The game freeze feature allows a player to pause or suspend play at a gaming machine and later resume play. The player may suspend play during a game or between games as desired. In one embodiment, the player must provide authenticating information to suspend a game. The authenticating information may subsequently be used to resume the suspended game. If a game is not resumed within an allotted time limit, the player's credits, wager, or both may be forfeited and the game reset to allow a new game to be played. The player may reclaim forfeited wagers and credits by providing the authenticating information used to suspend a game. The game freeze feature provides the benefit of allowing players to reserve gaming machines or to take a break from play.
Fig. 4

Accept a wager

Start a game

Player suspends play?

yes

Suspend the game

Within time limit?

no

Forfeit the game

yes

Resume the game

Player resumes play?

no

Continue the game

End the game

yes

Resume the game
Fig. 5

1. Accept a wager
2. Present a game
3. End the game
4. Credit(s) > 0?
   - no: Forfeit credit(s)
   - yes: Player suspends play?
      - no: Suspend play
      - yes: Within time limit?
         - no: Resume play
         - yes: Player resumes play?
            - no: End the game
            - yes: Resume play
**Fig. 6D**

Password: *****

```
1 2 3
4 5 6
7 8 9
0
```

**Fig. 6E**

Bet: 2
Credit(s): 12

**Two of a Kind Winner!**

```
10 2 9 9 10
```

Buttons:
- Hold
- Freeze
- Resume
- Bet
- Deal
Fig. 7

- Freeze Button
- Resume Button
- Player Input Devices
- Processor
- Transceiver
- Random Number Generator
- Controller
- Display
- Peripherals
GAMING MACHINE WITH GAME FREEZE FEATURE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to gaming machines and wagering games, and specifically to a game freeze feature for one or more games presented on gaming machines.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Traditional gaming machines present one or more games to a player. Typically, a game is presented in response to the player placing a wager at the gaming machine. The player may play one or more games as desired by placing one or more wagers. It is common for players to play a single gaming machine for a period of time.

[0003] One problem with traditional gaming machines is that they are not configured to allow players to take a break. Prior to leaving a gaming machine, the player must finish his or her current game and cash out any credits remaining in the gaming machine. For example, a player who wishes to get a beverage, use the phone, or go to the restroom must first finish his or her current game and cash out before leaving the gaming machine. If the player does not, the player’s game and credits remain in the machine, which is accessible to any passersby who may take the player’s credits or play the player’s game without permission.

[0004] Another problem with leaving a traditional gaming machine is that another player may start playing the gaming machine once a player leaves. This can occur even if the first player is gone only for a short period of time. This can be troublesome to the first player who may wish to continue playing the same gaming machine. For example, the first player may believe the gaming machine is about to payout an award or “hit” and desire to continue playing the same gaming machine. If the player must leave the machine for even a short period of time, he or she risks losing the machine to another player.

[0005] Thus, what is provided herein is a novel gaming machine and method therefor for providing a game freeze feature.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] A game freeze feature is disclosed herein. As discussed below, the game freeze feature generally allows a player to suspend and later resume play of a game at a gaming machine. This is advantageous in that it allows player to take a break from playing a game as well as reserve their favorite or “lucky” gaming machines for a period of time. In one or more embodiments, the game freeze feature protects suspended games from tampering by requiring authenticating information. It is contemplated that a suspension of a game may be limited to a time period and that the player may forfeit credits, games, or both if a game is not resumed in time.

[0007] In one or more embodiments, the game freeze feature may be provided by a gaming machine comprising a display, a freeze button, a resume button, and a processor configured to present a game to a player on the display. The processor may also be configured to suspend play of the game on the gaming machine for a predetermined period of time in response to activation of the freeze button by the player whereby play of the game resumes in response to activation of the resume button by the player within the predetermined period of time. Play may be suspended in a variety of ways. In one embodiment, the processor suspends play of the game by ignoring further input to the gaming machine other than input received from the resume button. When play of the game is suspended, the display may provide a notification of the same to the player. The notification may provide the remaining time for suspension of play of the game which will typically be at least a portion of the predetermined period of time.

[0008] In one embodiment, the gaming machine may include one or more player input devices or a card reader configured to receive authenticating information from the player whereby play of the game on the gaming machine resumes only if the authenticating information verifies the identity of the player.

[0009] In another embodiment, the gaming machine may include a memory device configured to store game information, such as but not limited to, the number of credits in the gaming machine and the amount of wagers in the gaming machine, whereby if the game is not resumed within the predetermined period of time the game information is stored on the memory device and the gaming machine is reset to allow play of a new game. Once the gaming information is stored, the game may be forfeited if the game is not resumed within the predetermined period of time.

[0010] A method for providing a game freeze feature on a gaming machine is also provided. In one embodiment, the method comprises accepting one or more credits from the player, presenting a game to a player on the gaming machine whereby the player is paid an award for achieving a winning outcome, suspending play of the game at the gaming machine for a predetermined period of time if the player activates the freeze button, displaying a notification on the display indicating that play of the game is suspended, and resuming play of the game at the gaming machine if the player activates the resume button within the predetermined period of time.

[0011] In one embodiment, the method may include accepting a first authenticating information from the player prior to suspending play of the game. In this embodiment, a second authenticating information may be accepted prior to resuming play of the game whereby play of the game resumes only if the first authenticating information and the second authenticating information match. It is noted that the first authenticating information and the second authenticating information may be accepted via a card reader or one or more player input devices of the gaming machine. A second authenticating information may also be accepted from the player to allow the player reclaim his or her forfeited credits, if the second authenticating information matches the first authenticating information.

[0012] In another embodiment, a game freeze device for a gaming machine may be provided. The game freeze device may comprise a freeze button, a resume button, and a controller connected to a processor and a display of a gaming machine. The controller may be configured to provide the game freeze feature to the gaming machine whereby the controller suspends play of a game for a predetermined period of time on the gaming machine when the freeze button is activated and resumes play of the game when the resume button is activated. As with the above, the controller may provide a notification on the display indicating play of the game is suspended when play of the game is suspended. In one embodiment, the controller may intercept communication from one or more player input devices of the gaming machine.
Further objects, features, and advantages of the present invention over the prior art will become apparent from the detailed description of the drawings which follows, when considered with the attached figures.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The components in the figures are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating the principles of the invention. In the figures, like reference numerals designate corresponding parts throughout the different views.

FIG. 1 illustrates a gaming machine and system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating the components of a gaming machine according to an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3 illustrates a screen display according to an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating the operation of the game freeze feature during a game according to an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 5 is a flow diagram illustrating the operation of the game freeze feature between games according to an embodiment of the invention;

FIGS. 6A-6E illustrate screen displays of the game freeze feature in operation according to various embodiments of the invention; and

FIG. 7 is a block diagram illustrating components of a game freeze device according to an embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a more thorough description of the present invention. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art, that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well-known features have not been described in detail so as not to obscure the invention.

In general, the gaming machine with game freeze feature allows a game being played on a gaming machine to be paused or suspended for a period of time and then resumed later at the same gaming machine. This is advantageous in that it allows a player to leave the machine such as to take a break, use the restroom, get refreshments, socialize, or for various other reasons and then resume his or her game. In addition, this allows a player to reserve a gaming machine for a period of time so that the player may later return to the same gaming machine. This is advantageous in that players often desire to play the same gaming machine on the belief that the machine is about to hit or is a lucky machine. The game freeze feature allows a player the freedom to leave for a period of time without the risk of another player taking the machine. The game freeze feature may require authentication information to resume a game in order to prevent unauthorized access to a suspended gaming machine. As will be described further below, authentication information may be a code, PIN, password, phrase, or other information.

The game freeze feature is distinguishable from traditional save/restore schemes where games may be saved to a memory device and later resumed by retrieving and reloading or restoring the saved game. In one or more embodiments, the game freeze feature does not save a game but rather freezes or suspends the game such as by preventing further user input or by holding a game and/or gaming machine in its current state, as will be described further below.

FIG. 1 illustrates one embodiment of a gaming machine 100 at which the game freeze features of the invention may be implemented. In one embodiment, the gaming machine 100 is a wager-based gaming machine configured to present one or more games to a player, which games offer the possibility of an award of winnings. Of course, the gaming machine 100 could be configured to present games or amusing activities based upon payment and either no award winnings or offer the opportunity for points, tickets, prizes or the like.

In one embodiment, the gaming machine 100 defines a generally enclosed interior space for housing one or more components. As illustrated, the gaming machine 100 generally comprises a housing or cabinet 102 for supporting and/or enclosing various components required for operation of the gaming machine. In the embodiment illustrated, the housing 102 may include a door 106 located at a front thereof, the door capable of being moved between an open position which allows access to the interior and a closed position in which access to the interior is generally prevented. The configuration of the gaming machine 100 may vary. In the embodiment illustrated, the gaming machine 100 has an "upright" configuration. However, the gaming machine 100 could have other configurations, shapes or dimensions (such as being of a "slant"-type or other configuration as is well known to those of skill in the art). It is noted that the configuration of the door 106 may vary, such as dependent upon the configuration of the gaming machine 100.

The gaming machine 100 preferably includes at least one display device 104 configured to display game information. The display device 104 may be a mechanical, electromechanical or electronic display, such as one or more rotating reels, a video display or the like. When the display device 104 is an electronic video display, it may comprise a cathode ray tube (CRT), high resolution flat panel liquid crystal display (LCD), projection LCD, plasma display, field emission display, digital micro-mirror display (DMD), digital light processing display (DLP), LCD touchscreen, a light emitting display (LED) or other suitable displays now known or later developed, in a variety of resolutions, sizes and formats (e.g. 4:3, widescreen or the like). The display 104 may be capable of projecting or displaying a wide variety of information, including images, symbols and other indicia or information associated with game play, game promotion or other events.

The gaming machine 100 may be configured to present a wide variety of games. These may include games in Class III, such as video poker games, slot-type games, and blackjack or other card, dice or various other games now known or later developed, as well as games in Class II, including central determinant games such as video lottery, bingo and bingo-based games, and other games now known or later developed. The gaming machine may also be skill based or include one or more skill components. In one embodiment, certain game outcomes may be designated as winning outcomes. Awards may be provided for winning outcomes, such as monetary payments (or representations thereof, such as award of credits), prizes or the like. As is well known in the art, the number of winning outcomes may vary dependent upon the desired
payout or winning percentage offered to the players as compared to wagers that are retained by the gaming establishment.

[0029] The gaming machine 100 may include one or more player input devices 108 (such as input buttons, a touchscreen display, joystick, touch-pad or the like) that may be utilized by the player to facilitate game play. The gaming machine 100 may include a coin accepting mechanism 112 for accepting coins and/or a currency or bill acceptor 114 for accepting cash or paper currency. It is also contemplated that other mechanisms may be provided for accepting value for game play, such as credit card, ticket readers or input devices whereby a player may have funds paid from a remote account. The gaming machine 100 may also include a “bet credit” button 118 or the like, such as to permit a player to wager monetary credits credited to the machine.

[0030] In one preferred embodiment, the gaming machine 100 includes one or more microprocessors or controllers for controlling the gaming machine, including receiving player input and sending output signals for controlling the various components of the machine 100 (such as generating game information for display by the display 104). The controller may be arranged to send signals for determining winning combinations and to cause the display 104 to display winning amount information. In addition, the controller is preferably arranged to determine if a round of game play has resulted in a win, and if so, the amount to be paid to the player for that win.

[0031] The gaming machine 100 may include a means for paying a player any winnings accumulated during game play. For example, a “cash out” button 116 may be provided for permitting a player to be paid the winnings or redeeming any credits initially paid into the gaming machine 100. The term “cash out” is used herein to define an event initiated by the player wherein the player receives a number of coins or currency that is equivalent to the value of the player’s accrued credit base. Typically when a player cashes out, the player receives either a paper currency voucher or currency in the form of a coin disbursement. If the player decides to receive a coin disbursement, the gaming machine 100 may activate a coin hopper or coin handling device (not shown) which physically counts and delivers the proper number of coins to the player. The coin handling device is commonly configured to transport coins from a supply source (such as a hopper) to a dispensing device or coin tray or the like, where the player physically receives the coins. The player might also elect to cash out by having a ticket or other media dispensed, such as via a printer.

[0032] The gaming machine 100 may be configured as a stand-alone device or be in communication with one or more external devices at one or more times. For example, the gaming machine 100 may be configured as a server based device and obtain game code or game outcome information from a game controller. The gaming machine 100 may also communicate with one or more gaming servers 120. These one or more gaming servers 120 may be configured to perform accounting, player tracking, bonus, game generation, or other functions.

[0033] In one embodiment, the gaming machine 100 may include various hardware and/or software for implantaing a gaming machine or game “freeze” feature in accordance with the invention.

[0034] FIG. 2 illustrates the components of an exemplary gaming machine. As shown, the gaming machine comprises a processor 204, display 204, one or more player input devices 108, and a random number generator 220. A gaming machine may also comprise one or more peripherals 208 to facilitate play of a game such as card readers, coin acceptors, bill acceptors, coin hoppers, ticket/ receipt printers or dispensers, and the like, as detailed above.

[0035] The gaming machine may also include a transceiver 212 to allow the gaming machine to communicate with external devices such as other gaming machines, game controllers, progressive controllers, gaming servers, and the like. The transceiver 212 may allow wired or wireless communications via one or more network or other connections. It will be understood that the game freeze feature may be implemented in various embodiments of gaming machines that may include additional or other electronic components, or that may not require one or more of the components illustrated in FIG. 2.

[0036] As indicated, the gaming machine may include a random number generator 220 for use in generating random game results or outcomes. It is noted that the random number generator 220 may be a separate component or part of another component, such as the processor 204, in one or more embodiments. The random number generator 220 may be configured to provide one or more random numbers to facilitate the play of one or more games. As is known, random numbers are commonly used in wagering games to provide an outcome of a game.

[0037] The random number generator 220 may accept one or more seed values in one or more embodiments from which one or more random numbers may be generated. The seed value may represent various tangible objects or characteristics. For example, a measurement of vibration, temperature, voltage, or time may be used as a seed value. It is noted that the random number generator 220 may include or be connected to one or more sensors or the like to measure these or other values for use as seed values. It is also noted that in server based gaming environments, the random number generator 220 may be remote from one or more gaming machines and that the random numbers generated by the random number generator may be communicated to the gaming machines and/or game outcomes may be provided to the gaming machine.

[0038] In general, the processor 204 may be a microprocessor, circuit, or the like configured to process input and generate output to present one or more games, provide the game freeze feature, or both. In one or more embodiments, the processor 204 may execute machine readable code to present one or more games, provide the game freeze feature, or both. In one or more embodiments, the machine readable code comprises instructions that the processor 204 may execute to provide the game freeze feature as described herein. The output from the processor 204 may be used to control or communicate with other components connected to the processor such as a display 104, transceiver 212, or gaming machine peripherals 208. A processor 204 may accept input from one or more player input devices 108 or other components connected to the processor.

[0039] In one or more embodiments, the processor 204 may be connected to a memory device 216 configured to store data. The memory device 216 may be various types of electronic memory, now known or later developed, including but not limited to magnetic, flash, or optical memory.

[0040] The memory device 216 may be configured to store machine readable code for one or more games. In this manner,
the processor 204 may retrieve and execute machine readable code to present one or more games or other gaming machine features to players. It is noted that a processor 204 may include its own memory in some embodiments. In addition, the machine readable code may be hardwired into the circuitry of a processor 204. In these embodiments, a separate memory device 216 may not be required.  

[0041] It is contemplated that a memory device 216 may also be configured to store information for one or more games. For example, information related to the play or execution of a game such as but not limited to credits, amounts wagered, amounts won, one or more paytables, winning outcomes, paylines, jackpot amounts, bonuses, and randomly generated numbers may be stored in the memory device 216. Game freeze information which generally refers to information related to providing the game freeze feature may also be stored. For example, a memory device 216 may be used to store information indicating whether or not a game is suspended as well as one or more passwords, codes, or other information that must be inputted to resume a suspended game. It will be understood that other information related to presenting a game or providing the game freeze feature may be stored as well.  

[0042] As will be described further below, a player may engage a player input device 108 to suspend a game as well as to resume a suspended game. Engaging the appropriate player input device 108 may send a signal or information to the processor 204 indicating the player desires to suspend or resume a game. The processor 204 may then execute one or more functions to suspend or resume a game as appropriate.  

[0043] In one or more embodiments, the player input devices 108 may comprise a freeze button, a resume button, or both. Of course, player input devices 108 (including touch screen input to a video display, such as display 104) other than buttons may be used to suspend or resume a game. This is illustrated in FIG. 3, which shows an exemplary display 104 presenting a slot game along with a freeze button 308 and a resume button 312 thereon. In the embodiment shown, the player input devices 108, including the freeze button 308 and the resume button 312 are touch screen buttons. It will be understood that the freeze button 308 and the resume button 312 may be push button type devices as well, such as shown in FIG. 1. It is contemplated that a single button may be both a freeze button and a resume button in some embodiments. For example, a button may be activated to suspend a game and the same button may be activated again to resume the game from its suspended state. Though labeled respectively as “freeze” and “resume”, it is noted that the freeze button 308 and the resume button 312, or a single button that functions as both, may be labeled differently with various characters or symbols as desired. In general, the labels will typically convey the function of the button should it be activated or engaged.  

[0044] As can be seen from FIG. 3, the game freeze feature allows a player to suspend play between games. For example, in the slot embodiment of FIG. 3, the player may suspend play after the outcome of a game has been achieved, such as after a spin of slot game reels (video animated or physical reels). As shown, the player has 10 credits in the gaming machine. The player may then take a break and then resume the game later with his or her 10 credits of the same gaming machine. In this manner, the player does not have to cash out even if he or she physically leaves the gaming machine.  

[0045] The game freeze feature also allows a player to suspend play during a game. For example, the player may suspend a game after it has been started, such as when a wager has been placed, and before an outcome is obtained. This is advantageous in card type games such as blackjack or poker because rounds or hands of these games may provide a convenient point for a player to suspend a game. In addition, additional cards or indicia may be displayed during a single round or hand. The game freeze feature allows the player (whether card based or not) to be suspended prior to or after these events or at other times during a game.  

[0046] It is contemplated that the game freeze feature may also be used to suspend play of various types of games, including mechanical reel type games, video games such as video slots and video poker, and various other games such as keno, bingo and others. For example, in one embodiment, the game freeze feature may suspend a game as one or more reels are spinning. In another embodiment, the game freeze feature may suspend a slot type game before, during, or after a bonus round. Of course, as stated, the game freeze feature may be used to suspend a slot game at other times during a game as well. The player may resume the game later as desired. It is contemplated that the game freeze feature may be used multiple times during and between one or more games. Preferably, when play is suspended, other players or people will not be allowed to access or play the suspended gaming machine.  

[0047] Play may be suspended in various ways. In one embodiment, play may be suspended by locking a gaming machine such that no input other than that related to resuming play is permitted. For example, input other than that from a resume button or authenticating information for resuming play may be ignored. This prevents any currently played game from progressing and prevents new games from being started. Play may also be suspended by holding a game at its present state and ignoring input not related to resuming play. For example, the position of reels, display of indicia, number of credits/wagers, and other information related to a game may be preserved as is in a memory device.  

[0048] A gaming machine may also display a notification that play has been suspended or that the gaming machine has been frozen in one or more embodiments. The notification may cover some or all of a gaming machine’s display to ensure that players are aware play has been suspended. Other types of indicators could be provided, such as de-illuminating all of the buttons of the gaming machine, displaying a blank screen on the gaming machine display, etc.  

[0049] In one embodiment, as will be discussed further below, proper authenticating information may be required to freeze and/or resume game play. As used herein, authenticating information refers to a code, password, phrase, player identifier, or other information that a player enters to freeze play, resume play, or both. Typically, authenticating information will be used to verify the player’s identity such that only the player who suspended play at a gaming machine can resume play at the gaming machine.  

[0050] Authenticating information may be stored on the player as such as on a gaming machine display, printed ticket or receipt, player tracking card, or the like. It is contemplated that authenticating information may also be provided via email, text messaging, or other electronic communications.
mechanisms. In one embodiment, authenticating information may be given to a player verbally or on various mediums by gaming establishment personnel such as but not limited to bartenders, wait staff, and cashiers.

[0051] Authenticating information may also be provided by the player. For example, a player may select his or her authenticating information may inputting a password or code to a gaming machine or other device. In general, authenticating information will be used to verify that the player resuming play at a gaming machine is the same player that suspended play at the gaming machine.

[0052] It is noted that, in one or more embodiments, a game may only be suspended for a limited time. This may be beneficial to a gaming establishment that does not want a plurality of machines to be unavailable to other players because they are suspended. Various time limits may be set as desired ranging from seconds, minutes, hours, and longer. In a preferred embodiment, the time limit may be one or more minutes such as 3, 5, 10, 15, or 20 minutes. If play is not resumed within the time limit the player may forfeit the game, any credits in the gaming machine, or both. In one or more embodiments, the player may be provided a printed ticket or receipt when play is suspended. The ticket may be provided to a gaming machine or establishment to reclaim some or all the credits in a gaming machine that was not resumed within the time limit. In other embodiments, authenticating information, such as a password or code, or a player tracking card may inputted or inserted in a gaming machine when suspending a game and be later used to reclaim credits.

[0053] Players may have to meet certain criteria to be allowed to suspend play in one or more embodiments. For example, a player may be required to insert a player tracking card or input authenticating information before the game freeze feature will be provided to the player. This is beneficial in that credits may be returned to a player identified by a player tracking card or authenticating information if a game is not resumed within the allotted time limit or if the game is not resumed at all. In one or more embodiments, players may have to acknowledge or agree to various instructions, terms, or conditions before the game freeze feature will be provided. For example, a player may have to acknowledge that a game may only be suspended for a limited time and that placed wagers, credits, or both may be forfeited if the game is not resumed within the time limit or at all. In other embodiments, players may have to ask permission from gaming establishment personnel to suspend a game. For example, the game freeze feature may not be available unless authorized by such personnel. In one embodiment, a player must request and receive authenticating information, such as a password, from gaming establishment personnel and correctly input the authenticating information into a gaming machine before play may be suspended.

[0054] Operation of the gaming machine or game freeze feature in accordance with one embodiment of the invention will now be described. FIG. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating an exemplary embodiment of the machine freeze feature in operation during the play of a game. At a step 404, a wager is accepted from a player at a gaming machine. As is known, this may occur in various ways including but not limited to accepting currency, tokens, credits, or the like in physical or electronic form through a card reader, bill acceptor, coin slot, or the like. It is noted that the wager may come from one or more credits a player already has in a gaming machine as well.

[0055] Once a wager has been accepted, the gaming machine may start a wagering game where the player may win a payout or other award. In one embodiment, the wagering game may start by dealing or revealing one or more cards, symbols, or other indicia. As shown in the exemplary display of FIG. 6A, five cards 604 are revealed in a poker type wagering game to start the game. In another embodiment, the wagering game may start by activating one or more player input devices which allow the player to provide input (i.e., play a game) such as to reveal one or more indicia such as by spinning one or more reels.

[0056] It is contemplated that the game freeze feature may be enabled and activated by a player after a game has started. As shown in FIG. 6A, the freeze button 308 is enabled while the resume button 312 is disabled after the start of the game. As illustrated in FIG. 4, it is determined whether or not a player desires to suspend a game at a step 412. If the player does not suspend the game at step 412, the game continues at step 424 until the game ends at step 428. In one or more embodiments the game may end with the player winning an award, achieving a draw, or losing his or her wager.

[0057] If the player does suspend the game at step 412, such as by activating a freeze button, play will be suspended at step 416. It is noted that the player may suspend play of a game in various ways. In one embodiment, the player may press or otherwise activate a player input device 108 such as those illustrated in FIG. 1. In another embodiment, the player may activate a touch screen freeze button 308, such as illustrated in FIG. 6A or 6B, by touching or engaging the freeze button.

[0058] It will be understood that the game freeze feature may be used at various times during a game. For example, the game freeze feature may be used after the start of a game such as in FIG. 6A where an initial hand of cards has been dealt. In addition, the game freeze feature may be activated at different stages of or at different times during a game. For example, FIG. 6B shows that a freeze button 308 may be activated after the player chooses which of five cards to hold in a poker game.

[0059] Suspension of play of a game may occur in various ways. In one embodiment, a gaming machine may suspend a game by preventing further input except for input directed to resuming a suspended game. The gaming machine may also provide notification that a game has been suspended. As shown in FIG. 6C, the gaming machine may display a screen indicating that a game has been suspended. The display of game symbols, indicia, or the like may be cleared from the screen. The exemplary embodiment of FIG. 6C also provides a notification of the time remaining for the game to remain suspended as well as an enabled resume button 312 to allow the player to resume a game. It is contemplated that promotional displays such as advertising may also be displayed. The freeze button 308 may be deactivated such as shown in FIG. 6C when a game is suspended. This prevents confusion as a suspended game may generally not be suspended again.

[0060] In one or more embodiments, authenticating information, such as a password, may be collected from the player at step 416. The player may then be required to input authenticating information in order to resume the suspended game. In this manner, only an authorized player or the player that suspended the game may resume play. A prompt or other screen display, such as illustrated in FIG. 6D, may be presented on a gaming machine to collect such password, code, or other authenticating information from a player. Typically the screen display will be presented after the player indicates,
such as by activating a freeze button 308, that he or she wishes to suspend a game. The player may enter authenticating information utilizing a number or key pad presented on the gaming machine such as in FIG. 6D. It is contemplated that the authenticating information may also be entered through one or more player input devices. In addition, a button panel or keyboard such as that of a player tracking device may also be used to input authenticating information. In other embodiments, a player may be provided a ticket or receipt having previously generated authenticating information thereon when the player suspends play of a game. The ticket or receipt may be printed or dispensed from the gaming machine in one or more embodiments.

[0061] In some embodiments, where a player has inserted a player tracking card, authenticating information may be read from the player tracking card or a player tracking account linked to the card. In these embodiments, the player may be required to remove his or her player tracking card to suspend play. This prevents a player from leaving his or her player tracking card behind and potentially losing the card. The player tracking card may then be subsequently reinserted to resume the game and verify that the player who suspended the game is resuming the game. In other embodiments, a player may briefly insert and remove a player tracking card to input authenticating information. In this manner, the player tracking card may be used to resume the game even though the player tracking card was not previously inserted.

[0062] At a step 420, it is determined whether or not the game has been suspended for longer than a certain time limit. If the game has not been suspended for longer than the time limit, the player may choose to resume the game at a step 424. If the player does not resume the game, game freeze feature may return to step 420 to again determine whether the time limit for game suspension has been reached.

[0063] If, at step 420, the time limit for game suspension has been reached then the suspended game may be forfeited at a step 440 in one or more embodiments. A game may be forfeited in various ways. In one embodiment, a game is forfeited by giving or transferring the player's current wager to the gaming establishment and ending the game. In this embodiment, the player loses the current wager to the gaming establishment. In another embodiment, a game is forfeited by returning the current wager to the player's credits and ending the game. Any credits in the gaming machine may be cleared and the gaming machine may be reset for a new player, a new game, or both. For example, the credits indicator may be set to zero and the gaming machine may return to step 404 to accept a wager for a new game.

[0064] It is contemplated that, prior to clearing the credits, any credits remaining in the machine may be associated with the authenticating information that the player provided prior to or after suspending the game, such as described above with regard to step 416. The credits and associated authenticating information may be stored on a memory device of the gaming machine or on a gaming server so that the player may reclaim these credits later on.

[0065] For example, in one or more embodiments, the player may input his or her authenticating information to reclaim credits from the gaming machine. The gaming machine may query its memory device or a gaming server to determine the number of forfeited credits associated with the authenticating information. The gaming machine may include a player input device, such as a button labeled “Reclaim Credits” and an input screen or prompt, to facilitate reclaiming credits. Once the authenticating information is provided, the gaming machine may dispense currency, a ticket or tokens representing the credits the player left in the machine. Of course, the player may also use the reclaimed credits to play a game on the gaming machine. It is contemplated that credits may be reclaimed at other gaming machines as well in some embodiments. Also, credits may be reclaimed through the gaming establishment such as by presenting authenticating information to a cashier or other personnel. It is noted that authenticating information may be read from a player tracking card (or associated player tracking account), ticket, receipt, or the like and thus the player may input or present authenticating information by providing his or her player tracking card in one or more embodiments.

[0066] If the player does choose to resume the game at step 424, the game may correspondingly be resumed at a step 428. The game may be resumed in various ways. In one embodiment, the player may press or activate a player input device to indicate that he or she wishes to resume the game. In another embodiment, the player may activate a resume button 312 such as illustrated in FIG. 6C to indicate that he or she wishes to resume a game. It is contemplated that a resume button 312 or other player input device which provides resume functionality may be disabled, such as shown in FIG. 6A, when play is not suspended and enabled when play is suspended, such as shown in FIG. 6C. Similarly, a freeze button 308 may be disabled, such as in FIG. 6C, when play is suspended, and enabled, such as in FIG. 6A, when play is not suspended and the game freeze feature is available to a player.

[0067] Once a resume button 312 or similar player input device is activated, the player may then be prompted to provide authenticating information to resume the game. For example, a screen display or graphical user interface such as that of FIG. 6D may be presented to accept a player’s authenticating information. A player may also insert his or her player tracking card to provide authenticating information. In one or more embodiments, the authenticating information must match the authenticating information used to suspend the game to resume play. This verifies the identity of the player by ensuring that the same player is resuming play. Of course, players may provide the authenticating information to other players. In these cases, at the very least, requiring matching authenticating information ensures that only players with the proper authenticating information can resume play. In the case where authenticating information was provided on a ticket or receipt, the player may input the authenticating information thereon or may use a peripheral of a gaming machine to scan the authenticating information from the ticket or receipt.

[0068] Once matching authenticating information has been provided, the game may continue at a step 432. Preferably, the play will resume such that the game continues from where the player suspended the game. In the exemplary poker embodiment of FIG. 6A, for example, if the player suspended the game after the initial hand is dealt, the game may resume by presenting the initial hand and allowing the player to continue playing from that point. If the player suspended the game after holding one or more cards, such as in FIG. 6B, the game may resume by presenting the initial hand with the player’s hand selections. In the exemplary embodiment, the player continues the game by holding the two 10 cards and dealing three replacement cards to achieve the 2 of a kind shown hand in FIG. 6E.
At a step 436 the game ends. The player may be paid an award or lose his or her wager based on the outcome the player receives. If desired, the player may then play a new game by placing a new wager. It is noted that in the exemplary embodiment of FIG. 6E, the player has achieved a winning poker hand and thus would be paid an award.

It is contemplated that the player may be presented with one or more bonus games or at the end of his or her original game. It will be understood that a variety of bonus games may be presented at the end of the original game. In one or more embodiments, the player may win various awards such as progressive or other jackpots during a bonus game. A bonus game may be presented at the end of every game or may be presented only where a player achieves a particular outcome or outcomes in the original game. As is known, a bonus game may also be presented in response to a random event or other event.

It will be understood that the game freeze feature may be used to suspend play of a bonus game as well. To illustrate, a player may press or activate a freeze button to suspend a bonus game. In response, the gaming machine may prompt the player to input authenticating information. If applicable, the player may be required to remove his or her player tracking card to suspend the bonus game. The bonus game may then be suspended for a period of time. The player may resume the bonus game by inputting the proper authenticating information. If the bonus game is not resumed within the allotted time, the bonus game and its underlying game may be forfeited. If additional wagers have been collected for the bonus game, they may be given or transferred to the gaming establishment or may be credited back to the player's credits. Any credits remaining in the gaming machine may then be cleared and the gaming machine reset for a new game. As described above, remaining credits may be associated with authenticating information to allow the player to reclaim any credits left in the machine using his or her authenticating information.

As indicated above, the game freeze feature may also suspend play in between one or more games including bonus games. FIG. 5 is a flow chart illustrating operation of the game freeze feature according to one embodiment. At a step 504, a wager is accepted at a gaming machine such as described above. Once a wager has been accepted, a game may be presented to a player at a step 508. In general the game will be presented by displaying one or more symbols, indicia, or the like. In some embodiments, input from a player may be collected to allow the player to play the game. The game will then result in an outcome and the player may lose a portion or all of his or her wager based on such outcome. If the player achieves a winning outcome, the player may be paid an award. If the player does not achieve a winning outcome his or her wager may be collected by the gaming machine. The game may then end at a step 512 once an outcome has occurred. It is noted that the game freeze feature may also be used one or more times during a game in step 508 such as described above with regard to FIG. 4.

At a step 516, it is determined whether or not the player has credits remaining in the gaming machine. If the player does not have any credits remaining, an additional wager must be placed/accepted at step 504 to play a new game. If the player does have credits remaining, the player may suspend play of the gaming machine at a step 520. To illustrate, the screen display of FIG. 6E may be the player's final hand for a game of poker. As can be seen, the player still has 12 credits in the gaming machine. Thus, the player may suspend play by activating the freeze button 308 at the lower left of the display 104. Of course, other player input devices such as push buttons may be used instead of or in addition to the freeze button 308 illustrated. Typically, the player must have at least one credit in the machine to suspend play between games. However, in one or more embodiments, such as when a player has inserted a player tracking card, a player may suspend play between games without any credits in the machine.

If the player does not choose to suspend play at step 520, a new game may start such as by accepting a wager at step 504. It is noted that this wager may be made from any credits currently in the gaming machine. If the player suspends play at step 520, such as by activating a freeze button, play at a gaming machine may be suspended.

Similar to above, play at a gaming machine may be suspended in various ways. In one embodiment, play is suspended by preventing player input except input related to resuming play. For example, all player input devices except those for resuming play, such as a resume button, may be disabled. In addition, a notification, such as a graphic, textual or other screen display, may be provided indicating that play has been suspended. For example, as illustrated in FIG. 6C, a notification is presented on a gaming machine's display 104 that informs players that play has been suspended. The screen display may also provide the time remaining for the suspension of play. Other players waiting for the machine will then know how long they must wait, assuming the original player does not resume play. Also, the player suspending play will know how long of a break he or she can take before play must be resumed. As with the above, a resume button 312 may be provided as well to allow play to be resumed when desired by the player.

Authenticating information may be required to suspend play such as described above. For example, a screen display such as shown in FIG. 6D may be presented to allow authentication information to be input by a player. In one or more embodiments, the authenticating information prevents other players or people from resuming play. If a player tracking card was previously inserted, the gaming machine may require a player to remove the player tracking card as part of suspending play. In this manner, the player is less likely to leave his or her player tracking card behind should the player leave while play is suspended. This also allows the player to resume play later by inserting his or her player tracking card.

As stated, suspension of play may be limited to a period of time. The period of time may be set as desired, such as described above. At a step 528, it is determined if play has been suspended for longer than such a time limit. If play has been suspended for longer than the time limit, the player's credits may be forfeited at a step 540.

Credits may be forfeited in various ways. In one embodiment, the player's credits may be cleared from the gaming machine such as by setting the player's credits to zero. The player's credits may also be forfeited by giving or transferring any credits remaining in a gaming machine to a gaming establishment. Once the credits have been forfeited, the gaming machine may be reset for a new game. For example, a gaming machine may continue to step 504 where a wager may be accepted to start a new game.

In one or more embodiments, credits may be associated with a player's authenticating information prior to being forfeited. For example, authenticating information may
be stored on a memory device of the gaming machine along with the number or value of credits remaining in the gaming machine. Alternatively, or in addition, authenticating information may be stored on a gaming server along with the number or value of remaining credits. As stated above, this allows players to reclaim forfeited credits.

[0080] It is contemplated that a player may reclaim forfeited credits by providing the authenticating information used to suspend play of a gaming machine. For example, the player may input authenticating information into the same gaming machine to reclaim his or her forfeited credits. The reclaimed credits may then be cashed out or used to make wagers for one or more games at the gaming machine. In one embodiment, the player may present authenticating information to gaming establishment personnel, such as a cashier, to reclaim his or her forfeited credits. It is contemplated that forfeited credits may be reclaimed by inputting authenticating information into any suitably configured gaming machine, not just the gaming machine on which the credits were forfeited.

[0081] If the suspension of play is within the time limit, it may be determined whether or not a player desires to resume play at a step 532. If the player does not wish to resume play, the method may return to step 528 where it is again determined if the suspension of play is within the time limit. If the player does wish to resume play, the player may indicate so by activating a resume button or other similarly configured player input device. For example, as shown in FIG. 6C, a player may engage a resume button 312 to indicate his or her desire to resume play.

[0082] Then, at step 536, play may resume. In one or more embodiments, the player may be required to input his or her authenticating information to resume play. Typically, the authenticating information must be the same as that used to suspend play. In this manner, other players or people may not resume another player’s suspended play. If the proper authenticating information or player tracking card is provided, the method may continue at step 504 where an additional wager may be accepted for a new game. The additional wager may come from one or more credits remaining in the gaming machine. A screen display such as shown in FIG. 6D may be provided to allow a player to input authenticating information to resume play.

[0083] FIGS. 4-5 illustrate the game freeze feature suspending and resuming play during one or more games and in between one or more games. Though described as occurring after a particular step or steps, it will be understood that the game freeze feature may be implemented and used at other times during and between games. For example, a game or game play may be suspended after a wager has been accepted but prior to the start of a game. In addition, it will be understood that aspects of the game freeze feature for suspension of play during games may be used during suspension of play between games, and vice versa.

[0084] In embodiments utilizing a player tracking card, it is contemplated that play may be suspended prior to the acceptance of any wager or where the player has no credits in a gaming machine. For example, a player may be given the option to suspend play as soon as a player inserts his or her player tracking card regardless of whether the player has made a wager or if there are any credits in the gaming machine. This allows players to reserve a machine for a limited period of time, without requiring the player to make a wager. It is contemplated that the period of time for suspension may be smaller if no wager has been placed. Wagerless or creditless suspension of play with player tracking cards may be used as a feature to promote the use of player tracking cards if desired.

[0085] It is contemplated that the game freeze feature may be implemented in a game freeze device. Such a device may be used to retrofit existing gaming machines or installed in new gaming machines. FIG. 7 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary embodiment of game freeze device 700. The game freeze device 700 shown comprises a controller 704, and two player input devices, one configured as a freeze button 308 and the other configured as a resume button 312. It is noted that, as described above, the functionality of a freeze button 308 and a resume button 312 may be combined into a single button in some embodiments.

[0086] The controller 704 may be configured to provide the game freeze feature to existing gaming machines 100 without extensive modification to existing machines. As can be seen, the controller 704 may be connected to one or more components of a gaming machine 100. For example, the controller 704 of FIG. 7 is connected to the gaming machine’s processor 204, display 104, and one or more player input devices 108.

[0087] The controller 704 may be a microprocessor or other electronic circuit configured to provide the game freeze feature. In one embodiment, the controller 704 allows the gaming machine’s processor 204 to communicate with one or more of the gaming machine’s other components through the controller. For example, the controller 704 may forward signals or other communication between the processor 204 and any other components of a gaming machine 100 which are connected to the controller. In this manner, the processor 204 may communicate with these components as it normally does in existing gaming machines 100. As can be seen from the exemplary embodiment of FIG. 7, the controller 704 may forward signals between the processor 204, player input devices 108, and display 104.

[0088] To provide the game freeze feature to an existing gaming machine, the controller 704 may also be configured to interrupt communication between the processor 204 and components of the gaming machine 100 as well as communicate directly with the components of a gaming machine. For example, the controller 704 may interrupt communication between the user inputs and the processor 204 when a player activates the freeze button 308. In this manner, play of a game may be suspended by not permitting further player input. The controller 704 may also interrupt communication between the processor 204 and the display 104. For example, the controller 704 may block signals from the processor to display a game on the display 104. These signals may be replaced or overlaid with a notification that play has been suspended, such as illustrated in FIG. 6C. When, the resume button 312 is activated, the controller may cease interrupting communications and forward information between the processor 204 and other components to allow the player to continue play. It is noted that authenticating information may be collected by the controller 704, when suspending or resuming play, through the player input devices 108 or display 104 if the display is touch enabled.

[0089] It is noted that the freeze button 308, resume button 312, or both may be provided as an overlay graphic of a button on the display 104 of a gaming machine. In this manner, the freeze button 308, resume button 312, or both may be displayed along with the game being presented by the gaming
In one embodiment, the connection between the processor 204, the controller 704, and the display 104 comprises a video cable, such as a VGA, HDMI, Component Video, Composite Video, Coaxial, or other cable, which allows video output from the processor to pass through the controller on its way to the display. In this manner, when play is suspended, the controller 704 may intercept and replace or overlay game freeze screen displays, such as described herein, on a gaming machine’s display 104. The connection between the controller 704 and other components of a gaming machine may be standardized or existing cables or connectors as well. This allows the game freeze device 700 to be easily connected to an existing gaming machine.

It is contemplated that other components, such as one or more peripherals 208, of a gaming machine 100 may be connected to a processor 204 through the controller 704 as well. For example, a card reader or ticket/coin printer or dispenser may be connected through the controller 704. In this manner, the controller 704 may provide or read authenticating information with these peripherals 208.

It is not contemplated that the controller 704 may include or be connected to its own memory device to store game freeze and other information as well as machine readable code for the game freeze feature in one or more embodiments. The controller 704 may also be hard wired to provide a game freeze feature in some embodiments. In addition, the controller 704 may include or be connected to a transceiver to receive and transmit information for the game freeze feature. For example, the transceiver may be used to communicate amounts wagered, credits remaining, authentication information, and the like between the game freeze device 700 and a gaming machine 100 or a gaming server.

The invention has numerous advantages and benefits. As indicated, the prior art discloses “saving” games so that they can be played at a later time. For example, if a player is in the middle of a game or sequence of games, a player might save the game so that they can go home and then restart the game at a later time, such as in several days’ time. Once the player leaves the gaming machine, however, another player may utilize that machine to play other games. Moreover, even if the player were to return to the same gaming machine and it were available for play, the gaming machine must “reload” the game and all game state information in order to restart the game.

Saving a game involves storing the current state of a game or the game itself on a storage medium so that the game may later be retrieved and replayed. This requires game information such as the cards or other indicia displayed and/or dealt, the amount of wagers, stage or round of a game, or other information to be stored on a storage medium. The game information must then be retrieved from the storage medium to reload the saved game. In addition, once retrieved, the game information must then be used to set the state of a game such that it is identical to the saved game. For example, the game information indicating the cards displayed in the saved game is used to display the same cards when the saved game is loaded.

In save game implementations, a gaming machine is cleared or reset to allow other games to be played after the current game has been saved. Thus, the gaming machine continues to accept player input related to playing one or more games. The saved game may then be retrieved and reloaded from a storage medium after one or more other games have been played. It can be seen that a step of storing the saved game on a storage medium is required to implement the saving/reloading of a game.

In contrast, the present invention is directed to a gaming machine or game “freeze”. In accordance with this feature, a player can freeze or stop game play for a limited period of time and then continue play of that same gaming machine and game. In one or more embodiments, freezing game play does not require the step of saving games or game information to a storage medium. For example, when frozen, the current state of a game may simply be preserved in a gaming machine, such as in the gaming machine’s memory. In one embodiment, this may occur by preventing further player input to a gaming machine (except to unfreeze or resume a game) thus preventing alterations to the game or the game’s state.

When a frozen game is resumed, the game does not have to be reloaded from a storage medium. In one or more embodiments, this is because the game is already present/preserved in the gaming machine’s memory. The play of the game is simply allowed to continue, such as by once again permitting player input related to playing the game. In one embodiment, the game simply remains in its current state in a gaming machine’s memory when the game freeze feature is activated. Player or other input related to the play of the game may be ignored or not allowed until the game is resumed. In this way the game is preserved in the gaming machine’s memory while the game is frozen.

This is distinct from saving a game in that the specific action to store game information on a storage medium is not required or necessary. In fact, as discussed herein, the game freeze may be implemented in some embodiments simply by preventing player input related to the play of a game. When the game is resumed, player input related to the play of the game may be accepted or allowed once again.

It is not noted that the freeze feature may be activated at any time during a game including during the spinning of reels or dealing of cards. In some embodiments, the game freeze feature prevents machine readable code, software, or the like of a game from continuing to execute thus preserving the game in the gaming machine’s memory. The game may then be resumed by continuing from the point it was frozen. It can be seen that this too does not require a separate step of storing the game or game information on a storage medium as would be required in a save game implementation.

In one embodiment, when the game or gaming machine is frozen, an indication may be provided to that effect. This notification alerts potential players that the gaming machine is not available for use. This is another distinction from saving a game in that the gaming machine may not be available for use while a game is frozen in some embodiments.

In a preferred embodiment, during the time the game or gaming machine is frozen, the gaming machine does not accept input other than to resume the game. This prevents, for example, another player from attempting to play another game while the first game is frozen. For example, the various buttons such as “bet credits” and the like may be frozen to prevent input.

Most importantly, in accordance with the invention, the game is “frozen”, rather than being saved and then cleared.
from the gaming machine to permit the gaming machine to be further used or played. As indicated, a particular advantage to the “freeze” feature is that the gaming machine is frozen from further use. Also, as discussed herein, a frozen game may simply be placed in an ‘idle’ mode (for example, the controller may just lock further activity relative to the game, even though the game program is still active and game information is still stored in the local memory) so that when a player resume the game it immediately resumes play, rather than having to reload and entire game from a storage medium or the like, as in the case where a game is saved and cleared from the gaming machine.

As indicated, various safeguards may be utilized to allow a player to freeze a game/gaming machine and to resume a game. In order to prevent a user from locking up multiple gaming machines or freezing games or gaming machines for excessively long periods, the game freeze may have a time limit. In addition, the player may be required to obtain authorization. For example, a player’s tracking card may be used to verify that the player is only playing one game or gaming machine and is only seeking to freeze that one game. Alternatively, an operator might physically assist in the game or gaming machine freeze. For example, in a tavern the player might request that the bar keeper enter a freeze authorization code, turn a “freeze” input key or the like which permits the player to freeze the game or gaming machine.

As indicated, authorization may also be required to resume a game. This may include input of a code, card or the like by the player to authenticate that the player seeking to resume the game is the one that froze the game. The step of resuming a game may again include input from the operator or the like.

While various embodiments of the invention have been described, it will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that many more embodiments and implementations are possible that are within the scope of this invention. In addition, the various features, elements, and embodiments described herein may be claimed or combined in any combination or arrangement.

What is claimed is:
1. A gaming machine comprising:
a display;
a freeze button;
a resume button; and
a processor configured to present a game to a player on said display and to suspend play of said game on said gaming machine for a predetermined period of time in response to activation of said freeze button by said player whereby play of said game resumes in response to activation of said resume button by said player within said predetermined period of time.

2. The gaming machine of claim 1, where said processor suspends play of said game by ignoring further input to said gaming machine other than input received from said resume button.

3. The gaming machine of claim 1 further comprising one or more player input devices configured to receive authenticating information from said player whereby play of said game on said gaming machine resumes only if said authenticating information verifies the identity of said player.

4. The gaming machine of claim 1 further comprising a card reader configured to read authenticating information from a player tracking card of said player whereby play of said game on said gaming machine resumes only if said authenticating information verifies the identity of said player.

5. The gaming machine of claim 1 further comprising a memory device configured to store game information selected from the group consisting of the number of credits in said gaming machine and the amount of wagers in said gaming machine whereby if said game is not resumed within said predetermined period of time said game information is stored on said memory device and said gaming machine is reset to allow play of a new game.

6. The gaming machine of claim 5 wherein said game is forfeited if said game is not resumed within said predetermined period of time.

7. The gaming machine of claim 1, wherein said display provides a notification to said player when play of said game is suspended.

8. The gaming machine of claim 7, wherein said notification includes a remaining time for suspension of play of said game, said remaining time being at least a portion of said predetermined period of time.

9. A method for providing a game freeze feature on a gaming machine comprising:
providing a gaming machine comprising a display, a freeze button, and a resume button;
accepting one or more credits from said player;
presenting a game to a player on said gaming machine whereby paid player is paid an award for achieving a winning outcome;
suspending play of said game at said gaming machine for a predetermined period of time if said player activates said freeze button;
displaying a notification on said display indicating that play of said game is suspended; and
resuming play of said game at said gaming machine if said player activates said resume button within said predetermined period of time.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein suspending play of said game at said gaming machine comprises ignoring further input to said gaming machine other than input received from said resume button.

11. The method of claim 9 further comprising accepting a first authenticating information from said player prior to suspending play of said game.

12. The method of claim 11 further comprising accepting a second authenticating information from said player prior to resuming play of said game whereby play of said game resumes only if said first authenticating information and said second authenticating information match.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein said first authenticating information and said second authenticating information are accepted via a card reader of said gaming machine.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein said first authenticating information and said second authenticating information are accepted via one or more player input devices of said gaming machine.

15. The method of claim 11 further comprising:
forfeiting said one or more credits if play of said game is not resumed within said predetermined period of time; and
resetting said gaming machine for a new game.
16. The method of claim 15 further comprising accepting a second authenticating information from said player to reclaim said one or more credits if said second authenticating information and said first authenticating information match.

17. A game freeze device for a gaming machine comprising:
   a freeze button;
   a resume button; and
   a controller connected to a processor and a display of a gaming machine, said controller configured to provide a game freeze feature to said gaming machine whereby said controller suspends play of a game for a predetermined period of time on said gaming machine when said freeze button is activated and resumes play of said game when said resume button is activated.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein said controller provides a notification on said display indicating play of said game is suspended when play of said game is suspended.

19. The gaming machine of claim 17, wherein said controller is connected to and intercepts communication from one or more player input devices of said gaming machine when play of said game is suspended.

20. The gaming machine of claim 17, wherein said controller receives authenticating information from a player via one or more player input devices of a gaming machine and resumes play of said game on said gaming machine only if said authenticating information verifies the identity of said player.

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