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(54) **METHODS AND DEVICES FOR REEL-TYPE WAGERING WITH BONUS GAMES**

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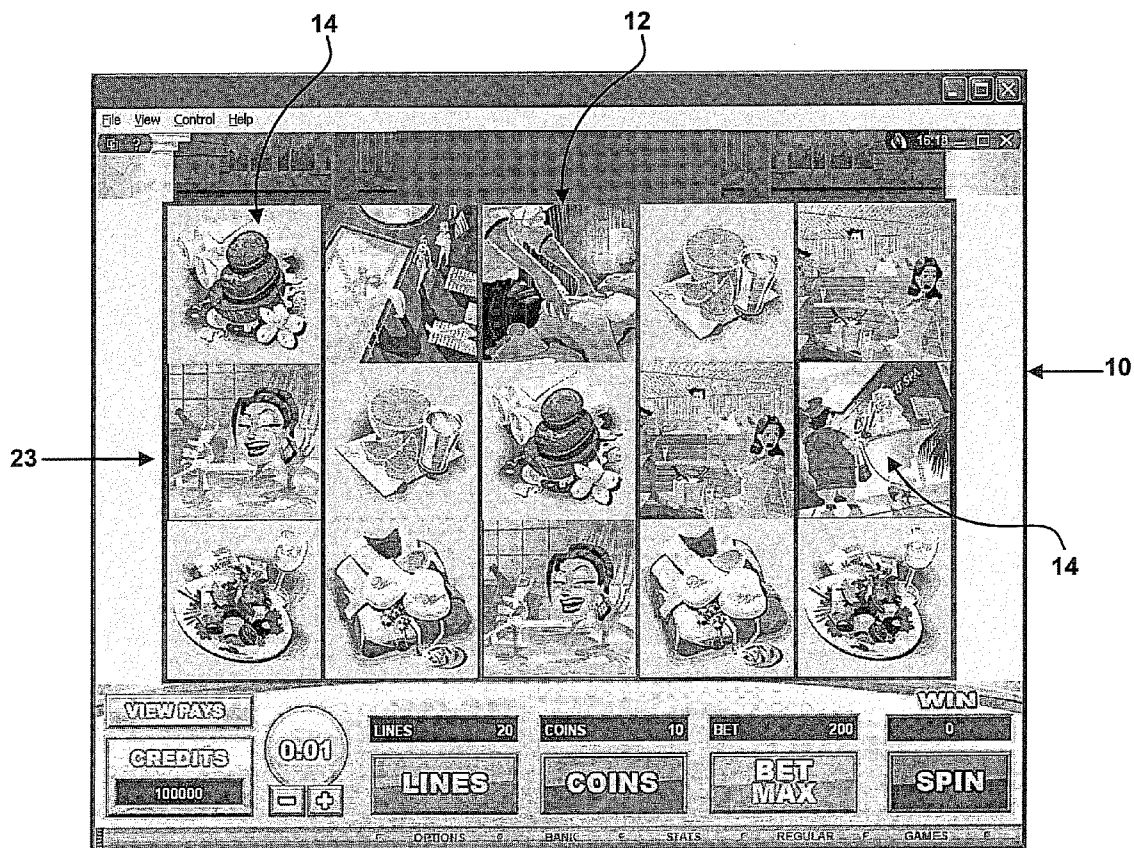
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

One or more client machines may engage in the play of reel-type games with a gaming server, where each gaming session may include one or more spins of a reel in the reel-type game. Certain outcomes of these spins may include a bonus token, or some other type of indication that bonus credits have been awarded. Once a given client machine has accumulated a sufficient number of bonus tokens, the client machine may have the option to engage in a bonus game.

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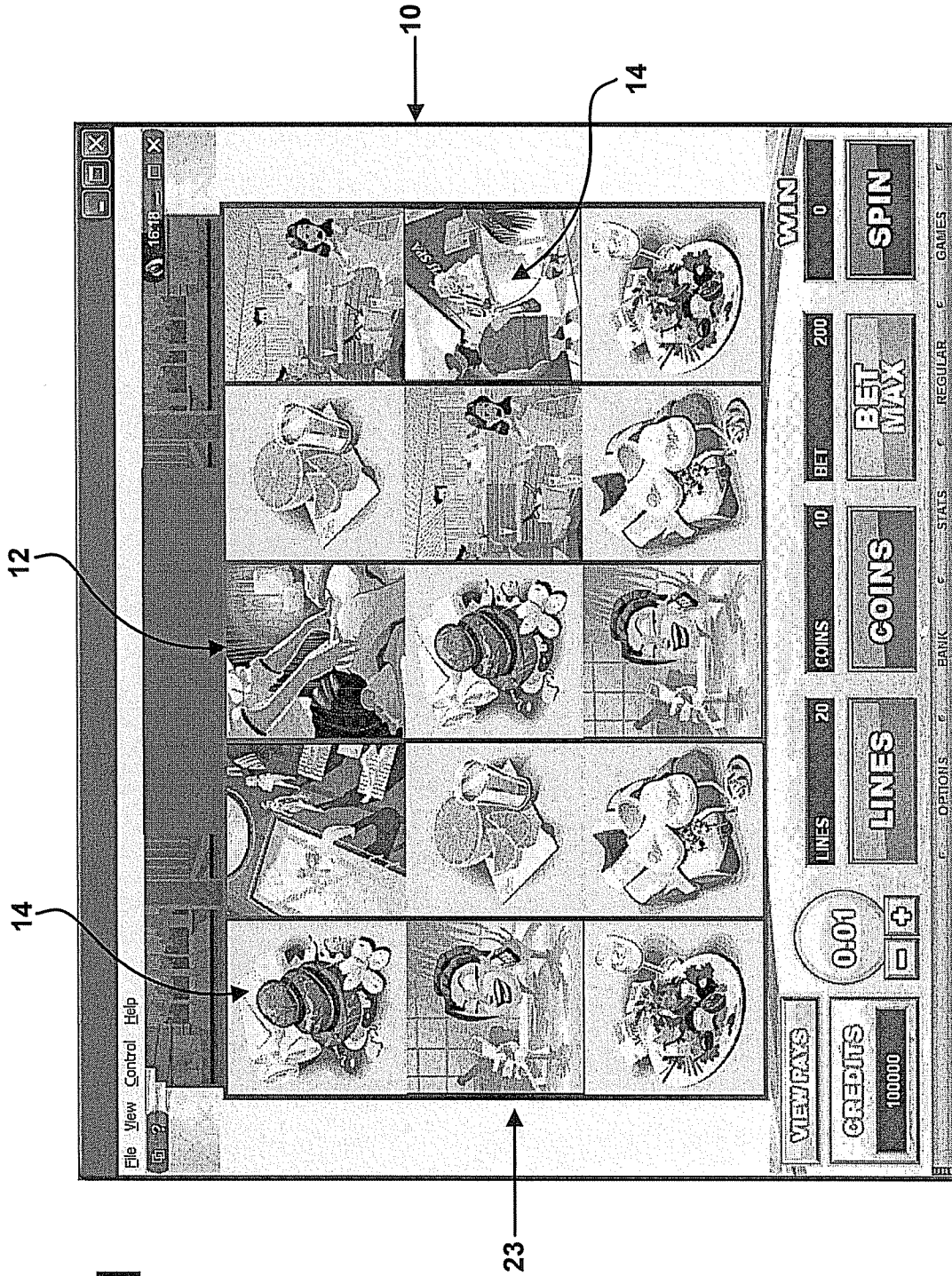


FIG. 2





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FIG. 3

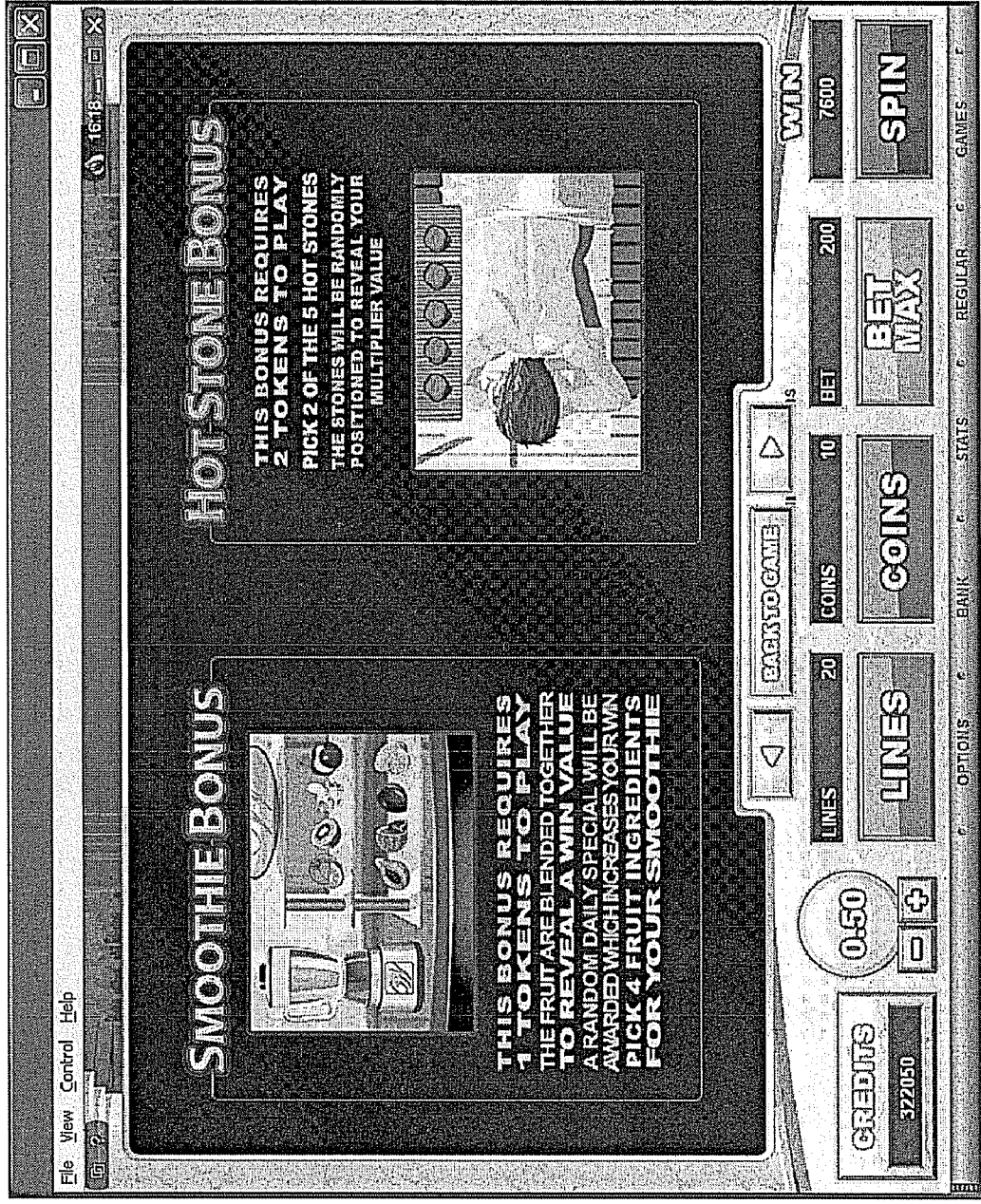


FIG. 4

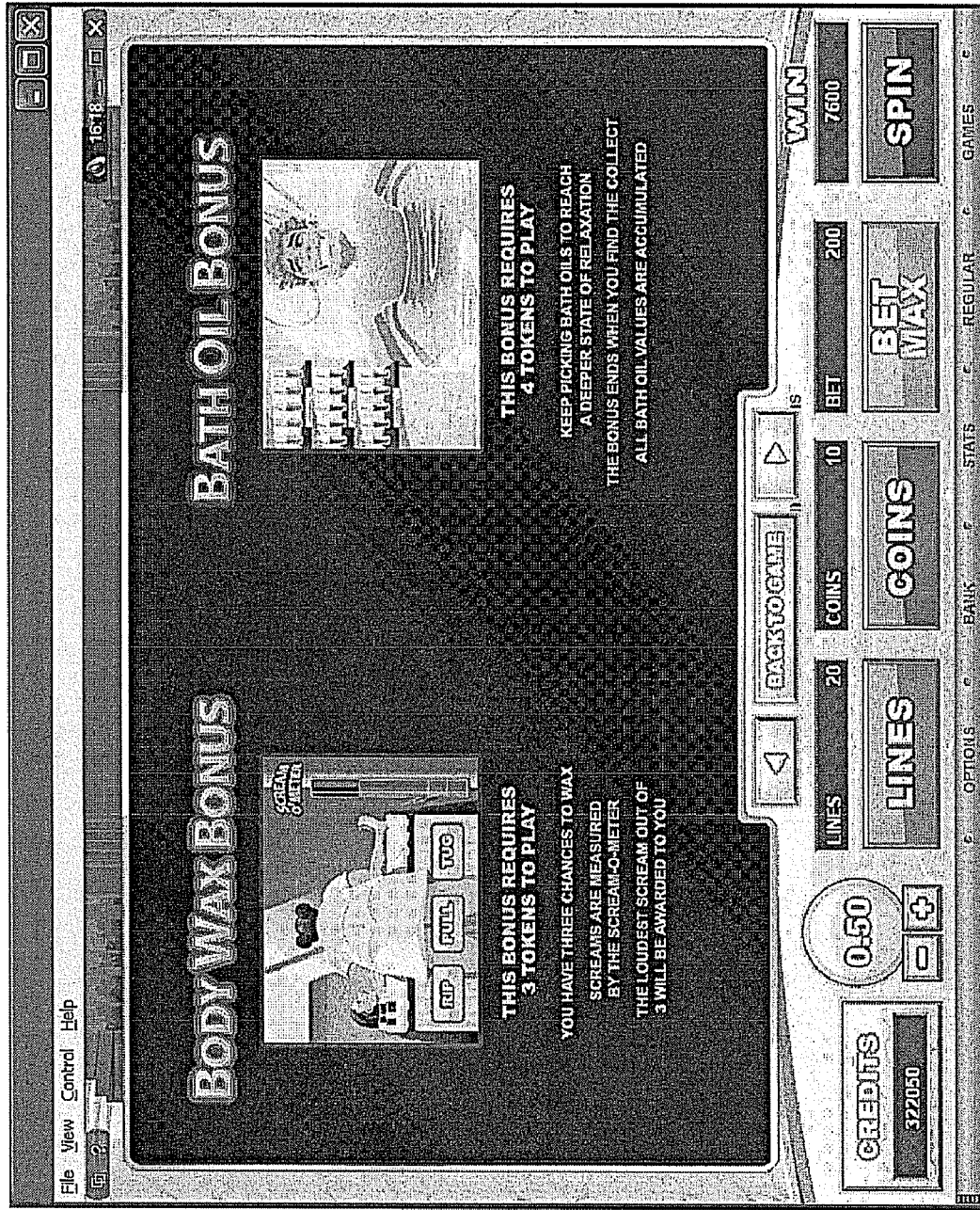


FIG. 5

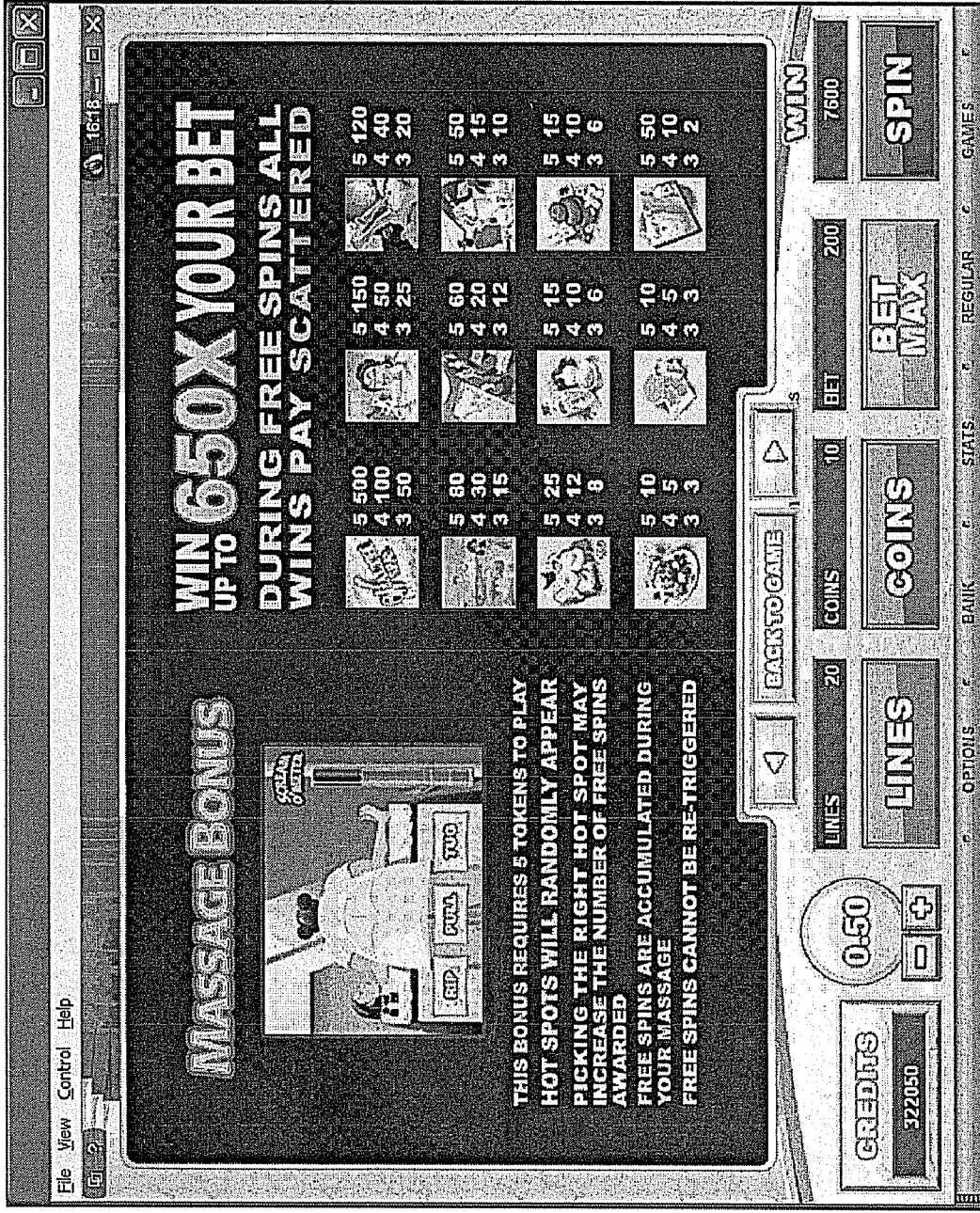


FIG. 6

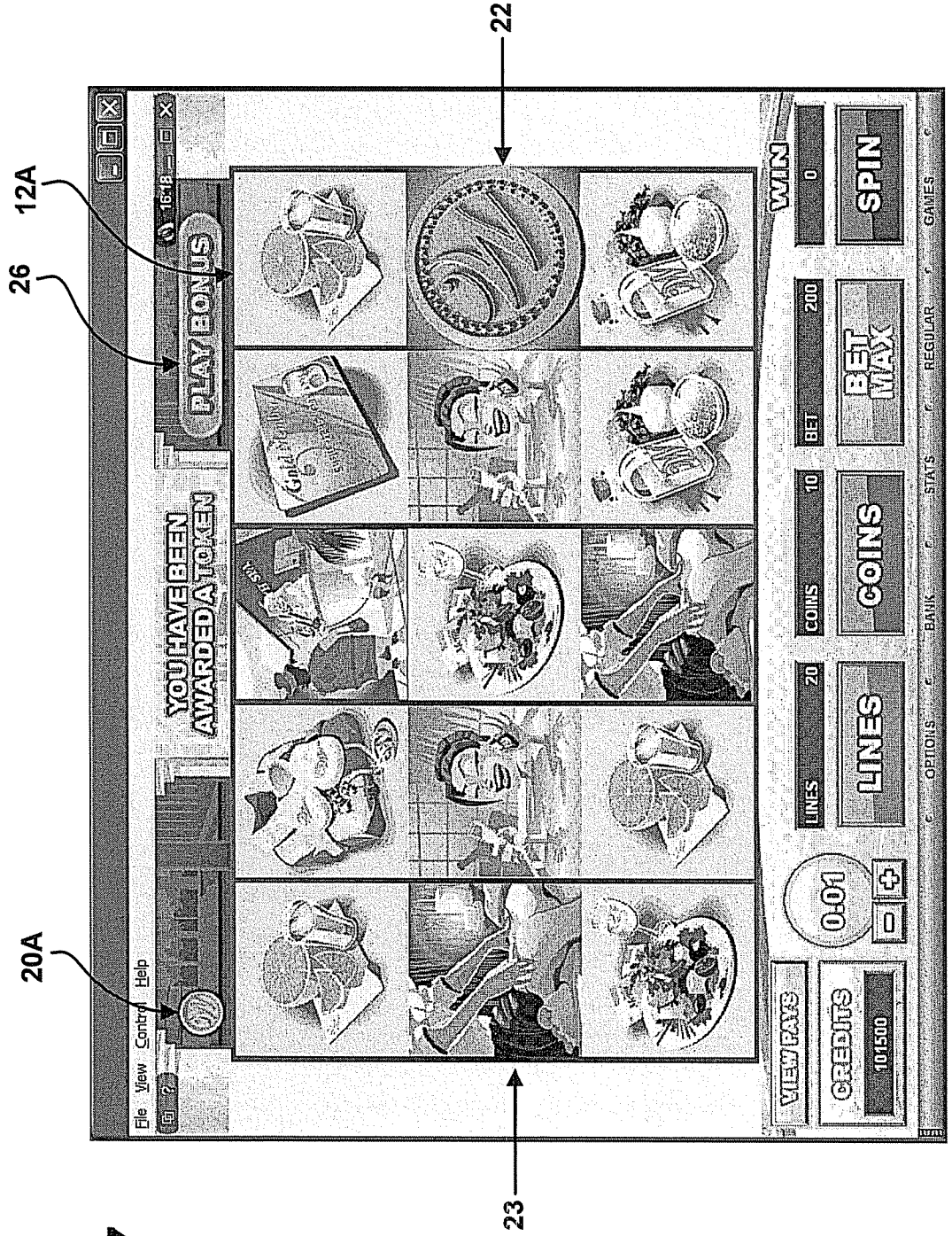
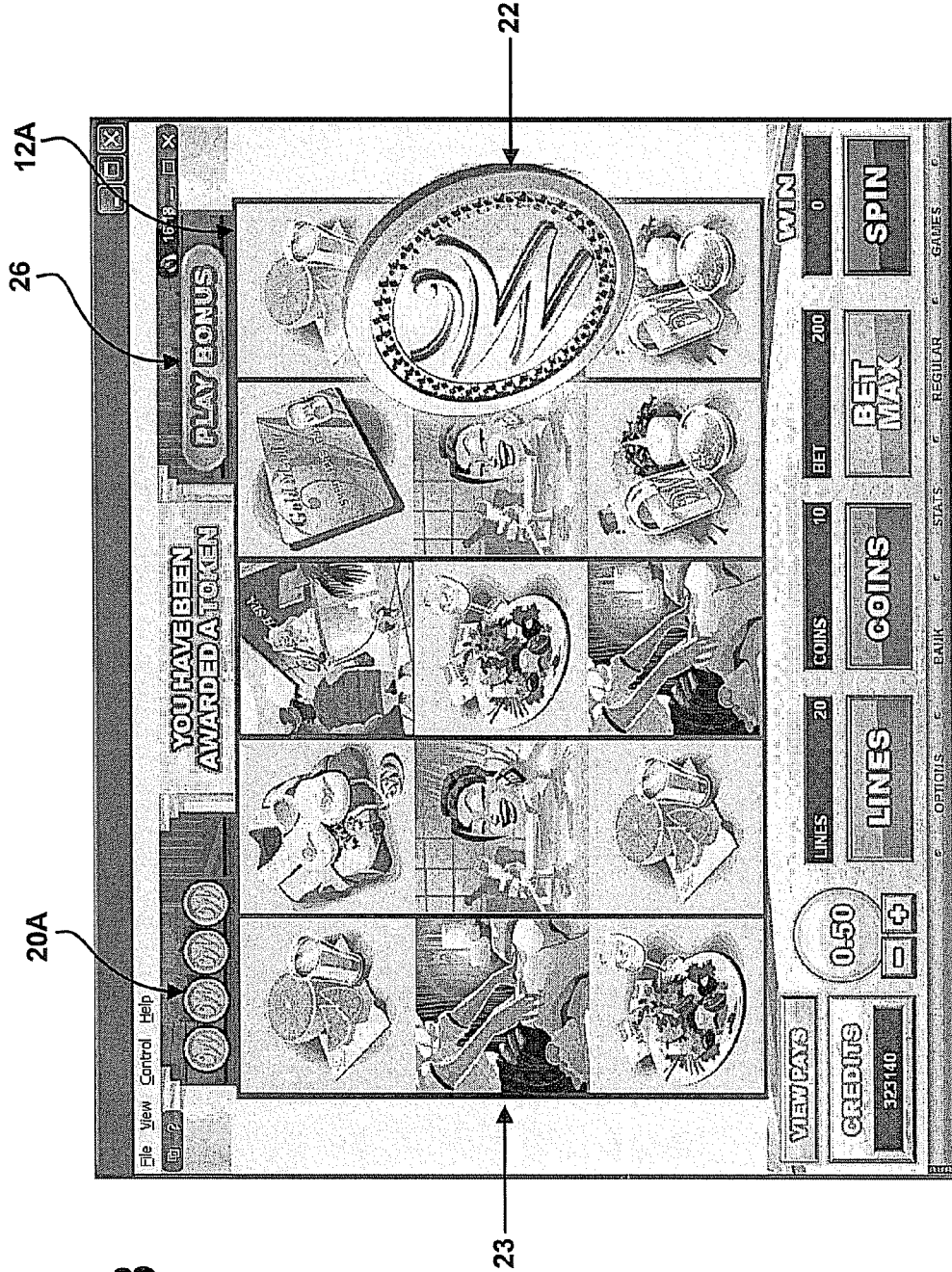


FIG. 7



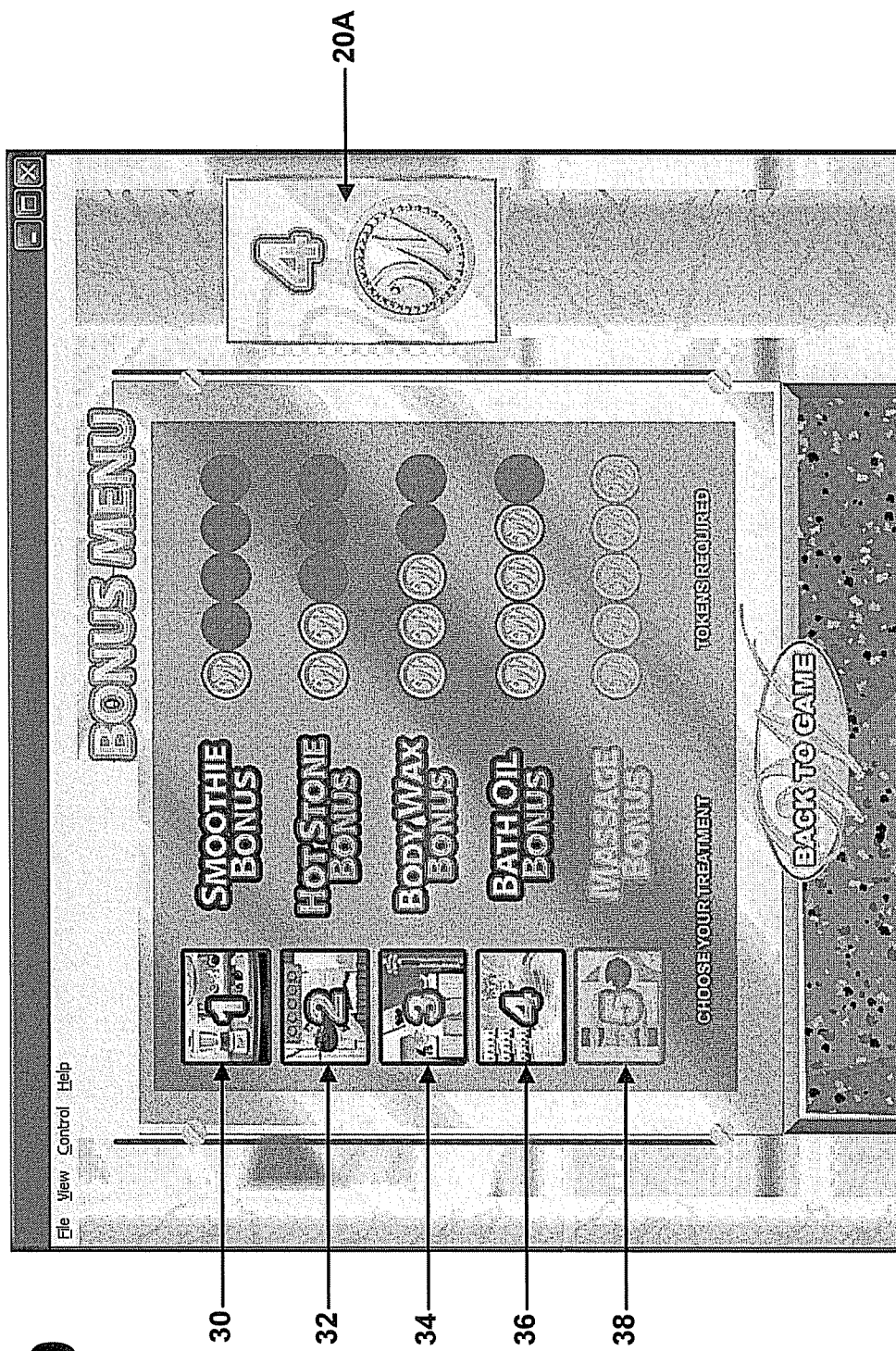


FIG. 9

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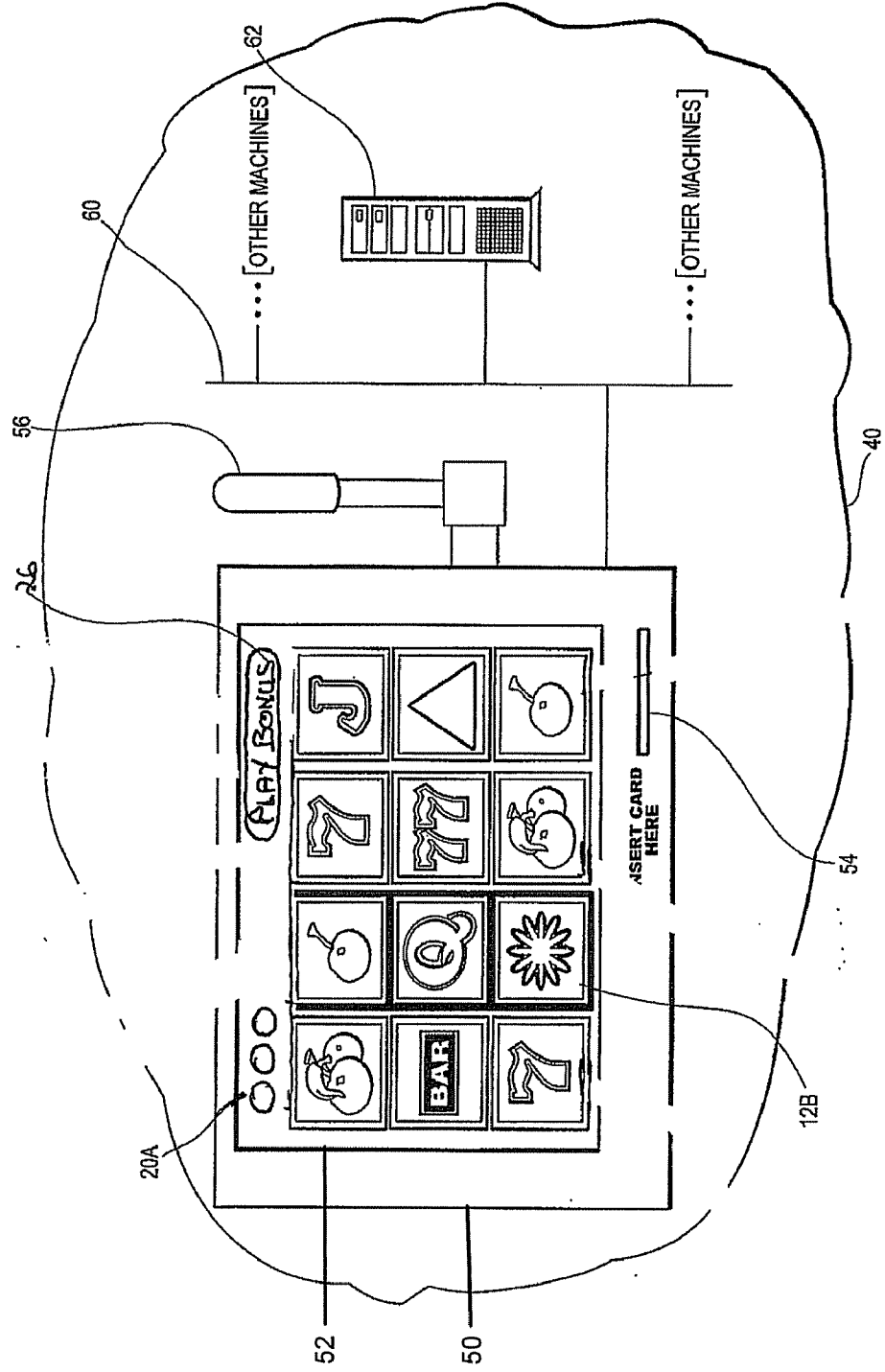
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FIG. 10



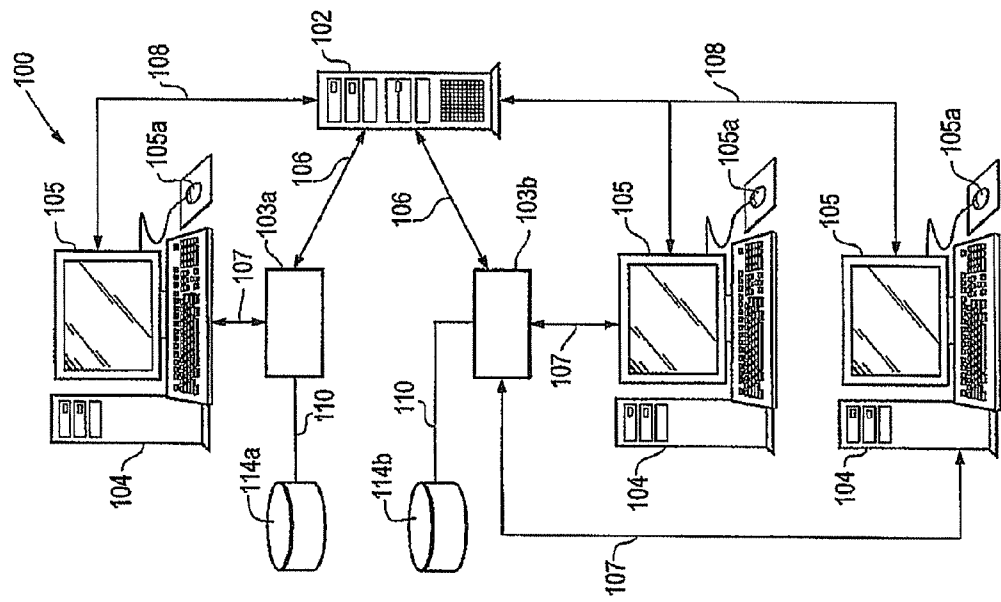


FIG. 11

FIG. 12

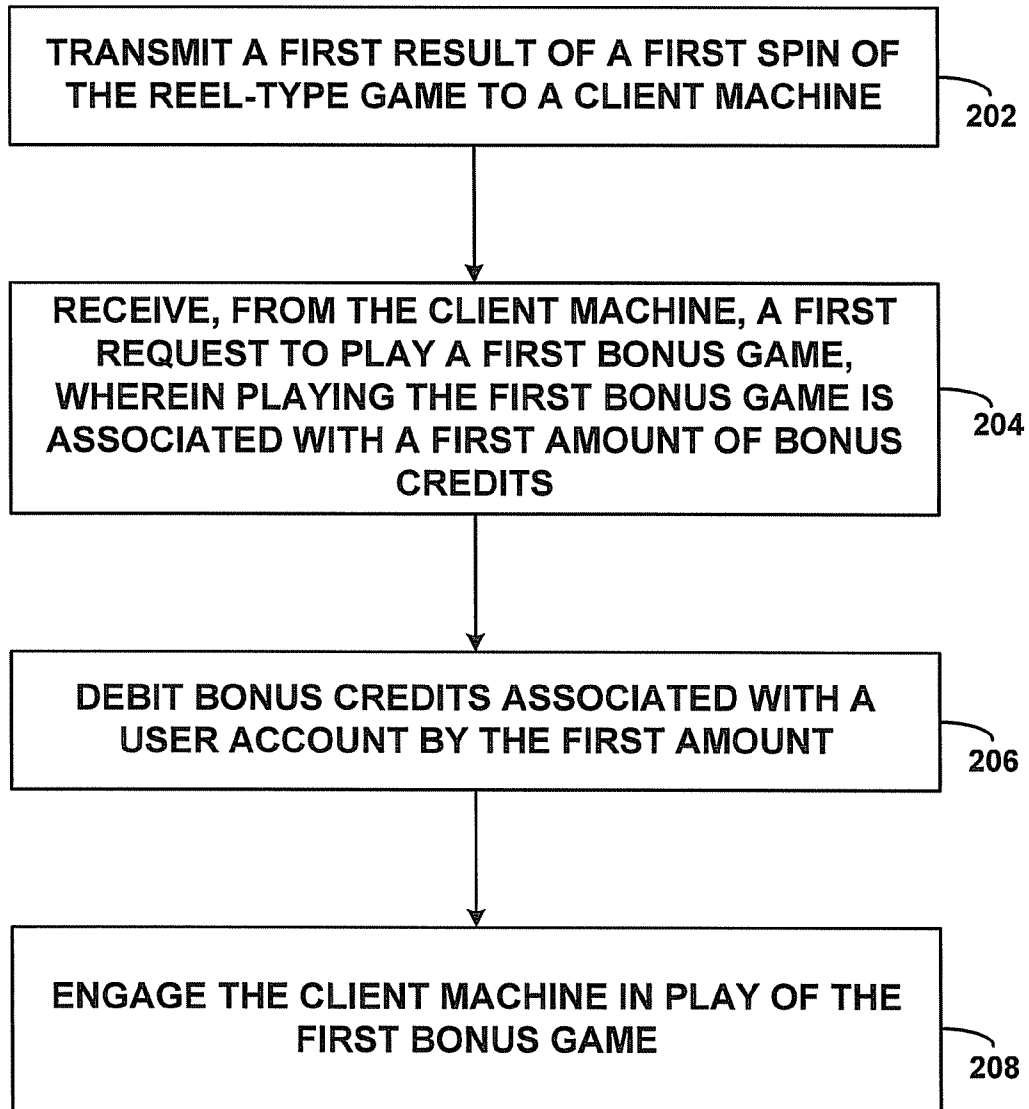


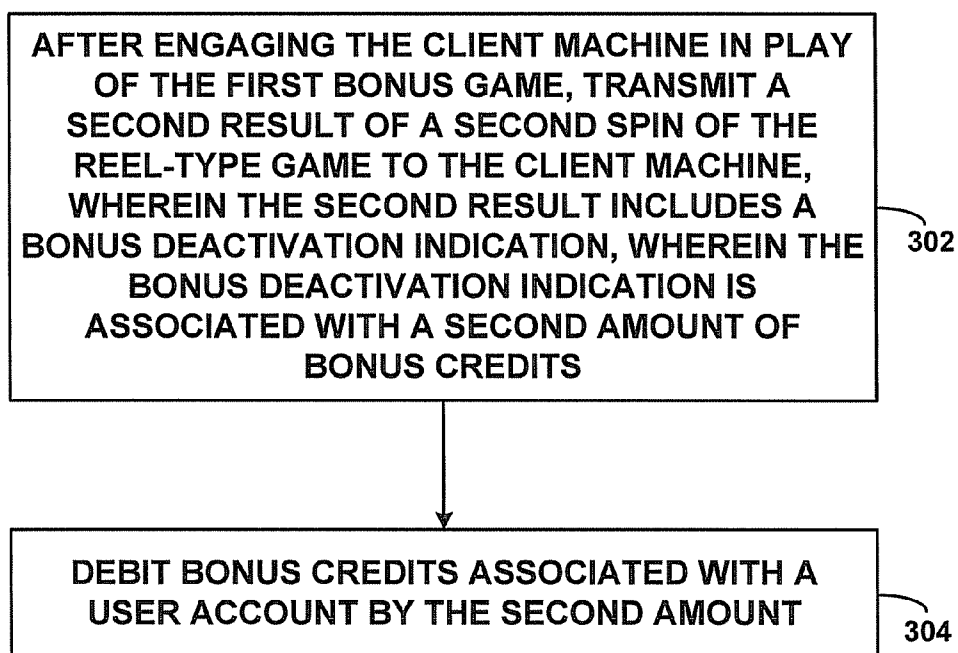
FIG. 13

FIG. 14

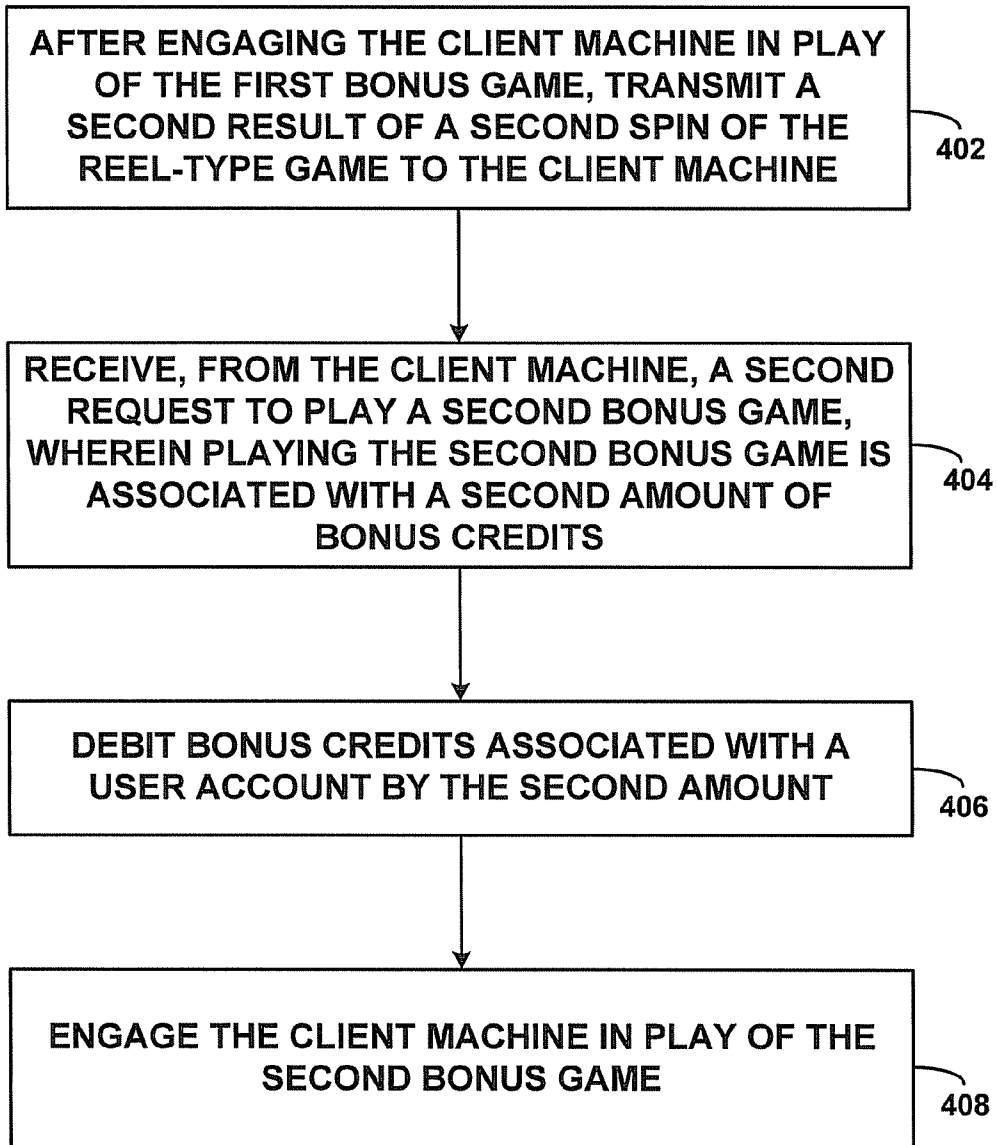
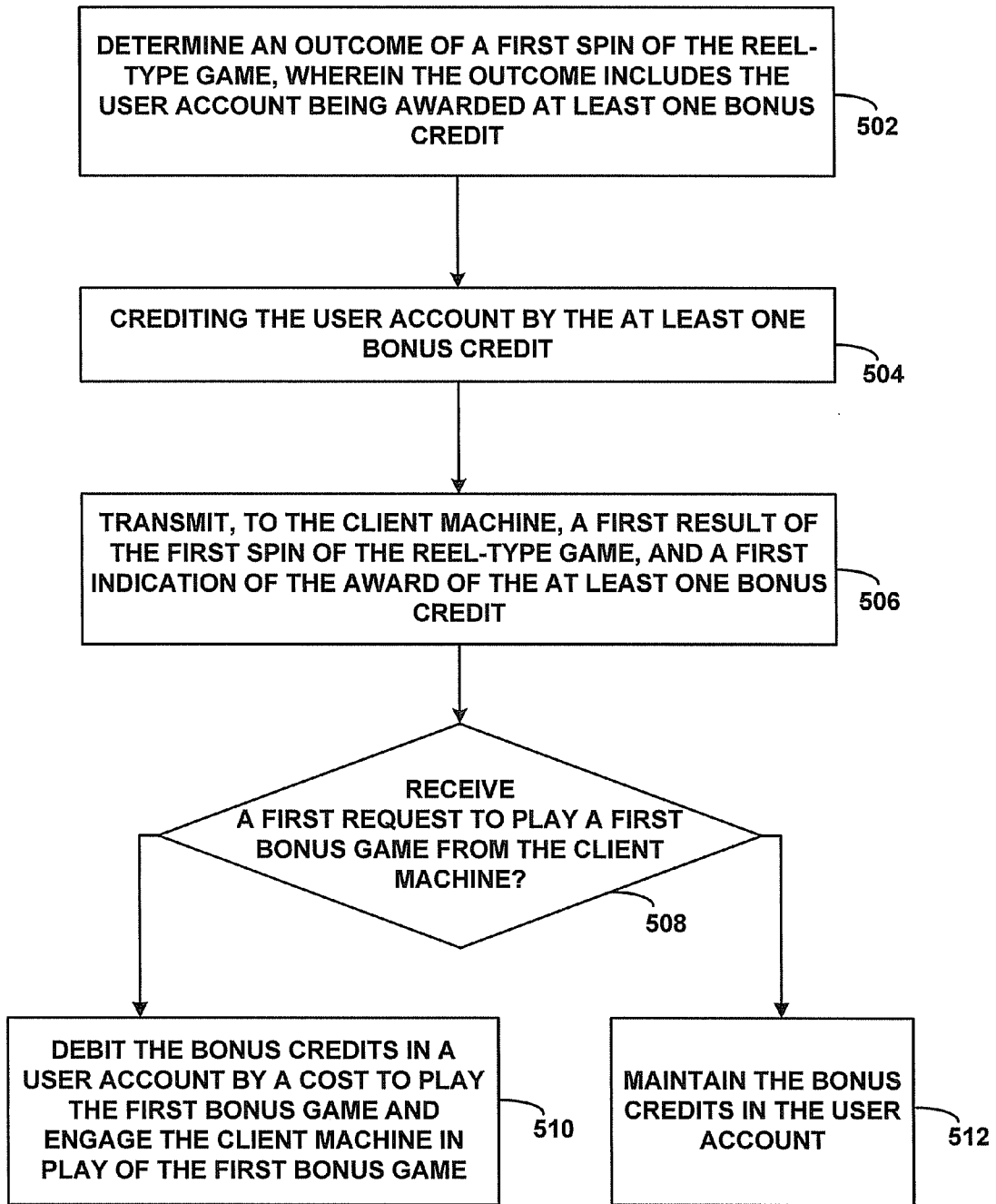


FIG. 15



METHODS AND DEVICES FOR REEL-TYPE WAGERING WITH BONUS GAMES

BACKGROUND

[0001] This disclosure relates generally to the field of wager games and more particularly to methods and apparatuses for initiating bonus games during play of a reel-type wager game. The methods are applicable in a variety of game playing formats, for example physical slot machines, electronic video gaming terminals, and computer workstations playing wager games over a computer network.

SUMMARY

[0002] In a first aspect, a client machine configured to play a reel-type wager game featuring a bonus game is described. The client machine can take the form of a video slots machine, a general purpose computer or other type of client machine used to play games. The client machine may include a display configured to display two or more reels of a reel-type wager game, a memory storing program instructions for facilitating a user to play the reel-type wager game, and a processor for executing the program instructions. The program instructions may be arranged to display bonus tokens accumulated by the user during play of the game. A bonus token, which may take the form of an icon or graphical device of any sort, may be accumulated when the reels display a symbol or combination of symbols that are associated with an award of a bonus token. The symbol may take any form and could for example be a coin symbol, the letter "B" or the word "Bonus". The bonus game is typically triggered by the player at any time after accumulating one or more of the bonus tokens.

[0003] The number of accumulated bonus tokens may be initially set to none when the player starts play of the game for the first time. The player may accumulate bonus token(s) when the symbol associated with the bonus game appears on the pay line on any one of the reels. The player may accumulate further bonus token(s) when the bonus symbol again appears on the pay line on any one of the reels. The player may continue to accumulate bonus tokens in this manner indefinitely, or up to a predefined maximum number of tokens, for example five such tokens.

[0004] In one embodiment, the client machine may be connected to a computer network, and the client machine may be configured to receive results of spins of the reels from a gaming server over the computer network. In other forms of the invention, the client machine can be a completely stand alone machine and have program instructions resident that determine results of spins of the reels. As one further example, the client machine may take the form of a video gaming terminal. In some forms of the game, the display may be configured to display N reels, where N is an integer greater than zero. In other forms, the results of a spin or turn of the reel-type game may be displayed in the form of an array of symbols in M rows and N columns, each column of the N columns is in the form of a reel. In one specific form of the game, if the symbol associated with the bonus game appears on any of the M rows in any of the N columns (any of the reels), the user may accumulate a bonus token. In another form of the game, the user may accumulate a bonus token only when the symbol associated with the bonus game appears on a centre row of the array of symbols.

[0005] In another aspect, a gaming server is disclosed which communicates with a client machine playing a reel-

type game over a computer network. The gaming server generates results of a spin of each of a plurality of reels in the reel-type game for the client machine and transmits such results to the machine as a datagram over the computer network. The gaming server features a memory storing data representing potential results for each of the reels (e.g., an array of symbols such as Cherries, Bar, Bar Bar, 7, etc.), with the potential results also including a result in the form of a symbol which is associated with the award of a bonus token that can be applied to trigger a bonus game. Should a given spin of the reels for a machine result in this symbol associated with award of the bonus token, when the machine receives the result from the gaming server the machine will then display the bonus token, as described herein.

[0006] In one particular embodiment, a player can "bank" any accumulated bonus tokens in the event that the player leaves the game. Thus, in this embodiment the gaming server may be further provided with a memory storing data (e.g., a flag or bit) indicating whether a result of a spin of the reels for the client machine has included the symbol associated with the bonus game. The gaming server stores such data in the memory after the client machine has ceased play of the game. Should the player later rejoin the game, the server retrieves the data and sends it in a datagram to the client machine. The client machine then displays the number of previously-accumulated bonus tokens and the player basically starts play again with their accumulated bonus tokens displayed on the display.

[0007] In one embodiment of this disclosure, a potential result for each of the reels may be a forfeiture symbol. Should this symbol be the result for a given spin, previously-accumulated bonus token(s) may be forfeited.

[0008] In still another aspect, a method is disclosed of playing a reel-type game using a client machine having a display. The method includes the steps of providing on the display a plurality of reels and providing a mechanism by which bonus tokens can be accumulated progressively over multiple turns of the game. All or part of the accumulated bonus tokens can be consumed by the player at any time to trigger a bonus game. In one embodiment, the method further includes the step of providing on the display a visible indication of the number of accumulated bonus tokens, with a bonus token being accumulated when a symbol associated with the award of a bonus token appears on any one of the plurality of reels as a result of a turn of the play of the reel-type game. As noted above, accumulated bonus tokens may be displayed on the display.

[0009] In a yet further aspect, a user can trigger a bonus game at any time after having accumulated one or more bonus tokens. The bonus game may have an associated cost in bonus tokens and the total of the user's accumulated bonus tokens may be decremented by the corresponding cost of the bonus game. As an example, the user may trigger the bonus game only when the user has accumulated sufficient bonus tokens to cover the corresponding cost of the bonus game. In another example, the user may trigger any one of a number of different bonus games, each bonus game having a corresponding, but different, associated cost in bonus tokens. The user may only be able to trigger those bonus games for which the user has accumulated a sufficient number of tokens. It is anticipated that a user can win a prize from a bonus game that is, on average, proportional to the corresponding number of accumulated bonus tokens that are consumed in triggering the bonus game.

[0010] These and other aspects and advantages will become apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art by reading the following detailed description, with reference where appropriate to the accompanying drawings. Further, it should be understood that the foregoing overview is merely exemplary and is not intended to limit the scope of the invention as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIG. 1 is an illustration of the display of a machine used to play a reel-type wager game;

[0012] FIG. 2 is an illustration of the pay lines and a partial pay table of the reel-type wager game of FIG. 1;

[0013] FIG. 3 is an illustration of a further partial pay table of a reel-type wager game, where the pay table illustrates a symbol that is associated with an award of a bonus token.

[0014] FIGS. 4, 5 and 6 are further partial pay tables of a reel-type wager game, each illustrating one or more bonus games that can be triggered against a corresponding cost in accumulated bonus tokens;

[0015] FIG. 7 is an illustration of a display of a reel-type wager game after a spin of the reels, where a single bonus token is displayed due to the presence on the far right-hand reel of a symbol associated with the award of a bonus token;

[0016] FIG. 8 is another illustration of the display of a reel-type wager game after a spin of the reels;

[0017] FIG. 9 is an illustration of a menu of bonus games available to a user after a bonus game icon has been activated to trigger a bonus game;

[0018] FIG. 10 is an illustration of an environment in which a reel-type game can be played by a video gaming terminal in a casino or like establishment;

[0019] FIG. 11 is an illustration of an environment in which a reel-type game can be played by client machines connected to a gaming server over a network such as the Internet; and

[0020] FIGS. 12, 13, 14, and 15 are flow charts in accordance with example embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0021] Reel-type games are disclosed which enable qualifying players to trigger a bonus game on demand, thereby providing a player with flexibility and increasing the excitement of the playing experience. This may be achieved by providing a mechanism for accumulating or collecting assets over multiple turns or spins of the video slot game until a predetermined threshold is reached, thereby qualifying to trigger the bonus game, or multiple bonus games, when desired against consumption of all or part of the accumulated assets.

I. Game Description

[0022] In reel-type games such as slots, one or more reels are provided, each of which contain a multitude of symbols distributed around the circumference of the reel. When a player places a wager (e.g., by placing a coin in the machine) they may be permitted to spins the reels. Each reel comes to rest, with typically with either one of the symbols, or a space in between the symbols, in alignment with a pay line. The player wins according to whether a particular winning symbol or combination of symbols is present on a pay line. In a simple three-reel slot machine game, the pay line may be a horizontal line going across the middle of the reels. In other reel-type games, such as an array of 5x3 symbols which all

“spin” during a turn of play, the “pay line” refers to a particular combination of positions of symbols in the 5x3 array which are used to determine if a winning result was achieved.

[0023] The game of slots can be played on a video gaming terminal with a graphical user interface, e.g., a dedicated gaming machine such as found in a casino. In the case of a video gaming terminal, the user interface displays an image of a set of reels. Animation effects are used to simulate the spinning action. Program instructions, which may be resident in the video gaming terminal, randomly generate a result for a simulated spin of the reels, and the result may be presented on the user interface.

[0024] Slots games may also be played over a computer network, e.g., by a player using a personal computer which has established a connection to a gaming server. In this later situation, the gaming server generates results of play and transmits the results over the computer network to the personal computer for display.

[0025] The popularity of video slot games has increased due to the incorporation of bonus games into such video slot games. A bonus game may be distinct from the underlying video slot game and may provide a player with entertainment, and also additional opportunities to win game prizes. The play of bonus games may utilize the reels of the video slot game itself (“reel-based bonus games”), or, alternatively, may occur on a separate bonus screen (“non-reel-based bonus games”).

[0026] One type of reel-based bonus game consists of an award of “free spins”, in which the player may be provided with a quantity of further play of the underlying video slot game at no cost to the player, while at the same time allowing the player to win game prizes in the usual manner. For purposes of determining a payout for a winning result in accordance with a pay table, the amount wagered per spin during a “free spins” game is typically fixed, e.g. at \$1.00, but again, the “free spins” do not result in the player’s account being debited.

[0027] Other types of reel-based bonus games feature the addition of wild multipliers in the reels, randomly-changing symbols, cascading features where winning combinations of symbols disappear and are replaced by further symbols, “expanding wilds” where a wild symbol replicates to cover an entire reel of the video slot game on which it appears, and slide features in which a reel symbol replicates across multiple reels.

[0028] Non-reel-based bonus games allow game designers unlimited scope for creativity. One possible such bonus game is a “pick-a-box” feature in which the player is presented with a number of choices and has to select items in order to win prizes. A variation of this bonus game is the so-called “Pick until Pop” game in which the player continues to select items until a terminating item is selected. A further category of non-reel-based bonus games is based on a wheel spin in which a player is awarded a prize that is a function of a position at which the wheel comes to rest. Another category of non-reel-based bonus games is multi-level games in which selection of a correct item allows the player to progress to a higher level of prizes that may also include a progressive jackpot. The bonus game may also be a combination game comprising both reel-based bonus features and non-reel-based bonus features.

[0029] The underlying video slot game may require a trigger event to occur in order to launch the bonus game. One such type of trigger event may be the occurrence of a pre-

defined combination of trigger symbols on a pay line of the underlying video slot game. This combination of trigger symbols which must be present to trigger the launch of the bonus game is usually included in the pay table of the video slot game. For example, the bonus game may be triggered by a game outcome in which three or more trigger symbols appear on any active pay line of the underlying video slot game. Alternatively, the required number of trigger symbols need not all appear on a single pay line, but could be scattered in any positions in the reel display area of the video slot game. As a further alternative, the bonus game may be triggered randomly. As a yet further alternative, the bonus game may be triggered by the occurrence of a "wind-up" in which the appearance of a predetermined combination of symbols on a subset of the reels of the video slots game initiates a random outcome on the remaining reels of the game. In all of these prior art scenarios, the bonus game may be triggered based on the results of a single play or spin of the underlying video slot game.

[0030] The games of this disclosure are typically played on a client machine which is configured to play a reel-type wager game featuring a bonus game. The client machine may include a display configured to display two or more reels of a reel-type wager game, a memory storing program instructions for facilitating a user to play the reel-type wager game, and a processor for executing the program instructions.

[0031] U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/513,140 discloses an example gaming system whereby multiple distributed client machines may engage in gaming activity via a gaming server over a computer network such as the Internet or a private network. The entire contents of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/513,140 are incorporated by reference herein, as if fully set forth in this description. Furthermore, U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/978,876 discloses another example gaming system wherein play of reel-type games is facilitated. The entire contents of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/978,876 are also incorporated by reference herein, as if fully set forth in this description. In various embodiments, the methods described herein may be implemented in a gaming system of the type disclosed in the U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/513,140 or U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/978,876. However, other embodiments may involve other arrangements of client machines and gaming servers.

[0032] The program instructions at the client machine may include features for displaying assets in the form of bonus tokens as they are accumulated during play of the game. A bonus token, which may take the form of an icon or graphical device of any sort, is accumulated when a symbol associated with an award of a bonus token appears on any one of the reels. The symbol may take any form and could for example be a coin symbol, the letter "B" or the word "Bonus." The bonus game can typically be triggered on demand when at least one bonus token has been accumulated.

[0033] This is illustrated by example with reference to a sequence of screen shots shown in FIGS. 1-9. These screen shots show a display on a user interface (10) of a game playing machine used for playing a reel-type game. The machine may take the form of a video gaming terminal, a slot machine, general purpose computer, personal digital assistant, cellular telephone, or other electronic device. The device includes a memory storing program instructions (not shown but conventional in such machines) and a processing unit (e.g., CPU or microprocessor) which executes the instructions stored in the machine, which again is conventional. The sequence and

organization of the program instructions will be apparent to persons skilled in the art from the description and illustrated examples of operation of the various embodiments of the invention set forth below.

[0034] In particular, FIG. 1 is a representation of a five-reel video slot game which is presented on the display (10) of the game playing machine. The symbols (14) are displayed in an array of symbols (14) in M rows and N columns, here M=3 and N=5. Each column is in the form of a reel (12). Each reel (12) displays three symbols after a turn of the game. The game has up to twenty pay lines, each comprising a unique sequence of array elements (14) going from left to right across the display, each pay line having an associated number. The pay lines in a game of this type are known in the art and the details are not particularly important.

[0035] FIGS. 2 to 6 represent, collectively, a pay table of the five-reel video slot game. FIG. 2 shows the unique sequences of array elements (16), going from left to right, that make up the twenty pay lines. The pay table indicates that the set of symbols (14) of the video slot game contains a "passport" symbol associated with an award of a bonus token, represented in FIG. 3 by the coin symbol (22). During regular play of the video slot game, whenever a passport symbol (22) appears on the centre pay line (23) of the reel display area, a bonus token is awarded. According to the rules of the present embodiment the player may accumulate a maximum of 5 bonus tokens. In FIG. 7, the passport symbol (22) has appeared on the fifth reel (12A) of the video slot game and a bonus token (20A) has been awarded. The bonus token (20A) is represented by a coin symbol that appears outside of the reel display area. The manner of representing an awarded bonus token (20A) is not particularly important and can vary widely. Note that a "PLAY BONUS" icon (26) is also displayed. The PLAY BONUS icon (26) can be used to trigger a bonus game as will be described in more detail below.

[0036] As game play progresses and further spins of the reels occur, the awarded bonus token (20A) and the PLAY BONUS icon (26) remain displayed. In other words, the game is structured such that accumulated bonus tokens (20A) may be preserved from spin to successive spin. In theory, accumulated bonus tokens (20A) could be preserved as long as the player continues to play in one continuous session. It is also possible to "bank" accumulated bonus tokens (20A) should the player quit the game and resume playing later, as will be described in further detail later on.

[0037] Suppose, in this example, that the player continues to play. Consider now FIG. 8. In this particular spin of the game the passport symbol (22) has once again appeared on the fifth reel (12A) of the video slot game and a further bonus token (20A) has been awarded. By this stage the player has, through play of the game, accumulated 4 bonus tokens (20A) represented by four coin symbols that appear outside of the reel display area. The PLAY BONUS icon (26) remains displayed. In this particular version of the game, the rules of the game may be such that the player requires a minimum of one bonus token in order to trigger a bonus game. Since the player has accumulated four bonus tokens (20A), the player may elect to trigger the bonus game when desired. The eligibility of the player to trigger the bonus game may optionally be indicated by a message (not shown) informing the player of such eligibility.

[0038] Although the trigger conditions for bonus play have been met (situation in FIGS. 7 and 8), the game may not automatically transition into a bonus game mode, but instead

may require the player to enter the bonus game mode by activating the PLAY BONUS icon (26). Upon activating the PLAY BONUS icon, the player may be presented with a menu of 5 different bonus games, for example named SMOOTHIE (30), HOT STONE (32), BODY WAX (34), BATH OIL (36) and MASSAGE (38), respectively, as represented in FIG. 9. Each bonus game has an associated "cost" in terms of bonus tokens that will be consumed when the particular bonus game is triggered. In particular, the SMOOTHIE bonus game (30) may consume 1 bonus token (20A) when triggered by the player. The HOT STONE, BODY WAX, BATH OIL and MASSAGE bonus games may consume 2, 3, 4 and 5 bonus tokens, respectively, when triggered. The cost of, and rules associated with, each one of the bonus games are represented in FIGS. 4, 5, and 6. In the present example, the player has accumulated only 4 bonus tokens and will therefore be unable to trigger the MASSAGE bonus game (38), i.e. the first four bonus games in the menu are feasible, while the last bonus game is non-feasible and is greyed-out. The player may be able to selectively trigger any of the feasible bonus games, on demand.

[0039] When the player triggers a selected one of the feasible bonus games, the player's bonus token balance (20A) may be reduced by the associated cost of that bonus game. For example, if the player triggers the BATH OIL bonus game (36), which will consume 4 bonus tokens (20A), the player's bonus token balance may reduce to zero and, once play of the bonus game terminates, neither bonus tokens (20A) nor the PLAY BONUS icon (26) may be visible outside of the reel display area.

[0040] Alternatively, if the player elects to trigger the SMOOTHIE bonus game (30), for example, the player's bonus token balance may reduce from 4 to 3. In this instance, once play of the bonus game terminates, 3 bonus tokens (20A) may still be displayed (one bonus token having been consumed to trigger the SMOOTHIE bonus game), in addition to the PLAY BONUS icon (26). The player may immediately re-activate the PLAY BONUS icon (26), in which case the bonus game menu will show that the SMOOTHIE, HOT STONE and BODY WAX bonus games are still feasible, while both the BATH OIL and MASSAGE bonus games are non-feasible.

[0041] The particular bonus games that are provided to the player may vary widely and are not particularly important. The bonus games may take the form of free spins of the underlying reel-type game, free spins of a new type reel-type game, a "pick until pop" type game, or any other form. It is envisaged that the probability of achieving a winning payout in any bonus game, and the magnitude of such a winning payout, is proportional to the corresponding cost in bonus tokens consumed in triggering that bonus game.

[0042] Whenever the player has consumed all available bonus tokens (20A) to trigger one or more bonus games, the player may be required to accumulate at least one further bonus symbol in the manner described above in order to again qualify for bonus play, and the player's eligibility for such bonus play is presented using the indicators in the manner described above.

[0043] In the above embodiment, the essence of the triggering mechanism is that bonus tokens (20A) are accumulated over time as game play progresses and different bonus games can be triggered when the player has accumulated sufficient bonus tokens to meet different corresponding thresholds, 1 to 5 in this example. It is anticipated that player

interest in the video slot game will be sustained, particularly in circumstances where a player has accumulated a substantial number of bonus tokens (20A).

[0044] Numerous variations and permutations are possible to this embodiment without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, a bonus token (20A) may be accumulated when a passport symbol (22) occurs in any position in the viewable portion of the associated slot reel (12) instead of only on the centre pay line position (line 23 in FIGS. 1, 7 and 8).

[0045] In another example, the symbol set of the video slot game may also include a deactivation symbol (not shown), e.g., the word "bonus" with a line through it. When the deactivation symbol appears on any one of the reels, one accumulated bonus token (20A) may be forfeited. Alternatively, all accumulated bonus tokens may be forfeited when the deactivation symbol appears. This feature can be used to discourage the player from "warehousing" or hoarding accumulated bonus tokens.

[0046] In yet another example, at the commencement of a playing session, the player starts with no accumulated bonus tokens (20A). Alternatively, in order to encourage a player to return to the game, all accumulated bonus tokens at the end of a playing session could be carried forward to the player's next playing session. In other words, when a player plays the game and accumulates one or more bonus tokens (20A), the accumulated bonus tokens are "banked" until the player logs back in and continues playing the game. The "banking" of the accumulated bonus tokens (20A) can take the form of storing data in memory local to the client machine indicating the identity of the player and the number of accumulated bonus tokens at the time of termination of play. Such information may also be stored in a gaming server that functions to generate results of play and transmits results of play to the player's client machine.

II. Game Playing Environments

[0047] As noted previously, the features of this disclosure can be implemented in a variety of game playing formats. Several representative examples of these formats will be described in this section.

[0048] In one format, a personal computer may be loaded with game playing program instructions which includes a reel-type game. The game can be played solely for amusement, in which case the computer is typically not interacting with any external resource which logs wagers, determines and communicates results, or adjusts a player's credit account. The game software may present the reels such as shown in FIGS. 1 and 7-8. When a "passport symbol" (22) is present on a pay line, a bonus token (20A) is accumulated as described above. When one or more bonus tokens (20A) have been accumulated in this manner, the program instructions for the game may enable the player to trigger a bonus game in exchange for a predetermined number of bonus tokens.

[0049] In another format, the game may be played in a video gaming terminal, such as found in a land or ship-borne casino. One example of this embodiment is shown in FIG. 10. A casino (40) includes a plurality of game playing machines (50) (in this example, four reel video slot machines) which are connected to a local area network (60). A player inserts a card having a magnetic strip storing a credit amount into a slot (54) in the machine (50). The card is read and wager amounts are deducted from the value carried by the card. The machine (50) includes a display (52) showing four reels (12). The display

(52) may also include features which are not shown, such as wager controls, which are conventional and not important. A turn of the game is made by pulling on the handle (56) or by pressing a spin button, or in some other fashion.

[0050] In this example, the results of play may be generated by a gaming server (62) using a random number generator (or other process to generate a set of reel symbols randomly). The gaming server may communicate the results of play to the client machine (50) (e.g., a video gaming terminal) over the network (60) as one or more packets or datagram containing data indicating which symbols are to be displayed on the reels (12). The datagram(s) are processed by program instructions on the client device (50) and presented on the display (52) in known fashion. When the gaming server's randomly generated results include the passport symbol (22) (in this example a star symbol), the gaming server includes with the datagram (s) containing the results of the spin a flag or bit which indicates that an accumulated bonus token (20A) and the PLAY BONUS icon (26) are to be displayed, since one of the results for reel (12B) is the star symbol (22). Alternatively, the program instructions in the terminal (50) may include logic or code which searches the datagram for a data indicating that the star symbol was returned as a result, and if it finds such data a bonus token (20A) is displayed outside of the reel display area.

[0051] In this example, suppose the player accumulated two bonus tokens and decided to play poker at a table in the casino (40), or some other wager game on a different machine (50). The player's accumulated bonus tokens stored in the gaming server (62) or, alternatively, in the player's client machine or locally on the player's magnetic card. The player ejects their card from the slot (54) and then proceeds to play wager games elsewhere in the casino. At a later time, they may return to a client machine (50) (need not be the same machine they previously played at) and insert their card. The card includes a unique code such as a card number which is correlated at the server (62) with the stored results when the player previously exited the game. The display of the reels reverts to the display of the accumulated bonus tokens (20A) that were present when the player previously exited the game on the previous client machine (50). In this example, the player continues the game where they left off. In one variation, accumulated bonus tokens (20A) are not carried over and when they exit the play on the client machine (50) any accumulated bonus tokens are lost.

[0052] Aspects for this invention are also particularly suited for use in the context of playing of wager games over a computer network. Referring to FIG. 11, a gaming system suitable for use in wager games and promotions of this disclosure is indicated generally by reference numeral (100). The gaming system (100) includes a central gaming server (102), and a number of portals (103a, 103b) in the form of portal websites on the World Wide Web of the Internet. In this embodiment, each one of the portal websites may be an online casino website hosted on a corresponding casino web server (not shown). For convenience, embodiments of the invention will be described with particular reference to only two such online casino websites (103a, 103b). Other online casino websites may be present, or, alternatively, just one casino website may be present.

[0053] Each one of the online casino websites (103a, 103b) may be accessible by a would-be player (not shown) through a player gaming client machine (104) in the form of an Internet-enabled client machine (e.g., general purpose computer)

having a display monitor (105) and an associated pointing device (105a) such as a mouse or, alternatively, a touchpad. In this embodiment, online casino website (103a) is shown as having one client machine (104) logically connected thereto, whereas casino website (103b) is shown as being logically connected to two client machines (104). It should be appreciated that such online casino websites (103a, 103b) can be logically connected to any desired number of such client machines (104) simultaneously, which number is physically limited only by considerations of processing power and Internet access bandwidth.

[0054] The gaming server (102), the online casino web servers (not shown) corresponding to the online casino websites (103a, 103b), and the client machines (104) are capable of communicating with each other by means of an open communication network, which, in this embodiment, may be the Internet. The Internet is represented in FIG. 11 as separate logical communication networks (106, 107, 108, and 110). The particular networking topology used and presence of intermediate networks or switching equipment is not important, and may make use of intervening communications network such as the public switched telephone network, cable networks, cellular wireless networks, WiFi, WiMax, etc.

[0055] Each online casino operates an account facility (114a and 114b, respectively) with a credit account corresponding to each player who participates in a game offered by the online casino. In the illustrated embodiment, therefore, the credit account facility (114a) has one player credit account associated with it, while credit account facility (114b) has two associated, but separate, player credit accounts.

[0056] Stored program instructions (not shown) may be resident in the client machine (104) which enables a participating player to browse a casino website and to interact with the gaming server (102) to play wager games such as slots, poker, Black Jack, Roulette and other games. The program instructions may include display tools for displaying on the user interface display (105) gaming symbols (e.g., slot machine reels, cards, Roulette wheels, etc.), display gaming controls by which the player can place wagers, spin the reels, etc., and display the results of play. The program instructions may also include gaming logic for facilitating the execution of a turn of a game, and communications facilities for communicating player actions using the user interface to the central gaming server, and receiving datagrams from the gaming server containing results of play. The data representing results of play is translated to graphical symbols which are presented on the user interface display (105). Further details are known in the art and described in the patent literature, see e.g., U.S. application Ser. No. 10/550,744 filed Sep. 23, 2005, and incorporated by reference in its entirety herein.

[0057] Each client machine (104) may take the form of a conventional personal computer operating under a Windows Vista, XP, ME, 2000 or other operating system, which is well known and commercially available from Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Wash., or other operating system such as provided by Apple Computer or a Linux operating system. The client machine (104) may also take the form of a portable computing device such as personal digital assistant or cellular telephone. The client machine (104) may also take the form of an electronic gaming terminal.

[0058] The gaming server (102) may operate under control of program instructions (not shown) that co-operates with the client machine program instructions in order to enable a

player at the client machine (104) to play a wager game. The gaming server (102) may operate, for example, under the Windows NT operating system.

[0059] The client machine program instructions or application (not shown) and the corresponding gaming server program instructions will be referred to, for convenience, as a client process and a server process, respectively. The server process may generate one or more random events that determine the outcome of turns of the game, such as determining the outcome of spins of the slot machine reels in the various slots games of the participating players. The client process of any particular client machine (104) obtains the result of the random events from the gaming server (102) along the communication network (108) and displays the outcome of the game on the display monitor (105) of the client machine in an intelligible manner, by causing the player's set of slots reels to spin and to come to rest at a position corresponding to the outcome. If a slot machine reel includes a symbol (22) associated with an award of a bonus token, such as the star symbol of FIG. 11 or the "passport" symbol (22) of FIGS. 7 and 8, then an accumulated bonus token (20A) may be displayed outside of the reel display area. As noted, the instruction to display the bonus token could come from the gaming server (102) in the form of a flag or bit in the datagram with the results of the spin, or alternatively the client machine program instructions may detect the presence of the bonus symbol in the datagram and activate the indicator (20A).

[0060] The gaming server (102) thus may generate results of spins of the reels for the client machines (104) and send datagram(s) to the client machines indicating such results. In one possible embodiment, to generate the results of a spin of the reels, the gaming server (102) includes a memory (not shown, but conventional) storing data representing potential results for each of the reels. The gaming server may use a random process (e.g., random number generator) to select one of the results from memory. One of the results stored in the gaming server memory is data representing a result in the form of a symbol which is associated with award of a bonus token, e.g., the coin symbol (22) shown in FIGS. 7 and 8. The memory may also store data representing a potential result in the form of a deactivation symbol (e.g., the letter B or the word "Bonus" with a line through it). Should the deactivation symbol be returned, at least some previously accumulated bonus symbols may be lost.

[0061] The gaming server can also "bank" the progress made towards a bonus game in the event that a player ceases playing the reel-type game, e.g., logs out of the casino or elects to play other games such as poker. The gaming server is further provided with a memory storing data (e.g., a flag or bit) indicating whether a result of a spin of the reels for the client machines has included the symbol associated with accumulation of a bonus token. The gaming server may store such data in the memory after the client machine has ceased play of the game. Should the player return to playing the reel-type game, the gaming server (102) consults the memory and returns a datagram to the player's client machine which includes such data. The player's client machine display then shows the accumulated or "banked" bonus tokens (20A) and starts play where they previously left off.

[0062] In order to play the games from any particular client machine (104), the client process (not shown) may first be downloaded to that client machine from the gaming server (102) or, alternatively, from a separate web server (not shown), and then installed on the client machine.

[0063] In use, a player wishing to participate in a wager game uses a client machine (104) to access an online casino website (103a, 103b) of his choice. When the player navigates using a Web browser to a home page of a casino, a promotional message may be displayed (described below). The player may be presented with an icon on the user interface on his client machine (104), which the player can activate in order to download the client process and register with the casino operator. Following these tasks, the player may request to play games provided on the casino website by clicking on an appropriate icon or taking other similar action.

[0064] The online casino websites (103a, 103b) may be provisioned as a virtual slots room where slots is the only game available to would-be players, rather than one where a variety of different games are offered to a player. It will be noted again that a system implementing the methods of this invention need not include two (or more) separate casino websites (103a, 103b), and that only one website (103) may be linked to the gaming server (102).

III. Example Gaming Methods

[0065] FIGS. 12-15 are flow charts of methods in accordance with example embodiments of this invention. It should be understood that each of the methods illustrated by these figures may include more or fewer steps. Furthermore, the steps of any two or more of these flow charts can be combined with one another, in whole or in part, without departing from the scope of the invention.

[0066] FIG. 12 illustrates a method for a gaming server, that supports play of a reel-type game with a client machine, to also engage in play of a bonus game. At step (202), the gaming server may transmit a first result of a first spin of the reel-type game to the client machine. The reel-type game may comprise any number of reels and each reel may be marked with any number of symbols.

[0067] Preferably, the client machine accesses a user account on the gaming server, and the user account contains a representation of a number of bonus credits that may be used by the user account when playing bonus games. The number of bonus credits may be positive, indicating a surplus, or negative, indicating a deficit that the user account may "pay back" at some point in the future. Of course, there also may be zero bonus credits associated with the user account.

[0068] The gaming server may maintain these bonus credits between spins of the reel-type game, or between gaming sessions of the reel-type game. Gaming sessions of the reel-type game may be defined as, for example, a sequence of events involving the client machine logging on to the user account, a number of turns of the reel-type game being played by the client machine, and the client machine logging off of the user account.

[0069] Furthermore, the gaming server and the client machine may either be integrated with one another or communicatively coupled by a network. For instance, the gaming server and client machines may be components of the same physical machine, in communication with one another by a local network, or in communication with one another by a wide area network such as the Internet.

[0070] Regardless, at step (204), the gaming server may receive, from the client machine, a first request to play a first bonus game. The first bonus game may be one of various game types, such as, but not limited to, free spins of the reel-type game, free spins of a different reel-type game, or a

pick-until-pop type game. Preferably, playing the first bonus game is associated with a first amount of bonus credits.

[0071] At step (206), the gaming server may debit the bonus credits associated with the user account by the first amount. In this way, the client machine “pays” for the privilege of playing the first bonus game. Then, at step (208), the gaming server may engage the client machine in play of the first bonus game.

[0072] The outcome of the first bonus game may vary. For instance, the client machine may win something of value, such as money, virtual money, more bonus tokens, or some other form of prize. Of course, some outcomes of the first bonus game may be negative outcomes, in the sense that the client machine may lose something of value.

[0073] As discussed above, between spins of the reel type game, the gaming server preferably stores and maintains the bonus tokens accumulated by the client machine. Thus, as illustrated in FIGS. 13 and 14, further spins of the reel-type game may decrease or increase the number of these stored bonus tokens.

[0074] For instance, FIG. 13 illustrates the operation of a bonus deactivation feature. After engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the client machine may engage in subsequent spins of the reel-type game. At step (302), the gaming server may transmit a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine. This second result may include a bonus deactivation indication, and the bonus deactivation indication may be associated with a second amount of bonus credits. At step (304), the gaming server may debit the bonus credits associated with the user account by the second amount. This second amount may be a predetermined amount, or may be all of the bonus credits associated with the user account.

[0075] One useful aspect of this bonus deactivation feature is to discourage the client machine from “warehousing” or otherwise hoarding bonus credits. Additionally or alternatively, the gaming server may discourage such behaviour by allowing a user account to accumulate no more than a threshold number of bonus credits. Accordingly, once this threshold is reached, the gaming server may prohibit the further accumulation of bonus credits in the user account.

[0076] FIG. 14 illustrates the client machine accumulating additional bonus credits, and using its accumulated bonus credits to play a second bonus game. At step (402), after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server may transmit a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine. At step (404), the gaming server may receive, from the client machine, a second request to play the second bonus game. Preferably playing the second bonus game is associated with a second amount of bonus credits. Then, at step (406), the gaming server may debit the bonus credits associated with the user account by the second amount, and at step (408) may engage the client machine in play of the second bonus game.

[0077] The second amount of bonus credits may be greater than the first amount of bonus credits, therefore making the second bonus game more “expensive” to play than the first bonus game. Thus, among other aspects of the method illustrated in FIG. 14, the client machine may be able to accumulate bonus credits in the user account. At any given point, the client machine may have accumulated sufficient bonus credits to play one or more bonus games, but not all bonus games.

By continuing to accumulate bonus credits, the client machine may eventually be able to play any available bonus game.

[0078] Other aspects and embodiments in accordance with FIGS. 12-14 may be possible as well. For instance, in addition to transmitting the indication of the result of the first spin to the client machine, the gaming server may also transmit a list of at least one bonus game available to the user account, wherein the first bonus game is in the list. The decision to transmit the list may be based on the bonus credits associated with the user account. Upon receiving the list, the client device may choose a bonus game from the list.

[0079] Additionally, the results any of the spins of the reel-type game may be transmitted as part of a screen display, and the screen display may include a reel display area. The result may also include a bonus token. This bonus token may appear in various places on the screen display, including but not limited to, inside the reel display area, outside the reel display area, or on a centre play line position in the reel display area.

[0080] FIG. 15 illustrates another method for a gaming server to support a bonus game. Similar to the discussion in reference to FIG. 12, a client machine may access a user account on the gaming server, and the user account may contain a representation of a number of bonus credits that may be used by the user account when playing bonus games. The gaming server may maintain these bonus credits between spins of the reel-type game, or between gaming sessions of the reel-type game. Furthermore, the gaming server and the client machine may either be integrated with one another or communicatively coupled by a network.

[0081] At step (502), the gaming server may determine an outcome of a first spin of the reel-type game. The outcome may include the user account being awarded at least one bonus credit. Accordingly, at step (504), the gaming server may credit the user account by the at least one bonus credit. Additionally, at step (506), the gaming server may transmit, to the client machine, a first result of the first spin of the reel-type game, and a first indication of the award of the at least one bonus credit.

[0082] At step (508), the gaming server may determine whether it receives, from the client machine, a first request to play a first bonus game. At step (510), if the gaming server receives the first request to play a first bonus game, then the gaming server may debit the bonus credits in the user account by a cost to play the first bonus game and engage the client machine in play of the first bonus game. At step (512) however, if the gaming server instead receives a second request to not play any bonus game, then the gaming server may maintain the bonus credits in the user account. In other words, the gaming server may leave the user account’s balance unchanged.

IV. Additional Description

[0083] The following clauses are offered as further description of the disclosed inventions.

[0084] 1. A method for a gaming server to facilitate play of bonus games, wherein the gaming server is communicatively coupled to a client machine playing a reel-type game, wherein the client machine uses a user account to play the reel-type game, wherein the gaming server generates results of a spin of each of a plurality of reels in the reel-type game for the client machine and transmits the results to the client machine, and wherein the gaming server maintains bonus credits associated with the user account, the method comprising:

[0085] the gaming server transmitting a first result of a first spin of the reel-type game to the client machine;

[0086] the gaming server receiving, from the client machine, a first request to play a first bonus game, wherein playing the first bonus game is associated with a first amount of bonus credits;

[0087] in response to receiving the first request, the gaming server debiting the bonus credits associated with the user account by the first amount; and

[0088] the gaming server engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game.

[0089] 2. The method of clause 1, further comprising:

[0090] based on the bonus credits associated with the user account, the gaming server also transmitting, to the client machine, a list of at least one bonus game available to the user account, wherein the first bonus game is in the list.

[0091] 3. The method of any previous clause, wherein the gaming server maintains the bonus credits between spins of the reel-type game.

[0092] 4. The method of any previous clause, wherein a gaming session of the reel type game, facilitated by the gaming server, consists of the client machine logging on to the user account, a number of turns of the reel-type game being played by the client machine, and the client machine logging off of the user account, and wherein the gaming server maintains the bonus credits between gaming sessions.

[0093] 5. The method of any previous clause, wherein the result of the first spin of the reel-type game is transmitted as part of a screen display, wherein the screen display includes a reel display area, and the indication of the result also includes a bonus token.

[0094] 6. The method of clause 5, wherein the bonus token is displayed in any position in the reel display area.

[0095] 7. The method of clause 5, wherein the bonus token is displayed outside of the reel display area.

[0096] 8. The method of clause 5, wherein the reel display area includes a centre pay line position, and wherein the bonus token is displayed in the centre pay line position.

[0097] 9. The method of any previous clause further comprising:

[0098] after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, wherein the second result includes a bonus deactivation indication, wherein the bonus deactivation indication is associated with a second amount of bonus credits; and

[0099] the gaming server debiting the bonus credits associated with the user account by the second amount.

[0100] 10. The method of clause 9, wherein the second amount is all bonus credits associated with the user account.

[0101] 11. The method of any previous clause, wherein the gaming server allows no more than a threshold number of bonus credits to be associated with the user account.

[0102] 12. The method of any previous clause, further comprising:

[0103] after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine;

[0104] the gaming server receiving, from the client machine, a second request to play a second bonus game, wherein playing the second bonus game is associated with a second amount of bonus credits;

[0105] in response to receiving the second request to play the second bonus game, the gaming server debiting the user account by the second amount; and

[0106] the gaming server engaging the client machine in play of the second bonus game.

[0107] 13. The method of clause 12, wherein the second amount is greater than the first amount.

[0108] 14. The method of any previous clause, wherein the bonus game is chosen from the group consisting of free spins of the reel-type game, free spins of a different reel-type game, and a pick-until-pop type game.

[0109] 15. A method for a gaming server to facilitate play of bonus games, wherein the gaming server is communicatively coupled to a client machine playing a reel-type game, wherein the client machine uses a user account to play the reel-type game, wherein the gaming server generates results of spins of each of a plurality of reels in the reel-type game for the client machine, and transmits results of the spins to the client machine, and wherein the gaming server maintains bonus credits associated with the user account, the method comprising:

[0110] the gaming server determining an outcome of a first spin of the reel-type game, wherein the outcome includes the user account being awarded at least one bonus credit;

[0111] the gaming server crediting the user account by the at least one bonus credit;

[0112] the gaming server transmitting, to the client machine, a first result of the first spin of the reel-type game, and a first indication of the award of the at least one bonus credit;

[0113] if the gaming server receives, from the client machine, a first request to play a first bonus game, then the gaming server debiting the bonus credits in the user account by a first amount and engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, wherein the first amount is the cost to play the first bonus game; and

[0114] if the gaming server receives, from the client machine, a second request not to play any bonus game, then the gaming server maintaining the bonus credits in the user account.

[0115] 16. The method of clause 15, further comprising:

[0116] after the first spin of the reel-type game, the gaming server also transmitting, to the client machine, a list of at least one bonus game available to play, wherein the first bonus game is in the list.

[0117] 17. The method of any of clauses 15 and 16, wherein the gaming server maintains the bonus credits between spins of the reel-type game.

[0118] 18. The method of any of clauses 15, 16, and 17, wherein a gaming session of the reel type game consists of the client machine logging on to the user account, a number of turns of the reel-type game being played by the client machine, and the client machine logging off of the user account, and wherein the gaming server maintain the bonus credits between gaming sessions.

[0119] 19. The method of any of clauses 15, 16, 17, and 18, wherein the first result of the first spin of the reel-type game is transmitted as part of a screen display, wherein the screen display includes a reel display area, and the indication includes a bonus token.

[0120] 20. The method of any of clauses 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19, further comprising:

[0121] the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine,

wherein the second result includes a bonus deactivation indication, wherein the bonus deactivation indication is associated with a second amount of bonus credits; and

[0122] the gaming server debiting the bonus credits associated with the user account by the second amount.

[0123] 21. The method of any of clauses 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20, further comprising:

[0124] after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine;

[0125] the gaming server receiving, from the client machine, a second request to play a second bonus game, wherein playing the second bonus game is associated with a second amount of bonus credits;

[0126] in response to receiving the second request, the gaming server debiting the user account by the second amount; and

[0127] the gaming server engaging the client machine in play of the second bonus game.

[0128] 22. The method of clause 21, wherein the second amount is greater than the first amount.

[0129] 23. A gaming server, communicatively coupled to at least one client machine, wherein the gaming server allows the client machine to play a reel-type game, wherein the gaming server generates results of spins of each of a plurality of reels in the reel-type game for the client machine and transmits results of the spins to the client machine, the gaming server comprising:

[0130] a processor capable of executing program instructions; and

[0131] a memory containing data and the program instructions,

[0132] wherein the data includes a representation of a user account, wherein the client machine plays the reel-type game via the gaming server with the user account, wherein the representation of the user account contains a quantity of bonus credits,

[0133] wherein the program instructions are executable by the processor to (i) transmit a first result of a first spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, (ii) receive, from the client machine, a first request to play a first bonus game, wherein playing the first bonus game is associated with a first amount of bonus credits, (iii) in response to receiving the first request, debit the user account by the first amount, and (iv) engage the client machine in play of the first bonus game.

[0134] 24. The gaming server of clause 23, wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to, based on the bonus credits associated with the user account, also transmit, to the client machine, a list of at least one bonus game available to the user account, wherein the first bonus game is in the list.

[0135] 25. The gaming server of any of clauses 23 and 24, wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to maintain the bonus credits between spins of the reel-type game.

[0136] 26. The gaming server of any of clauses 23, 24, and 25, wherein a gaming session of the reel type game, facilitated by the gaming server, consists of the client machine logging on to the user account, a number of turns of the reel-type game being played by the client machine, and the client machine logging off of the user account, and wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to maintain the bonus credits between gaming sessions.

[0137] 27. The gaming server of any of clauses 23, 24, 25, and 26, wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to (i) after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, transmit a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, wherein the second result includes a bonus deactivation indication, wherein the bonus deactivation indication is associated with a second amount of bonus credits, and (ii) debit the bonus credits associated with the user account by the second amount.

[0138] 28. The gaming server of any of clauses 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27, wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to (i) after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, (ii) the gaming server receiving, from the client machine, a second request to play a second bonus game, wherein playing the second bonus game is associated with a second amount of bonus credits, (iii) in response to receiving the second request, the gaming server debiting the user account by the second amount, and (iv) the gaming server engaging the client machine in play of the second bonus game.

[0139] 29. The gaming server of any of clauses 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28, wherein the second amount is greater than the first amount.

V. Conclusion

[0140] As used herein, the term “reel” is intended to be interpreted to include any device displaying one or more symbols in which the one or more symbols displayed are randomly determined. Furthermore, for the embodiments described herein, the terms “random” or “randomly” shall refer to any realizable process of randomly generating events. Such processes shall include, but not be limited to, generating events without a deterministic pattern of occurrences. Additionally, these processes may be pseudo-random, thus resulting in a deterministic pattern of occurrences that exhibit some form of statistical randomness.

[0141] Variation from the disclosed embodiments may of course be made without departure from the scope of the invention. All questions concerning scope are to be answered by reference to the appended claims.

We claim:

1. A method for a gaming server to facilitate play of bonus games, wherein the gaming server is communicatively coupled to a client machine playing a reel-type game, wherein the client machine uses a user account to play the reel-type game, wherein the gaming server generates results of a spin of each of a plurality of reels in the reel-type game for the client machine and transmits the results to the client machine, and wherein the gaming server maintains bonus credits associated with the user account, the method comprising:

the gaming server transmitting a first result of a first spin of the reel-type game to the client machine;

the gaming server receiving, from the client machine, a first request to play a first bonus game, wherein playing the first bonus game is associated with a first amount of bonus credits;

in response to receiving the first request, the gaming server debiting the bonus credits associated with the user account by the first amount; and

the gaming server engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
based on the bonus credits associated with the user account, the gaming server also transmitting, to the client machine, a list of at least one bonus game available to the user account, wherein the first bonus game is in the list.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the gaming server maintains the bonus credits between spins of the reel-type game.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein a gaming session of the reel type game, facilitated by the gaming server, consists of the client machine logging on to the user account, a number of turns of the reel-type game being played by the client machine, and the client machine logging off of the user account, and wherein the gaming server maintains the bonus credits between gaming sessions.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the first result of the first spin of the reel-type game is transmitted as part of a screen display, wherein the screen display includes a reel display area, and the indication of the result also includes a bonus token.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein the bonus token is displayed in any position in the reel display area.
7. The method of claim 5, wherein the bonus token is displayed outside of the reel display area.
8. The method of claim 5, wherein the reel display area includes a centre pay line position, and wherein the bonus token is displayed in the centre pay line position.
9. The method of claim 1 further comprising:
after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, wherein the second result includes a bonus deactivation indication, wherein the bonus deactivation indication is associated with a second amount of bonus credits; and
the gaming server debiting the bonus credits associated with the user account by the second amount.
10. The method of claim 9, wherein the second amount is all bonus credits associated with the user account.
11. The method of claim 1, wherein the gaming server allows no more than a threshold number of bonus credits to be associated with the user account.
12. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine;
the gaming server receiving, from the client machine, a second request to play a second bonus game, wherein playing the second bonus game is associated with a second amount of bonus credits;
in response to receiving the second request to play the second bonus game, the gaming server debiting the user account by the second amount; and
the gaming server engaging the client machine in play of the second bonus game.
13. The method of claim 12, wherein the second amount is greater than the first amount.
14. The method of claim 1, wherein the bonus game is chosen from the group consisting of free spins of the reel-type game, free spins of a different reel-type game, and a pick-until-pop type game.
15. A method for a gaming server to facilitate play of bonus games, wherein the gaming server is communicatively coupled to a client machine playing a reel-type game, wherein the client machine uses a user account to play the reel-type game, wherein the gaming server generates results of spins of each of a plurality of reels in the reel-type game for the client machine, and transmits results of the spins to the client machine, and wherein the gaming server maintains bonus credits associated with the user account, the method comprising:
the gaming server determining an outcome of a first spin of the reel-type game, wherein the outcome includes the user account being awarded at least one bonus credit;
the gaming server crediting the user account by the at least one bonus credit;
the gaming server transmitting, to the client machine, a first result of the first spin of the reel-type game, and a first indication of the award of the at least one bonus credit;
if the gaming server receives, from the client machine, a first request to play a first bonus game, then the gaming server debiting the bonus credits in the user account by a first amount and engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, wherein the first amount is the cost to play the first bonus game; and
if the gaming server receives, from the client machine, a second request to not play any bonus game, then the gaming server maintaining the bonus credits in the user account.
16. The method of claim 15, further comprising:
after the first spin of the reel-type game, the gaming server also transmitting, to the client machine, a list of at least one bonus game available to play, wherein the first bonus game is in the list.
17. The method of claim 15, wherein the gaming server maintains the bonus credits between spins of the reel-type game.
18. The method of claim 15, wherein a gaming session of the reel type game consists of the client machine logging on to the user account, a number of turns of the reel-type game being played by the client machine, and the client machine logging off of the user account, and wherein the gaming server maintain the bonus credits between gaming sessions.
19. The method of claim 15, wherein the first result of the first spin of the reel-type game is transmitted as part of a screen display, wherein the screen display includes a reel display area, and the first result includes a bonus token.
20. The method of claim 15 further comprising:
the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, wherein the second result includes a bonus deactivation indication, wherein the bonus deactivation indication is associated with a second amount of bonus credits; and
the gaming server debiting the bonus credits associated with the user account by the second amount.
21. The method of claim 15, further comprising:
after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine;
the gaming server receiving, from the client machine, a second request to play a second bonus game, wherein playing the second bonus game is associated with a second amount of bonus credits;

in response to receiving the second request, the gaming server debiting the user account by the second amount; and
the gaming server engaging the client machine in play of the second bonus game.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the second amount is greater than the first amount.

23. A gaming server, communicatively coupled to at least one client machine, wherein the gaming server allows the client machine to play a reel-type game, wherein the gaming server generates results of spins of each of a plurality of reels in the reel-type game for the client machine and transmits results of the spins to the client machine, the gaming server comprising:

a processor capable of executing program instructions; and
a memory containing data and the program instructions,
wherein the data includes a representation of a user account, wherein the client machine plays the reel-type game via the gaming server with the user account, wherein the representation of the user account contains a quantity of bonus credits,

wherein the program instructions are executable by the processor to (i) transmit a first result of a first spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, (ii) receive, from the client machine, a first request to play a first bonus game, wherein playing the first bonus game is associated with a first amount of bonus credits, (iii) in response to receiving the first request, debit the user account by the first amount, and (iv) engage the client machine in play of the first bonus game.

24. The gaming server of claim 23, wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to, based on the bonus credits associated with the user account, also transmit, to the client machine, a list of at least one bonus game available to the user account, wherein the first bonus game is in the list.

25. The gaming server of claim 23, wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to maintain the bonus credits between spins of the reel-type game.

26. The gaming server of claim 23, wherein a gaming session of the reel type game, facilitated by the gaming server, consists of the client machine logging on to the user account, a number of turns of the reel-type game being played by the client machine, and the client machine logging off of the user account, and wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to maintain the bonus credits between gaming sessions.

27. The gaming server of claim 23, wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to (i) after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, transmit a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, wherein the second result includes a bonus deactivation indication, wherein the bonus deactivation indication is associated with a second amount of bonus credits, and (ii) debit the bonus credits associated with the user account by the second amount.

28. The gaming server of claim 23, wherein the memory further contains program instructions executable by the processor to (i) after engaging the client machine in play of the first bonus game, the gaming server transmitting a second result of a second spin of the reel-type game to the client machine, (ii) the gaming server receiving, from the client machine, a second request to play a second bonus game, wherein playing the second bonus game is associated with a second amount of bonus credits, (iii) in response to receiving the second request, the gaming server debiting the user account by the second amount, and (iv) the gaming server engaging the client machine in play of the second bonus game.

29. The gaming server of claim 23, wherein the second amount is greater than the first amount.

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