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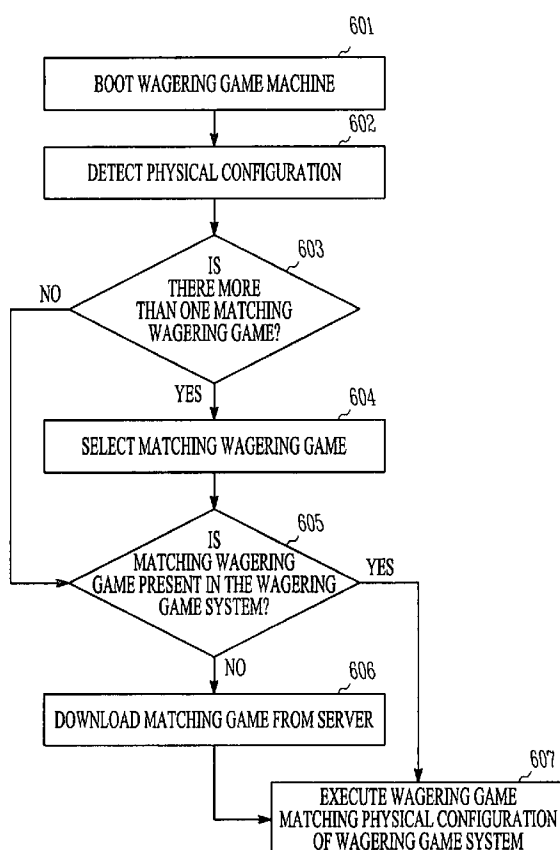
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(54) Title: GAME-SPECIFIC COMPONENT ENABLEMENT IN A WAGERING GAME SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: A computerized wagering game system includes a gaming module comprising a processor and gaming code which is operable when executed on the processor to present a wagering game on which monetary value can be wagered, and a physical configuration monitor module operable to enable execution of one or more wagering games associated with a game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine and to detect the game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine.

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GAME-SPECIFIC COMPONENT ENABLEMENT IN A WAGERING GAME SYSTEM

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Related Application

This patent application claims the priority benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/829,034 filed October 11, 2006 and entitled “GAME-SPECIFIC COMPONENT ENABLEMENT IN A WAGERING
10 GAME SYSTEM”, which application is incorporated herein by reference.

Field of the Invention

The invention relates generally to computerized wagering game machines, and more specifically to game-specific component enablement of
15 games in a wagering game system.

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Background

Computerized wagering games have largely replaced traditional mechanical wagering game machines such as slot machines, and are rapidly being adopted to implement computerized versions of games that are traditionally played live such as poker and blackjack. These computerized
30 games provide many benefits to the game owner and to the gambler, including greater reliability than can be achieved with a mechanical game or human dealer, more variety, sound, and animation in presentation of a game, and a lower overall cost of production and management.

The elements of computerized wagering game systems are in many ways

the same as the elements in the mechanical and table game counterparts in that they must be fair, they must provide sufficient feedback to the game player to make the game fun to play, and they must meet a variety of gaming regulations to ensure that both the machine owner and gamer are honest and fairly treated in
5 implementing the game. Further, they must provide a gaming experience that is at least as attractive as the older mechanical gaming machine experience to the gamer, to ensure success in a competitive gaming market.

Computerized wagering games do not rely on the dealer or other game players to facilitate game play and to provide an entertaining game playing
10 environment, but rely upon the presentation of the game and environment generated by the wagering game machine itself. Incorporation of audio and video features into wagering games to present the wagering game, to provide help, and to enhance the environment presented are therefore important elements in the attractiveness and commercial success of a computerized wagering game
15 system. It is not uncommon for audio voices to provide instruction and help, and to provide commentary on the wagering game being played. Music and environmental effects are also played through speakers in some wagering game systems to enhance or complement a theme of the wagering game. These sounds typically accompany video presentation of the wagering game on a screen,
20 which itself often includes animation, video, and three-dimensional graphics as part of presentation of the wagering game.

A variety of wagering games can typically be built using the same enclosure or "chassis", with various elements such as mechanical reel symbols, button configuration, and artwork modified to fit a particular wagering game.
25 The wagering game specific to that artwork and chassis configuration is then loaded into the computerized system, and is available for play. But, given the variety of artwork and game-specific features available, and the increasing prevalence of downloadable wagering game software, ensuring that a wagering game loaded into a wagering game system is consistent with or appropriate for
30 the artwork or chassis configuration of a wagering game system is not trivial.

Summary

One example embodiment of the invention comprises a computerized wagering game system including a gaming module comprising a processor and

gaming code which is operable when executed on the processor to present a wagering game on which monetary value can be wagered, and a physical configuration monitor module operable to detect a game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine, and to enable execution of one or more wagering games associated with the game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine. The physical configuration comprises in some embodiments mechanical or electrical identifiers comprising a part of at least one physical configuration element of the wagering game machine.

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Brief Description of the Figures

Figure 1 shows a computerized wagering game machine, as may be used to practice some example embodiments of the invention.

Figure 2 is a block diagram of a computerized wagering game machine, consistent with some example embodiments of the invention.

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Figure 3 is a block diagram of a wagering game system network, consistent with an example embodiment of the invention.

Figure 4 shows a wagering game system mechanical reel assembly comprising an identifier, consistent with an example embodiment of the invention.

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Figure 5 shows a wagering game system game art glass plate comprising an identifier, consistent with an example embodiment of the invention.

Figure 6 comprises a flowchart of a method of practicing an example embodiment of the invention.

Figure 7 shows a wagering game system with a top box assembly including a hierarchy of identifiable components, consistent with an example embodiment of the invention.

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Detailed Description

In the following detailed description of example embodiments of the invention, reference is made to specific examples by way of drawings and illustrations. These examples are described in sufficient detail to enable those skilled in the art to practice the invention, and serve to illustrate how the invention may be applied to various purposes or embodiments. Other embodiments of the invention exist and are within the scope of the invention,

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and logical, mechanical, electrical, and other changes may be made without departing from the scope or extent of the present invention. Features or limitations of various embodiments of the invention described herein, however essential to the example embodiments in which they are incorporated, do not
5 limit the invention as a whole, and any reference to the invention, its elements, operation, and application do not limit the invention as a whole but serve only to define these example embodiments. The following detailed description does not, therefore, limit the scope of the invention, which is defined only by the appended claims.

10 One example embodiment of the invention provides enhanced graphics rendering presentation capability via a computerized wagering game system including a gaming module comprising a processor and gaming code which is operable when executed on the processor to present a wagering game on which monetary value can be wagered, and a physical configuration monitor module
15 operable to enable execution of one or more wagering games associated with a game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine and to detect the game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine.

Figure 1 illustrates a computerized wagering game machine, as may be used to practice some embodiments of the present invention. The computerized
20 gaming system shown generally at 100 is a video wagering game system, which displays information for at least one wagering game upon which monetary value can be wagered on video display 101. Video display 101 is in various embodiments a CRT display, a plasma display, an LCD display, a surface conducting electron emitter display, or any other type of display suitable for
25 displaying electronically provided display information. In some further embodiments, additional displays such as a bonus game display or top box display 102 are further operable to display electronically provided information to a wagering game player. Alternate embodiments of the invention will have other game indicators, such as mechanical reels instead of the video graphics reels
30 shown at 103 that comprise a part of a video slot machine wagering game.

A wagering game is implemented using software within the wagering game machine, such as through instructions stored on a machine-readable medium such as a hard disk drive or nonvolatile memory. In some further example embodiments, some or all of the software stored in the wagering game

machine is encrypted or is verified using a hash algorithm or encryption algorithm to ensure its authenticity and to verify that it has not been altered. For example, in one embodiment the wagering game software is loaded from nonvolatile memory in a compact flash card, and a hash value is calculated or a digital signature is derived to confirm that the data stored on the compact flash card has not been altered. The game of chance implemented via the loaded software takes various forms in different wagering game machines, including such well-known wagering games as reel slots, video poker, blackjack, craps, roulette, or hold 'em games. In some further embodiments, a secondary game or bonus game is displayed on the secondary display 102, or other information such as progressive slot information or other community game information is displayed.

The wagering game is played and controlled with inputs such as various buttons 104 or via a touchscreen overlay to video screen 101. The touchscreen is used in some embodiments to display virtual buttons, which can have unique functions in some embodiments, or can duplicate the functions provided by the mechanical buttons 104 in other embodiments. In some alternate examples, other devices such as a pull arm used to initiate reel spin in this reel slot machine example are employed to provide other input interfaces to the game player. The player interface components are in this example contained within or mechanically coupled to the wagering game system, but in other embodiments will be located outside the wagering game system cabinet such as by a wired or wireless electronic connection to the wagering game system.

Monetary value is typically wagered on the outcome of the games, such as with tokens, coins, bills, or cards that hold monetary value. The wagered value is conveyed to the machine such as through a changer 106 or a secure user identification module interface 107, and winnings are returned such as via a returned value ticket, a stored value card, or through the coin tray 108. Sound is also provided through speakers 109, typically including audio indicators of game play, such as reel spins, credit bang-ups, and environmental or other sound effects or music to provide entertainment consistent with a theme of the computerized wagering game. In some further embodiments, the wagering game machine is coupled to a network, and is operable to use its network connection to

receive wagering game data, track players and monetary value associated with a player, and to perform other such functions.

In other embodiments, the computerized wagering game system takes one or more other forms, such as a mobile or portable wagering game device, a server-based wagering game device, or a networked wagering game system. These other computerized wagering game system embodiments need not contain all features of the wagering game system of Figure 1, which does not limit the scope of a computerized wagering game but is provided as an example only.

Figure 2 shows a block diagram of an example embodiment of a wagering game system. The wagering game system includes a processor 201, which is sometimes called a microprocessor, controller, or central processing unit (CPU). In some embodiments, more than one processor is present, or different types of processors are present in the wagering game system, such as using multiple processors to run gaming code, or using dedicated processors for audio, graphics, security, or other functions. The processor is coupled via a bus 202 to various other components, including memory 203 and nonvolatile storage 204. The nonvolatile storage is able to retain the data stored therein when power is removed, and in various embodiments takes the form of a hard disk drive, nonvolatile random access memory such as a compact flash card, or network-coupled storage. Further embodiments include additional data storage technologies, such as compact disc, DVD, or HD-DVD storage in the wagering game system.

The bus 202 also couples the processor and components to various other components, such as a value acceptor 205, which is in some embodiments a token acceptor, a card reader, or a biometric or wireless player identification reader. A touchscreen display 206 and speakers 207 serve to provide an interface between the wagering game system and a wagering game player, as do various other components such as buttons 208, pullarms, and joysticks. A network connection 209 couples the wagering game system to other wagering game machines and to a wagering game server, such as to provide downloadable games or to provide accounting, player tracking, or other functions. These components are located in a wagering game machine cabinet such as that of Figure 1 in some embodiments, but can be located in multiple enclosures comprising a wagering game system or outside a wagering game machine

cabinet in other embodiments, or in alternate forms such as a wireless or mobile device.

In operation, the wagering game system loads program code from nonvolatile storage 204 into memory 203, and the processor 201 executes the
5 program code to cause the wagering game system to perform desired functions such as to present a wagering game upon which monetary value can be wagered. This and other functions are provided by various modules in the computerized system such as an audio module, a game presentation module, or a touchscreen display module, where such modules comprise in some embodiments hardware,
10 software, mechanical elements, manual intervention, and various combinations thereof.

Figure 3 shows a wagering game network diagram, consistent with an example embodiment of the invention. In this example, a wagering game server 301 is coupled via a network 302 to two or more wagering game machines
15 303A-303n. The server is operable in various embodiments to perform functions such as providing downloadable games to the wagering game machines, conducting wagering games that are presented on the wagering game machines, performing accounting functions for games presented on the wagering game machines, coordinating community, multi-player, or progressive games played
20 on the wagering game machines, or to provide player tracking features for users of the wagering game machines. The wagering game machines are coupled to the server via a network, which is in various examples a wired network such as Ethernet, broadband, or InfiniBand; a wireless network such as a IEEE 802.11-compliant networks, cellular data networks, or other wireless networks; or other
25 types of networks such as a fiber optic network. The server 301 is in some embodiments a wagering game server having dedicated wagering game functionality, but is in other embodiments a standard computerized system configured to perform various wagering game server functions such as are described above.

30 In some embodiments, the wagering game server is operable to execute or conduct one or more different wagering game programs, and to receive input and present results on a networked wagering game machine such as 303 of Figure 3. In other embodiments, the wagering game systems 303 are operable to download a variety of different wagering games from the server, and to present

one or more of these games to a user. In this and in other examples, the wagering game system may store a variety of different wagering games within the wagering game system.

Unfortunately, some wagering games that are playable on a given
5 wagering game system 303 may not be appropriate for execution on each specific wagering game machine. For example, a fishing-themed wagering game may not be suitable for play on a wagering game cabinet having western-themed icons on its installed mechanical reel set, while a gold rush-themed game may be determined to be suitable for use with that particular reel set. Similarly,
10 the artwork installed on the wagering game machine, such as the commonly used glass panels illuminated from behind (known simply as “glass” in some parts of the industry), may be associated with a particular wagering game or group of wagering games, and may not be appropriate for use with other games. Controls such as buttons installed in a user interface console may further be appropriate
15 for some games, but not for others.

Figure 4 shows a mechanical reel slot assembly, and Figure 5 shows a piece of art glass for use in a wagering game machine, each including an identifier, consistent with example embodiments of the invention. In Figure 4, a reel slot machine assembly has a number of reel slots 401 attached to a frame
20 402 that is used to mount the reel assembly in a wagering game system. In other embodiments, the reel frame is a fixed part of the wagering game system, but the individual reel elements 401 are replaceable. Here, the reel assembly is further coupled to the wagering game system by an electrical connector 403, which is coupled to motor 404 and is used for purposes such as to control motors 404 to
25 spin, stop, and track position of the reels.

The reel slot assembly of this example has a wild west theme, and so features images of cowboy hats, rifles, law enforcement badges, and other thematic elements on the reels. These theme elements are consistent with at least one wild west-themed wagering game, such as in this example a game
30 called Wild West. Because the reels are game-specific, it is desired that the reels not be installed or used when games with other themes are played, such as during a fishing or car racing themed game. The reel assembly therefore includes at least one indicator, operable to identify the reel assembly to the wagering game system.

The indicator in this example comprises an electrical signal conveyed via the connector 403, such as a serial number or other identifier stored in circuitry or a simple pattern of interconnected wires designed to convey the identity of the reel assembly. In other embodiments, other features of the reel assembly, such as a barcode, a mechanical pattern formed in the reels or the reel frame, or other mechanical or electrical methods are used to store an identifier that is able to identify the reel assembly to the wagering game system. In a further example, each reel strip may be different from the next, and will contain an identifier distinguishing one reel strip from another, so that the proper order of reel strips in the reel strip assembly can be confirmed.

The wagering game system in some embodiments is therefore only operable to run or play wagering games matching the installed physical elements, such as by having the proper reel assembly for a particular game. In other embodiments, an alert or misconfiguration signal is generated, but the game remains functional. The indicator in another example indicates that the necessary physical components for the particular wagering game have been purchased, and that the game is therefore licensed for play.

Availability of various wagering games will vary depending on the type of wagering game system and network configuration. Some wagering game systems will have a single wagering game installed, such as via a flash memory device or hard disk drive storage, and simply be unable to execute the game without having the proper physical component or components with the proper indicators present. In other embodiments, a variety of wagering games are installed within the wagering game system, or a variety of wagering games are available via a network, and only those suitable for use with the installed physical component configuration will be available for play. Networked games in one example are downloaded over the network to the wagering game system, where they are available for play. The wagering game player selects the wagering game in some such systems, while the wagering game establishment controls the wagering game available for play on other systems. In other server-based examples, the wagering games are executed on the wagering game server, and are merely presented on the wagering game system.

Figure 5 shows a further example of a wagering game system physical element comprising an identifier, in which a piece of art glass showing a

particular theme comprises an identifier. In this example, the art glass 501 includes a visible area 502 that can be seen by a wagering game system player, when installed such as shown as the top panel of the wagering game shown in Figure 1. This example continues the wild west theme, showing both the name
5 of the game and a variety of artistic or thematic elements to indicate the theme of the game and enhance the game presentation. Outside the visible area 502 of the glass 501, an indicator contains coded information identifying the particular piece of art glass, its theme, or some other such characteristic of the art glass or the wagering games with which the art glass is compatible.

10 The first indicator example shown at 503 is a barcode, which is in one embodiment simply printed onto the art glass using the same traditional printing process used to print the art onto the glass. This has the advantage of using existing equipment and methods to produce the art glass, but requires a barcode reader be installed in the wagering game system to read the barcode to enable
15 operations such as game availability or downloading a particular wagering game based on the identified barcode. In the other illustrated example, a foil pattern 504, or a pattern of conductive paint or other material printed onto the glass can be detected by a series of electrical contacts within the wagering game machine, enabling easy identification of the art glass and determination of whether a
20 particular wagering game is compatible with the art glass based on the identifier. In more complicated systems, a variety of other identifiers are incorporated into the art glass physical component, such as electrical, optical, mechanical, or radio frequency components. In one such example, a simple wireless passive transponder device such as the security cards commonly used for parking ramp
25 and building access is incorporated into a physical component of the wagering game machine, such as the glass or reels, enabling an easy automatic check of the physical configuration of the wagering game system. In a more complex example, wireless devices such as a Bluetooth transponder are incorporated into a physical component, and may include a simple identifier, license information,
30 or even the game code itself in various example embodiments.

In other wagering game system examples, a unique characteristic of some physical configuration component is identified by the wagering game machine, such as a security camera system that peers through an opening in the art glass recognizing an identifier such as a barcode or a portion of the art itself. In other

embodiments, a camera recognizes reels, art, or another characteristic identifier of the physical component. In a more complex example, security cameras within the wagering game establishment enable identification of the art glass, mechanical reels, or other physical component of various wagering game machines installed in the facility, and work with other networked components of the wagering game system such as a wagering game server including a physical map of wagering game machine locations to determine what wagering game machines are eligible to run what software.

Figure 6 illustrates one example method of using a physical component identifier to enable play of selected wagering games. The wagering game system is turned on and begins the self-test and boot routine at 601, and detects its physical configuration at 602. This includes reading an identifier comprising a part of a physically configurable or replaceable component of the wagering game system, such as recognizing art glass or reading information encoded into a mechanical reel set. The physical configuration information is compared to a list of known or available games in this example, to determine which if any games available to the wagering game system are compatible with the machine's current physical configuration. If there is more than one matching wagering game available as determined at 603, such as a five-reel and three-reel version of a fishing-themed game, one of the matching wagering games is selected at 604.

In either event, the wagering game system then looks for the matching wagering game identified or the selected matching wagering game in the wagering game machine's nonvolatile memory at 605. If the wagering game isn't present, it is downloaded at 606 and installed for play. In some embodiments this requires a reboot of the wagering game machine and revalidation of the executable code upon bootup. Once the matching wagering game is installed in the wagering game system, it is executed at 607, and is available for play.

In an alternate embodiment, all matching wagering games that are available are downloaded into the wagering game machine, and are made available to the player. The player is therefore able to select from among at least two games before beginning game play, providing a greater range of game variation to the game player.

The indicators are installed in components of various types, such as a mechanical reel assembly or top box, but in further embodiments are also installed in sub-components such as in both a mechanical reel assembly and the individual reel strips, or in a top box and in the installed art glass. In one such example shown in Figure 7, a top box is itself identified via one or more identifiers comprising a part of the top box, indicating that a particular type of top box is installed in the wagering game machine. This may be needed for a particular game, such as where a bonus component of the game is played on a second display within the top box. In this example, the top box is not a single component but comprises a hierarchy of identifiable components, including the top box itself as well as the art glass and display installed therein. In the example of Figure 7, the wagering game system 701 has an attached top box assembly 702, which includes art glass 703 and 704, as well as a display 705. The top box of this example also includes a spinning wheel device 706 that is attached to the top of the top box, such as via a mounting bracket or pole on top of the top box. The indicators in the top box and its various components take various forms, including a serial number communicated over a USB port or a USB device identification string, as well as mechanical, optical, and other such identifiers.

The examples shown here illustrate how recognition of physical configuration elements in a wagering game system enable the wagering game machine to make specific wagering games matching the physical configuration available for play. Although certain examples are shown and described here, other variations exist and are within the scope of the invention. It will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that any arrangement which is calculated to achieve the same purpose may be substituted for the specific embodiments shown. This application is intended to cover any adaptations or variations of the example embodiments of the invention described herein. It is intended that this invention be limited only by the claims, and the full scope of equivalents thereof.

Claims

1. A computerized wagering game system, comprising:
a gaming module comprising a processor and gaming code which is
5 operable when executed on the processor to present a wagering game on which
monetary value can be wagered; and
a physical configuration monitor module operable to enable execution of
one or more wagering games associated with a game-specific physical
configuration of the wagering game machine, and to detect the game-specific
10 physical configuration of the wagering game machine.
2. The computerized wagering game system of claim 1, wherein enabling
execution of one or more wagering games comprises enabling loading game
code into an executable area of wagering game storage.
- 15 3. The computerized wagering game system of claim 1, wherein the game-
specific configuration comprises physical artwork installed on the wagering
game system.
- 20 4. The computerized wagering game system of claim 3, wherein the
physical artwork comprises at least one of physical slot reels, cabinet artwork, or
interface consoles.
5. The computerized wagering game system of claim 3, wherein the
25 physical configuration monitor module is operable to detect an identity of the
physical artwork installed on the wagering game machine.
6. The computerized wagering game system of claim 1, wherein the
physical configuration monitor module is operable to detect the game-specific
30 physical configuration by reading one or more identifiers comprising a part of
the physical configuration.

7. The computerized wagering game system of claim 6, wherein the one or more identifiers comprise at least one of mechanical codes, barcodes, electronic codes, RFID (radio frequency ID) tags, physical circuitry, digital keys, and encrypted data.

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8. The computerized wagering game system of claim 1, wherein enabling execution comprises making available for play at least one of a plurality of games while excluding at least one of the plurality of games from play.

10 9. The computerized wagering game system of claim 8, wherein the plurality of executable games comprise at least one of server-based games, downloadable games, and preinstalled games.

15 10. The computerized wagering game system of claim 1, wherein presence of the game-specific physical configuration by the physical configuration monitor module evidences license to execute the one or more associated wagering games.

11. A method of operating a computerized wagering game system, comprising:

20 presenting a wagering game on which monetary value can be wagered;
detecting a game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine; and

enabling execution of one or more wagering games associated with the game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine.

25

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the game-specific configuration comprises physical artwork installed on the wagering game system.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein the physical artwork comprises at least one of physical slot reels, cabinet artwork, or interface consoles.

30

14. The method of figure 12, wherein detecting a game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine comprises detecting an identity of the physical artwork installed on the wagering game machine.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein enabling execution of one or more wagering games comprises enabling loading game code into an executable area of wagering game storage.

5

16. The method of claim 11, wherein enabling execution of one or more wagering games comprises enabling execution of the one or more wagering games on a server coupled to the wagering game system.

10 17. The method of claim 11, wherein detecting the game-specific physical configuration comprises reading one or more identifiers comprising a part of the physical configuration.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein the one or more identifiers comprise at
15 least one of mechanical codes, barcodes, electronic codes, RFID (radio frequency ID) tags, physical circuitry, digital keys, and encrypted data.

19. The method of claim 11, wherein enabling execution comprises making available for play at least one of a plurality of games while excluding at least one
20 of the plurality of games from play.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the plurality of executable games comprise at least one of server-based games, downloadable games, and preinstalled games.

25

21. The method of claim 11, wherein detection of the game-specific physical configuration evidences license to execute the one or more associated wagering games.

22. A machine-readable medium with instructions stored thereon, the instructions when executed operable to cause a computerized wagering game system to:

- present a wagering game on which monetary value can be wagered;
- 5 detect a game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine; and
- enable execution of one or more wagering games associated with the game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine.

10 23. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein detecting a game-specific physical configuration of the wagering game machine comprises detecting an identity of physical artwork installed on the wagering game machine.

15 24. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein detecting the game-specific physical configuration comprises reading one or more identifiers comprising a part of the physical configuration.

20 25. The machine-readable medium of claim 24, wherein the one or more identifiers comprise at least one of mechanical codes, barcodes, electronic codes, RFID (radio frequency ID) tags, physical circuitry, digital keys, and encrypted data.

25 26. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein enabling execution comprises making available for play at least one of a plurality of games while excluding at least one of the plurality of games from play.

30 27. The machine-readable medium of claim 22, wherein detection of the game-specific physical configuration evidences license to execute the one or more associated wagering games.

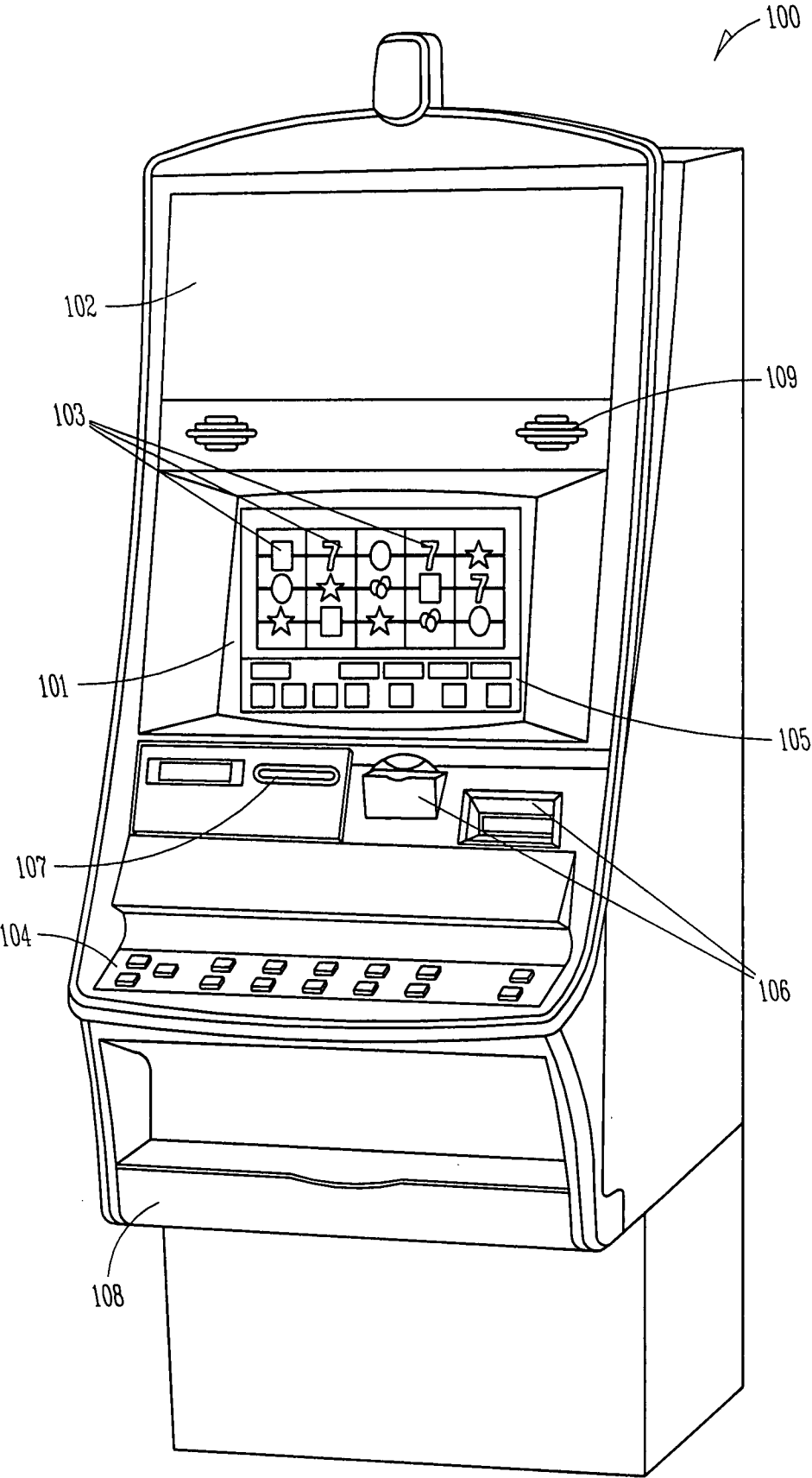


FIG. 1

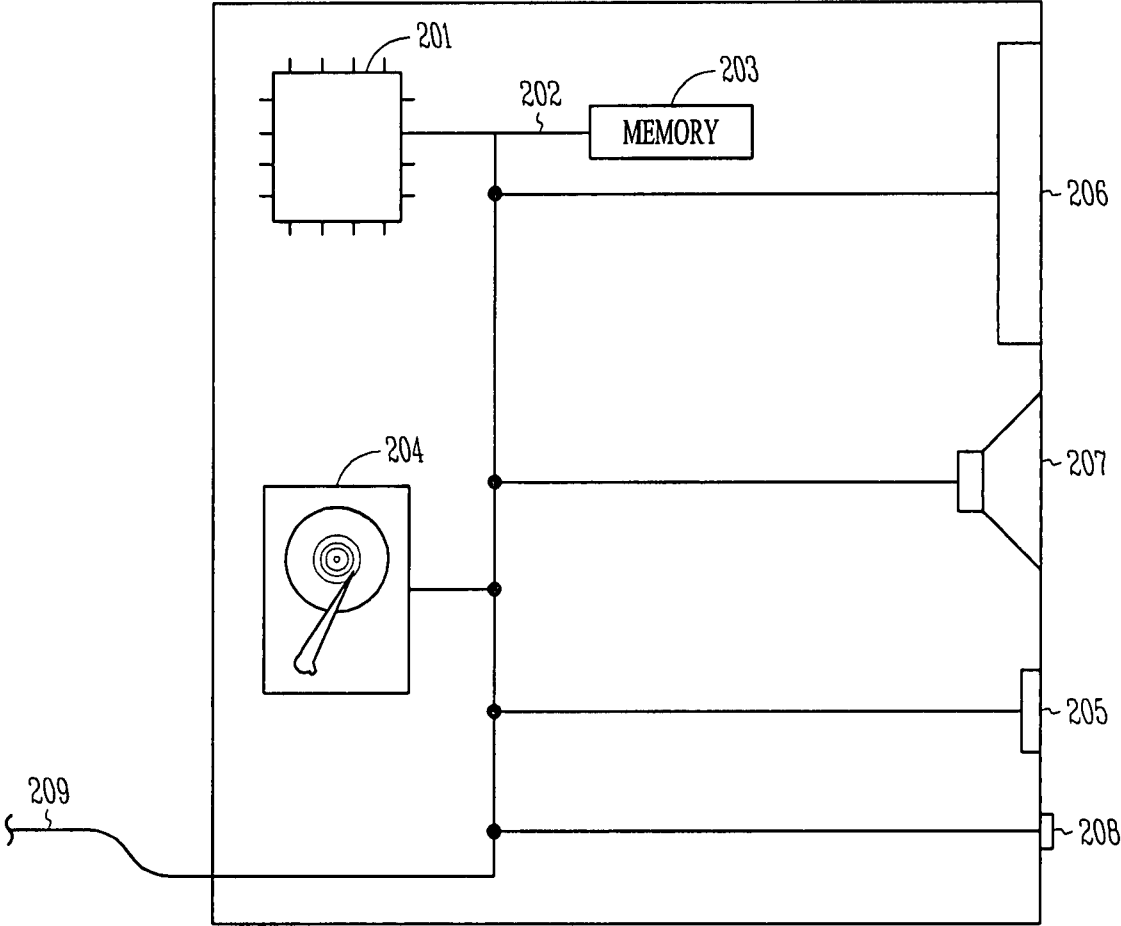


FIG. 2

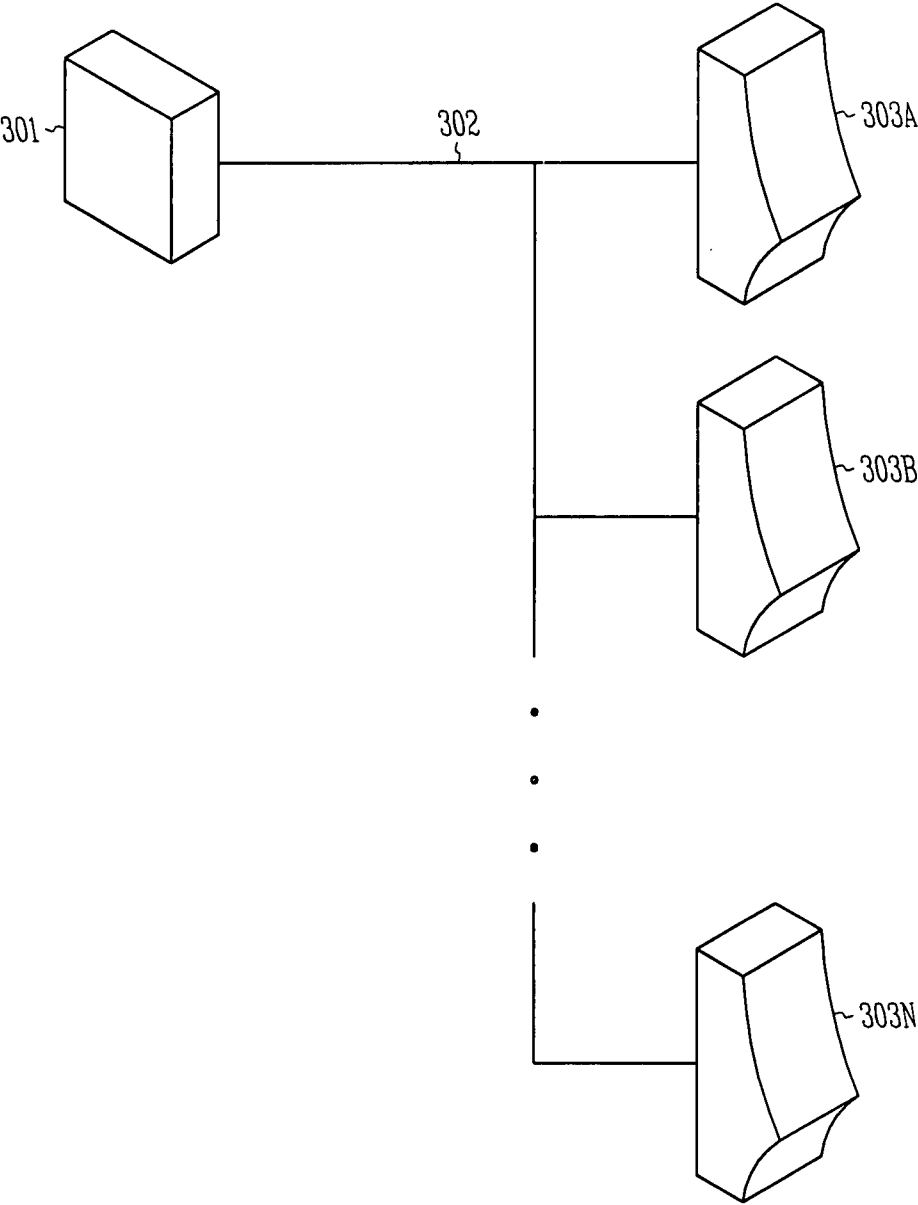


FIG. 3

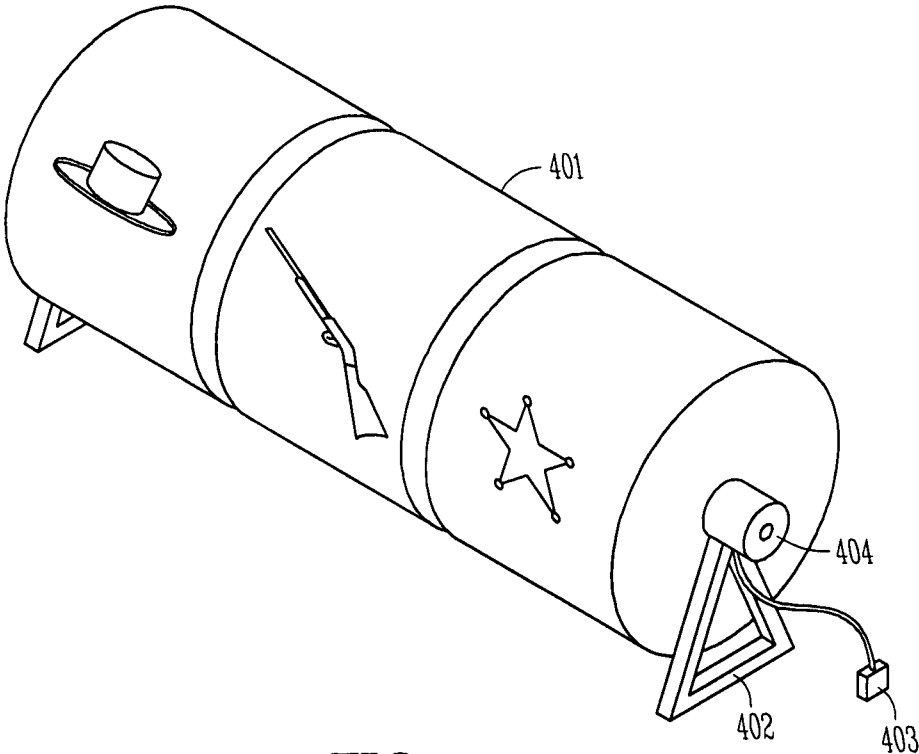


FIG. 4

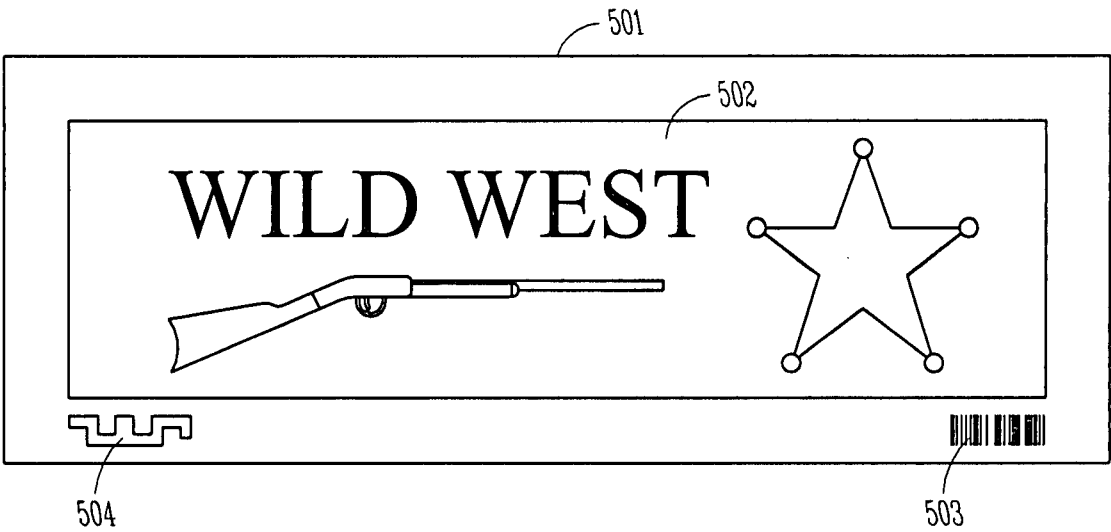
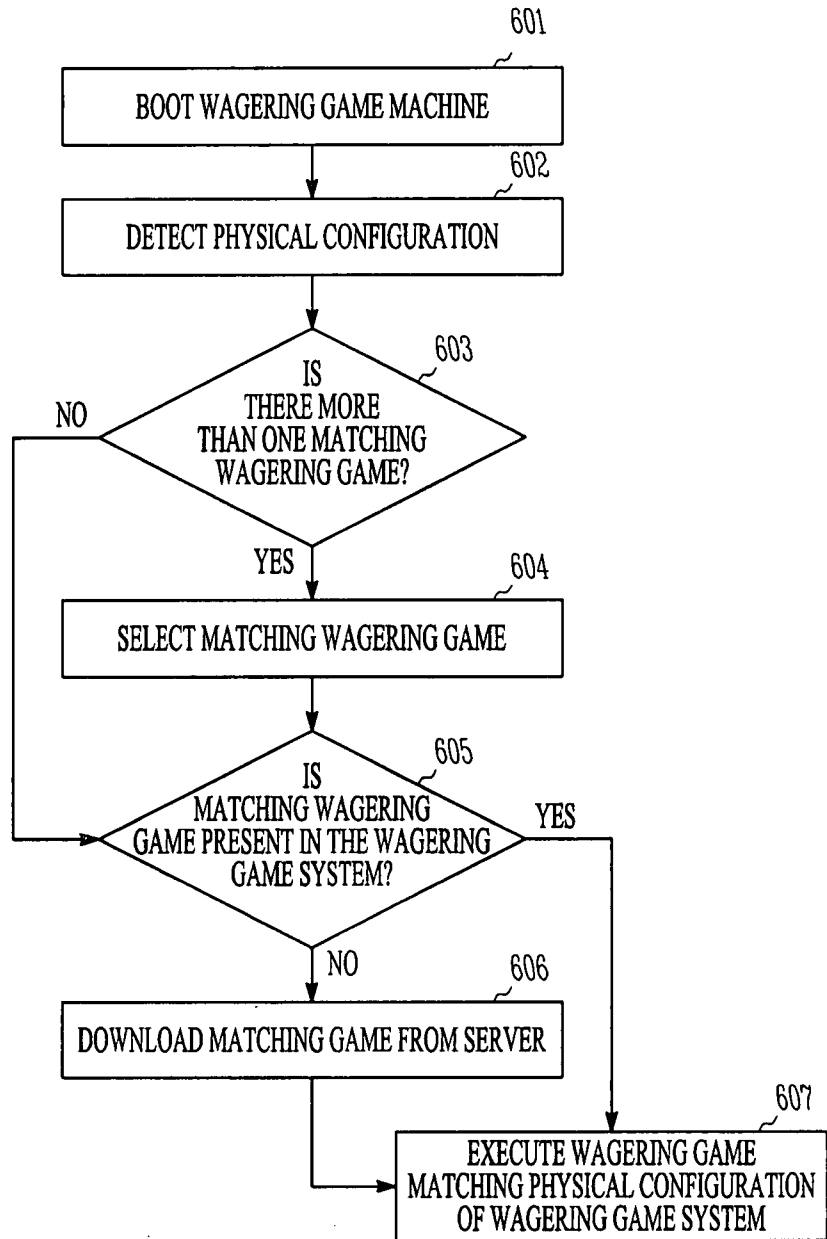


FIG. 5

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*FIG. 6*

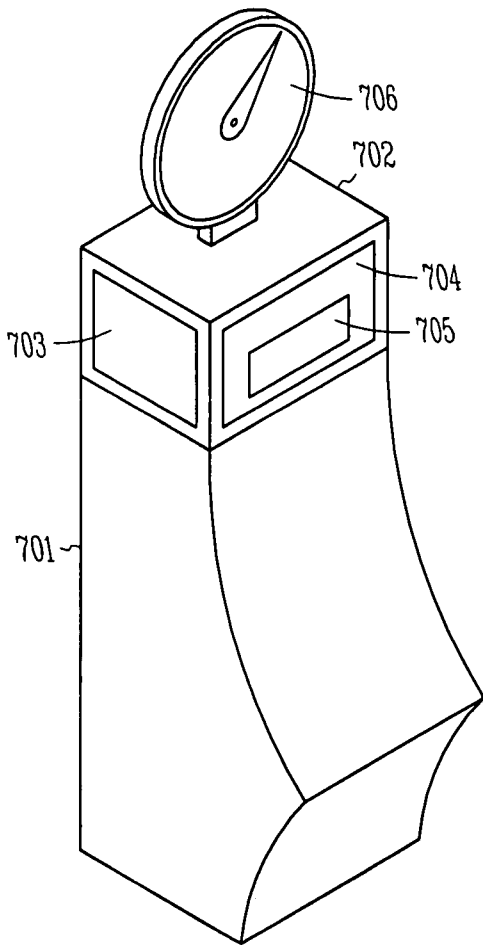


FIG. 7