



(11) **EP 1 833 014 A1**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:
12.09.2007 Bulletin 2007/37

(51) Int Cl.:
G06Q 30/00 (2006.01) G07F 17/32 (2006.01)

(21) Application number: **07250996.1**

(22) Date of filing: **09.03.2007**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC MT NL PL PT RO SE SI SK TR
Designated Extension States:
AL BA HR MK YU

(72) Inventors:
• **Moshal, Martin Paul**
Queens Way Quay (GI)
• **Naicker, Theo**
Sunningdale, 4019
Durban (ZA)

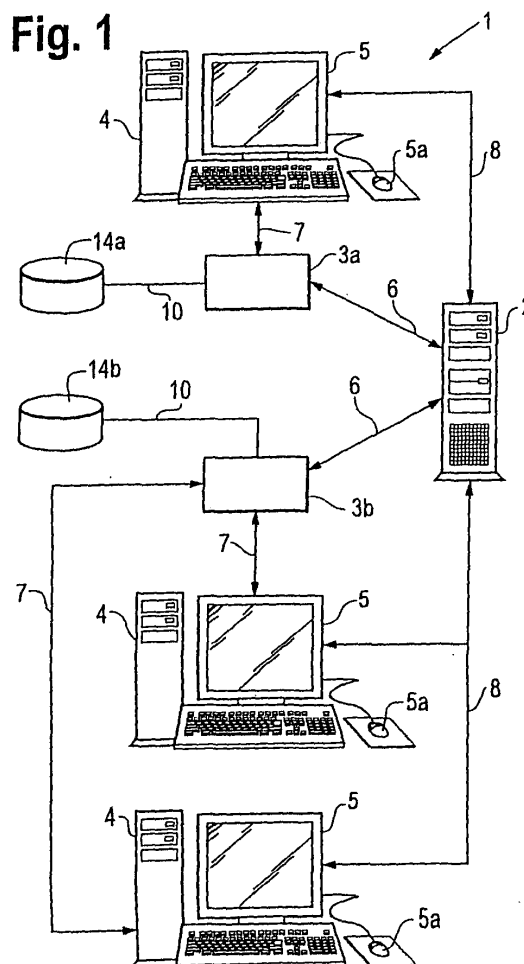
(30) Priority: **09.03.2006 US 373748**

(74) Representative: **Butler, Michael John**
Frank B. Dehn & Co.
St Bride's House
10 Salisbury Square
London EC4Y 8JD (GB)

(71) Applicant: **Waterleaf Ltd.**
14 Athol Street
Douglas
Isle of Man IM1 1JA (GB)

(54) **Wager games with bonus play promotions, bonus play game mode, and pay table**

(57) A promotion for inducing players to play wager games takes the form of bonus play. The bonus play, in one form, takes the form of "free" turns of play in which a player credit account is not debited by such turns of play. Winnings from bonus play can take the form of cashable credit, bonus credit, or additional bonus play, as dictated by the pay table of the wager game. In other embodiments, the operator exercises control over the utilization and features of the bonus play, such as by fixing the wagering for the bonus play in advance and limiting the availability of the bonus play to a particular time period. Bonus play is played in a bonus mode of operation and the player may switch between bonus mode and a regular mode. A pay table featuring bonus play as one of the awards for a winning result of a wager game is also described. A pay table featuring an award of bonus credit is also described. Bonus credit is credit which is not subject to immediate withdrawal by the player. Bonus credit can be withdrawn, if at all, provided conditions set by the operator of the game are met.



Description

[0001] This disclosure relates generally to wager games and to methods and systems for enabling a workstation, such as a personal computer, to play wager games over a computer network such as the Internet. Further aspects of this disclosure relate to methods of providing bonuses to players in the form of "free" spins or turns of a wager game (or, more generally, "bonus play"). Additional aspects of this disclosure relate to promotions featuring such bonus play, pay tables for wager games featuring bonus play as an award for a winning result, and pay tables for wager games featuring an award of bonus credit.

[0002] Operators of land-based casinos and casino web sites offer wager games that have payout percentages that are slightly in the favor of the casino operators. The more players that sign up and play at a casino, and specifically the more wagering that is conducted, the, more revenue the casino operator realizes. Hence, casinos typically feature promotions to attract new players. Promotions are also important because a casino's clientele may become disinterested over time or suffer losses, prompting them to quit or play less. Furthermore, casinos, and casino web sites are competing with each other to attract new players.

[0003] It has become common for an online casino/poker room to attract players by means of promotions that involve free credit (referred to herein as "promotional credit"), wherein the casino operator essentially adds "free" money to the player's credit account which they can use for placing wagers on wager games. The administration of such promotional credit is problematic. For example, the player may attempt to cash out early after playing only a few turns and wagering a few dollars, and take with them most of a promotional credit of say \$ 25.00. The casino operator needs to have in place complex rules on cashing out of a player account balance in order to prevent this from happening. The assignee of this invention has devised methods and apparatus for overcoming administrative problems associated with promotional credit, described in pending U.S. application serial no. 10/550,744 filed September 23, 2005. The entire content of the '744 application is incorporated by reference herein.

[0004] Aside from the administrative problems explained in the above-cited US patent application, promotional credit tends to be expensive for operators of online casinos and poker rooms, as the wagering of such credit, in the long run, will result in some net payout to players coming straight from the operator's bottom line. Moreover, it does not permit any significant differentiation between on-line casino operators, as they all tend to offer the same incentive or inducement to would-be players in order to remain competitive. For example, if casino website operator "A" offers a \$ 25 promotional credit for new players, casino website operator "B" will typically also offer a \$ 25 promotional credit for a new player to remain competitive in attracting new players. From the player's perspective, there is no difference between the two operators. This situation may, at least in theory, induce an operator to increase the amount of promotional credit to offer to new players as a way of differentiation. Essentially, a promotional credit "arms race" may result. This, in turn, only further increases the costs to the operators, cutting further into their bottom line.

[0005] There is a need in the art for a mechanism to attract new players and retain existing players that is an improvement over a mere award of promotional credit. In particular, there is a need for a mechanism to attract new players and retain existing players which avoids the administrative problems associated with promotional credit, which is less costly for casino operators, and which allows for ready market differentiation between casino operators. Aspects of this invention meet this need.

[0006] Additional aspects of this disclosure relate to wager games which feature a pay table that offers bonus play as an award for achieving a winning result in a wager game. Whereas, in the prior art a slots-type game may include free spins as an award for a winning result, such free spins are tightly integrated into the game play itself and are automatically played immediately after the player wins the award. Moreover, wagering for the free spins is typically frozen at the wager that was in place when the free spin(s) was won. There is a need in the art for a bonus play award in a pay table that allows the operator to exercise more control over the utilization and wagering features of the bonus play award. Additional aspects of this disclosure provide a pay table which includes bonus play as an award for a winning result, and in which (a) the bonus mode of play is treated as a separate mode of play from a regular mode of play, (b) wagering controls during such bonus mode of play are fixed in advance by the operator and cannot be changed by the player, and (c) the player's credit account is not debited for turns of play in the bonus mode.

[0007] In a first aspect, this disclosure provides new methods for attracting and retaining players by means of promotions that offer "free" play (or, more generally, "bonus play") on any particular wager game. While the invention is applicable to a variety of wager games including card games and Roulette, it is particularly applicable to slots-type games. A promotion providing bonus play carries with it two major advantages, namely: 1) it is less expensive for the operator than bonus credit; and 2) it allows for more competitive and imaginative promotions to attract and retain players, and differentiation between casino website operators. For example one casino operator may offer 50 bonus plays on game "A", while a different operator may offer 100 bonus plays on game "B". With large numbers of different wager games available at casino websites, an almost endless variety of possible promotions and avenues for differentiation between casino operators is possible.

[0008] In one embodiment, a method for promoting play of a wager game by a remote game playing workstation over

a computer network is provided. The method comprises providing data to the workstation for presenting a promotion for playing the wager game on the user interface of the workstation. The promotion comprises bonus play of the wager game, the bonus play comprising one or more turns of play of the wager game wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play.

[0009] In one exemplary embodiment, the operator of the wager game exercises control over the utilization and features of the bonus play awarded in the promotion. For example, the control comprises (a) enabling a bonus mode of the wager game, which may also include setting conditions and limitations on which bonus play may be exercised, (b) when the player plays the wager game in bonus mode, the player utilizes bonus plays that were awarded in the promotion; and (c) the wager amounts for the play in the bonus mode are set by the operator and cannot be changed by the player.

[0010] In another aspect, an improvement to a gaming server system is provided for facilitating play of wager games by remotely located workstations over a computer network. The improvement comprises (a) providing a facility to the operator of the wager game whereby the operator may set controls for promotional awards of bonus play, the bonus play comprising one or more turns of play of the wager game wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play. The improvement further comprises (b) providing datagrams to the workstation enabling the workstation to play the wager game in a bonus mode, wherein the player may make turns of bonus play, such turns of bonus play comprising turns of play awarded in the promotional award of bonus play.

[0011] An example is provided below of a user interface providing the facility by which an operator of a wager game may set controls for the promotional award of bonus play. The user interface allows the operator to set the conditions for availability of the bonus mode of play and to fix or set the wager controls for bonus play. Such controls can be global across all players, or specific to a single player or a group or class of players. The facility for setting controls for promotional awards of bonus play can take a variety of forms and the example provided herein is offered by way of example and not limitation.

[0012] In another aspect, wager games are described herein which have a pay table with multiple winning entries, such as that normally associated with a video slots game or a video poker game, for example. Examples of such entries in a three-reel video slots game could be, for example, BAR BAR BAR (e.g., paying out at 5000 to 1), BAR BAR LEMON (e.g., paying out at 500 to 1), etc. The distinguishing feature of this aspect of the invention is that the pay table has two or more different types or classifications of awards for winning entries, namely (1) cashable credit (e.g., paying out \$ 5000 for every dollar wagered) and (2) bonus play. The bonus play in the pay table is characterized in that: a) one or more turns of play of the wager game are awarded to the player wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play, b) wagers for such one or more turns of bonus play are set in advance by the operator of the wager game, and cannot be controlled by the player, and c) wherein the bonus play is played in a bonus mode of play of the wager game, a separate mode of play from a regular mode of play.

[0013] As an example, a pay table for a three-reel video slots game may pay out (for a \$ 1.00 wager) \$ 1000 for a result of 3 reels each displaying BLUE 7 and 30 bonus plays for a result of three reels each displaying BAR3. For at least one of the entries in the pay table, the player wins a corresponding quantity of credit that is added to their credit balance and the player can cash out in a regular manner. Credit which can be cashed out in the regular manner without restriction is referred to herein as "real" credit. The distinguishing feature is that for at least one of the entries of the pay table (3 x BAR3 in this example), the player wins a corresponding number of bonus plays as characterized above instead of credit. In the context of slot machine-type games the bonus play will comprise "free" spins of the reels, with wagering controls set by the operator. In the context of other wager games the bonus play may take the form of free hands of cards (and a certain amount of credit available for wager), free spins of a Roulette wheel with a certain amount of credit available to apply for wagers on the Roulette wheel, or in other forms as will be apparent to persons skilled in the art.

[0014] To invoke such bonus play, the player activates an icon on the game graphical user interface indicating that they wish to play their bonus plays, instead of playing against their credit balance ("regular mode"). The game then enters into a bonus mode, which is a separate mode of operation of the game from a regular mode. In bonus mode, the player uses up turns of bonus play. Wagers are not charged against their credit account, but rather the wager amounts are set by the operator. The player is able to toggle or switch between bonus mode and regular mode of the wager game. The ability to switch between the two modes may be limited by the game operator.

[0015] An advantage of providing bonus play as a promotional tool, as well as an award for a winning result of play, is reduced cost relative to conventional credit. This saving can be applied advantageously to make the game more attractive to players while at the same time maintaining the overall profitability of the game. This can be done by a) modifying the pay table by increasing the "real" credit payouts for the higher-level entries in the pay table while leaving the payouts for the lower-level entries unchanged; b) modifying the pay table by increasing the bonus plays for the lower-level entries in the pay table while leaving the payouts for the higher-level entries unchanged; or c) modifying the composition of symbols on the reels of the game to increase the frequency of occurrence of a winning result. The first two modifications will be attractive to players because the game will create a perception that it has a generous pay table and is therefore a game with a high payout percentage. The last modification creates a game that provides a player with a satisfactory playing experience, once again creating the perception of a high-payout percentage game. Alternatively,

the saving can be applied solely to increase the profitability of the game while not reducing the "hit/win frequency" of the playing experience.

[0016] In an additional aspect of this disclosure, a wager game is provided with a pay table which awards bonus credit for a winning result of play. "Bonus credit", as used herein, is credit which cannot be immediately withdrawn by the player, e.g., as cash. It can be cashed out, if at all, subject to satisfaction of certain conditions set by the operator of the wager game, such as the player having already wagered a minimum amount of the player's own money. In some embodiments, bonus credit is not cashable and can be only applied to additional turns of play of the wager game (but winnings resulting from such play may be real credit). Combinations of real credit, bonus credit, and bonus play are possible, both in the overall pay table and in a given entry in the pay table. For example, in a three-reel video slots game, a result of LEMON LEMON LEMON may pay out at 500 to 1 in real credit and the player also is awarded 25 bonus plays; a winning result of one BAR7 results in \$ 50 of bonus credit alone.

[0017] In addition to the exemplary aspects and embodiments described above, further aspects and embodiments will become apparent by reference to the drawings and by study of the following detailed description.

[0018] Exemplary embodiments are illustrated in the drawings. It is intended that the embodiments and Figures disclosed herein are to be considered illustrative rather than restrictive.

Figure 1 is an illustration of a gaming environment in which remote gaming workstations communicate with a central gaming server over a computer network. Embodiments of this invention are suitable for implementation in the environment of Figure 1. The invention can also be implemented on other environments, such as a land-based casino. Figure 2 is a simplified illustration of a home page of a casino website of Figure 1, showing a promotion for new players in the form of an award of bonus play of a slots game. When the workstation of Figure 1 accesses the home page of the website, it receives a datagram which contains the promotional display shown in Figure 2, as an inducement to register with the casino website operator and play wager games hosted by the website.

Figure 3 is a screen shot providing one example of a wager game in the form of a five reel slots-type game, in which bonus play awarded for registering with the casino operator can be exercised.

Figure 3A is an illustration of pay lines which are part of the wager game of Figure 3; while Figure 3A shows 5 pay lines, it will be appreciated that the game of Figure 3 may contain a different number of pay lines. In one aspect, the operator of the game controls the number of pay lines that are available when the player enters into a bonus mode of the wager game and plays turns of bonus play.

Figure 4 is an illustration of facility in the form of a user interface in a gaming server system by which the operator of the wager game of Figure 3 may set controls for promotional awards of bonus play, including wager controls, and availability of the bonus mode of the game. The facility of Figure 4 also includes a drop down menu by which the operator may select different wager games and configure bonus play for each wager game. The wagering controls may further dictate whether winnings from bonus play are awarded as cashable "real" credit, or as bonus credit.

Figure 5 is a screen display provided on the gaming workstation of Figure 1, which provides a selection mechanism by which the player may select to play in either a bonus mode of play, wherein they may exercise bonus play awarded in the promotion of Figure 2, and a regular mode, wherein wagers made are applied against the player's credit account.

Figure 6 is an illustration of a second embodiment of a wager game showing the play of the game in a bonus mode. This mode includes an icon showing the number of bonus plays awarded to the player and the number of turns of bonus play they have exercised, and any winnings resulting from a turn of bonus play.

Figure 7 is an illustration of the pay table of the game of Figure 6.

Figure 8 is an illustration of the game of Figure 6 when the player has switched to a regular mode of play.

Overview

[0019] Aspects for this invention are particularly suited for use in the context of playing of wager games over a computer network. As will be appreciated from the following discussion, aspects of this invention are also suitable for use in other environments, including land or ship-based casinos.

[0020] Referring to Figure 1, a gaming system suitable for use in wager games and promotions of this disclosure is indicated generally by reference numeral (1). The gaming system (1) includes a central gaming server (2), and a number of portals (3a, 3b) in the form of portal websites on the World Wide Web of the Internet. In this embodiment, each one of the portal websites is 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 (3a, 3b). Other online casino websites may be present, or, alternatively, just one casino website may be present.

[0021] Each one of the online casino websites (3a, 3b) is accessible by a would-be player (not shown) through a player gaming workstation (4) in the form of an Internet-enabled computer workstation having a display monitor (5) and an associated pointing device (5a) such as a mouse or, alternatively, a touchpad. In this embodiment, online casino website (3a) is shown as having one computer workstation (4) logically connected thereto, whereas casino website (3b) is shown

as being logically connected to two computer workstations (4). It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that such online casino websites (3a, 3b) can be logically connected to any desired number of such computer workstations (4) simultaneously, which number is physically limited only by considerations of processing power and Internet access bandwidth.

[0022] The gaming server (2), the online casino web servers (not shown) corresponding to the online casino websites (3a, 3b), and the computer workstations (4) are capable of communicating with each other by means of an open communication network that is, in this embodiment, the Internet. The Internet is represented in Figure 1 as separate logical communication networks (6, 7, 8, 10). 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.

[0023] Each online casino operates an account facility (14a and 14b, 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 (14a) has one player credit account associated with it, while credit account facility (14b) has two associated, but separate, player credit accounts.

[0024] A stored workstation program (not shown) is resident in the client computer workstation (4) which enables a participating player to browse a casino website and to interact with the gaming server (2) to play wager games such as slots, poker, Black Jack, Roulette and other games. The stored workstation program includes display tools for displaying on the user interface display (5) 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 stored workstation program also includes 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 (5). Further details are known in the art and described in the patent literature, see e.g., U.S. application serial no. 10/550,744 filed September 23, 2005.

[0025] Each computer workstation (4) may take the form of a conventional personal computer operating under a Windows XP, ME, 2000 or other operating system, which is well known and commercially available from Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Washington, or other operating system such as provided by Apple Computer or a Linux operating system. The gaming workstation may also take the form of a portable computing device such as personal digital assistant or cellular telephone. The gaming workstation may also take the form of an electronic gaming terminal.

[0026] The gaming server (2) operates under control of a server-stored program (not shown) that co-operates with the stored workstation program in order to enable a player at the computer workstation (4) to play a wager game. The gaming server (2) operates, for example, under the Windows NT operating system.

[0027] The stored workstation program or application (not shown) and the corresponding stored server program will be referred to, for convenience, as a client process and a server process, respectively. The server process generates 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 computer workstation (4) obtains the result of the random events from the gaming server (2) along the communication network (8) and displays the outcome of the game on the display monitor (5) of the workstation 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.

[0028] In order to play the games from any particular computer workstation (4), the client process (not shown) must first be downloaded to that computer workstation from the gaming server (2) or, alternatively, from a separate web server (not shown), and then installed on the workstation.

[0029] In use, a player wishing to participate in a wager game uses a computer workstation (4) to access an online casino website (3a, 3b) 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 is presented with an icon on the GUI on his computer workstation (4), 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.

[0030] The online casino websites (3a, 3b) 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.

[0031] It will be noted again that a system implementing the methods of this invention need not include two (or more) separate casino websites (3a, 3b), and that only one website (3) may be linked to the gaming server (2).

Bonus Play Promotions, Bonus Mode of Play, and Pay Tables Featuring Bonus Play and Bonus Credit

A. Promotions of Bonus Play

[0032] To attract new players, when a player clicks on or navigates to a casino website, they may be presented with

a "home page" that contains various information about the casino and its features. Such home page may also display a message announcing the promotion of bonus play to prospective new players or to existing players. For example, such message could take the form of a message such as "Sign- up Bonus -- 50 Free Plays of the Lucky Slots Game!", "New Players Get 10 Free Hands of Black Jack!" or some other similar message.

[0033] Figure 2 is a simplified illustration of a home page (20) of a casino website (3, Figure 1). When the workstation (4) of Figure 1 logs onto the home page (20) of the website they receive a datagram which contains the promotional display of bonus play (24), as an inducement to register with the casino website operator and play wager games hosted by the website. Obviously, the particular layout of the home page and the promotion of bonus play is not important and can vary widely. In the example of Figure 2, the home page includes a welcoming message and the name or trademark of the casino website (22), and a promotional message (24) indicating that if the visitor to the web site signs up (i.e., registers with) the casino web site operator they are rewarded with one or more turns of bonus play of a particular wager game. In this example, the promotion is 50 bonus plays of the "Lucky Slots" game. To obtain such promotional award, the user clicks on the link (26) and follows the instructions for downloading the client process and registering with the casino website operator. The player can register to play for free, or, more customarily, as a player wishing to wager for money. In such case, the player will typically place a certain amount into their credit account, such as \$ 25.00. The bonus play aspects of this disclosure pertain primarily to players that register and play for money.

B. Bonus Mode and Bonus Play

[0034] After the player downloads the client process and registers with the casino website, they select the game they wish to play. It is assumed in this example that the player selects to play the game for which the bonus play is awarded (Lucky Slots game or Black Jack). When the selection occurs, the player is presented with a user interface display showing game icons and a play area, wager controls, a pay table, and other aspects of the game.

[0035] In one possible embodiment, the user is able to play the game in either one of two modes, REGULAR mode and EXPERT mode. Further details are set forth in published PCT application of the assignee, publication number WO 2003/068349 dated August 21, 2003, the content of which is incorporated by reference herein. These two modes of game play provide for differing levels of game functionality, which are not relevant to the present discussion. A player can freely switch the game between REGULAR and EXPERT modes during play, as desired. As used herein and in the claims, the term "regular mode" is intended to refer to a normal mode of play (either EXPERT or REGULAR), wherein the player is placing wagers from the player's credit account, as distinguished from a bonus mode of play wherein the player plays turns of the game awarded either a) by a bonus play promotion or b) by the pay table of the game and described in detail below, and wherein wager amounts are not deducted from the player's account.

[0036] Suppose the player wishes to play the bonus plays they were awarded when they registered with the casino website operator. The graphical user interface provides features, examples of which are described herein, which allow the player to specifically play such bonus play in a mode of play of the wager game referred to herein as "bonus mode." The specifics of how the user enters bonus mode are not particularly important. In one embodiment, the graphical user interface provides an icon (such as an icon labeled BONUS), which, when activated by user, triggers the bonus mode of play. When the game is in the bonus mode, the icon could display the number of turns that were awarded, the coin size (unit of wager), and the number of turns of bonus play that have been used, the pay table, etc. As another possibility, in addition to providing REGULAR and EXPERT modes, a further mode of play is available, namely BONUS mode. The user toggles or switches between REGULAR and EXPERT modes by clicking on an icon, which is labeled REGULAR when in REGULAR mode, and EXPERT when in EXPERT mode. Further toggling the icon changes the mode to bonus mode and the icon is labeled BONUS.

[0037] In a presently preferred embodiment, bonus mode of the wager game (regardless of methodology by which the player gets to this mode) has the following characteristics:

1. Only an operator of the online casino can enable and disable the BONUS mode of the game. That is, the bonus mode is available only when the online casino operator has awarded bonus play to a player and the player has not completed playing all the bonus plays. Otherwise, the bonus mode is disabled.
2. In bonus mode, when the player plays the game (e.g., clicks on SPIN in a slots type game), a player utilizes bonus plays that were awarded, meaning that the play is essentially free to the player. That is, in bonus mode, the player's credit account is not debited when they play the game.
3. Wager controls in bonus mode, e.g., the coin size, coins per active pay line, and the number of active pay lines (in the case of a slots type game) are configured in advance by the operator. The term "pay line" refers to a combination of symbols, or, more specifically, positions in an array of symbols, that together form a set for which a winning combination of symbols must be present in order to win. In the simplest case, a game of three-reel slots has one pay line, which is a straight line across the center of the display of the reels. In the next simplest case, consider three sets of three slot machine reels arranged with the sets on top of each other. The game has three pay lines,

which are three parallel straight lines across the sets of reels displayed on the display. Combinations of symbols in the pay table may appear on more than one pay line simultaneously, in which the player wins the prize on each winning pay line. Pay lines need not be straight lines. With a game presenting a 5 X 3 array of symbols such as shown in Figure 3, the game can have a configurable number of pay lines such as 5, 9 or even 25 pay lines. The pay lines can be revealed to the user by activating a pay table or other icon. Figure 3A discussed below gives one example of a slots game comprising a 5 X 3 array of symbols with five pay lines, each pay line comprised of a combination of 5 symbols in the array.

4. The player cannot change the wager controls in bonus mode, e.g., the coin size, the number of active pay lines, or number of coins wagered per active pay line.

[0038] A first example of a wager game in the form of a slots game featuring bonus mode of play is shown in Figure 3. The screen display (50) includes a display of a 5 X 3 array (48) of symbols (51), which spin when the player activates a SPIN icon (53). The game of Figure 3 includes wager controls (52) (including select lines, select coins and bet max icons) which are greyed out (unavailable to the player) when the game is in the bonus mode. The coins icon (58), which illustrates the unit of wager or coin size (here \$0.10), is also greyed out. Greying the icons out shows the player that the parameters can normally be altered in regular mode but not in bonus mode. As an alternative, these icons could be omitted altogether when the game is in bonus mode.

[0039] The field (55) entitled "Spins" shows the number of turns of play awarded in bonus mode, in this example 10. The field also shows the number of turns of bonus play that the player has used up, here 2. The field (54) shows the number of active pay lines in the bonus mode, here 9. The coins field (56) indicates the number of coins (units of wager) wagered per pay line. Since the wager controls are frozen and set in advance by the operator of the wager game in bonus mode, the numbers in fields (54) and (56) are also set and not changeable by the player. The VIEW PAYOUT icon (60), when activated, reveals the pay table for the game.

[0040] Figure 3A is an illustration of pay lines which are part of a slots-type wager game such as that shown in Figure 3. In the example of Figure 3A, there are five pay lines (102) comprised of three horizontal pay lines, numbers 1, 2 and 3, and two crisscrossing pay lines, numbers 4 and 5. In the game of Figure 3 where there are nine pay lines, the additional four pay lines are formed from additional sets of icons in the 5 X 3 array (48). As noted above, the operator of the game controls the number of pay lines that are available when the game is in bonus mode.

[0041] During play in bonus mode, the player clicks on the SPIN icon (53) to execute a turn of bonus play. The symbols in the 5 X 3 array (48) spin, and come to rest in a randomly chosen position. In one embodiment, results of play are determined in the gaming server (2) of Figure 1 and sent in the form of a datagram to the workstation for display on the workstation's graphical user interface. The player wins if a symbol, or combination of symbols, appearing on any of the nine active pay lines present in the 5 X 3 array corresponds to a winning result in the pay table of the game. The award for a winning result will be determined by the pay table for the game. Such award for a winning result could consist of real credit added to the player's credit account and immediately redeemable for cash, as bonus credit in a separate bonus credit account, or additional awards of bonus play, or combinations thereof.

[0042] Referring again to Figure 3, the player is able to revert from bonus mode, shown in Figure 3, to regular mode, by activating the REGULAR icon (62). When the player switches to regular mode, the "Spins" field (55) reverts to a display such as -/-, to indicate that the player is not using any bonus play. The icons (52) and (58) are no longer greyed out and the player can adjust the wager controls. Wagers on additional turns of the game in regular mode are charged against the player's credit account.

[0043] The operator will configure the coin size and the number of active pay lines that will apply to the game bonus mode shown in Figure 3. These are preferably global parameters that will apply to all players who play the game in bonus mode. It is envisaged that the operator may also enable the game's bonus mode per individual player, usually based on a particular event such as, for example, a new player sign-up or the achievement of a predetermined threshold of play. The operator may also configure the number of bonus plays allowed for that player as a player-specific parameter.

[0044] Each turn of the game that the player plays while in bonus mode causes the number of bonus plays available to the player to be decremented by one. In the example of Figure 3, the digit to the left of the slash "/" in field (55) increases by 1 each time the player activates the SPIN icon (53). Any win of real credit arising out of a bonus play causes the player's credit balance to increment accordingly. In one embodiment, any win resulting from bonus play results in the player winning a quantity of "real" credit that the player can cash out at any time (e.g., immediately). In one alternative embodiment, where the player wins at a turn of bonus play, a quantity of bonus credit is awarded that may or may not be cashed out. Rules for cashing out bonus credit may take into account the features disclosed in U.S. application serial no. 10/550,744. For example, the casino website operator may separately account for bonus credit and apply special rules, such as requiring a minimum amount of the player's own money to be wagered, before permitting cashing out bonus credit.

[0045] When all bonus plays have been used up, the player is notified by means of a dialog box and given an option to either leave the game, or to continue playing the game in regular mode. In regular mode, the player resumes the

ability to adjust the coin size and the number of active pay lines, change the amount of the wager per pay line, etc., as described above.

[0046] If the player leaves the game or switches to EXPERT/REGULAR mode without having used up all the bonus plays, in one embodiment the unused bonus plays will still be available to the player when the player re-enters the game or switches back to bonus mode. As a variation, any unused bonus plays corresponding to a player may expire a predetermined time after the operator of the online casino enables the game bonus mode for that player.

[0047] Figure 4 is an illustration of a facility in the form of a user interface screen (70) generated by a gaming server system (2) of Figure 1, by which the operator of a wager game may set controls for promotional awards of bonus play, including wager controls, and availability of bonus mode. Field (72) is a drop down list of wager games for which bonus mode of play may be configured. The operator clicks on the arrow in the field (72) and a window pops up showing a list of wager games. The operator uses their cursor to select a game for setting up bonus mode parameters applicable to that wager game.

[0048] Area (74) of the display includes wager controls by which the game operator may set wager conditions for bonus play in advance. The controls provided in area (74) include a number of active pay lines (field 76). The user clicks on the arrow in field (76) and a pop-up window appears where the operator may select a number of pay lines, such as 5, 9 or 25. Field (78) includes a display of the number of coins or units of wager wagered per pay line. The user clicks on the arrow in the field to change the number of lines. The field (80) displays the coin size or unit of wager. The operator clicks on the arrow in the field (80) to change the unit of wager. For a slots-type game with 9 pay lines, 5 coins per pay line, and a wager of \$ 0.01, each turn of the game in bonus mode is a wager of \$.45 (9 X 5 X 0.01). Obviously, with wager games other than slots-type games, the wager controls for bonus mode provided in area (74) may differ.

[0049] Area (76) of the display provides a mechanism by which the operator can control the availability of bonus mode of play to players. By checking the box (78), the bonus mode of play is activated for the wager game selected in field (72) at a certain date and time and expires after a period of time elapses. This time period is dictated by a starting date defined in field (80), a starting time defined in field (82), and a field (84) defining a duration after the starting date and time when bonus play is available. The operator can change the values in the fields (80) and (82) and the duration set forth in field (84).

[0050] If the operator checks the box (86), the bonus play is enabled when the player first enters play of the game. In field (88) the operator is given the option to set a number of times in which the player can switch back and forth between regular mode and bonus mode. The values in field (88) could be 0 -- indicating that the player cannot switch back to bonus mode once they have left it initially, 1 -- indicating that the player can change from regular mode to bonus mode only once, 2 -- indicating that the player can change from regular mode to bonus mode twice, etc., to unlimited -- indicating that the player can switch back and forth between regular and bonus mode without limitation (or until all the bonus play has been used up). The display (70) may also include an additional time limit (not shown, but similar to the field (84)), where the operator can limit the duration of bonus mode availability once it is first entered. Thus, the availability of bonus mode could be limited by the number of times the player can switch back and forth between regular and bonus mode, established by the field (88), either alone or in combination with a time limit on availability of bonus mode, e.g., 24 hours.

[0051] The display (70) also includes a field (90) where the operator may set up the number of bonus plays to provide as the bonus play promotion. The number of bonus plays is selected by activating the up and down arrows in the field (90) and selecting a new number which pops up. In the example of Figure 4, the operator has set the number at 50.

[0052] The operator further can specify how winnings resulting from bonus play should be credited to the player. This is provided by a field (92). The operator clicks on the arrow in the field (92) and a window showing possible credit accounts is displayed. A selection of an available credit account type is then made. In the illustrated example, the player winnings resulting from bonus play are credited to a bonus credit account. Alternatively, the winnings could be awarded as real credit. With bonus credit, the winnings are not immediately available for withdrawal by the player. In one option, bonus credit cannot be withdrawn and may only used for additional wagers. In another option, bonus credit is available for withdrawal only if specified conditions for withdrawal of bonus credit set by the game operator have been met. For example, bonus credit can be withdrawn only if the player has wagered a certain amount of their own money, played at least a certain number of turns of play of the wager game, etc.

[0053] Once the operator has finished setting all the controls for bonus play using the facility of Figure 4, the operator clicks on the setup game icon (94) and the settings are saved in the gaming server (2) of Figure 1 and applied to bonus play for players registered with the gaming server. The operator then proceeds to select a new game using the drop-down menu (72) and repeats the process for a new game, or a new player or class of players.

[0054] The facility for setting up conditions for bonus play shown in Figure 4 is offered by way of example and wide variation is possible. For example, the features shown in Figure 4 could be provided in a series of screen displays, each one accessed from a menu of available controls.

[0055] The facility illustrated in Figure 4 can be used to define the parameters for bonus play globally, or on a per-player or per class of player basis. For example, the screen display could have a field where the operator could specify a class of players, e.g., "first time players", or "experienced players", and set up different wagering controls or bonus

play availability for different classes of players.

[0056] The economics of providing bonus plays in a promotion as compared to bonus credit as in the prior art are such that bonus play is advantageous to the operator of the wager game. Firstly, the bonus play allows for ready differentiation between casino operators and a wide variety of possible promotions. Secondly, bonus play is generally less costly for the operators. Consider an example of a slots game such as shown in Figure 3, and an example where during bonus mode the coin size is set to, say, \$0.01 and the number of active pay lines to 20, and suppose the bonus play awarded was 100 turns. Assuming all bonus plays are played, the bonus play of the game will cost the operator, on average,

$$(1) \quad \$ 0.01 \times 20 \times 100 \times \text{Game Payout}$$

which, for a game having a payout of 0.95 (i.e. 95%), equates to \$ 19. This is a substantial reduction in cost compared to traditional bonus credit where an operator might, for example, award \$ 100 of bonus credit to a new player who signs-up with that operator's online casino. Therefore, for a cost of less than \$ 20, the operator can provide a very compelling sign-up bonus of 100 bonus plays.

[0057] In general, the cost to an operator of such a game-specific bonus play promotion is:

$$(2) \quad [\text{Coin Denomination}] \times [\text{No. of Active Pay Lines}] \times [\text{No. of bonus play turns}] \times [\text{Payout}]$$

[0058] Figure 5 shows a second embodiment of a method of a player selecting between regular and bonus mode of play. In the embodiment of Figure 5, the player logs onto the casino website of Figure 1, registers with the casino operators, and is awarded bonus play in the form of 50 free bonus spins. After registering with the operator, the player is sent a datagram presenting the display of Figure 5 and provided with a message (100) prompting the player to select bonus mode (106) or regular mode (104). The bonus mode legend (106) includes the parameters of bonus mode play (9 pay lines, 5 coins of \$ 0.01 per line). The legend also includes an expiration time limit - bonus mode plays must be used within 5 hours of the player signing up and logging on to the game or else they are lost.

[0059] Suppose the player selects the bonus mode (106). The GUI display then reverts to the display (50) of the game shown in Figure 6. The display includes a game area (48) comprising a 5 X 3 array of symbols which are randomly selected in order to play a slots-type game. The icons include a spins icon (53) showing the number of bonus plays awarded (fifty) and the number of bonus plays that have been utilized (here, two). The icons further include a lines icon (54) showing the number of pay lines that are active in bonus mode (nine). The coins icon (56) shows the number of coins wagered per pay line (five). The coin size (58), and wager control icons SELECT LINES, SELECT COINS AND BEX MAX (52) are greyed out to show that they are not available to the player. The spin icon (53), when activated, causes each of the symbols (51) to spin and come to rest on a symbol randomly determined by the gaming server. The display includes a display (110) of the time remaining in bonus mode, and a display (112) of winnings from a turn of bonus mode. The winnings shown in area (112) are also shown in area (64). In this turn of the game the pay line number 1 (middle row of symbols) includes two of the castle symbols, which is a winning result of \$ 10 in accordance with the pay table for the game. The win is also indicated by the line (116) going across the middle row.

[0060] When the user clicks on the REGULAR icon (62), the player switches out of bonus mode and enters regular mode. Regular mode is described below in conjunction with Figure 8.

[0061] Figure 7 is an illustration of the pay table of the game of Figure 6. The pay table shows the payouts for symbols that appear on a pay line which are a winning result (generally designated by (120)). The payouts in the pay table are in the form of real credit. The pay table also includes feature (122) in which if a pay line includes three RAMS symbols, the player wins 15 free spins. Such free spins are tightly integrated into the functionality of the wager game itself and are automatically placed immediately after the player wins the award of free spins. Wagering for the free spins is frozen at the wager that was in place when the award of free spins was won, but the free spins are "free" to the player in that the wager amount is not charged to the player's credit account. The award and utilization of such free spins can occur even if the operator has not enabled bonus mode for the particular wager game in question. The free spins associated with the RANIS result are not credited to the player's bonus play balance and cannot be played in bonus mode as described above. Thus, such free spins are not bonus play as contemplated in this embodiment.

[0062] Obviously, the specifics of the pay table are not particularly pertinent and the pay table could include one or more entries associated with a winning result of real credit, one or more entries associated with a winning result of bonus

credit, and one or more entries associated with a winning result of additional bonus play.

[0063] The player returns to the play of the game by activating the RETURN TO GAME icon (124).

[0064] Figure 8 is an illustration of the game of Figure 6 when the player has switched to a regular mode of play. The icon (62) shows that the player is in REGULAR mode and can switch to either an expert mode or bonus mode by toggling the icon (62). The wager controls (52) and (58) are not greyed out and the player can change the coin size, change the number of pay lines, select the number of coins to play per line, and activate a BET MAX amount. The player clicks on the SPIN icon (53) to play a turn. Wagers are charged against the player's credit account, the balance of which is shown in the lower left hand corner of the display. Any winnings from the play are dictated by the pay table for the game and may be credited to the player's real credit balance, bonus credit account, or bonus play, or combinations thereof.

C. Pay tables with Bonus Play

[0065] As noted above, bonus play can be awarded before any play of the game commences, e.g., as a promotion. The bonus play is typically available when a new player logs in and plays for the first time. However, bonus play can be incorporated into a pay table for a wager game and awarded when then player obtains a winning result. In particular, wager games such as slots, poker, Roulette, or other are contemplated herein which have a pay table which awards both credit and bonus play. Consider, for example, a game of video slots, where the pay table has multiple winning entries. Examples of such entries could be BAR BAR BAR (e.g., paying out at 5000 to 1), BAR BAR LEMON (e.g., paying out at 500 to 1), etc. The distinguishing feature is that the pay, table has two or more different types or classifications of payouts for winning entries, namely (1) credit (e.g., paying out \$ 10 for every dollar wagered) and (2) bonus play (e.g., free spins or free hands). As an example, consider the following pay table for a three-reel video slot game (for a \$ 1.00 wager):

Table 1			
Result	Award	Type of Award	
3 x Blue 7	\$ 1000	Cashable credit	
3 x Red 7	\$ 80	Cashable credit	
3 x Any 7	\$ 40	Cashable Credit	
3 x Bar3	30	BONUS PLAYS	
3 x Bar2	20	BONUS PLAYS	
3 x Bar1	10	BONUS PLAYS	
3 x Cherry	10	BONUS PLAYS	
3 x AnyBar	5	BONUS PLAYS	
Any 2 Cherry	5	BONUS PLAYS	
Any 1 Cherry	2	BONUS PLAYS	

[0066] For each higher-level entry in the pay table, the player wins a corresponding quantity of "real" credit that the player can cash out in a regular manner. The distinguishing feature is that for each lower-level entry in the pay table, the player wins a corresponding number of bonus plays, which the player can use in bonus mode as described above. In bonus mode, one or more turns of play of the wager game are awarded to the player wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play. Unlike a prior art situation where bonus spins are tightly integrated with the play of the game and are not played in a separate mode of play of the wager game, the bonus play in the pay table is characterized in that wagering parameters for such one or more turns of play of the wager game are set in advance by the operator of the wager game and cannot be changed by the player, and the bonus play is played in a bonus mode of play of the wager game, the bonus mode of play being a separate mode of play from a regular mode of play.

[0067] The advantage of this arrangement is that the "cost" to an operator of a payout consisting of bonus plays is less costly than a corresponding payout consisting of "real" credit. This saving can be applied advantageously to make the game more attractive to players while at the same time maintaining the overall profitability of the game. This can be done by a) modifying the pay table by increasing the "real" credit payouts for the higher-level entries in the pay table while leaving the payouts for the lower-level entries unchanged; b) modifying the pay table by increasing the bonus play payouts for the lower-level entries in the pay table while leaving the payouts for the higher-level entries unchanged; or c) modifying the composition of symbols on the reels of the game to increase the frequency of occurrence of a winning result. The first two modifications will be attractive to players because the game will create a perception that it has a generous pay table and is therefore a game with a high payout percentage. The last modification will create a game that provides a player with a satisfactory playing experience, once again creating the perception of a high-payout percentage game. Alternatively, the saving can be applied solely to increase the profitability of the game while not reducing the

"hit/win frequency" of the playing experience.

[0068] Thus, in one aspect of the invention, a wager game is provided having a pay table, wherein the pay table comprises one in which two or more types of rewards are possible for winning results of play of the wager game, one type comprising a credit payout and a second type comprising one or more turns of bonus play, the bonus play characterized in that a) one or more turns of play of the wager game are awarded to the player wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play, b) wagering for such one or more turns of play of the wager game are set in advance by the operator of the wager game, and c) wherein bonus play is played in a bonus mode of play of the wager game, the bonus mode of play comprising a separate mode of play from a regular mode of play. In one embodiment, the game is a wager game in the form of a slots game. Alternatively, the wager games could be a card game such as poker wherein the player is awarded one or more free hands and a credit amount is made available to wager on the hand. Alternatively, the wager game could be a Roulette game, and the player awarded with one or more free spins of the Roulette wheel and a credit amount made available to place one or more positions on the Roulette wheel.

[0069] In one embodiment the wager game comprises a slots game and wherein the pay table comprises a plurality of winning results of play of the slots game, and wherein at least one of the winning results is associated with an award of a credit payout and wherein at least one of the winning results is associated with an award of bonus play, for example as shown in TABLE 1. As a further example, the pay table may comprise two or more winning results each associated with a credit payout and two or more winning results each associated with an award of bonus play, again as shown by example in TABLE 1. In a further example, the wager game is played over a computer network as described above in conjunction with Figure 1. Alternatively, the game can be played in a land-based casino in which a gaming workstation is connected to a central gaming server over a local area network.

D. Pay tables with Bonus Credit

[0070] As an alternative, a wager game could have a pay table that awards bonus credit. For example, the pay table may be generally similar to the pay table of TABLE 1, with the exception that the payouts for one or more of the lower-level entries in the pay table, such as 3 x BAR3, consists of bonus credit instead of bonus plays. The pay table may award bonus credit either alone or in combination with real credit and bonus play, or combinations thereof. Such bonus credit is credit which is not immediately available for withdrawal and which may only be cashed out, if at all, in accordance with particular rules defined by the operator, as described, for example, in U.S. application serial no. 10/550,744.

[0071] Examples of wager games with a pay table including an award of bonus credit include slots-type games, card games such as poker, and Roulette. The bonus credit can be applied to future turns of play, such as for example an amount to wager on additional hands of play, or spins of the Roulette wheel, or the like. In preferred embodiments, the bonus credit is available for withdrawal to the player, provided restrictions placed on return of bonus credit to the player set by the operator of the wager game have been complied with, e.g., a minimum amount of the player's own money has been wagered or the player has played a minimum number of turns wagering their own money. Also, bonus credit is preferably added to a bonus credit account for the player, such bonus credit account being separate from a cashable credit account for the player.

Casino embodiments

[0072] It will be understood that the inventive aspects of this disclosure, including bonus play promotions, pay tables with bonus play, and pay tables with bonus credit, are applicable to casinos generally. Such casinos can take the form of electronic casinos and conventional "brick and mortar" casinos, e.g., land or ship-based casinos. Such casinos, whether virtual or physical, will have one or more game playing areas (e.g., virtual slots room or bank of slot machine gaming terminals) where a wager game is played. The wager game has a pay table. The pay table comprises one in which two or more types of rewards are possible for winning results of play of the wager game, one type comprising credit payout and a second type comprising one or more turns of bonus play; the bonus lay characterized in that:

- a) one or more turns of play of the wager game are awarded to the player wherein player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play,
- b) wagering for such one or more turns of play of the wager game are set in advance by the operator of the wager game, as explained for example in Figure 4, and
- c) wherein bonus play is played in a bonus mode of play of the wager game, the bonus mode of play comprising a separate mode of play from a regular mode of play, as explained for example in the discussion of Figures 3, 5, 6 and 8.

[0073] In another embodiment, a casino is provided comprising one or more game playing areas where a wager game is played, the wager game having a pay table, and wherein the pay table comprises a plurality of winning results, each of which is associated with an award, and wherein at least one of the awards for a winning result comprises an award

of bonus credit, wherein the bonus credit comprising a credit added to a player account but such credit is not immediately available for withdrawal by a player winning such bonus credit.

[0074] While a number of exemplary aspects and embodiments have been discussed above, those of skill in the art will recognize certain modifications, permutations, additions and sub-combinations thereof are present in the disclosure. It is therefore intended that the following appended claims and claims hereafter introduced are interpreted to include all such modifications, permutations, additions and sub-combinations as are within their true scope.

Claims

1. A method for promoting play of a wager game by a player using a game playing workstation, comprising:
 - providing a promotion for playing the wager game on the user interface of the workstation, wherein the promotion comprises bonus play of the wager game, the bonus play comprising one or more turns of play of the wager game wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the bonus play is awarded to the player as a sign-up bonus for registering with an operator of the wager game.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the wager game is presented to the player of the workstation in two modes, namely a regular mode and a bonus mode, wherein in the bonus mode turns of the play of the wager game are charged against the number of turns of play awarded in the bonus play.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein the wager game is presented on the user interface of the workstation in a manner wherein the player may switch between the bonus mode and the regular mode.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the wager game is presented in a manner wherein the user may enter the bonus mode, play one or more turns of the wager game in the bonus mode, and switch to regular mode, and wherein the operator of the wager game limits the ability of the player switch between the bonus mode and regular mode.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein a time limit is set for the player to exercise the bonus play.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein an operator of the wager game exercises control over the utilization and features of the bonus play.
8. The method of claim 7, wherein the control comprises (a) enabling a bonus mode of the wager game, (b) when the player plays the wager game in bonus mode, the player utilizes bonus plays that were awarded in the promotion; and (c) the wager amounts for the play in the bonus mode are set by the operator and cannot be changed by the player.
9. The method of claim 8, wherein the wager game comprises a slots-type game with one or more pay lines, and wherein the operator controls the wager amount for play in the bonus mode by setting (a) a unit of wager, (b) a number of pay lines and (c) a number of units of wager per pay line.
10. The method of claim 9, wherein the number of pay lines is greater than or equal to 5.
11. The method of claim 7, wherein the control comprises setting a start time and duration of the availability of the bonus play.
12. The method of claim 7, wherein the control comprises making the bonus play available upon the player accessing the game with the workstation and setting a limit to the number of times the player can switch between a regular mode of play and a bonus mode of play.
13. The method of claim 1, wherein the wager game comprises a slots game, and wherein the bonus play comprises one or more spins of the slots game.
14. The method of claim 1, wherein the wager game comprises a Roulette game having a Roulette wheel and wherein the bonus play comprises one or more spins of the Roulette wheel and a predetermined amount of credit to place on one or more places in the Roulette wheel.

15. The method of claim 1 wherein the wager game comprises a card game and wherein the bonus play comprises one or more hands of play and a predetermined amount of credit with which to wager on the one or more hands of play, and wherein the one or more hands of play are played in a bonus mode of the card game..
- 5 16. The method of claim 1, wherein the method further comprises the step of providing data to the workstation in the form of a pay table, wherein the pay table comprises a pay table in which two or more types of payout are possible, one type comprising a credit payout and a second type comprising one or more turns of bonus play.
- 10 17. A gaming server system for facilitating play of a wager game by a workstation over a communications network, wherein the gaming server:
 - (a) provides a facility to the operator of the wager game whereby the operator may set controls for promotional awards of bonus play, the bonus play comprising one or more turns of play of the wager game wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play;
 - 15 and wherein the gaming server system further
 - (b) provides datagrams to the workstation enabling the workstation to play the wager game in a bonus mode, wherein the player may make turns of bonus play, such turns of bonus play comprising turns of play awarded in the promotional award of bonus play.
- 20 18. The gaming server of claim 17, wherein the controls comprise (a) enabling a bonus mode of the wager game, (b) when the player plays the wager game in bonus mode, the player utilizes bonus plays that were awarded in the promotion; and (c) the wager amounts for the play in the bonus mode are set by the operator and cannot be changed by the player.
- 25 19. The gaming server of claim 18, wherein the wager game comprises a slots-type game with one or more pay lines, and wherein the operator controls the wager amount for play in the bonus mode by setting (a) a unit of wager, (b) a number of pay lines and (c) a number of units of wager per pay line
- 30 20. The gaming server of claim 19, wherein the number of pay lines is greater than 5.
21. The gaming server of claim 17, wherein the controls comprises setting a start date and duration of the availability of the bonus mode of play.
- 35 22. The gaming server of claim 17, wherein the controls comprise making the bonus mode play available upon the player accessing the game with the workstation and setting a limit to the number of times the player can switch between a regular mode of play and the bonus mode of play.
- 40 23. The gaming server of claim 1.7, wherein the facility provided to the operator of the wager game whereby the operator may set controls for promotional awards of bonus play comprises one or more user interface screen displays comprising fields for entry of parameters relating to 1) wagering properties for the wager game in the bonus mode; 2) availability of the bonus mode of play, 3) number of turns of bonus play for the wager game; and 4) assignment of winnings resulting from bonus play to a credit account.
- 45 24. The gaming server of claim 23, wherein the user interface screen displays further comprises a means for accessing multiple different wager games wherein parameters (1). - (4) may be set for such different wagers games.
25. The gaming server of claim 17, wherein the wager game comprises a slots-type game.
- 50 26. The gaming server of claim 23, wherein the wager game comprises a slots-type game, and wherein the parameters for the wagering properties of the wager game comprise (a) a number of pay lines, (b) a unit of wager, and (c) a number of units of wager per pay line.
- 55 27. The gaming server of claim 17, wherein in aspect (b) the workstation may switch between the bonus mode of play and a regular mode of play, and wherein in aspect (a) the operator is provided with a feature whereby the ability to switch between the bonus mode and the regular mode is subject to restriction.
28. The gaming server of claim 17, wherein in aspect (b) the workstation is presented with a pay table in which two or more types of payout are possible, one type comprising a credit payout and a second type comprising one or more

turns of bonus play.

29. A wager game having a pay table, wherein:

the pay table comprises one in which two or more types of awards are provided for winning results of play of the wager game, one type comprising a credit award and a second type comprising one or more turns of bonus play, the bonus play **characterized in that**

- a) one or more turns of play of the wager game are awarded to a player wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play,
- b) wagering for such one or more turns of play of the wager game are set in advance by the operator of the wager game, and
- c) wherein said bonus play is played in a bonus mode of play of the wager game, said bonus mode of play comprising a separate mode of play from a regular mode of play.

30. The wager game of claim 29, wherein the wager game comprises a slots game wherein the pay table comprises a plurality of winning results of play of the slots game, and wherein at least one of the winning results is associated with an award of credit and wherein at least one of the winning results is associated with an award of bonus play.

31. The wager game of claim 30, wherein the pay table comprises two or more winning results each associated with a credit award and two or more winning results each associated with an award of bonus play.

32. The wager game of claim 30, wherein the wager game is played over a computer network.

33. The wager game of claim 29, wherein said pay table further comprises a third type of award for a winning result comprising an award of bonus credit, such bonus credit comprising credit added to a player account but such credit not being immediately available for withdrawal by a player winning such bonus credit.

34. The wager game of claim 33, wherein bonus credit is available for withdrawal provided restrictions placed on return of bonus credit to the player set by the operator of the wager game have been complied with.

35. The wager game of claim 33, wherein the bonus credit is added to a bonus credit account for the player, such bonus credit account being separate from a cashable credit account for the player.

36. A wager game having a pay table, wherein:

the pay table comprises one in which two or more types of awards are provided for winning results of play of the wager game, one type of award comprising an award of bonus credit, wherein the bonus credit comprises credit added to a player account but such credit not being immediately available for withdrawal by a player winning such bonus credit.

37. The wager game of claim 36, wherein bonus credit is available for withdrawal to the player provided restrictions placed on return of bonus credit to the player set by the operator of the wager game have been complied with.

38. The wager game of claim 36, wherein the bonus credit is added to a bonus credit account for the player, such bonus credit account being separate from a cashable credit account for the player.

39. A casino comprising:

one or more game playing areas where a wager game is played, the wager game having a pay table, and wherein the pay table comprises one in which two or more types of awards are provided for winning results of play of the wager game, one type comprising a credit award and a second type comprising one or more turns of bonus play; the bonus play **characterized in that:**

- a) one or more turns of play of the wager game are awarded to a player wherein a player credit account is not debited by such one or more turns of play,
- b) wagering for such one or more turns of play of the wager game are set in advance by the operator of the wager game, and

c) wherein said bonus play is played in a bonus mode of play of the wager game, said bonus mode of play comprising a separate mode of play from a regular mode of play.

5 **40.** The casino of claim 39, wherein the casino comprises an electronic casino accessed over a computer network and wherein the game playing area comprises a virtual game room of the electronic casino where a player may access an electronic wager game.

10 **41.** The casino of claim 39, wherein the pay table comprises one in which a third type of award is possible for a winning result of play, the third type comprising an award of bonus credit, wherein the bonus credit comprises credit added to a player account but such credit not being immediately available for withdrawal by a player winning such bonus credit.

42. The casino of claim 39, wherein the game playing areas comprises terminals for playing the wager game.

15 **43.** A casino comprising:

20 one or more game playing areas where a wager game is played, the wager game having a pay table, and wherein the pay table comprises a plurality of winning results, each of which is associated with an award, and wherein at least one of the awards for a winning result comprises an award of bonus credit, wherein the bonus credit comprises a credit added to a player account but such credit is not immediately available for withdrawal by a player winning such bonus credit.

25 **44.** The casino of claim 43, wherein the casino comprises an electronic casino accessed over a computer network and wherein the game playing area comprises a virtual game room of the electronic casino where a player may access an electronic wager game.

45. The casino of claim 43, wherein the game playing areas comprises terminals for playing the wager game.

30 **46.** The casino of claim 43, wherein the bonus credit is added to a bonus credit account for the player, such bonus credit account being separate from a cashable credit account for the player.

47. The casino of claim 43, wherein bonus credit is available for withdrawal to the player provided restrictions placed on return of bonus credit to the player set by the operator of the casino have been complied with.

Fig. 1

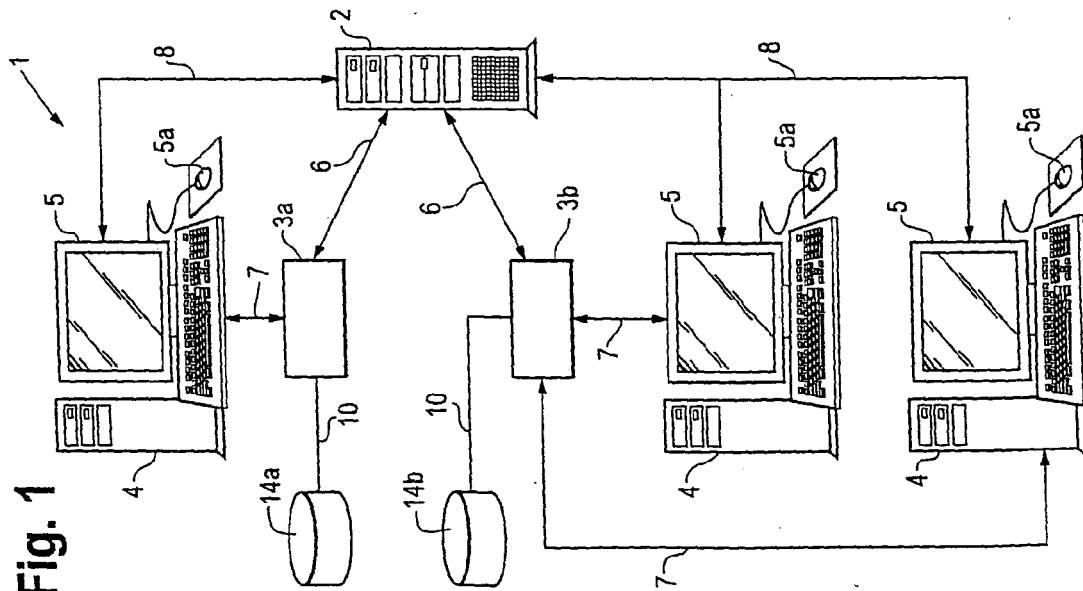
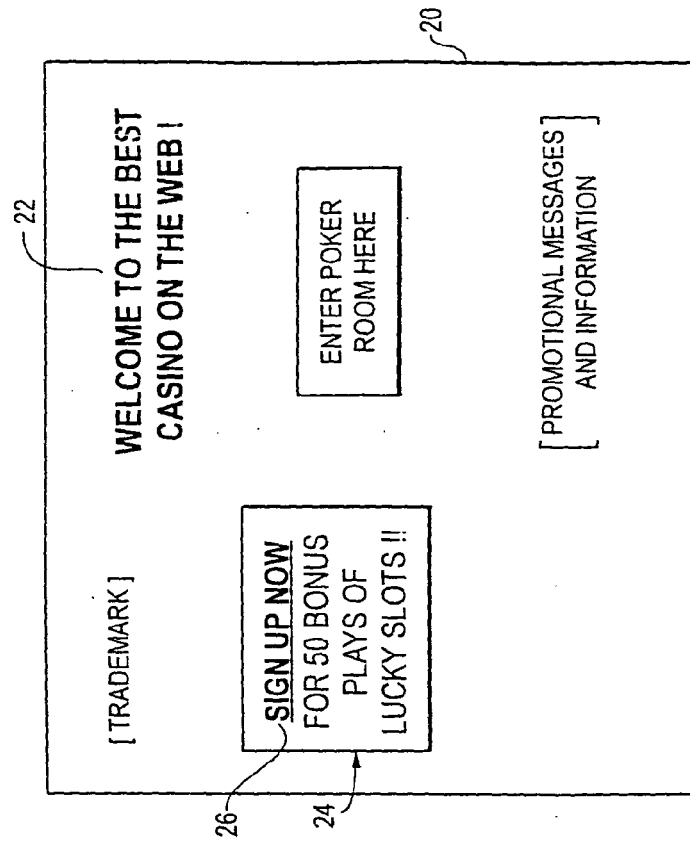


Fig. 2



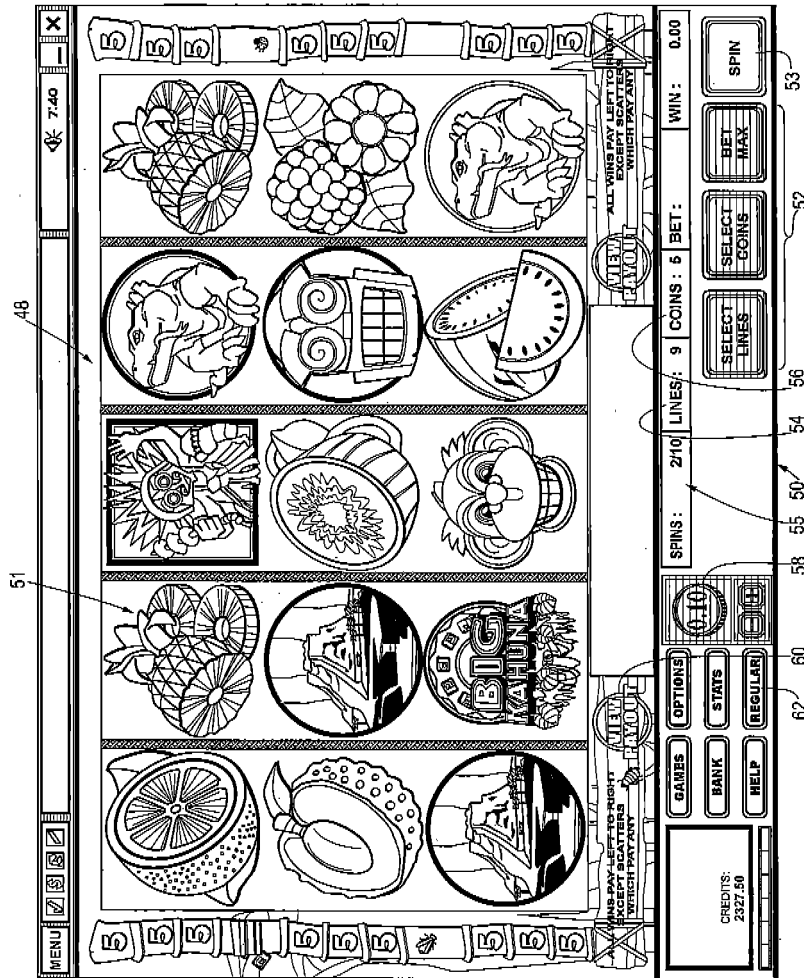


Fig. 3

Fig. 3A

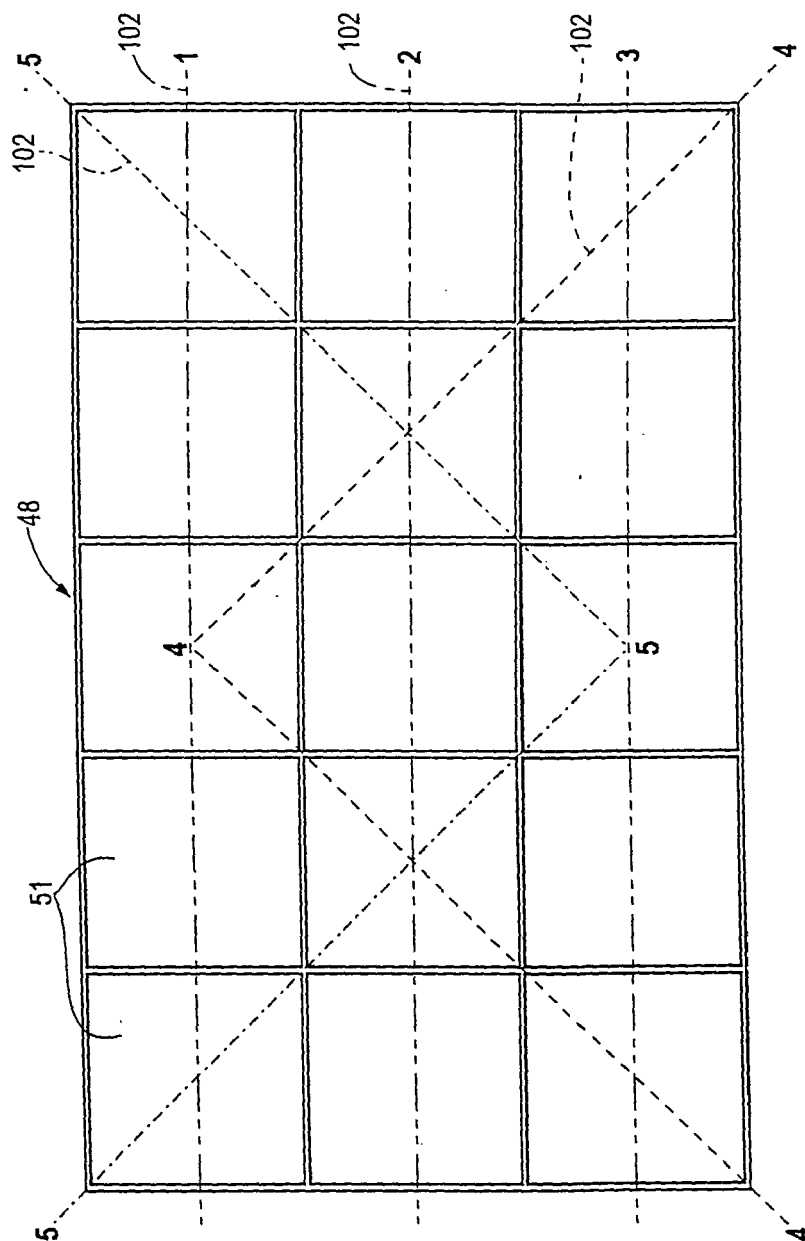


Fig. 4

70

72

74

76

78

80

82

84

86

88

90

92

94

SLOT GAME

- SELECT A SLOT GAME -

CASINO BONUS PLAY SETUP

BONUS PLAY PROPERTIES

LINES: 9

COINS PER LINE: 5

COIN SIZE: 0.01

IMPLEMENTATION OF BONUS PLAY

☒ EXPIRE AFTER GIVEN AMOUNT OF TIME

START DATE: 2006 1 23

PERIOD OF VALIDITY: 5 0 0

AVAILABLE AT 1ST ENTRY

NUMBER OF TIMES TO RETURN: 0

NUMBER OF BONUS PLAYS: 50

BONUS CREDITS

SETUP GAME

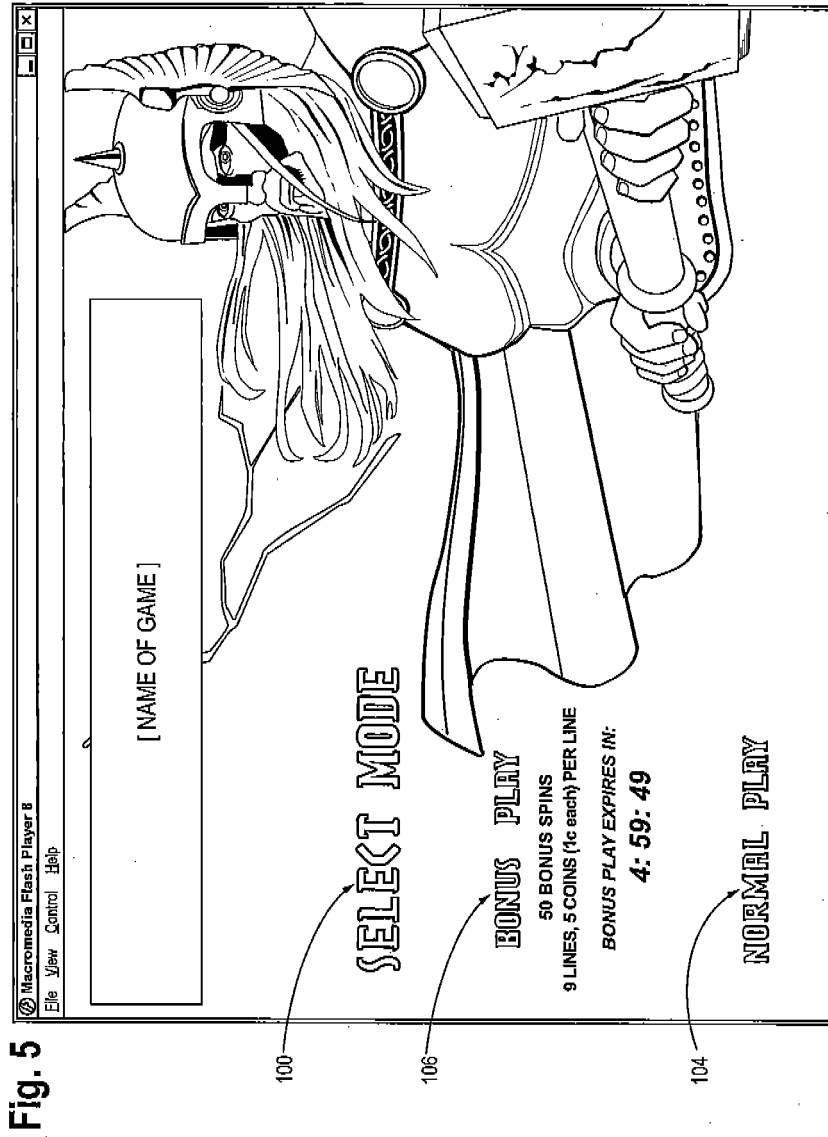


Fig. 6

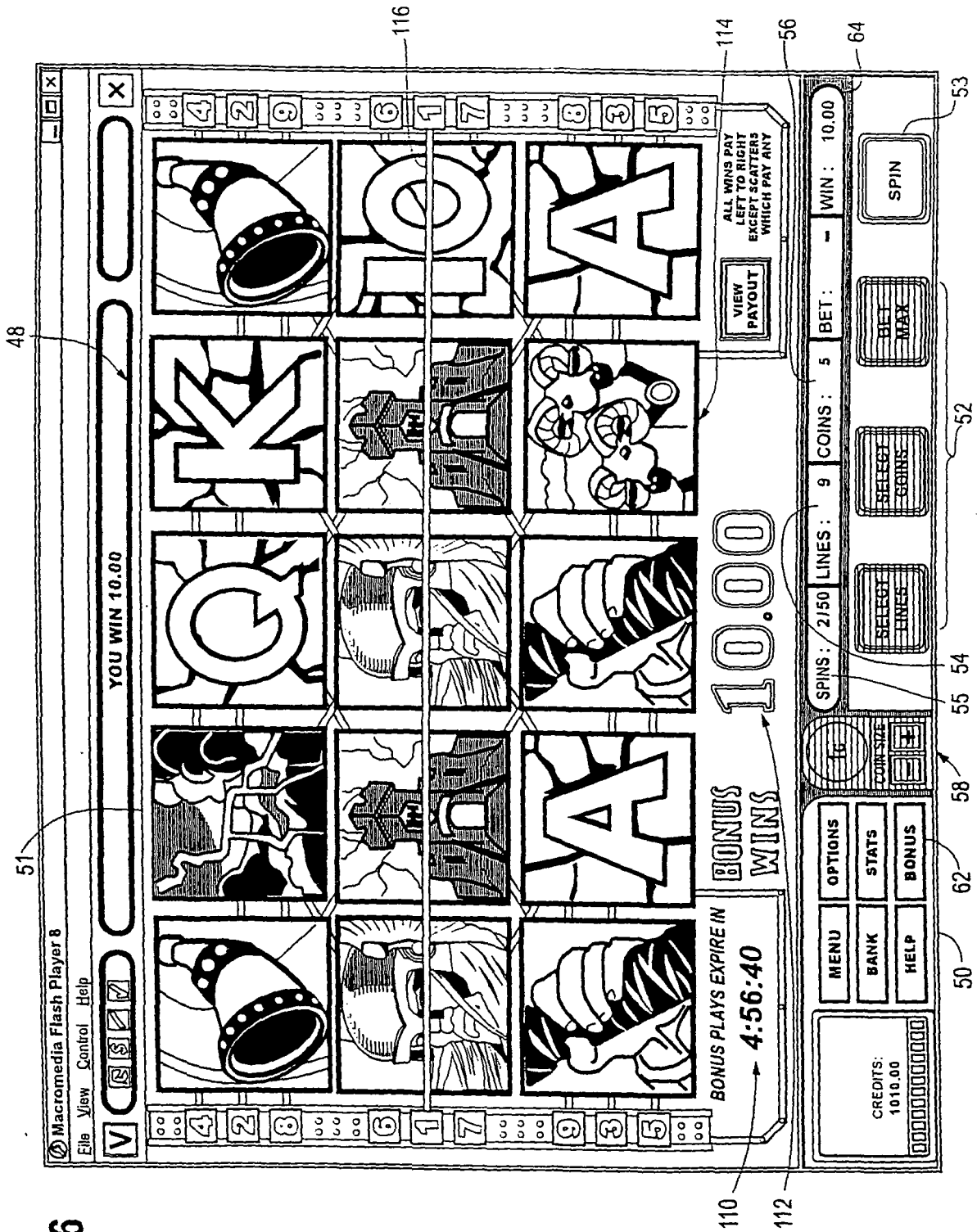


Fig. 7

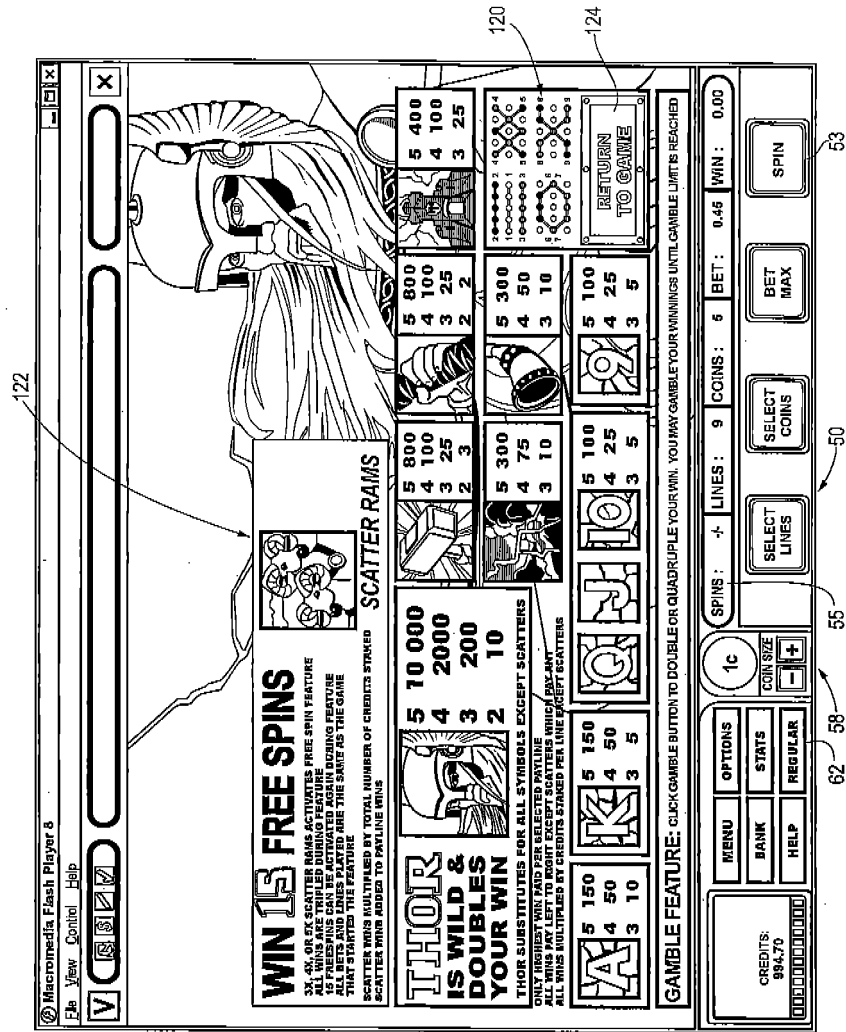
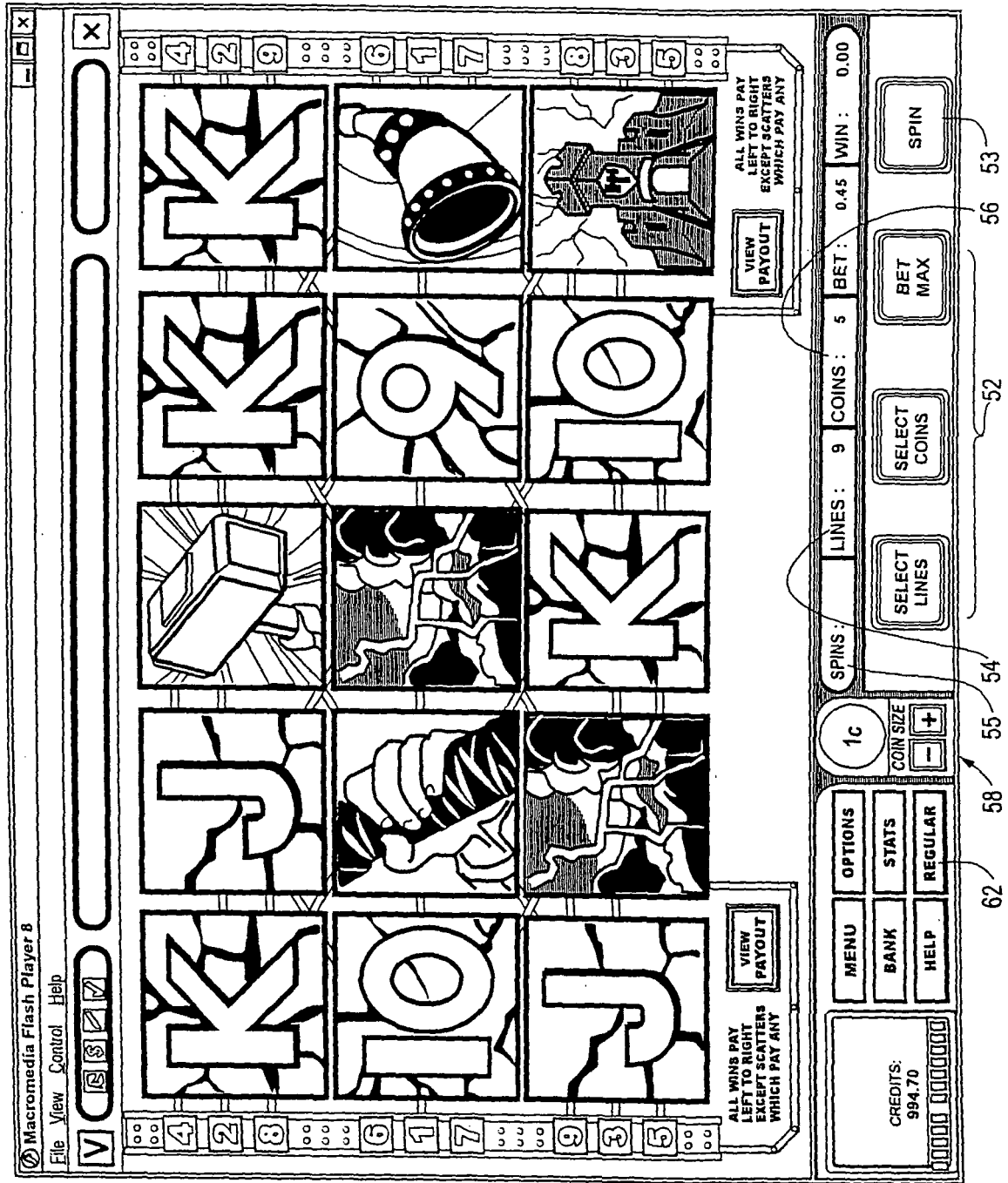


Fig. 8





European Patent
Office

DECLARATION

Application Number

which under Rule 45 of the European Patent Convention EP 07 25 0996 shall be considered, for the purposes of subsequent proceedings, as the European search report

The Search Division considers that the present application, does not comply with the provisions of the EPC to such an extent that it is not possible to carry out a meaningful search into the state of the art on the basis of all claims Reason: The claims relate to subject matter excluded from patentability under Art. 52(2) and (3) EPC, in particular gaming rules and methods for doing business. Given that the claims are formulated in terms of such subject matter or merely specify notoriously known features relating to its technological implementation, the search examiner could not establish any technical problem which might potentially have required an inventive step to overcome. The closest prior art for the present application appears to be a gaming machine for wagering games. Such machines are notoriously known in the art. Their existence at the filing date of the present application requires no written evidence. The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that a search may be carried out during examination following a declaration of no search under Rule 45 EPC, should the problems which led to the declaration being issued be overcome (see EPC Guideline C-VI, 8.5). -----		CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (IPC) INV. G06Q30/00 ADD. G07F17/32
Place of search Munich	Date 21 June 2007	Examiner Kemény, Michael

1

EPO FORM 1504 (P04C37)

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

This list of references cited by the applicant is for the reader's convenience only. It does not form part of the European patent document. Even though great care has been taken in compiling the references, errors or omissions cannot be excluded and the EPO disclaims all liability in this regard.

Patent documents cited in the description

- US 55074405 A [0003] [0024]
- WO 2003068349 A [0035]
- US 550744 A [0044] [0070]