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(71) Applicant: **Aristocrat Technologies Australia Pty.
Ltd.**

Lane Cove, NSW 2066 (AU)

(72) Inventors:

- **Fong, Colin c/o Aristocrat T. Australia Pty Ltd
Lane Cove / 2066 - New South Wales (AU)**
- **Hall, James c/o Aristocrat T. Australia Pty Ltd
Lane Cove / 2066 - New South Wales (AU)**

(74) Representative: **Driver, Virginia Rozanne et al**

Page White & Farrer

54 Doughty Street

London WC1N 2LS (GB)

(54) **Gaming machine with sequential awarding of special feature bonuses**

(57) A gaming machine 10 has a display 14 and a game controller arranged to control images of symbols displayed on the display. The game controller is arranged to play a game 16 wherein at least one random event is caused to be displayed on the display 14 and, if a predefined winning event occurs, the machine 10 awards a prize. When a trigger condition occurs in a base game of the game 16, a special feature is awarded where, prior to commencement of the special feature,

an animation occurs, without any player intervention. The animation results in a sequence of images being caused to be revealed serially, at least certain of the images revealing a number of bonuses associated with the special feature. A final set of the bonuses awarded in respect of the special feature only becomes known to a player of the game after all the images have been revealed.

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Description

[0001] This invention relates to a gaming machine. More particularly, the invention relates to a gaming machine and to an improvement to a game played on such a gaming machine.

[0002] Players who regularly play gaming machines quickly tire of particular games and therefore it is necessary for manufacturers of these machines to develop innovative game features which add interest to the games. In so doing, it is hoped to keep players amused and therefore willing to continue playing the game as well as to attract new players.

[0003] Also, with the growth that has occurred in the gaming machine market, there is intense competition between manufacturers to supply various existing and new venues. When selecting a supplier of gaming machines, the operator of a venue will often pay close attention to the popularity of various games with their patrons. Therefore, gaming machine manufacturers are keen to devise games and/or game features which are popular with the players as a mechanism for improving sales, retaining customers and attracting new customers.

[0004] According to the invention, there is provided a gaming machine having a display means and a game control means arranged to control images of symbols displayed on the display means, the game control means being arranged to play a game wherein at least one random event is caused to be displayed on the display means and, if a predefined winning event occurs, the machine awards a prize, wherein, when a trigger condition occurs in a base game of the game, a special feature is awarded where, prior to commencement of the special feature, an animation occurs, without any player intervention, the animation resulting in a sequence of images being caused to be revealed serially, at least certain of the images revealing a number of bonuses associated with the special feature, with a final set of the bonuses awarded in respect of the special feature only becoming known to a player of the game after all the images have been revealed.

[0005] In a preferred embodiment of the game, the special feature may be a free game feature comprising a number of free games.

[0006] The bonuses may be selected from the group comprising a number of free games to be played in the special feature, multipliers to multiply wins during the free games, bonus symbols which award an amount of credit when the bonus symbols occur during the free games and combinations of the foregoing. Preferably, the bonuses comprise a combination of free games, multipliers and bonus symbols.

[0007] The images may include non-award winning images which do not award any bonuses but merely act as fillers in the sequence of images.

[0008] The animation may reveal only a portion of the total number of free games constituting the special fea-

ture at a time as the sequence of images is revealed so that, until all the images have been revealed in the sequence, the player is unaware of the total number of free games to be awarded.

[0009] The animation may occur in a manner related thematically to the theme of the base game. For example, the game may be a game having a travel theme. The device by which the images are revealed may be in the form of a roll of unexposed film which is withdrawn from a canister, after which each frame on the roll is "exposed" sequentially to reveal the bonuses awarded.

[0010] Thus, for example, a first frame may reveal a non-bonus awarding, picture image which does not influence the outcome of the special feature, a second frame may reveal a first quantity of free games awarded followed by a number of picture images. A further frame may then reveal a multiplier which applies to wins, if any, resulting from the free games, a further image may reveal a bonus symbol which, when it appears in any of the free games results in the awarding of a number of credits, yet a further image may reveal a further quantity of free games, etc.

[0011] What is revealed in each position in the sequence of images may vary from feature to feature. Preferably, the images which are to be revealed in the sequence of images and the order in which they are to be revealed are contained in a pathway of outcomes (referred to below as a "pathway").

[0012] Hence, the control means may include a set of pathways and when the special feature is awarded, one of the pathways is randomly selected by the control means to apply to that feature. Thus, the selected pathway may govern the number of free games constituting the special feature, whether or not a multiplier will apply during the free games and, if a multiplier is to apply, the value of the multiplier by which any wins in the free games are multiplied and whether or not any bonus, credit prizes will be awarded during the free games.

[0013] A display relating to the special feature may include a recording device that records the bonuses awarded as they are revealed so that, when the animation has been completed, the total number of free games of the special feature, any multipliers and any bonus prizes applicable to the special feature are displayed.

[0014] The recording means may, once again, be related thematically to the game of the gaming machine and may be superimposed over images of the base game which triggered the special feature. Once all the images have been revealed, the recording means may be removed. A message may appear on the screen display indicating the bonuses awarded.

[0015] The invention is now described by way of example with reference to the accompanying diagrammatic drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows a perspective view of a gaming machine, in accordance with the invention;

Figure 2 shows a block diagram of a control circuit

of the gaming machine;

Figure 3 shows a screen display of a base game leading to the awarding of a special feature; and Figures 4a to 4f show screen displays of a precursor to the special feature showing the awarding of bonuses applicable to the special feature.

[0016] In Figure 1, reference numeral 10 generally designates a gaming machine, including a game, in accordance with the invention. The machine 10 includes a console 12 having a video display unit 14 on which a game 16 is played, in use. The game 16 is a spinning reel game which simulates the rotation of a number of spinning reels 18. A midtrim 20 of the machine 10 houses a bank 22 of buttons for enabling a player to play the game 16. The midtrim 20 also houses a credit input mechanism 24 including a coin input chute 24.1 and a bill collector 24.2.

[0017] The machine 10 includes a top box 26 on which artwork 28 is carried. The artwork 28 includes paytables, details of bonus awards, etc.

[0018] A coin tray 30 is mounted beneath the console 12 for cash payouts from the machine 10.

[0019] Referring now to Figure 2 of the drawings, a control means or control circuit 32 is illustrated. A program which implements the game and user interface is run on a processor 34 of the control circuit 32. The processor 34 forms part of a controller 36 that drives the screen of the video display unit 14 and that receives input signals from sensors 38. The sensors 38 include sensors associated with the bank 22 of buttons and touch sensors mounted in the screen of the video display unit 14. The controller 36 also receives input pulses from the mechanism 24 to determine whether or not a player has provided sufficient credit to commence playing. The mechanism 24 may, instead of the coin input chute 24.1 or the bill collector 24.2, or in addition thereto, be a credit card reader (not shown) or any other type of validation device.

[0020] Finally, the controller 36 drives a payout mechanism 40 which, for example, may be a coin hopper for feeding coins to the coin tray 30 to make a pay out to a player when the player wishes to redeem his or her credit.

[0021] The game 16 has a base game 52 which is a spinning reel game. Referring now to Figure 3 of the drawings, a screen display of the base game 52 of the game 16 is shown and is designated generally by the reference numeral 50. The screen display 50 displays five reels 18 constituting the spinning reel game.

[0022] In the game 16, when a trigger condition occurs in the base game 52, a special feature is awarded. The special feature comprises a number of free games. A multiplier may be applicable to the free games so that any win in the free games is multiplied by the value of the multiplier. Still further, the special feature may award bonus, credit prizes each time a predetermined bonus symbol appears anywhere on any reel during the free

games.

[0023] The game 16 has a particular theme. In the illustrated example, the theme of the game is a travel theme. The trigger condition in this game is the presence of a symbol 54 representing a roll of film on the first reel 18 and a symbol 56 representing a camera flash gun on the fifth reel 18 of the base game 52.

[0024] It is to be noted that the presence of the symbol 54 anywhere on the first reel and the presence of the symbol 56 anywhere on the fifth reel results in the trigger condition. In other words, the symbols 54 and 56 do not need to be in prize winning combinations of symbols or on active paylines of the gaming machine 10.

[0025] At the time when the special feature is triggered, the player is not aware of the bonuses associated with the special feature. More particularly, the player does not know how many free games will constitute the special feature, whether or not a multiplier will apply to wins during the free games and, if a multiplier is to apply, what that multiplier will be and whether or not any bonus, credit prizes will be awarded during the playing of the free games.

[0026] When the special feature is triggered by the occurrence of the symbols 54 and 56 on the first reel 18 and the last reel 18, respectively, during the base game 52, the controller 36 randomly selects, from a set of pathways, the pathway that will be applicable to the special feature. Each pathway in the set governs the number of free games constituting the special feature, whether or not a multiplier will apply during the free games and, if a multiplier is to apply, the value of the multiplier by which any wins in the free games are multiplied and whether or not any bonus, credit prizes will be awarded during the free games.

[0027] Prior to commencement of the special feature, an animation sequence, which is representative of the outcomes of the selected pathway, occurs. The animation sequence occurs in a bevel area 58 above the reels 18 in the screen display 50. As shown in Figure 4a of the drawings, the animation sequence initially involves the display of a canister of film 60 in the bevel area 58. In the animation, a web of film 62 is withdrawn from the canister 60 across the screen display 50.

[0028] Once the web of film 62 extends fully across the screen of the screen display 50, a recording device 64, which is related thematically to the game 16, appears on the screen display 50 as shown in Figure 4b of the drawings. Because this game relates to travel, the recording device 64 is a boarding pass which is displayed in a superimposed position over the reels 18 of the base game 52. The boarding pass 64 records what bonuses will be applicable during the special feature.

[0029] After the boarding pass 64 is displayed, individual "frames" of the web of film 62 begin to be "exposed" in a sequential fashion. This is shown in greater detail in Figures 4c to 4f of the drawings. In Figure 4c, the first two frames 66 and 68 of the film 62 are exposed to reveal non-bonus awarding pictures. These pictures

do not contribute in any way to the special feature to be played and are mere fillers to heighten the sense of anticipation experienced by the player.

[0030] A third frame 70 of the web of film 62, as shown in Figure 4d of the drawings, reveals that five free games have been awarded. This is recorded on the boarding pass 64. The screen display 50 shown in Figure 4e of the drawings shows the situation after a further three frames 72, 74 and 76 have been exposed. The frame 72 is, once again, a non-bonus awarding, picture image which does not contribute to the special feature. The frame 74 shows that a further two free games have been awarded making a total of seven free games awarded up to that stage of the animation. The additional free games revealed by the animation of frame 74 are also recorded on the boarding pass 64. The frame 76 shows that all wins during the free games will be multiplied by a multiplier, in this case, a multiplier of two.

[0031] Finally, as shown in Figure 4f of the drawings all the frames in the web of film 62 have been exposed. Frame 78, when it is exposed, reveals a further two free games 35 which are awarded making a total of nine free games constituting the special feature.

[0032] When frame 80 is exposed, it reveals a special, boat symbol 82. The presence of this special bonus symbol 82 means that, when it is spun up on any one of the reels 18 during any of the free games, a bonus, credit prize of a number of credits will be awarded to the player.

[0033] After the animation sequence has been completed, the player presses a "Start Feature" button on the bank 22 of buttons of the gaming machine 10 and the series of free games starts. In this case, the series of free games comprises nine free games during which all wins occurring in the free games are double what they are in a payable associated with the base game 52. Whenever the boat symbol 82 appears on any one of the reels 18, that boat symbol 82 animates to reveal a number of bonus credits won, for example, twenty-five credits or fifty credits.

[0034] It is an advantage of the invention that a game 16 is provided where, when a special feature is triggered, the player does not know initially what bonuses will comprise the special feature until an animation sequence has been completed. Accordingly, the sense of anticipation is heightened as the bonuses applicable during the special feature are revealed sequentially.

[0035] It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that numerous variations and/or modifications may be made to the invention as shown in the specific embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as broadly described. The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive.

Claims

1. A gaming machine having a display means and a

game control means arranged to control images of symbols displayed on the display means, the game control means being arranged to play a game wherein at least one random event is caused to be displayed on the display means and, if a predefined winning event occurs, the machine awards a prize, **characterised in that**, when a trigger condition occurs in a base game of the game, a special feature is awarded where, prior to commencement of the special feature, an animation occurs, without any player intervention, the animation resulting in a sequence of images being caused to be revealed serially, at least certain of the images revealing a number of bonuses associated with the special feature, with a final set of the bonuses awarded in respect of the special feature only becoming known to a player of the game after all the images have been revealed.

2. The gaming machine of claim 1 **characterised in that** the special feature is a free game feature comprising a number of free games.

3. The gaming machine of claim 1 or claim 2 **characterised in that** the bonuses are selected from the group comprising a number of free games to be played in the special feature, multipliers to multiply wins during the free games, bonus symbols which award an amount of credit when the bonus symbols occur during the free games and combinations of the foregoing.

4. The gaming machine of claim 3 **characterised in that** the bonuses comprise a combination of free games, multipliers and bonus symbols.

5. The gaming machine of claim 3 or claim 4 **characterised in that** the images include non-award winning images which do not award any bonuses but merely act as fillers in the sequence of images.

6. The gaming machine of claim 5 **characterised in that** the animation reveals only a portion of the total number of free games constituting the special feature at a time as the sequence of images is revealed so that, until all the images have been revealed in the sequence, the player is unaware of the total number of free games to be awarded.

7. The gaming machine of claim 6 **characterised in that** the animation occurs in a manner related thematically to the theme of the base game.

8. The gaming machine of claim 7 **characterised in that**, what is revealed in each position in the sequence of images varies from feature to feature.

9. The gaming machine of claim 8 **characterised in**

that the images which are to be revealed in the sequence of images and the order in which they are to be revealed are contained in a pathway of outcomes.

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10. The gaming machine of claim 9 **characterised in that** the control means includes a set of pathways and when the special feature is awarded, one of the pathways is randomly selected by the control means to apply to that feature.

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11. The gaming machine of any one of claims 3 to 10 **characterised in that** a display relating to the special feature includes a recording device that records the bonuses awarded as they are revealed so that, when the animation has been completed, the total number of free games of the special feature, any multipliers and any bonus prizes applicable to the special feature are displayed.

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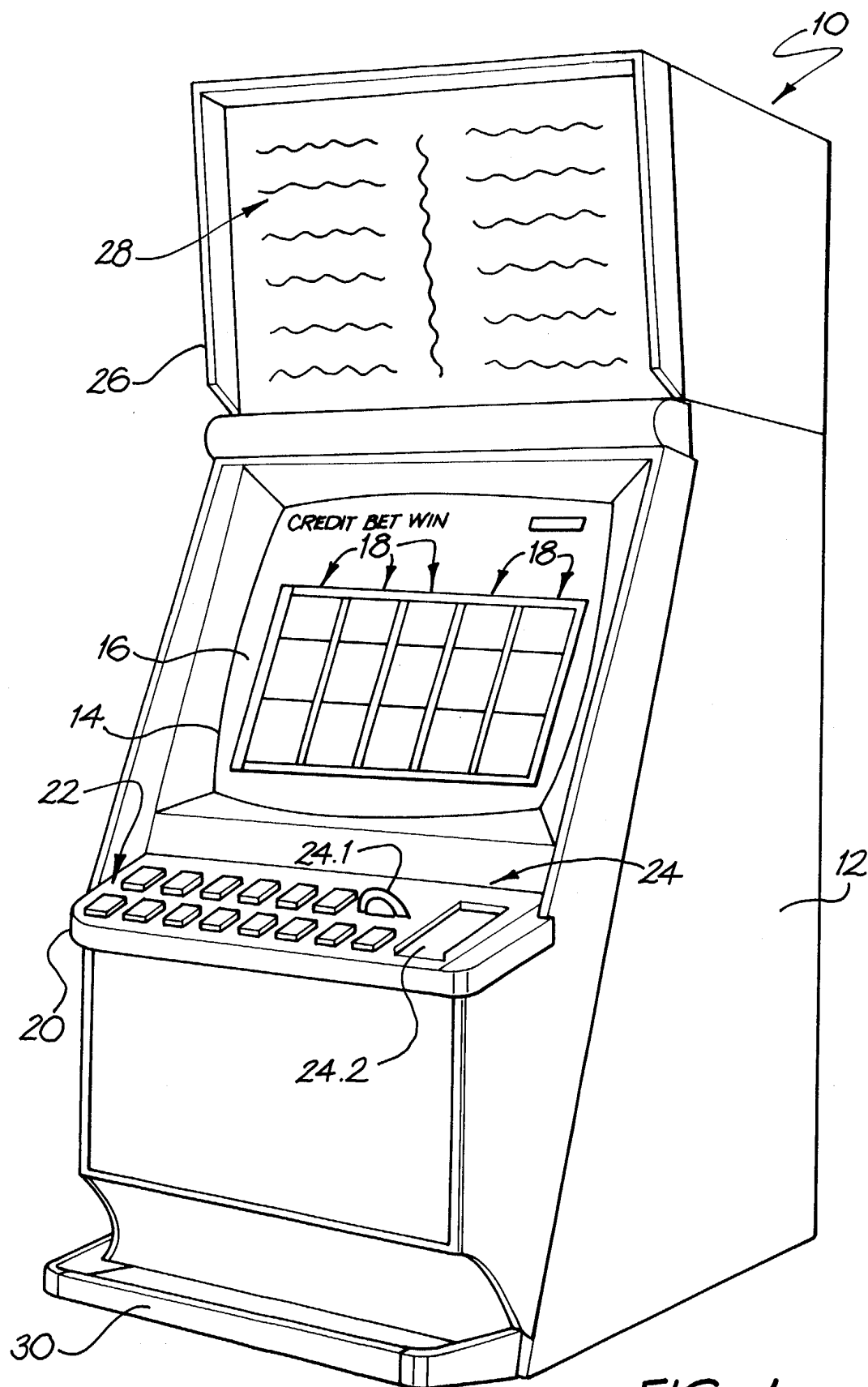


FIG. 1

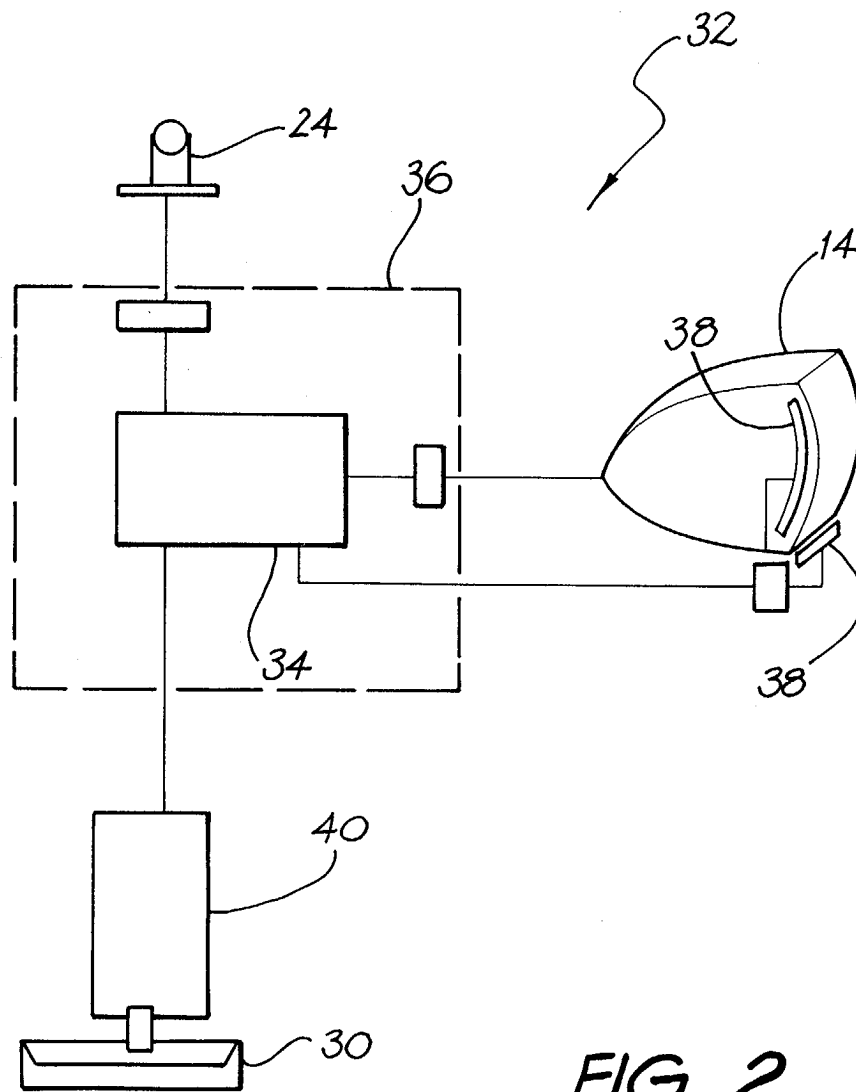


FIG. 2

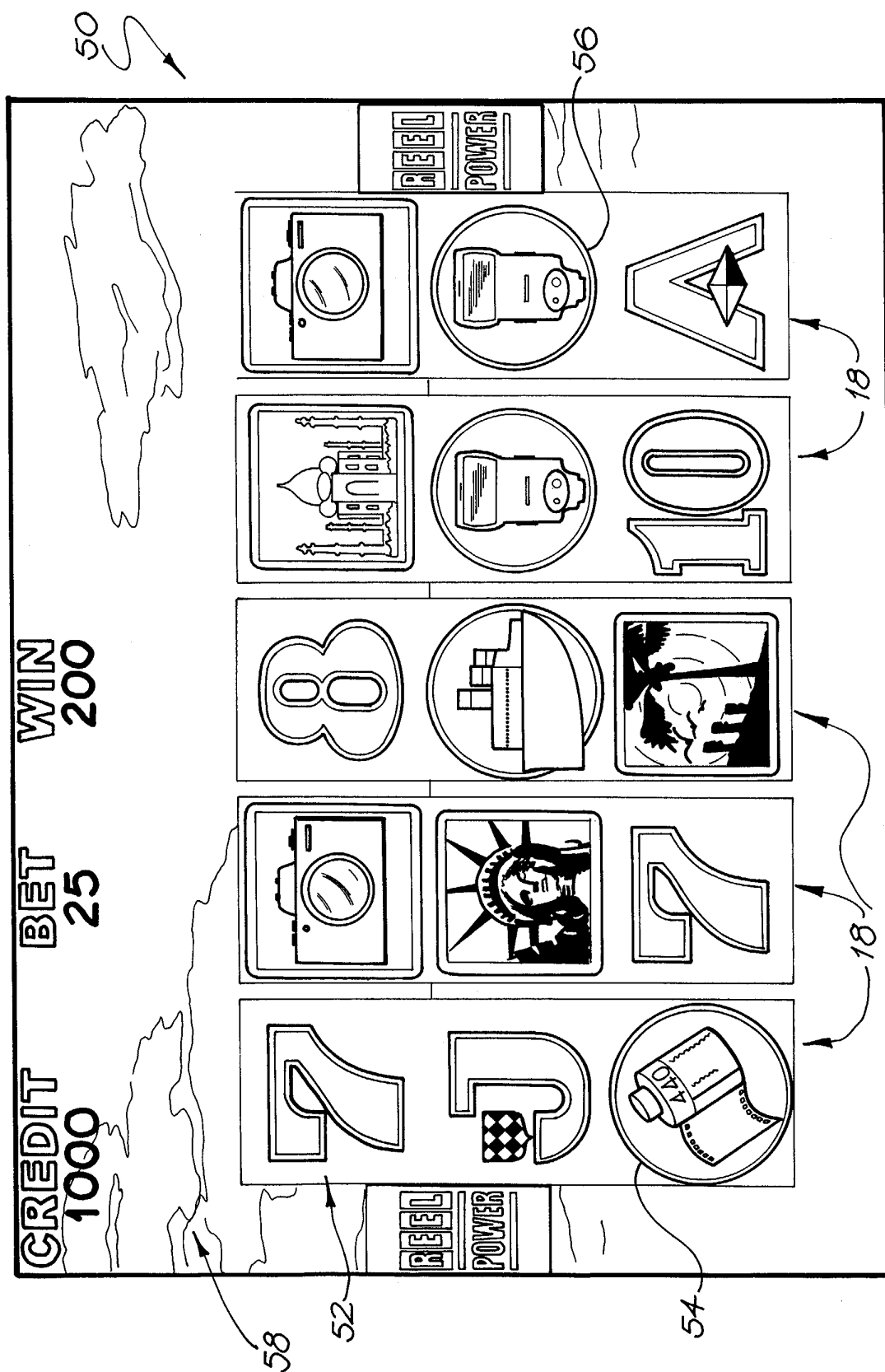
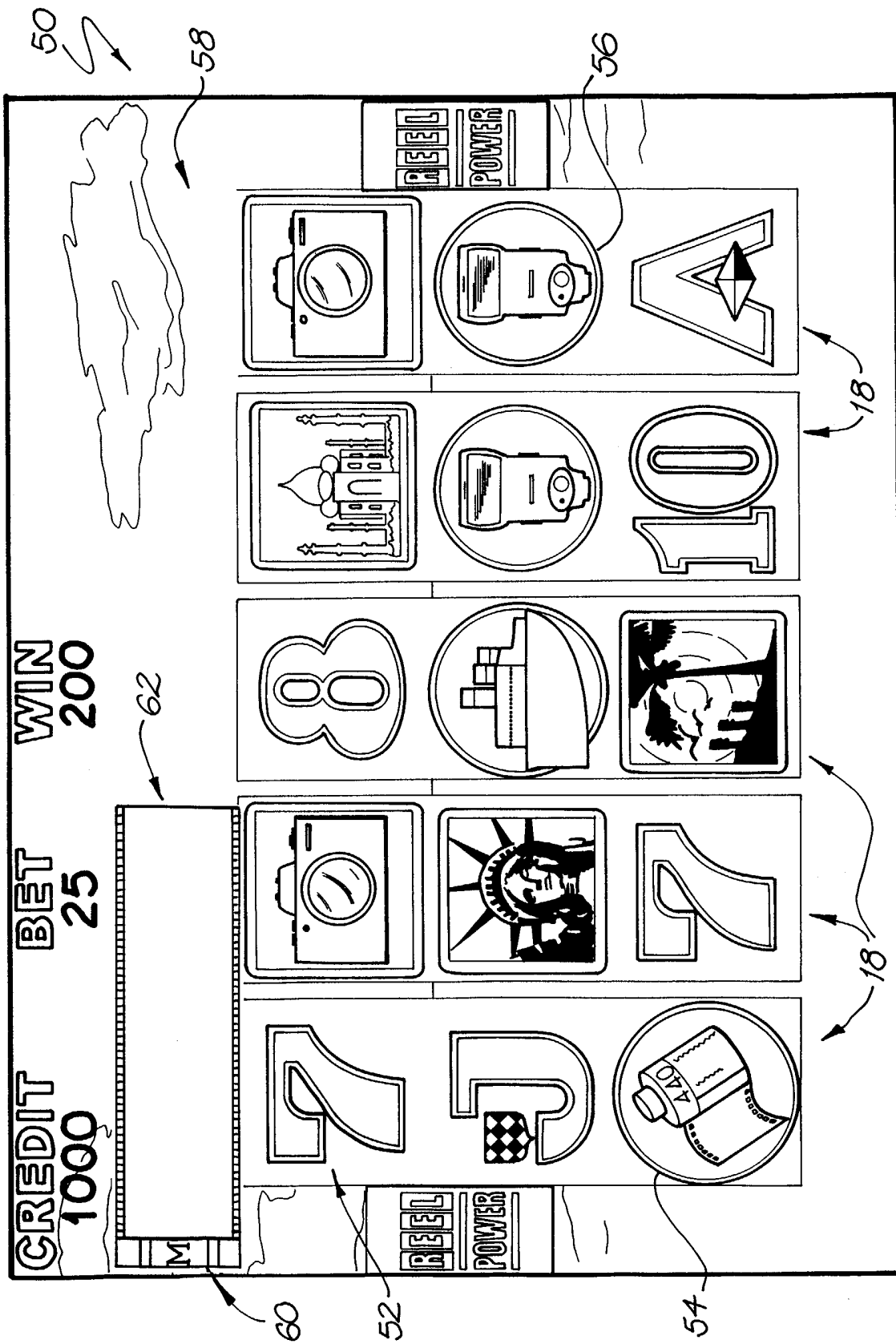


FIG. 3



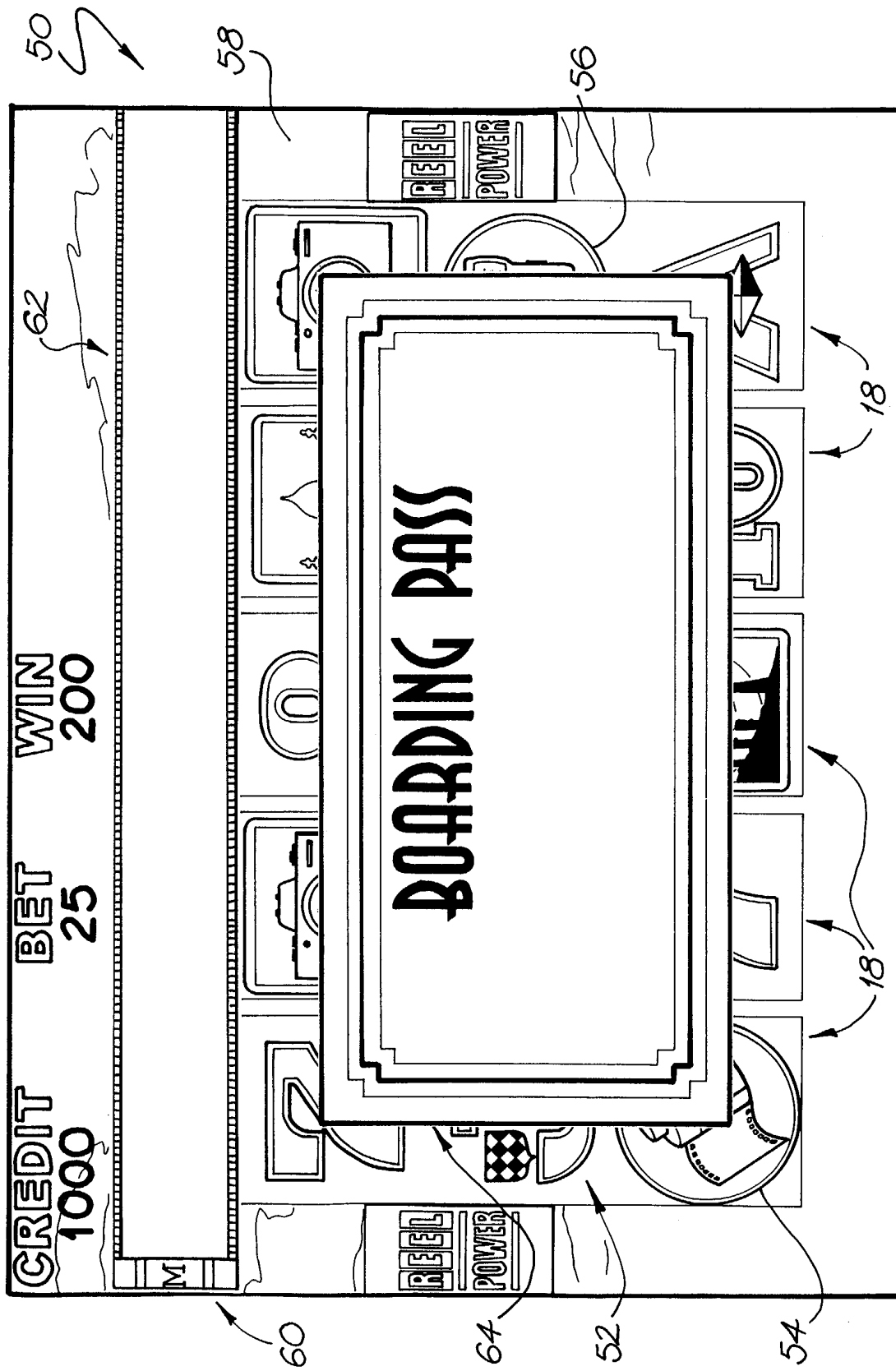


FIG. 4b

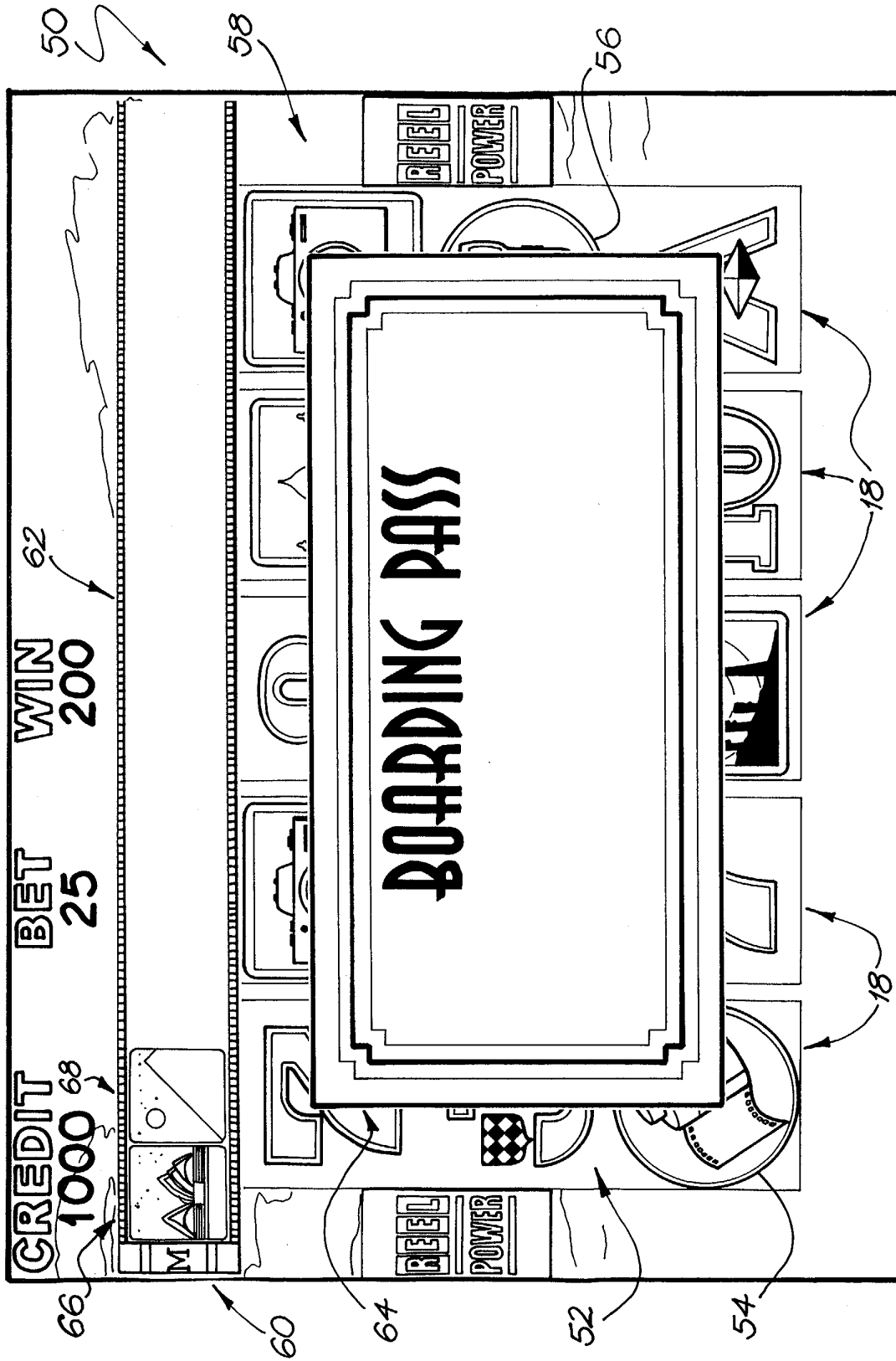


FIG. 4C

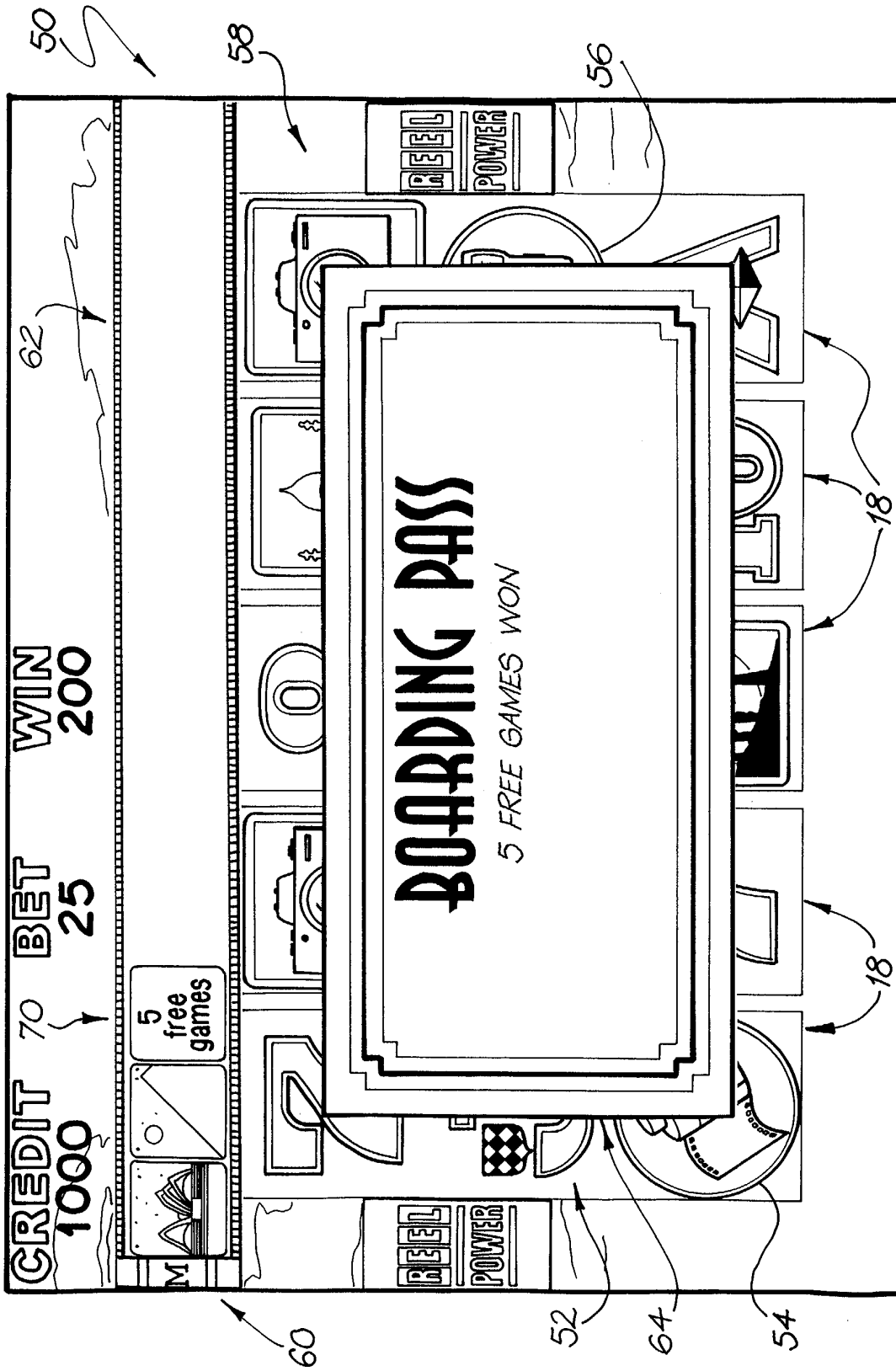


FIG. 4d

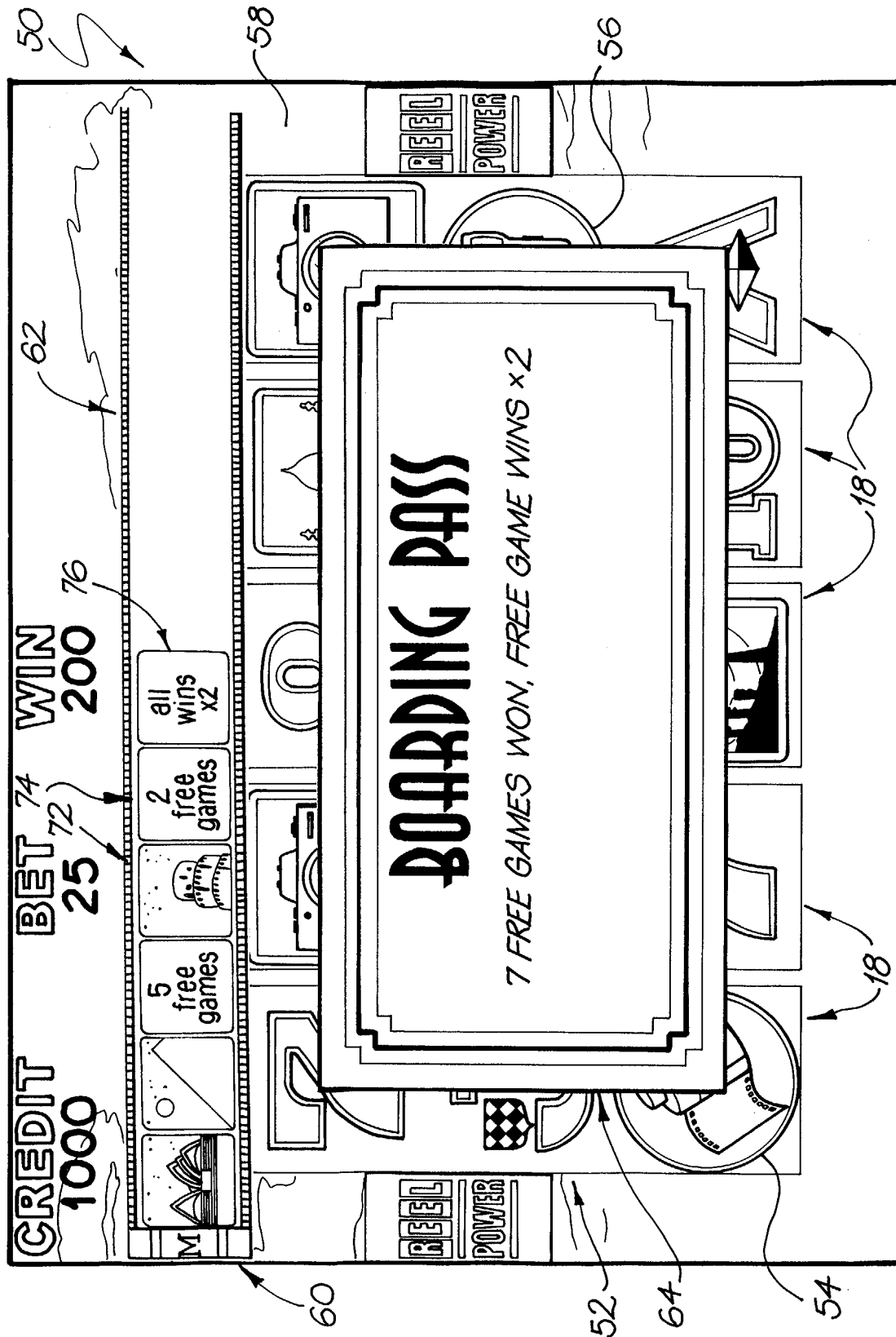


FIG. 4e

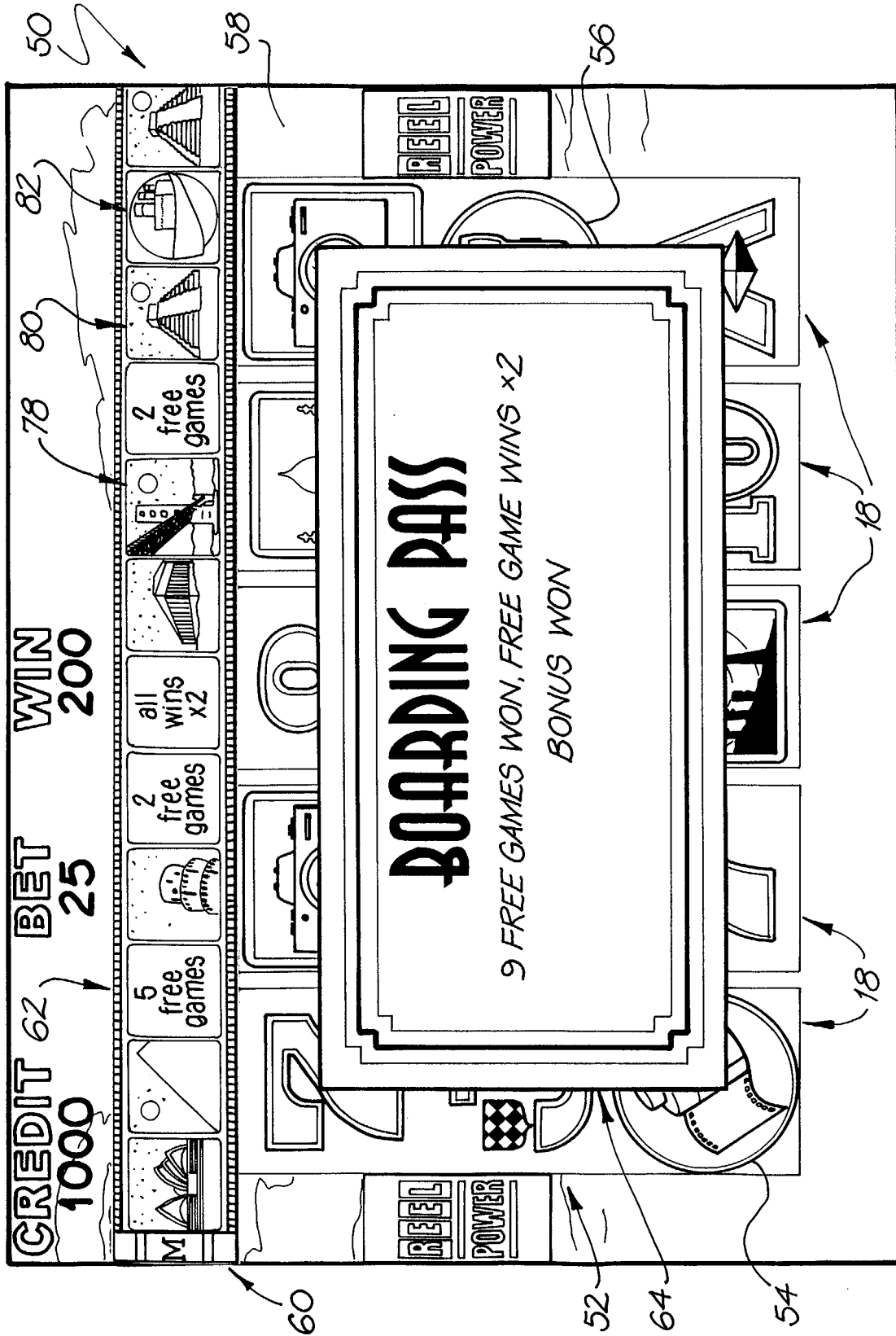


FIG. 4f