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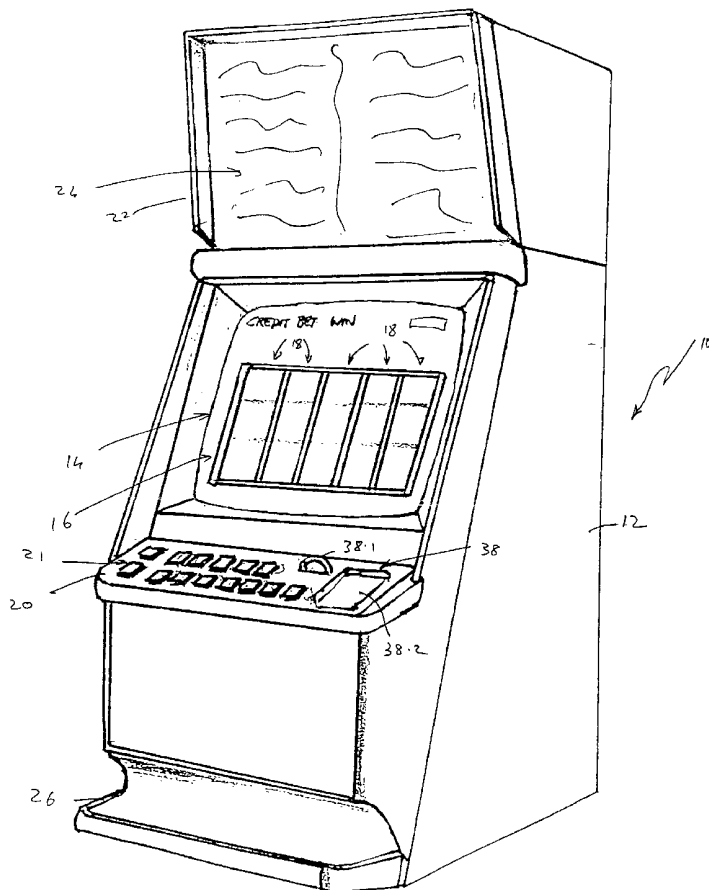
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(54) Title: GAMING MACHINE WITH SPECIAL SYMBOL



(57) Abstract: A gaming machine (10) has a display (14) and a game controller arranged to control images displayed on the display (14). The game controller is arranged to play a game (16) wherein at least one random event is caused to be displayed on the display (14). If a predefined winning event occurs, the machine (10) awards a prize. When a special symbol is carried by a symbol-carrying element into a display position on the display (14), the special symbol substitutes as more than one occurrence of a standard symbol of the game (16).



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Gaming machine with special symbol

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a gaming machine. More particularly, the invention relates to a gaming machine and to an improvement to a game played on such a gaming machine.

5

Background to the Invention

Players who regularly play gaming machines quickly tire of particular games and therefore it is necessary for manufacturers of these machines to develop innovative game features which add interest to the games. In so
10 doing, it is hoped to keep players amused and therefore willing to continue playing the game as well as to attract new players.

Also, with the growth that has occurred in the gaming machine market, there is intense competition between manufacturers to supply various existing and new venues. When selecting a supplier of gaming machines, the
15 operator of a venue will often pay close attention to the popularity of various games with their patrons. Therefore, gaming machine manufacturers are keen to devise games which are popular with the players as a mechanism for improving sales, retaining customers and attracting new customers.

Summary of the Invention

According to the invention, there is provided a gaming machine having a display means and a game control means arranged to control images displayed on the display means, the game control means being arranged to play a game wherein at least one random event is caused to be displayed on
25 the display means and, if a predefined winning event occurs, the machine awards a prize, the gaming machine being characterized in that, when a special symbol is carried by a symbol-carrying element into a display position on the display means, the special symbol substitutes as more than one occurrence of a standard symbol of the game.

30 At least one applicable standard symbol may have to be present together with the special symbol in a winning combination in order for the special symbol to substitute.

When more than one special symbol occurs in a winning combination, each special symbol may substitute for more than one occurrence of a
35 standard symbol of the game provided that the maximum number of symbols

does not exceed the maximum number of symbols in an applicable payable of the game.

Prizes may be awarded for specific combinations of special symbols.

5 The special symbol of the invention may be applicable in respect of any type of game played on gaming machines. However, for ease of explanation, the invention will be described with reference to spinning reel games and, more particularly, gaming machines having video simulations of spinning reels.

10 The special symbol may appear on a standard reel of the game. Instead, the special symbol may appear on a dedicated, separate reel. For example, a spinning reel game may have a video simulation of five spinning reels. Then, the special symbol may be carried on a sixth reel, the sixth reel not having any of the standard reel symbols.

15 It will be appreciated that, for a card game, special cards could be added to the deck or, instead or in addition, a certain card or cards in the deck could be designated to act as the special cards in addition to their other functions. Similarly, in respect of ball-type games, such as Keno, Bingo or Pachinko, special balls may be added to the set of balls or certain of the standard balls may double as the special balls.

20

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention is now described by way of example with reference to the accompanying diagrammatic drawings in which:-

25 Figure 1 shows a three dimensional view of a gaming machine, in accordance with the invention;

Figure 2 shows a block diagram of a control circuit of the gaming machine;

Figures 3a to 3e show screen displays of variations of a first embodiment of a game played on the gaming machine of Figure 1;

30 Figure 4 shows a screen display of a second embodiment of the game;

Figure 5 shows a screen display of a third embodiment of the game;

and

Figure 6 shows a screen display of a fourth embodiment of the game;

35

Detailed Description of the Drawings

In Figure 1, reference numeral 10 generally designates a gaming machine, including a game, in accordance with the invention. The machine 10 includes a console 12 having a video display unit 14 on which a game 16 is played, in use. The preferred form of the game 16 is a spinning reel game which simulates the rotation of a number of spinning reels 18. It will, however, be appreciated that the invention is equally applicable to other types of games such as card games or ball games such as Keno, or the like. A midtrim 20 of the machine 10 houses a bank 21 of buttons for enabling a player to play the game 16. The midtrim 20 also houses a credit input mechanism 38 including a coin input chute 38.1 and a bill collector 38.2.

The machine 10 includes a top box 22 on which artwork 24 is carried. The artwork 24 includes paytables, details of bonus awards, etc.

A coin tray 26 is mounted beneath the console 12 for cash payouts from the machine 10.

Referring now to Figure 2 of the drawings, a control means or control circuit 30 is illustrated. A program which implements the game and user interface is run on a processor 32 of the control circuit 30. The processor 32 forms part of a controller 34 which drives the screen of the video display unit 14 and which receives input signals from sensors 36. The sensors 36 include sensors associated with the bank 21 of buttons and touch sensors mounted in the screen 16. The controller 34 also receives input pulses from the mechanism 38 indicating that a player has provided sufficient credit to commence playing. The mechanism 38 may, instead of the coin input chute 38.1 or the bill collector 38.2, or in addition thereto, be a credit card reader (not shown) or any other type of validation device.

Finally, the controller 36 drives a payout mechanism 40 which, for example, may be a coin hopper for feeding coins to the coin tray 26 to make a pay out to a player when the player wishes to redeem his or her credit.

The invention relates to the use of a special symbol in the game where the special symbol performs a particular function. Thus, the special symbol performs that function when it appears on the screen. Hence, in the case of a spinning reel game, the special symbols will be carried on the reel strips to be displayed at random intervals.

In this invention, a special symbol 122, indicated in the drawings as a "Bonus" symbol, is provided. When this symbol 122 is spun up in a winning

combination in a game, as shown by screen display 120, the symbol 122 substitutes as more than one occurrence of a particular standard symbol, preferably, two of that symbol. The only exception will be if the total number of symbols in the combination ends up being more than the maximum
5 number of symbols on the paytable in which case the prize for the maximum number of symbols will be paid.

In the following description, it is assumed that the game 16 is a standard spinning reel game with prizes paying when they appear in left-to-right and/or right-to-left combinations on a payline. As illustrated, there are
10 five reels with three standard horizontal paylines applicable. Coinciding wins on a payline will be added. However, for the special symbol 122 to substitute in a combination of other standard symbols, there must be at least one of the actual, standard symbols present in the combination and not just special symbols.

15 In the game illustrated in Figure 3a of the drawings, a winning combination exists on payline one. As described above, the symbol 122 substitutes as two of the standard symbols. Accordingly, a prize is paid for 5 x Q on payline one.

20 If, however, the symbol 122 appeared on the fourth reel, rather than the second reel, as shown in Figure 3b, a prize would be paid for 5 x Q as well as 3 x TEN, the latter paying from right-to-left.

In the case of two special symbols 122 appearing side-by-side as shown in Figure 3c of the drawings, a prize is paid for 5 x Q due to each symbol 122 substituting for two of the standard symbols.

25 However, in the scenario illustrated in Figure 3d of the drawings, theoretically there are six Q symbols on payline one. However, as a prize is only payable for a maximum of five Q symbols, a win will be awarded in respect of 5 x Q symbols.

30 In the embodiment illustrated in Figure 3e of the drawings, a prize is paid for 5 x Q on payline one. Note that the special symbols 122 do not substitute as four of a kind for the rest of the set of standard symbols because there must be at least one of the actual symbols present in the combination for the prize to be paid. Hence the special symbols can only substitute for the symbol Q in the illustrated combination. It will be appreciated that if the
35 machine paid a prize for an "any" combination, the situation would be different.

In another embodiment of the invention, the special symbol 122 may appear only on the centre reel, i.e. reel three. Then, for a left-to-right and/or right-to-left paying game the special symbol will only serve to improve combinations of at least three of a kind to at least four of a kind. In other words, it would not be possible for the special symbol 122 to appear with only one other symbol to give a three of a kind win. Also, it would not then be possible to get more than one special symbol in a winning combination. Hence, as illustrated in Figure 4 of the drawings a win will be paid for the combination of 4 x 8 and 4 x J on payline two as well as 5 x 7 on payline three.

Prizes may also be given for specific combinations of special symbols 122 in addition to the special substitute wins. In this case, the symbol 122 will be acting as a symbol in its own right and will not represent more than one of itself. In the example illustrated in Figure 5 of the drawings, a prize is paid for 5 x Bonus, the prize being substantially higher than the prize for five of any other symbol.

Figure 6 shows the application of the special symbol 122 to a card game. In this embodiment, the special symbol substitutes as more than one card symbol towards a specific paying combination. In the illustrated example, the presence of the special symbol 122 results in a Royal Flush pay because the special symbol 122 substitutes as both a Queen of spades and a Ten of spades in the one hand.

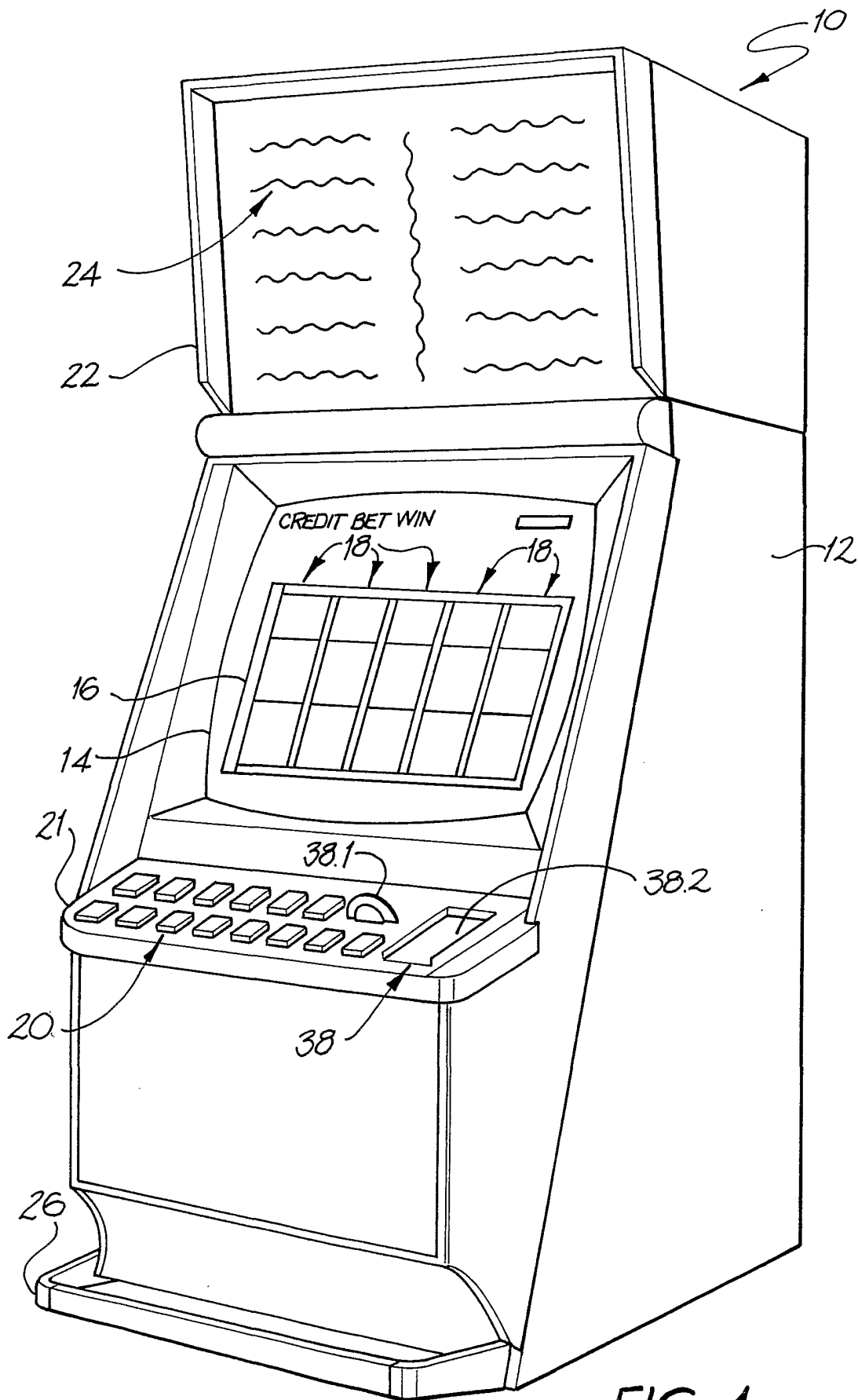
Note that the special symbol 122 could also apply to a ball game such as Keno, or the like.

Hence, it is an advantage of the invention that a special symbol is provided which, it is believed, will enhance player interest.

It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that numerous variations and/or modifications may be made to the invention as shown in the specific embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as broadly described. The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive.

CLAIMS:

1. A gaming machine having a display means and a game control means arranged to control images displayed on the display means, the game control means being arranged to play a game wherein at least one random event is caused to be displayed on the display means and, if a predefined winning event occurs, the machine awards a prize, the gaming machine being characterized in that, when a special symbol is carried by a symbol-carrying element into a display position on the display means, the special symbol substitutes as more than one occurrence of a standard symbol of the game.
2. The gaming machine of claim 1 in which at least one applicable standard symbol must be present together with the special symbol in a winning combination in order for the special symbol to substitute.
3. The gaming machine of claim 1 or claim 2 in which, when more than one special symbol occurs in a winning combination, each special symbol substitutes for more than one occurrence of a standard symbol of the game provided that the maximum number of symbols does not exceed the maximum number of symbols in an applicable payable of the game.
4. The gaming machine of any one of the preceding claims in which prizes are awarded for specific combinations of special symbols.
5. The gaming machine of any one of the preceding claims in which the special symbol appears on a standard symbol-carrying element of the game.
6. The gaming machine of any one of claims 1 to 4 inclusive in which the special symbol appears on a dedicated, separate symbol-carrying element.



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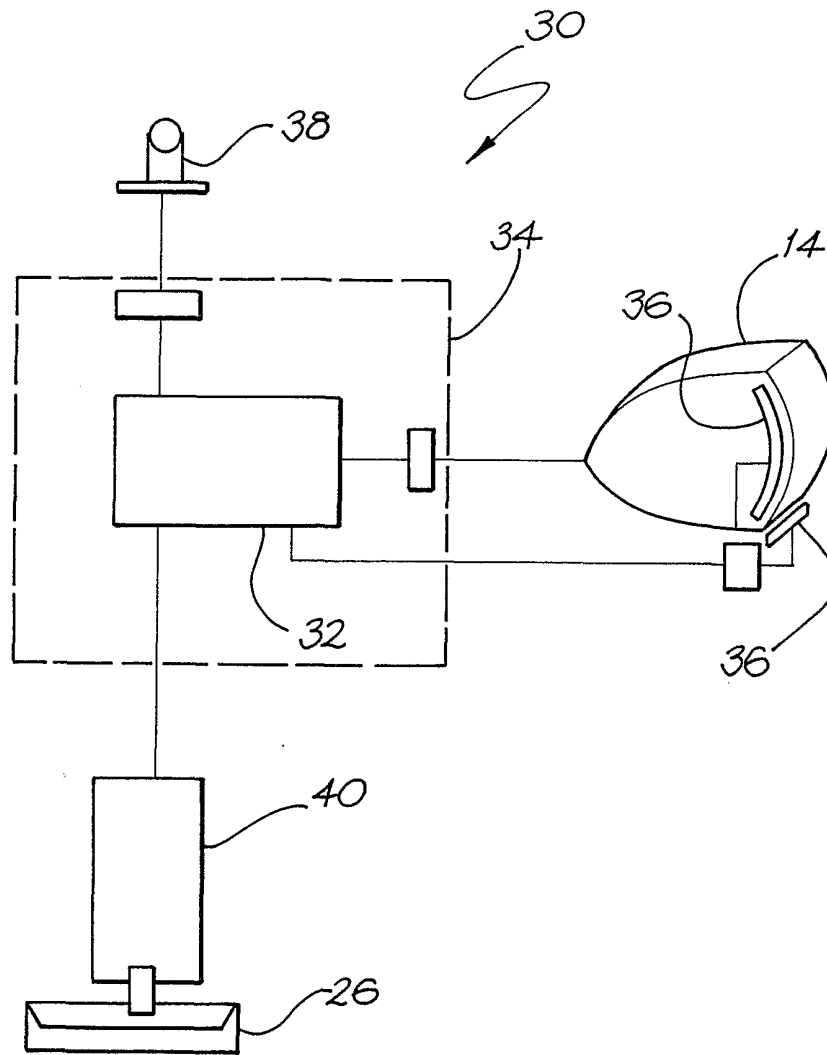


FIG. 2

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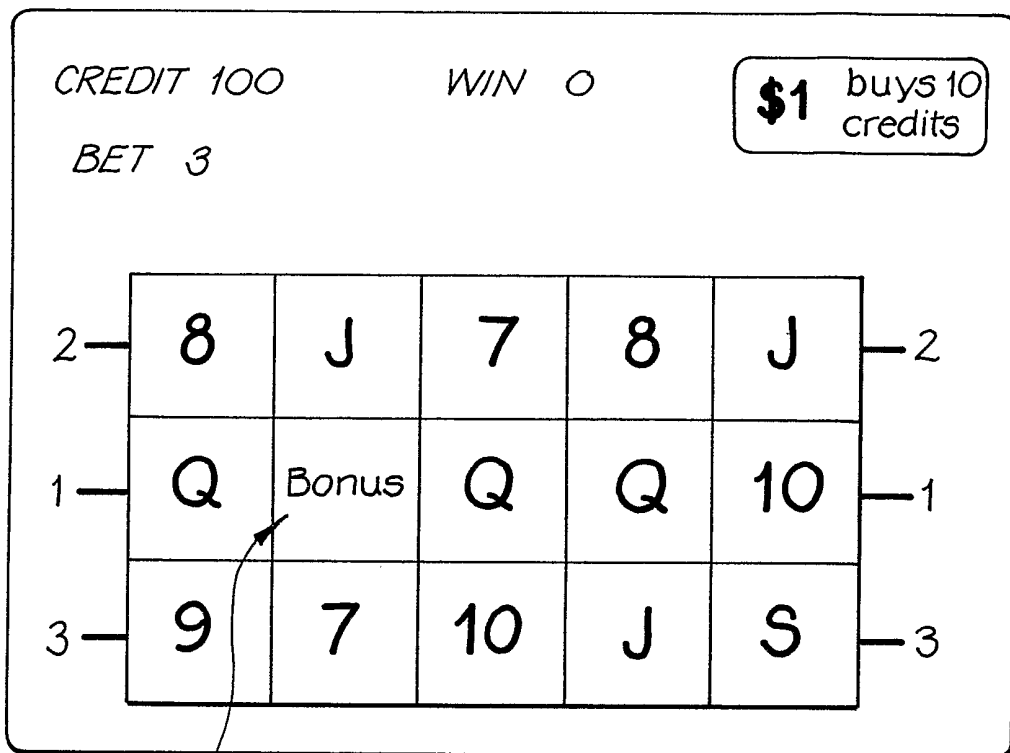


FIG. 3a

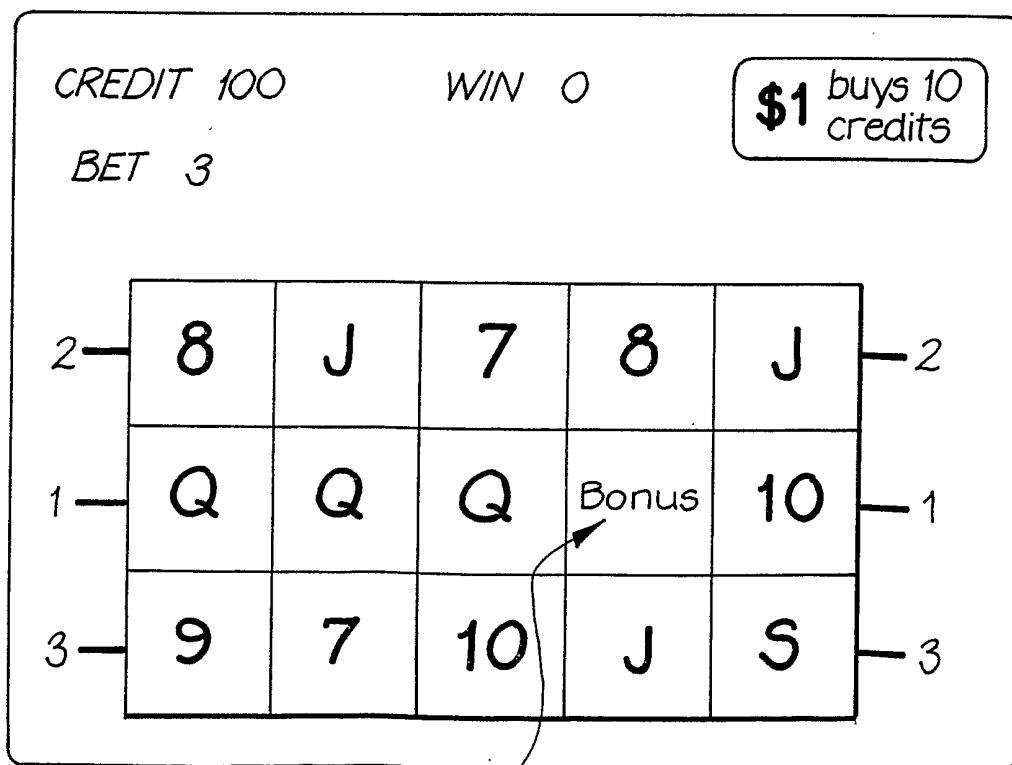


FIG. 3b

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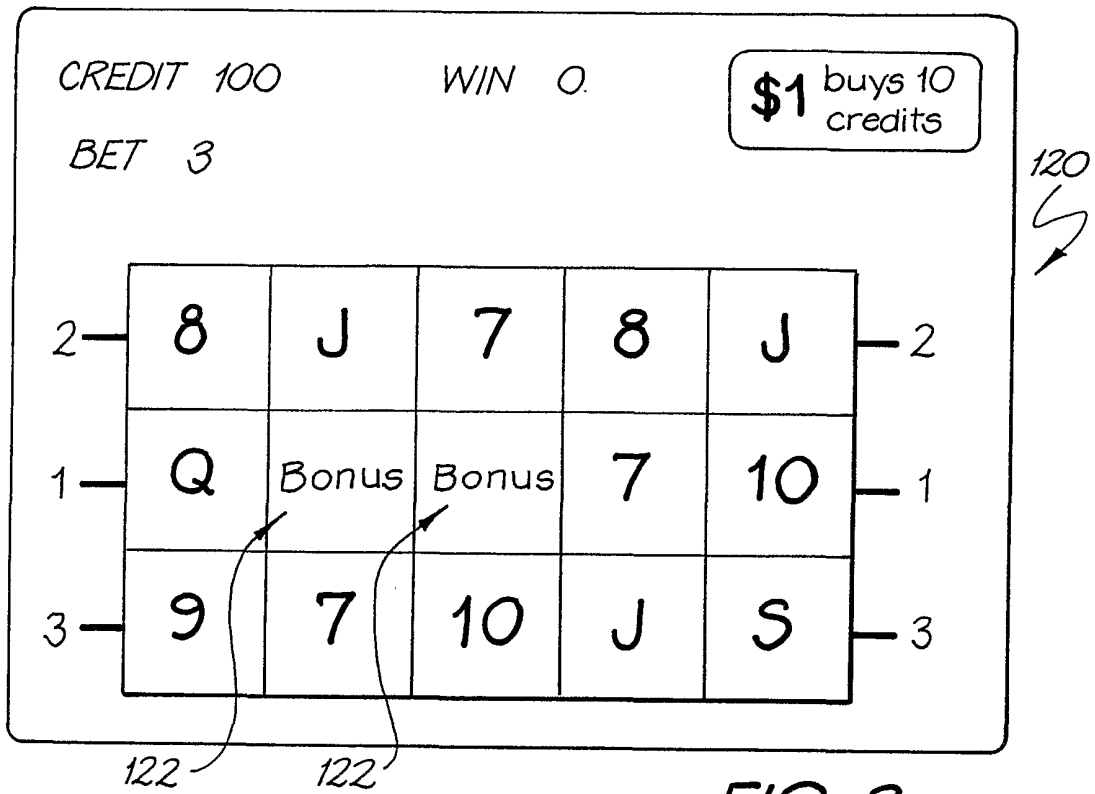


FIG. 3c

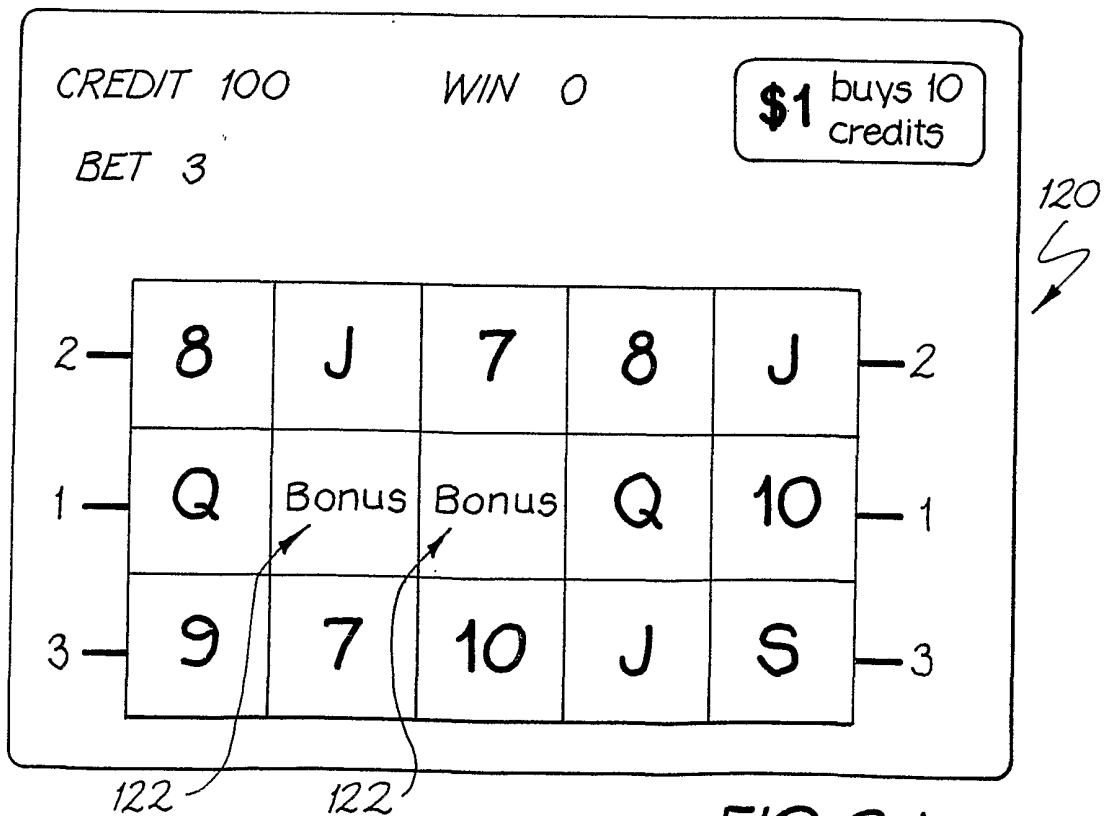


FIG. 3d

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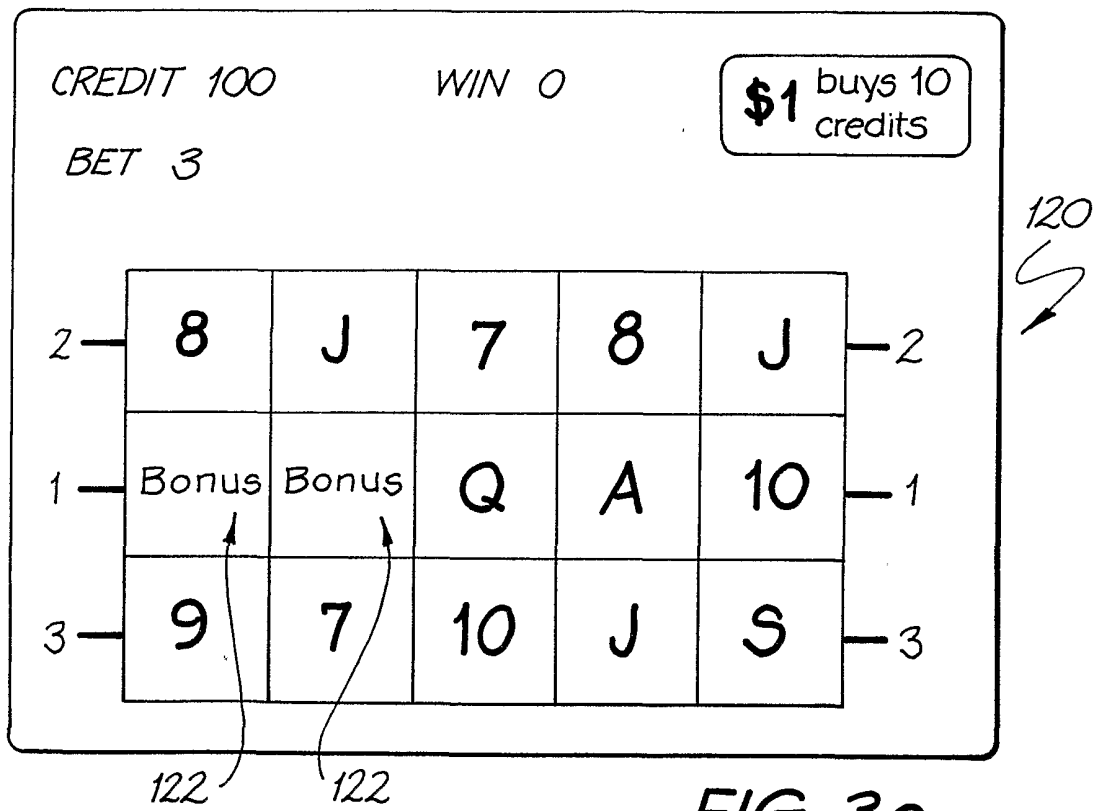


FIG. 3e

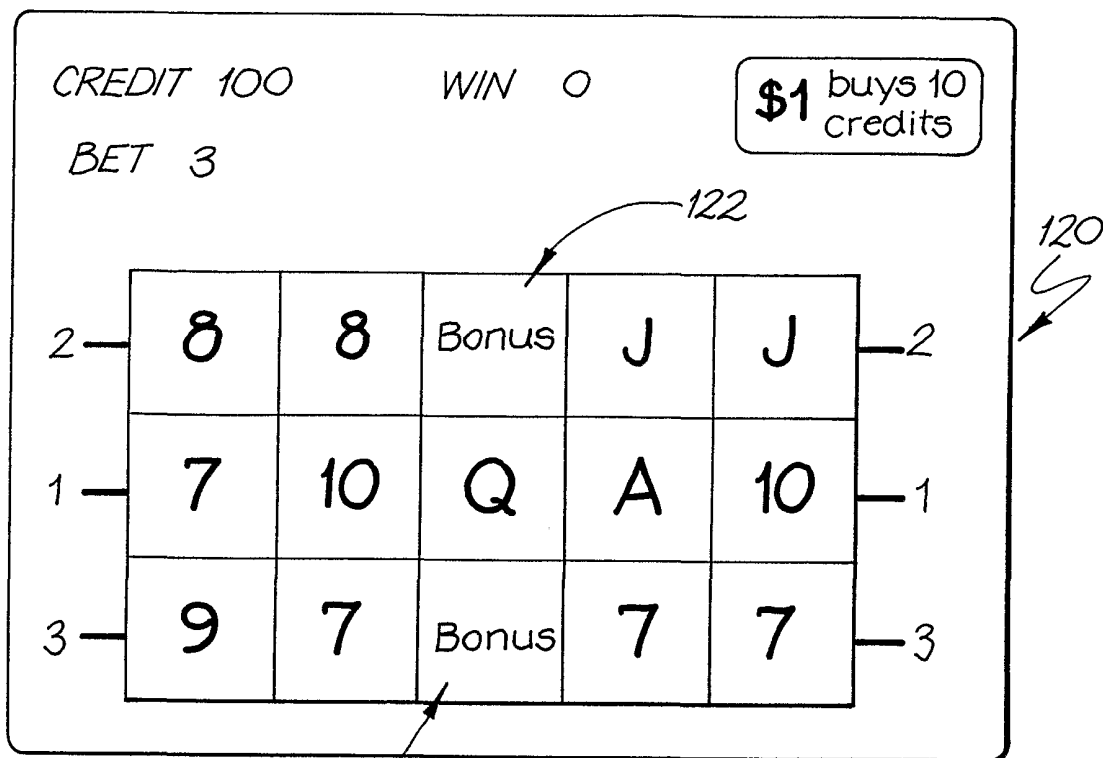


FIG. 4

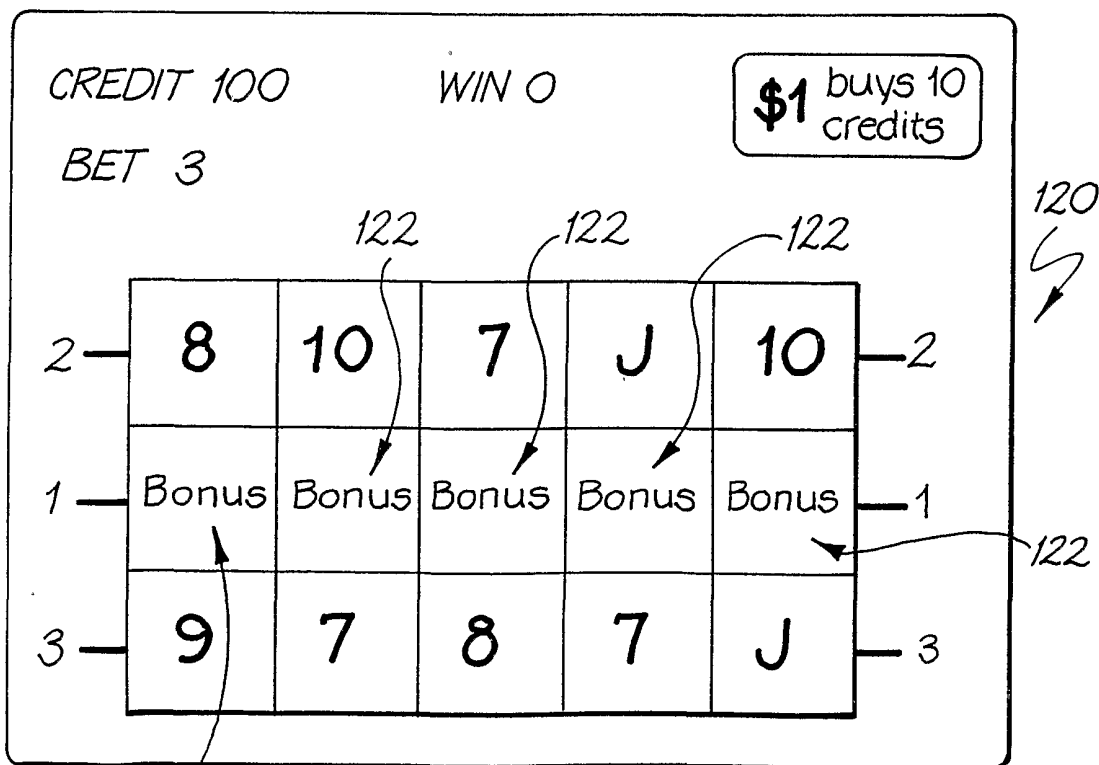


FIG. 5

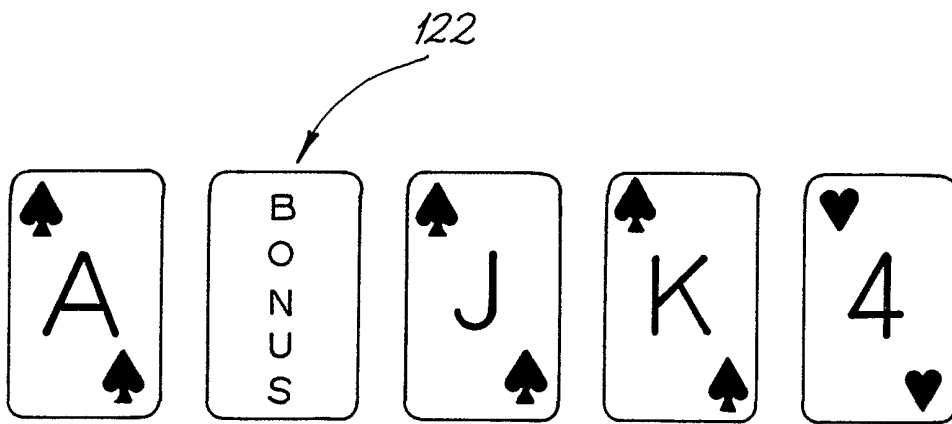


FIG.6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/AU01/00552

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER																	
Int. Cl. ⁷ : A63F 5/04																	
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC																	
B. FIELDS SEARCHED																	
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) IPC: A63F 5/04																	
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched AU: IPC AS ABOVE																	
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) DWPI with keywords (eg poker, symbol, special)																	
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT																	
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.															
X	EP 950998 A (ARUZE CORPORATION) 20 October 1999 Entire document	1-6															
X	WO 97/32285 A (ARISTOCRAT LEISURE INDUSTRIES PTY LTD) 4 September 1997 Entire document	1-6															
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex																	
* Special categories of cited documents: <table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%;">"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</td> <td style="width: 33%;">"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</td> <td style="width: 33%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date</td> <td>"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</td> <td>"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</td> <td>"&" document member of the same patent family</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention		"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone		"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art		"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&" document member of the same patent family		"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		
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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&" document member of the same patent family																
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Date of the actual completion of the international search 8 June 2001		Date of mailing of the international search report 14 June 2001															
Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaustrialia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929		Authorized officer A. SEN Telephone No : (02) 6283 2158															

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on patent family members

International application No.
PCT/AU01/00552

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent Document Cited in Search Report			Patent Family Member		
EP	950998	AU	23720/99	JP	11290505
WO	9732285	AU	18618/97	US	6089977
END OF ANNEX					