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A gaming system and a method of gaming

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Abstract

A gaming system (10, 40, 100) is disclosed which comprises a plurality of reels (304, 306, 308, 310, 312), each reel comprising a plurality of symbols (14) from a set of symbols, a symbol selector (20) arranged to select a plurality of symbols from each reel for display, a reel selector (24) arranged to select at least one reel, a function allocator (26) arranged to allocate a function to at least one selected reel such that each displayed symbol on said at least one selected reel acquires the function, and a game outcome generator (28) arranged to determine a game outcome based on the displayed symbols and on the function allocated to said at least one selected reel. A corresponding method of gaming is also disclosed.

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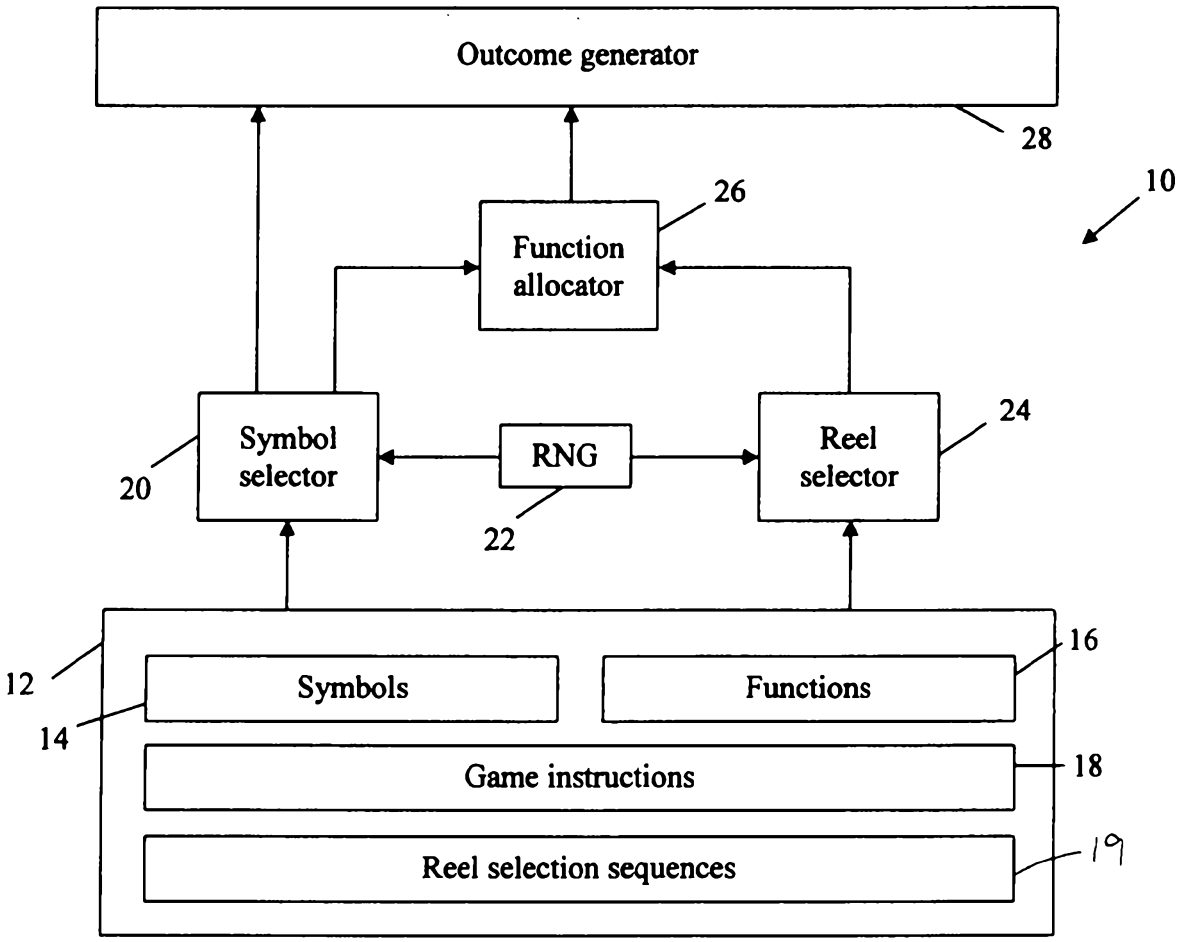

Fig. 1

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Applicant:

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Invention Title:

A GAMING SYSTEM AND A METHOD OF GAMING

The following statement is a full description of this invention, including the best method for performing it known to us:

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A GAMING SYSTEM AND A METHOD OF GAMING

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a gaming system and to a method of gaming.

Background of the Invention

It is known to provide a gaming system which comprises a game controller arranged to randomly display several symbols from a predetermined set of symbols and to determine a game outcome such as a game win based on the displayed symbols. Such gaming systems may commonly be implemented as a stepper machine provided with reels with each reel carrying several symbols of the set, or a video machine wherein selected symbols are displayed on virtual reels on a graphical display device.

Summary of the Invention

In accordance with a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a gaming system arranged to implement a multilevel game, said gaming system comprising a plurality of reels, each reel comprising a plurality of symbols selectable from a set of symbols, a symbol selector arranged to select a plurality of symbols from the set of symbols for each reel for display for each level of the multilevel game, a reel selector arranged to select at least one reel for each level of the multilevel game, a function allocator arranged to allocate a function to the at least one selected reel such that each displayed symbol on said at least one selected reel acquires the function in at least one level of the multilevel game, wherein for each selected reel having an allocated function, the function of the selected reel is retained for the selected reel in a subsequent level of the multilevel game and wherein the function allocator

allocates a function to an additional reel in another level subsequent to the at least one level of the multilevel game, the additional reel being without the function in at least one level prior to the another level and a game outcome generator arranged to determine a game outcome for each level of the multilevel game based on the displayed symbols and on the function allocated to said at least one selected reel and on the function allocated to the additional reel.

In one arrangement, each reel is a physical rotatable reel. In an alternative arrangement, each reel is a virtual reel displayable on a graphical display device.

In one arrangement, the gaming system is operable in normal game mode wherein the function allocator does not allocate a function to a reel, and special game mode wherein the function allocator allocates a function to a reel. The gaming system may comprise a set of first symbols used during normal game mode and a set of second symbols used during special game mode.

The gaming system may be arranged to commence special game mode either automatically, based on occurrence of a particular game outcome, based on a system event such as receipt of an instruction from a remote game server to commence special game mode, or in response to player input, for example in response to a player input received after a particular game outcome has occurred or after an instruction has been received to commence special game mode.

The function allocated to a reel may be a wild function, a scatter function, a repeat win function, a multiplier function, a jackpot function or a feature commencement function.

In one embodiment, the gaming system is arranged to implement a multilevel game, and the function allocator is arranged to allocate a function to at least one reel at each level of the multilevel game.

In one embodiment, the gaming system comprises a plurality of reel sequences, each reel sequence defining which at least one reel is allocated a function at each level of the multilevel game and the order in which the reels are allocated the function, and the gaming system is arranged to randomly select one of the reel sequences.

The gaming system may be implemented as a stand alone gaming machine or across a network.

The gaming system may be arranged such that during implementation of a multilevel game the function allocated to a reel is retained at each level of the game.

A reel that acquires a function may be provided with a visible or audible indicator that the reel has an associated function, for example by displaying a pictorial representation such as a representation of a monkey over the selected reel.

In accordance with a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of gaming for implementing a multilevel game, the method comprising providing a plurality of reels, each reel comprising a plurality of symbols selectable from a set of symbols, selecting a plurality of symbols from the set of symbols for each reel for display for each level of the multilevel game, randomly allocating a function to a selected reel for at least one level of the multilevel game such that each displayed symbol on the selected reel acquires the function in the at least one level of the multilevel game, retaining the allocated function for the selected reel in

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a level subsequent to the at least one level of the multilevel game, allocating a function to an additional reel in another level subsequent to the at least one level of the multilevel game, the additional reel being without the function in at least one level prior to the another level and determining a game outcome for each level of the multilevel game based on the displayed symbols and on the function allocated to the selected reel and on the function allocated to the additional reel.

In accordance with a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a computer program arranged when loaded into a computer to instruct the computer to operate in accordance with the gaming system of the first aspect of the invention.

In accordance with a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a computer readable medium having computer readable program code embodied therein for causing a computer to operate in accordance with the gaming system of the first aspect of the present invention.

In accordance with a fifth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a data signal having computer readable program code embodied therein for causing a computer to operate in accordance with the gaming system of the first aspect of the present invention.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic block diagram of a gaming system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a diagrammatic representation of a gaming system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention with the gaming system implemented in the form of a stand alone gaming machine;

Figure 3 is a schematic block diagram of operative components of the gaming machine shown in Figure 2;

Figure 4 is a schematic block diagram of components of a memory of the gaming machine shown in Figure 2;

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram of a gaming system in accordance with an alternative embodiment of the present invention with the gaming system implemented over a network;

Figure 6 is a flow diagram illustrating game play of a gaming system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention; and

Figures 7 to 11 are diagrammatic representations of example screen views of a gaming system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention during implementation of a game.

Description of an Embodiment of the Invention

Referring to the drawings, there is shown a schematic block diagram of a gaming system 10 arranged to implement a probabilistic game of the type wherein several symbols

from a set of symbols are randomly displayed on a plurality of reels, and a game outcome is determined on the basis of the symbols displayed on the reels. With some such probabilistic games, the set of symbols include standard symbols and function symbols, and the game outcome is determined on the basis of the displayed standard symbols and the function associated with any displayed function symbol. For example, standard symbols may resemble fruit such as apples, pears and bananas with a win outcome being determined when a predetermined number of the same fruit appear on a display in the same line, scattered, and so on. The function associated with a function symbol may be for example a wild function wherein display of the function symbol is treated during consideration of the game outcome as any of the standard symbols. A function symbol may be represented as the word "WILD", a star, or by any other suitable word or symbol. Other functions are also envisaged such as scatter functions, multiplier functions, repeat win functions, jackpot functions and feature commencement functions.

The present gaming system operates such that at least during a portion of a game implemented by the gaming system at least one reel is selected and a function is allocated to each of the symbols displayed on the reel. The game outcome is determined based on the displayed symbols and the function allocated to the selected reel. In this way, the probability of occurrence of a win outcome is increased and thereby player interest in the game enhanced.

It will be understood that allocation of a function to a reel is not dependent on symbols appearing on a reel during a game; instead a reel to acquire a function is randomly or pseudo randomly selected irrespective of the symbols displayed on the reels.

Referring to Figure 1, the gaming system 10 comprises a memory 12 arranged to store symbols data 14 indicative of a plurality of symbols for subsequent display to a player, function data 16 indicative of one or more functions allocatable to the symbols, and game instruction data 18 indicative of game instructions usable by the gaming machine 10 to control operation of the game.

In this embodiment, the memory 12 also includes reel selection sequences 19, each of which defines a reel selection pathway which determines the order in which specific reels will be selected during a multilevel game.

The gaming system 10 also includes a symbol selector 20 which is arranged to select several symbols for display to a player. In this example, the selection carried out by the symbol selector 20 is made using a random number generator 22.

It will be appreciated that the random number generator 22 may be of a type which is arranged to generate pseudo random numbers based on a seed number, and that in this specification the term "random" will be understood accordingly to mean truly random or pseudo random.

The gaming system 10 also comprises a reel selector 24 arranged to select one or more reels to which a function is to be applied, and a function allocator 26 arranged to select and allocate one or more functions to one or more selected reels. The function allocator 26 may be arranged to randomly select a function or to select a function on the basis of a predefined rule.

In the present embodiment, the reel selector 24 in association with the random number generator 22 selects one of the reel sequences 19 stored in the memory 12, the selected reel sequence 19 defining which reels will be

selected in a multilevel special game and the order in which the reels will be selected. In this way, pseudo random selection of reels can be achieved whilst ensuring that desired win probability values are achieved, for example so as to ensure that the gaming system complies with relevant regulatory requirements.

The functions allocatable to a reel may include a wild function, a scattered function, a wild and scattered function, or any other suitable function.

The gaming system 10 also comprises an outcome generator 28 which in accordance with the game instructions 18 determines game outcomes based on the symbols selected for display to a player by the symbol selector 20, and on the basis of the function(s) allocated to one or more selected reels.

In the embodiments described below, the symbol selector 20, the reel selector 24, the function allocator 26, and the outcome generator 28 are implemented using a microprocessor and associated software, although it will be understood that other implementations are envisaged.

The gaming system 10 can take a number of different forms.

In a first form, a stand alone gaming machine is provided wherein all or most components required for implementing the game are present in a player operable gaming machine.

In a second form, a distributed architecture is provided wherein some of the components required for implementing the game are present in a player operable gaming machine and some of the components required for implementing the game are located remotely relative to the gaming machine. For example, a "thick client" architecture may be used wherein part of the game is executed on a player operable

gaming machine and part of the game is executed remotely, such as by a gaming server; or a "thin client" architecture may be used wherein most of the game is executed remotely such as by a gaming server and a player operable gaming machine is used only to display audible and/or visible gaming information to the player and receive gaming inputs from the player.

However, it will be understood that other arrangements are envisaged. For example, an architecture may be provided wherein a gaming machine is networked to a gaming server and the respective functions of the gaming machine and the gaming server are selectively modifiable. For example, the gaming system may operate in stand alone gaming machine mode, "thick client" mode or "thin client" mode depending on the game being played, operating conditions, and so on. Other variations will be apparent to persons skilled in the art.

With a thick client implementation, a data signal containing a computer program usable by the client terminal to implement the gaming system may be transferred from the game server to the client terminal, for example in response to a request by the client terminal.

A gaming system in the form of a stand alone gaming machine 40 is illustrated in Figure 2. The gaming machine 40 includes a console 42 having a display 44 on which is displayed representations of a game 46 that can be played by a player. A mid-trim 50 of the gaming machine 40 houses a bank of buttons 52 for enabling a player to interact with the gaming machine, in particular during gameplay. The mid-trim 50 also houses a credit input mechanism 54 which in this example includes a coin input chute 54A and a bill collector 54B. Other credit input mechanisms may also be employed, for example, a card reader for reading a smart card, debit card or credit

card. A reading device may also be provided for the purpose of reading a player tracking device, for example as part of a loyalty program. The player tracking device may be in the form of a card, flash drive or any other portable storage medium capable of being read by the reading device.

A top box 56 may carry artwork 58, including for example pay tables and details of bonus awards and other information or images relating to the game. Further artwork and/or information may be provided on a front panel 59 of the console 42. A coin tray 60 is mounted beneath the front panel 59 for dispensing cash payouts from the gaming machine 30.

The display 44 is in the form of a video display unit, particularly a cathode ray tube screen device. Alternatively, the display 44 may be a liquid crystal display, plasma screen, or any other suitable video display unit. The top box 56 may also include a display, for example a video display unit, which may be of the same type as the display 44, or of a different type.

The display 44 in this example is arranged to display representations of several reels, each reel of which has several associated symbols. Typically 3, 4 or 5 reels are provided. During operation of the game, the reels first appear to rotate then stop with typically three symbols visible on each reel. Game outcomes are determined on the basis of the visible symbols together with any special functions associated with the symbols, and if a function has been allocated to a reel, on the basis of the allocated function.

It will be understood that instead of providing a video display unit which displays representations of reels, physical reels may be used. Such gaming machines

including actual rotatable reels are commonly termed stepper machines.

A stepper machine typically has a separate motor for each reel, and the game controller of such a gaming machine has a stop determining function that determines the stop position for each reel. For example, if there are five reels, each having twenty symbols, the stop determining function might determine that the stop positions are positions 3, 13, 7, 9 and 17. When a reel stops, the symbols will be in one of a plurality of possible symbol positions for that reel relative to the stop position.

Figure 3 shows a block diagram of operative components of a typical gaming machine 100 which may be the same as or different to the gaming machine shown in Figure 2.

The gaming machine 100 includes a game controller 101 having a processor 102. Instructions and data to control operation of the processor 102 in accordance with the present invention are stored in a memory 103 which is in data communication with the processor 102. The gaming machine 100, and in particular the processor 102 and the memory 103, implement the gaming system 10 shown schematically in Figure 1.

Typically, the gaming machine 100 will include both volatile and non-volatile memory and more than one of each type of memory, with such memories being collectively represented by the memory 103.

Figure 4 shows a block diagram of the main components of an exemplary memory 103. The memory 103 includes RAM 103A, EPROM 103B and a mass storage device 103C. The RAM 103A typically temporarily holds program files for execution by the processor 102 and related data. The EPROM 103B may be a boot ROM device and/or may contain

some system or game related code. The mass storage device 103C is typically used to store game programs, the integrity of which may be verified and/or authenticated by the processor 102 using protected code from the EPROM 103B or elsewhere.

The gaming machine has hardware meters 104 for purposes including ensuring regulatory compliance and monitoring player credit, an input/output (I/O) interface 105 for communicating with a player interface 120 of the gaming machine 100, the player interface 120 having several peripheral devices. The input/output interface 105 and/or the peripheral devices may be intelligent devices with their own memory for storing associated instructions and data for use with the input/output interface or the peripheral devices. A random number generator module 113 generates random numbers for use by the processor 102.

In the example shown in Figure 3, the peripheral devices that communicate with the game controller 101 comprise one or more displays 106, a touch screen and/or bank of buttons 107, a card and/or ticket reader 108, a printer 109, a bill acceptor and/or coin input mechanism 110 and a coin output mechanism 111. Additional hardware may be included as part of the gaming machine 100, or hardware may be omitted as required for the specific implementation.

In addition, the gaming machine 100 may include a communications interface, for example a network card 112. The network card may, for example, send status information, accounting information or other information to a central controller, server or database and receive data or commands from the central controller, server or database.

It is also possible for the operative components of the

gaming machine 100 to be distributed, for example input/output devices 106,107,108,109,110,111 may be provided remotely from the game controller 101.

Figure 5 shows a gaming system 200 in accordance with an alternative embodiment. The gaming system 200 includes a network 201, which for example may be an Ethernet network, a LAN or a WAN. In this example, three banks 203 of two gaming machines 202 are connected to the network 201. The gaming machines 202 provide a player operable interface and may be the same as the gaming machines 10,100 shown in Figures 2 and 3, or may have simplified functionality depending on the requirements for implementing game play. While banks 203 of two gaming machines are illustrated in Figure 5, banks of one, three or more gaming machines are also envisaged.

One or more displays 204 may also be connected to the network 201. The displays 204 may, for example, be associated with one or more banks 203 of gaming machines. The displays 204 may be used to display representations associated with game play on the gaming machines 202, and/or used to display other representations, for example promotional or informational material.

In a thick client embodiment, a game server 205 implements part of the game played by a player using a gaming machine 202 and the gaming machine 202 implements part of the game. With this embodiment, as both the game server 205 and the gaming machine 202 implement part of the game, they collectively provide a game controller. A database management server 206 may manage storage of game programs and associated data for downloading or access by the gaming devices 202 in a database 206A. Typically, if the gaming system enables players to participate in a Jackpot game, a Jackpot server 207 will be provided to monitor and carry out the Jackpot game. A loyalty program server 212

may also be provided.

In a thin client embodiment, the game server 205 implements most or all of the game played by a player using a gaming machine 202 and the gaming machine 202 essentially provides only the player interface. With this embodiment, the game server 205 provides the game controller. The gaming machine will receive player instructions, and pass the instructions to the game server which will process them and return game play outcomes to the gaming machine for display. In a thin client embodiment, the gaming machines could be computer terminals, e.g. PCs running software that provides a player interface operable using standard computer input and output components.

Servers are also typically provided to assist in the administration of the gaming system 200, including for example a gaming floor management server 208 and a licensing server 209 to monitor the use of licenses relating to particular games. An administrator terminal 210 is provided to allow an administrator to monitor the network 201 and the devices connected to the network.

The gaming system 200 may communicate with other gaming systems, other local networks such as a corporate network, and/or a wide area network such as the Internet, for example through a firewall 211.

Persons skilled in the art will appreciate that in accordance with known techniques, functionality at the server side of the network may be distributed over a plurality of different computers. For example, elements may be run as a single "engine" on one server or a separate server may be provided. For example, the game server 205 could run a random number generator engine. Alternatively, a separate random number generator server

could be provided.

During operation, the game controller, whether implemented in a stand alone gaming machine 10, 100 or over a network 201, implements a probabilistic game wherein at least during part of the game the probability of occurrence of a win outcome is increased by allocating a function to one or more of the reels.

Examples of specific implementations of the gaming system will now be described in relation to a stand alone gaming machine 10, 100 although it will be understood that implementation may also be carried out using other gaming system architectures such as a network architecture of the type shown in Figure 5.

In one embodiment, the gaming system is operable in normal game mode and special game mode.

During normal game mode, reels comprising standard symbols and optionally one or more function symbols are provided. Win outcomes are determined on the basis of the symbols visible when the reels stop rotating, and in this example three symbols are displayed on each reel at any time. A win outcome may occur based on display of the same symbol along a horizontal or diagonal line, as scattered symbols, or in any other predefined way. A win outcome may also occur on the basis of one or more standard symbols in combination with at least one function symbol having a predetermined assigned function. For example a function symbol may correspond to a wild function, a scatter function, a multiply function, a repeat win function, and so on.

During special game mode, a new function is allocated to each symbol on a selected reel that is used in determining a game outcome, typically the visible symbols. In a

multilevel game, a function may additionally be allocated to a different reel at each level of the game.

For example, in a first game, a first function may be allocated to a first reel, and in a second successive game a second function may be allocated to a second reel such that during the second game two reels have an allocated function.

It will be understood that with this embodiment a function is allocated to a reel only when the gaming system operates in a special game mode. However, other arrangements are envisaged. For example, the gaming system may be arranged so as to operate in only one mode and to allocate a function to a reel during normal game operation.

The gaming system may be arranged to commence special game mode when predetermined game outcomes occur and special game mode may comprise one or more free games, in this example three free games. Special game mode may commence automatically on the basis of a game event occurring during a game, based on game outcomes determined by the gaming system, or may be prompted by a player pressing a button on the gaming system 10 after the player has identified that a game outcome corresponding to special game mode requirements has occurred.

The gaming system 10, 100 may also be arranged so as to determine eligibility for special game mode, for example based on the amount or type of bet placed, based on certain time periods and so on.

A specific example will now be described in relation to flow diagram 250 shown in Figure 6 which illustrates steps 252 to 272 of a method of gaming implemented by the gaming system according to the present embodiment.

In this example, five reels are provided, with each reel having multiple symbols. The reels are virtual reels and, as such, representations of the reels are displayed on a graphical display device 44. An example representation 300 shown on the display device 44 is shown in Figure 7.

The gaming system 10, 100 is operable in normal game mode and special game mode. During normal game mode, symbols 302 disposed on first, second, third, fourth and fifth reels 304, 306, 308, 310, 312 as shown in Figure 7 are used. Win outcomes are determined on the basis of the displayed symbols 302 according to predetermined win lines which may be horizontal, diagonal or in any other predetermined patterns.

When a predetermined condition occurs during normal game mode, for example based on occurrence of predetermined game outcomes, by a player pressing a button after the player has identified that requirements for special game mode have been met, or in any other way, the gaming system 10, 100 implements special game mode. Commencement of special game mode may be communicated to a player in any suitable way, for example by displaying an icon 313 on the graphical display.

During special game mode, an alternative representation 314 is displayed by the display device 44, as shown in Figure 8. In this example, special game mode uses alternative symbols 316 and winning outcomes are determined on the basis of alternative symbols 316 appearing in predetermined patterns having one symbol from the pattern in each reel. However, it will be understood that the symbols used during normal game mode may also be used during special game mode if desired.

In the present example, three consecutive free games are played, although it will be understood that other implementations are possible.

During a first free game, the reels rotate and stop, and a marker, in this example in the form of a monkey animation 318 moves consecutively across the reels 304, 306, 308, 310, 312 and stops above one of the reels to indicate that the reel is selected to acquire a function. It will be understood that the position of the marker 318 relative to the reels is determined by the reel selector 24 which is implemented by the processor 102 in association with programs in the memory 103, and the random number generator 22. The selected reel may be identified using suitable graphical indicia, in this example by displaying a monkey 319 across the entire selected reel as shown in the representation 320 in Figure 9. In the first free game, the first reel 304 is selected to acquire a function.

In this example, the function allocated to the selected reel 304 is a wild function and, accordingly, win outcomes are determined on the basis of the displayed alternative symbols 316 and the wild function allocated to the selected first reel 304. Each display position on the wild reel substitutes for all symbols, but only once per symbol. In the present example, a win outcome is deemed to occur if five of the same symbols are present.

In the present example shown in Figure 9, even with the first reel 302 acquiring a wild function, five of the same symbols do not occur and, accordingly, the outcome generator 28 implemented by the processor 102 in association with programs in the memory 103 determines that no prize is applicable for the first free game.

During a subsequent second free game, the reels are spun and subsequently stopped, the wild function allocated to the first reel 304 is retained, and a second reel to acquire a new function is selected in the same way as described above in relation to the first free game. In this example, as shown in the representation 322 shown in Figure 10, the fifth reel 312 is selected to acquire a new function and a visible indication that the fifth reel has been selected is displayed over the fifth reel 312, in this example by displaying a monkey 324 across the entire selected fifth reel 312.

In this example, the function allocated to the selected fifth reel 312 is a wild function.

The game outcome is then determined by the outcome generator 28 based on the displayed alternative symbols 316 and on the wild functions allocated to the first and fifth reels 304, 312.

In the present example, a giraffe is displayed in each of the second, third and fourth reels 306, 308, 310 and, accordingly, the outcome generator 28 determines that a win outcome containing five giraffes in a line has occurred and an appropriate prize is provided to the player.

During a subsequent third free game, the reels are spun and subsequently stopped, the wild function allocated to the first and fifth reels 304, 312 is retained, and a third reel is selected to acquire a new function. As with the first and second free games, a visible indication that the reel has been selected is displayed over the third reel 308, in this example by displaying a monkey 326 over the third reel 308.

The game outcome is then determined by the outcome generator 28 and, in this example, since an armadillo is present in each of the second and fourth reels 306, 310, the outcome generator 28 determines that five armadillos are present in a line and an appropriate prize is paid to the player.

After completion of the third free game, special game mode ceases and the gaming system 10, 100 returns to normal game mode.

Modifications and variations as would be apparent to a skilled addressee are deemed to be within the scope of the present invention.

Claims:

1. A gaming system arranged to implement a multilevel game, said gaming system comprising:

a plurality of reels, each reel comprising a plurality of symbols selectable from a set of symbols;

a symbol selector arranged to select a plurality of symbols from the set of symbols for each reel for display for each level of the multilevel game;

a reel selector arranged to select at least one reel for each level of the multilevel game;

a function allocator arranged to allocate a function to the at least one selected reel such that each displayed symbol on said at least one selected reel acquires the function in at least one level of the multilevel game,

wherein for each selected reel having an allocated function, the function of the selected reel is retained for the selected reel in a subsequent level of the multilevel game; and

wherein the function allocator allocates a function to an additional reel in another level subsequent to the at least one level of the multilevel game, the additional reel being without the function in at least one level prior to the another level; and

a game outcome generator arranged to determine a game outcome for each level of the multilevel game based on the displayed symbols and on the function allocated to said at least one selected reel and on the function allocated to the additional reel.

2. A gaming system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the gaming system comprises a plurality of reel sequences, each reel sequence defining which at least one reel is allocated a function at each level of the multilevel game and the order in which the reels are allocated the

function, and wherein the gaming system is arranged to randomly select one of the reel sequences.

3. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein each reel is a physical rotatable reel.

4. A gaming system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein each reel is a virtual reel displayable on a graphical display device.

5. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the gaming system is implemented as a stand alone gaming machine.

6. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the gaming system is implemented across a network.

7. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the gaming system is arranged to provide a reel that acquires a function with a visible or audible indicator that the reel has acquired the function.

8. A gaming system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the visible indicator is a pictorial representation disposed over the selected reel.

9. A method of gaming for implementing a multilevel game, the method comprising:

providing a plurality of reels, each reel comprising a plurality of symbols selectable from a set of symbols;

selecting a plurality of symbols from the set of symbols for each reel for display for each level of the multilevel game;

randomly allocating a function to a selected reel for at least one level of the multilevel game such that each displayed symbol on the selected reel acquires the function in the at least one level of the multilevel game;

retaining the allocated function for the selected reel in a level subsequent to the at least one level of the multilevel game;

allocating a function to an additional reel in another level subsequent to the at least one level of the multilevel game, the additional reel being without the function in at least one level prior to the another level; and

determining a game outcome for each level of the multilevel game based on the displayed symbols and on the function allocated to the selected reel and on the function allocated to the additional reel.

10. A method as claimed in claim 9 further comprising providing a plurality of reel sequences, each reel sequence defining which at least one reel is allocated a function at each level of the multilevel game and the order in which the reels are allocated the function, and comprising randomly selecting one of the reel sequences.

11. A method as claimed in claim 9 or claim 10, comprising providing a plurality of physical rotatable reels.

12. A method as claimed in any one of claims 9 to 11, comprising providing a plurality of virtual reels displayable on a graphical display device.

13. A method as claimed in any one of claims 9 to 12, comprising providing a reel that acquires a function with a visible indicator that the reel has acquired the function.

14. A method as claimed in claim 13, wherein the visible indicator is a pictorial representation over the selected reel.

15. A computer program arranged when loaded into a computer to instruct the computer to operate in accordance with a gaming system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8.

16. A computer readable medium having computer readable program code embodied therein for causing a computer to operate in accordance with a gaming system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8.

17. A data signal comprising computer readable program code embodied therein for causing a computer to operate in accordance with a gaming system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8.

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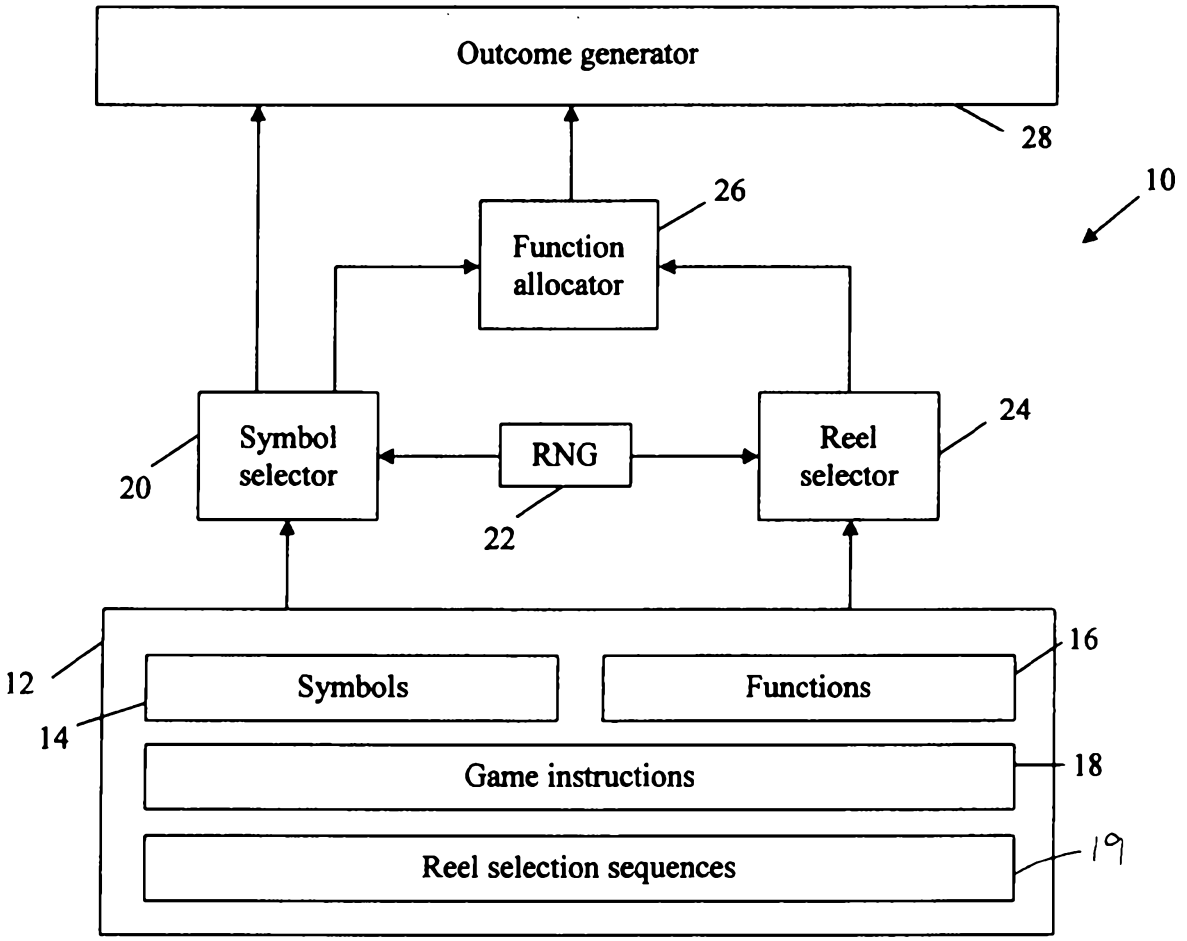

Fig. 1

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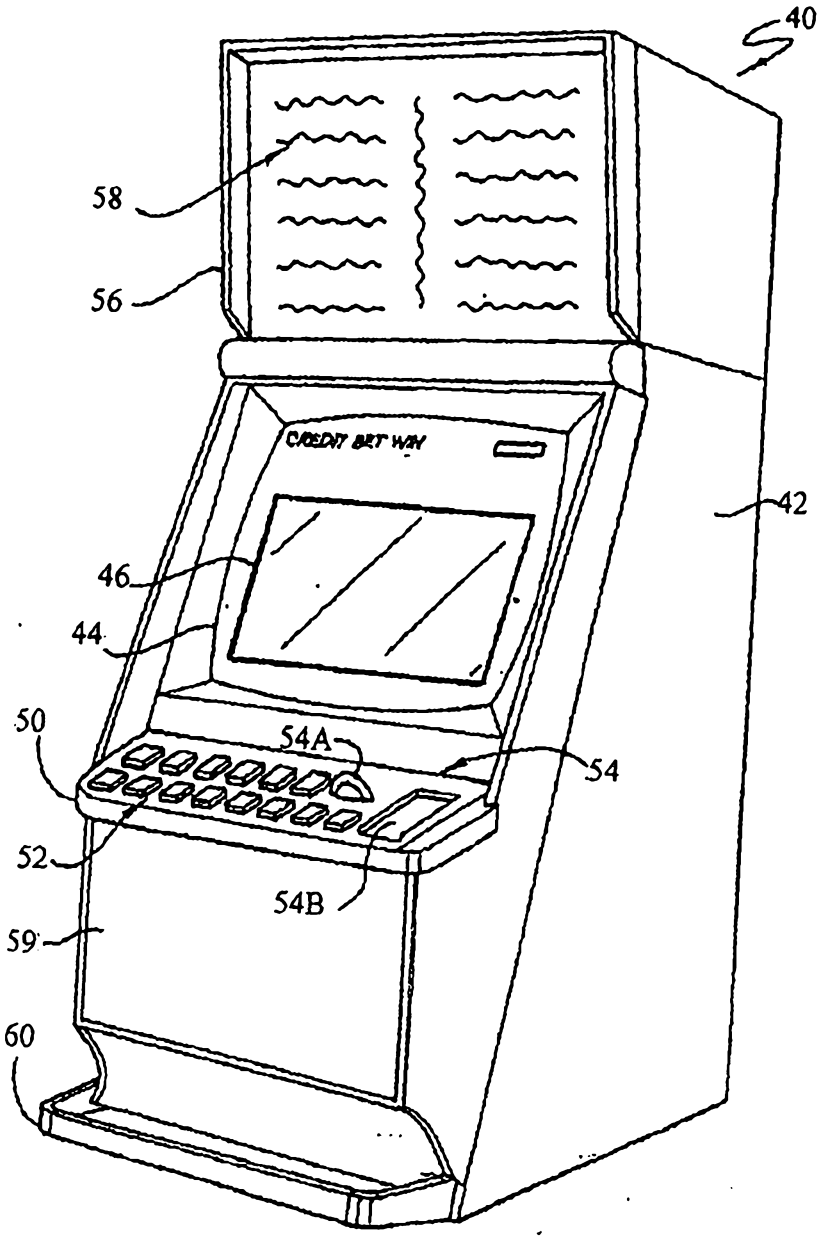

Fig. 2

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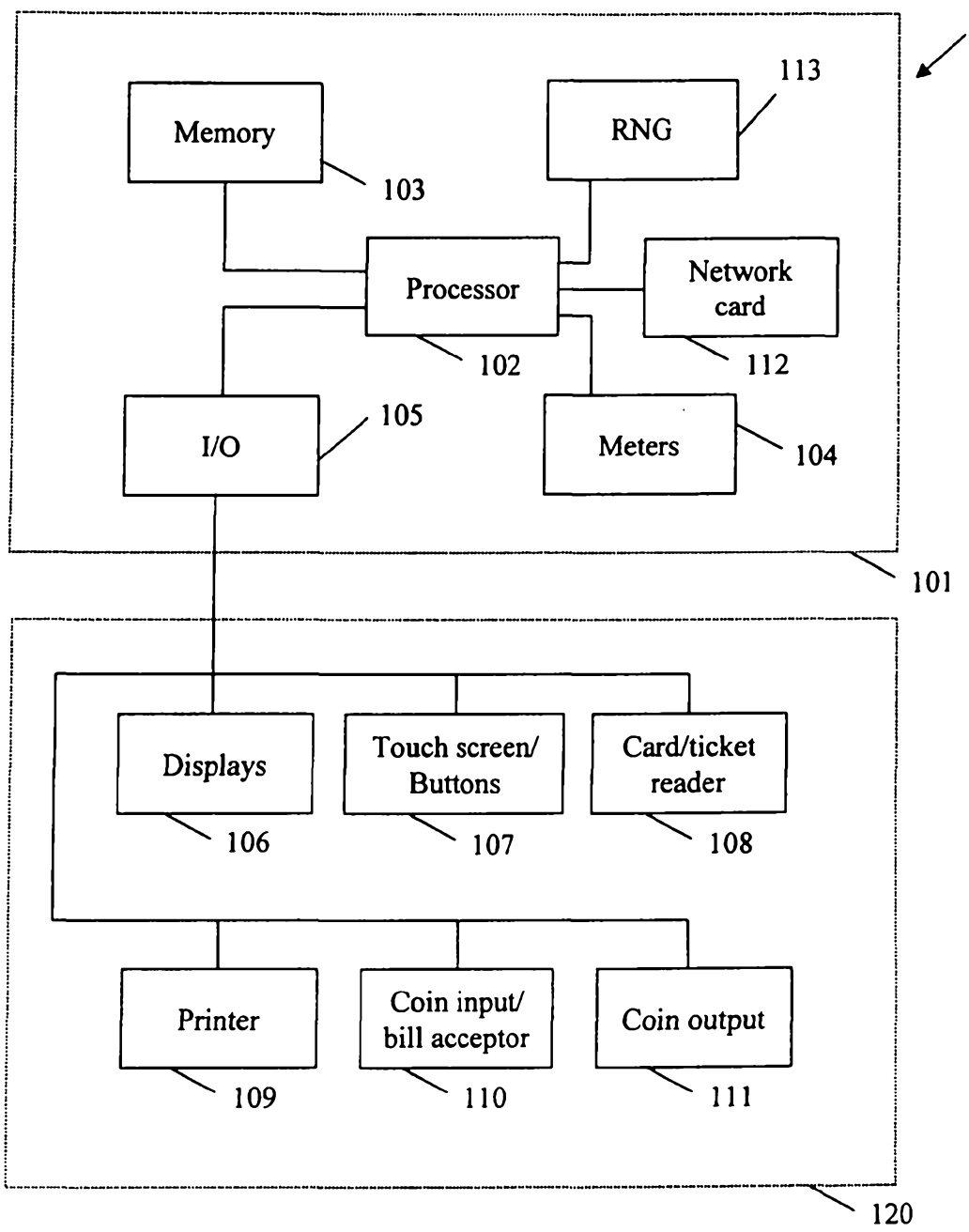

Fig. 3

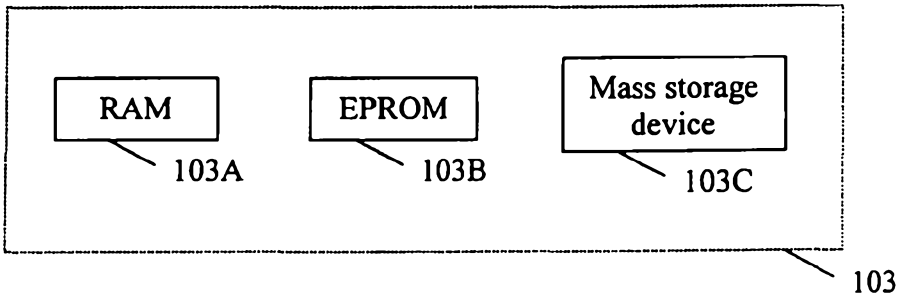

Fig. 4

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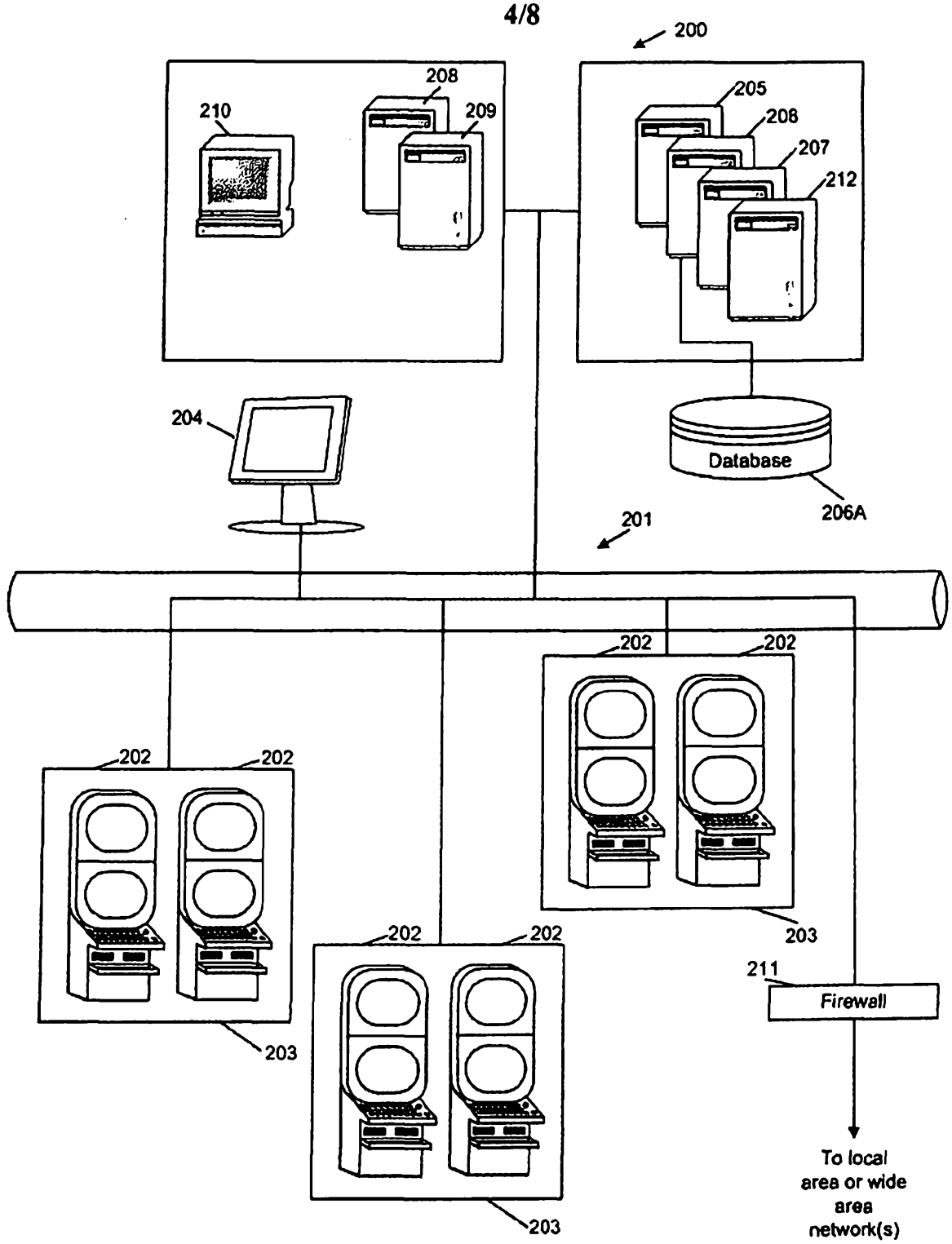

Fig. 5

2009202239 05 Jun 2009

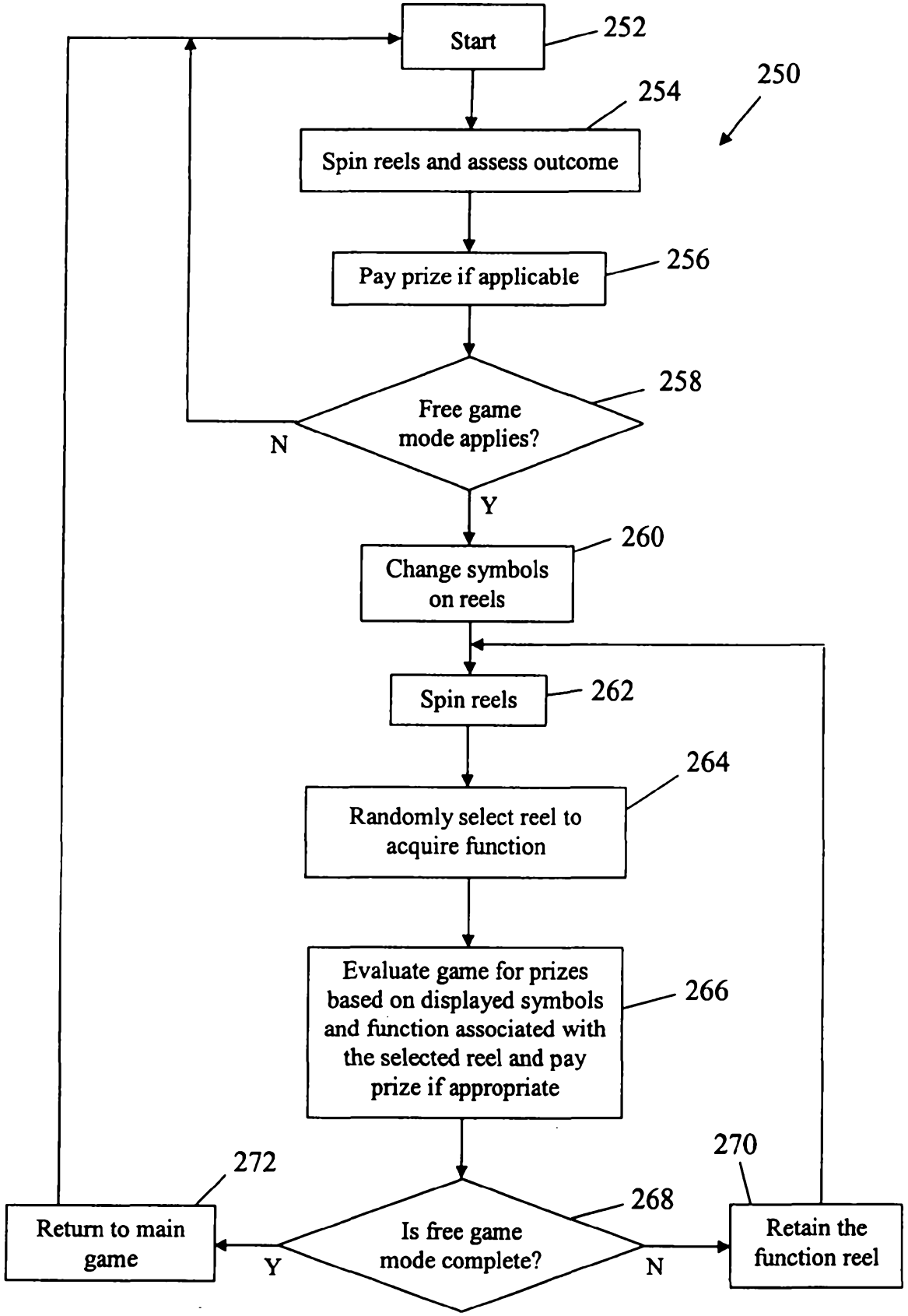

Fig. 6

2009202239 05 Jun 2009

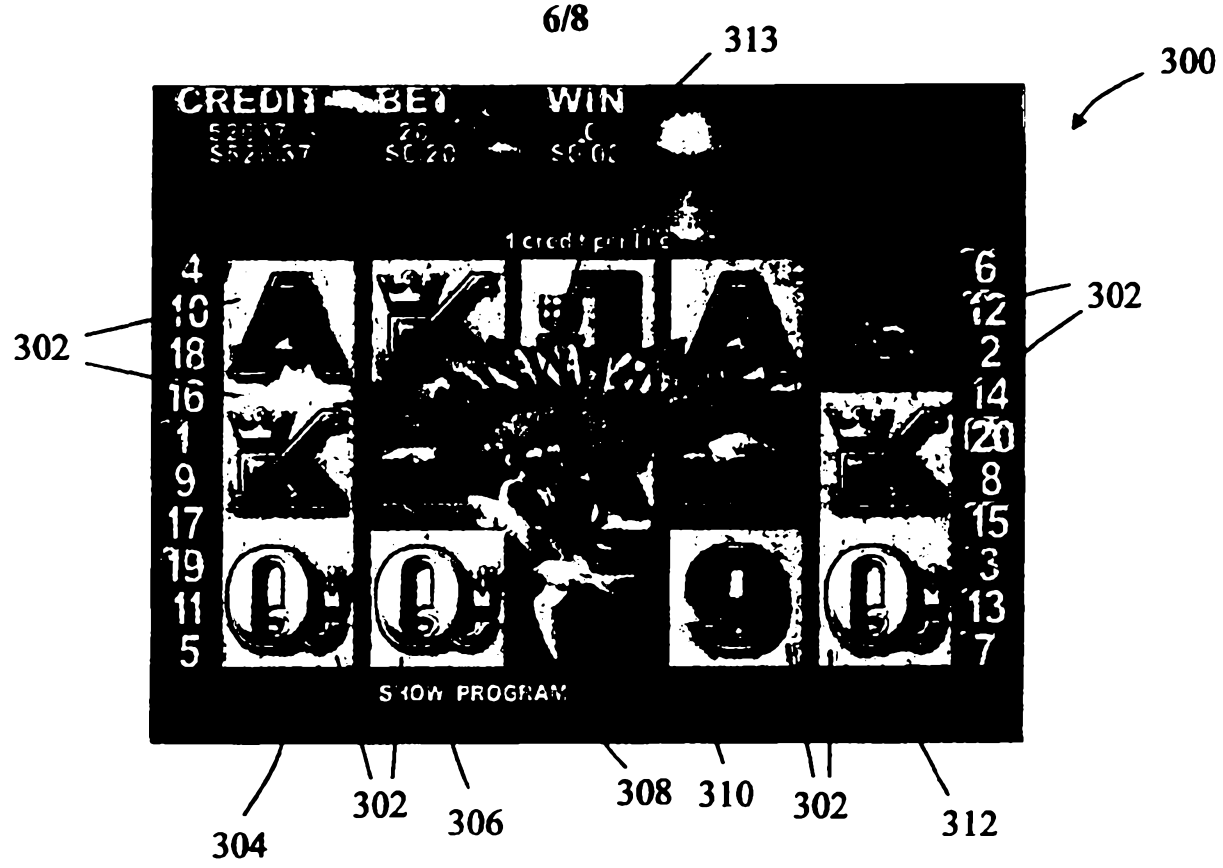

Fig. 7

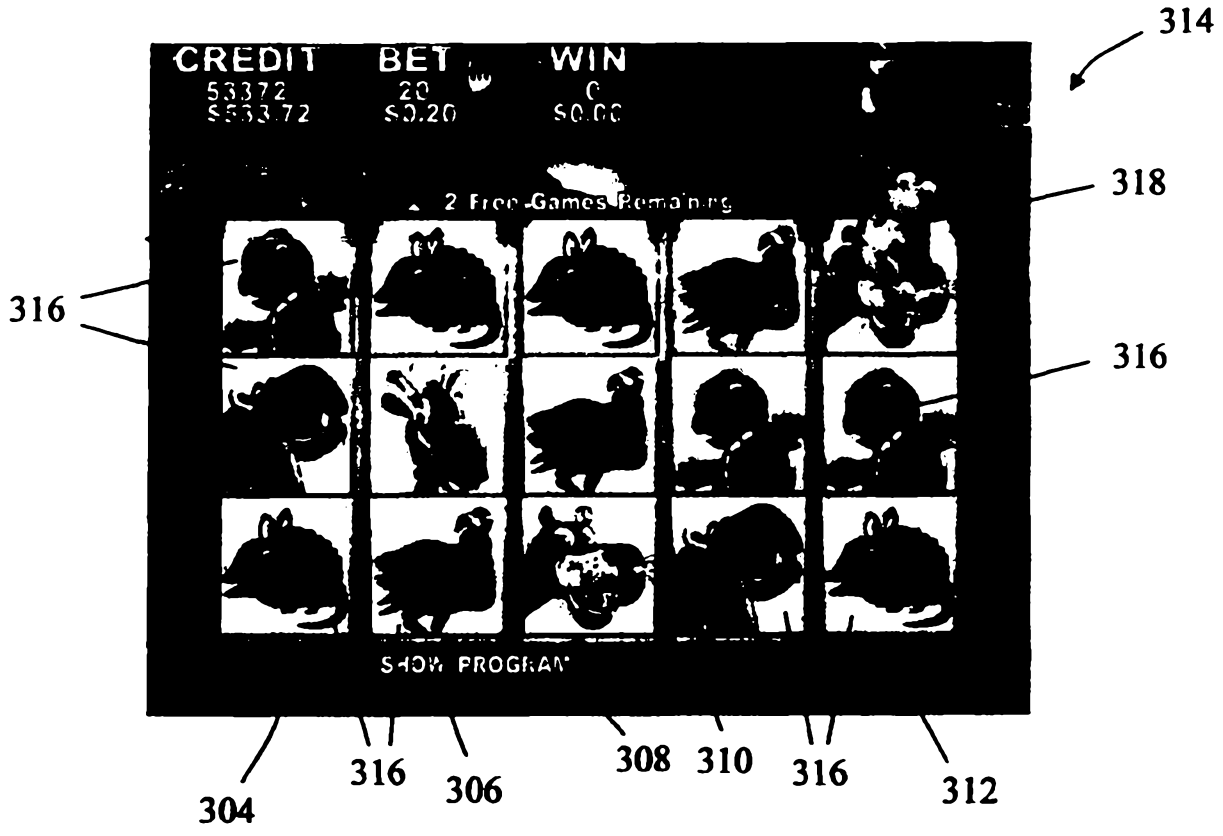

Fig. 8

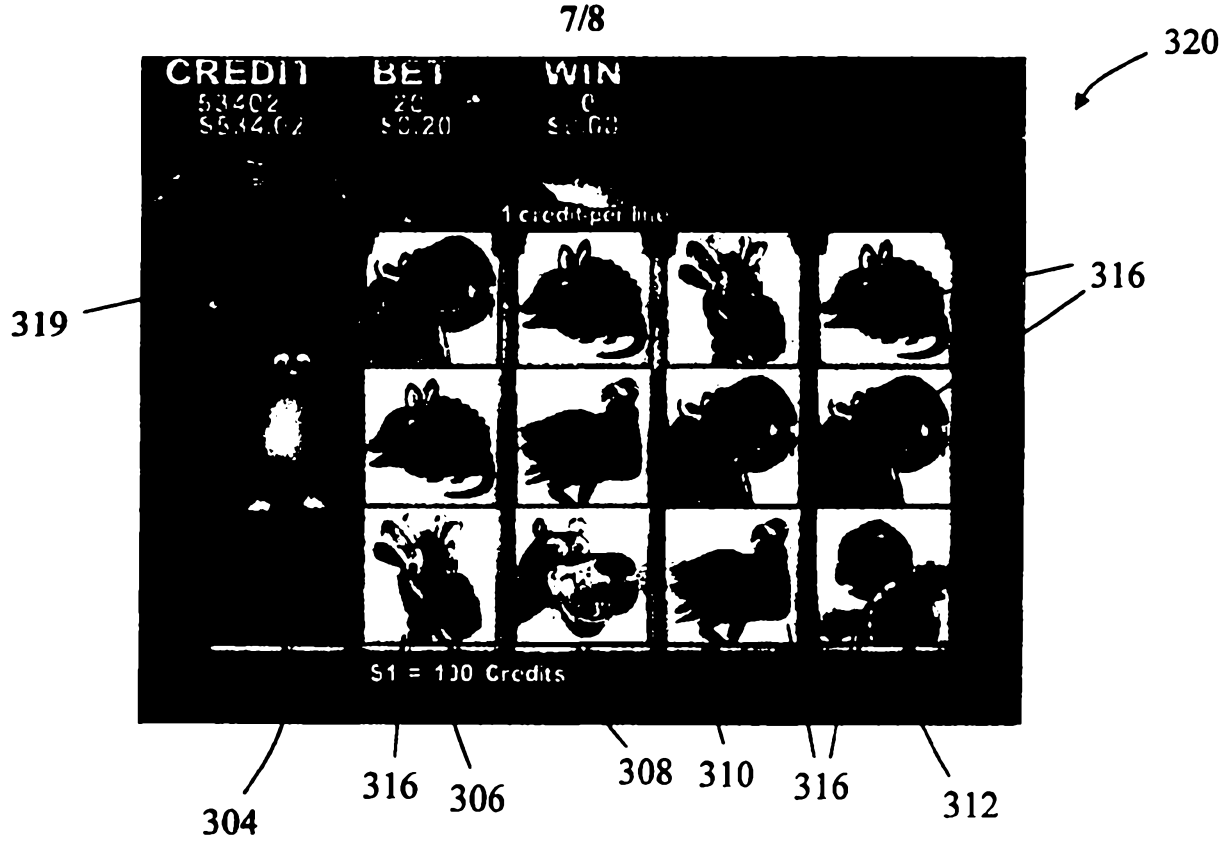

Fig. 9

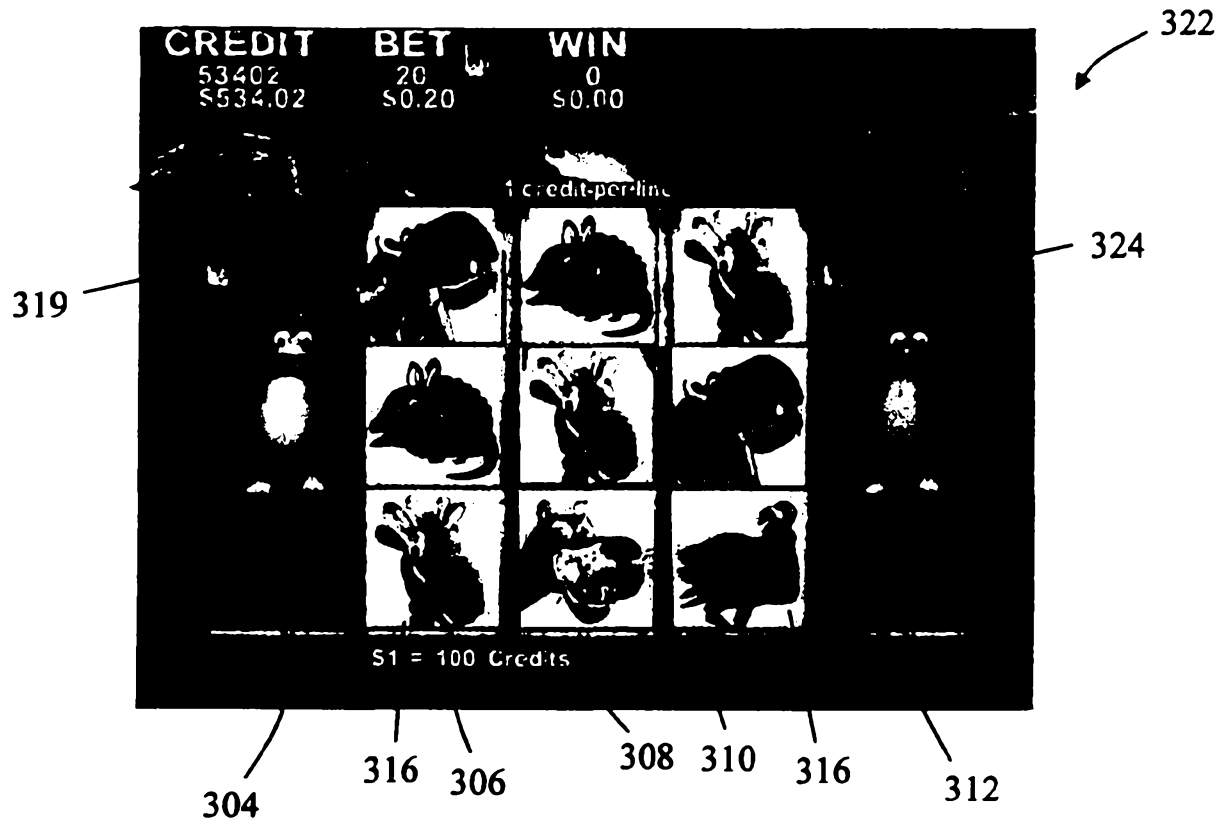

Fig. 10

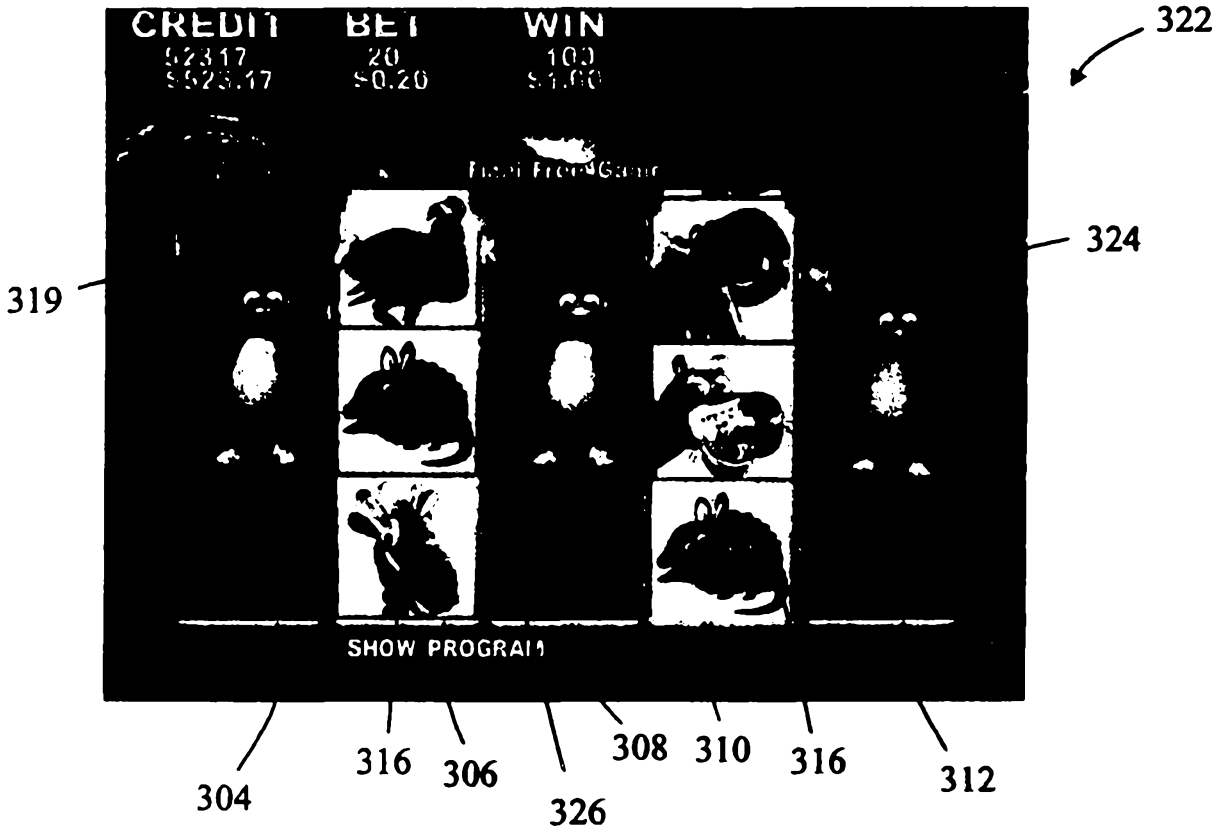

Fig. 11