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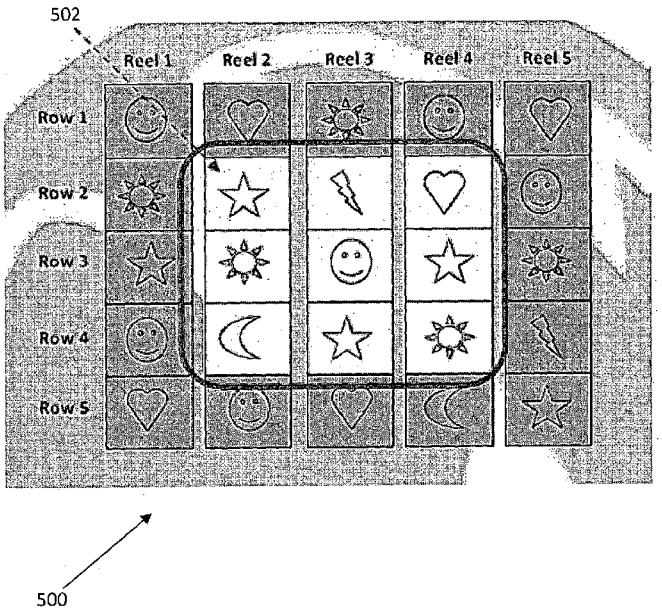

(57) Abstract: A gaming machine and a method of generating a focus area may be provided, the gaming machine comprising a game module for operating a game area, the game module being capable of randomly generating in the game area one or more game elements from a plurality of predetermined game elements; a play module for allowing selection of a play area in association with the game area; a trigger module for monitoring the selected play area, the trigger module being capable of generating a trigger signal based on whether the selected play area contains randomly generated game elements that match at least one of a set of predetermined conditions; and wherein the play module is configured to detect a boundary of the selected play area and to emphasise the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, against any unselected portions of the game area such that the selected play area becomes a focus area.

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A Gaming Machine and A Method of Generating A Focus Area

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates broadly to a gaming machine and to a method of generating a focus area.

BACKGROUND

In the gaming industry, popular games can include games whereby one or more designated instance (e.g. icon/symbol) can be programmed to appear aligned in a particular sequence to result in a win to players. For example, in a line-type game, a player may choose a number of lines as a sequence and designate an icon/symbol as a designated element. During play, if the designated element appears aligned, e.g. adjacent to an identical element, and in the desired sequence, a win is awarded to the player.

To allow more winning opportunities to the players, games have been programmed to further allow players to choose multiple sequences, e.g. selection of multiple play-lines in a line-type game. This can in turn increase profits for a gaming machine if, for example, a fee is to be paid for each additional sequence chosen.

However, by allowing players to choose multiple sequences, e.g. multiple play-lines, there can arise a situation of a maximum or bottleneck of playable sequences.

Furthermore, increasing the number of possible winning sequences can give rise to a situation that a game becomes more complicated for a player. This can lead to the player losing interest in the game as the player begins to lose understanding of how the game is won or lost. Another problem is that the possible winning sequences may appear over an entire game screen, thus leading to a further loss of interest by the

player. The inventors have recognized that there have been no technical attempts at assisting players regarding the above.

In view of the above, there exists a need for a gaming machine and a method of generating a focus area that seek to address at least one of the above problems.

SUMMARY

In accordance with an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a gaming machine, the gaming machine comprising a game module for operating a game area, the game module being capable of randomly generating in the game area one or more game elements from a plurality of predetermined game elements; a play module for allowing selection of a play area in association with the game area; a trigger module for monitoring the selected play area, the trigger module being capable of generating a trigger signal based on whether the selected play area contains randomly generated game elements that match at least one of a set of predetermined conditions; and wherein the play module is configured to detect a boundary of the selected play area and to emphasise the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, against any unselected portions of the game area such that the selected play area becomes a focus area.

The play module may be further configured to emphasise the selected play area against any unselected portions of the game area both upon selection of the play area and during generation of the one or more game elements.

The play area may be within the game area or may substantially encompass the game area.

The selected play area may be emphasised by the play module instructing dimming a display of said any unselected portions of the game area; by the play module instructing brightening a display of the selected play area; or both.

The selected play area may be emphasised by the play module instructing a display of a visible boundary enclosing the selected play area based on the detected boundary.

The selected play area may be emphasised by the game module instructing a display of the selected play area at a separate display area external the game area.

The gaming machine may further comprise a first selection module coupled to the play module, wherein the first selection module can be configured to allow a player to select the play area.

The play area may be configured to be variable in dimensions.

The play area may be configured to be variable in dimensions based on a number of points exchanged by a player.

The play area may comprise two or more discontinuous sub-areas.

The play area may comprise two or more sub-areas fixed in dimensions.

The sub-areas fixed in dimensions may be allowed to overlap as the play area.

The trigger module may be configured to detect a number of occurrences of each game element within the selected play area.

The trigger module may be further configured to detect a position of each randomly generated game element within the selected play area.

The gaming machine may further comprise a second selection module coupled to the game module, wherein the second selection module can be configured to allow a player to select at least one designated game element whereby the trigger module may be arranged to detect whether the selected play area contains the at least one designated game element.

The predetermined game elements may comprise a neutral element, the neutral element may be capable of representing at least one randomly generated game element.

The game area may comprise one or more columns, one or more rows, or both, for display of the game elements.

The game area may comprise a plurality of reel windows, further wherein each reel window may be arranged to display a game element.

The game area may comprise a non-ordered array of reel windows.

The gaming machine may further comprise a storage module for storing a database of the set of predetermined conditions.

The set of predetermined conditions may comprise a condition based on a number of occurrences of a game element being randomly generated within the selected play area.

The set of predetermined conditions may comprise a condition based on whether one or more game elements are randomly generated to be adjacent one another within the selected play area.

The set of predetermined conditions may comprise a condition based on whether one or more game elements are randomly generated to be in a visible pattern within the selected play area.

The game module may comprise integrally one or both of the play module and the trigger module.

In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of generating a focus area, the method comprising operating a game area; selecting a play area in association with the game area; detecting a boundary of the selected play area; and emphasising the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, against any unselected portions of the game area such that the selected play area becomes the focus area.

The step of emphasising the selected play area may be performed both upon selection of the play area and during generation of the one or more game elements.

The play area may be within the game area or may substantially encompass the game area.

The step of emphasising the selected play area may comprise dimming a display of said any unselected portions of the game area; brightening a display of the selected play area; or both.

The step of emphasising the selected play area may comprise instructing a display of a visible boundary enclosing the selected play area.

The step of emphasising the selected play area may comprise instructing a display of the selected play area at a separate display area external the game area.

The method may further comprise allowing a player to select the play area.

The play area may be variable in dimensions.

The play area may be variable in dimensions based on a number of points exchanged by a player.

The play area may comprise two or more discontinuous sub-areas.

The play area may comprise two or more sub-areas fixed in dimensions.

The sub-areas fixed in dimensions may overlap as the play area.

The method may further comprise randomly generating in the play area one or more game elements from a plurality of predetermined game elements; and generating a trigger signal based on whether the selected play area contains randomly generated game elements that match at least one of a set of predetermined conditions

The method may further comprise detecting a number of occurrences of each game element within the selected play area.

The method may further comprise detecting a position of each randomly generated game element within the selected play area.

The method may further comprise allowing a player to select at least one designated game element; and the step of generating a trigger signal may further comprise detecting whether the selected play area contains the at least one designated game element.

The predetermined game elements may comprise a neutral element, the neutral element may be capable of representing at least one randomly generated game element.

The method may further comprise providing the game area comprising one or more columns, one or more rows, or both, for display of the game elements.

The method may further comprise providing the game area comprising a plurality of reel windows, further wherein each reel window may be arranged to display a game element.

The game area may comprise a non-ordered array of reel windows.

The method may further comprise storing a database of the set of predetermined conditions.

The set of predetermined conditions may comprise a condition based on a number of occurrences of a game element randomly generated within the selected play area.

The set of predetermined conditions may comprise a condition based on whether one or more game elements are randomly generated to be adjacent one another within the selected play area.

The set of predetermined conditions may comprise a condition based on whether one or more game elements are randomly generated to be in a visible pattern within the selected play area.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a computer readable medium having stored thereon instructions for instructing a processor of a gaming machine to execute a method of generating a focus area, the method comprising operating a game area; selecting a play area in association with the game area; detecting a boundary of the selected play area; and emphasising the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, against any unselected portions of the game area such that the selected play area becomes the focus area.

The step of emphasising the selected play area may be performed both upon selection of the play area and during generation of the one or more game elements.

The computer readable medium may comprise the method further comprising randomly generating in the play area one or more game elements from a plurality of predetermined game elements; and generating a trigger signal based on whether the selected play area contains randomly generated game elements that match at least one of a set of predetermined conditions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Example embodiments of the invention will be better understood and readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art from the following written description, by way of example only, and in conjunction with the drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic front view diagram of a front panel of a gaming machine in an example embodiment.

Figure 2 is a schematic front view diagram of a gaming machine with a front panel opened in part from a gaming machine in an example embodiment.

Figures 3 to 6 are schematic drawings for illustrating an exemplary game in an example embodiment.

Figure 7 is a schematic drawing that illustrates discontinuous selected areas in an example embodiment.

Figure 8(a) is a schematic drawing that illustrates fixed areas selected as a play area in an example embodiment.

Figure 8(b) is a schematic drawing that illustrates fixed areas selected as a play area in an example embodiment.

Figure 9 is a schematic drawing illustrating a pattern in an example embodiment.

Figure 10 shows an exemplary look-up table in an example embodiment.

Figure 11(a) is a schematic drawing illustrating a game area in an example embodiment.

Figure 11(b) is a schematic drawing illustrating a selected play area in an example embodiment.

Figure 12 is a schematic drawing illustrating a game area in another example embodiment.

Figure 13 is a schematic flowchart for illustrating a method of generating a focus area in an example embodiment.

Figure 14 is a schematic drawing illustrating a network environment suitable for implementing an example embodiment.

Figure 15 is a schematic drawing of a computer system suitable for implementing an example embodiment.

Figure 16 is a schematic flowchart for illustrating an exemplary way of determining a number of occurrences of a game element in an example embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Example embodiments described below can provide a gaming machine and a method of generating a focus area. In an example embodiment, it may be provided that one or more particular areas can be selected and these areas are detected e.g. monitoring/detecting a boundary or boundaries of these areas. The selected area(s) is then emphasised according to the detected boundary such that the selected area(s) becomes a focus area that advantageously allows a player to focus attention on.

Preferably, the selected area or areas is emphasised or highlighted, upon selection, to the player such that the player can more easily concentrate on the play within the selected area or areas. For example, upon selection, an "end selection" signal may be transmitted such that the selected area is emphasised or highlighted. Advantageously, the player can better understand the win conditions with such emphasis or highlighting.

Further, preferably, the selected area or areas is emphasised or highlighted to the player, after selection and, during play. That is, the emphasis or highlighting is maintained during playing of the game. For example, upon selection and during play, the selected area is emphasised or highlighted until an "end current play round" signal is transmitted. Advantageously, the player can simply ignore areas outside the selected area or areas during play, thus leading to better satisfaction and entertainment for the player.

In some embodiments, it may be provided such that a condition that occurs, such as a designated element that appears within that one or more areas, can result in a win for a player if the condition matches at least one of a set of predetermined conditions.

Therefore, in an example embodiment, there can be provided a gaming machine that comprises a game module for operating a game area, the game module being capable of randomly generating in the game area one or more game elements from a plurality of predetermined game elements. The gaming machine further comprises a play module for allowing selection of a play area in association with the game area. The game module can

also randomly generate one or more game elements within the play area. The gaming machine further comprises a trigger module for monitoring the selected play area, the trigger module being capable of generating a trigger signal based on whether the selected play area contains randomly generated game elements that match at least one of a set of predetermined conditions. In the example embodiment, the play module is configured to detect a boundary of the selected play area and to emphasise the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, against any unselected portions of the game area such that the selected play area becomes a focus area. The emphasising can still be performed if the selected play area substantially encompasses the game area. In addition, the emphasising can be performed upon selection of the play area and more preferably, also during generation of the one or more game elements, i.e. during game play.

The terms "coupled" or "connected" as used in this description are intended to cover both directly connected or connected through one or more intermediate means, unless otherwise stated.

The description herein may be, in certain portions, explicitly or implicitly described as algorithms and/or functional operations that operate on data within a computer memory or an electronic circuit. These algorithmic descriptions and/or functional operations are usually used by those skilled in the information/data processing arts for efficient description. An algorithm is generally relating to a self-consistent sequence of steps leading to a desired result. The algorithmic steps can include physical manipulations of physical quantities, such as electrical, magnetic or optical signals capable of being stored, transmitted, transferred, combined, compared, and otherwise manipulated.

Further, unless specifically stated otherwise, and would ordinarily be apparent from the following, a person skilled in the art will appreciate that throughout the present specification, discussions utilizing terms such as “scanning”, “calculating”, “determining”, “replacing”, “generating”, “initializing”, “outputting”, and the like, refer to action and processes of an instructing processor/computer system, or similar electronic circuit/device/component, that manipulates/processes and transforms data represented as physical quantities within the described system into other data similarly represented as physical quantities within the system or other information storage, transmission or display devices etc.

The description also discloses relevant device/apparatus for performing the steps of the described methods. Such apparatus may be specifically constructed for the purposes of the methods, or may comprise a general purpose computer/processor or other device selectively activated or reconfigured by a computer program stored in a storage member. The algorithms and displays described herein are not inherently related to any particular computer or other apparatus. It is understood that general purpose devices/machines may be used in accordance with the teachings herein. Alternatively, the construction of a specialized device/apparatus to perform the method steps may be desired.

In addition, it is submitted that the description also implicitly covers a computer program, in that it would be clear that the steps of the methods described herein may be put into effect by computer code. It will be appreciated that a large variety of programming languages and coding can be used to implement the teachings of the description herein. Moreover, the computer program if applicable is not limited to any particular control flow and can use different control flows without departing from the scope of the invention.

Furthermore, one or more of the steps of the computer program if applicable may be performed in parallel and/or sequentially. Such a computer program if applicable may be stored on any computer readable medium. The computer readable medium may include storage devices such as magnetic or optical disks, memory chips, or other storage devices suitable for interfacing with a suitable reader/general purpose computer. In such instances, the computer readable storage medium is non-transitory. Such storage medium also covers all computer-readable media e.g. medium that stores data only for short periods of time and/or only in the presence of power, such as register memory, processor cache and Random Access Memory (RAM) and the like. The computer readable medium may even include a wired medium such as exemplified in the Internet system, or wireless medium such as exemplified in bluetooth technology. The computer program when loaded and executed on a suitable reader effectively results in an apparatus that can implement the steps of the described methods.

The example embodiments may also be implemented as hardware modules. A module is a functional hardware unit designed for use with other components or modules. For example, a module may be implemented using digital or discrete electronic components, or it can form a portion of an entire electronic circuit such as an Application Specific

Integrated Circuit (ASIC). A person skilled in the art will understand that the example embodiments can also be implemented as a combination of hardware and software modules.

Further, in the description herein, the word "substantially" whenever used is understood to include, but not restricted to, "entirely" or "completely" and the like. In addition, terms such as "comprising", "comprise", and the like whenever used, are intended to be non-restricting descriptive language in that they broadly include elements/components recited after such terms, in addition to other components not explicitly recited. Further, terms such as "about", "approximately" and the like whenever used, typically means a reasonable variation, for example a variation of +/- 5% of the disclosed value, or a variance of 4% of the disclosed value, or a variance of 3% of the disclosed value, a variance of 2% of the disclosed value or a variance of 1% of the disclosed value.

Furthermore, in the description herein, certain values may be disclosed in a range. The values showing the end points of a range are intended to illustrate a preferred range. Whenever a range has been described, it is intended that the range covers and teaches all possible sub-ranges as well as individual numerical values within that range. That is, the end points of a range should not be interpreted as inflexible limitations. For example, a description of a range of 1% to 5% is intended to have specifically disclosed sub-ranges 1% to 2%, 1% to 3%, 1% to 4%, 2% to 3% etc., as well as individually, values within that range such as 1%, 2%, 3%, 4% and 5%. The intention of the above specific disclosure is applicable to any depth/breadth of a range.

Figure 1 is a schematic front view diagram of a front panel of a gaming machine in an example embodiment. The gaming machine 100 comprises the front panel 101 that in turn comprises a top screen 102, a main screen 104, a player transactions panel 106 and a player interaction panel 108. The gaming machine 100 may optionally comprise a printer outlet 110, a tower light 112 and a poster display portion 114. The gaming machine 100 allows a player to play one or more games installed or network-implemented by the gaming machine 100.

In the example embodiment, the top screen 102 can be used to display game celebrations, promotional/advertising information or other information that is typically not

primarily related to a progression of the games of the gaming machine. The main screen 104 is used to display the games of the gaming machine 100, for the player's attention. Typically, the main screen 104 is the screen that the player focuses on for playing the games.

In the example embodiment, the player transactions panel 106 is provided for the player to transact with the gaming machine 100. The term "transactions" is taken to mean extraction of remaining points/credits that the player possesses or insertion of points/credits that the player possesses, for example, in a magnetic identification card or a radio frequency identification (RFID) card or any stored-value card. The term should not be limited to monetary transactions. The player transactions panel 106 comprises a liquid crystal display (LCD) information screen 116 and a card insert slot 118. The card insert slot 118 is used for receiving, in the case of a card insert slot, an identification card containing the points/credits and/or identification belonging to the player. The points/credits can be extracted from the card into the gaming machine 100 for playing the games installed in the gaming machine 100. Upon the player deciding to end play at the gaming machine 100, the player transactions panel 106 can store the latest/updated points/credits information in the stored-value card. For example embodiments relating to using player identification cards, the player transactions panel 106 can retrieve points/credits information of the player from an external server or database based on player identification. The retrieved information can then be used at the gaming machine 100 for playing the games. For such embodiments, upon the player deciding to end play at the gaming machine 100, the player transactions panel 106 can transmit the latest/updated points/credits information to be stored on the external server or database based on the player identification. It will be appreciated that the card insert slot 118 can be in other forms depending on the type of identification card used by the player. For example, if the player is using a RFID card, the transactions module 118 can be a RFID reader/writer. The LCD information screen 116 is used to display e.g. the points/credits information contained in the card.

The player interaction panel 108 comprises push buttons e.g. 120 provided to allow the player to actuate the buttons e.g. 120 for interacting with the games being played on the gaming machine 100. For example, the player can use the buttons e.g. 120 to make player selections being displayed on the main screen 104. In an alternative embodiment, the push buttons e.g. 120 may be replaced by a touch-sensitive screen that corresponds to the

display on the main screen 104 to allow the player to interact with the games using touch commands. This may be in the form of a touch sensitive membrane with switch panels each corresponding to a display position of a display on the main screen 104. A bill validator 122 can be provided for a player to use paper money to buy credits for playing the games of the gaming machine 100. This is similar to, for example, using paper money at a vending machine to buy drinks/food.

It will be appreciated that although a card-in (using the card insert slot 118) and bill-in (using the bill validator 122) has been discussed above, the gaming machine is not limited as such and can comprise mechanisms to allow coin-in, key-in, ticket-in etc. for playing the games in the gaming machine.

It will be appreciated that the main screen 104 can be in the form of a touch-sensitive screen that may complement or replace the player interaction panel 108. The touch-sensitive screen can be a capacitive-type sensing screen, pressure-type sensing screen or the like. That is, the main screen 104 may be a touch-sensitive screen that allows the player to interact with the gaming machine 100 using touch commands.

In the example embodiment, the printer outlet 110 may be provided for the gaming machine 100 to output information in printed form to the player. For example, the gaming machine 100 may print a sticker or reward voucher for the player. The gaming machine 100 may also print a receipt or record of the points transaction for the player. The tower light 112 may be provided to light up during game celebrations. This may attract the attention of spectators or the player. The tower light 112 can also be used for highlighting technical issues, requesting assistance or service etc. The poster display portion 114 may be provided for e.g. game information to be displayed.

In the example embodiment, the front panel 101 may be opened or detached in whole or in part from the gaming machine 100 body to allow, for example, maintenance on the circuits or components encased in the gaming machine 100.

Figure 2 is a schematic front view diagram of a gaming machine with a front panel opened in part from the gaming machine in an example embodiment. The gaming machine 200 functions substantially identically to the gaming machine 100 described with reference to

Figure 1. Like numerals are used to refer to substantially identical components already described. As shown, the front panel 101 is opened from the gaming machine 200, and opened in part containing the main screen 104 and the player transactions panel 106, to reveal the internal portion of the gaming machine 200.

The gaming machine 200 comprises a power supply unit 202 for powering the various components of the gaming machine 200. The power supply unit 202 is coupled to a main board circuits cage 204. The main board circuits cage 204 is used to contain and protect a game module 206. The game module 206 implements the games on the gaming machine and also implements game functions such as points/rewards calculations. The game module 206 also drives visual contents, for example of the games, on the main screen 104 and, for example, audio content from the gaming machine 200. Speakers (not shown) are provided to output audio. Thus, the game module 206 can be a processor or a processing module of the gaming machine 200.

In the example embodiment, the game module 206 comprises integrally, or alternatively is coupled to, a play module 208 and a trigger module 210. That is, the game module 206 can integrate functions of the play module 208 and the trigger module 210. The modules 206, 208, 210 can be in the form of printed circuit boards comprising ASIC that can perform specific functions with inputs from components coupled to these modules. Alternatively, these modules 206, 208, 210 can be software modules. Preferably, the play module 208 is coupled to a first selection module 212 that is in turn coupled to one or more input members such as buttons e.g. 120 of a player interaction panel 108. The first selection module 212 may also be coupled to a touch screen input member of the main screen 104. In the example embodiment, preferably, the game module 206 is coupled to a second selection module 214 that is in turn coupled to one or more input members such as buttons e.g. 120 of a player interaction panel 108. The second selection module 214 may also be coupled to a touch screen input member of the main screen 104. In an alternative embodiment, the first and second selection modules 212, 214 may be a same module.

In the example embodiment, the game module 206 facilitates implementation of one or more games of the gaming machine 200 and facilitates the display of the one or more games on a display means of the gaming machine 200 such as the main screen 104. The game module 206 is configured to generate/operate a game display area showing

the game in play. The generation/operation may be graphical such as a game display area generated/operated based on computer code or may be mechanical such as controlling mechanically rotatable reels, depending on implementation.

In the example embodiment, the play module 208 is configured to select or demarcate a play area that is associated with the game display area. For example, the play area may be a sub-area with a clear boundary within the game display area. The play area may even be selected as an area substantially covering the game display area. In the example embodiment, the boundary of the play area can be selectable by a player via the first selection module 212 by, for example, using buttons e.g. 120 or using touch commands on the main screen 104. In an alternative embodiment, the boundary of the play area may be automatically selected by a processor of the game module. In example embodiments relating to reel-type games, the game display area can be the reel windows of the reel row-by-column array. The selected play area can be a sub-set of the reel windows within the array.

In the example embodiment, following selection of the play area, a detection is performed to determine the boundary of the play area. The detection may be performed by the play module 208. The detection may be based on, but not limited to, reading of co-ordinates by touch sensors coupled to a touch screen.

The play module 208 is configured to emphasise or highlight the selected or demarcated play area to the player, such that the selected play area becomes a focus area for the player. The emphasizing or highlighting can be based on, but not limited to, using the detected boundary and instructing display means based on the detected boundary.

Further, preferably, the play module 208 is further configured to maintain the emphasis or highlighting of the selected or demarcated play area to the player, after selection and, during play.

In the example embodiment, the game module 206 provides signals to the play module 208 regarding providing and/or maintaining the emphasis or highlighting. For example, after the play area is selected, an "end selection" signal may be transmitted by

the game module 206 to the play module 208 such that the play module 208 detects a boundary of the play area and emphasises the play area based on the detected boundary. During play, the game module 206 monitors whether one round of game play has been completed. If the game play has been completed, an "end current play round" signal is transmitted by the game module 206 to the play module 208 such that the play module 208 switches off the emphasis or highlighting of the play area. If the "end current play round" signal has not been received by the play module 208, the play module 208 maintains the emphasis or highlighting of the play area.

In the example embodiment, the game module 206 is configured to randomly generate one or more game elements to populate the game display area. The game elements are from a group/table of predetermined game elements. The trigger module 210 is configured to monitor the selected play area to detect which of the game elements from the group/table appear in the play area, the number of occurrences of the game elements appearing within the play area, and preferably, the position of each game element appearing within the play area. The detection of which game element, the number of occurrences of the game element appearing and preferably the position of each game element can form one or more conditions to be compared against a set of predetermined conditions to determine whether a win is to be awarded to the player. If at least one of the predetermined conditions is met, the trigger module 210 generates a trigger signal to the game module 206 signalling that a win is awarded. This may trigger the game module 206 to perform relevant game functions comprising, for example, awarding game points to the player, displaying media etc. The displaying of media may be for example a display based on the favourable result such as performance of celebratory displays on a top screen 102, and a video display on the main screen 104 etc.

In an alternative example embodiment, the player can designate one or more game elements depending on choice. The designated elements are selectable from the group/table of predetermined game elements. For example, the player can select an apple symbol and/or an orange symbol as designated elements from a group of fruit symbols, for play in a game of luck. The selection can be via the second selection module 214 by, for example, using buttons e.g. 120 or using touch commands on the main screen 104. The predetermined condition can be whether any one of the designated game elements appear in the selected play area. Thus, if the trigger module 210 detects that there is at least one

designated game element appearing within the selected play area, a trigger signal is generated.

The gaming machine 200 can optionally further comprise an interface circuit board 216 coupled to the game module 206, and a bill validator module 218 coupled to the game module 206. The bill validator module 218 comprises circuitry for implementing bill validation and counting. In the example embodiment, if a printer outlet 110 is provided, a printer 220 is also comprised in the gaming machine 200 for performing the printing functions.

It will be appreciated that the gaming machine 200 may further comprise other components that are not described here for clarity of illustration of the example embodiments.

The interface circuit board 216 can be optionally provided to communicate with a game control server (not shown) that can e.g. monitor the results of the games of the gaming machine 200, for example for logging results of theme-type base games of the gaming machine 200.

In such an example embodiment, a win that is awarded based on the trigger module 210 can trigger the game module 206 to instruct or inform the interface circuit board 216 that a favourable result has been obtained. The game control server can be informed via the interface circuit board 216.

In some example embodiments, the game control server (not shown) can e.g. control the gaming machine 200, for example for informing of a winning instance of an external mystery-type server/network game implemented at the game control server. The server/network game is typically independent of the base games installed at the gaming machine 200. The communication with the game control server may be over a wired or wireless network.

For example, optionally, for a network game, the game control server can instruct or inform the interface circuit board 216 that a favourable result, specifically for the gaming machine 200, has been obtained. This may be due to, for example but not limited to, a predetermined playing time being reached by the player, or a random generated number

internal the gaming machine matching a predetermined number stored in a database on the game control server etc. The interface circuit board 216 can then instruct the game module 206 to perform relevant game functions comprising displaying media e.g. based on the favourable result of the network game.

Figures 3 to 6 are schematic drawings for illustrating an exemplary game in an example embodiment. In the example embodiment, a reel game is described for illustration purposes. The exemplary game is implemented on a gaming machine that functions substantially identically to the gaming machines 100, 200 described with reference to Figures 1 and 2. Like numerals are used to refer to substantial identical components already described.

With reference to Figure 3, the reel game is implemented using an array of e.g. 5 rows and 5 columns (i.e. 5 x 5 reel space). In the example embodiment, a game display area 300 encompasses the reel windows of the array. The game display area 300 is displayed on a main screen (compare 104) of the gaming machine. The game display area 300 can be generated/controlled/operated by the game module (compare 206).

With reference to Figure 4, a play area 400 is selected in association with the game display area 300. The play area 400 shows a 3 x 3 reel area. The selected reel windows of the play area 400 are, smaller than and, within the game display area 300. In the example embodiment, the play module (compare 208) detects, upon selection, a boundary of the play area 400. The play module facilitates dimming the areas outside the play area 400 by, e.g. instructing display components coupled to the main screen 104, based on the detected boundary such that the play area 400 becomes a focus area for the player. Alternatively, the play area 400 may be brightened with respect to the areas outside the play area 400. This may be achieved by the play module (compare 208) facilitating brightening the play area 400 by, e.g. instructing display components coupled to the main screen 104, based on the detected boundary such that the play area 400 becomes a focus area for the player. The display components may be light emitting diodes (LED) of a LED touch screen used as the main screen 104. The detection of the boundary may be performed by reading touch sensors coupled to the touch screen used as the main screen 104. The play module may provide emphasis or prominence or highlighting to the play area 400 such that a player can focus on the selected play area 400. In yet another alternative, the play area 400 may even

be duplicated and displayed at a separate display area that is external the game display area 300 such that the player can focus on the game being displayed in the play area 400 without looking at any part of the game display area 300. For example, using the detected boundary, the play module may transmit data to the game module. The game module can instruct a display of the selected play area at a separate display area external the game area. This may be achieved by the game module (compare 206) instructing display components coupled to the main screen 104 to graphically generate a separate display area.

Preferably, the emphasis or prominence or highlighting of the play area 400 is maintained, after selection of the play area 400 and maintained, during play of the game.

The selection of the play area 400 is by a player using a player interaction panel (compare 108) or using touch commands via a touch screen input of the main screen 104. In an alternative embodiment, the play area 400 is automatically and/or randomly selected by the game module 206.

With reference to Figure 5, the game module 206 accesses a table/list of predetermined game elements. These predetermined game elements may be stored in a database or storage and may be located within the gaming machine. The game module 206 randomly generates one or more game elements from the predetermined game elements, and instructs the display of the randomly generated game elements in the game area 300 on the main screen 104. This is shown in the populated game area 500 operated by the game module 206. The player's attention is directed/focused to the populated play area 502 by the emphasising of the play area 502, such that the play area 502 becomes a focus area.

In the example embodiment, a trigger module (compare 210) monitors the selected play area 502 to detect which of the game elements from the table/list appear in the play area 502, the number of occurrences of the game elements appearing within the play area 502, and preferably, the position of each game element appearing within the play area 502. This can be, for example but not limited to, reading parameter values of each game element/symbol appearing within coordinates of the play area to determine what game element has appeared at each reel window of the selected play area. If one or more predetermined conditions is met by the game elements appearing within the play area 502, the trigger module 210 generates a trigger signal to the game module 206 signalling that a

win is awarded. This may trigger the game module 206 to perform relevant game functions comprising, for example, awarding game points to the player, displaying media etc.

In an alternative example embodiment, the player can be allowed to designate game elements of choice, and the predetermined condition may be whether the designated game elements appear within the play area 502.

In the example embodiment, it may be a pre-determined condition that three occurrences of a game element such as a star symbol (see numeral 602) results in a win. Thus, in the drawing shown in Figure 6, a condition/instance of three occurrences of the star symbol triggers the game module 206 in awarding points to the player. Preferably, there is a base predetermined condition of awarding points for one occurrence of the star symbol. For example, 1000 bonus points may be awarded for 3 star symbols appearing. The points may be determined based on an odds table or predetermined list that is stored in a database or storage located in the gaming machine and/or displayed on a top screen (compare 102) of the gaming machine.

In an alternative example embodiment, it may even be provided that all the symbols appearing in the play area 502 can each result in awarding of points and thus, points are awarded based on the number of single appearances of the symbols in the play area 502. For example, a star symbol may result in 10 points awarded while a moon symbol may result in 100 points awarded.

In the example embodiment, a neutral game element can also be provided, from the predetermined game elements, such that the neutral element can represent at least one or any generated elements for comparison to the predetermined conditions. For example, the heart symbol 604 can be a neutral element or a so-called joker symbol. Thus, with the heart symbol 604, the trigger module 210 can determine that there is instance/condition of 4 occurrences/appearances of the star symbol and correspondingly, more points may be awarded to the player due to a predetermined condition of four occurrences of the star symbol. In addition, if there is a predetermined condition of two occurrences of two moons and/or three suns, the heart symbol 604 can also lead to these predetermined conditions being met based on the drawing in Figure 6. Therefore, additional points may be awarded to the player.

In the example embodiments, there is advantageously no need for a player to look out for game elements appearing in a line (e.g. a game element being adjacent to an identical game element and the elements have to be connected in a line that stretches across the game area from one edge of the game area to an opposite edge of the game area). Given the many permutations of lines that can be stretching across the game area, line-type games can become confusing to a player. In the example embodiments, a area-type game is provided whereby as long as a predetermined condition of a game element appearing within the play area is met, a win can be awarded. The player need advantageously not look out for unbroken lines of game elements within the game area. Further, advantageously, as opposed to line-type games, emphasis or prominence or highlighting of the play area can allow the player to better understand the win conditions and obtain higher satisfaction and entertainment due to e.g. ease of understanding how a game is won each time.

In addition, a selection of a play area may make the game interesting to a player. Any area may be selected and it may be provided that the player can exchange points to cover a different area. That is, the play area may be variable in dimensions based on a number of points exchanged by the player. For example, a larger area may be exchanged for a larger amount of points from the player. The play area may even substantially encompass the game area. That is, the entire game area may be selected as the play area. Thus, the above example embodiment is not limited to a play area of 3 x 3 reel area and can include, for example, 5 x 5 reel area, 2 x 2 reel area, 1 x 1 reel area etc. As an example, the player can actuate a button (or use a touch screen option) to select a play area of a 3 x 2 reel area or six reel windows. The player can actuate another button (or use a touch screen option) to select a larger play area of a 4 x 2 reel area or eight reel windows. The player can actuate yet another button (or use a touch screen option) to select an even larger play area of a 3 x 3 reel area or nine reel windows. The player can actuate another button (or use a touch screen option) to select a larger play area of a 2 x 6 reel area or twelve reel windows. The buttons or touch screen options may be associated with increasing amount of points to be exchanged by the player with a larger selectable play area being exchanged for more points from the player.

In addition, there may even be a plurality of play sub-areas that can be selected in association to a game area. For example, two separate 2 x 2 reel areas may be selected as play area within a game area of 5 x 5 reel area. Thus, in this instance, there can be discontinuous sub-areas selected as a play area within the game area.

Figure 7 is a schematic drawing that illustrates discontinuous selected areas in an example embodiment. As a further example, the player may select four corners e.g. 702, 704 of a game area 700 as the play area. The four corners are brightened in contrast to the areas outside of these four corners to emphasise the play area.

Alternatively, the player may even be allowed to only select multiple numbers of sub-areas fixed in dimensions (or "fixed areas"), i.e. each area having a fixed number of reel windows, as the final play area. Figure 8(a) is a schematic drawing that illustrates fixed areas selected as a play area in an example embodiment. In this example embodiment, 500 points may be exchanged for each fixed area of 2 x 2 reel area. Thus, a player may exchange 1000 points for two such fixed areas 802, 804, and selectably place these areas 802, 804 within the game area 800.

Figure 8(b) is a schematic drawing that illustrates fixed areas selected as a play area in an example embodiment. In this example embodiment, a player may exchange 1000 points for two fixed areas (compare 802, 804), and selectably place these areas in an overlapping manner to have a play area 806 of 3 x 2 reel area within the game area 800. In the example embodiment, the emphasis of the play areas 802, 804, 806 may be via a boundary line enclosing each play area. Dimming and brightening of unselected/selected areas respectively may also be used to emphasise the play area.

In addition, the predetermined conditions may be made more interesting rather than just counting the number of occurrences. For example, but not being limiting, a predetermined condition may be such that certain game elements appearing adjacent each other may result in a win. Preferably, the certain game elements may refer to, but are not limited to, identical game elements. This win may be in additional to other predetermined conditions such as a win being awarded for a single occurrence of a game element of the adjacent pair. As another example, but not being limiting, a predetermined condition may be such that certain game elements appearing in a pattern may result in a win. Such a pattern

may be a pattern visible to a player. Preferably, the certain game elements may refer to, but are not limited to, identical game elements. This win may be in additional to other predetermined conditions such as a win being awarded for a single occurrence of a game element of the pattern.

Figure 9 is a schematic drawing illustrating a pattern in an example embodiment. In the example embodiment, a cross pattern of smiley face game elements e.g. 902, 904 can result in an additional win. The additional win may be in addition to wins awarded for five occurrences of the smiley face game element e.g. 902 and for four occurrences of the moon game element e.g. 906.

Further, in some example embodiments, a look-up or awards table may be provided that can provide a set of predetermined conditions. The look-up or awards table may be stored in a database provided, for example, in a storage module or medium. Figure 10 shows an exemplary look-up table 1000 in an example embodiment. In the example embodiment, it may be provided that certain game elements are rare such that occurrences of such game elements in the selected play area can result in a major win. For example, for a smiley face game element 1002, a one time occurrence can result in a major win. A two-time occurrence can result in a major win as well, or a bigger win than if there is only one occurrence. It may also be provided that certain game elements that commonly appear in the game area may be deemed as common game elements such that multiple occurrences of such game elements in the selected play area may be disregarded. For example, for a lightning game element 1004, a four time occurrence does not result in any win while a five time occurrence results only in a minor win. In the example embodiment, optionally, a minor win awards a small number of points to the player while a major win awards a substantial amount of points to the player.

Further, in some example embodiments, the game area may be of a non-ordered or non-traditionally-ordered column-row array. That is, the game area may be of an irregular shape.

Figure 11(a) is a schematic drawing illustrating a game area in an example embodiment. Figure 11(b) is a schematic drawing illustrating a selected play area in an example embodiment. In the example embodiment, the game area 1100 is a non-

traditionally-ordered array and is irregular in shape. One selected play area 1102 is shown brightened with respect to the areas outside the selected play area 1102.

Figure 12 is a schematic drawing illustrating a game area in another example embodiment. In the example embodiment, the game area 1200 is a non-traditionally-ordered array and is triangular in shape. One selected play area 1202 is shown brightened with respect to the areas outside the selected play area 1202.

Further, the designation of game elements can make the game interesting to a player. In some embodiments, the player can be allowed to choose from a predetermined list/table/group of game elements. For example, a larger number of game elements may be designated for a larger amount of points from the player.

In the example embodiment, the game module randomly generates one or more game elements for population of the game area, such as in a normal reel game. The wins of the game are determined based on the contents of the play area.

In one example embodiment, a gaming machine may be provided to implement an exemplary reel game. The reel game can operate substantially similar to the exemplary game described with reference to Figures 3 to 6.

The gaming machine can, instead of a video machine, be a machine that employs mechanical spinning reels. For example, the reels may be stepper motor driven and carry symbols. The game module operates the game area on a display (e.g. a window) of the gaming machine by randomly generating/rolling the reels so as to randomly achieve symbols on each position of the reel game.

A play area may be selected by a player e.g. actuating mechanical buttons to vary a boundary of a window and moving the window to select the play area in association with the game area. The boundary may be detected based on its final position and preferably, a plurality of light sources such as light emitting diodes at the detected boundary position may be turned on to emphasise the play area, such that the selected play area becomes a focus area.

A play module may calculate the coordinates of the selected play area and correlate the coordinates to the game area. A trigger module may read resistor values of randomly achieved symbols on each position of the reel game and co-operate with the play module to determine if at least one predetermined condition is met. For example, if there is detected a game element on display within the play area and there is a predetermined condition that awards a win based on an occurrence of the game element, the trigger module generates a trigger signal to the game module so that the game module can e.g. award points to a player.

Figure 16 is a schematic flowchart 1600 for illustrating an exemplary way of determining a number of occurrences of a game element in an example embodiment. In the example embodiment, the particular game element may be known as a scatter symbol and a predetermined condition is such that a win can be awarded based on at least one occurrence of the scatter symbol. At step 1602, a counter cnt is initialised to a zero value. The counter cnt is used for counting the number of occurrences of the scatter symbol. A trigger module proceeds to check each position or reel window of a play area for an occurrence of the scatter symbol. Firstly, a column co-ordinate n is set to 1 and a row co-ordinate x is set to 1. Thus, the starting co-ordinate is (1,1). At step 1604, the symbol at the co-ordinate is obtained by the detected parameter value. This may, for example, by a number 1 to 10 with each number representing a different symbol. At step 1606, it is determined whether the symbol is a scatter symbol. At step 1608, if the symbol is a scatter symbol, the counter cnt is incremented by 1. Otherwise, if the symbol is determined to be not a scatter symbol, at step 1610, the trigger module proceeds to check a next row of the same column, i.e. the row co-ordinate is incremented to 2. At step 1612, it is determined whether the row number represents a number beyond the maximum row number, i.e. the trigger module has checked past the last row of the play area. If the current row is not beyond the last row, i.e. at most at the last row, the process loops to step 1604 to determine the symbol.

Otherwise, if it is determined at step 1612 that the row number is beyond the maximum row number, i.e. the previous row checked was the last row, the process proceeds to step 1614. At step 1614, the column co-ordinate n is incremented to 2. At step 1616, it is determined whether the column number represents a number beyond the maximum column number, i.e. the trigger module has checked past the last column of the play area. If the current column is not beyond the last column, i.e. at most at the last column, the process

proceeds to step 1618. At step 1618, the row co-ordinate is reset to value 1. Thus, the detection has progressed to a first row of the next column of the play area. The process loops to step 1604 to determine the symbol of the new co-ordinates.

Otherwise, if it is determined at step 1616 that the column number is beyond the maximum column number, i.e. the previous column checked was the last column, the trigger module determines that all columns and rows have been checked and the process proceeds to end at step 1620. The value of counter cnt is then retrieve to determine the number of occurrences of the scatter symbol, and compare to the predetermined condition. Thus, if there is a predetermined condition that a win is awarded for at least one occurrence of the scatter symbol, a value of one or more for the counter cnt can result in a win being awarded to the player.

Figure 13 is a schematic flowchart 1300 for illustrating a method of generating a focus area in an example embodiment. At step 1302, a game area is being operated. At step 1304, a play area in association with the game area is selected. At step 1306, a boundary of the selected play area is detected. At step 1308, the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, is emphasised against any unselected portions of the game area, such that the selected play area becomes the focus area.

Figure 14 is a schematic drawing illustrating a network environment suitable for implementing an example embodiment. In the example embodiment, one or more gaming machines e.g. 1402, 1404 are network-linked to a server, e.g. a game server 1406, using communication links e.g. 1408. The gaming machines can function substantially similarly to the gaming machines 100, 200 as described with reference to Figures 1 and 2. The server 1406 can perform logging, backup operations etc., of the gaming machines e.g. 1402, 1404. The network links e.g. 1408 may be wired or wireless. The communication protocol may be using e.g. Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) protocol.

Different example embodiments can be implemented in the context of data structure, program modules, program and computer instructions executed in a computer implemented environment. A general purpose computing environment is briefly disclosed herein. One or more example embodiments may be embodied in one or more computer systems, such as is

schematically illustrated in Figure 15. Such computer systems may be generally implemented in e.g. a gaming machine.

One or more example embodiments may be implemented as software, such as a computer program being executed within, for example, a general computer system 1500, and instructing the computer system 1500 to conduct a method of an example embodiment.

The computer system 1500 comprises a computer unit 1502, input modules such as a keyboard 1504 and a pointing device 1506 and a plurality of output devices such as a display 1508, and printer 1510. A user can interact with the computer unit 1502 using the above devices. The pointing device can be implemented with a mouse, track ball, pen device or any similar device. One or more other input devices (not shown) such as a joystick, game pad, satellite dish, scanner, touch sensitive screen or the like can also be connected to the computer unit 1502. The display 1508 may include a cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), field emission display (FED), plasma display or any other device that produces an image that is viewable by the user.

The computer unit 1502 can be connected to a computer network 1512 via a suitable transceiver device 1514, to enable access to e.g. the Internet or other network systems such as Local Area Network (LAN) or Wide Area Network (WAN) or a personal network. The network 1512 can comprise a server, a router, a network personal computer, a peer device or other common network node, a wireless telephone or wireless personal digital assistant. Networking environments may be found in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks and home computer systems etc. The transceiver device 1514 can be a modem/router unit located within or external to the computer unit 1502, and may be any type of modem/router such as a cable modem or a satellite modem.

It will be appreciated that network connections shown are exemplary and other ways of establishing a communications link between computers can be used. The existence of any of various protocols, such as TCP/IP, Frame Relay, Ethernet, FTP, HTTP and the like, is presumed, and the computer unit 1502 can be operated in a client-server configuration to permit a user to retrieve web pages from a web-based server. Furthermore, any of various web browsers can be used to display and manipulate data on web pages.

The computer unit 1502 in the example comprises a processor 1518, a Random Access Memory (RAM) 1520 and a Read Only Memory (ROM) 1522. The ROM 1522 can be a system memory storing basic input/ output system (BIOS) information. The RAM 1520 can store one or more program modules such as operating systems, application programs and program data.

The computer unit 1502 further comprises a number of Input/Output (I/O) interface units, for example I/O interface unit 1524 to the display 1508, and I/O interface unit 1526 to the keyboard 1504. The components of the computer unit 1502 typically communicate and interface/couple connectedly via an interconnected system bus 1528 and in a manner known to the person skilled in the relevant art. The bus 1528 can be any of several types of bus structures including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, and a local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures.

It will be appreciated that other devices can also be connected to the system bus 1528. For example, a universal serial bus (USB) interface can be used for coupling a video or digital camera to the system bus 1528. An IEEE 1394 interface may be used to couple additional devices to the computer unit 1502. Other manufacturer interfaces are also possible such as FireWire developed by Apple Computer and i.Link developed by Sony. Coupling of devices to the system bus 1528 can also be via a parallel port, a game port, a PCI board or any other interface used to couple an input device to a computer. It will also be appreciated that, while the components are not shown in the figure, sound/audio can be recorded and reproduced with a microphone and a speaker. A sound card may be used to couple a microphone and a speaker to the system bus 1528. It will be appreciated that several peripheral devices can be coupled to the system bus 1528 via alternative interfaces simultaneously.

An application program can be supplied to the user of the computer system 1500 being encoded/stored on a data storage medium such as a CD-ROM or flash memory carrier. The application program can be read using a corresponding data storage medium drive of a data storage device 1530. The data storage medium is not limited to being portable and can include instances of being embedded in the computer unit 1502. The data storage device 1530 can comprise a hard disk interface unit and/or a removable memory interface unit (both not shown in detail) respectively coupling a hard disk drive and/or a

removable memory drive to the system bus 1528. This can enable reading/writing of data. Examples of removable memory drives include magnetic disk drives and optical disk drives. The drives and their associated computer-readable media, such as a floppy disk provide nonvolatile storage of computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules and other data for the computer unit 1502. It will be appreciated that the computer unit 1502 may include several of such drives. Furthermore, the computer unit 1502 may include drives for interfacing with other types of computer readable media.

The application program is read and controlled in its execution by the processor 1518. Intermediate storage of program data may be accomplished using RAM 1520. The method(s) of the example embodiments can be implemented as computer readable instructions, computer executable components, or software modules. One or more software modules may alternatively be used. These can include an executable program, a data link library, a configuration file, a database, a graphical image, a binary data file, a text data file, an object file, a source code file, or the like. When one or more computer processors execute one or more of the software modules, the software modules interact to cause one or more computer systems to perform according to the teachings herein.

The operation of the computer unit 1502 can be controlled by a variety of different program modules. Examples of program modules are routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, libraries, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. The example embodiments may also be practiced with other computer system configurations, including handheld devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor-based or programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, personal digital assistants, mobile telephones and the like. Furthermore, the example embodiments may also be practiced in distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a wireless or wired communications network. In a distributed computing environment, program modules may be located in both local and remote memory storage devices.

It will be appreciated by a person skilled in the art that other variations and/or modifications may be made to the specific embodiments without departing from the spirit or

scope of the invention as broadly described. The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects to be illustrative and not restrictive.

For example, although dimming/brightening of displays or providing light sources have been described as exemplary ways to emphasise play areas, the example embodiments are not limited as such and can include e.g. ways to make the areas outside the play areas opaque, or simply to indicate boundaries to set out the play areas (e.g. without dimming of displays) etc. The emphasising can also include flashing boundaries or the like. For example, if the entire game area is selected as the play area, the selected play area may have a flashing display. Alternatively, the selected play area may be made substantially brighter in display to emphasise to the player that the entire game area is the selected play area.

Furthermore, although it is described that the game area is populated with game elements before determining whether any win is to be awarded based on the play area, the example embodiments are not limited as such and can include generation of game elements within the play area only e.g. the areas outside the play area are not populated.

In addition, while it has been described that the game module can comprise integrally, or alternatively is coupled to, a play module and a trigger module, the example embodiments are limited to these alternatives. The game module may comprise integrally one of the play module and the trigger module, and be coupled to the other module that is not integrated with the game module.

Further, the game is not limited to a reel game but can include e.g. any game of chance or game of skill that can provide the player with entertainment. The game can take different forms and graphical representations of games including, but not limited to, table games, card games, numbers games, sports games, medal games, redemption games, vending games, video games, music games, amusement games etc.. The winning combinations may also be governed by different game rules.

In addition, the prizes awarded are not limited to points and can include loyalty points, entertainment credits etc.

The gaming machines may be implemented as physical or virtual gaming machines, such as via the Internet, interactive TV, Local Area Network (LAN)-based or other service networks. The virtual gaming machines may be implemented on desk top devices or portable devices. For gaming machines implemented as physical gaming machines, although touch screen keys have been primarily described in the example embodiments, other actuators such as mechanical keys or pull/push handles may also be used to play the games contained in the gaming machine.

CLAIMS

1. A gaming machine, the gaming machine comprising,

a game module for operating a game area, the game module being capable of randomly generating in the game area one or more game elements from a plurality of predetermined game elements;

a play module for allowing selection of a play area in association with the game area;

a trigger module for monitoring the selected play area, the trigger module being capable of generating a trigger signal based on whether the selected play area contains randomly generated game elements that match at least one of a set of predetermined conditions; and

wherein the play module is configured to detect a boundary of the selected play area and to emphasise the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, against any unselected portions of the game area such that the selected play area becomes a focus area.

2. The gaming machine as claimed in claim 1, wherein the play module is further configured to emphasise the selected play area against any unselected portions of the game area both upon selection of the play area and during generation of the one or more game elements within the selected play area.

3. The gaming machine as claimed in claims 1 or 2, wherein the play area is within the game area or substantially encompasses the game area.

4. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the selected play area is emphasised by the play module instructing dimming a display of said any unselected portions of the game area; by the play module instructing brightening a display of the selected play area; or both.

5. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the selected play area is emphasised by the play module instructing a display of a visible boundary enclosing the selected play area based on the detected boundary.

6. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the selected play area is emphasised by the game module instructing a display of the selected play area at a separate display area external the game area.

7. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, further comprising a first selection module coupled to the play module, wherein the first selection module is configured to allow a player to select the play area.

8. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the play area is configured to be variable in dimensions.

9. The gaming machine as claimed in claim 8, wherein the play area is configured to be variable in dimensions based on a number of points exchanged by a player.

10. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein the play area comprises two or more discontinuous sub-areas.

11. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein the play area comprises two or more sub-areas fixed in dimensions.

12. The gaming machine as claimed in claim 11, wherein the sub-areas fixed in dimensions are allowed to overlap as the play area.

13. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein the trigger module is configured to detect a number of occurrences of each game element within the selected play area.

14. The gaming machine as claimed in claim 13, wherein the trigger module is further configured to detect a position of each randomly generated game element within the selected play area.

15. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 14, further comprising a second selection module coupled to the game module, wherein the second selection module is configured to allow a player to select at least one designated game

element whereby the trigger module is arranged to detect whether the selected play area contains the at least one designated game element.

16. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 15, wherein the predetermined game elements comprise a neutral element, the neutral element being capable of representing at least one randomly generated game element.

17. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 16, wherein the game area comprises one or more columns, one or more rows, or both, for display of the game elements.

18. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 17, wherein the game area comprises a plurality of reel windows, further wherein each reel window is arranged to display a game element.

19. The gaming machine as claimed in claim 18, wherein the game area comprises a non-ordered array of reel windows.

20. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 19, further comprising a storage module for storing a database of the set of predetermined conditions.

21. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 20, wherein the set of predetermined conditions comprises a condition based on a number of occurrences of a game element being randomly generated within the selected play area.

22. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 21, wherein the set of predetermined conditions comprises a condition based on whether one or more game elements are randomly generated to be adjacent one another within the selected play area.

23. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 22, wherein the set of predetermined conditions comprises a condition based on whether one or more game elements are randomly generated to be in a visible pattern within the selected play area.

24. The gaming machine as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 23, wherein the game module comprises integrally one or both of the play module and the trigger module.

25. A method of generating a focus area, the method comprising,

operating a game area;

selecting a play area in association with the game area;

detecting a boundary of the selected play area; and

emphasising the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, against any unselected portions of the game area such that the selected play area becomes the focus area.

26. The method as claimed in claim 25, wherein the step of emphasising the selected play area is performed both upon selection of the play area and during generation of one or more game elements within the selected play area.

27. The method as claimed in claims 25 or 26, wherein the play area is within the game area or substantially encompasses the game area.

28. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 27, wherein the step of emphasising the selected play area comprises dimming a display of said any unselected portions of the game area; brightening a display of the selected play area; or both.

29. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 28, wherein the step of emphasising the selected play area comprises instructing a display of a visible boundary enclosing the selected play area.

30. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 27, wherein the step of emphasising the selected play area comprises instructing a display of the selected play area at a separate display area external the game area.

31. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 30, further comprising allowing a player to select the play area.

32. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 31, wherein the play area is variable in dimensions.

33. The method as claimed in claim 32, wherein the play area is variable in dimensions based on a number of points exchanged by a player.

34. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 33, wherein the play area comprises two or more discontinuous sub-areas.

35. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 33, wherein the play area comprises two or more sub-areas fixed in dimensions.

36. The method as claimed in claim 35, wherein the sub-areas fixed in dimensions overlap as the play area.

37. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 36, further comprising randomly generating in the play area the one or more game elements from a plurality of predetermined game elements; and

generating a trigger signal based on whether the selected play area contains randomly generated game elements that match at least one of a set of predetermined conditions.

38. The method as claimed in claim 37, further comprising detecting a number of occurrences of each game element within the selected play area.

39. The method as claimed in claim 38, further comprising detecting a position of each randomly generated game element within the selected play area.

40. The method as claimed in any one of claims 37 to 39, further comprising allowing a player to select at least one designated game element; and the step of generating a trigger signal further comprises detecting whether the selected play area contains the at least one designated game element.

41. The method as claimed in any one of claims 37 to 40, wherein the predetermined game elements comprise a neutral element, the neutral element being capable of representing at least one randomly generated game element.

42. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 41, further comprising providing the game area comprising one or more columns, one or more rows, or both, for display of game elements.

43. The method as claimed in any one of claims 25 to 42, further comprising providing the game area comprising a plurality of reel windows, further wherein each reel window is arranged to display a game element.

44. The method as claimed in claim 43, wherein the game area comprises a non-ordered array of reel windows.

45. The method as claimed in any one of claims 37 to 44, further comprising storing a database of the set of predetermined conditions.

46. The method as claimed in any one of claims 37 to 45, wherein the set of predetermined conditions comprises a condition based on a number of occurrences of a game element randomly generated within the selected play area.

47. The method as claimed in any one of claims 37 to 46, wherein the set of predetermined conditions comprises a condition based on whether one or more game elements are randomly generated to be adjacent one another within the selected play area.

48. The method as claimed in any one of claims 37 to 47, wherein the set of predetermined conditions comprises a condition based on whether one or more game elements are randomly generated to be in a visible pattern within the selected play area.

49. A computer readable medium having stored thereon instructions for instructing a processor of a gaming machine to execute a method of generating a focus area, the method comprising,

operating a game area;

selecting a play area in association with the game area;

detecting a boundary of the selected play area; and

emphasising the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, against any unselected portions of the game area such that the selected play area becomes the focus area.

50. The computer readable medium as claimed in claim 49, wherein the step of emphasising the selected play area is performed both upon selection of the play area and during generation of the one or more game elements.

51. The computer readable medium as claimed in claims 49 or 50, the method further comprising randomly generating in the play area one or more game elements from a plurality of predetermined game elements; and generating a trigger signal based on whether the selected play area contains randomly generated game elements that match at least one of a set of predetermined conditions.

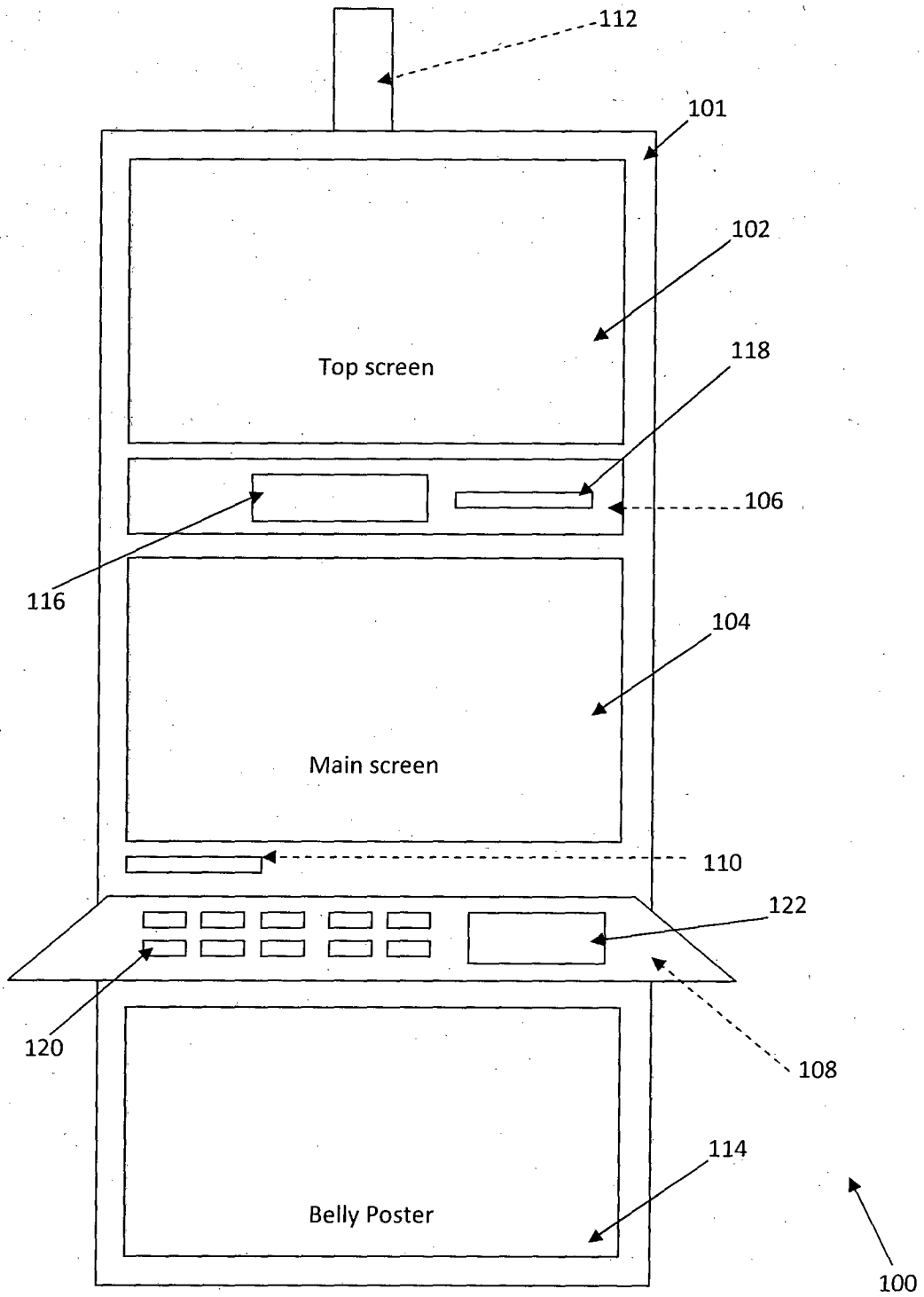

112
101
102
Top screen
118
106
116
104
Main screen
110
122
120
108
114
Belly Poster
100

Figure 1

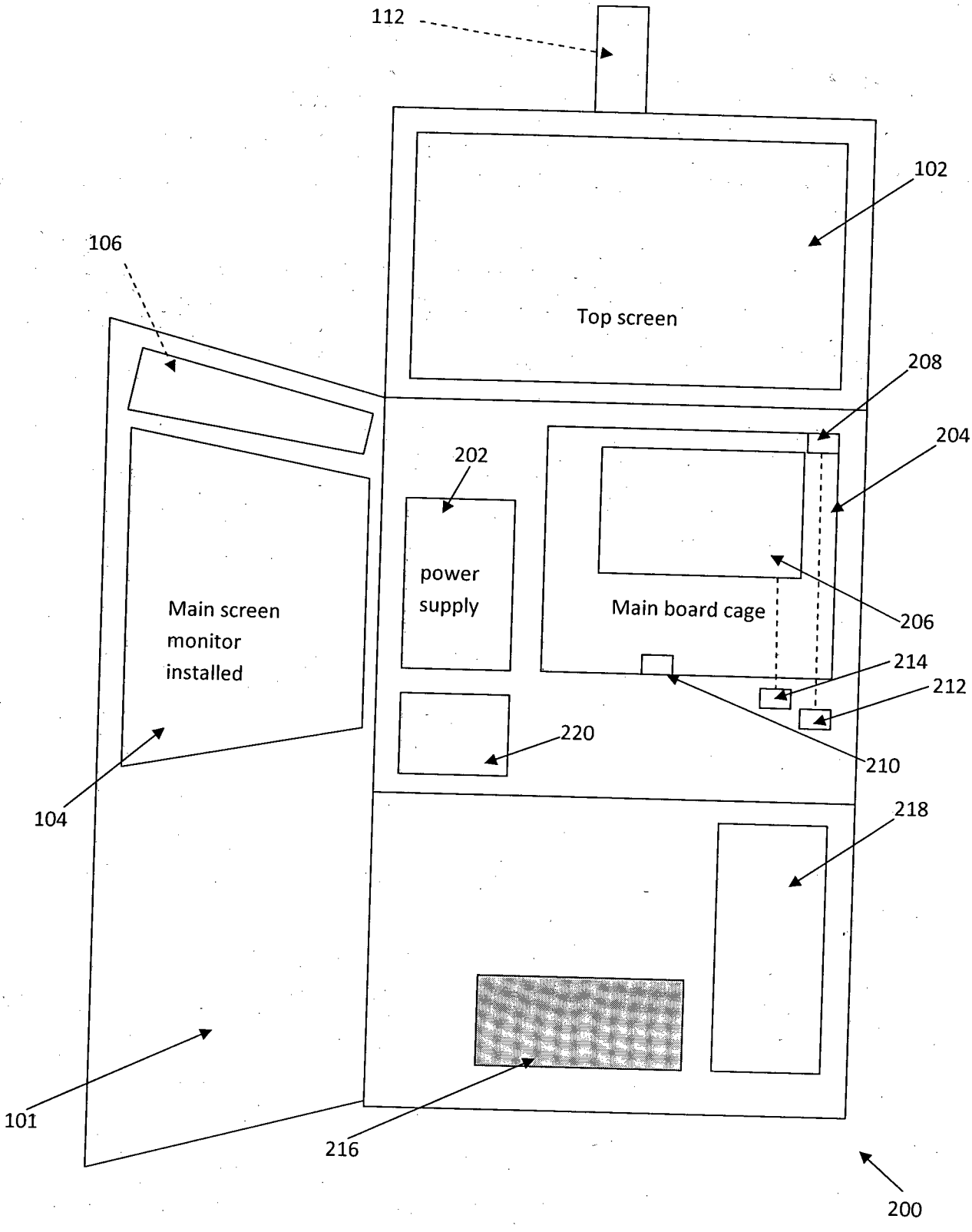

112
102
Top screen
106
208
204
202
power
supply
Main board cage
206
214
212
220
210
Main screen
monitor
installed
104
218
101
216
200

Figure 2

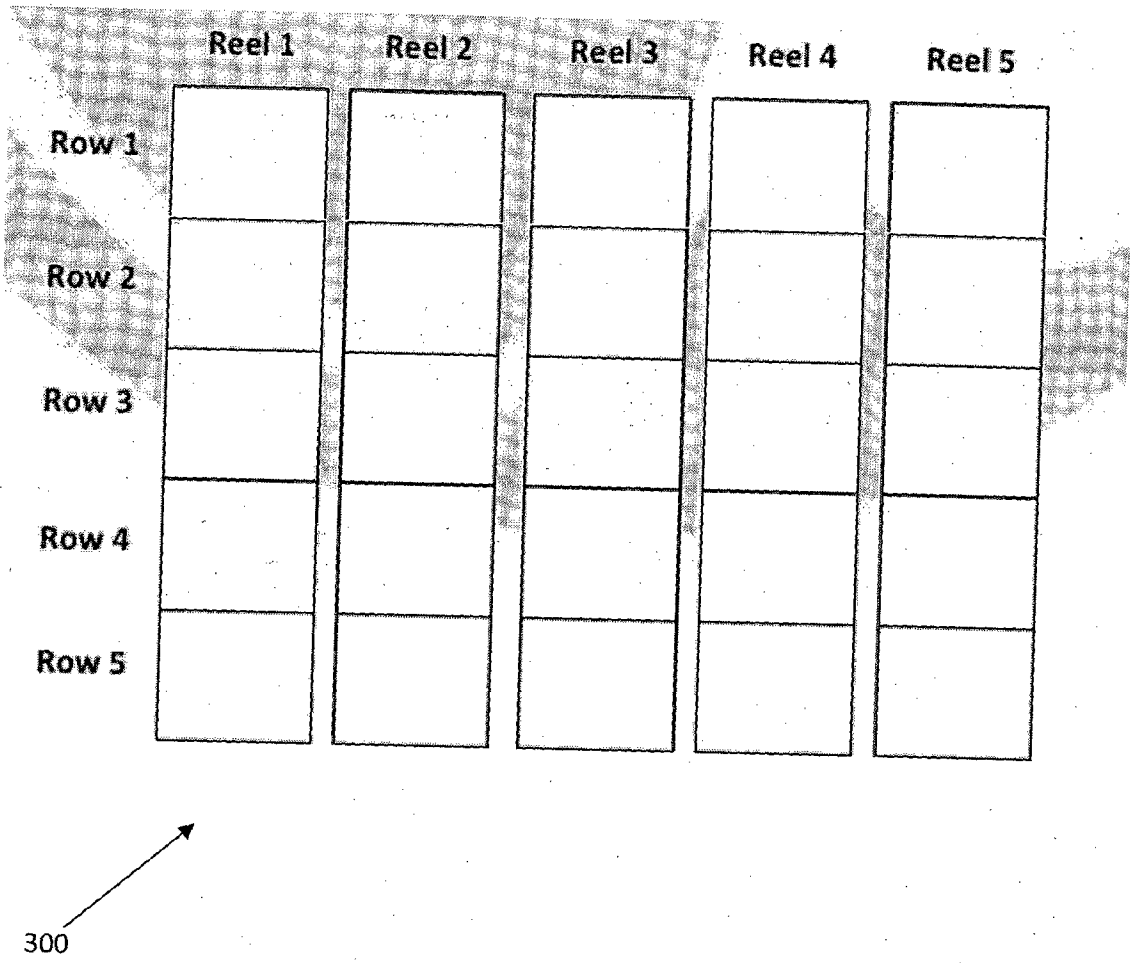


Figure 3

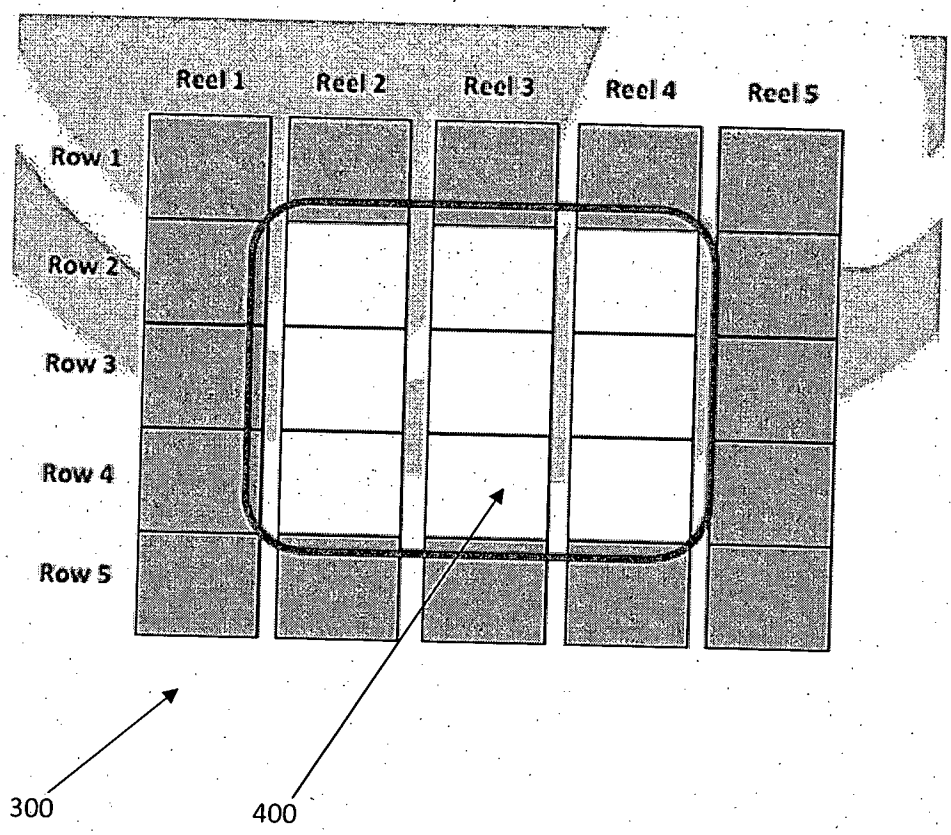

Reel 1
Reel 2
Reel 3
Reel 4
Reel 5
Row 1
Row 2
Row 3
Row 4
Row 5
300
400

Figure 4

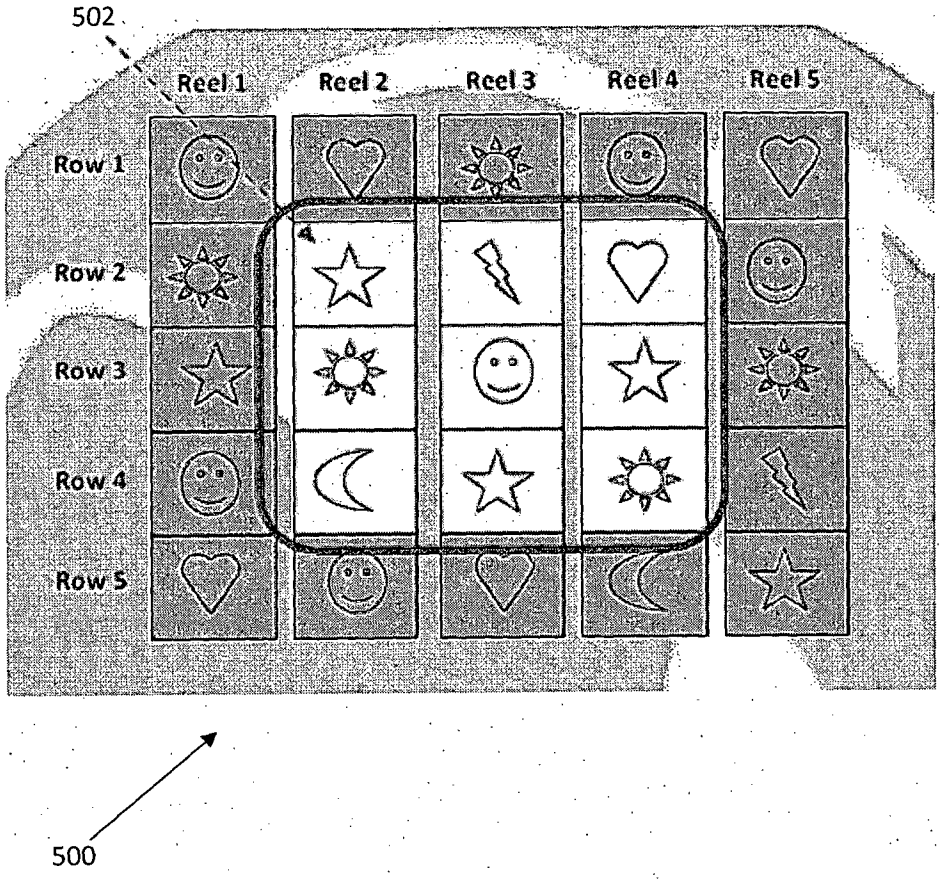

502
Reel 1
Reel 2
Reel 3
Reel 4
Reel 5
Row 1
Row 2
Row 3
Row 4
Row 5
500

Figure 5

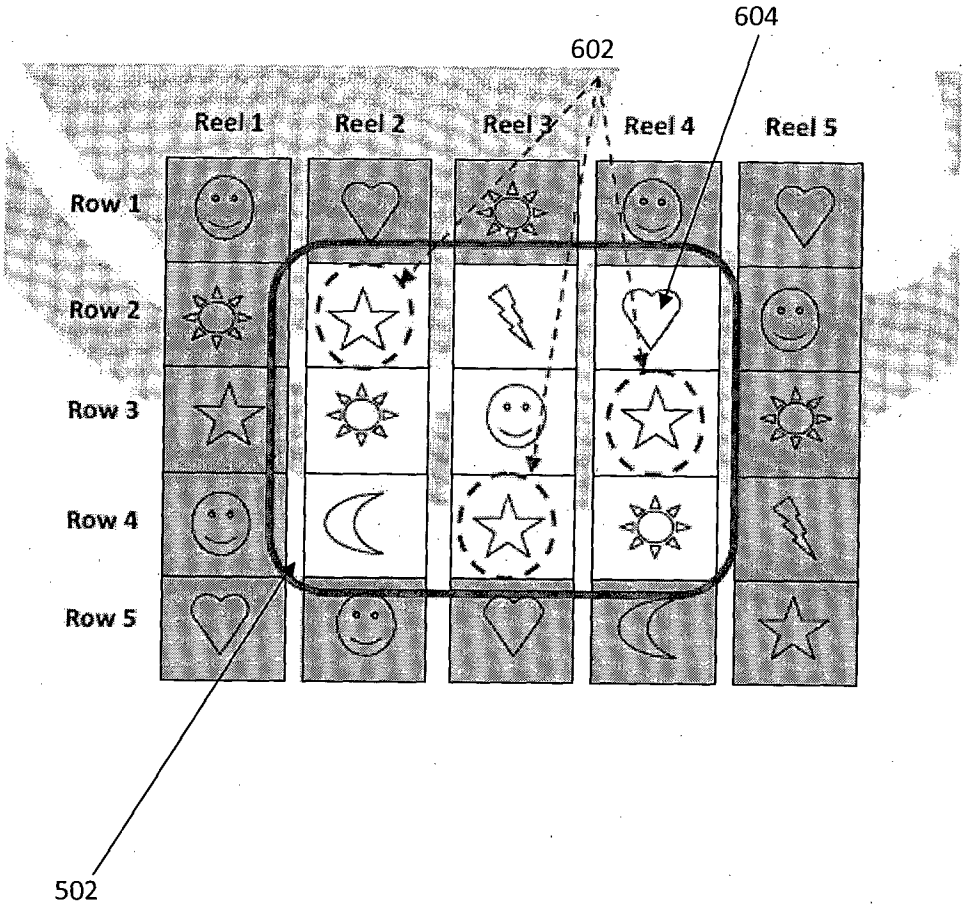

604
602
Reel 1
Reel 2
Reel 3
Reel 4
Reel 5
Row 1
Row 2
Row 3
Row 4
Row 5
502

Figure 6

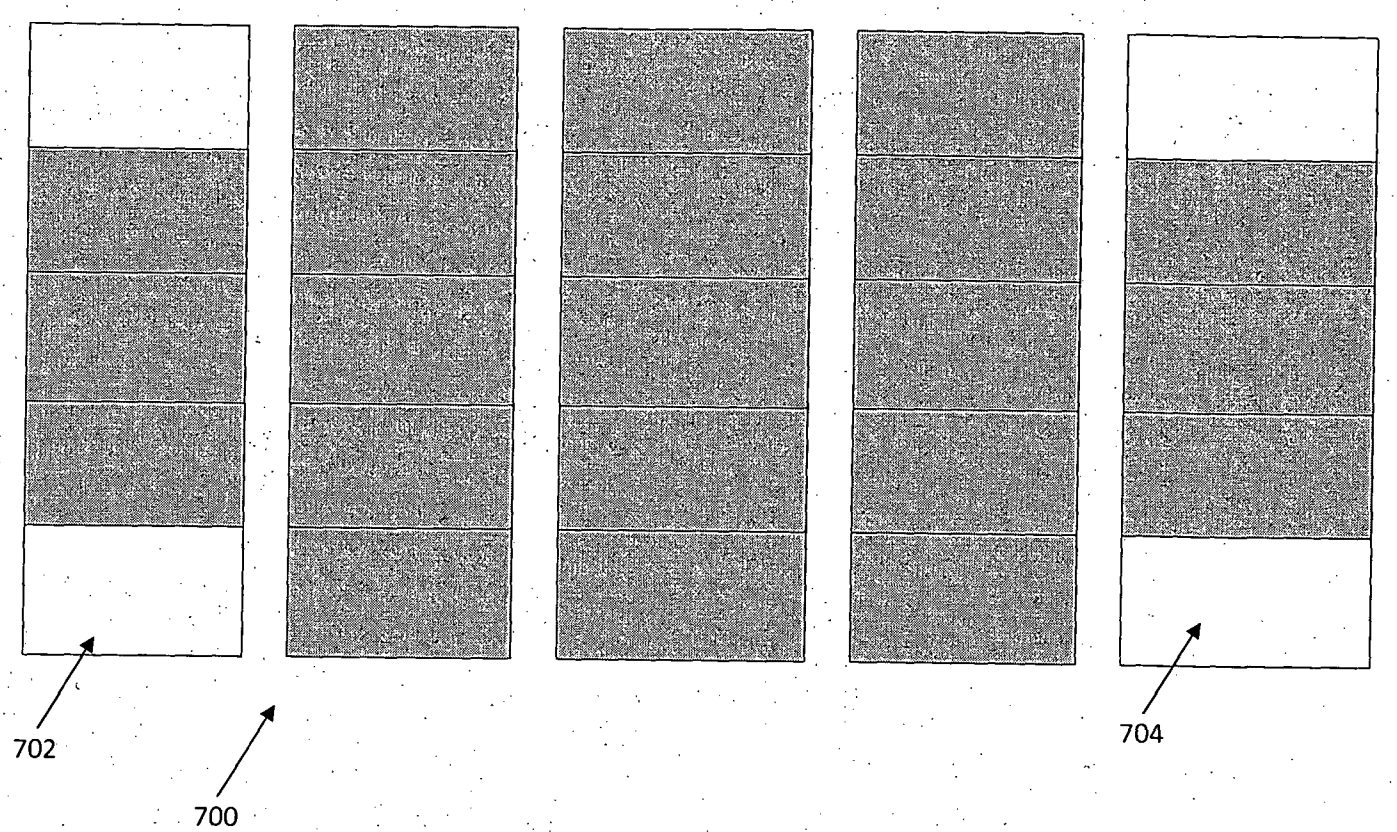
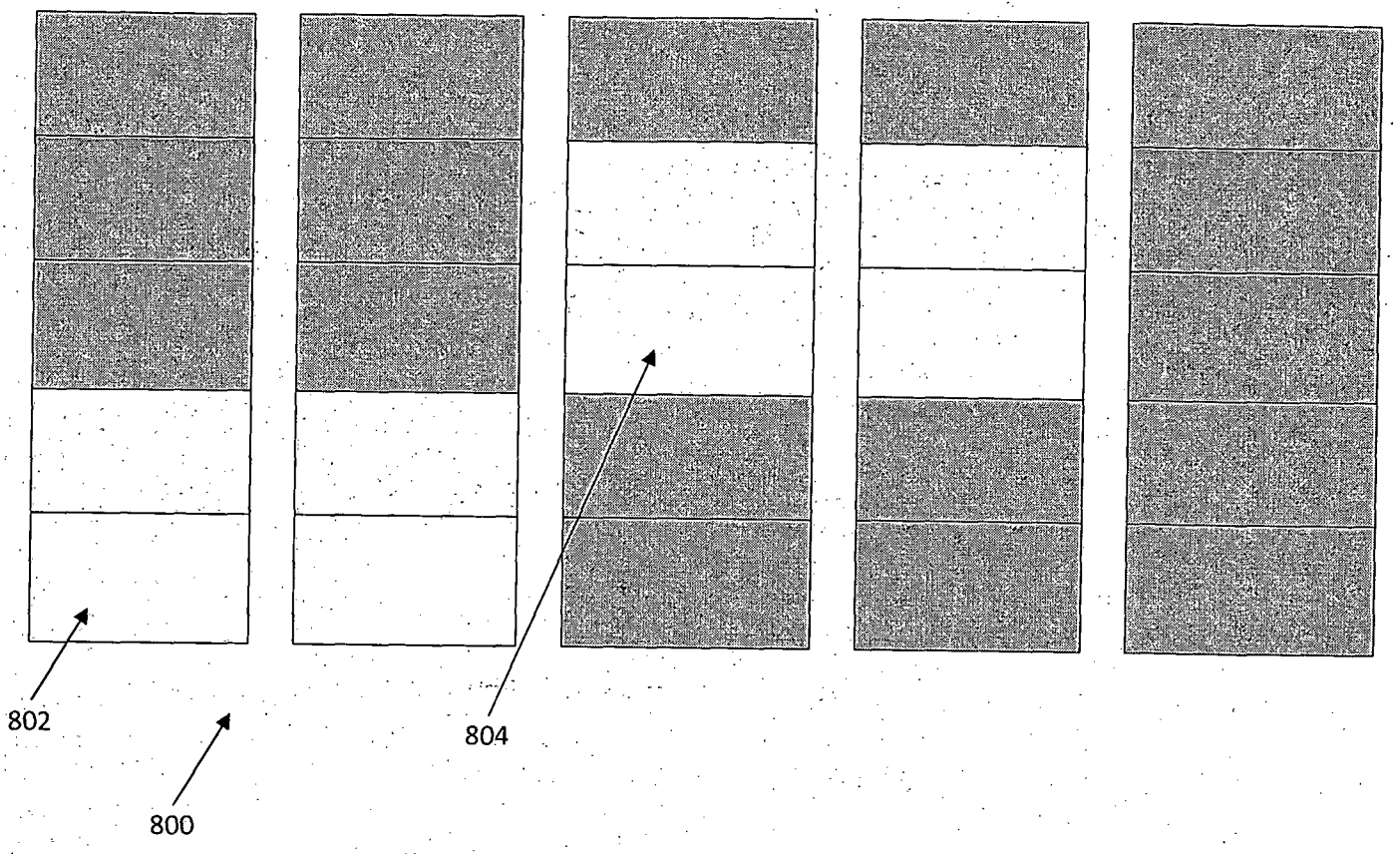
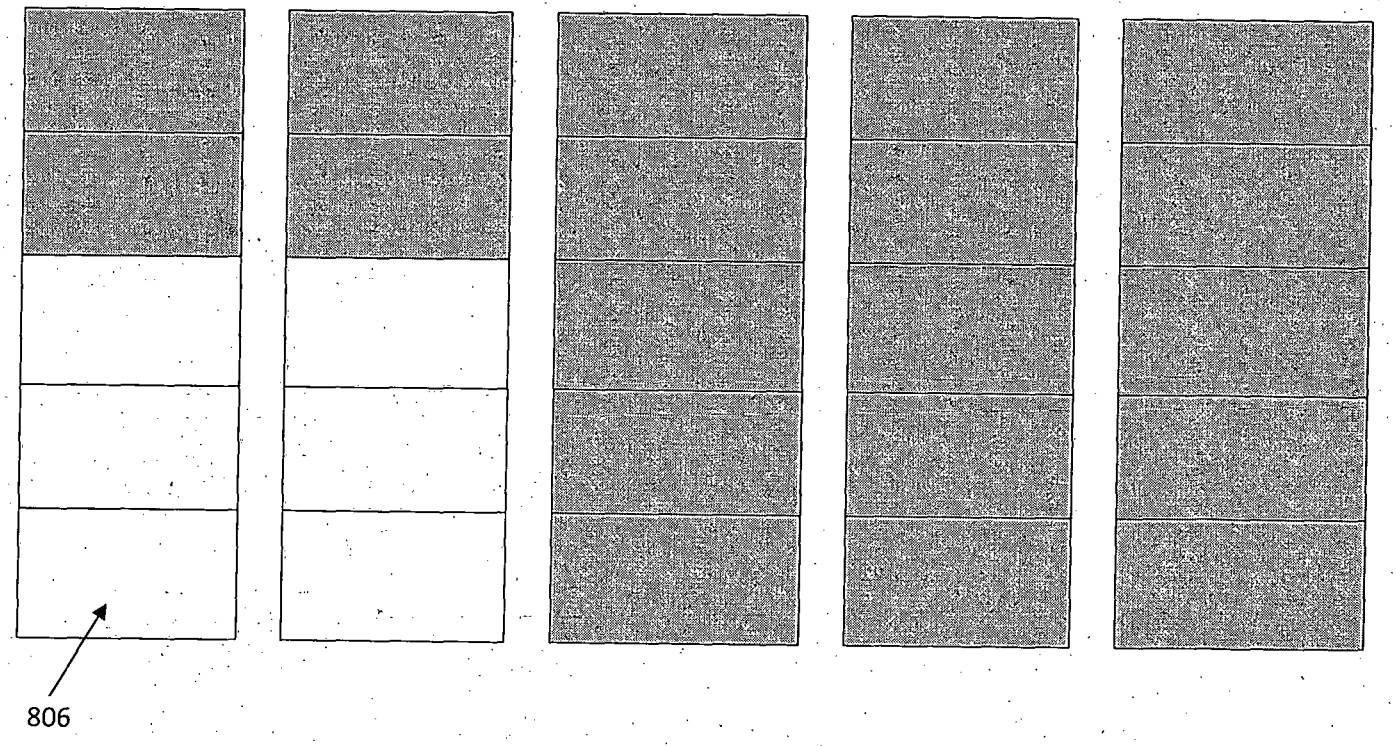


Figure 7



(a)



(b)

Figure 8

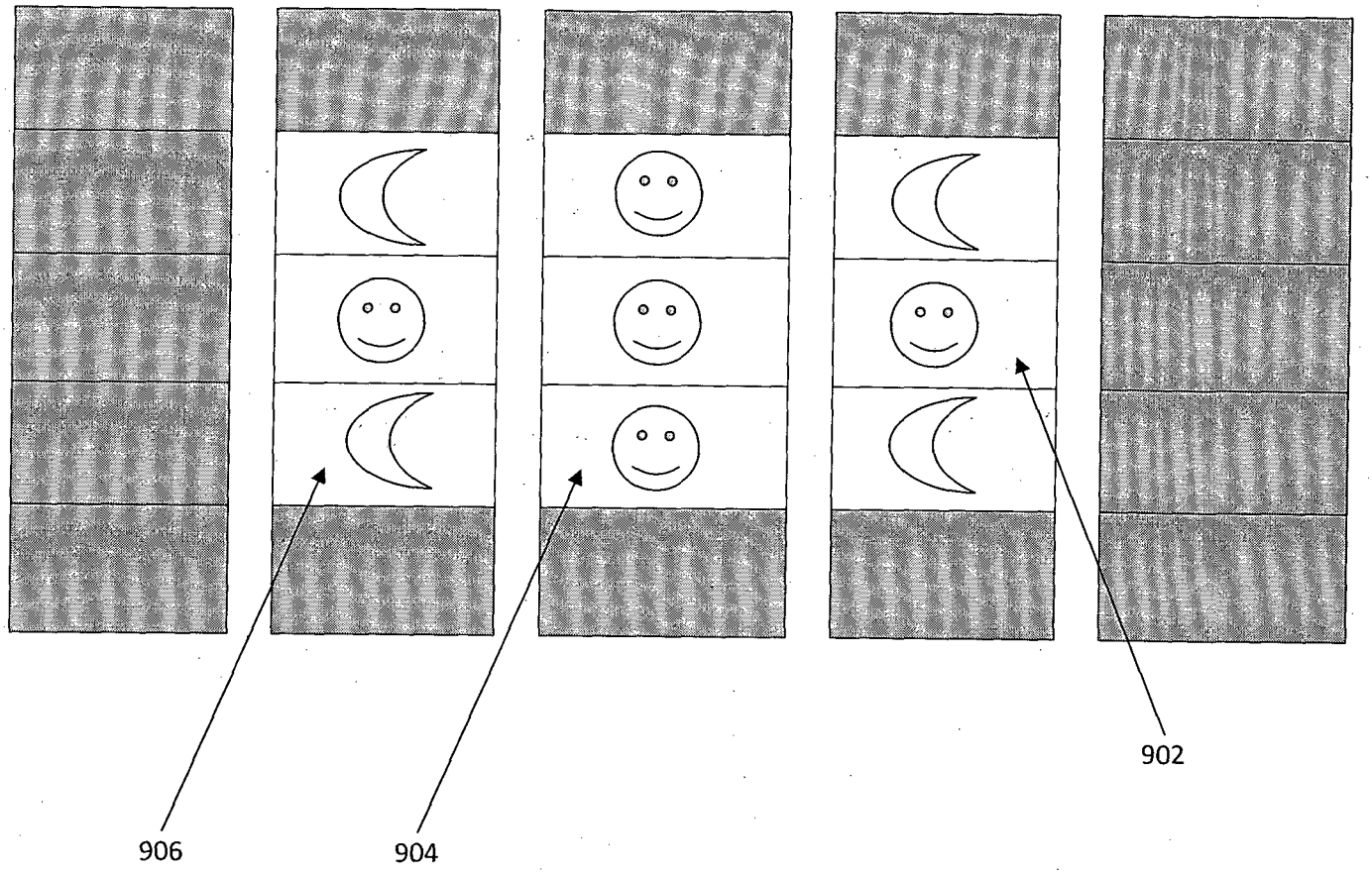
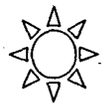


Figure 9

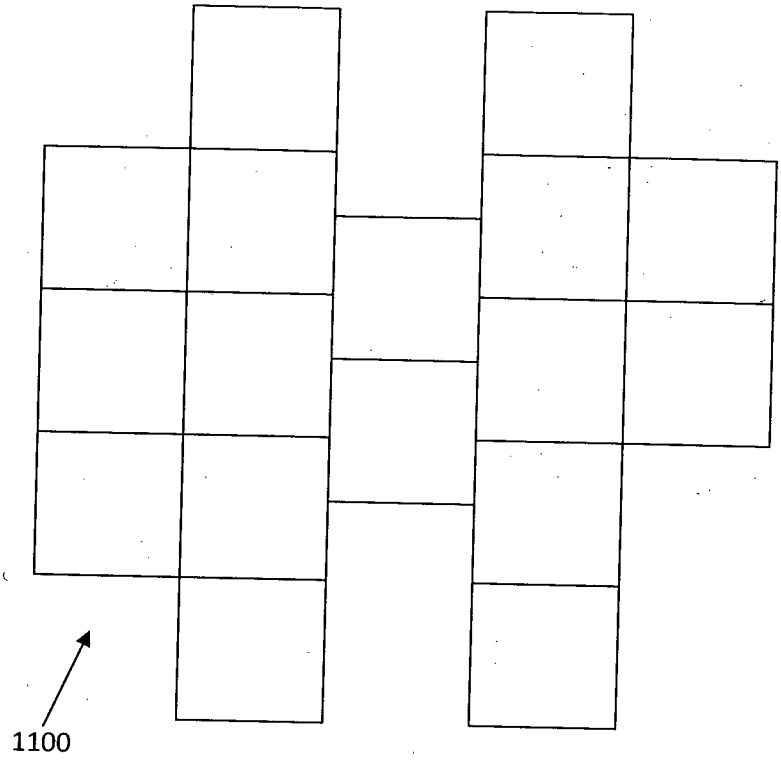
Symbol	Occurrence (1)	Type of Win	Occurrence (2)	Type of Win
	2X	Major	1X	Major
	3X	Major	2X	Minor
	4X	Minor	3X	Minor
	5X	Minor	4X	Nil

1002

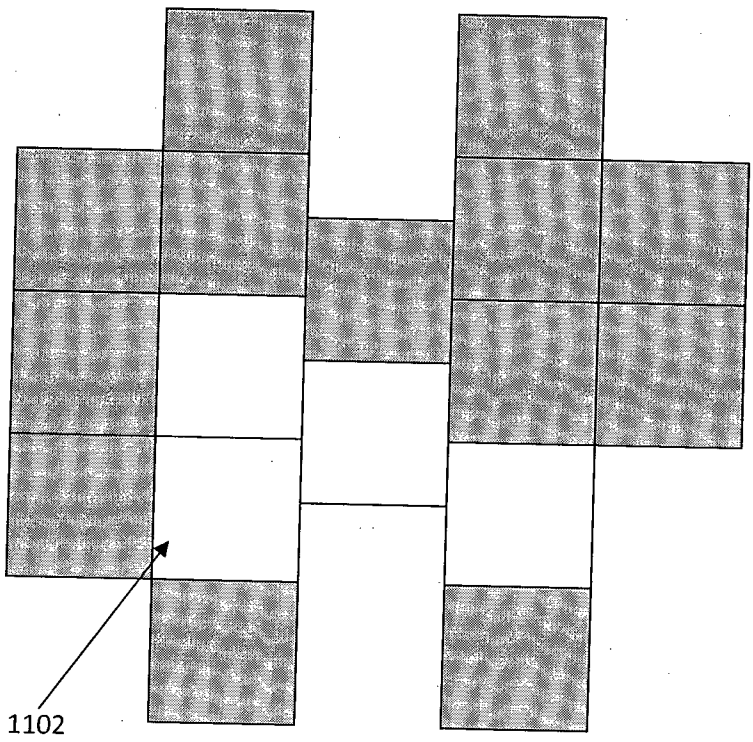
1004

1000

Figure 10



(a)



(b)

Figure 11

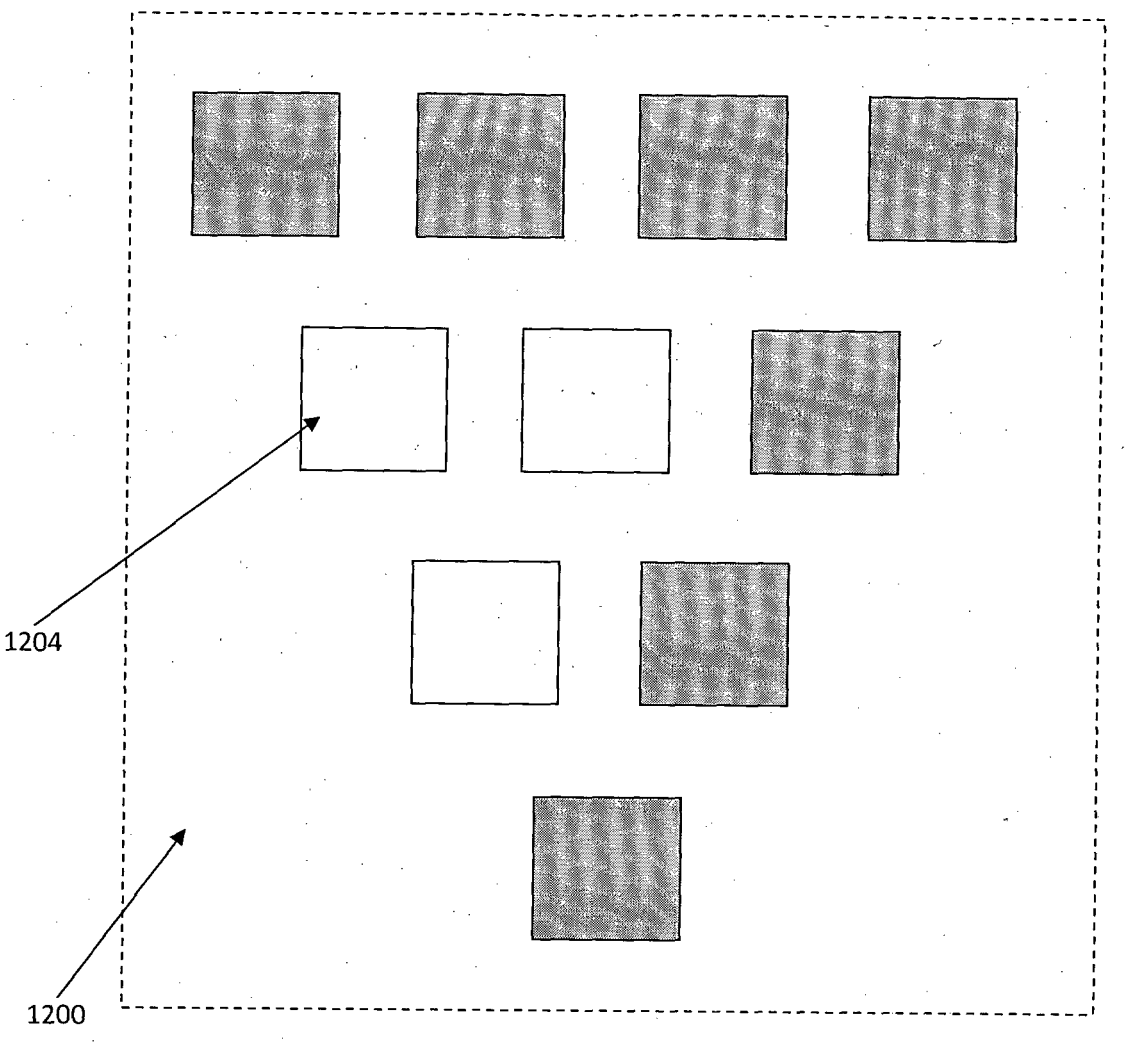


Figure 12

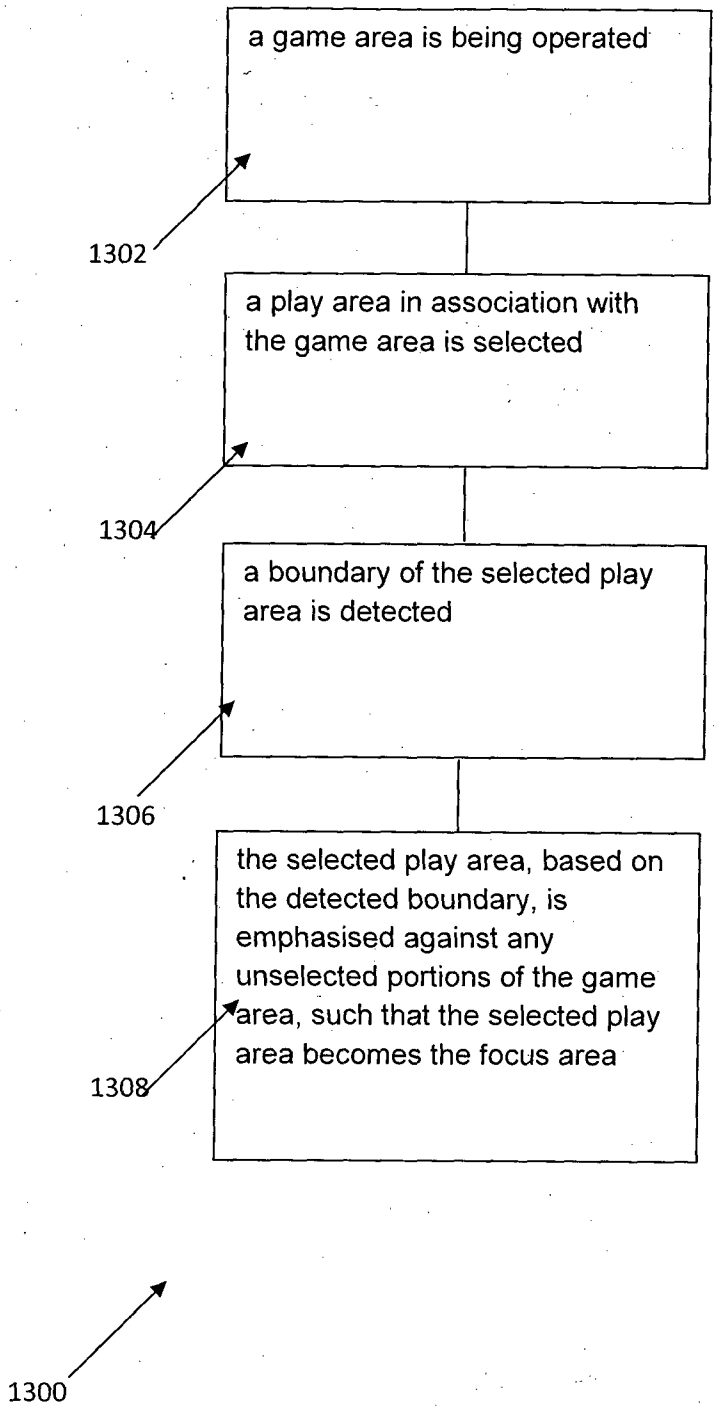

a game area is being operated
1302
a play area in association with the game area is selected
1304
a boundary of the selected play area is detected
1306
the selected play area, based on the detected boundary, is emphasised against any unselected portions of the game area, such that the selected play area becomes the focus area
1308
1300

Figure 13

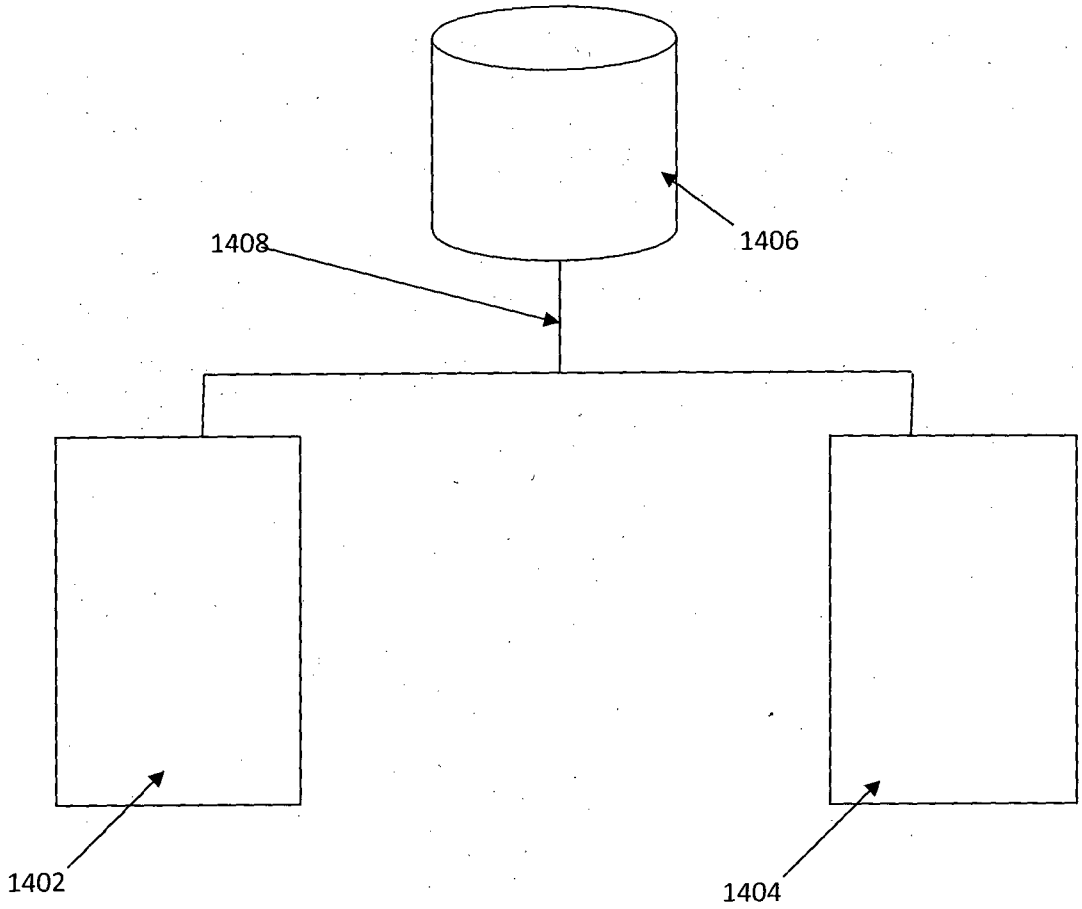


Figure 14

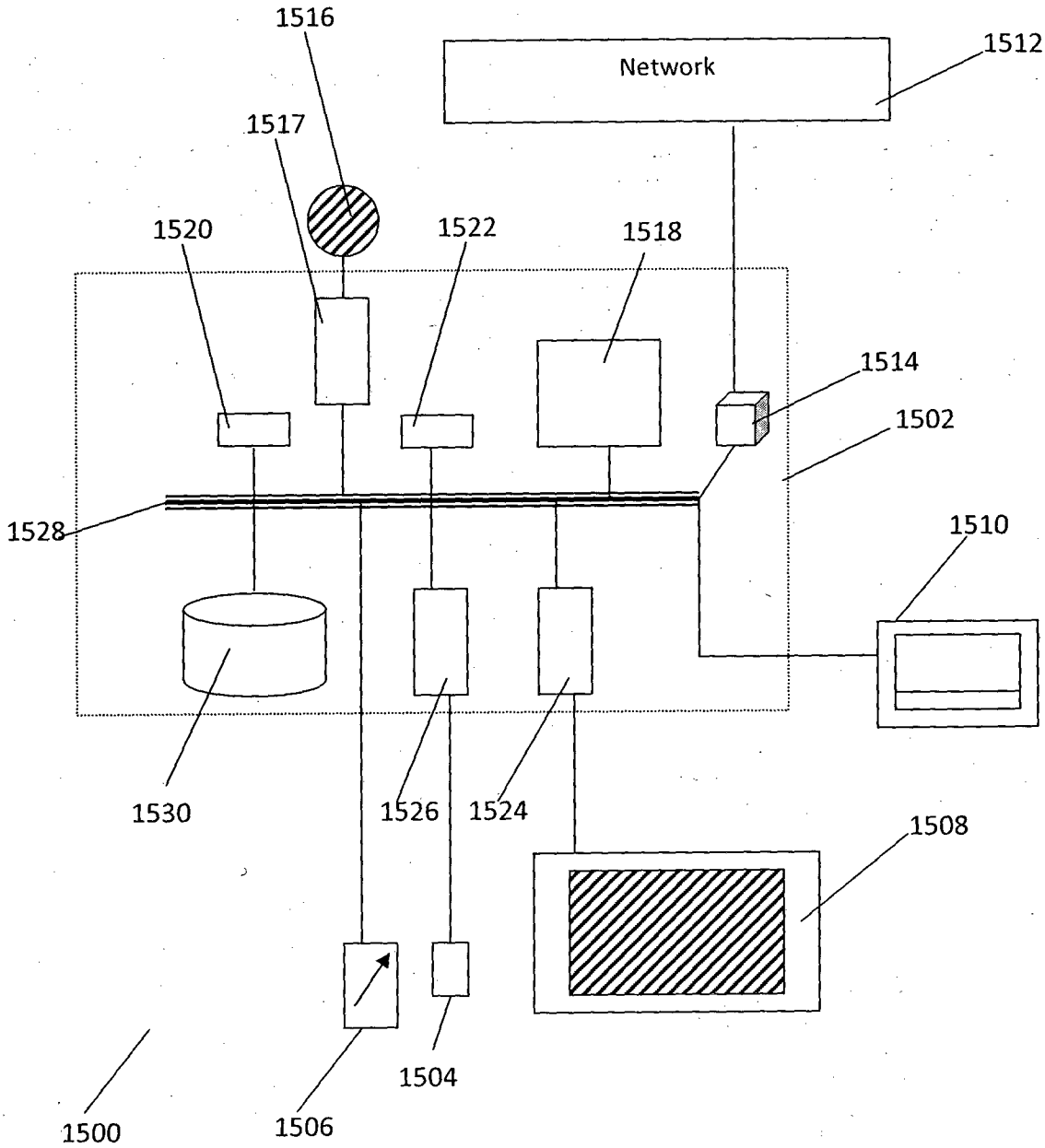

1516
Network
1512
1517
1520
1522
1518
1514
1502
1528
1510
1530
1526
1524
1508
1504
1506
1500

Figure 15

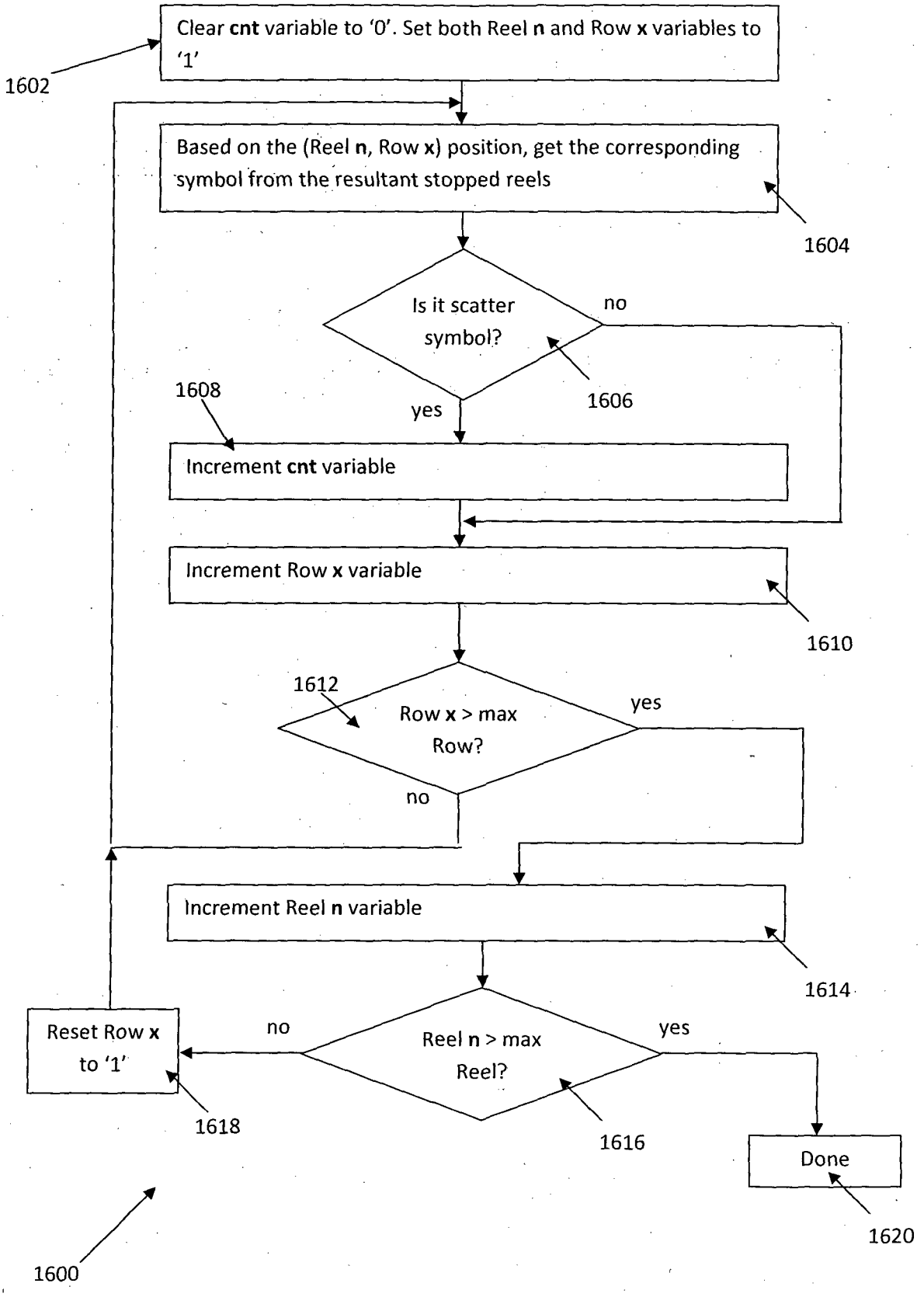

Clear cnt variable to '0'. Set both Reel n and Row x variables to '1'
1602
Based on the (Reel n, Row x) position, get the corresponding symbol from the resultant stopped reels
1604
Is it scatter symbol?
no
1606
1608
yes
Increment cnt variable
Increment Row x variable
1610
1612
Row x > max Row?
yes
no
Increment Reel n variable
1614
Reset Row x to '1'
no
Reel n > max Reel?
yes
1618
1616
Done
1620
1600

Figure 16

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/SG2014/000037

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

A63F 13/00 (2014.01)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EPODOC, WPI, Google Patents, Free Patents Online & Keywords [game, gaming, wager, screen, area, region, environment, space, spacing, vicinity, region, sector, section, realm, sphere, boundary, border, dimension, perimeter, trigger, activate, initiate, precipitate, set off, random, arbitrary, unplanned, unpredictable, select, chosen, choose, highlight, Weike Pte Ltd, Poh, Po Lian] and similar terms with various combinations.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
	Documents are listed in the continuation of Box C	

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C

[X] See patent family annex

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
6 May 2014	06 May 2014
Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU	**Authorised officer**
AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA Email address: pct@ipaustralia.gov.au Facsimile No.: +61 2 6283 7999	Xavier Simon AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE (ISO 9001 Quality Certified Service) Telephone No. 0399359637

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT		International application No.
C (Continuation).	DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT	**PCT/SG2014/000037**

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2008/0204476 A1 (MONTAGUE) 28 August 2008 [abstract, para 0003, para 0005, para 0007, para 0008, para 0009, para 0033, para 0034, para 0036, para 0039, para 0040, para 0041, para 0042, para 0043, para 0044, para 0048, para 0049, para 0052, para 0053, para 0054, para 0071, para 0083, para 0090, para 0096, para 0101, para 0115, para 0121, para 0130 para 0131, para 0136, para 0137, claim 1, claim 4, claim 12]	1 - 51
X	US 2010/0273556 A1 (BRIGGS et al.) 28 October 2010 [abstract, para 0007, para 0008, para 0014, para 0020, para 0022, para 0023, para 0024, para 0026, para 0033, para 0043, para 0058, para 0060, para 0104, para 0105, para 0106, para 0150, para 0152, para 0163, para 0176, para 0179, para 0187, para 0188, para 0191, para 0193, para 0194, para 0217, para 0219, para 0221, para 0222, para 0224, para 0229, para 0234, fig 7]	1 - 51

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT Information on patent family members	International application No. **PCT/SG2014/000037**

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

Patent Document/s Cited in Search Report		Patent Family Member/s	
Publication Number	**Publication Date**	**Publication Number**	**Publication Date**
US 2008/0204476 A1	28 Aug 2008	US 8274534 B2	25 Sep 2012
		US 2005168488 A1	04 Aug 2005
		US 7366995 B2	29 Apr 2008
		US 2013019200 A1	17 Jan 2013
US 2010/0273556 A1	28 Oct 2010	US 8342929 B2	01 Jan 2013
		AU 4221900 A	14 Nov 2000
		CA 2367514 A1	19 Oct 2000
		WO 0061251 A1	19 Oct 2000
		US 2006287030 A1	21 Dec 2006
		US 6634949 B1	21 Oct 2003
		US 7749089 B1	06 Jul 2010
		US 2013116048 A1	09 May 2013
		US 2013217453 A1	22 Aug 2013

End of Annex

Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.