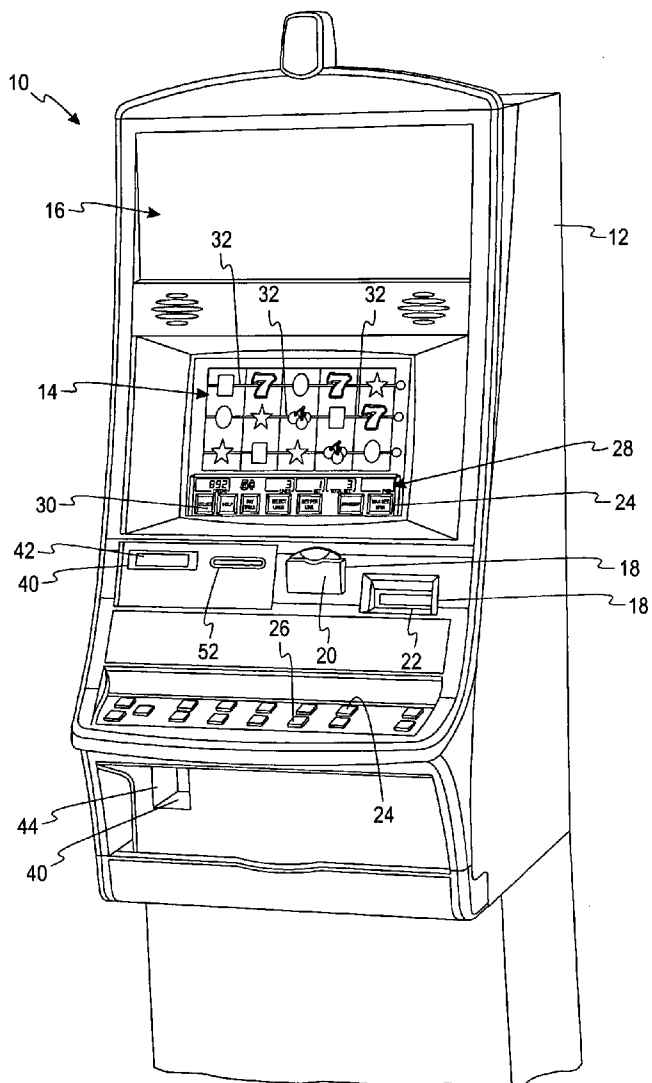
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A gaming machine for conducting a wagering game includes a game board and a plurality of reels, each reel having a plurality of symbols for representing an outcome of the wagering game. The player is given a predefined number of free spins of the reels upon occurrence of a predetermined event in the wagering game, such as a start-bonus outcome. A number symbol appearing on the reels after one of the free spins determines how many game spaces to move the player around the game board. Various prizes are awarded to the player when he or she lands on certain ones of the game spaces.

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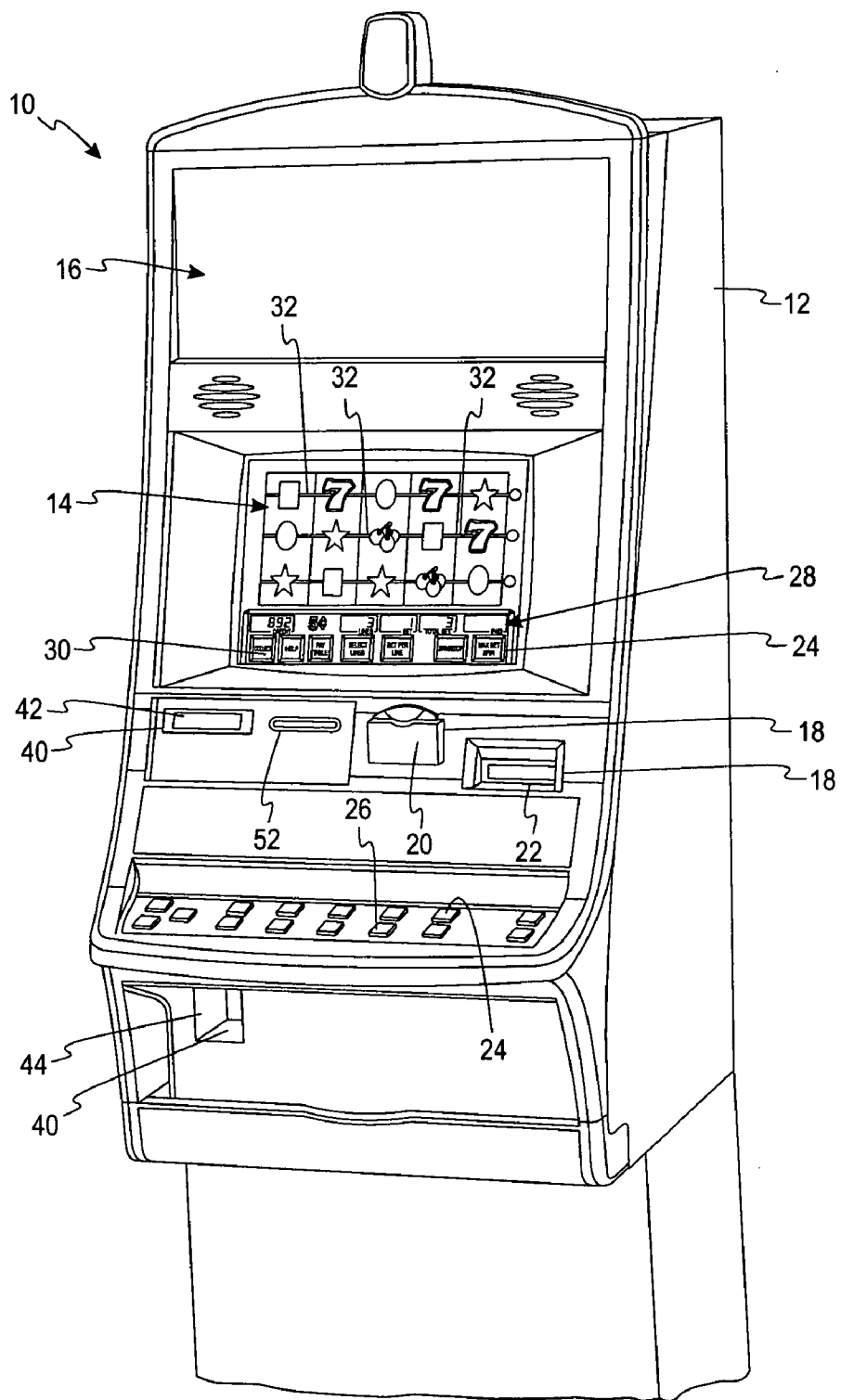


Fig. 1

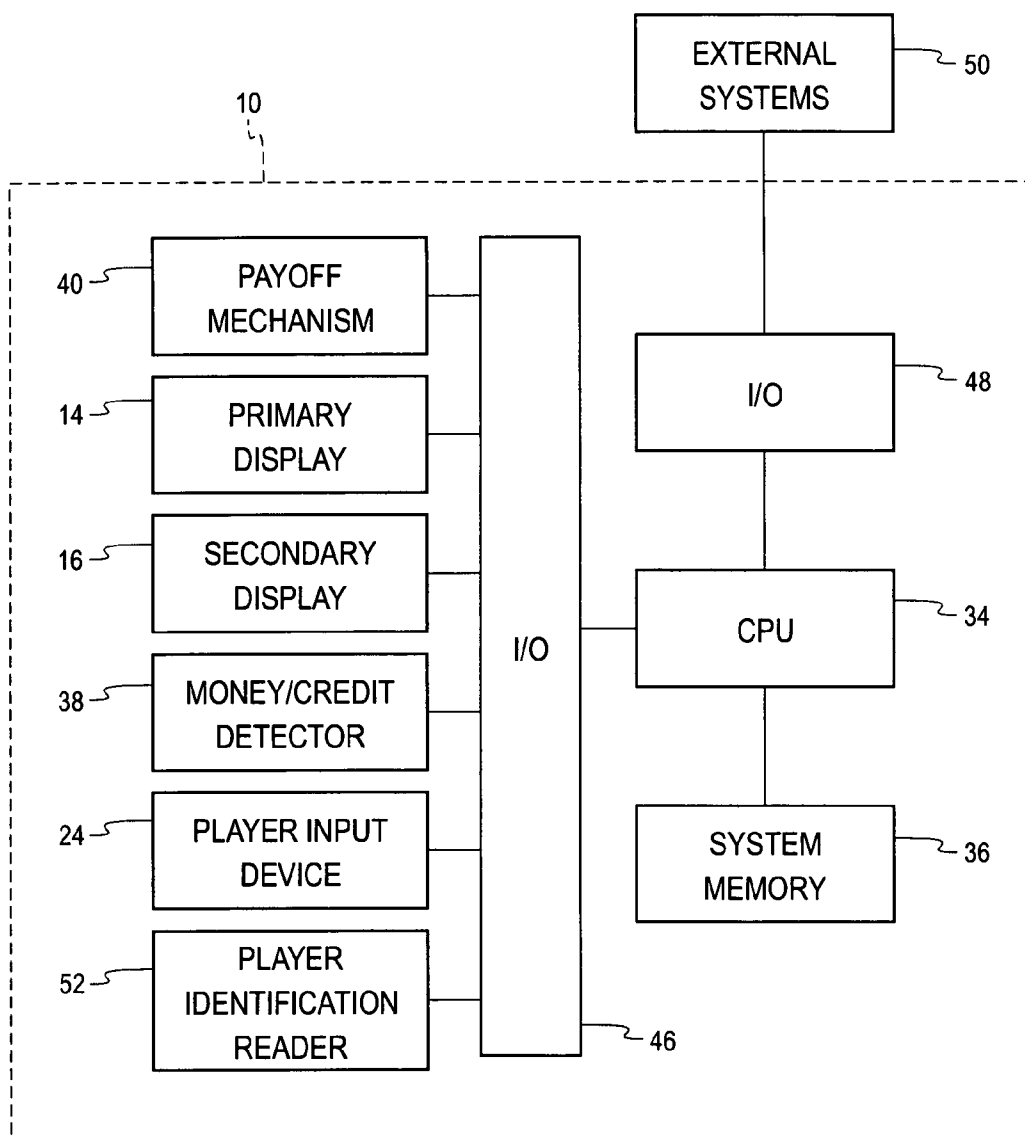


Fig. 2

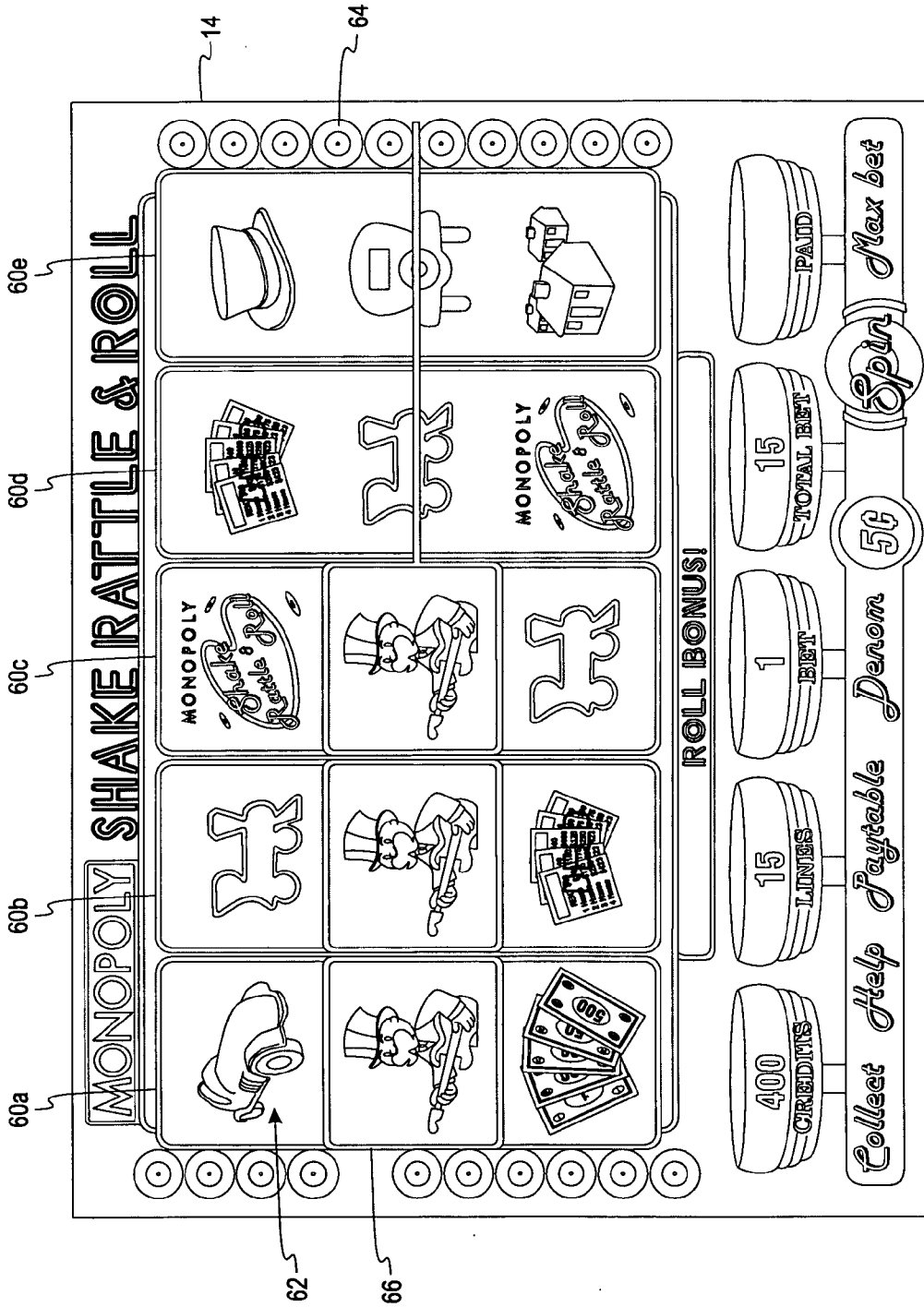


Fig. 3a

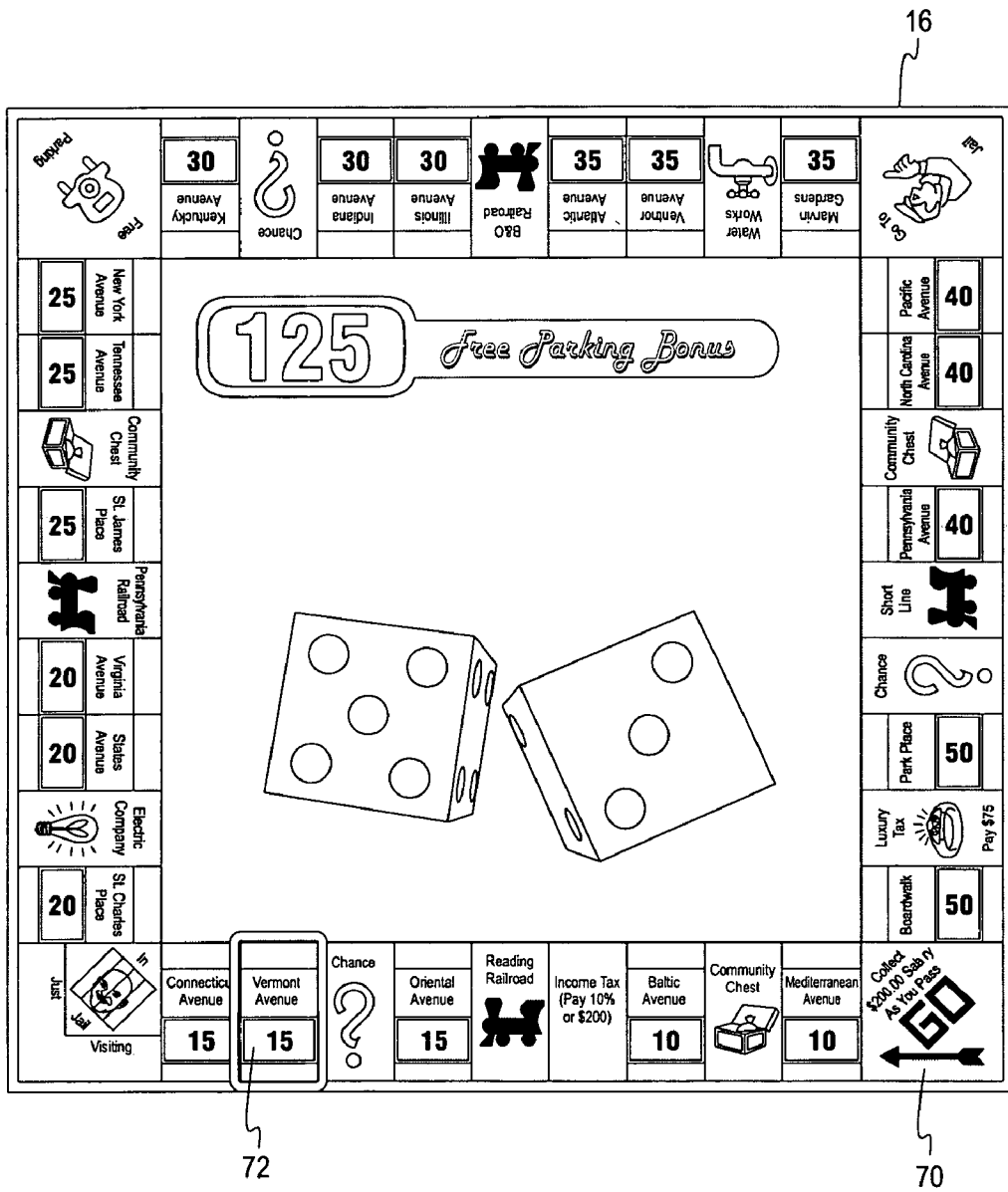


Fig. 3b

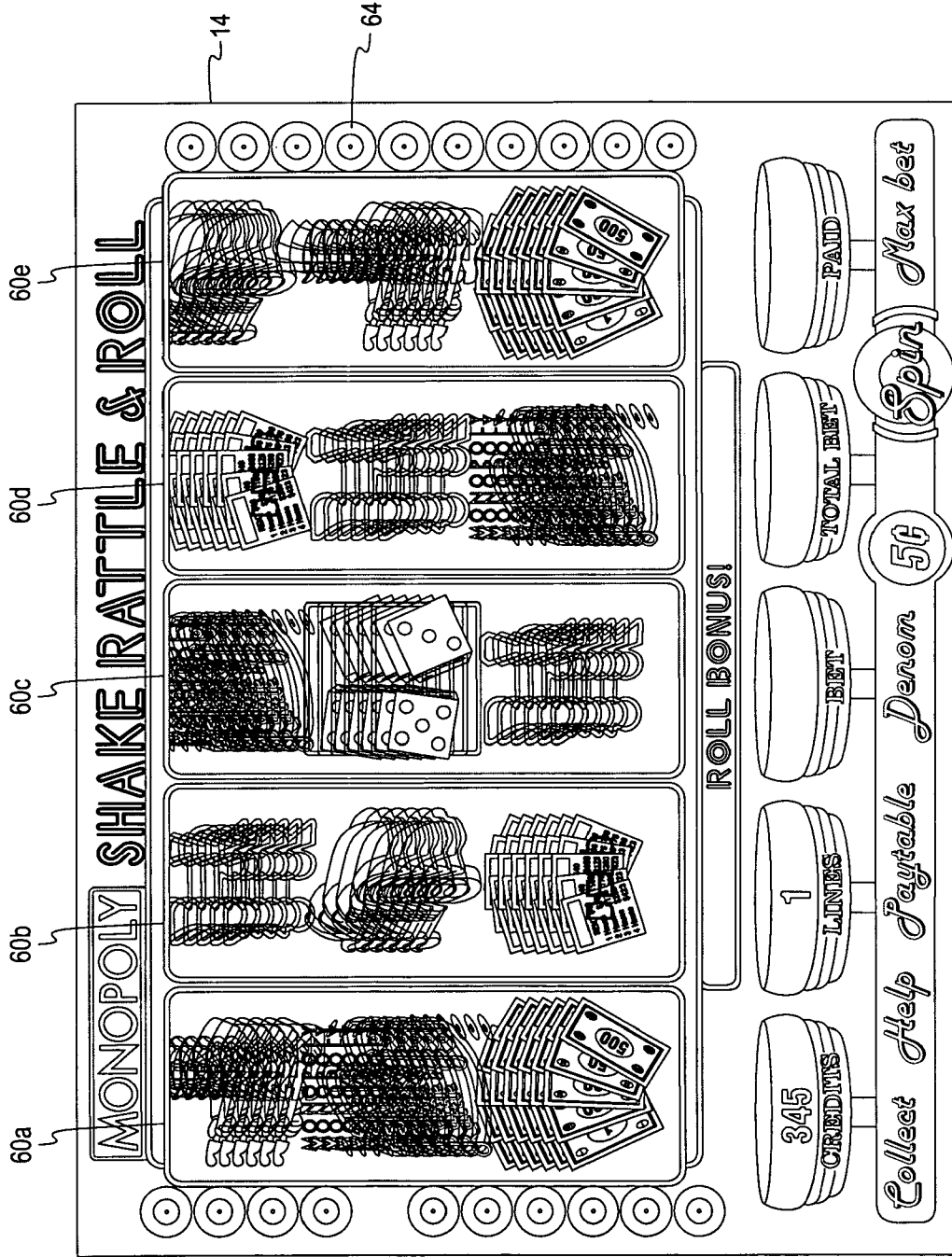


Fig. 3c

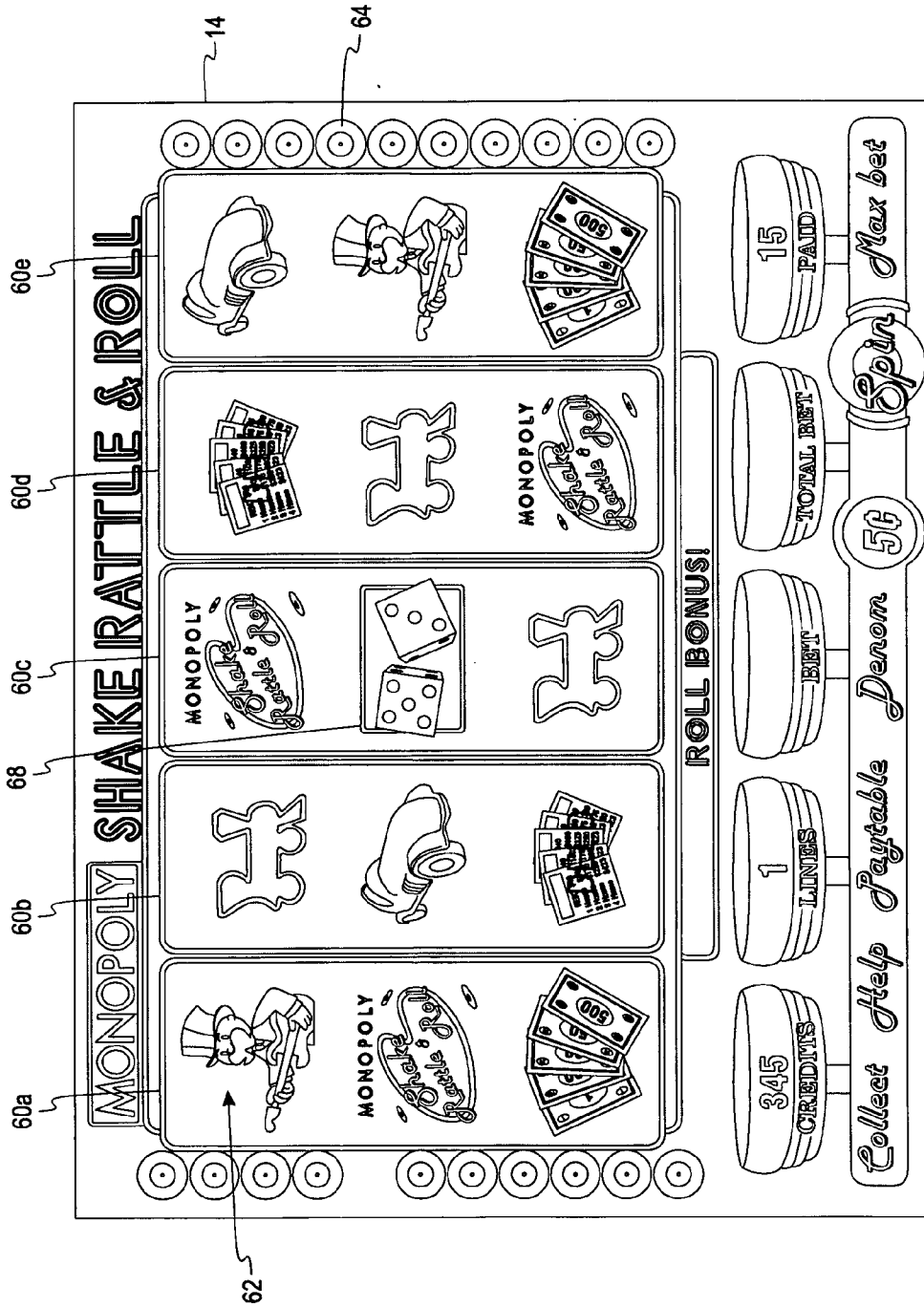


Fig. 3d

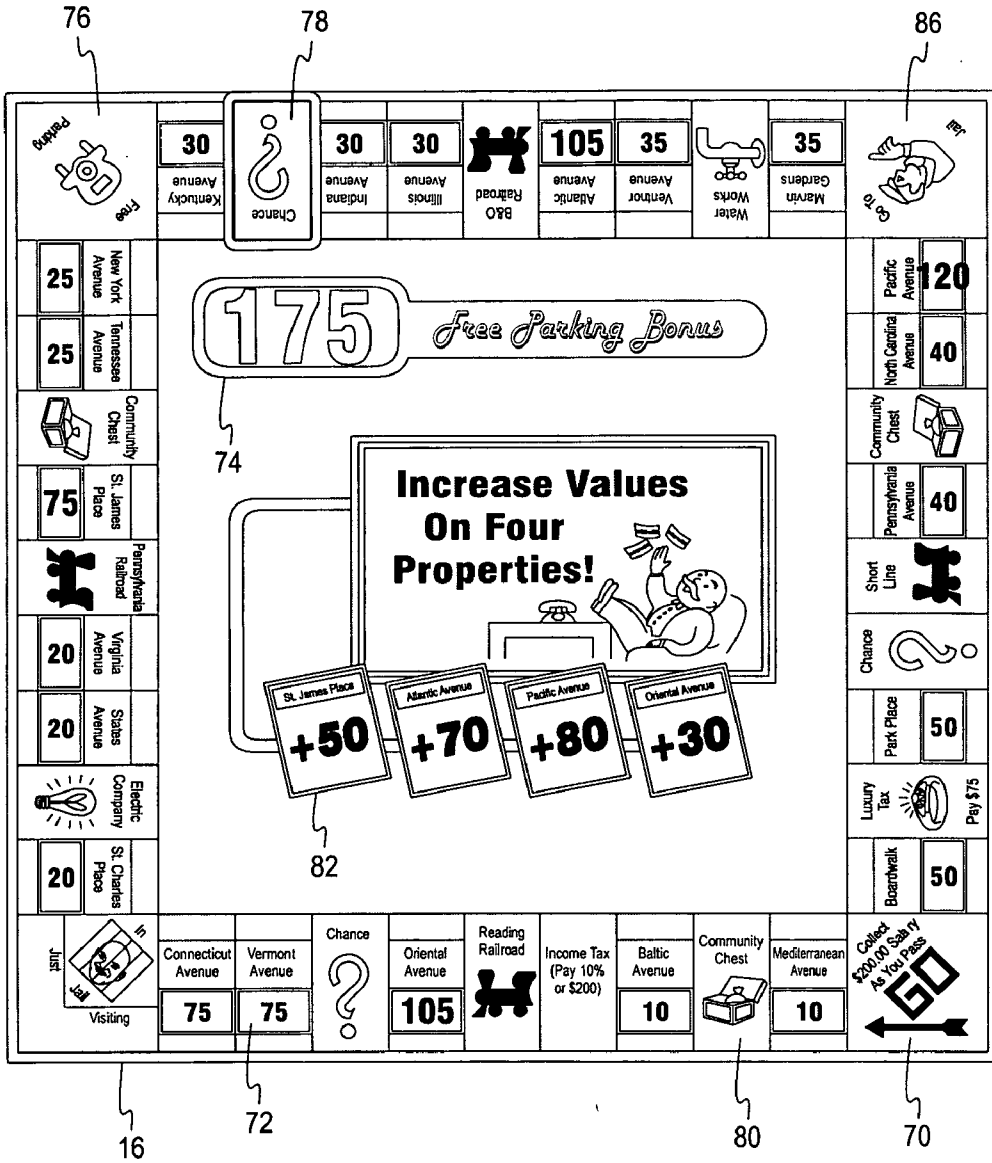


Fig. 4

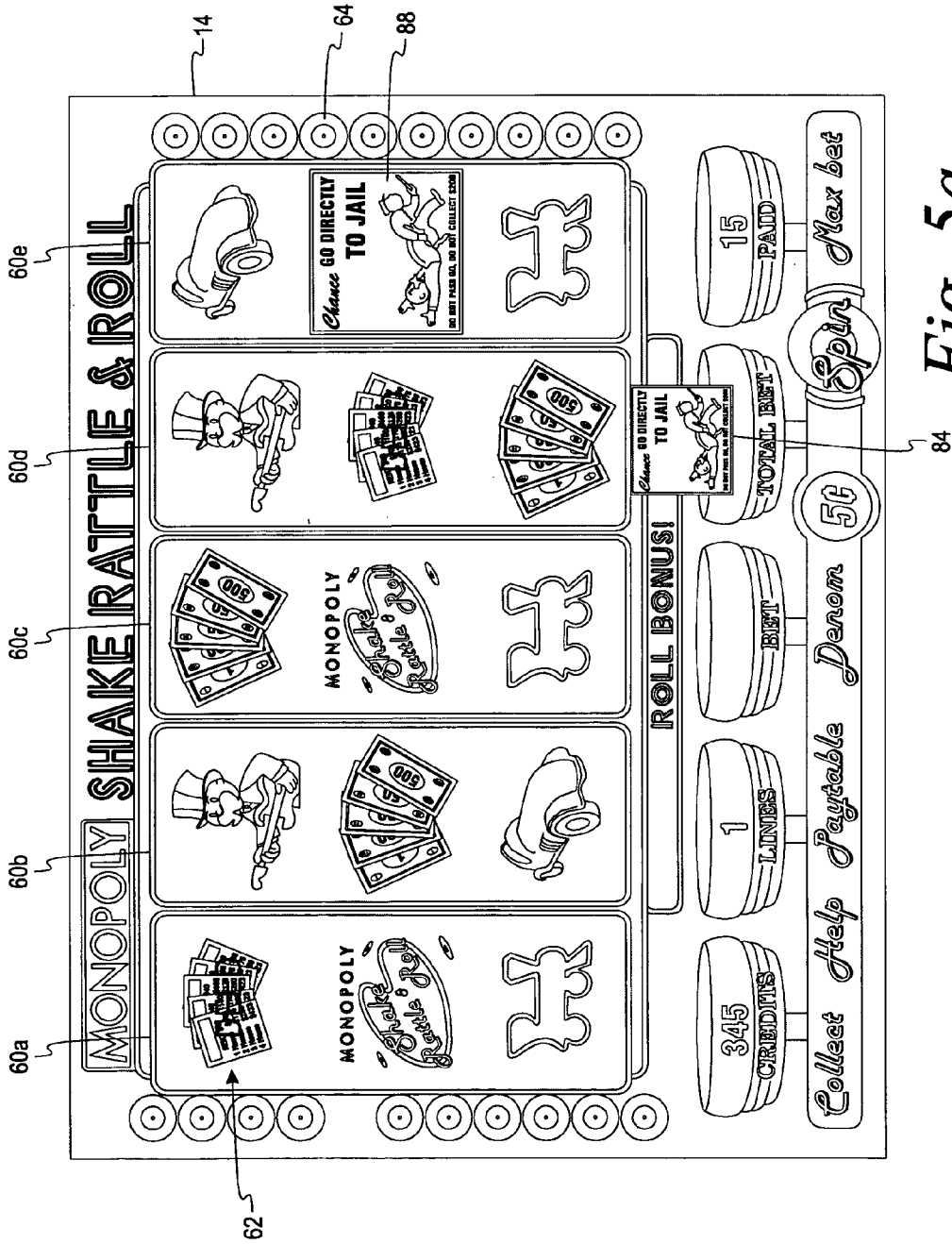


Fig. 5a

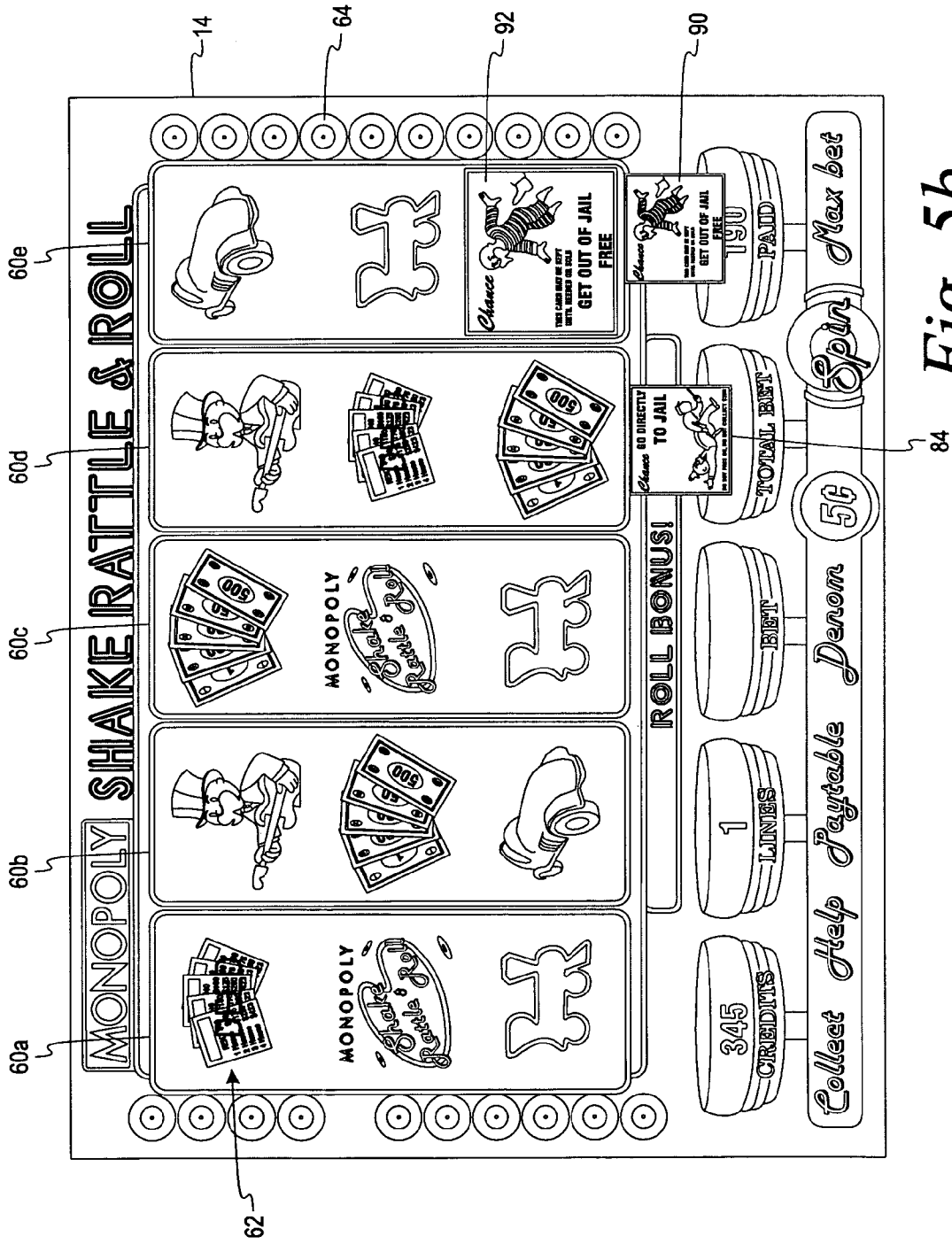


Fig. 5b

**GAMING MACHINE WITH PLAYING-BOARD
BONUS GAME AFFECTED BY FREE SPINS OF
THE REELS**

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to gaming machines, and methods for playing wagering games, and more particularly, to a gaming machine having a playing-board bonus game.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Gaming machines, such as slot machines, video poker machines and the like, have been a cornerstone of the gaming industry for several years. Generally, the popularity of such machines with players is dependent on the likelihood (or perceived likelihood) of winning money at the machine and the intrinsic entertainment value of the machine relative to other available gaming options. Where the available gaming options include a number of competing machines and the expectation of winning at each machine is roughly the same (or believed to be the same), players are likely to be attracted to the most entertaining and exciting machines. Shrewd operators consequently strive to employ the most entertaining and exciting machines, features, and enhancements available because such machines attract frequent play and hence increase profitability to the operator. Therefore, there is a continuing need for gaming machine manufacturers to continuously develop new games and improved gaming enhancements that will attract frequent play through enhanced entertainment value to the player.

[0004] One concept that has been successfully employed to enhance the entertainment value of a game is the concept of a "secondary" or "bonus" game that may be played in conjunction with a "basic" game. The bonus game may comprise any type of game, either similar to or completely different from the basic game, which is entered upon the occurrence of a selected event or outcome in the basic game. Generally, bonus games provide a greater expectation of winning than the basic game and may also be accompanied with more attractive or unusual video displays and/or audio. Bonus games may additionally award players with "progressive jackpot" awards that are funded, at least in part, by a percentage of coin-in from the gaming machine or a plurality of participating gaming machines. Because the bonus game concept offers tremendous advantages in player appeal and excitement relative to other known games, and because such games are attractive to both players and operators, there is a continuing need to develop gaming machines with new types of bonus games to satisfy the demands of players and operators.

[0005] One type of bonus game that has been developed is a playing-board bonus game where elements of a playing-board game are incorporated into the bonus game. These

games may have reel symbols that resemble the characters, tokens, game pieces, and so forth of the playing-board game. Similarly, the cabinet, signage, and/or the graphics design of the gaming machine may be made to resemble the board layout of the playing-board game. Furthermore, the rules that control certain aspects of game play may, in some cases, be modeled after the rules of the playing-board game.

[0006] It would be desirable to be able to increase the excitement and entertainment value of these playing-board game type bonus games in order to attract more players.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] According to one aspect of the invention, a gaming machine includes a value input device for receiving a wager from a player at the gaming machine, a wagering game being initiated upon receipt of the wager. The gaming machine further includes at least one display for displaying a plurality of reels of the wagering game. Each reel has a plurality of symbols for representing an outcome of the wagering game, the outcome being randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes. The at least one display is also for displaying a game board of the wagering game, the game board having a game path composed of a plurality of game spaces. Upon occurrence of a predetermined event, the player is given one or more free spins of the reels and movement of a space identifier of the player around the game path is determined by at least one advancement symbol or symbol combination appearing on the reels after one of the one or more free spins.

[0008] According to another aspect of the invention, a method of conducting a wagering game on a gaming machine includes initiating a wagering game upon receipt of a wager from a player at the gaming machine, the wagering game having an outcome that is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes. The method further includes displaying a game board and a plurality of reels of the wagering game, the game board having a game path composed of a plurality of game spaces and each reel having a plurality of symbols. The player is given one or more free spins of the reels upon occurrence of a predetermined event and a space identifier of the player is moved around the game path based on an advancement symbol or symbol combination appearing on the reels after one of the one or more free spins.

[0009] According to still another aspect of the invention, a gaming machine includes a value input device for receiving a wager from a player at the gaming machine, a wagering game being initiated upon receipt of the wager. The gaming machine also includes a plurality of reels of the wagering game, each reel having a plurality of symbols for representing an outcome of the wagering game, the outcome being randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes. The gaming machine further includes a display for displaying a game board having a game path, the plurality of reels including symbols that cause advancement of a space identifier of the player along the game path during free spins of the reels.

[0010] According to yet another aspect of the invention, a gaming machine includes a value input device for receiving a wager from a player at the gaming machine, a wagering game being initiated upon receipt of the wager. The gaming machine further includes a display for displaying a plurality of reels of the wagering game, each reel having a plurality of symbols for representing an outcome of the wagering

game, the outcome randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes. Upon occurrence of a predetermined event, the player is given one or more free spins of the reels, where each free spin increments a conditional award that is awarded to the player upon satisfaction of a predetermined condition.

[0011] Additional aspects of the invention will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art in view of the detailed description of various embodiments, which is made with reference to the drawings, a brief description of which is provided below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a gaming machine embodying the present invention;

[0013] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a control system suitable for operating the gaming machine;

[0014] FIGS. 3a-3d illustrate movement of a player around an exemplary game board according to one embodiment of the invention;

[0015] FIG. 4 illustrates exemplary awards that may be given based on the movement of the player around the game board according to one embodiment of the invention; and

[0016] FIGS. 5a-5b illustrate a conditional termination of game play based on the movement of the player around the game board according to one embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] While this invention is susceptible of embodiment in many different forms, there is shown in the drawings and will herein be described in detail preferred embodiments of the invention with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered as an exemplification of the principles of the invention and is not intended to limit the broad aspect of the invention to the embodiments illustrated.

[0018] Referring to FIG. 1, a gaming machine 10 is used in gaming establishments such as casinos. With regard to the present invention, the gaming machine 10 may be any type of gaming machine and may have varying structures and methods of operation. For example, the gaming machine 10 may be an electromechanical gaming machine configured to play mechanical slots, or it may be an electronic gaming machine configured to play a video casino game, such as blackjack, slots, keno, poker, blackjack, roulette, etc.

[0019] The gaming machine 10 comprises a housing 12 and includes input devices, including a value input device 18 and a player input device 24. For output the gaming machine 10 includes a primary display 14 for displaying information about the basic wagering game. The primary display 14 can also display information about a bonus wagering game and a progressive wagering game. The gaming machine 10 may also include a secondary display 16 for displaying game events, game outcomes, and/or signage information. While these typical components found in the gaming machine 10 are described below, it should be understood that numerous other elements may exist and may be used in any number of combinations to create various forms of a gaming machine 10.

[0020] The value input device 18 may be provided in many forms, individually or in combination, and is prefer-

ably located on the front of the housing 12. The value input device 18 receives currency and/or credits that are inserted by a player. The value input device 18 may include a coin acceptor 20 for receiving coin currency (see FIG. 1). Alternatively, or in addition, the value input device 18 may include a bill acceptor 22 for receiving paper currency. Furthermore, the value input device 18 may include a ticket reader, or barcode scanner, for reading information stored on a credit ticket, a card, or other tangible portable credit storage device. The credit ticket or card may also authorize access to a central account, which can transfer money to the gaming machine 10.

[0021] The player input device 24 comprises a plurality of push buttons 26 on a button panel for operating the gaming machine 10. In addition, or alternatively, the player input device 24 may comprise a touch screen 28 mounted by adhesive, tape, or the like over the primary display 14 and/or secondary display 16. The touch screen 28 contains soft touch keys 30 denoted by graphics on the underlying primary display 14 and used to operate the gaming machine 10. The touch screen 28 provides players with an alternative method of input. A player enables a desired function either by touching the touch screen 28 at an appropriate touch key 30 or by pressing an appropriate push button 26 on the button panel. The touch keys 30 may be used to implement the same functions as push buttons 26. Alternatively, the push buttons 26 may provide inputs for one aspect of the operating the game, while the touch keys 30 may allow for input needed for another aspect of the game.

[0022] The various components of the gaming machine 10 may be connected directly to, or contained within, the housing 12, as seen in FIG. 1, or may be located outboard of the housing 12 and connected to the housing 12 via a variety of different wired or wireless connection methods. Thus, the gaming machine 10 comprises these components whether housed in the housing 12, or outboard of the housing 12 and connected remotely.

[0023] The operation of the basic wagering game is displayed to the player on the primary display 14. The primary display 14 can also display the bonus game associated with the basic wagering game. The primary display 14 may take the form of a cathode ray tube (CRT), a high resolution LCD, a plasma display, an LED, or any other type of display suitable for use in the gaming machine 10. As shown, the primary display 14 includes the touch screen 28 overlaying the entire monitor (or a portion thereof) to allow players to make game-related selections. Alternatively, the primary display 14 of the gaming machine 10 may include a number of mechanical reels to display the outcome in visual association to at least one payline 32. In the illustrated embodiment, the gaming machine 10 is an "upright" version in which the primary display 14 is oriented vertically relative to the player. Alternatively, the gaming machine may be a "slant-top" version in which the primary display 14 is slanted at about a thirty-degree angle toward the player of the gaming machine 10.

[0024] A player begins play of the basic wagering game by making a wager via the value input device 18 of the gaming machine 10. A player can select play by using the player input device 24, via the buttons 26 or the touch screen keys 30. The basic game consists of a plurality of symbols arranged in an array, and includes at least one payline 32 that

indicates one or more outcomes of the basic game. Such outcomes are randomly selected in response to the wagering input by the player. At least one of the plurality of randomly-selected outcomes may be a start-bonus outcome, which can include any variations of symbols or symbol combinations triggering a bonus game.

[0025] In some embodiments, the gaming machine 10 may also include a player information reader 52 that allows for identification of a player by reading a card with information indicating his or her true identity. The player information reader 52 is shown in FIG. 1 as a card reader, but may take on many forms including a ticket reader, bar code scanner, RFID transceiver or computer readable storage medium interface. Currently, identification is generally used by casinos for rewarding certain players with complimentary services or special offers. For example, a player may be enrolled in the gaming establishment's loyalty club and may be awarded certain complimentary services as that player collects points in his or her player-tracking account. The player inserts his or her card into the player information reader 52, which allows the casino's computers to register that player's wagering at the gaming machine 10. The gaming machine 10 may use the secondary display 16 or other dedicated player-tracking display for providing the player with information about his or her account or other player-specific information. Also, in some embodiments, the information reader 52 may be used to restore game assets that the player achieved and saved during a previous game session.

[0026] Turning now to FIG. 2, the various components of the gaming machine 10 are controlled by a central processing unit (CPU) 34, also referred to herein as a controller or processor (such as a microcontroller or microprocessor). To provide gaming functions, the controller 34 executes one or more game programs stored in a computer readable storage medium, in the form of memory 36. The controller 34 performs the random selection (using a random number generator (RNG)) of an outcome from the plurality of possible outcomes of the wagering game. Alternatively, the random event may be determined at a remote controller. The remote controller may use either an RNG or pooling scheme for its central determination of a game outcome. It should be appreciated that the controller 34 may include one or more microprocessors, including but not limited to a master processor, a slave processor, and a secondary or parallel processor.

[0027] The controller 34 is also coupled to the system memory 36 and a money/credit detector 38. The system memory 36 may comprise a volatile memory (e.g., a random-access memory (RAM)) and a non-volatile memory (e.g., an EEPROM). The system memory 36 may include multiple RAM and multiple program memories. The money/credit detector 38 signals the processor that money and/or credits have been input via the value input device 18. Preferably, these components are located within the housing 12 of the gaming machine 10. However, as explained above, these components may be located outboard of the housing 12 and connected to the remainder of the components of the gaming machine 10 via a variety of different wired or wireless connection methods.

[0028] As seen in FIG. 2, the controller 34 is also connected to, and controls, the primary display 14, the player

input device 24, and a payoff mechanism 40. The payoff mechanism 40 is operable in response to instructions from the controller 34 to award a payoff to the player in response to certain winning outcomes that might occur in the basic game or the bonus game(s). The payoff may be provided in the form of points, bills, tickets, coupons, cards, etc. For example, in FIG. 1, the payoff mechanism 40 includes both a ticket printer 42 and a coin outlet 44. However, any of a variety of payoff mechanisms 40 well known in the art may be implemented, including cards, coins, tickets, smartcards, cash, etc. The payoff amounts distributed by the payoff mechanism 40 are determined by one or more pay tables stored in the system memory 36.

[0029] Communications between the controller 34 and both the peripheral components of the gaming machine 10 and external systems 50 occur through input/output (I/O) circuits 46, 48. More specifically, the controller 34 controls and receives inputs from the peripheral components of the gaming machine 10 through the input/output circuits 46. Further, the controller 34 communicates with the external systems 50 via the I/O circuits 48 and a communication path (e.g., serial, parallel, IR, RC, 10bT, etc.). The external systems 50 may include a gaming network, other gaming machines, a gaming server, communications hardware, or a variety of other interfaced systems or components. Although the I/O circuits 46, 48 may be shown as a single block, it should be appreciated that each of the I/O circuits 46, 48 may include a number of different types of I/O circuits.

[0030] Controller 34, as used herein, comprises any combination of hardware, software, and/or firmware that may be disposed or resident inside and/or outside of the gaming machine 10 that may communicate with and/or control the transfer of data between the gaming machine 10 and a bus, another computer, processor, or device and/or a service and/or a network. The controller 34 may comprise one or more controllers or processors. In FIG. 2, the controller 34 in the gaming machine 10 is depicted as comprising a CPU, but the controller 34 may alternatively comprise a CPU in combination with other components, such as the I/O circuits 46, 48 and the system memory 36.

[0031] As mentioned above, bonus games have been developed that incorporate elements of a playing-board game. It would be desirable to be able to increase the excitement and entertainment value of these bonus games, for example, using new methods to simulate the movement of the player (or the player's game symbol) around the game board of the playing-board game. FIGS. 3A-3D show an embodiment of the invention where the bonus game simulates the movement of the player around the game board of the playing-board game. In particular, FIGS. 3a-3d illustrate an embodiment of the invention where the movement of the player (or the player's game symbol) around the game board in the bonus game is affected by free spins of the reels.

[0032] FIG. 3a shows an exemplary implementation of the invention in more detail, as displayed on the main display 14 of the gaming machine 10. As can be seen, the basic game in this embodiment is a multi-line, five-reel video slot machine. Each reel 60a, 60b, 60c, 60d, and 60e includes a plurality of symbols, one of which is shown at 62. Only three symbols 62 are visible at any given time on each reel 60a-e, resulting in a three-by-five array of symbols. Here, the reels 60a-e and the symbols 62 have a playing-board game theme,

for example, the Monopoly™ playing-board game theme. Other playing-board game themes may also be used without departing from the scope of the invention.

[0033] In operation, a player typically inputs a wager into the gaming machine 10 and presses one of the touch keys 30 to spin the reels 60a-e. The reels 60a-e will eventually stop to reveal a certain symbol combination that includes an outcome of the basic game, which outcome is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes. Pay lines, one of which is shown at 64, identify the outcomes represented by the various symbol combinations.

[0034] In the exemplary implementation of FIG. 3a, three or more of a certain predefined symbol 66 appearing on an active pay line 64 represent a start-bonus game outcome. The predefined symbol 66 may be any one of the symbols 62, but is a “Mr. Moneybags” symbol in this exemplary implementation. Of course, other ways of triggering the bonus game known to those having ordinary skill in the art may also be used without departing from the scope of the invention. In any event, when the bonus game is triggered, the gaming machine 10 causes a Monopoly™ board to appear in the secondary display 16, as shown in FIG. 3B. The gaming machine 10 then grants the player a certain number (e.g., ten) of free spins or a period of free spins (e.g., one minute) of the reels 60a-e on the main display 14, as shown in FIG. 3c.

[0035] In accordance with embodiments of the invention, a die or dice symbol 68 (or other types of number indicators) appearing anywhere on one of the reels 60a-e after a free spin causes the gaming machine 10 to move the player around the Monopoly™ board by the number of spaces indicated by the dice symbol 68. The die or dice symbol 68 may already have a set number at the time the reels 60a-e stop, or it may go through a simulated rolling motion and then stop on a randomly selected number when the reels 60a-e stop. In the example shown in FIG. 3d, one of the free spins has resulted in a randomly selected number eight dice symbol 68 appearing in the middle location of the third reel 60c. This causes the gaming machine 10 to move the player around the Monopoly™ board eight spaces, as is illustrated in FIG. 3b. Here, the eighth space starting from the “Go” space 70 is the “Vermont Avenue” property 72. If the player has already advanced beyond the “Go” space 70, then he or she would start from his or her current position instead.

[0036] In some embodiments, for each property that the player lands on, he or she is awarded a credit amount equal to the value of that property. In FIG. 3b, for example, the player would be awarded 15 credits for landing on the “Vermont Avenue” property 72. Additionally, in some embodiments, all property values are increased by a predetermined amount each time the player completes one pass around the Monopoly™ board. The bonus game may also be designed to increase the property value for all properties in a Monopoly™ group each time the player lands on any property in the property group.

[0037] Other variations include the player being represented on the Monopoly™ board by a game piece (i.e., token) of his or her choosing, or the player’s position on the Monopoly™ board simply being highlighted or identified (i.e., without a game piece). In addition, some free spins do not result in a die or dice symbol 68 and/or the die or dice symbol 68 may be required to appear on a particular reel

60a-e, in a particular payline 64, and/or in a particular location on the reels 60a-e. Furthermore, the free spins may be initiated by predefined events in the basic game (e.g., the appearance of three “Mr. Moneybags” symbols 66), and/or they may be initiated by certain events in a bonus game, either the same bonus game or a different bonus game, or different episodes of the bonus game. Instead of moving the player around the Monopoly™ board by the number of spaces indicated by the dice symbol 68, movement around the board may be determined by particular symbols or symbol combinations appearing anywhere on the reels or at particular locations on the reels without regard to a number indicated by the symbol or symbol combination.

[0038] FIG. 4 illustrates another exemplary implementation where the free spins of the reels 60a-e affect the movement of the player around the game board of the bonus game (and hence the awards and/or prizes he or she may achieve). In FIG. 4, the Monopoly™ board displayed on the secondary display 16 includes a “Free Parking” meter 74 that may or may not have an initial credit amount. Each time a free spin of the reels 60a-e results in the appearance of a die or dice symbol 68, either at any location or at a predetermined location, the gaming machine 10 increases the credit amount in the “Free Parking” meter 74 by a predetermined increment. It is also possible to increase the credit amount in the “Free Parking” meter 74 with each free spin regardless of whether a die or dice symbol 68 appears on the reels 60a-e. Then, if the player happens to land on the “Free Parking” space 76, the gaming machine 10 awards the player the credit amount in the “Free Parking” meter 74 and may or may not reset the meter to a base value.

[0039] In addition to the “Free Parking” space 76, landing on the “Chance” space 78 or the “Community Chest” space 80 may also benefit the player. Referring again to FIG. 4, in some implementations, if the player lands on the “Chance” space 78 or the “Community Chest” space 80, the gaming machine 10 increases the values of certain randomly selected properties 82 by a randomly selected amount. Then, if the player subsequently lands on one of those properties, then the gaming machine 10 awards him or her the increased value.

[0040] The free spins of the reels 60a-e may also affect the conclusion of the bonus game. For example, the conclusion of the bonus game may be conditioned on an event or events in the bonus game that are driven by the free spins. FIGS. 5a-5b illustrate an example where the bonus game is concluded when the player receives a predetermined number (e.g., one, two, three, etc.) of “Go to Jail” cards 84. The “Go to Jail” cards 84 may be given to the player when he or she lands on the “Go to Jail” space 86 (see FIG. 4), as indicated by the die or dice symbol 68 appearing on the reels 60a-e following a free spin. In a similar manner, the player may draw the “Go to Jail” cards 84 after landing on the “Chance” space 78 or the “Community Chest” space 80. It is also possible for the player to receive a “Go to Jail” card 84 when a “Go to Jail” symbol 88 appears on the reels 60a-e following a free spin. The number of “Go to Jail” cards 84 that will terminate the bonus game may depend, in some cases, on the amounts the player has wagered, either during the current gaming session or over several gaming sessions.

[0041] In some embodiments, a “Get Out of Jail Free” card 90 (see FIG. 5b) cancels a “Go to Jail” card 84.

Therefore, the player may prolong the bonus game by acquiring as many "Get Out of Jail Free" cards 90 as possible. The player may acquire the "Get Out of Jail Free" cards 90 by drawing them when he or she lands on the "Chance" space 78 or the "Community Chest" space 80 (see FIG. 4), or he or she may receive them when a "Get Out of Jail Free" symbol 92 appears on one of the reels 60a-e after a free spin. In some implementations, the gaming machine 10 may also award the player one or more complementary "Get Out of Jail Free" cards 90 at the beginning of the bonus game. The number of complementary "Get Out of Jail Free" cards 90 may depend, in some cases, on the amounts the player has wagered, either during the current gaming session or over several gaming sessions.

[0042] As mentioned above, when the bonus game is triggered, the gaming machine 10 grants the player a certain number of free spins of the reels 60a-e. When the player uses up all of his or her free spins, or if the player decides to prematurely terminate the gaming session, the gaming machine 10 halts the bonus game temporarily until the player returns or has obtained more free spins. In these embodiments, the gaming machine 10 stores information regarding the player's accumulated assets, including his or her current position on the Monopoly™ board along with all credit amounts he or she has accumulated, all "Go to Jail" or "Get Out of Jail Free" cards 84 and 90 he or she has obtained, and all property values and other credit amounts (e.g., the "Free Parking" meter 74) at time the bonus game is halted. Such gaming machines 10 are "persistent state" gaming machines because they are able to store the current state of the wagering game when game play stops and then restore the current state of the wagering game when game play resumes.

[0043] The gaming machine 10 may store the above asset information in a portable data unit (e.g. smart card, magnetic card, ticket, etc.) carried by a player, in the local system memory 36, and/or an external system memory (not expressly shown) in the external systems 50 (see FIG. 2), depending on the architecture and operation of the overall gaming system. For example, if the information is stored in an account in the external systems 50, the player may access such account with a portable data unit. The assets may then be restored to the gaming machine 10 or to another gaming machine connected to the gaming system for use in a subsequent gaming session by the player. The assets may also be sold or otherwise transferred to another player who may then use the assets in a subsequent gaming session, either at the same or a different gaming terminal as the first gaming session.

[0044] While the invention has been described with respect to a number of exemplary embodiments, obvious modifications and variations exist. Each of these embodiments and the obvious variations thereof is contemplated as falling within the spirit and scope of the claimed invention, which is set forth in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A gaming machine, comprising:

a value input device for receiving a wager from a player at the gaming machine, a wagering game being initiated upon receipt of the wager; and

at least one display for displaying a plurality of reels of the wagering game, each reel having a plurality of symbols for representing an outcome of the wagering game, the outcome being randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes;

the at least one display also for displaying a game board of the wagering game, the game board having a game path composed of a plurality of game spaces;

wherein upon occurrence of a predetermined event, the player is given one or more free spins of the reels and movement of a space identifier of the player around the game path is determined by at least one advancement symbol or symbol combination appearing on the reels after one of the one or more free spins.

2. The gaming machine according to claim 1, wherein the plurality of outcomes includes a start-bonus outcome and the predetermined event includes the start-bonus outcome being selected as the randomly selected outcome.

3. The gaming machine according to claim 1, wherein the at least one display includes a first display for displaying the reels and a second display for displaying the game board.

4. The gaming machine according to claim 1, wherein the advancement symbol or symbol combination includes a dice symbol.

5. The gaming machine according to claim 4, wherein the dice symbol simulates a random rolling motion before settling on a randomly selected number.

6. The gaming machine according to claim 1, wherein the advancement symbol or symbol combination may appear anywhere on the reels.

7. The gaming machine according to claim 1, wherein the advancement symbol or symbol combination must appear in a specific location on the reels.

8. The gaming machine according to claim 1, wherein the gaming machine allows the player to store a current state of the wagering game and to subsequently restore the current state of the wagering game.

9. A method of conducting a wagering game on a gaming machine, the method comprising:

initiating a wagering game upon receipt of a wager from a player at the gaming machine, the wagering game having an outcome that is randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes;

displaying a game board and a plurality of reels of the wagering game, the game board having a game path composed of a plurality of game spaces and each reel having a plurality of symbols;

giving the player one or more free spins of the reels upon occurrence of a predetermined event; and

moving a space identifier of the player around the game path based on an advancement symbol or symbol combination appearing on the reels after one of the one or more free spins.

10. The method according to claim 9, wherein the game board includes at least one game space having a predetermined credit value associated therewith, further comprising increasing the credit value associated with the game space when the space identifier lands on the game space.

11. The method according to claim 9, wherein the game board includes at least one group of game spaces, each game

space in the group of game spaces having a predetermined credit value associated therewith, further comprising increasing the credit value associated with every game space in the group of game spaces when the space identifier lands on any game space in the group of game spaces.

12. The method according to claim 9, wherein the game board includes a plurality of game spaces that each have a credit value associated therewith, further comprising increasing the credit values associated with randomly selected ones of the plurality of game spaces when the space identifier lands on a predetermined game space.

13. The method according to claim 9, further comprising giving the player a game termination symbol when the space identifier lands on a predetermined game space or when the game termination symbol appears on the plurality of reels after one of the one or more free spins.

14. The method according to claim 12, further comprising terminating the wagering game upon the player receiving a predetermined number of game termination symbols.

15. The method according to claim 12, further comprising giving the player a game prolongation symbol when the space identifier lands on a predetermined game space or when the game prolongation symbol appears on the plurality of reels after one of the one or more free spins.

16. The method according to claim 15, wherein each game prolongation symbol cancels one game termination symbol.

17. The method according to claim 16, further comprising giving the player a predetermined number of complementary game prolongation symbols.

18. A computer readable storage medium encoded with instructions for directing a gaming machine to perform the method according to claim 9.

19. A gaming machine, comprising:

a value input device for receiving a wager from a player at the gaming machine, the wagering game being initiated upon receipt of the wager;

a plurality of reels of the wagering game, each reel having a plurality of symbols for representing an outcome of the wagering game, the outcome being randomly selected from a plurality of outcomes; and

a display for displaying a game board having a game path, the plurality of reels including symbols that cause advancement of a space identifier of the player along the game path during free spins of the reels.

20. The gaming machine according to claim 19, wherein the game board includes at least one game space having a predetermined credit value associated therewith, further comprising increasing the credit value associated with the game space when the space identifier lands on the game space.

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