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(54) **WAGERING GAME WITH PLAYER-DIRECTED PURSUIT OF AWARD OUTCOMES**

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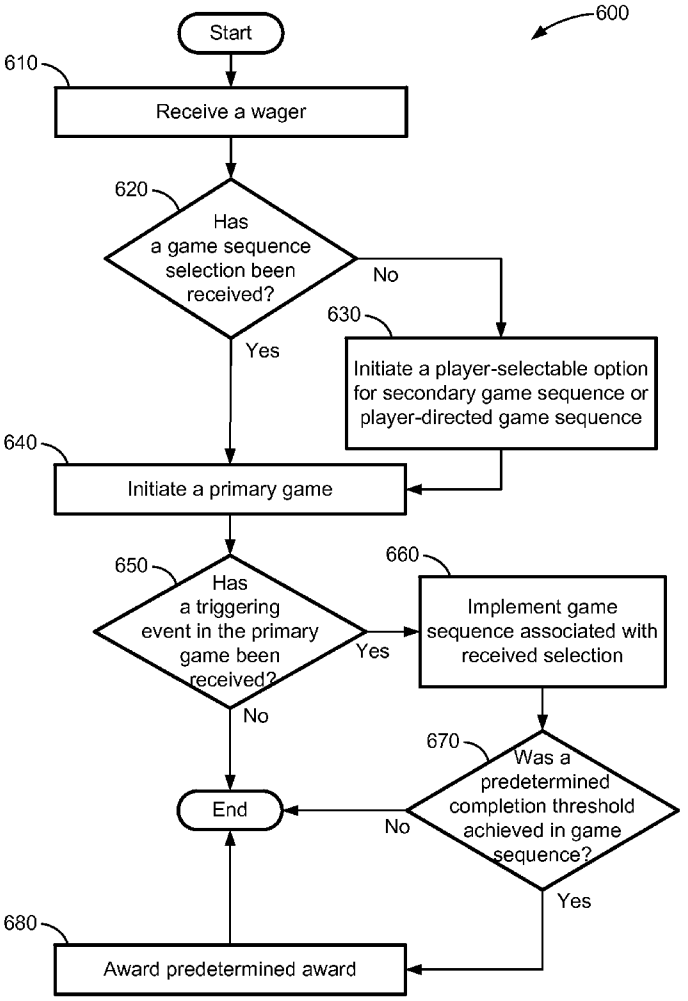
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A63F 9/24 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **463/25**; 463/43

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method and system for conducting a wagering game includes receiving a wager. A standard game of the wagering game is initiated via a processor. The standard game has an expected value associated therewith. A player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game is initiated via a processor. The player-directed secondary game includes a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences. Each of the game sequences has a predetermined completion threshold capable of being achieved during play of the standard game. A player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game is received. In response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold for that game sequence during play of the standard game, a secondary award is awarded that is independent of the expected value of the standard game.



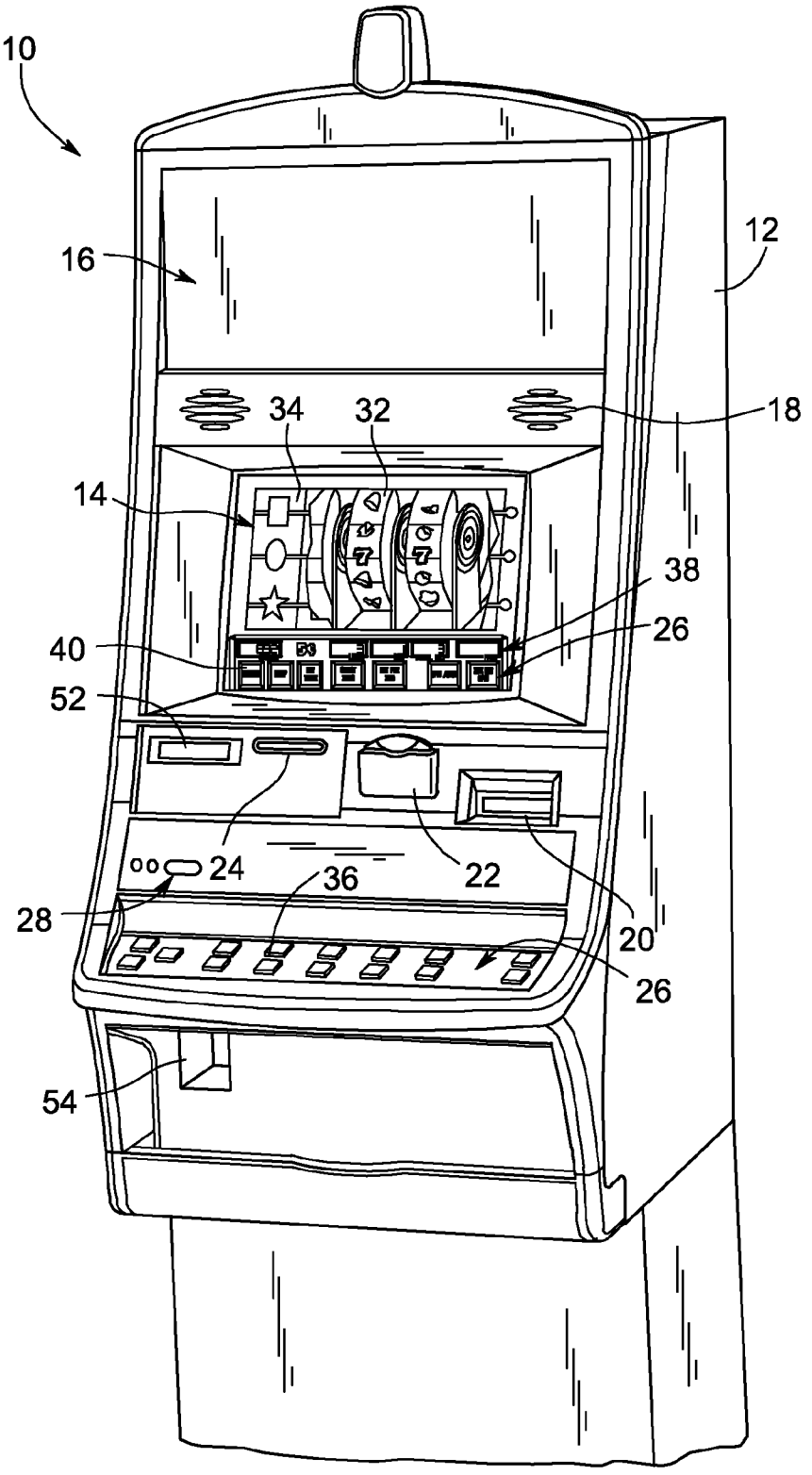


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

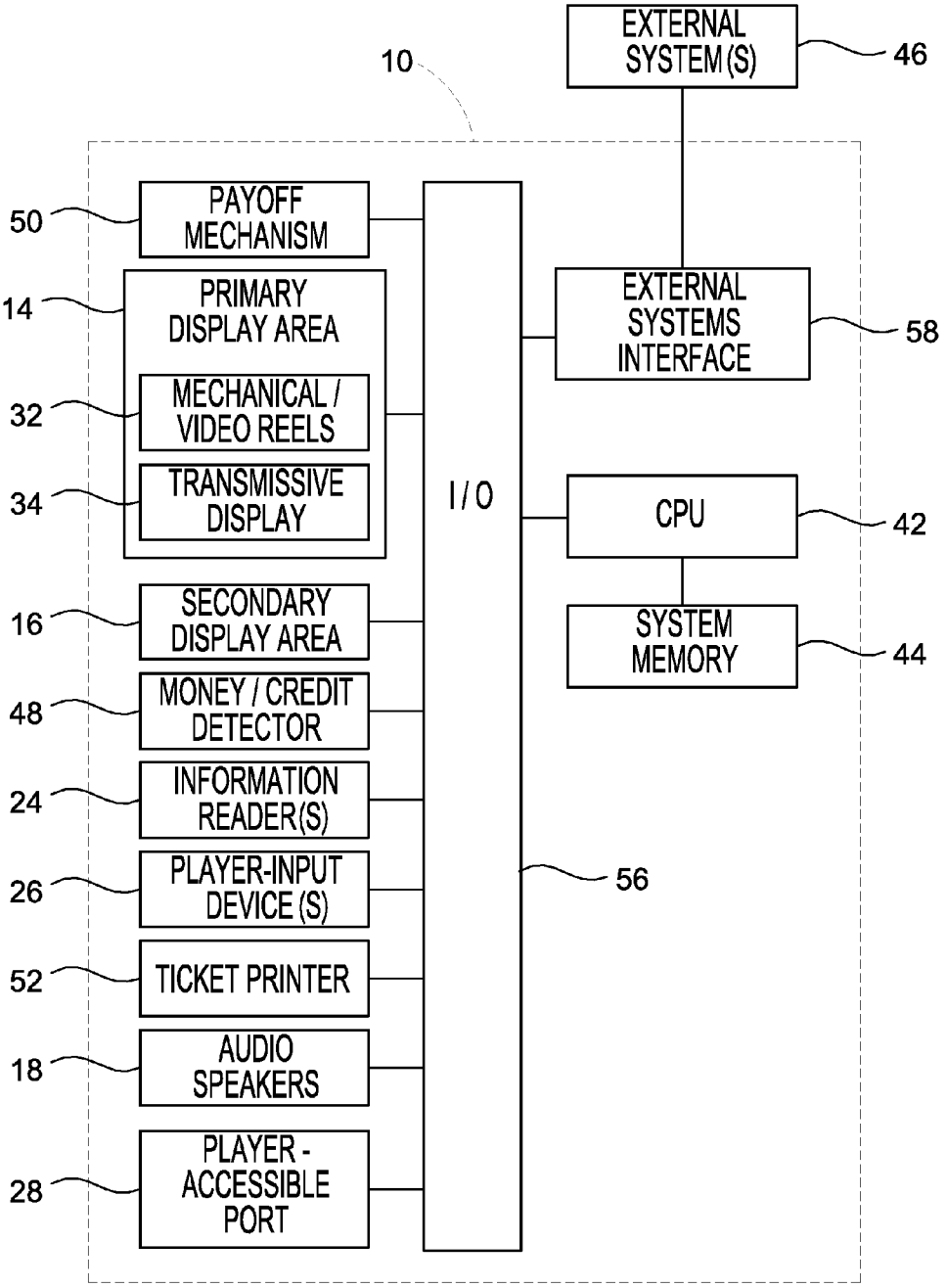


FIG. 2
(PRIOR ART)

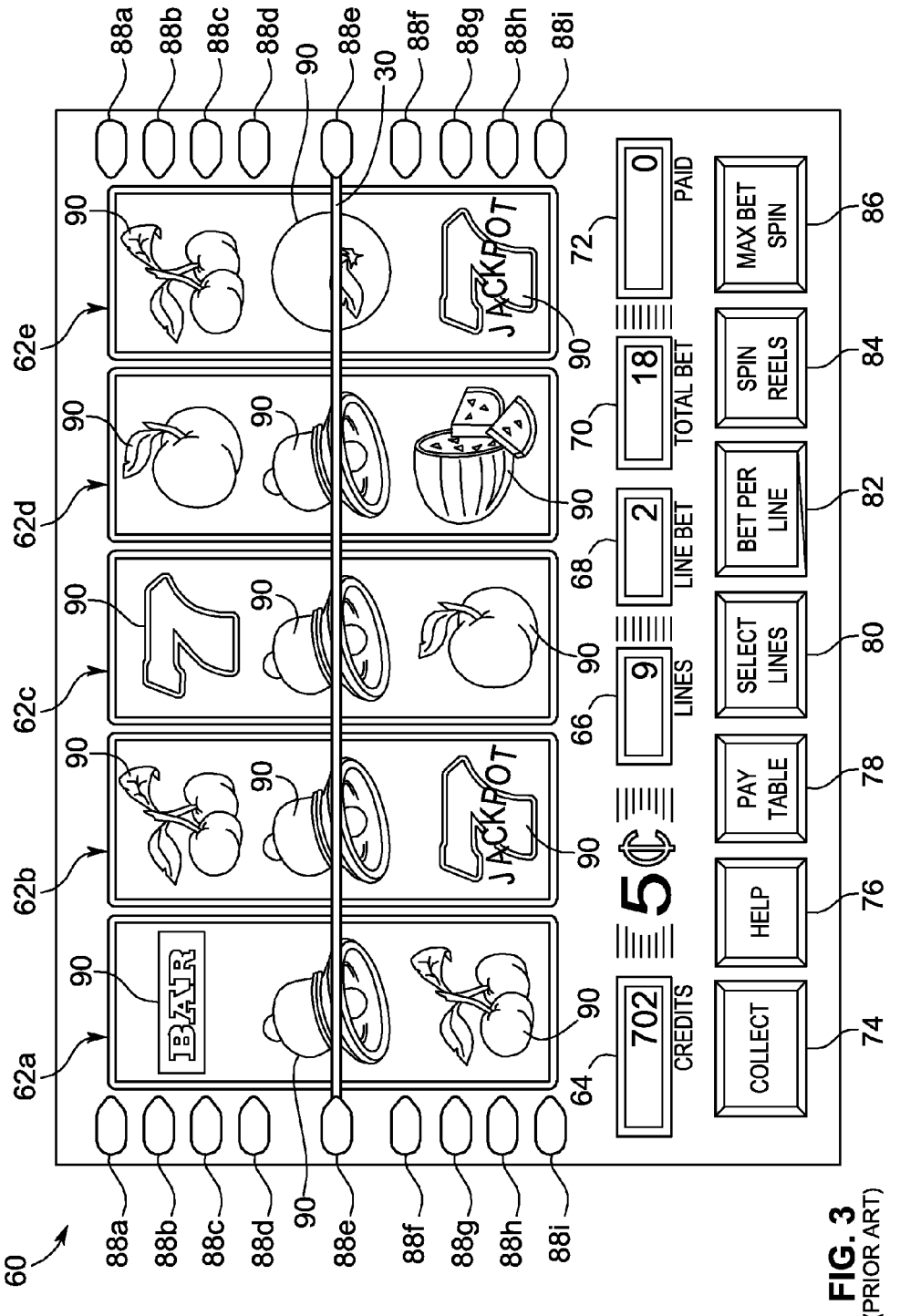


FIG. 3
(PRIOR ART)

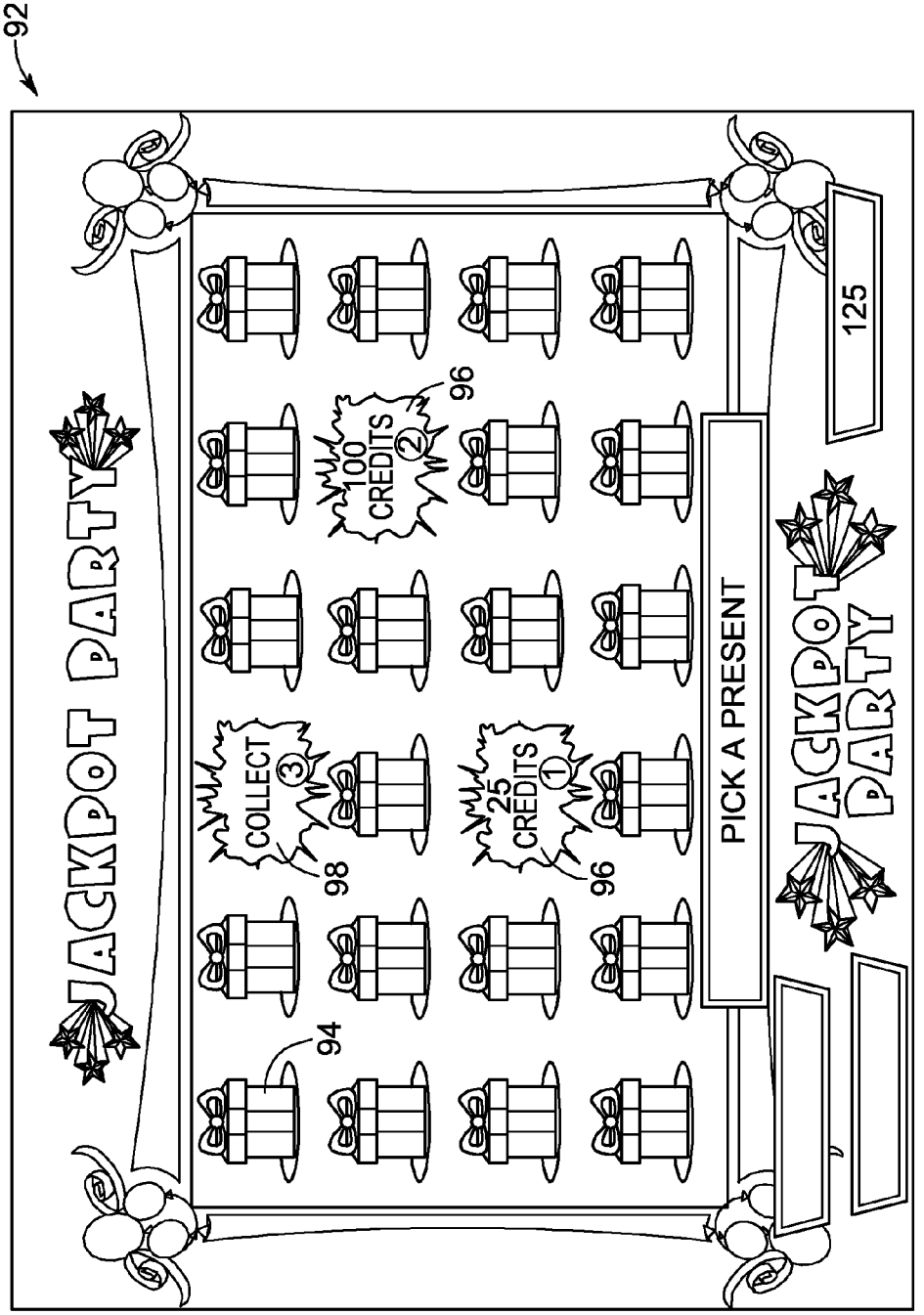


FIG. 4
(PRIOR ART)

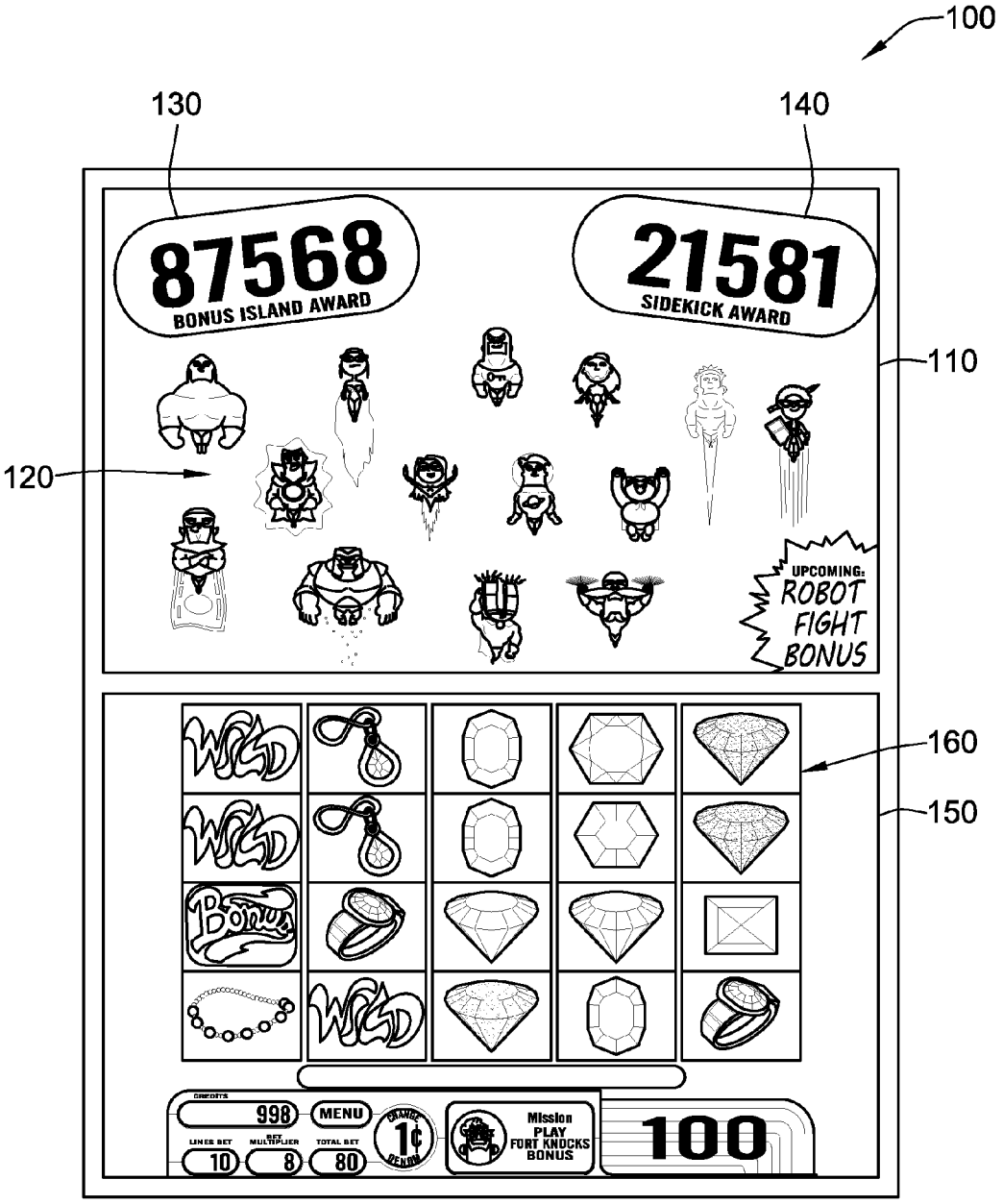

100
130
140
87568
BONUS ISLAND AWARD
21581
SIDEKICK AWARD
110
120
UPCOMING:
ROBOT
FIGHT
BONUS
160
150
998
MENU
LINES BET
10
MULTIPLIER
8
TOTAL BET
80
1¢
Mission
PLAY
FORT KNOCKS
BONUS
100

FIG. 5

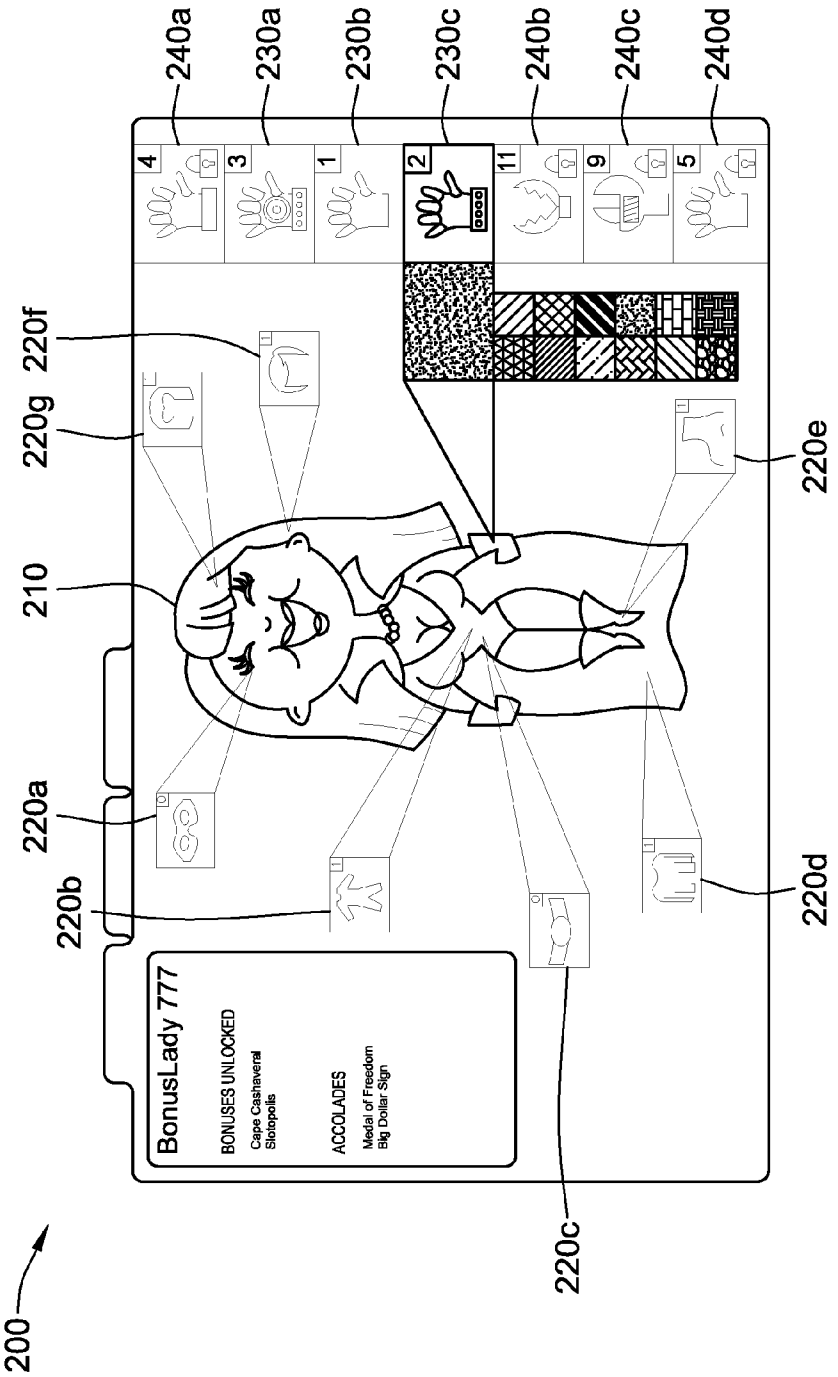

200
240a
230a
230b
230c
240b
240c
240d
4
3
1
2
11
9
5
220f
220g
210
220a
220b
220c
220d
220e
BonusLady 777
BONUSES UNLOCKED
Cape Casheveral
Slotopolis
ACCOLADES
Medal of Freedom
Big Dollar Sign

FIG. 6

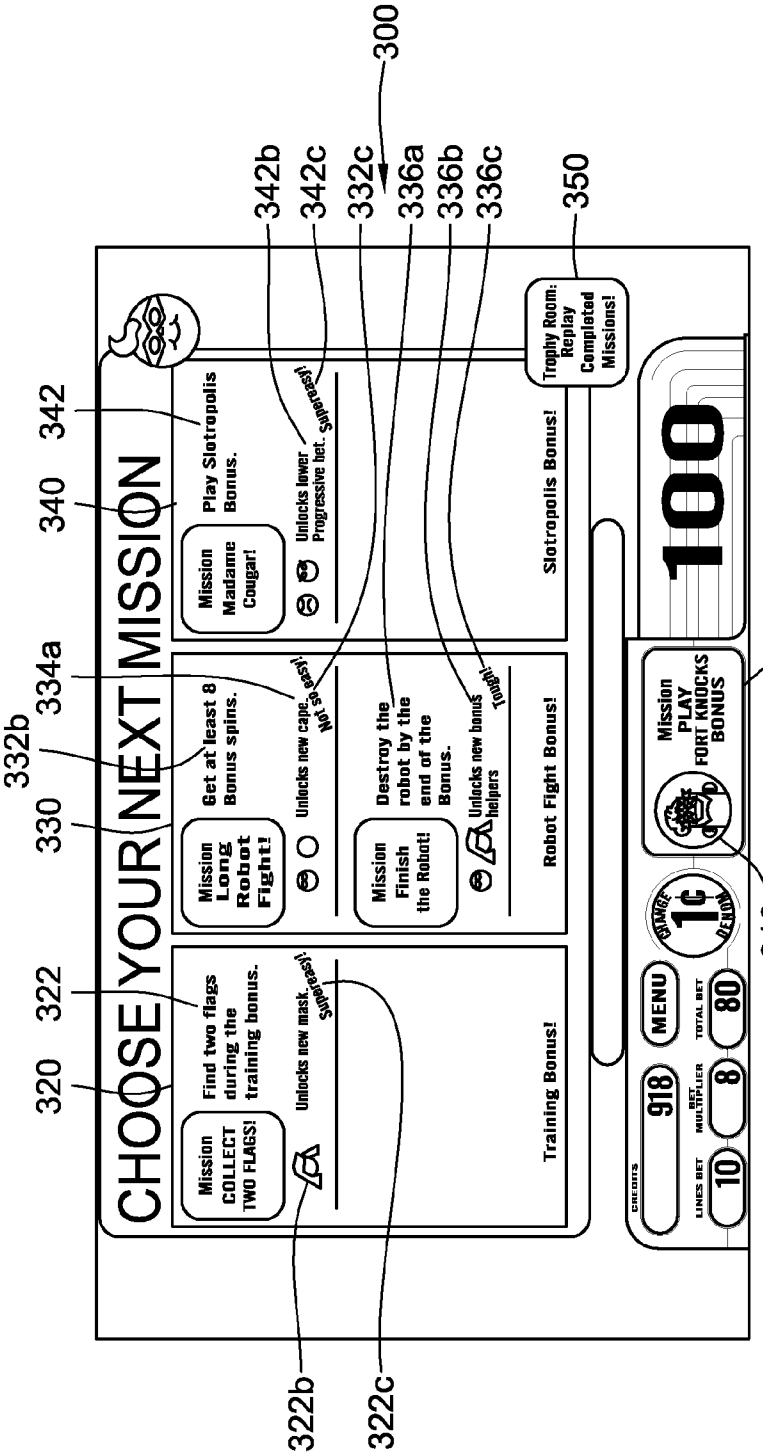

CHOOSE YOUR NEXT MISSION
Mission COLLECT TWO FLAGS!
Find two flags during the training bonus.
Unlocks new mask. Suspicious!
Training Bonus!
Mission Long Robot Fight!
Get at least 8 Bonus spins.
Unlocks new cape. Not so easy!
Mission Finish the Robot!
Destroy the robot by the end of the Bonus.
Unlocks new bonus helpers Tough!
Robot Fight Bonus!
Mission Madame Cougar!
Play Slotropolis Bonus.
Unlocks lower Progressive bet. Suspicious!
Slotropolis Bonus!
Trophy Room: Replay Completed Missions!
Mission PLAY FORT KNOCKS BONUS
CREDITS 918
LINES BET 10
BET MULTIPLIER 8
MENU
TOTAL BET 80
CHANGE 1¢ DENOM
100
320
322
322b
322c
330
332b
334a
340
342
342b
342c
332c
336a
336b
336c
350
305
310
300

FIG. 7

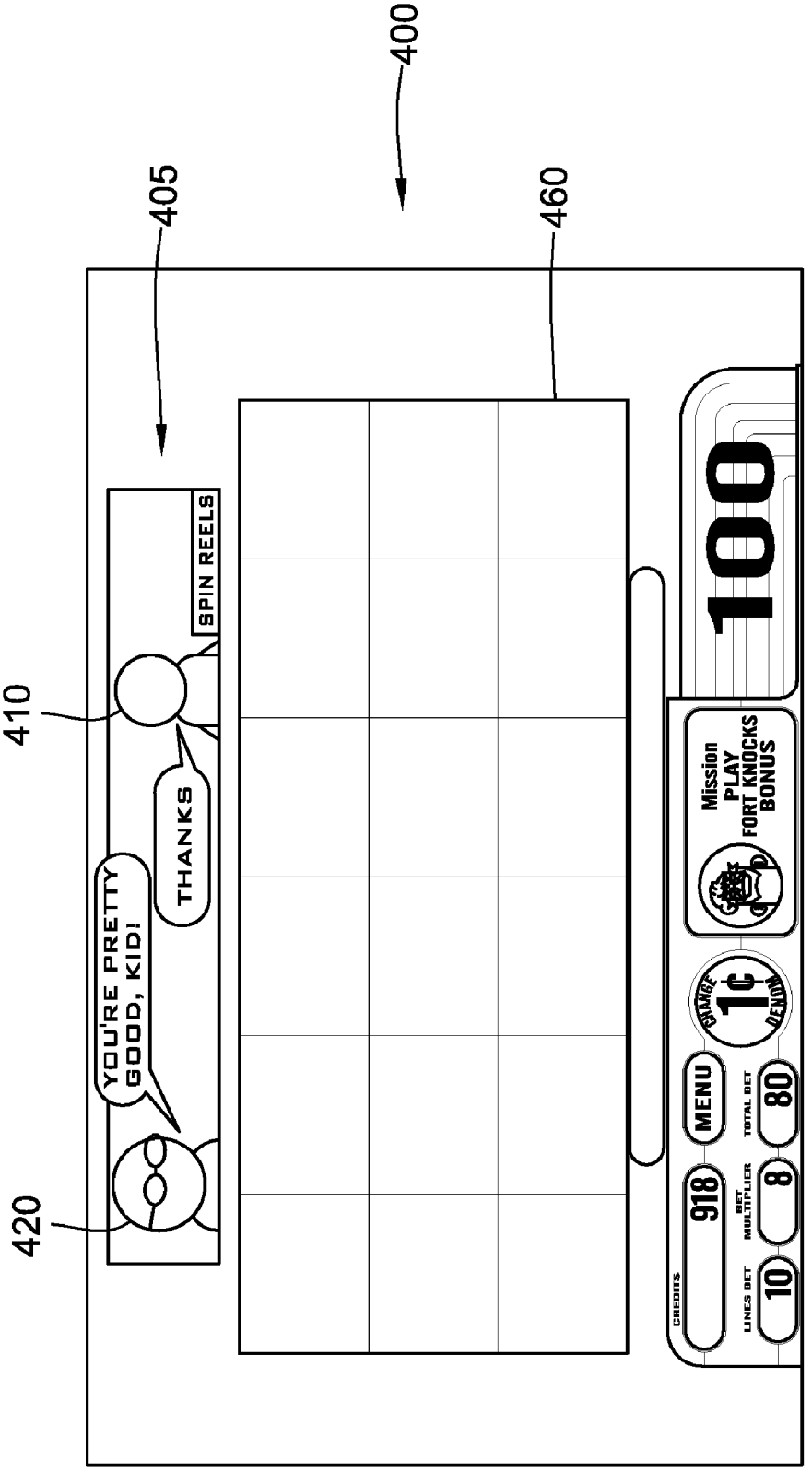

400
405
460
410
420
SPIN REELS
THANKS
YOU'RE PRETTY GOOD, KID!
100
Mission
PLAY
FORT KNOCKS
BONUS
CHANGE
1¢
DENOM
MENU
TOTAL BET
80
BET MULTIPLIER
8
LINES BET
10
CREDITS
918

FIG. 8

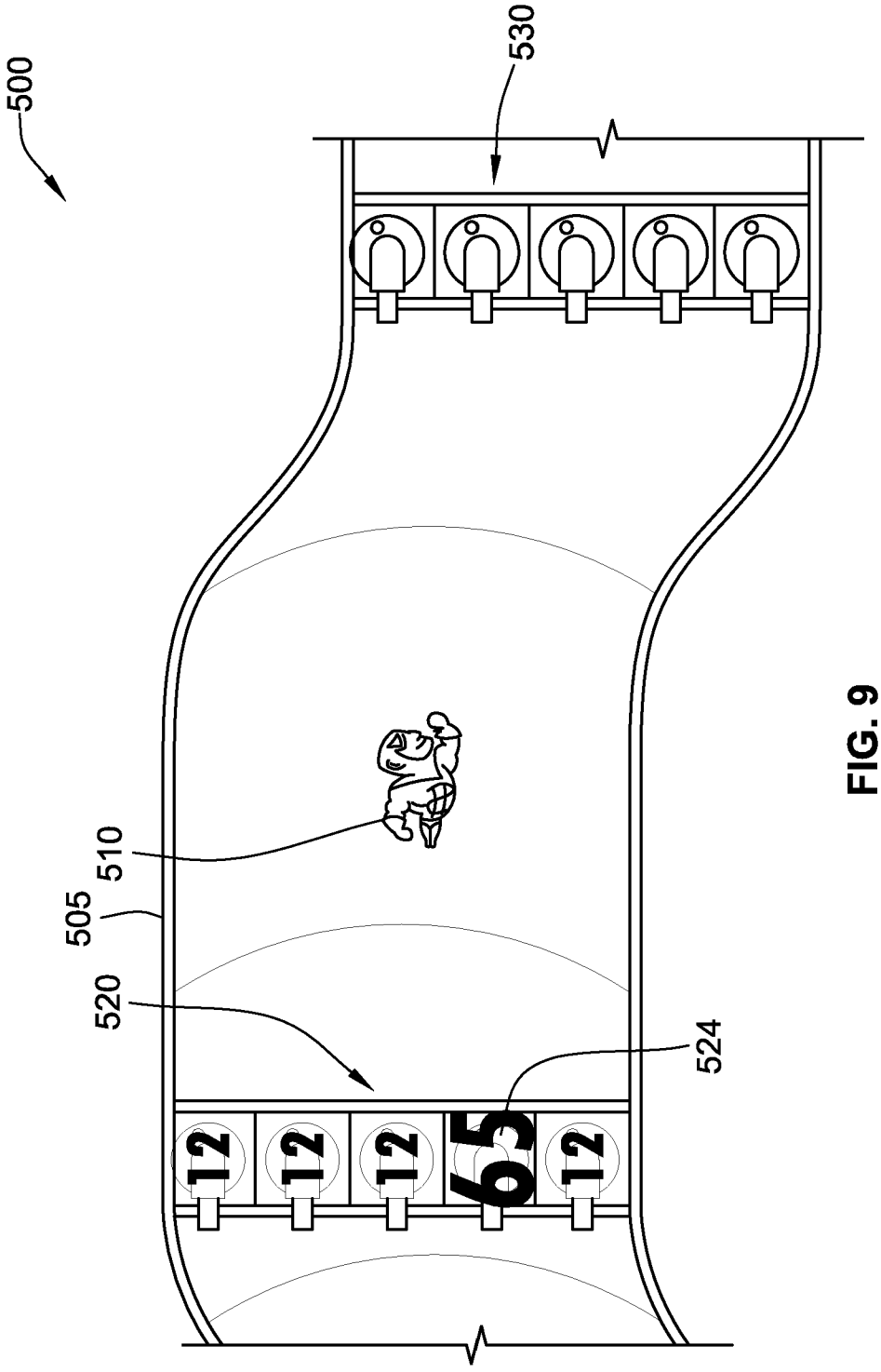


FIG. 9

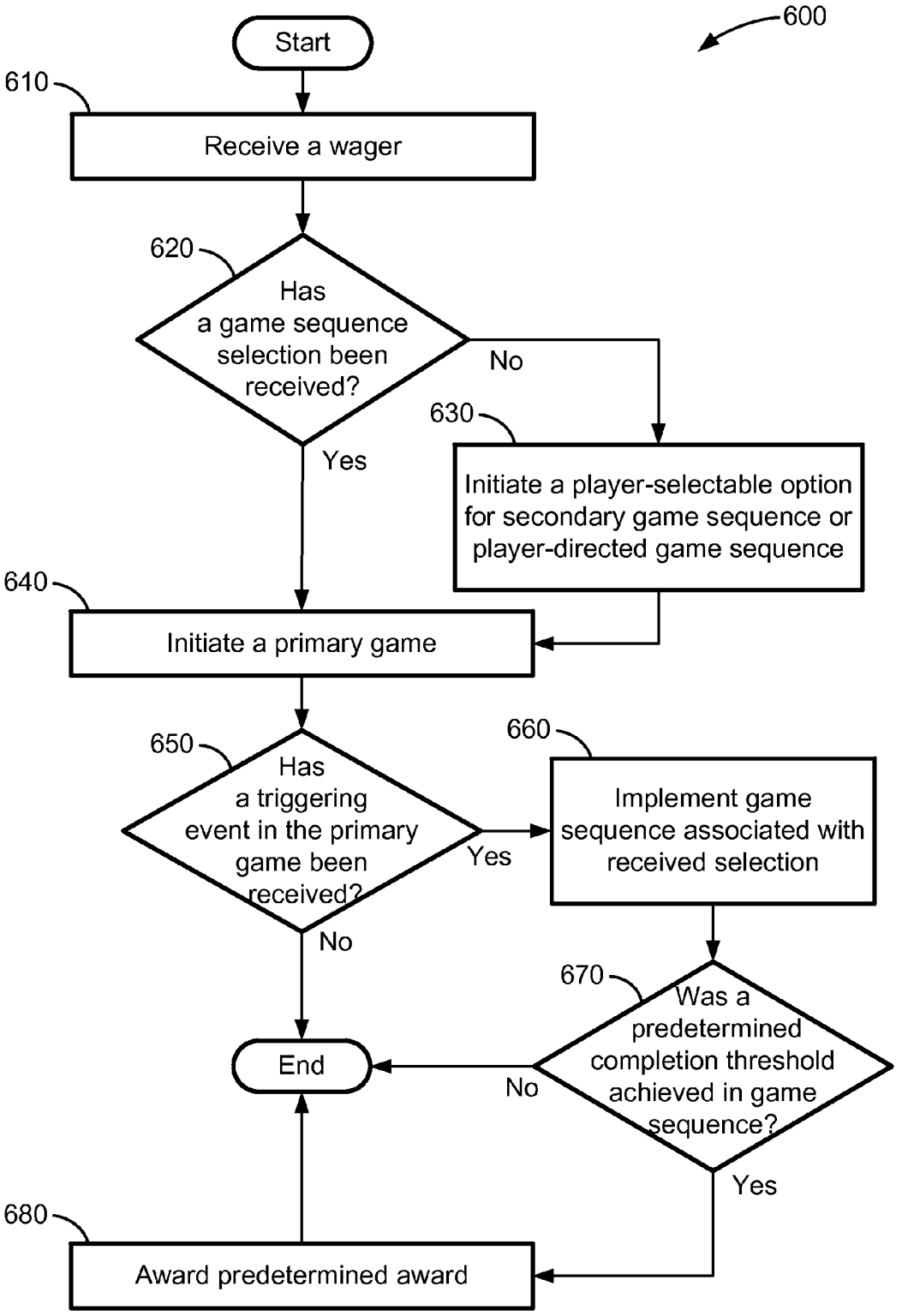

600
Start
610
Receive a wager
620
Has a game sequence selection been received?
No
Yes
630
Initiate a player-selectable option for secondary game sequence or player-directed game sequence
640
Initiate a primary game
650
Has a triggering event in the primary game been received?
Yes
No
660
Implement game sequence associated with received selection
670
Was a predetermined completion threshold achieved in game sequence?
No
Yes
End
680
Award predetermined award

FIG. 10

WAGERING GAME WITH PLAYER-DIRECTED PURSUIT OF AWARD OUTCOMES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application is related to and claims the benefits of U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/410,824, filed Nov. 5, 2010, U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/410,850, filed Nov. 5, 2010, and U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/413,307, filed Nov. 12, 2010, all of which are hereby incorporated by reference herein in their entireties.

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention relates generally to a gaming system, and methods for playing wagering games, and more particularly, to secondary games including player-directed game sequences.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] Gaming terminals, 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.

[0005] To maintain a player's interest in the game, some player can be motivated by being awarded a random bonus award. Other types of wagering games include episodic wagering games in which game play progresses through a plurality of game episodes.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] According to one aspect of the present disclosure, a method of conducting a wagering game includes a standard game in which a player input is received and a wagering game outcome is determined. The method further includes the act of receiving a player input via a first user interface device. The player input is transformed to electronic data signals at least partially indicative of a wager to play the wagering game. The wager from the data signals is interpreted via at least one of one or more processors. The recording of a digital representation of the wager is initiated in one or more storage devices. The standard game of the wagering game is initiated via at least one of the one or more processors. The standard game has an expected value associated therewith. A player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game is initiated via at least one of the one or more processors. The player-directed secondary game includes a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences. Each of the game sequences has a predetermined completion threshold capable of being achieved during play of the standard game. A player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game is received. In response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold for that game sequence during play of the standard game, a secondary award is awarded that is independent of the expected value of the standard game.

[0007] According to another aspect of the present disclosure, a method of conducting a wagering game on a gaming system includes the acts of receiving a first player input via a first user interface device. The first player input is indicative of a wager to play the wagering game. After receiving the player input, a standard game of the wagering game is initiated via at least one of one or more processors. The standard game has an expected value associated therewith. A player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game is initiated via at least one of the one or more processors. The player-directed secondary game includes a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences. Each of the game sequences has a predetermined completion threshold achievable during play of the standard game. A second player input indicative of a player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game is received. During play of the standard game, the predetermined completion threshold associated with the received player selection of one of the game sequences is achieved. In response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold associated with the selected bonus game, a non-monetary secondary award is awarded.

[0008] According to yet another aspect of the present disclosure, a gaming system includes a credit detector configured to detect a wager to play a wagering game having a standard game and a secondary game. One or more displays are configured to display a randomly selected outcome for the standard game and to display the secondary game. A controller is operative to implement the following acts including initiating the standard game having an expected monetary value associated with achieving a winning outcome in the standard game. The controller further initiates the secondary game. The secondary game includes a plurality of player-directed and player-selectable game sequences. Each of the plurality of game sequences has an associated predetermined completion threshold capable of occurring during play of the standard game. The controller is also operative to display indicia of at least one of the plurality of game sequences on the one or more displays. The indicia include information on the associated predetermined completion threshold. After the act of displaying, the controller is further operative to detect a player selection of one of the game sequences. After the act of detecting the player selection, the controller is also operative to detect a player achievement of the predetermined completion threshold for the selected one of the game sequences. In response to the act of detecting the player achievement, the controller is operative to award a secondary award that is not associated with the expected monetary value of the standard game.

[0009] According to another aspect of the present disclosure, a method of conducting a wagering game includes receiving a wager via a user interface device, the wager being associated with a wagering game. The standard game of the wagering game is initiated via at least one of one or more processors. A player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game is initiated via at least one of the one or more processors. The player-directed secondary game

includes a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences. Each of the game sequences has a predetermined completion threshold that is configured to be achievable during play of the standard game. A player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game is received. In response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold for that game sequence during play of the standard game, a non-monetary secondary award that is independent of an expected value of the standard game is awarded.

[0010] According to a further aspect of the present disclosure, one or more non-transitory computer readable storage media are encoded with instructions, which when executed by at least one processor or controller associated with a gaming system, causes the at least one processor or controller to perform the above methods.

[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 aspects of the present disclosure, 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 free-standing gaming terminal, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0013] FIG. **2** is a schematic view of a gaming system, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0014] FIG. **3** is an image of a basic-game screen of a wagering game displayed on a gaming terminal, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0015] FIG. **4** is an image of a bonus-game screen of a wagering game displayed on a gaming terminal, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0016] FIG. **5** illustrates a display including a top secondary game related screen and a base game screen for a wagering game displayed on a gaming terminal, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0017] FIG. **6** is an image of a virtual character screen displayed on a gaming terminal, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0018] FIG. **7** is an image of a selection screen for a player-directed secondary game displayed on a gaming terminal, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0019] FIG. **8** is an image of a base game screen including interactions between virtual characters for a wagering game displayed on a gaming terminal, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0020] FIG. **9** is an image of a player-directed game sequence for a player-directed secondary game displayed on a gaming terminal, according to an exemplary aspect of the present disclosure.

[0021] FIG. **10** is a flowchart of an exemplary algorithm that corresponds to instructions executed by a controller in accordance with at least some aspects of the present disclosure.

[0022] While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments have been shown by way of example in the drawings and will be described in detail herein. It should be understood, however, that the invention is not intended to be limited to the particular forms disclosed. Rather, the invention is to cover all modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0023] 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.

[0024] Referring to FIG. **1**, there is shown a gaming terminal **10** similar to those used in gaming establishments, such as casinos. With regard to the present disclosure, the gaming terminal **10** may be any type of gaming terminal and may have varying structures and methods of operation. For example, in some aspects, the gaming terminal **10** is be an electromechanical gaming terminal configured to play mechanical slots, whereas in other aspects, the gaming terminal is an electronic gaming terminal configured to play a video casino game, such as slots, keno, poker, blackjack, roulette, craps, etc. It should be understood that although the gaming terminal **10** is shown as a free-standing terminal of the upright type, the gaming terminal is readily amenable to implementation in a wide variety of other forms such as a free-standing terminal of the slant-top type, a portable or handheld device primarily used for gaming, such as is disclosed by way of example in PCT Patent Application No. PCT/US2007/000792 filed Jan. 11, 2007, titled "Handheld Device for Wagering Games," which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, a mobile telecommunications device such as a mobile telephone or personal digital assistant (PDA), a counter-top or bar-top gaming terminal, or other personal electronic device, such as a portable television, MP3 player, entertainment device, etcetera.

[0025] The gaming terminal **10** illustrated in FIG. **1** comprises a cabinet or housing **12**. For output devices, this embodiment of the gaming terminal **10** includes a primary display area **14**, a secondary display area **16**, and one or more audio speakers **18**. The primary display area **14** and/or secondary display area **16** variously displays information associated with wagering games, non-wagering games, community games, progressives, advertisements, services, premium entertainment, text messaging, emails, alerts or announcements, broadcast information, subscription information, etc. appropriate to the particular mode(s) of operation of the gaming terminal. For input devices, the gaming terminal **10** illustrated in FIG. **1** includes a bill validator **20**, a coin acceptor **22**, one or more information readers **24**, one or more player-input devices **26**, and one or more player-accessible ports **28** (e.g., an audio output jack for headphones, a video headset jack, a wireless transmitter/receiver, etc.). While these typical components found in the gaming terminal **10** are described below, it should be understood that numerous other peripheral devices and other elements exist and are readily utilizable in any number of combinations to create various forms of a gaming terminal in accord with the present concepts.

[0026] The primary display area **14** include, in various aspects of the present concepts, a mechanical-reel display, a video display, or a combination thereof in which a transmissive video display is disposed in front of the mechanical-reel display to portray a video image in superposition over the mechanical-reel display. Further information concerning the latter construction is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,517,433 to

Loose et al. entitled "Reel Spinning Slot Machine With Superimposed Video Image," which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. The video display is, in various embodiments, a cathode ray tube (CRT), a high-resolution liquid crystal display (LCD), a plasma display, a light emitting diode (LED), a DLP projection display, an electroluminescent (EL) panel, or any other type of display suitable for use in the gaming terminal **10**, or other form factor, such as is shown by way of example in FIG. **1**. The primary display area **14** includes, in relation to many aspects of wagering games conducted on the gaming terminal **10**, one or more paylines **30** (see FIG. **3**) extending along a portion of the primary display area. In the illustrated embodiment of FIG. **1**, the primary display area **14** comprises a plurality of mechanical reels **32** and a video display **34**, such as a transmissive display (or a reflected image arrangement in other embodiments), in front of the mechanical reels **32**. If the wagering game conducted via the gaming terminal **10** relies upon the video display **34** only and not the mechanical reels **32**, the mechanical reels **32** are optionally removed from the interior of the terminal and the video display **34** is advantageously of a non-transmissive type. Similarly, if the wagering game conducted via the gaming terminal **10** relies only upon the mechanical reels **32**, but not the video display **34**, the video display **34** depicted in FIG. **1** is replaced with a conventional glass panel. Further, in still other embodiments, the video display **34** is disposed to overlay another video display, rather than a mechanical-reel display, such that the primary display area **14** includes layered or superimposed video displays. In yet other embodiments, the mechanical-reel display of the above-noted embodiments is replaced with another mechanical or physical member or members such as, but not limited to, a mechanical wheel (e.g., a roulette game), dice, a pachinko board, or a diorama presenting a three-dimensional model of a game environment.

[0027] Video images in the primary display area **14** and/or the secondary display area **16** are rendered in two-dimensional (e.g., using Flash Macromedia™) or three-dimensional graphics (e.g., using Renderware™). In various aspects, the video images are played back (e.g., from a recording stored on the gaming terminal **10**), streamed (e.g., from a gaming network), or received as a TV signal (e.g., either broadcast or via cable) and such images can take different forms, such as animated images, computer-generated images, or "real-life" images, either prerecorded (e.g., in the case of marketing/promotional material) or as live footage. The format of the video images can include any format including, but not limited to, an analog format, a standard digital format, or a high-definition (HD) digital format.

[0028] The player-input or user-input device(s) **26** include, by way of example, a plurality of buttons **36** on a button panel, as shown in FIG. **1**, a mouse, a joy stick, a switch, a microphone, and/or a touch screen **38** mounted over the primary display area **14** and/or the secondary display area **16** and having one or more soft touch keys **40**, as is also shown in FIG. **1**. In still other aspects, the player-input devices **26** comprise technologies that do not rely upon physical contact between the player and the gaming terminal, such as speech-recognition technology, gesture-sensing technology, eye-tracking technology, etc. The player-input or user-input device(s) **26** thus accept(s) player input(s) and transforms the player input(s) to electronic data signals indicative of a player input or inputs corresponding to an enabled feature for such input(s) at a time of activation (e.g., pressing a "Max Bet" button or soft key to indicate a player's desire to place a maximum wager to play the wagering game). The input(s), once transformed into electronic data signals, are output to a CPU or controller **42** (see FIG. **2**) for processing. The electronic data signals are selected from a group consisting essentially of an electrical current, an electrical voltage, an electrical charge, an optical signal, an optical element, a magnetic signal, and a magnetic element.

[0029] The information reader **24** (or information reader/writer) is preferably located on the front of the housing **12** and comprises, in at least some forms, a ticket reader, card reader, bar code scanner, wireless transceiver (e.g., RFID, Bluetooth, etc.), biometric reader, or computer-readable-storage-medium interface. As noted, the information reader may comprise a physical and/or electronic writing element to permit writing to a ticket, a card, or computer-readable-storage-medium. The information reader **24** permits information to be transmitted from a portable medium (e.g., ticket, voucher, coupon, casino card, smart card, debit card, credit card, etc.) to the information reader **24** to enable the gaming terminal **10** or associated external system to access an account associated with cashless gaming, to facilitate player tracking or game customization, to retrieve a saved-game state, to store a current-game state, to cause data transfer, and/or to facilitate access to casino services, such as is more fully disclosed, by way of example, in U.S. Patent Publication No. 2003/0045354, published on Mar. 6, 2003, entitled "Portable Data Unit for Communicating With Gaming Machine Over Wireless Link," which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. The noted account associated with cashless gaming is, in some aspects of the present concepts, stored at an external system **46** (see FIG. **2**) as more fully disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 6,280,328 to Holch et al. entitled "Cashless Computerized Video Game System and Method," which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, or is alternatively stored directly on the portable storage medium. Various security protocols or features can be used to enhance security of the portable storage medium. For example, in some aspects, the individual carrying the portable storage medium is required to enter a secondary independent authenticator (e.g., password, PIN number, biometric, etc.) to access the account stored on the portable storage medium.

[0030] Turning now to FIG. **2**, the various components of the gaming terminal **10** are controlled by one or more processors (e.g., CPU, distributed processors, etc.) **42**, also referred to herein generally as a controller (e.g., microcontroller, microprocessor, etc.). The controller **42** can include any suitable processor(s), such as an Intel® Pentium processor, Intel® Core 2 Duo processor, AMD Opteron™ processor, or UltraSPARC® processor. By way of example, the controller **42** includes a plurality of microprocessors including a master processor, a slave processor, and a secondary or parallel processor. Controller **42**, as used herein, comprises any combination of hardware, software, and/or firmware disposed in and/or disposed outside of the gaming terminal **10** that is configured to communicate with and/or control the transfer of data between the gaming terminal **10** and a bus, another computer, processor, or device and/or a service and/or a network. The controller **42** comprises one or more controllers or processors and such one or more controllers or processors need not be disposed proximal to one another and may be located in different devices and/or in different locations. For example, a first processor is disposed proximate a user interface device (e.g., a push button panel, a touch screen display,

etc.) and a second processor is disposed remotely from the first processor, the first and second processors being electrically connected through a network. As another example, the first processor is disposed in a first enclosure (e.g., a gaming machine) and a second processor is disposed in a second enclosure (e.g., a server) separate from the first enclosure, the first and second processors being communicatively connected through a network. The controller **42** is operable to execute all of the various gaming methods and other processes disclosed herein.

[0031] To provide gaming functions, the controller **42** executes one or more game programs comprising machine-executable instructions stored in local and/or remote computer-readable data storage media (e.g., memory **44** or other suitable storage device). The term computer-readable data storage media, or "computer-readable medium," as used herein refers to any media/medium that participates in providing instructions to controller **42** for execution. The computer-readable medium comprises, in at least some exemplary forms, non-volatile media (e.g., optical disks, magnetic disks, etc.), volatile media (e.g., dynamic memory, RAM), and transmission media (e.g., coaxial cables, copper wire, fiber optics, radio frequency (RF) data communication, infrared (IR) data communication, etc). Common forms of computer-readable media include, for example, a hard disk, magnetic tape (or other magnetic medium), a 2-D or 3-D optical disc (e.g., a CD-ROM, DVD, etc.), RAM, PROM, EPROM, FLASH-EPROM, any other memory chip or solid state digital data storage device, a carrier wave, or any other medium from which a computer can read. By way of example, a plurality of storage media or devices are provided, a first storage device being disposed proximate the user interface device and a second storage device being disposed remotely from the first storage device, wherein a network is connected intermediate the first one and second one of the storage devices.

[0032] Various forms of computer-readable media may be involved in carrying one or more sequences of one or more instructions to controller **42** for execution. By way of example, the instructions may initially be borne on a data storage device of a remote device (e.g., a remote computer, server, or system). The remote device can load the instructions into its dynamic memory and send the instructions over a telephone line or other communication path using a modem or other communication device appropriate to the communication path. A modem or other communication device local to the gaming machine **10** or to an external system **46** associated with the gaming machine can receive the data on the telephone line or conveyed through the communication path (e.g., via external systems interface **58**) and output the data to a bus, which transmits the data to the system memory **44** associated with the processor **42**, from which system memory the processor retrieves and executes the instructions.

[0033] Thus, the controller **42** is able to send and receive data, via carrier signals, through the network(s), network link, and communication interface. The data includes, in various examples, instructions, commands, program code, player data, and game data. As to the game data, in at least some aspects of the present concepts, the controller **42** uses a local random number generator (RNG) to randomly generate a wagering game outcome from a plurality of possible outcomes. Alternatively, the outcome is centrally determined using either an RNG or pooling scheme at a remote controller included, for example, within the external system **46**.

[0034] As shown in the example of FIG. **2**, the controller **42** is coupled to the system memory **44**. The system memory **44** is shown to comprise a volatile memory (e.g., a random-access memory (RAM)) and a non-volatile memory (e.g., an EEPROM), but optionally includes multiple RAM and multiple program memories.

[0035] As shown in the example of FIG. **2**, the controller **42** is also coupled to a money/credit detector **48**. The money/credit detector **48** is configured to output a signal the controller **42** that money and/or credits have been input via one or more value-input devices, such as the bill validator **20**, coin acceptor **22**, or via other sources, such as a cashless gaming account, etc. The value-input device(s) is integrated with the housing **12** of the gaming terminal **10** and is connected to the remainder of the components of the gaming terminal **10**, as appropriate, via a wired connection, such as I/O **56**, or wireless connection. The money/credit detector **48** detects the input of valid funds into the gaming terminal **10** (e.g., via currency, electronic funds, ticket, card, etc.) via the value-input device(s) and outputs a signal to the controller **42** carrying data regarding the input value of the valid funds. The controller **42** extracts the data from these signals from the money/credit detector **48**, analyzes the associated data, and transforms the data corresponding to the input value into an equivalent credit balance that is available to the player for subsequent wagers on the gaming terminal **10**, such transforming of the data being effected by software, hardware, and/or firmware configured to associate the input value to an equivalent credit value. Where the input value is already in a credit value form, such as in a cashless gaming account having stored therein a credit value, the wager is simply deducted from the available credit balance.

[0036] As seen in FIG. **2**, the controller **42** is also connected to, and controls, the primary display area **14**, the player-input device(s) **26**, and a payoff mechanism **50**. The payoff mechanism **50** is operable in response to instructions from the controller **42** to award a payoff to the player in response to certain winning outcomes that occur in the base game, the bonus game(s), or via an external game or event. The payoff is provided in the form of money, credits, redeemable points, advancement within a game, access to special features within a game, services, another exchangeable media, or any combination thereof. Although payoffs may be paid out in coins and/or currency bills, payoffs are alternatively associated with a coded ticket (from a ticket printer **52**), a portable storage medium or device (e.g., a card magnetic strip), or are transferred to or transmitted to a designated player account. The payoff amounts distributed by the payoff mechanism **50** are determined by one or more pay tables stored in the system memory **44**.

[0037] Communications between the controller **42** and both the peripheral components of the gaming terminal **10** and the external system **46** occur through input/output (I/O) circuit **56**, which can include any suitable bus technologies, such as an AGTL+ frontside bus and a PCI backside bus. Although the I/O circuit **56** is shown as a single block, it should be appreciated that the I/O circuit **56** alternatively includes a number of different types of I/O circuits. Furthermore, in some embodiments, the components of the gaming terminal **10** can be interconnected according to any suitable interconnection architecture (e.g., directly connected, hypercube, etc.).

[0038] The I/O circuit **56** is connected to an external system interface or communication device **58**, which is connected to

the external system **46**. The controller **42** communicates with the external system **46** via the external system interface **58** and a communication path (e.g., serial, parallel, IR, RC, 10bT, near field, etc.). The external system **46** includes, in various aspects, a gaming network, other gaming terminals, a gaming server, a remote controller, communications hardware, or a variety of other interfaced systems or components, in any combination. In yet other aspects, the external system **46** may comprise a player's portable electronic device (e.g., cellular phone, electronic wallet, etc.) and the external system interface **58** is configured to facilitate wireless communication and data transfer between the portable electronic device and the controller **42**, such as by a near field communication path operating via magnetic field induction or a frequency-hopping spread spectrum RF signals (e.g., Bluetooth, etc.).

[0039] The gaming terminal **10** optionally communicates with external system **46** (in a wired or wireless manner) such that each terminal operates as a "thin client" having relatively less functionality, a "thick client" having relatively more functionality, or with any range of functionality therebetween (e.g., an "intermediate client"). In general, a wagering game includes an RNG for generating a random number, game logic for determining the outcome based on the randomly generated number, and game assets (e.g., art, sound, etc.) for presenting the determined outcome to a player in an audio-visual manner. The RNG, game logic, and game assets are contained within the gaming terminal **10** ("thick client" gaming terminal), the external systems **46** ("thin client" gaming terminal), or are distributed therebetween in any suitable manner ("intermediate client" gaming terminal).

[0040] Referring now to FIG. **3**, an image of a basic-game screen **60** adapted to be displayed on the primary display area **14** is illustrated, according to one embodiment of the present disclosure. A player begins play of a basic wagering game by providing a wager. A player can operate or interact with the wagering game using the one or more player-input devices **26**. The controller **42**, the external system **46**, or both, in alternative embodiments, operate(s) to execute a wagering game program causing the primary display area **14** to display the wagering game that includes a plurality of visual elements.

[0041] In accord with various methods of conducting a wagering game on a gaming system in accord with the present concepts, the wagering game includes a game sequence in which a player makes a wager, such as through the money/credit detector **48**, touch screen **38** soft key, button panel, or the like, and a wagering game outcome is associated with the wager. The wagering game outcome is then revealed to the player in due course following initiation of the wagering game. The method comprises the acts of conducting the wagering game using a gaming apparatus, such as the gaming terminal **10** depicted in FIG. **1**, following receipt of an input from the player to initiate the wagering game. The gaming terminal **10** then communicates the wagering game outcome to the player via one or more output devices (e.g., primary display **14**) through the display of information such as, but not limited to, text, graphics, text and graphics, static images, moving images, etc., or any combination thereof. In accord with the method of conducting the wagering game, the controller **42**, which comprises one or more processors, transforms a physical player input, such as a player's pressing of a "Spin Reels" soft key **84** (see FIG. **3**), into an electronic data signal indicative of an instruction relating to the wagering game (e.g., an electronic data signal bearing data on a wager amount).

[0042] In the aforementioned method, for each data signal, the controller **42** is configured to processes the electronic data signal, to interpret the data signal (e.g., data signals corresponding to a wager input), and to cause further actions associated with the interpretation of the signal in accord with computer instructions relating to such further actions executed by the controller. As one example, the controller **42** causes the recording of a digital representation of the wager in one or more storage devices (e.g., system memory **44** or a memory associated with an external system **46**), the controller, in accord with associated computer instructions, causing the changing of a state of the data storage device from a first state to a second state. This change in state is, for example, effected by changing a magnetization pattern on a magnetically coated surface of a magnetic storage device or changing a magnetic state of a ferromagnetic surface of a magneto-optical disc storage device, a change in state of transistors or capacitors in a volatile or a non-volatile semiconductor memory (e.g., DRAM), etc.). The noted second state of the data storage device comprises storage in the storage device of data representing the electronic data signal from the controller (e.g., the wager in the present example). As another example, the controller **42** further, in accord with the execution of the instructions relating to the wagering game, causes the primary display **14** or other display device and/or other output device (e.g., speakers, lights, communication device, etc.), to change from a first state to at least a second state, wherein the second state of the primary display comprises a visual representation of the physical player input (e.g., an acknowledgement to a player), information relating to the physical player input (e.g., an indication of the wager amount), a game sequence, an outcome of the game sequence, or any combination thereof, wherein the game sequence in accord with the present concepts comprises acts described herein. The aforementioned executing of computer instructions relating to the wagering game is further conducted in accord with a random outcome (e.g., determined by the RNG) that is used by the controller **42** to determine the outcome of the game sequence, using a game logic for determining the outcome based on the randomly generated number. In at least some aspects, the controller **42** is configured to determine an outcome of the game sequence at least partially in response to the random parameter.

[0043] The basic-game screen **60** is displayed on the primary display area **14** or a portion thereof. In FIG. **3**, the basic-game screen **60** portrays a plurality of simulated movable reels **62***a-e*. Alternatively or additionally, the basic-game screen **60** portrays a plurality of mechanical reels or other video or mechanical presentation consistent with the game format and theme. The basic-game screen **60** also advantageously displays one or more game-session meters and various buttons adapted to be actuated by a player.

[0044] In the illustrated embodiment of FIG. **3**, the game-session meters include a "credit" meter **64** for displaying a number of credits available for play on the terminal; a "lines" meter **66** for displaying a number of paylines to be played by a player on the terminal; a "line bet" meter **68** for displaying a number of credits wagered (e.g., from 1 to 5 or more credits) for each of the number of paylines played; a "total bet" meter **70** for displaying a total number of credits wagered for the particular round of wagering; and a "paid" meter **72** for dis-

playing an amount to be awarded based on the results of the particular round's wager. The depicted user-selectable buttons include a "collect" button **74** to collect the credits remaining in the credits meter **64**; a "help" button **76** for viewing instructions on how to play the wagering game; a "pay table" button **78** for viewing a pay table associated with the basic wagering game; a "select lines" button **80** for changing the number of paylines (displayed in the lines meter **66**) a player wishes to play; a "bet per line" button **82** for changing the amount of the wager which is displayed in the line-bet meter **68**; a "spin reels" button **84** for moving the reels **62***a-e*; and a "max bet spin" button **86** for wagering a maximum number of credits and moving the reels **62***a-e* of the basic wagering game. While the gaming terminal **10** allows for these types of player inputs, the present disclosure does not require them and can be used on gaming terminals having more, less, or different player inputs.

[0045] As shown in the example of FIG. **3**, paylines **30** extend from one of the payline indicators **88***a-i* on the left side of the basic-game screen **60** to a corresponding one of the payline indicators **88***a-i* on the right side of the screen **60**. A plurality of symbols **90** is displayed on the plurality of reels **62***a-e* to indicate possible outcomes of the basic wagering game. A winning combination occurs when the displayed symbols **90** correspond to one of the winning symbol combinations listed in a pay table stored in the memory **44** of the terminal **10** or in the external system **46**. The symbols **90** may include any appropriate graphical representation or animation, and may further include a "blank" symbol.

[0046] Symbol combinations are evaluated in accord with various schemes such as, but not limited to, "line pays" or "scatter pays." Line pays are evaluated left to right, right to left, top to bottom, bottom to top, or any combination thereof by evaluating the number, type, or order of symbols **90** appearing along an activated payline **30**. Scatter pays are evaluated without regard to position or paylines and only require that such combination appears anywhere on the reels **62***a-e*. While an embodiment with nine paylines is shown, a wagering game with no paylines, a single payline, or any plurality of paylines will also work with the present disclosure. Additionally, though an embodiment with five reels is shown in FIG. **3**, different embodiments of the gaming terminal **10** comprise a greater or lesser number of reels in accordance with the present disclosure.

[0047] Turning now to FIG. **4**, an example of a bonus game to a basic wagering game is illustrated. A bonus-game screen **92** includes an array of markers **94** located in a plurality of columns and rows. The bonus game is entered upon the occurrence of a triggering event, such as the occurrence of a start-bonus game outcome (e.g., symbol trigger, mystery trigger, time-based trigger, etc.) in or during the basic wagering game. Alternatively, any bonus game described herein is able to be deployed as a stand-alone wagering game independent of a basic wagering game.

[0048] In the illustrated bonus game of FIG. **4**, a player selects, one at a time, from the array of markers **94** to reveal an associated bonus-game outcome. According to one embodiment of this bonus game, each marker **94** in the array is associated with an award outcome **96** (e.g., credits or other non-negative outcomes) or an end-game outcome **98**. In the illustrated example, a player has selected an award outcome **96** with the player's first two selections (25 credits and 100 credits, respectively). When one or more end-game outcome **98** is selected (as illustrated by the player's third pick), the bonus game is terminated and the accumulated award outcomes **96** are provided to the player.

[0049] The excitement and interest of a player of a wagering game can be enhanced through certain player-directed secondary games associated with the primary (e.g., base) wagering games or through player-directed secondary games associated with bonus games. In certain exemplary aspects of the present disclosure it may be desirable to allow players of a wagering game to select a secondary game in which the achievement of a goal or mission in the secondary game is player-directed and the award outcome of the secondary game is not a monetary award. The secondary game can include allowing the player to choose a type of player-directed adventure that can be later triggered through the occurrence of event(s) associated with the wagering game.

[0050] The secondary game, as used herein, refers to a series of achievements or goals (for example, missions) that are accomplished through events occurring during the standard game play. The standard game play including basic games, bonus games, or other games triggered by or during play of the basic and bonus games. The standard game play is determined largely or entirely based on a random number generator, whereas the outcomes for the secondary game may be player controlled as can the course of progression through the secondary game. In general, the secondary game is independent from the mathematical model of the standard game play and the secondary awards do not affect the player's expected value or volatility arising from the standard game play, though the thresholds for achieving the secondary awards may be met through outcomes available during play of the standard game. Generally, the "awards" associated with the standard game play are credits, additional free game play, or other monetary or pseudo-monetary awards, whereas the "awards" associated with the secondary game play are non-monetary awards such as player's points, additional avatars, additional features or content, promotional dollars, coupons, etc. However, in some embodiments, the "awards" associated with the secondary game may also provide the player with an additional feature that improves the player's expected value associated with the standard game play.

[0051] It is contemplated that the secondary game is player-directed such that a player can control the outcome of a selected mission or the achievement of a selected goal associated with the completion of the secondary game. It is further contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure the player chooses and customizes one or more virtual characters who participate and move through the game under the control of the player (e.g., player-directed), through the assistance of a gaming system controller. It is also contemplated that a virtual character can be controlled directly by the wagering game with little or no input from the player. In yet another exemplary aspect, a player may have some or no control over how the mission or goal is achieved in the secondary game. For example, a player may or may not have some control over the virtual character(s), and the secondary game may determine if and how a goal or mission is attained.

[0052] If a player, via the virtual character(s), completes a mission or goal associated with the player-directed secondary game, the player receives a predetermined award. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, the award is a non-monetary award. For example, the award for completing a mission or goal can include unlocking player access to new bonuses and/or bonus variations in the base wagering game or in subsequent secondary games. It is also contemplated that the

predetermined award can include providing modifications for the player's virtual character(s), such as modified bodily features, new outfits or clothing, special powers, special weapons, accumulation of player life points, and/or an accumulation of points that can be saved and later traded for different awards, such as those described herein. An award can also include unlocking access to additional virtual characters that assist the player-directed virtual character during a mission, or new villains for the player-directed virtual character to target. Other predetermined awards for completing a mission or goal associated with a player-directed secondary game can include unlocking (e.g., providing the player access she otherwise would not have) alternate layouts for the secondary game, such as allowing access to new mazes or opening up secret passages. It is further contemplated that secondary game awards can include providing lower betting thresholds for accessing progressive games associated with the base or bonus wagering game (e.g., indirect monetary awards that allow a player to play a game with a higher expected value than in previous play). In certain aspects of the present disclosure, such indirect monetary awards can be considered the result of a non-monetary award of the secondary game, because no direct monetary award is received as part of the secondary game.

[0053] To further enhance the player's gaming experience, the player-directed secondary games allow the player to select from different levels of difficulty (e.g., easy, moderate, tough) for completing the goal or mission of the secondary game. This can be particularly effective in attracting novice players to a gaming machine and for retaining expert players.

[0054] It is also contemplated that when a player successfully completes a mission by achieving a predetermined goal associated with the game, various attributes of the completed mission or goal are stored by the gaming system for later viewing. This feature may be in the form of a virtual trophy room which the player can access via selectable indicia displayed on a display of the gaming system. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, the virtual trophy room may be periodically displayed by the wagering game without direct player input. Attributes of a completed mission or goal that are stored in the virtual trophy room can include all or part of successfully completed missions of the player-directed secondary game(s).

[0055] Referring now to FIG. **5**, an exemplary aspect of a wagering game is illustrated that includes a display **100** having a top screen **110** (e.g., secondary display area) for displaying features associated with secondary games and a base game screen **150** for displaying a base wagering game. The base game screen can include a primary display area **160**, which in this particular non-limiting example, include reels and symbols associated with a slots-type wagering game. Other types of wagering games are contemplated such as card games and keno.

[0056] The top screen **110** includes multiple avatars **120** (e.g., personal heroes) for virtual characters associated with player-directed secondary game(s) associated with the wagering game. The avatars **120** are shown to be floating or flying on the top screen **110** during the play of a base game on screen **150**. The display of the avatars **120** on the top screen **110** can be used to attract players to the wagering game and/or to increase player excitement during play of the wagering game. For example, the avatars **120** can engage in certain activities on the top screen that attract attention during game play. It is also contemplated that the avatars **120** may be displayed shortly before the base game transitions to an upcoming secondary game (e.g., Robot Fight Bonus), such as a player-directed secondary game. Among the displayed avatars **120** may be virtual characters for other players actively playing elsewhere on the gaming system and/or virtual characters that a player may select should the player choose to play the wagering game including an avatar or virtual character previously developed by the player.

[0057] A wagering game can include progressive games and awards, such as standalone or group progressives. A progressive bonus can include one or more bonus levels. For example, if a player bets the maximum bet, a player can be eligible to win both a bonus island award **130** and the base sidekick award **140**. If a player bets less than the maximum bet, the player is only eligible for a lower base sidekick award **140**. However, it is also contemplated that certain predetermined awards for a player-directed secondary game unlock eligibility for a player to have a chance at the higher progressive award (e.g., bonus island award **130**), without placing a maximum bet. Such predetermined awards can be received by a player achieving certain goals associated with missions of player-directed secondary game(s), such as those described above and elsewhere herein. It is further contemplated that eligibility for higher progressive awards may be gradually unlocked, such that the betting threshold is gradually decreased as the player continues to achieve goals following multiple missions of the player-directed secondary game(s).

[0058] Turning now to FIG. **6**, an exemplary virtual character screen **200** on a gaming terminal is illustrated. As part of a player-directed secondary game, a player is given an opportunity to select or build a virtual character **210** before playing the secondary game. The virtual character may also be referred to as the player's avatar or personal hero. For example, the virtual character **210** may be selected from among different types of living creatures, including human-like personas, and may also be selected to be either male or female. The virtual character screen **200** may include various attributes of the virtual character, such as the character's name (e.g., BonusLady 777) or various game-play achievements (e.g., bonus unlocked, accolades).

[0059] The virtual character screen **200** illustrates and allows the player to continue developing their virtual character. For example, as the player, via their virtual character, progresses through missions and achieves the mission goals, the player may win an award outcome that awarding the player a modification to their virtual character. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, award outcomes can also include achieving and/or accruing life points that can be exchanged for modifications for the virtual character.

[0060] In FIG. **7**, the virtual character screen **200** illustrates a virtual character **210** (e.g., BonusLady 777) that has achieved several modification features **220***a*-**220***g* to the base character. FIG. **7** further illustrates several additional modification features that may be selected based on either the accrued life points or the achievement of another mission goal. For example, the virtual character **210** has already unlocked additional modification features, **230***a*-**230***c*, of which the player has selected highlighted modification feature **230***c* to enhance her virtual character **210**. To further enhance the player's experience, it may also be desirable to allow a player to select different colors or patterns for the selected modification feature(s). In certain aspects of the present disclosure, color or pattern modifications may occur if exchanged for life points or in response to achieving a

mission and being awarded a predetermined award outcome. The exemplary modification features displayed in FIG. **6** also include several locked features **240***a*-**240***d*, which are shown to the player, but can be achieved by accruing more life points and/or by achieving a goal associated with a mission for a player-directed secondary game.

[0061] In certain aspects of the present disclosure, it may be desirable to allow a player's virtual character to be associated with several aspects of a gaming session. For example, after a player has developed a personal hero, the character can be displayed on the base screen and/or top screen for portions of a wagering game session, other than the player-directed secondary game. In some instances, it may be desirable for some or substantially all of the wagering game session to include the display of a player's virtual character. As another example, during play of the base game, the character may be displayed in a small secondary window in the primary display area or the character may be displayed in the secondary display area. Such displays of the virtual character can be in addition to the virtual character being displayed during the player-directed secondary game.

[0062] Turning now to FIG. **7**, an exemplary selection screen **300** is illustrated for a player-directed secondary game displayed on a gaming terminal. After a player has selected and/or developed a virtual character (e.g., avatar, personal hero), a player is prompted during a gaming session to select one of a plurality of player-directed secondary game sequences to play as part of a secondary game. The prompt to select the secondary game sequence can occur at several different occasions. If a player has not yet developed a virtual character, the prompt can occur after the player selects and/or develops a virtual character. If a player already has a virtual character, the prompt can occur as part of the player initiating a wagering session. The prompt can also occur in response to direct player input into a gaming system input interface or in response to stored player preferences. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, it may be desirable for the prompt to occur at the beginning of a wagering session before play begins of the base wagering game. This allows the gaming session to be customized based on the player's virtual character, and further allows the implementation of the player-selected secondary game at various strategic triggering points of a base/bonus game that may increase the player's excitement and interest in the gaming session.

[0063] Selection screen **300** prompts a player to choose one of a plurality of exemplary player-directed secondary game sequences (e.g., player-directed missions), such as the Training Bonus **320**, Robot Fight Bonus **330**, or the Slotropolis Bonus **340**. Selection screen **300** may be displayed on the base screen upon a player logging in or inserting a player card into a gaming terminal. Selection screen **300** is generally displayed once a player has an existing virtual character. After the gaming system has determined the virtual character that is associated with a player, the virtual character **310** may be displayed within information window **305** of the selection screen **300**. The information window **305** can also include the previous, current, or next mission that will be played in response to a triggering event for the player-directed secondary game. Information window **305** can also be displayed during the base wagering game or as part of other screens displayed during the gaming session.

[0064] Selection screen **300**, or similar devices, can be useful because it allows a player to customize their mission experience and direct how the secondary game sequence will progress. Prior to selecting a game sequence, the display presents a player with a selection menu that includes the available missions from which the player may choose, the task(s) for completing the mission, the difficulty level of the mission, and the predetermined award outcome for completing the mission. For example, if the player selects the Training Bonus secondary game sequence **320**, the mission or goal of the secondary game sequence will be to collect two flags while moving through a training maze. As illustrated by element **322***a*, the mission "Find two flags during training bonus" is displayed to the player prior to the player selecting a secondary game sequence. Additional information, such as, a predetermined award outcome **322***b* (e.g., unlocks new mask) for completing the mission and the difficultly level **322***c* (e.g., supereasy) of the game sequence can also be displayed to the player.

[0065] If the player selects the Robot Fight Bonus secondary game sequence **330**, the player further has the option of selecting from a plurality of missions. For example, one mission involves a long robot fight and the other mission involves finishing off the robot. As illustrated by element **332***a*, the mission or goal, "Get at least 8 bonus spins", is displayed prior to the player selecting the game sequence. As illustrated by element **336***a*, the mission or goal, "Destroy the robot by the end of the bonus game", is also displayed to the player prior to the player selecting the game sequence. Additional information, such as, a predetermined award outcomes **332***b* (e.g., unlock new cape) and **336***b* (e.g., unlocks new bonus helpers) for completing the mission are further displayed prior to the selection of a secondary game sequence. To further assist the player's selection of a secondary game sequence, the difficulty levels of each goal, **332***c* (e.g., not so easy) and **336***c* (tough), are also displayed on the screen for each of the respective secondary game sequences.

[0066] If the player selects the exemplary Slotropolis bonus secondary game sequence **340**, the mission or goal of the game sequence is to capture big cats that are released by a villain, Madam Cougar. As illustrated by element **342***a*, the mission "Play Slotropolis Bonus" is displayed on the screen prior to the player selecting the game sequence. Additional information, such as, a predetermined award outcome **342***b* (e.g., unlocks lower progressive bet) for completing the mission and the difficultly level **342***c* (e.g., supereasy) of the game sequence can be displayed on the screen, as well.

[0067] It is further contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure the availability of different difficulty levels for the player-directed secondary game sequences increases with a player's continued play of a particular wagering game. For example, after tracking approximately 50 spins by a player on a particular wagering game, the difficulty levels may be limited to "Supereasy" and "Not So Easy". Then, after a player has accumulated over approximately 2000 spins, the availability of more difficulty levels may expand to include "Supertough". The upper and lower threshold for determining the variety of difficulty levels can be higher or lower than the non-limiting and exemplary number of spins discussed herein.

[0068] In another exemplary aspect of the present disclosure, the completion of a mission or reaching a goal associated with a player-directed secondary game sequence can unlock previously unavailable, or locked, missions or game sequences. The difficulty level of the mission or goal associated with the second game sequence may or may not determine the difficulty of the unlocked mission or game sequence.

For example, hard mission may unlock a plurality of easy missions, or an easy mission may unlock one or more hard missions.

[0069] It is also contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure, a game sequence may include more than one goal for achieving predetermined award outcomes. For example, achieving a mission may include a gold level award and a silver level award so that a player that completes something less than a selected gold level mission still obtains a predetermined award outcome, but at a reduced level (e.g., fewer player life points, simpler clothing for virtual character).

[0070] The selection screen **300** illustrated in FIG. **7** also includes a replay icon **350** (e.g., Trophy Room) that may be selected by a player to review and replay a player's previous successful missions. The replayable missions can include those missions where the player achieved a certain predetermined goal and received an award outcome. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, a player can replay a mission and try to attain higher award outcomes. The replay icon **350** can also be displayed on other display screens of a gaming session. In certain aspects, selection of the replay icon **350** may pause other activities associated with the gaming session and take the player directly to a selection screen (not shown) that allows the player to select earlier saved missions and replay all or a portion of the saved mission. Following the replay of the saved mission, the activity that was in session prior to the selection of replay icon **350** resumes.

[0071] Following a player's selection, a secondary game sequence may be implemented in response to any predetermined triggering event associated with the play of the wagering-aspects of the base game (or bonus game). For example, the mission may be implemented upon the display of certain symbol(s) following the spin of the reels of a slots game. It is also contemplated that the mission may be implemented upon the occurrence of any other triggering events that are known in the art.

[0072] It is contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure, a player selection of a mission or game sequence may not be received by the gaming system; or a selection may be received, but no subsequent player input is received indicating the player is engaged in playing the selected mission. In response, it is contemplated that the gaming system may resume the base game or another game rather than initiate the player-directed secondary game sequence. It is also contemplated that the gaming system may instead take over control of the secondary game sequence in place of the player. Should such a take over occur, it may be desirable for the player to be able to override the gaming system, if the player so chooses, so that the player can resume control of the secondary game sequence from the gaming system and finish the sequence at the player's direction. Should the player again cease to play, it is contemplated that the gaming system may again resume control of the secondary game sequence.

[0073] One of the benefits of the features associated with the player-direct secondary game sequences and the ability to select from a plurality of sequences is that it allows players flexibility in their gaming experience including having customized virtual character(s), choosing the desired game sequence, and choosing the level of difficulty for achieving a certain skill-based goal. This flexibility can increase the player's excitement and interest with a wagering game and/or a particular gaming session.

[0074] FIG. **8** illustrates an exemplary base game screen **400** that includes interactions between virtual characters **410**, **420** of a player-directed secondary game displayed on a gaming terminal. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, it may desirable to display a cut-scene panel **405** on the base screen just above a display **460** of the base wagering game. For example, after a player has set up their virtual character (see, for example, FIG. **6**) and selected a mission (see, for example, FIG. **7**), play of a base wagering game can be initiated. To provide a customized feel to the player's wagering experience, the player's virtual character **410** may interact with another virtual character **420**. The interactions in the cut-scene panel **405** can occur at various phases of the base game. For example for a slots game, the cut-scene interactions can occur during the betting phase, prior to a reel spin, during a reel spin, or after a reel spin. As illustrated in FIG. **8**, the interactions or story associated with the cut-scene panel **405** may advance via simple animations and dialogue balloons. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, each reel spin can lead to the display of a new cut-scene panel. It is also contemplated that between different cut-scenes, informational text may fill the space occupied by cut-scene panel **405**.

[0075] FIG. **9** illustrates an exemplary game sequence for a player-directed secondary game displayed on a gaming terminal. The game sequence illustrated in FIG. **9** is a pick bonus game with the player having a set number of picks as a virtual character **510** moves through a training maze define by the boundaries of a pipe **505**. The game sequence is player-directed, which means the player chooses his picks by steering his virtual character **510** up or down. The virtual character **510** is navigating the maze based on direct input received from the player via a gaming system input interface. While navigating through the pipe **505**, the virtual character **510** crosses different water cannon stations **520**, **530**, which define at least some of the picks. For example, as the virtual character **510** crossed the first water cannon station **520**, he passed over the fourth water cannon from the top **524**, which resulted in the player receiving a higher number of award points than if the player had picked any of the remaining four water cannons. The player will have at least one more opportunity in the illustrated embodiment to select another water cannon at the second water cannon station **530**.

[0076] In certain aspects of the present disclosure, one or more helper virtual characters (e.g., Helper Heroes) may enter the pipe **505** and improve a player's chances of completing the goal or mission associated with the player-directed secondary game sequence. The helper virtual character may, for example, have certain unique powers to assist the player's virtual character with meeting certain obligations for achieving an award-based goal. It is also contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure picks may provide mini-bonuses or open up secret passages that lead to additional maze(s). Furthermore, another bonus or rewards may be given for a player moving his virtual character **510** through the maze without touching the boundaries of the pipe **505**. For example, the player may receive additional Player Life points or point that can be exchanged for different virtual items.

[0077] In certain exemplary aspects of the present disclosure, a mission or goal of the secondary game sequence, such as the sequence illustrated in FIG. **9**, is skill based. For example, the skill may be for the virtual character to not touch the walls of a pipe or maze that the virtual character is moving through under player-direction (or with the assist of the gaming system). While the completion of the skill-based game

sequence may not affect the number of credits a player wins, the use of skill by the player can determine whether or not the mission or goal of the game sequence is achieved.

[0078] As generally discussed above, such as in FIG. **7**, a virtual character in a player-directed secondary game sequence is attempting to achieve a goal that is selected by the player from a plurality of available goals. As illustrated in element **322***a*, an exemplary goal was established for the Training Bonus game sequence of finding two flags. Thus, upon virtual character **510** finding two flags in the training bonus game illustrated in FIG. **9**, a player completes the goal associated with the training bonus game sequence. Completion of the goal can unlock or provide the player access to any of several predetermined award outcomes, such as unlocking a new mask, as described at element **322***c*. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, completing a goal can unlock new mazes or new maze layouts, provide access to different bonuses or mini-bonuses, provide access to new virtual characters (e.g., Helper Heroes), unlock new bonuses, or unlock various modifications for the virtual character such as new attire (e.g., cape, mask) or special powers (special weapons, increased strength). The unlocked features may otherwise be unavailable to the player if the goal is not completed.

[0079] In certain aspects of the present disclosure, it may be desirable to include cut-scene panels, similar to the exemplary cut-scene panel **405** in FIG. **8**, on the display screen during play of the exemplary player-directed game sequence, such as the sequence illustrated in FIG. **9**. For example, the cut-scene panel can display the mission or goal for the secondary game sequence selected by the player from a selection screen, such as the exemplary selection screen **300** illustrated in FIG. **7**. It is also contemplated that an information panel, similar to the exemplary information panel **305** in FIG. **7**, may be displayed during play of the player directed secondary game sequence. The information panel can include information such as a display of the player's virtual character, the virtual character name, and/or the selected game sequence.

[0080] Another exemplary player-directed secondary game sequence is the Robot Fight Bonus (not shown), which was introduced above in the discussion for FIG. **7**. In this player-directed secondary game sequence, a primary display area of a gaming system is set to allow free spins of a slot game. The top or secondary display area can include a player's virtual character, and optionally, one or more additional virtual characters (e.g., Helper Heroes) that fight a villain, the evil robot. Both the virtual characters and the robot can have life meters. A spin of the slots game that results in a winning spin allows the player's virtual character to shoot at the robot, which decreases the robot's life meter. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, one or more of the Helper Heroes may fly down to the primary display area and improve the chances for a winning outcome for subsequent reel spins. After a losing spin, the robot can blast the virtual characters, and thus, decrease their life meter. Once a robot's life meter is fully depleted, a predetermined award outcome may be awarded to the player. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, a new robot may come out that the player needs to defeat before receiving any awards. Once the life meter for the player's virtual character is depleted, the player-directed game sequence is over. Achieving the player-selected goal in the Robot Fight Bonus can unlock certain predetermined award outcomes that would otherwise not be available to a player. For example, access can be provided to different bonuses or mini-bonuses. Access can also be provided to new virtual characters (e.g., Helper Heroes). Various modifications for the virtual character can be unlocked such as new attire (e.g., gloves, boots) or special powers (special blasters). Lower betting thresholds for participating in progressive games associated with the base game can also be unlocked. Furthermore, new villains (e.g., new robots) can be unlocked, as well.

[0081] A further exemplary player-directed secondary game sequence is the Slotropolis Zoo Bonus (not shown), which was also introduced above in the discussion of FIG. **7**. In this player-directed secondary game sequence, a primary display area of a gaming system is set to allow free spins of a slots game. The symbols on the slot reels may be altered to include cat symbols and blank symbols. The game sequence begins on the top or secondary display area with the display of a villain (e.g., Madame Cougar) releasing big cats from their cages at the zoo. The player's virtual character must capture the released cats within a predetermined number of free spins. When a cat appears on a reel as a result of a free spin, the player's virtual character plays a skill-based game to catch the cat. It is also contemplated that additional virtual characters (e.g., Helper Heroes) may assist with catching the cats or improving the chances of the reels displaying a cat symbol, and thus, triggering the skill-based game. After catching a certain number of cats or after catching all the released cats under a certain threshold of attempts, the player may receive a predetermined award outcome for achieving the goal associated with the game sequence. By completing the player-selected goal, the player may receive an award such as the unlocking or receiving access to certain predetermined award outcomes that would otherwise not be available to a player.

[0082] FIG. **10** is a flowchart for an exemplary algorithm that corresponds to instructions executed by a controller in accord with at least some aspects of the present disclosure. An exemplary method **600** is illustrated for conducting a wagering game including a standard game in which a player input is received and a wagering game outcome is determined. The standard game may have a base game, bonus game, or other games associated therewith. At step **610**, a wager is received. The receiving of a wager can include receiving a player input via a first user interface device, transforming the player input to electronic data signals at least partially indicative of a wager to play the wagering game, and interpreting, via one or more processors, the wager from the data signals. Receiving of the wager can also include initiating the recording of a digital representation of the wager in one or more storage devices. At step **620**, a determination is made whether a player selection of a game sequence associated with a player-directed secondary game has been received. If not, at step **630**, a player-directed secondary game can be initiated that includes player-selectable and player-directed game sequences. In certain aspects of the present disclosure, the player-directed secondary game can be associated with the standard game. In other aspects, each of the game sequences has a predetermined completion threshold or goal. In certain aspects, the threshold or goal may be capable of being achieved during play of the standard game. If the determination at step **620** is positive, at step **640**, the standard game of the wagering can be initiated via at least one of the processors. The standard game may have an expected value associated therewith.

[0083] Next, at step **650**, a determination is made of whether a triggering event has occurred in the standard game. If no triggering event has occurred, then a base game or bonus game in the standard game may continue, or the gaming

system may continue querying for a trigger. If a triggering event does occur, then at step **660**, the game sequence associated with the received player selection is implemented. At step **670**, a determination is made whether a predetermined completion threshold is achieved that is associated with the received player selection of one of the game sequences. If the predetermined completion threshold is achieved, at step **680**, a predetermined award is awarded to the player. In certain aspects, the award may be non-monetary or it may also have indirect monetary implications.

[0084] FIG. **10**, which is described by way of example above, represents an exemplary algorithm that corresponds to at least some instructions executed by the controller **42** and/or external systems **46** in FIG. **2** to perform the above described functions associated with the disclosed aspects of the present disclosure.

[0085] It is contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure, a method of conducting a wagering game includes a standard game in which a player input is received and a wagering game outcome is determined. The method further includes the act of receiving a player input via a first user interface device. The player input is transformed to electronic data signals at least partially indicative of a wager to play the wagering game. The wager from the data signals is interpreted via one or more processors. The recording of a digital representation of the wager is initiated in one or more storage devices. The standard game of the wagering game is initiated via at least one of the processors. The standard game has an expected value associated therewith. A player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game is initiated via at least one of the processors. The player-directed secondary game includes a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences. Each of the game sequences has a predetermined completion threshold capable of being achieved during play of the standard game. A player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game is received. In response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold for that game sequence during play of the standard game, a secondary award is awarded that is independent of the expected value of the standard game.

[0086] It is further contemplated that in certain aspects, the standard game of the above method includes a basic game and at least one bonus game. In certain aspects, the player-directed game sequences are player directed virtual missions. It is also contemplated that in certain aspects, the predetermined completion thresholds of the above method are transmitted, prior to receiving a player selection of one of the game sequences, in a configuration allowing display of the predetermined completion thresholds on a user interface. In further aspects, at least one of the player-selectable and player-directed games sequences has multiple difficulty levels and each difficultly level has an associated predetermined completion threshold, wherein the higher the difficulty level, the less likely the associated threshold is to be achieved. It is also contemplated that in certain aspects the difficulty levels are transmitted, prior to receiving a player selection of one of the game sequences, in a configuration allowing display of the difficulty levels on a user interface. It is further contemplated that in certain aspects of the above method, the player-directed secondary game includes a virtual character. It is additionally contemplated that in certain aspects, the method may also include transmitting during play of the standard game, in a configuration allowing display on a user interface, the player-directed virtual character interacting with another virtual character. The interactions may increase prior achieving the predetermined completion threshold.

[0087] It is contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure, a method of conducting a wagering game includes the acts of receiving a first player input via a first user interface device. The first player input is indicative of a wager to play the wagering game. After receiving the player input, a standard game of the wagering game is initiated via one or more processors. The standard game has an expected value associated therewith. A player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game is initiated via at least one of the processors. The player-directed secondary game includes a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences. Each of the game sequences has a predetermined completion threshold achievable during play of the standard game. A second player input indicative of a player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game is received. During play of the standard game, the predetermined completion threshold associated with the received player selection of one of the game sequences is achieved. In response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold associated with the selected bonus game, a non-monetary secondary award is awarded.

[0088] It is further contemplated that in certain aspects, the above method includes that after the achieving of the predetermined completion threshold, the player-directed game sequence is saved in a memory in a configuration allowing subsequent display of the game sequence. It is also contemplated that in certain aspects, the non-monetary secondary award includes accruing points redeemable for unlocking features during subsequent play of a player-directed sequence. It is additional contemplated that in certain aspects, the non-monetary secondary award includes unlocking a bonus variation associated with the standard game. A non-monetary secondary award is also contemplated in certain aspects that include unlocking a bonus game associated with the standard game, the unlocked bonus game being associated with monetary awards. The player-directed secondary game may also include a player-directed virtual character, and the non-monetary secondary award can also include unlocking modifications to the player-directed virtual character. The unlocked modifications may include virtual gear for use by the player-directed virtual character. The non-monetary secondary award can also include unlocking new virtual characters, or unlocking new player-directed game sequences. It is further contemplated that in certain aspects of the above method, the non-monetary secondary award outcome includes unlocking different basic game wagering thresholds for triggering bonus or progressive game features.

[0089] It is contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure, a gaming system includes a credit detector configured to detect a wager to play a wagering game having a standard game and a secondary game. One or more displays are configured to display a randomly selected outcome for the standard game and to display the secondary game. A controller is operative to implement the following acts, including initiating the standard game. The standard game has an expected monetary value associated with achieving a winning outcome in the standard game. The controller further initiates the secondary game. The secondary game includes a plurality

of player-directed and player-selectable game sequences. Each of the plurality of game sequences has an associated predetermined completion threshold capable of occurring during play of the standard game. The controller is also operative to display indicia of at least one of the plurality of game sequences on the one or more displays. The indicia include information on the associated predetermined completion threshold. After the act of displaying, the controller is further operative to detect a player selection of one of the game sequences. After the act of detecting the player selection, the controller is also operative to detect a player achievement of the predetermined completion threshold for the selected one of the game sequences. In response to the act of detecting the player achievement, the controller is operative to award a secondary award that is not associated with the expected monetary value of the standard game.

[0090] It is contemplated that in certain aspects of the present disclosure, a computer program product comprising a non-transitory computer readable medium has an instruction set borne thereby. The instruction set is configured to cause, upon execution by a controller, the acts of: (i) receiving a wager via a user interface device, the wager associate with a wagering game; (ii) initiating, via one or more processors, the standard game of the wagering game; (iii) initiating, via at least one of the processors, a player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game, the player-directed secondary game including a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences, each of the game sequences having a predetermined completion threshold that is configured to be achievable during play of the standard game; (iv) receiving a player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game; and (v) in response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold for that game sequence during play of the standard game, awarding a non-monetary secondary award that is independent of an expected value of the standard game.

[0091] According to another aspect of the present disclosure, a method of conducting a wagering game includes receiving a wager via a user interface device, the wager being associated with a wagering game. The standard game of the wagering game is initiated via one or more processors. A player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game is initiated via at least one of the processors. The player-directed secondary game includes a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences. Each of the game sequences has a predetermined completion threshold that is configured to be achievable during play of the standard game. A player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game is received. In response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold for that game sequence during play of the standard game, a non-monetary secondary award that is independent of an expected value of the standard game is awarded.

[0092] According to a further aspect of the present disclosure, one or more non-transitory computer readable storage media are encoded with instructions, which when executed by at least one processor or controller associated with a gaming system, causes the at least one processor or controller to perform the above methods.

[0093] Each of these embodiments and 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 method of conducting a wagering game including a standard game in which a player input is received and a wagering game outcome is determined, the method comprising the acts of:

receiving a player input via a first user interface device;

transforming the player input to electronic data signals at least partially indicative of a wager to play the wagering game;

interpreting, via at least one of one or more processors, the wager from the data signals;

initiating a recording of a digital representation of the wager in one or more storage devices;

initiating, via at least one of the one or more processors, the standard game of the wagering game, the standard game having an expected value associated therewith;

initiating, via at least one of the one or more processors, a player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game, the player-directed secondary game including a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences, each of the game sequences having a predetermined completion threshold capable of being achieved during play of the standard game;

receiving a player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game; and

in response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold for that game sequence during play of the standard game, awarding a secondary award that is independent of the expected value of the standard game.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein the standard game includes a basic game and at least one bonus game.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein the player-directed game sequences are player directed virtual missions.

4. The method of claim **1**, wherein the predetermined completion thresholds are transmitted, prior to receiving a player selection of one of the game sequences, in a configuration allowing display of the predetermined completion thresholds on a user interface.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein at least one of the player-selectable and player-directed games sequences has multiple difficulty levels and each difficultly level has an associated predetermined completion threshold, wherein the higher the difficulty level, the less likely the associated threshold is to be achieved.

6. The method of claim **5**, wherein the difficulty levels are transmitted, prior to receiving a player selection of one of the game sequences, in a configuration allowing display of the difficulty levels on a user interface.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein the player-directed secondary game includes a virtual character.

8. The method of claim **7**, further comprising transmitting during play of the standard game, in a configuration allowing display on a user interface, the player-directed virtual character interacting with another virtual character.

9. The method of claim **8**, wherein the interactions increase prior achieving the predetermined completion threshold.

10. A method of conducting a wagering game on a gaming system, the method comprising the acts of:

receiving a first player input via a first user interface device, the first player input indicative of a wager to play the wagering game;

after receiving the player input, initiating a standard game of the wagering game via at least one of one or more processors, the standard game having an expected value associated therewith;

initiating, via at least one of the one or more processors, a player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game, the player-directed secondary game including a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences, each of the game sequences having a predetermined completion threshold achievable during play of the standard game;

receiving a second player input indicative of a player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game;

during play of the standard game, achieving the predetermined completion threshold associated with the received player selection of one of the game sequences; and

in response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold associated with the selected bonus game, awarding a non-monetary secondary award.

11. The method of claim **10**, wherein after the achieving of the predetermined completion threshold, the player-directed game sequence is saved in a memory in a configuration allowing subsequent display of the game sequence.

12. The method of claim **10**, wherein the non-monetary secondary award includes accruing points redeemable for unlocking features during subsequent play of a player-directed sequence.

13. The method of claim **10**, wherein the non-monetary secondary award includes unlocking a bonus variation associated with the standard game.

14. The method of claim **10**, wherein the non-monetary secondary award includes unlocking a bonus game associated with the standard game, the unlocked bonus game being associated with monetary awards.

15. The method of claim **10**, wherein the player-directed secondary game includes a player-directed virtual character.

16. The method of claim **15**, wherein the non-monetary secondary award includes unlocking modifications to the player-directed virtual character.

17. The method of claim **16**, wherein the unlocked modifications include virtual gear for use by the player-directed virtual character.

18. The method of claim **10**, wherein the non-monetary secondary award includes unlocking new virtual characters.

19. The method of claim **10**, wherein the non-monetary secondary award includes unlocking new player-directed game sequences.

20. The method of claim **10**, wherein the non-monetary secondary award outcome includes unlocking different basic game wagering thresholds for triggering bonus or progressive game features.

21. A gaming system comprising:

a credit detector configured to detect a wager to play a wagering game having a standard game and a secondary game;

one or more displays configured to display a randomly selected outcome for the standard game and to display the secondary game;

a controller operative to implement the following acts, including:

initiating the standard game, the standard game having an expected monetary value associated with achieving a winning outcome in the standard game;

initiating the secondary game, the secondary game including a plurality of player-directed and player-selectable game sequences, each of the plurality of game sequences having an associated predetermined completion threshold capable of occurring during play of the standard game;

displaying an indicia of at least one of the plurality of game sequences on the one or more displays, the indicia including information on the associated predetermined completion threshold;

after the act of displaying, detecting a player selection of one of the game sequences;

after the act of detecting the player selection, detecting a player achievement of the predetermined completion threshold for the selected one of the game sequences; and

in response to the act of detecting the player achievement, awarding a secondary award that is not associated with the expected monetary value of the standard game.

22. A computer program product comprising a non-transitory computer readable medium having an instruction set borne thereby, the instruction set being configured to cause, upon execution by a controller, the acts of:

receiving a wager via a user interface device, the wager associate with a wagering game;

initiating, via at least one of one or more processors, the standard game of the wagering game;

initiating, via at least one of the one or more processors, a player-directed secondary game that is associated with the standard game, the player-directed secondary game including a plurality of player-selectable and player-directed game sequences, each of the game sequences having a predetermined completion threshold that is configured to be achievable during play of the standard game;

receiving a player selection of one of the game sequences of the player-directed secondary game; and

in response to receiving the player selection of one of the game sequences and achieving the predetermined completion threshold for that game sequence during play of the standard game, awarding a non-monetary secondary award that is independent of an expected value of the standard game.

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