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(54) **SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR INCREMENTALLY INCREASING A TIERED PLURALITY OF PROGRESSIVE JACKPOTS**

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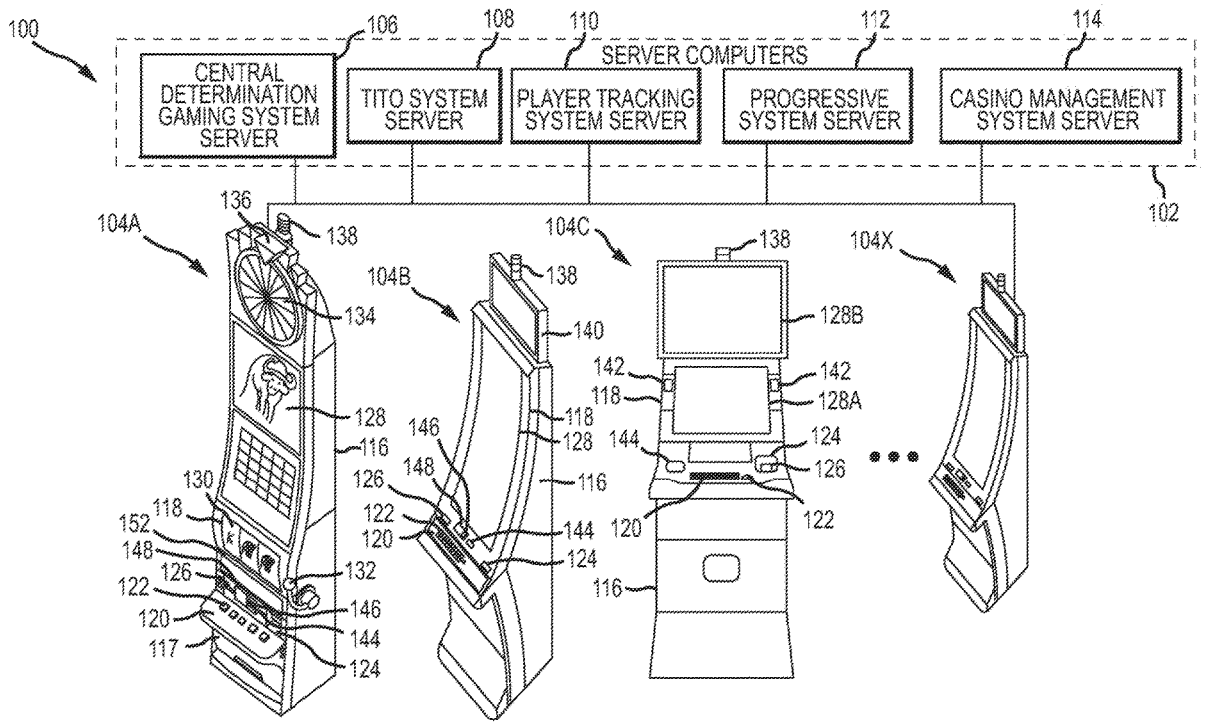
(57) **ABSTRACT**

An electronic gaming system includes a progressive system server configured to establish a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots that includes a first jackpot increasable a first cap value, a second jackpot increasable to a second cap value greater than the first cap value, and at least one intermediate jackpot increasable to at least one intermediate cap value greater than the first cap value and less than the second cap value. The progressive system server is further configured to allocate portions of player wagers to one of i) the first jackpot, ii) the at least one intermediate jackpot, and iii) the second jackpot, whereby the first jackpot is initially incrementally increased to the first cap value, the at least one intermediate jackpot is next incrementally increased to the at least one intermediate cap value, and the second jackpot is next incrementally increased to the second cap value.



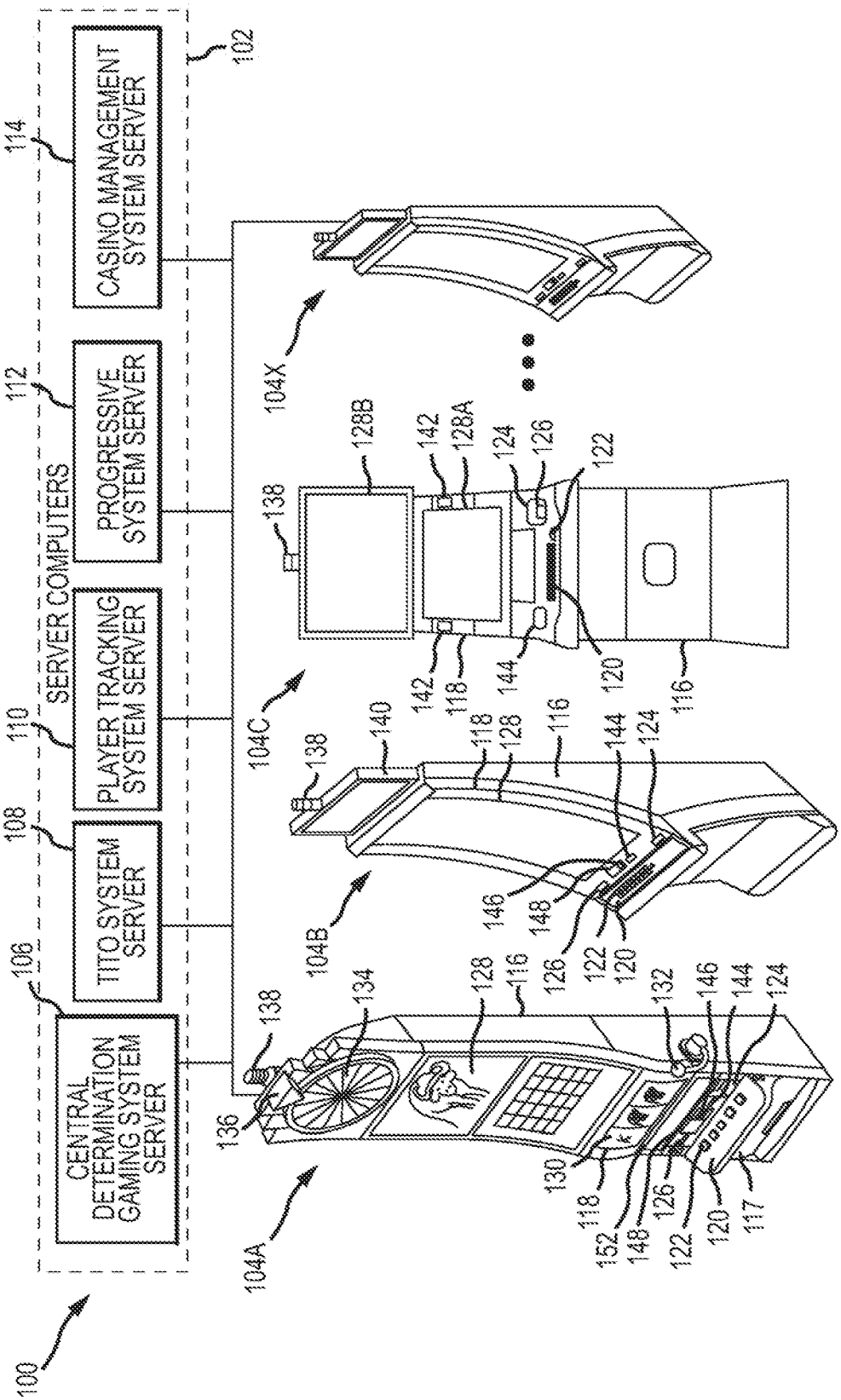

100
SERVER COMPUTERS
102
CENTRAL DETERMINATION GAMING SYSTEM SERVER
106
TITO SYSTEM SERVER
108
PLAYER TRACKING SYSTEM SERVER
110
PROGRESSIVE SYSTEM SERVER
112
CASINO MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SERVER
114
104A
104B
104C
104X

FIG. 1

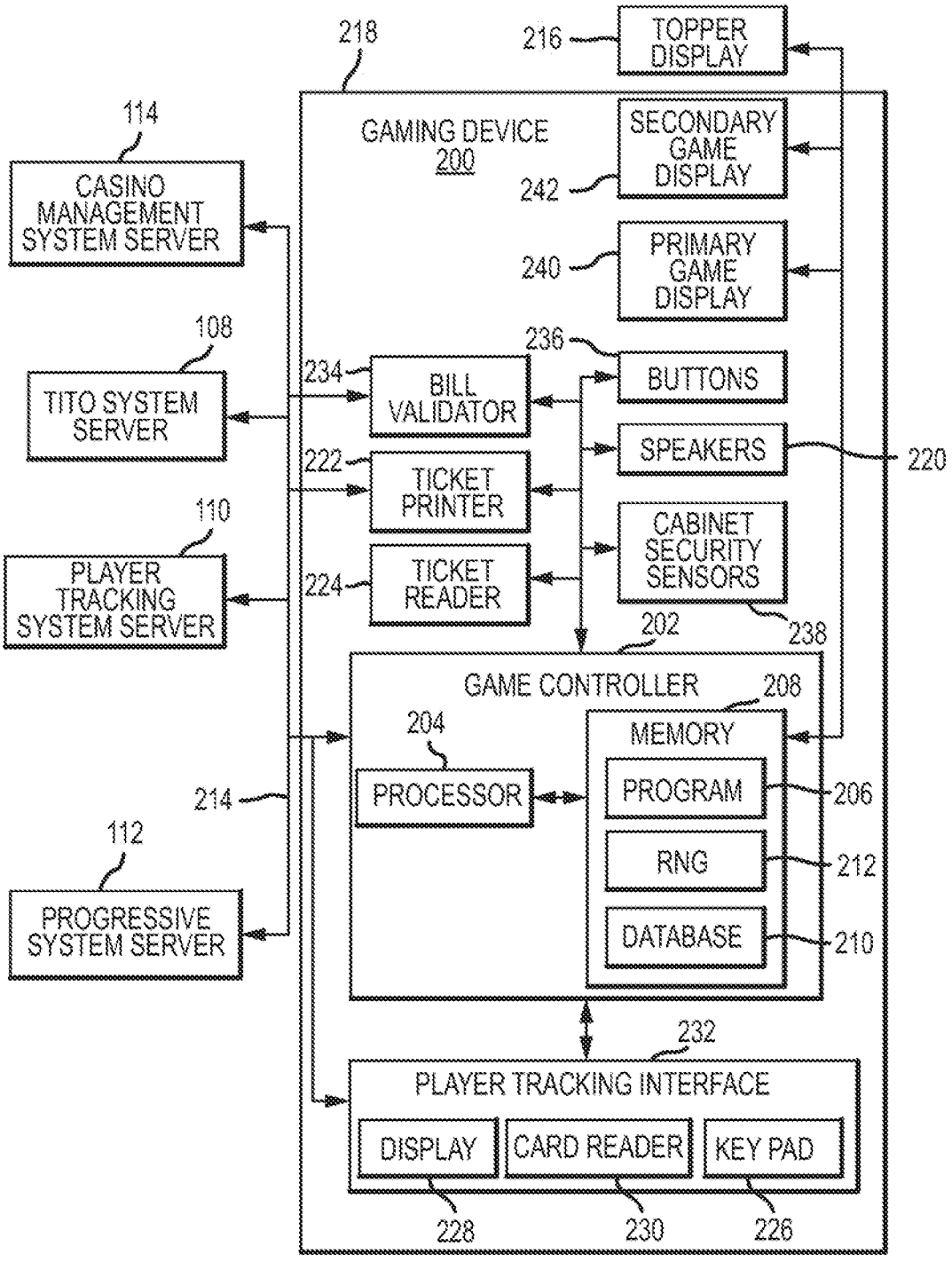

218
216
TOPPER DISPLAY
114
GAMING DEVICE
200
SECONDARY GAME DISPLAY
242
CASINO MANAGEMENT SYSTEM SERVER
PRIMARY GAME DISPLAY
240
108
236
234
BILL VALIDATOR
BUTTONS
TITO SYSTEM SERVER
SPEAKERS
220
222
TICKET PRINTER
110
CABINET SECURITY SENSORS
PLAYER TRACKING SYSTEM SERVER
224
TICKET READER
238
202
GAME CONTROLLER
208
204
MEMORY
PROCESSOR
PROGRAM
206
214
RNG
212
112
PROGRESSIVE SYSTEM SERVER
DATABASE
210
232
PLAYER TRACKING INTERFACE
DISPLAY
CARD READER
KEY PAD
228
230
226

FIG.2

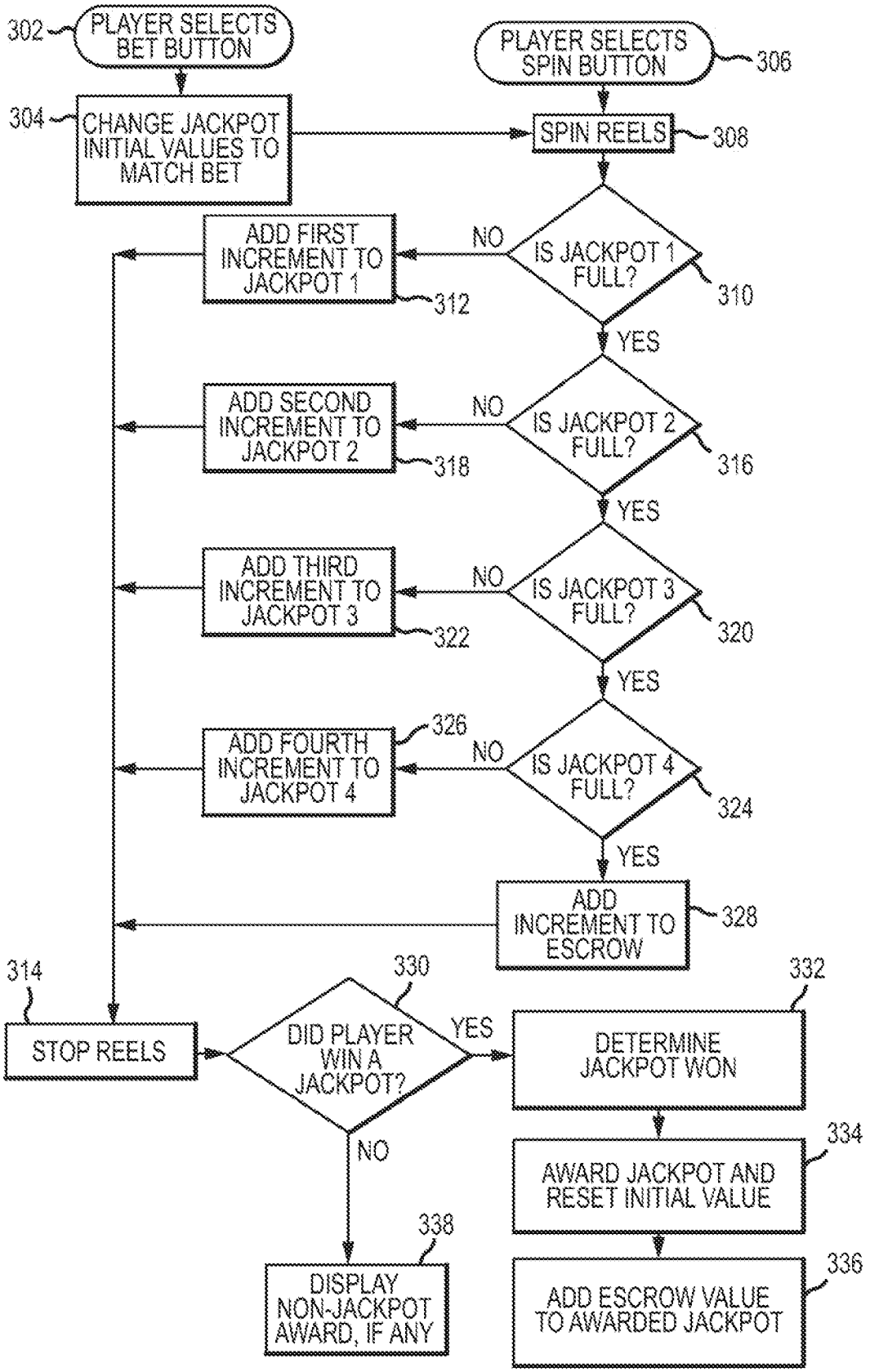
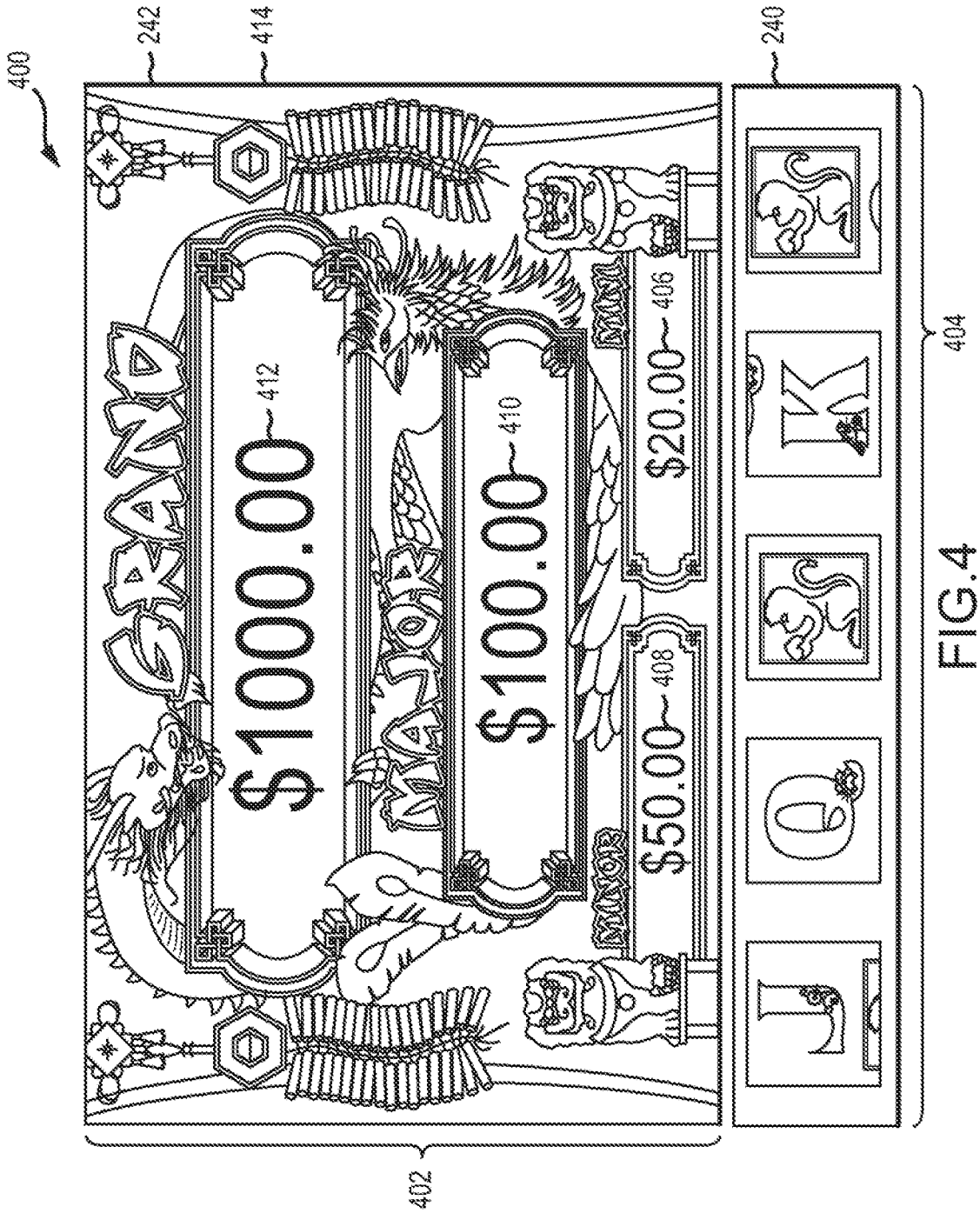

302
PLAYER SELECTS BET BUTTON
304
CHANGE JACKPOT INITIAL VALUES TO MATCH BET
PLAYER SELECTS SPIN BUTTON
306
SPIN REELS
308
IS JACKPOT 1 FULL?
310
NO
ADD FIRST INCREMENT TO JACKPOT 1
312
YES
IS JACKPOT 2 FULL?
316
NO
ADD SECOND INCREMENT TO JACKPOT 2
318
YES
IS JACKPOT 3 FULL?
320
NO
ADD THIRD INCREMENT TO JACKPOT 3
322
YES
IS JACKPOT 4 FULL?
324
NO
326
ADD FOURTH INCREMENT TO JACKPOT 4
YES
ADD INCREMENT TO ESCROW
328
314
STOP REELS
330
DID PLAYER WIN A JACKPOT?
YES
332
DETERMINE JACKPOT WON
NO
334
AWARD JACKPOT AND RESET INITIAL VALUE
336
ADD ESCROW VALUE TO AWARDED JACKPOT
338
DISPLAY NON-JACKPOT AWARD, IF ANY

FIG.3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GRAND
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FIG.4

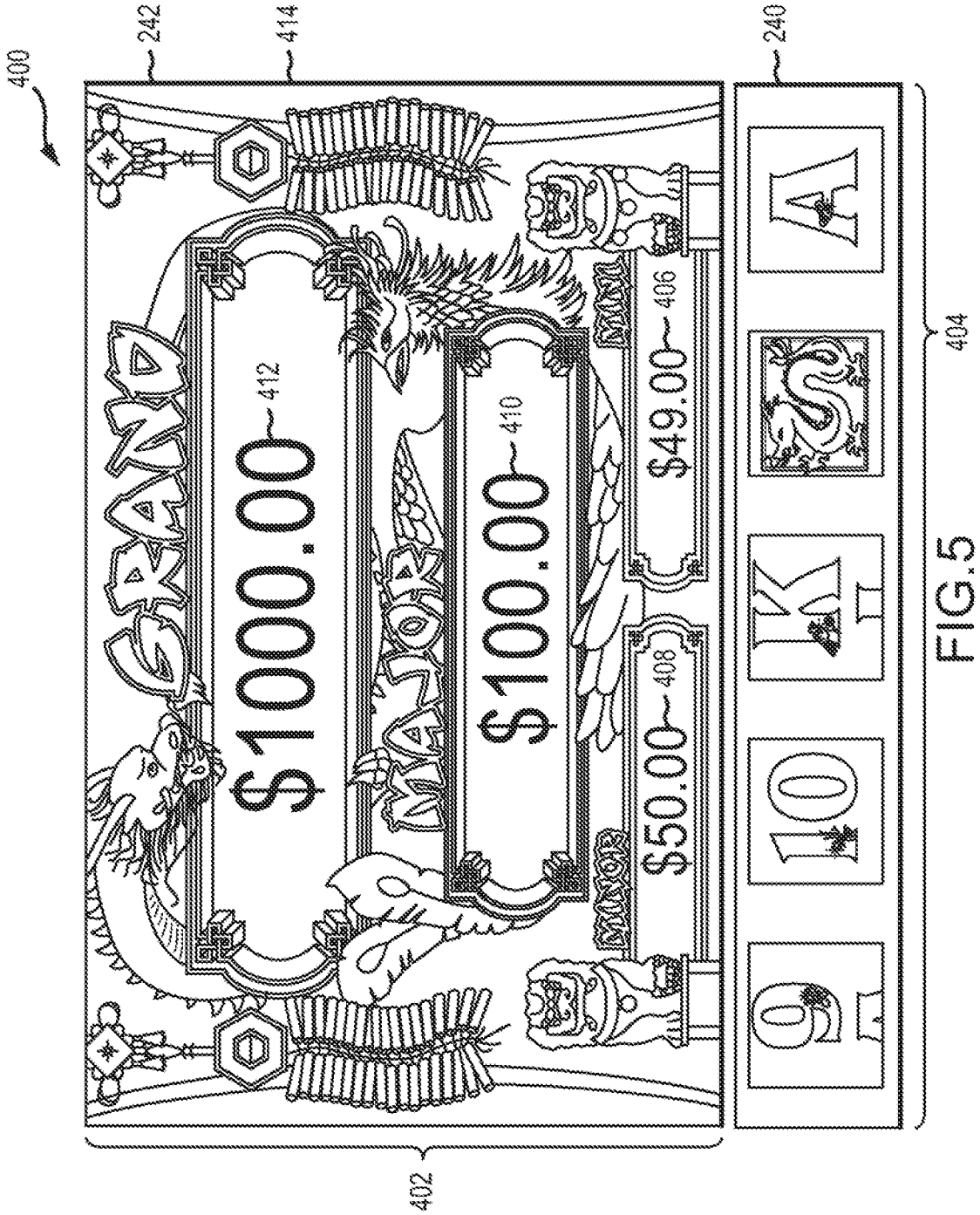
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FIG.5

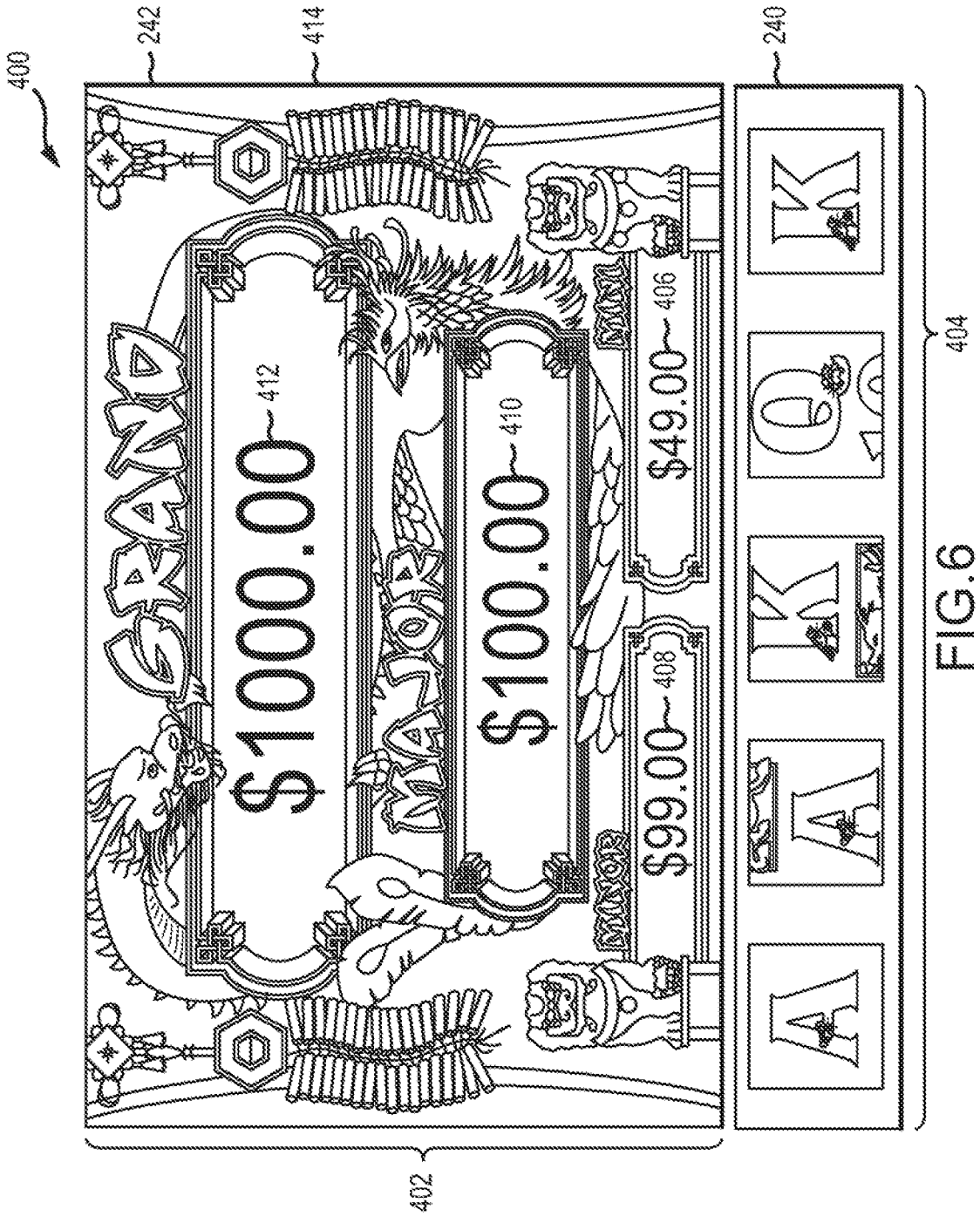
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FIG.6

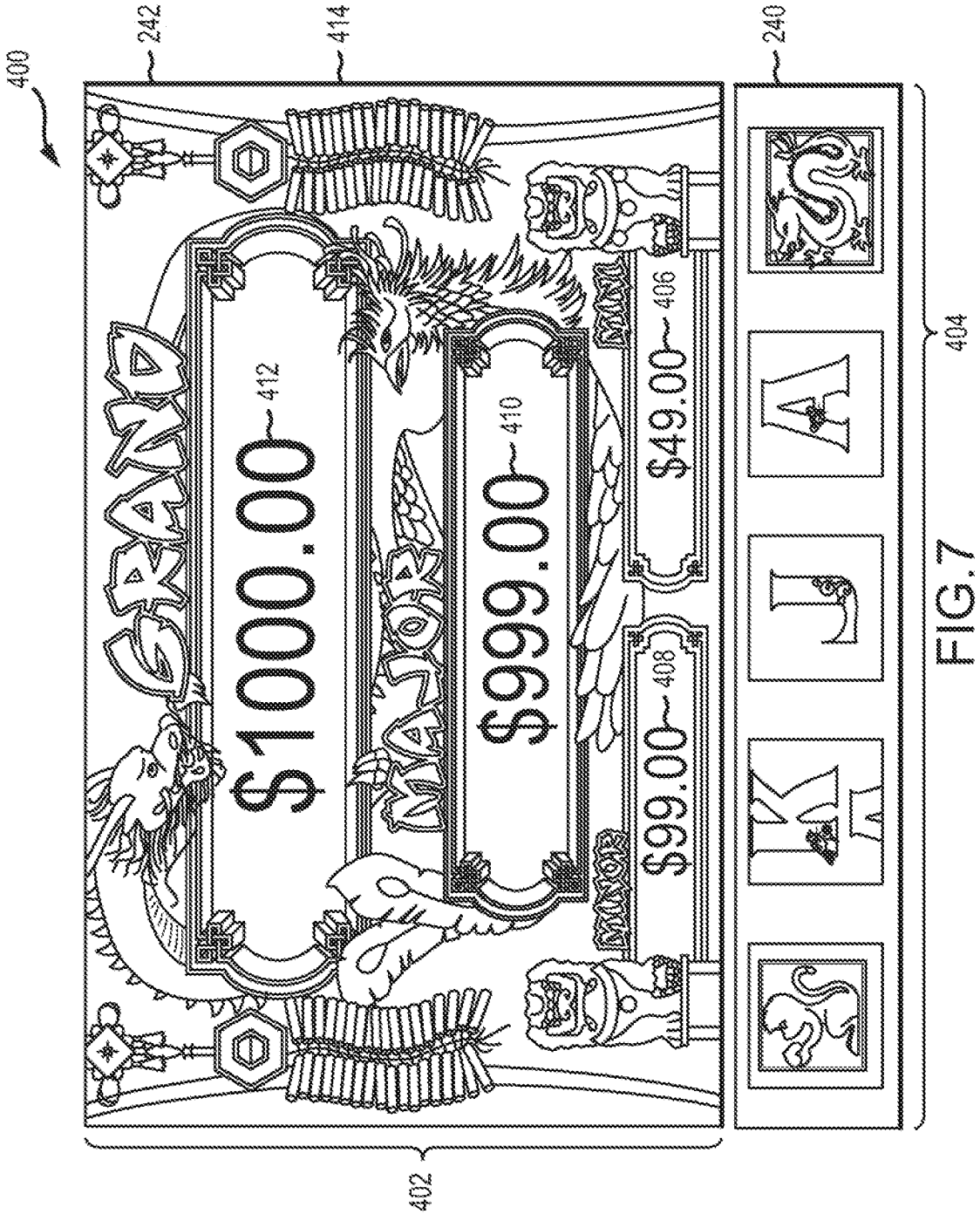
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FIG.7

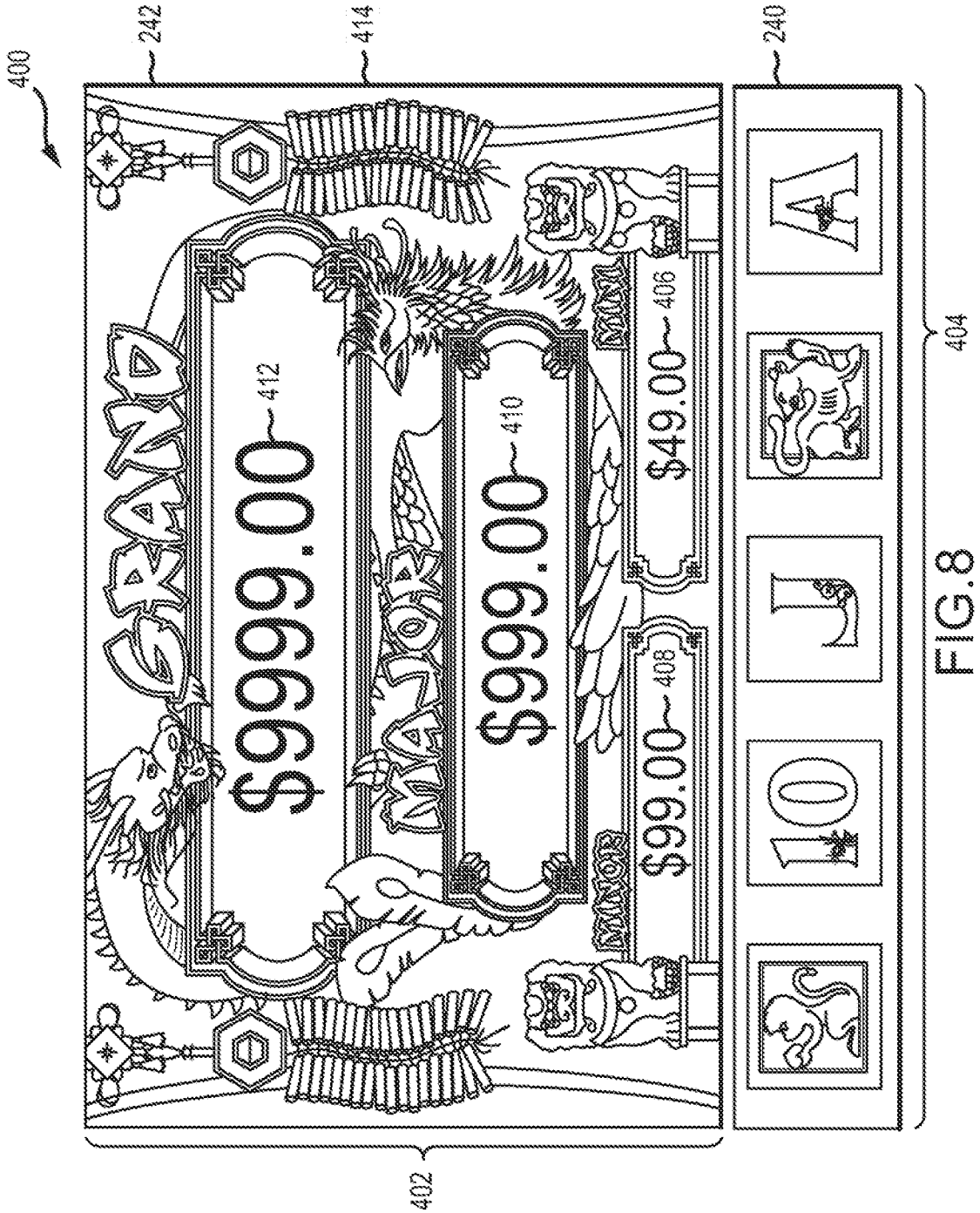
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FIG.8

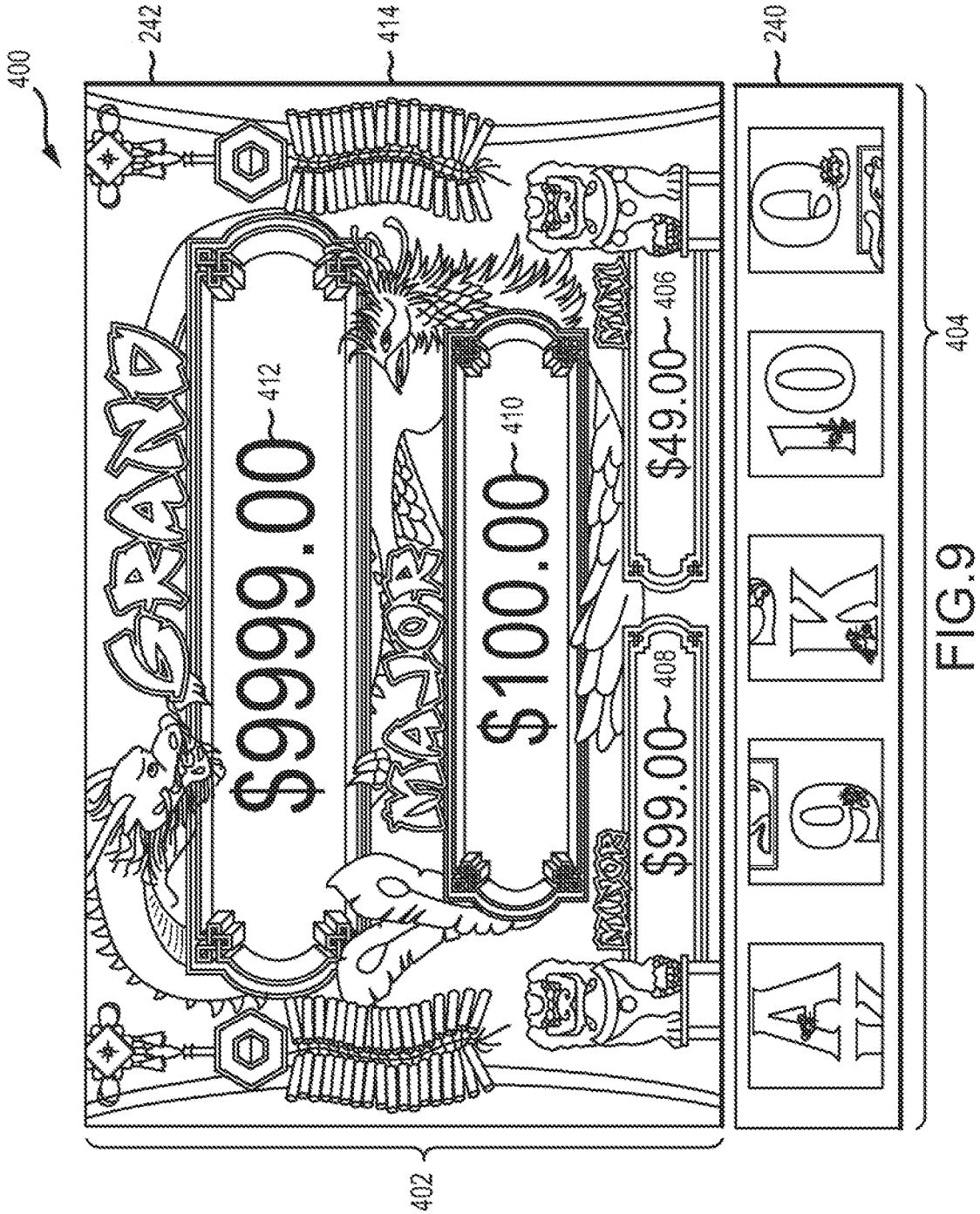
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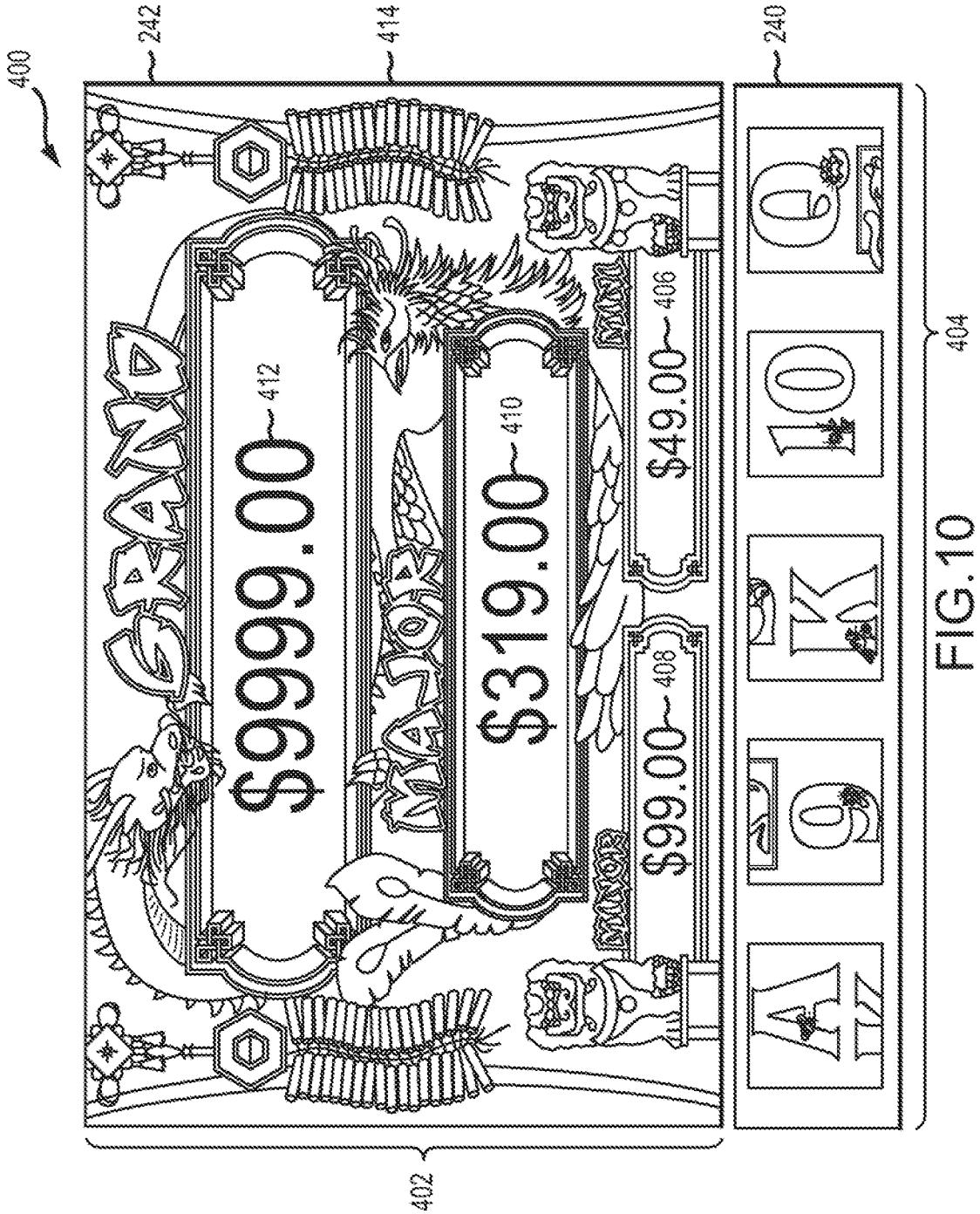
FIG.9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MAJOR
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Q
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FIG.10

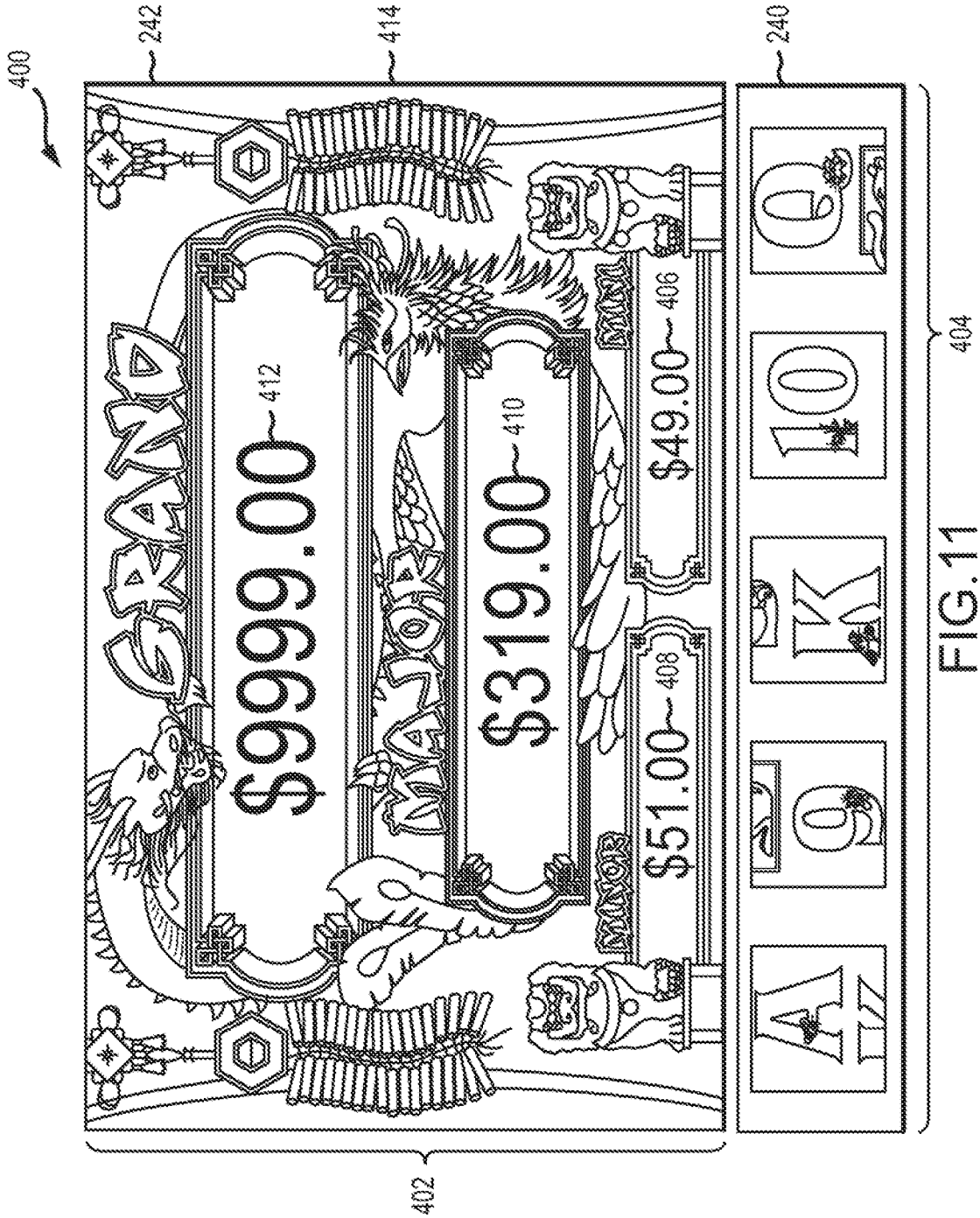
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FIG.11

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR INCREMENTALLY INCREASING A TIERED PLURALITY OF PROGRESSIVE JACKPOTS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/679,779, filed Nov. 11, 2019, which is a continuation of and claims the benefit of priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/057,965, filed 8 Aug. 2018, entitled "SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR INCREMENTALLY INCREASING A TIERED PLURALITY OF PROGRESSIVE JACKPOTS," the entire contents and disclosures of which, each are hereby incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The field of disclosure relates generally to electronic gaming, and more particularly to systems and methods for establishing a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots, and incrementally increasing the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Electronic gaming machines (EGMs), or gaming devices, provide a variety of wagering games such as, for example, and without limitation, slot games, video poker games, video blackjack games, roulette games, video bingo games, keno games, and other types of games that are frequently offered at casinos and other locations. Play on EGMs typically involves a player establishing a credit balance by inserting or otherwise submitting money and placing a monetary wager (deducted from the credit balance) on one or more outcomes of an instance, or play, of a primary game, sometimes referred to as a base game. In many games, a player may qualify for secondary games or bonus rounds by attaining a certain winning combination or other triggering event in the base game. Secondary games provide an opportunity to win additional game instances, credits, awards, jackpots, progressives, etc. Awards from any winning outcomes are typically added back to the credit balance and can be provided to the player upon completion of a gaming session or when the player wants to "cash out."

[0004] Slot games are often displayed to the player in the form of various symbols arranged in a row-by-column grid, or "matrix." Specific matching combinations of symbols along predetermined paths, or paylines, drawn through the matrix indicate the outcome of the game. The display typically highlights winning combinations and outcomes for ready identification by the player. Matching combinations and their corresponding awards are usually shown in a "pay-table" that is available to the player for reference. Often, the player may vary his/her wager to included differing numbers of paylines and/or the amount bet on each line. By varying the wager, the player may sometimes alter the frequency or number of winning combinations, the frequency or number of secondary games, and/or the amount awarded.

[0005] Typical games use a random number generator (RNG) to randomly determine the outcome of each game. The game is designed to return a certain percentage of the amount wagered back to the player, referred to as return to player (RTP), over the course of many plays or instances of the game. The RTP and randomness of the RNG are fundamental to ensuring the fairness of the games and are therefore highly regulated. The RNG may be used to randomly determine the outcome of a game and symbols may then be selected that correspond to that outcome. Alternatively, the RNG may be used to randomly select the symbols whose resulting combinations determine the outcome. Notably, some games may include an element of skill on the part of the player and are therefore not entirely random.

[0006] Within a casino, EGMs are often physically grouped in "banks" and arranged to contribute to one or more progressive jackpots. For example, each EGM organized within a bank of EGMs may contribute to a plurality of progressive jackpots, commonly referred to as "linked progressive jackpots" or simply "progressive jackpots" to indicate that the jackpots receive contributions from more than a single EGM. Traditionally, progressive jackpots are increased together, each time a player places a wager, by a small percentage of the wager. For example one or two percent of each wager may be evenly distributed to each progressive jackpot at the same time. One drawback of this method is that the jackpots increase together (rather than one by one), and only by small amounts, each time a wager is made.

[0007] Accordingly, systems and methods for incrementally increasing one or more progressive jackpots are desirable. More particularly, systems and methods in which portions of wagers are allocated to progressive jackpots hierarchically or in tiers, from a lowest paying jackpot to a highest paying jackpot, are desirable.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

[0008] In one aspect, an electronic gaming system is provided. The electronic gaming system includes an electronic gaming machine configured to present a wagering game, and a progressive system server communicatively coupled to the electronic gaming machine. The progressive system server configured to establish a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots that includes a first jackpot that is increasable a first cap value, a second jackpot that is increasable to a second cap value greater than the first cap value, and at least one intermediate jackpot that is increasable to at least one intermediate cap value greater than the first cap value and less than the second cap value. The progressive system server is further configured to allocate, based upon a plurality of wager allocation rules and in response to wagers received by the electronic gaming machine, portions of the wagers to one of i) the first jackpot, ii) the at least one intermediate jackpot, and iii) the second jackpot, whereby: the first jackpot is incrementally increased, if the first jackpot is below the first cap value, until the first jackpot reaches the first cap value, the at least one intermediate jackpot is incrementally increased, if the at least one intermediate jackpot is below the at least one intermediate cap value and after the first jackpot reaches the first cap value, until the at least one intermediate jackpot reaches the at least one intermediate cap value, and the second jackpot is incrementally increased, if the second jackpot is below the second cap value and after the at least one intermediate jackpot reaches the at least one intermediate cap value, until the second jackpot reaches the second cap value.

[0009] In another aspect, an electronic gaming system is provided. The electronic gaming system includes an elec-

tronic gaming machine configured to present a wagering game, and a progressive system server communicatively coupled to the electronic gaming machine. The progressive system server configured to establish a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots, each jackpot increasable to a respective cap value, the cap values increasing, in tiers, from a lowest cap value associated with a lowest paying jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to a highest cap value associated with a highest paying jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots. The progressive system server is further configured to add portions of wagers received by the electronic gaming machine to one jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to fill the jackpot to its respective cap value, wherein the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots are filled, in order, from the lowest paying jackpot until the lowest cap value is reached to the highest paying jackpot until the highest cap value is reached, and wherein a jackpot is not filled to a respective cap value until each lower paying jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a respective cap value.

[0010] In yet another aspect, a method of establishing and maintaining a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is provided. The method includes (i) establishing, by a progressive system server, a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots, the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots including a first jackpot that is increasable a first cap value, a second jackpot that is increasable to a second cap value greater than the first cap value, and at least one intermediate jackpot that is increasable to at least one intermediate cap value greater than the first cap value and less than the second cap value; and (ii) allocating, by the progressive system server and in response to wagers received by an electronic gaming machine, portions of the wagers to only one of i) the first jackpot, ii) the at least one intermediate jackpot, and iii) the second jackpot, whereby the first jackpot is initially increased to the first cap value, the at least one intermediate jackpot is next increased to the at least one intermediate cap value, and the second jackpot is last increased to the second cap value.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] An example embodiment of the subject matter disclosed will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

[0012] FIG. **1** is a diagram of exemplary EGMs networked with various gaming-related servers;

[0013] FIG. **2** is a block diagram of an exemplary EGM;

[0014] FIG. **3** is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary process for incrementally increasing each jackpot of a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots, one at a time, based upon portions of wagers received from one or more EGMs, as shown in FIG. **1** and FIG. **2**;

[0015] FIG. **4** is a schematic view of an illustrative wagering game that includes a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots and a plurality of reels, in which each jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is established and is configured to be increased from a corresponding initial value;

[0016] FIG. **5** is a schematic view of the illustrative wagering game shown in FIG. **4**, in which a first jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a first cap value;

[0017] FIG. **6** is a schematic view of the illustrative wagering game shown in FIG. **4**, in which a second jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a second cap value after the first jackpot is filled to the first cap value;

[0018] FIG. **7** is a schematic view of the illustrative wagering game shown in FIG. **4**, in which a third jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a third cap value after the second jackpot is filled to the second cap value;

[0019] FIG. **8** is a schematic view of the illustrative wagering game shown in FIG. **4**, in which a fourth jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a fourth cap value after the third jackpot is filled to the third cap value;

[0020] FIG. **9** is a schematic view of the illustrative wagering game shown in FIG. **4**, in which the third jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is reduced, after a jackpot win, to a corresponding initial value;

[0021] FIG. **10** is a schematic view of the illustrative wagering game shown in FIG. **9**, in which the third jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is incrementally increased from its initial value to a value less than the third cap value; and

[0022] FIG. **11** is a schematic view of the illustrative wagering game shown in FIG. **10**, in which the second jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is reduced, after a jackpot win, to a corresponding initial value and increased from the initial value to a value less than the second cap value

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0023] An electronic gaming system for incrementing a tiered plurality of jackpots, from a lowest paying jackpot to a highest paying jackpot, is described. The electronic gaming system includes a progressive system server communicatively coupled, or networked, to a plurality of electronic gaming machines. Each time a player places a wager, such as by selecting a spin button of an electronic gaming machine, a plurality of reels may be spun, and a lowest paying uncapped jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots may receive an incremental increase that corresponds to a portion or percentage of the player wager. In addition, the portion or percentage of each wager allocated to a jackpot may increase as jackpots are filled from the lowest paying to the highest paying jackpot. Specifically, a lowest paying jackpot may receive a smallest incremental increase, while a highest paying jackpot may receive a highest incremental increase. Thus, jackpots may incrementally fill from lowest to highest, and the rate of increase may accelerate as jackpots are filled.

[0024] As used herein, a "progressive jackpot" and/or a "linked progressive jackpot" is an award that receives contributions from a plurality of electronic gaming machines. For example, a plurality of electronic gaming machines may contribute a specified amount to one or more linked progressive jackpots each time any of the electronic gaming machines are played (e.g., with each wager placed on any of the electronic gaming machines). Over time, the linked progressive jackpots to which each electronic gaming machine contributes may increase or grow, and an indication of the jackpots may be provided to players to increase excitement as well as to encourage additional play. At a certain point, the linked progressive jackpots may be awarded (all or in part) to a player of one of the electronic

gaming machines, such as in response to a triggering event occurring on the player's electronic gaming machine.

[0025] FIG. **1** is a diagram of exemplary EGMs networked with various gaming-related servers in a gaming system **100**. Gaming system **100** operates in a gaming environment, including one or more servers, or server computers, such as slot servers of a casino, that are in communication, via a communications network, with one or more EGMs, or gaming devices **104**A-**104**X, such as EGMs, slot machines, video poker machines, or bingo machines, for example. Gaming devices **104**A-**104**X may, in the alternative, be portable and/or remote gaming devices such as, for example, and without limitation, a smart phone, a tablet, a laptop, or a game console.

[0026] Communication between gaming devices **104**A-**104**X and servers **102**, and among gaming devices **104**A-**104**X, may be direct or indirect, such as over the Internet through a web site maintained by a computer on a remote server or over an online data network including commercial online service providers, Internet service providers, private networks, and the like. In other embodiments, gaming devices **104**A-**104**X communicate with one another and/or servers **102** over wired or wireless RF or satellite connections and the like.

[0027] In certain embodiments, servers **102** may not be necessary and/or preferred. For example, the present invention may, in one or more embodiments, be practiced on a stand-alone gaming device such as gaming device **104**A and/or gaming device **104**A in communication with only one or more other gaming devices **104**B-**104**X (i.e., without servers **102**).

[0028] Servers **102** may include a central determination gaming system server **106**, a ticket-in-ticket-out (TITO) system server **108**, a player tracking system server **110**, a progressive system server **112**, and/or a casino management system server **114**. Gaming devices **104**A-**104**X may include features to enable operation of any or all servers for use by the player and/or operator (e.g., the casino, resort, gaming establishment, tavern, pub, etc.). For example, a game outcome may be generated on a central determination gaming system server **106** and then transmitted over the network to any of a group of remote terminals or remote gaming devices **104**A-**104**X that utilize the game outcome and display the result to the player.

[0029] Gaming device **104**A is often of a cabinet construction that may be aligned in rows or banks of similar devices for placement and operation on a casino floor. The gaming device **104**A often includes a main door **117** that provides access to the interior of the cabinet. Gaming device **104**A typically includes a button area or button deck **120** accessible by a player that is configured with input switches or buttons **122**, a bill validator **124**, and/or ticket-out printer **126**.

[0030] In FIG. **1**, gaming device **104**A is shown as a Relm XL™ model gaming device manufactured by Aristocrat® Technologies, Inc. As shown, gaming device **104**A is a reel machine having a gaming display area **118** including a plurality of mechanical reels **130**, typically 3 or 5 mechanical reels, with various symbols displayed there on. Reels **130** are then independently spun and stopped to show a set of symbols within the gaming display area **118** that may be used to determine an outcome to the game.

[0031] In many configurations, gaming machine **104**A may have a main display **128** (e.g., video display monitor) mounted to, or above, gaming display area **118**. Main display **128** may be, for example, a high-resolution LCD, plasma, LED, or OLED panel that may be flat or curved as shown, a cathode ray tube, or other conventional electronically controlled video monitor.

[0032] In certain embodiments, bill validator **124** may also function as a "ticket-in" reader that enables the player to use a casino-issued credit ticket to load credits onto gaming device **104**A (e.g., in a cashless TITO system). In such cashless embodiments, gaming device **104**A may also include a "ticket-out" printer **126** for outputting a credit ticket when a "cash out" button is pressed. Cashless ticket systems are well known in the art and are used to generate and track unique bar-codes printed on tickets to allow players to avoid the use of bills and coins by loading credits using a ticket reader and cashing out credits using ticket-out printer **126** on gaming device **104**A.

[0033] In certain embodiments, a player tracking card reader **144**, a transceiver for wireless communication with a player's smartphone, a keypad **146**, and/or an illuminated display **148** for reading, receiving, entering, and/or displaying player tracking information can be provided. In such embodiments, a game controller within gaming device **104**A communicates with player tracking server system **110** to send and receive player tracking information.

[0034] Gaming device **104**A may also include, in certain embodiments, a bonus topper wheel **134**. When bonus play is triggered (e.g., by a player achieving a particular outcome or set of outcomes in the primary game), bonus topper wheel **134** is operative to spin and stop with indicator arrow **136** indicating the outcome of the bonus game. Bonus topper wheel **134** is typically used to play a bonus game, but could also be incorporated into play of the base game, or primary game.

[0035] A candle **138** may be mounted on the top of gaming device **104**A and may be activated by a player (e.g., using a switch or one of buttons **122**) to indicate to operations staff that gaming device **104**A has experienced a malfunction or the player requires service. The candle **138** is also often used to indicate a jackpot has been won and to alert staff that a hand payout of an award may be needed.

[0036] In certain embodiments, there may also be one or more information panels **152** that may be, for example, a back-lit silkscreened glass panel with lettering to indicate general game information including, for example, a game denomination (e.g., $0.25 or $1), pay lines, pay tables, and/or various game related graphics. In some embodiments, information panels **152** may be implemented as an additional video display.

[0037] Gaming device **104**A traditionally includes a handle **132** typically mounted to the side of main cabinet **116** that may be used to initiate game play.

[0038] Many or all of the above described components may be controlled by circuitry (e.g., a gaming controller) housed inside main cabinet **116** of gaming device **104**A, the details of which are shown in FIG. **2**.

[0039] Not all gaming devices suitable for implementing embodiments of the gaming systems, gaming devices, or methods described herein necessarily include top wheels, top boxes, information panels, cashless ticket systems, and/or player tracking systems. Further, some suitable gaming devices have only a single game display that includes only a mechanical set of reels and/or a video display, while others

are designed, for example, for bar tables or table tops and have displays that face upwards.

[0040] Exemplary gaming device **104**B shown in FIG. **1** is an Arc™ model gaming device manufactured by Aristocrat® Technologies, Inc. Where possible, reference numeral identifying similar features of gaming device **104**A are also identified in gaming device **104**B using the same reference numerals. Gaming device **104**B, however, does not include physical reels **130** and instead shows game play and related game play functions on main display **128**. An optional topper screen **140** may be included as a secondary game display for bonus play, to show game features or attraction activities while the game is not in play, or any other information or media desired by the game designer or operator. In some embodiments, topper screen **140** may also or alternatively be used to display progressive jackpot prizes available to a player during play of gaming device **104**B.

[0041] Gaming device **104**B includes main cabinet **116** having main door **117** that opens to provide access to the interior of gaming device **104**B. Main door **117**, or service door, is typically used by service personnel to refill ticket-out printer **126** and collect bills and tickets inserted into bill validator **124**. Main door **117** may further be accessed to reset the machine, verify and/or upgrade the software, and for general maintenance operations.

[0042] Exemplary gaming device **104**C shown in FIG. **1** is a Helix™ model gaming device manufactured by Aristocrat® Technologies, Inc. Gaming device **104**C includes a main display **128**A that is in a landscape orientation. Although not illustrated by the front view illustrated in FIG. **1**, landscape display **128**A may include a curvature radius from top to bottom. In certain embodiments, display **128**A is a flat panel display. Main display **128**A is typically used for primary game play while a secondary display **128**B is used for bonus game play, to show game features or attraction activities while the game is not in play, or any other information or media desired by the game designer or operator.

[0043] Many different types of games, including mechanical slot games, video slot games, video poker, video black jack, video pachinko, keno, bingo, and lottery, may be provided with or implemented within gaming devices **104**A-**104**C and other similar gaming devices. Each gaming device may also be operable to provide many different games. Games may be differentiated according to themes, sounds, graphics, type of game (e.g., slot game vs. card game vs. game with aspects of skill), denomination, number of paylines, maximum jackpot, progressive or non-progressive, bonus games, Class II, or Class III, etc.

[0044] FIG. **2** is a block diagram of an exemplary gaming device **200**, or EGM, connected to various external systems, including TITO system server **108**, player tracking system server **110**, progressive system server **112**, and casino management system server **114**. All or parts of gaming device **200** may be embodied in game devices **104**A-**104**X shown in FIG. **1**. The games conducted on gaming device **200** are controlled by a game controller **202** that includes one or more processors **204** and a memory **208** coupled thereto. Games are represented by game software or a game program **206** stored on memory **208**. Memory **208** includes one or more mass storage devices or media housed within gaming device **200**. One or more databases **210** may be included in one or more databases **210** for use by game program **206**. A random number generator (RNG) **212** is implemented in hardware and/or software and is used, in certain embodiments, to generate random numbers for use in operation of gaming device **200** to conduct game play and to ensure the game play outcomes are random and meet regulations for a game of chance.

[0045] Alternatively, a game instance, or round of play of the game, may be generated on a remote gaming device such as central determination gaming system server **106**, shown in FIG. **1**. The game instance is communicated to gaming device **200** via a network **214** and is then displayed on gaming device **200**. Gaming device **200** executes game software to enable the game to be displayed on gaming device **200**. In certain embodiments, game controller **202** executes video streaming software that enables the game to be displayed on gaming device **200**. Game software may be loaded from memory **208**, including, for example, a read only memory (ROM), or from central determination gaming system server **106** into memory **208**. Memory **208** includes at least one section of ROM, random access memory (RAM), or other form of storage media that stores instructions for execution by processor **204**.

[0046] Gaming device **200** includes a topper display **216**. In an alternative embodiment, gaming device **200** includes another form of a top box such as, for example, a topper wheel, or other topper display that sits on top of main cabinet **218**. Main cabinet **218** or topper display **216** may also house various other components that may be used to add features to a game being played on gaming device **200**, including speakers **220**, a ticket printer **222** that prints bar-coded tickets, a ticket reader **224** that reads bar-coded tickets, and a player tracking interface **232***a*. Player tracking interface **232***a* may include a keypad **226** for entering player tracking information, a player tracking display **228** for displaying player tracking information (e.g., an illuminated or video display), a card reader **230** for receiving data and/or communicating information to and from media or a device such as a smart phone enabling player tracking. Ticket printer **222** may be used to print tickets for TITO system server **108**. Gaming device **200** may further include a bill validator **234**, buttons **236** for player input, cabinet security sensors **238** to detect unauthorized opening of main cabinet **218**, a primary game display **240**, and a secondary game display **242**, each coupled to and operable under the control of game controller **202**.

[0047] Gaming device **200** may be connected over network **214** to player tracking system server **110**. Player tracking system server **110** may be, for example, an OASIS® system manufactured by Aristocrat® Technologies, Inc. Player tracking system server **110** is used to track play (e.g., amount wagered and time of play) for individual players so that an operator may reward players in a loyalty program. The player may use player tracking interface **232***a* to access his/her account information, activate free play, and/or request various information. Player tracking or loyalty programs seek to reward players for their play and help build brand loyalty to the gaming establishment. The rewards typically correspond to the player's level of patronage (e.g., to the player's playing frequency and/or total amount of game plays at a given casino). Player tracking rewards may be complimentary and/or discounted meals, lodging, entertainment and/or additional play. Player tracking information may be combined with other information that is now readily obtainable by casino management system server **114**.

[0048] Gaming devices, such as gaming devices **104**A-**104**X and **200**, are highly regulated to ensure fairness and, in many cases, gaming devices **104**A-**104**X and **200** are operable to award monetary awards (e.g., typically dispensed in the form of a redeemable voucher). Therefore, to satisfy security and regulatory requirements in a gaming environment, hardware and software architectures are implemented in gaming devices **104**A-**104**X and **200** that differ significantly from those of general-purpose computers. Adapting general purpose computers to function as gaming devices **200** is not simple or straightforward because (1) regulatory requirements for gaming devices, (2) harsh environments in which gaming devices operate, (3) security requirements, and (4) fault tolerance requirements. These differences require substantial engineering effort and often additional hardware.

[0049] When a player wishes to play gaming device **200**, he/she can insert cash or a ticket voucher through a coin acceptor (not shown) or bill validator **234** to establish a credit balance on the gaming machine. The credit balance is used by the player to place wagers on instances of the game and to receive credit awards based on the outcome of winning instances of the game. The credit balance is decreased by the amount of each wager and increased upon a win. The player can add additional credits to the balance at any time. The player may also optionally insert a loyalty club card into card reader **230**. During the game, the player views the game outcome on game displays **240** and **242**. Other game and prize information may also be displayed.

[0050] For each game instance, a player may make selections that may affect play of the game. For example, the player may vary the total amount wagered by selecting the amount bet per line and the number of lines played. In many games, the player is asked to initiate or select options during course of game play (such as spinning a wheel to begin a bonus round or select various items during a feature game). The player may make these selections using player-input buttons **236**, primary game display **240**, which may include a touch screen, or using another suitable device that enables a player to input information into gaming device **200**.

[0051] During certain game events, gaming device **200** may display visual and auditory effects that can be perceived by the player. These effects add to the excitement of a game, which makes a player more likely to continue playing. Auditory effects include various sounds that are projected by speakers **220**. Visual effects include flashing lights, strobing lights, or other patterns displayed from lights on gaming device **200** or from lights behind information panel **152**, shown in FIG. **1**.

[0052] When the player wishes to stop playing, he/she cashes out the credit balance (typically by pressing a cash out button to receive a ticket from ticket printer **222**). The ticket may be "cashed-in" for money or inserted into another machine to establish a credit balance for play.

[0053] FIG. **3** is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary process **300** for playing a wagering game and incrementally increasing, during the wagering game, one or more jackpots of a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots. The steps illustrated by process **300** specify or describe a plurality of wager allocation rules for filling the one or more jackpots based upon an amount associated with each jackpot (e.g., each step of process **300** may be regarded as a wager allocation rule). In general, and as described in greater detail herein, each jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots may be organized hierarchically, or in tiers, and may receive portions or increments of player wagers only when a jackpot lower in the tier structure has been incremented to a corresponding cap value. In other words, the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots may be incrementally increased, or "filled," from a lowest paying jackpot to a highest paying jackpot, such that the lower paying jackpots are filled to corresponding cap values before higher paying jackpots are filled.

[0054] In the exemplary embodiment, a player may interact with an EGM **104**A-**104**X, as described herein, to establish an initial wager amount (step **302**). For example, as described above, a player may specify an initial wager amount via button deck **120**. In response to selection of an initial wager amount, progressive system server **112** may receive the initial wager amount and, in response, establish an initial (or "reset") value for each jackpot in a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots (step **304**). As described below, an initial value is a value below which a jackpot may not be permitted to decrease. In addition, a jackpot may be "reset" to an initial value after the jackpot is paid out.

[0055] FIG. **4** is a schematic view of an exemplary wagering game **400** that includes a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** and a plurality of reels **404**, such as a simulated rotating plurality of reels. In various embodiments, wagering game **400** may be a primary game and/or a bonus game triggered from a primary game.

[0056] Tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** and reels **404** may be displayed in any suitable manner. For example, in some embodiments, tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** may be displayed on secondary game display **242** and/or another secondary display, such as an overhead sign. Similarly, in at least some embodiments, reels **404** are not mechanical reels but simulated or "virtual" reels displayed on primary game display **240**. However, in other embodiments, reels **404** may include one or more mechanical reels.

[0057] Each reel of plurality of reels **404** may include a plurality of symbols. In addition, each reel of plurality of reels **404** may be spun and stopped (e.g., in a simulation or physically) to show a symbol combination. As described below, the symbol combination displayed on reels **404**, once stopped, may, in addition, be evaluated by processor **204** to determine whether the combination of stopped and displayed symbols corresponds to a winning game outcome and/or to determine whether the displayed symbol combination corresponds to one or more progressive jackpots of tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402**. If the symbol combination corresponds to a winning game outcome, a game award may be provided to the player in accordance with a paytable that correlates the displayed combination of symbols to the game award. Similarly, if the symbol combination corresponds to a progressive jackpot, the progressive jackpot to which the symbol combination corresponds may be provided to the player.

[0058] In the exemplary embodiment, each jackpot of tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** is configured to be incrementally increased from a corresponding initial (or "reset") value to a corresponding maximum (or "cap") value. As described herein, a jackpot may not be permitted to decrease below a corresponding initial value, and the jackpot may not be allowed to increase beyond a corresponding cap value. Accordingly, tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** may include a first, smallest, progressive

jackpot **406** (or a "first jackpot"), a second, intermediate, progressive jackpot **408** (or a "second jackpot"), a third, intermediate, progressive jackpot **410** (or a "third jackpot"), and a fourth, largest, progressive jackpot **412** (or a "fourth jackpot"). Although four progressive jackpots **406-412** are illustrated, it will be appreciated that any suitable number of progressive jackpots may be implemented and are within the scope of the present disclosure.

[0059] Thus, first jackpot **406** may be associated with a first initial value and a first cap value, second jackpot **408** may be associated with a second initial value and a second cap value, third jackpot **410** may be associated with a third initial value and a third cap value, and fourth jackpot **412** may be associated with a fourth initial value and a fourth cap value. Each initial value may be adjusted (e.g., increased or decreased) at the start of gameplay, such as, for example, based upon an initial wager amount specified by the player (as described above). For example, progressive system server **112** may reduce one or more initial values when a player specifies a smaller initial wager amount. Likewise, progressive system server **112** may increase one or more initial values when a player specifies a larger initial wager amount.

[0060] In the exemplary embodiment, a first initial value of first jackpot **406** is $20.00, and a first cap value of first jackpot **406** is $49.00. Similarly, a second initial value of second jackpot **408** is $50.00, and a second cap value of second jackpot **408** is $99.00. Further, a third initial value of third jackpot **410** is $100.00, and a third cap value of third jackpot **410** is $999.00. Further still, a fourth initial value of fourth jackpot **412** is $1000.00, and a fourth cap value of fourth jackpot **412** is $9,999.00. However, these initial and cap values are merely illustrative and may vary depending, for example, upon a number of jackpots in tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402**, an initial wager amount (as described above), and/or one or more other game rules.

[0061] Thus, jackpots **406-412** may be associated with a respective initial value and a respective cap value. In addition, as described above, the initial values and cap values associated with each jackpot **406-412** may increase in non-overlapping tiers or ranges. For example, in at least one embodiment, second jackpot **408** may be associated with an initial value of $50.00 and a cap value of $99.00, while first jackpot may be associated with a lower initial value (e.g., $20.00) and a lower cap value (e.g., $49.00). In other words, the range of possible values of first jackpot **406** (e.g., $20.00-$49.00) is less than the range of possible values of second jackpot **408** (e.g., $50.00-$99.00), and so on, for all jackpots **406-412**.

[0062] As a result, jackpots **406-412** may be organized in one or more tiers. For example, first jackpot **406** may occupy a first, or lowest, tier and second jackpot **408**, which is associated within an initial value that is greater than the first cap value of first jackpot **406**, may occupy a second, or intermediate tier. Similarly, third jackpot **410**, which is associated with an initial value that is greater than the second cap value of second jackpot **408**, may occupy a third, or another intermediate tier, and fourth jackpot, which is associated with an initial value that is greater than the third cap value of third jackpot **410**, may occupy a fourth, highest, tier. Accordingly, jackpots **406-412** may be organized in tiers according to their respective cap values, such as from a lowest paying jackpot (e.g., first jackpot **406**) to a highest paying jackpot (e.g., fourth jackpot **412**).

[0063] Visually, jackpots **406-412** may be vertically displayed, such that lower paying jackpots are displayed lower in a tier structure **414** or hierarchy of jackpots than higher paying jackpots. However, in some embodiments, jackpots **406-412** may not be displayed in a vertical tier structure **414** of progressive jackpots. In addition, even where jackpots **406-412** are not displayed in a vertical tier structure **414** of progressive jackpots, each jackpot **406-412** may still be regarded as occupying a level or tier of the tier structure **414**. For example, first jackpot **406** and second jackpot **408** may be displayed substantially parallel to one another (as shown at FIG. **4**); however, first jackpot **406** may still be regarded as occupying a first or lowest tier, and second jackpot **408** may be regarded as occupying a second, next highest, tier.

[0064] With returning reference to FIG. **3**, a player may select an option to spin reels **404**, such as, for example, using a spin button of button deck **120** (step **306**). In response, reels **404** may be spun (or may appear to spin, in the case of simulated or virtual reels) (step **308**). Progressive system server **112** may, in addition, receive an indication that the option to spin reels **404** has been selected, and progressive system server **112** may, in response, determine a value of first jackpot **406**. Specifically, progressive system server **112** may determine, each time reels **404** are spun, whether the value of first jackpot **406** is equal, or substantially equal, to the corresponding first cap value (step **310**).

[0065] As used herein, if a value of a jackpot **406-412** is equal, or substantially equal, to a corresponding cap value, the jackpot **406-412** may be regarded as "full," in that the jackpot **406-412** may not be increased further, as described herein, without exceeding the corresponding cap value of the jackpot **406-412**. Further, as used herein, a value of a jackpot **406-412** may be "substantially equal" to an associated cap value if the value of the jackpot **406-412** is within $5.00 of the associated cap value.

[0066] In response to a determination that first jackpot **406** is not full (and is capable of receiving an incremental increase), progressive system server **112** may allocate a portion of one or more wagers to first jackpot **406** (step **312**). For example, progressive system server **112** may allocate a portion, such as a specified first portion or percentage, of the initial wager amount specified by the player (as described above) to first jackpot **406**. In various embodiments, each time the player selects the spin button, progressive system server **112** may allocate the first portion or percentage of successive player wagers to first jackpot **406** until first jackpot **406** reaches, or substantially reaches, the first cap value.

[0067] In other words, each time the player selects the spin button, the first portion or percentage of the amount wagered in response to selection of the spin button may be allocated to first jackpot **406** until first jackpot **406** reaches the corresponding first cap value. In at least one embodiment, the first portion or percentage of wagers allocated to first jackpot **406** is in the range of 2-4% of an amount wagered. Thus, first jackpot **406** may be incrementally increased, each time a player selects the spin button, until first jackpot **406** is full. Once the first portion or percentage of a wager is allocated to first jackpot **406**, processor **204** may stop reels **404** and/or evaluate reels **404**, as described herein (step **314**).

[0068] FIG. **5** is a schematic view of wagering game **400**, including tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** and reels **404**, in which first jackpot **404** is filled to a first cap

value. Specifically, in the wagering game **400** shown at FIG. **5**, a player has placed a number of wagers, each resulting in a spin of reels **404**, and first jackpot **406** has been incrementally increased, as described above, to a first cap value of $49.00. Second jackpot **408**, third jackpot **410**, and fourth jackpot **412** have not been increased beyond their respective initial values. Rather, progressive system server **112** has incremented first jackpot **404** all the way to the corresponding first cap value prior to permitting increases to the remaining jackpots **408**-**412**.

[0069] If it is determined by progressive system server **112** that first jackpot **406** is equal, or substantially equal, to the corresponding first cap value (e.g., if it is determined that first jackpot **406** is full), progressive system server **112** may determine a value of a next jackpot in tier structure **414**. Specifically, in the exemplary embodiment, progressive system server **112** may determine whether the value of second jackpot **408** is equal, or substantially equal, to the corresponding second cap value (step **316**). In other words, progressive system server **112** may determine whether second jackpot **408** is full.

[0070] In response to a determination that second jackpot **408** is not full, progressive system server **112** may allocate a portion or percentage of one or more wagers to second jackpot **408**. More particularly, progressive system server **112** may allocate a second portion or percentage of wagers to second jackpot **408** in response to a determination that first jackpot **406** is full and that second jackpot **408** is not full (step **318**). As described above, each time the player selects the spin button, progressive system server **112** may allocate the second portion or percentage of successive player wagers to second jackpot **408** until second jackpot **408** reaches, or substantially reaches, the second cap value.

[0071] In at least one embodiment, the second portion or percentage of wagers allocated to second jackpot **408** is in the range of 3-6% of an amount wagered. Thus, second jackpot **408** may be incrementally increased, each time a player selects the spin button, until second jackpot **408** is full. Once the second portion or percentage of a wager is allocated to second jackpot **408**, processor **204** may stop reels **404** and/or evaluate reels **404**, as described herein (step **314**).

[0072] FIG. **6** is a schematic view of wagering game **400**, including tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** and reels **404**, in which first jackpot **404** is filled to a first cap value, and in which second jackpot **406** is filled to a second cap value. Specifically, in the wagering game **400** shown at FIG. **6**, a player has placed a number of wagers, each resulting in a spin of reels **404**, and first jackpot **406** has been incrementally increased, as described above, to a first cap value of $49.00. Likewise, second jackpot **408** has been increased to a second cap value of $99.00 (e.g., after first jackpot **406** was filled). Third jackpot **410** and fourth jackpot **412** have not been increased beyond their respective initial values. Rather, progressive system server **112** has incremented first jackpot **404** and second jackpot **406** all the way to their corresponding cap values prior to permitting increases to the remaining jackpots **410**-**412**.

[0073] If it is determined by progressive system server **112** that first jackpot **406** and second jackpot **408** are full, progressive system server **112** may determine a value of a next jackpot in tier structure **414**. Specifically, in the exemplary embodiment, progressive system server **112** may determine whether the value of third jackpot **410** is equal, or substantially equal, to the corresponding third cap value (step **320**). In other words, progressive system server **112** may determine whether third jackpot **410** is full.

[0074] In response to a determination that third jackpot **410** is not full, progressive system server **112** may allocate a portion or percentage of one or more wagers to third jackpot **410**. More particularly, progressive system server **112** may allocate a third portion or percentage of wagers to third jackpot **410** in response to a determination that first jackpot **406** is full, that second jackpot **408** is also full, and that third jackpot **410** is not full (step **322**). As described above, each time the player selects the spin button, progressive system server **112** may allocate the third portion or percentage of successive player wagers to third jackpot **410** until third jackpot **410** reaches, or substantially reaches, the third cap value.

[0075] In at least one embodiment, the third portion or percentage of wagers allocated to third jackpot **410** is in the range of 4-8% of an amount wagered. Thus, third jackpot **410** may be incrementally increased, each time a player selects the spin button, until third jackpot **410** is full. Once the third portion or percentage of a wager is allocated to third jackpot **410**, processor **204** may stop reels **404** and/or evaluate reels **404**, as described herein (step **314**).

[0076] FIG. **7** is a schematic view of wagering game **400**, including tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** and reels **404**, in which first jackpot **404** is filled to a first cap value, second jackpot **406** is filled to a second cap value, and third jackpot **410** is filled to a third cap value. Specifically, in the wagering game **400** shown at FIG. **7**, a player has placed a number of wagers, each resulting in a spin of reels **404**, and first jackpot **406** has been incrementally increased, as described above, to a first cap value of $49.00. Likewise, second jackpot **408** has been increased to a second cap value of $99.00, and third jackpot has been increased to a third cap value of $999.00. Fourth jackpot **412** has not been increased beyond a respective initial value. Rather, progressive system server **112** has incremented first jackpot **404**, second jackpot **406**, and third jackpot **408** all the way to their corresponding cap values prior to permitting increases to the remaining jackpot **412**.

[0077] If it is determined by progressive system server **112** that first jackpot **406**, second jackpot **408**, and third jackpot **410** are full, progressive system server **112** may determine a value of a next jackpot in tier structure **414**. Specifically, in the exemplary embodiment, progressive system server **112** may determine whether the value of fourth jackpot **412** is equal, or substantially equal, to the corresponding fourth cap value (step **324**). In other words, progressive system server **112** may determine whether fourth jackpot **412** is full.

[0078] In response to a determination that fourth jackpot **412** is not full, progressive system server **112** may allocate a portion or percentage of one or more wagers to fourth jackpot **412**. More particularly, progressive system server **112** may allocate a fourth portion or percentage of wagers to fourth jackpot **412** in response to a determination that first jackpot **406** is full, that second jackpot **408** is full, that third jackpot **410** is full, and that fourth jackpot **412** is not full (step **326**). As described above, each time the player selects the spin button, progressive system server **112** may allocate the fourth portion or percentage of successive player wagers to fourth jackpot **412** until fourth jackpot **412** reaches, or substantially reaches, the fourth cap value.

[0079] In at least one embodiment, the fourth portion or percentage of wagers allocated to fourth jackpot **412** is in the range of 6-12% of an amount wagered. Thus, fourth jackpot **412** may be incrementally increased, each time a player selects the spin button, until fourth jackpot **412** is full. Once the fourth portion or percentage of a wager is allocated to fourth jackpot **412**, processor **204** may stop reels **404** and/or evaluate reels **404**, as described herein (step **314**).

[0080] FIG. **8** is a schematic view of wagering game **400**, including tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** and reels **404**, in which first jackpot **404** is filled to a first cap value, second jackpot **406** is filled to a second cap value, third jackpot **410** is filled to a third cap value, and fourth jackpot **412** is filled to a fourth cap value. Specifically, in the wagering game **400** shown at FIG. **8**, a player has placed a number of wagers, each resulting in a spin of reels **404**, and first jackpot **406** has been incrementally increased, as described above, to a first cap value of $49.00. Likewise, second jackpot **408** has been increased to a second cap value of $99.00, third jackpot has been increased to a third cap value of $999.00, and fourth jackpot has been increased to a fourth cap value of $9,999.00.

[0081] In the exemplary embodiment, if it is determined by progressive system server **112** that first jackpot **406**, second jackpot **408**, third jackpot **410**, and fourth jackpot **412** are full, progressive system server **112** may allocate a portion or percentage of all subsequent wagers to an escrow account maintained by progressive system server **112** (step **328**). The escrow account may accumulate percentages of portions of wagers to any value when all jackpots **406-412** in tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** are full. In other words, the escrow account may not be capped. In various embodiments, the value of the escrow account may not be displayed for a player. However, in other embodiments, the value of the escrow account may be displayed as well. The portion of percentage allocated to the escrow account may, in addition, vary. In at least one embodiment, the portion of percentage of wagers allocated to the escrow account is in the range of 0.01-4% of wager amounts received. In other embodiments, the portion of percentage of the wagers allocated to the escrow account may be less than a percentage allocated to at least one jackpot of the tiered plurality of jackpots.

[0082] In addition, once a wager has been received and a portion thereof allocated to one of jackpots **406-412** and/or to the escrow account, processor **204** may stop reels **404** (step **314**). Further, once reels **404** are stopped, a symbol combination may be displayed from each of reels **404**, as described above. The stopped and displayed symbol combination may be evaluated by processor **204** (and/or progressive system server **112**) to determine whether the player is entitled to a game award.

[0083] Specifically, the combination of symbols may be further evaluated by processor **204** and/or progressive system server **112** to determine whether the player is entitled to a jackpot **406-412** (step **330**). For example, the combination of symbols may be compared to a jackpot paytable of wagering game **400** to determine whether, and to which, jackpot **406-412** the player is entitled (step **332**). In some embodiments, the jackpot paytable is a weighted paytable. However, in other embodiments, the jackpot paytable is any paytable that correlates one or more symbol combinations to one or more jackpot awards.

[0084] In response to a determination that the player is entitled to a jackpot **406-412**, processor **204** and/or progressive system server **112** may provide the jackpot **406-412** to which the player is entitled to the player (step **334**). For example, the jackpot **406-412** may be paid out to the player in the form of a printed ticket and/or all or a portion of the jackpot **406-412** may be deducted from the jackpot **406-412** itself and added to a credit balance of the player.

[0085] Once the jackpot **406-412** is paid out, progressive system server **112** may also reset the jackpot **406-412** to its corresponding initial value, opening the jackpot **406-412** for new or additional allocations, as described above (step **334**). In some embodiments, the value of the escrow account may be added, all or in part, to the initial jackpot value (step **336**). For example, if the escrow account contains a balance of $10.00, all or a portion of this amount may be added to the initial value of a jackpot **406-412** paid out to a player to "seed" the recently awarded jackpot **406-412** to a value that is greater than the initial value of the jackpot **406-412**.

[0086] FIG. **9** is a schematic view of wagering game **400**, including tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** and the reels **404**, in which third jackpot **410** is reduced, after a jackpot win, to a corresponding initial value. Specifically, and as shown, third jackpot **410** was paid to a player in its entirety and is reduced, as a result, to an initial value of $100.00. Although not shown, a value of the escrow account, if any, may be added to the initial value of $100.00 to seed third jackpot **410** after being won by a player.

[0087] Moreover, in the example shown, first jackpot **406**, second jackpot **408**, and fourth jackpot **412** are still full. As a result, subsequent wagers placed by a player may be allocated, as described herein, to third jackpot **410**. Specifically, progressive system server **112** may determine, in response to a player wager and as described above, that first jackpot **406** and second jackpot **408** are full. However, because third jackpot **410** is no longer full, progressive system server **112** may allocate portions or percentages of wagers received to third jackpot **410** until a lower paying jackpot is paid out and/or until third jackpot **410** is once again full.

[0088] Such an example is illustrated with respect to FIG. **10** and FIG. **11**. Specifically, as shown with reference to FIG. **10**, a schematic view of wagering game **400** is shown, in which third jackpot **410** is incrementally increased from its initial value (of $100.00) to a value less than the third cap value. As described herein, each time the player places a wager, a portion or percentage of the wager is incrementally allocated to third jackpot **410**, if no lower paying jackpot in the tiered plurality of jackpots **402** is uncapped, until third jackpot **410** once again reaches the third cap value. In the example shown, third jackpot **410** has been incrementally increased to an intermediate or uncapped value of $319.00. However, it will be appreciated that third jackpot **410** may be incrementally increased to any value less than or equal to the third cap value.

[0089] If, however, a lower paying jackpot, such as either or both of first jackpot **406** and/or second jackpot **408**, are uncapped or paid out while third jackpot **410** is still incrementally increasing towards the third cap value, subsequent portions or percentages of wagers received may not continue to be allocated (as described above) to third jackpot **410**, but to the one or more awarded lower paying jackpots (e.g., first

jackpot **406** and/or second jackpot **408**) until these jackpots are once again full (e.g., until they once again reach their respective cap values).

[0090] An example of a case in which third jackpot **410** has not yet reached its respective cap value and in which second jackpot **408** is uncapped is illustrated in FIG. **11**. As shown, third jackpot **410** is halted at the intermediate value of $319.00, and second jackpot **408** is reduced to its initial value (of $50.00) and begins to incrementally increase towards its respective cap value. Specifically, in the example, allocations have only just begun to second jackpot **408**, and it has only been increased to an intermediate value of $51.00. While second jackpot **408** increases towards its respective cap value, third jackpot **410** remains at the value (of $319.00) to which it had been incrementally increased prior to second jackpot **408** being awarded, until second jackpot **408** is once again full. If first jackpot **406** were to be paid out during this time period, as described herein, allocations would not be provided to either of second jackpot **408** or to third jackpot **410** until first jackpot **406** was once again full. Thus, during gameplay, increments to jackpots **406-412** may stop and start, depending, for example, upon the status of one or more lower paying jackpots **406-412**.

[0091] Finally, the combination of symbols may also be compared to a paytable of wagering game **400** to determine whether the player is entitled to a non-jackpot game award (step **338**). For example, if wagering game **400** is a base game, the combination of symbols may be compared to a base game paytable of wagering game **400** to identify a base game award associated with the combination of symbols. Likewise, if wagering game **400** is a bonus game, the combination of symbols may be compared to a bonus game paytable of wagering game **400** to determine a bonus game award associated with the combination of symbols.

[0092] If the player is entitled to a non-jackpot game award, the non-jackpot game award may be paid out, such as, for example, in the form of a printed ticket and/or as an automatic credit to the player's credit balance, and gameplay may return to step **302** and/or step **306**. A player may also select an option to cash out or otherwise terminate wagering game **400**.

[0093] As described above, the portion or percentage of player wagers allocated to tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** may increase from one jackpot **406-412**, or one tier of jackpot **406-412**, to the next. For example, a first portion of player wagers may be allocated to first jackpot **406** when first jackpot **406** receives allocations, and a second, larger, portion of player wagers may be allocated to second jackpot **408** when second jackpot **408** receives allocations. Third jackpot **410** may likewise receive a larger, third portion, of player wagers, and fourth jackpot **412** may receive an even larger fourth portion of player wagers. Specifically, in the exemplary embodiment, first portion is in the range of 2-4% of player wagers, second portion is in the range of 3-6% of player wagers, third portion is in the range of 4-8% of player wagers, and fourth portion is in the range of 6-12% of player wagers.

[0094] Accordingly, tiered plurality of progressive jackpots **402** may not only be filled from a lowest paying jackpot **406** to a highest paying jackpot **412**, as described above. In addition, a rate at which each jackpot **406-412** is filled may vary from one jackpot **406-412** to the next jackpot **406-412**. For example, in at least one embodiment, each jackpot **406-412** is filled at a rate greater that the rate a preceding or lower paying jackpot **406-412** is filled. For example, first jackpot **406** may receive wager allocations at a rate of 2%, second jackpot **408** may receive wager allocations at a rate of 3%, third jackpot may receive wager allocations at a rate of 4%, and fourth jackpot may receive wager allocations at a rate of 6%. Thus, the portion or percentage of wagers allocated to a respective jackpot **406-412** may increase as jackpots **406-412** are filled from lowest to highest. As a result, from a player perspective, the rate of wager allocation (or jackpot increases) may appear to accelerate or speed up as jackpots **406-412** are filled.

[0095] Thus, an electronic gaming system for incrementing a tiered plurality of jackpots, from a lowest paying jackpot to a highest paying jackpot, is described. The electronic gaming system includes a progressive system server communicatively coupled, or networked, to a plurality of electronic gaming machines. Each time a player places a wager, such as by selecting a spin button, a plurality of reels may be spun, and a lowest paying uncapped jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots may receive an incremental increase that corresponds to a portion or percentage of the player wager. In addition, the portion or percentage of each wager allocated to a jackpot may increase as jackpots are filled from the lowest paying to the highest paying jackpot. Specifically, a lowest paying jackpot may receive a smallest incremental increase, while a highest paying jackpot may receive a highest incremental increase. Thus, jackpots may incrementally fill from lowest to highest, and the rate of increase may accelerate as jackpots are filled.

[0096] A computer, controller, or server, such as those described herein, includes at least one processor or processing unit and a system memory. The computer, controller, or server typically has at least some form of computer readable non-transitory media. As used herein, the terms "processor" and "computer" and related terms, e.g., "processing device", "computing device", and "controller" are not limited to just those integrated circuits referred to in the art as a computer, but broadly refers to a microcontroller, a microcomputer, a programmable logic controller (PLC), an application specific integrated circuit, and other programmable circuits "configured to" carry out programmable instructions, and these terms are used interchangeably herein. In the embodiments described herein, memory may include, but is not limited to, a computer-readable medium or computer storage media, volatile and nonvolatile media, removable and non-removable media implemented in any method or technology for storage of information such as computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules, or other data. Such memory includes a random access memory (RAM), computer storage media, communication media, and a computer-readable non-volatile medium, such as flash memory. Alternatively, a floppy disk, a compact disc-read only memory (CD-ROM), a magneto-optical disk (MOD), and/or a digital versatile disc (DVD) may also be used. Also, in the embodiments described herein, additional input channels may be, but are not limited to, computer peripherals associated with an operator interface such as a mouse and a keyboard. Alternatively, other computer peripherals may also be used that may include, for example, but not be limited to, a scanner. Furthermore, in the exemplary embodiment, additional output channels may include, but not be limited to, an operator interface monitor.

[0097] As indicated above, the process may be embodied in computer software. The computer software could be

supplied in a number of ways, for example on a tangible, non-transitory, computer readable storage medium, such as on any nonvolatile memory device (e.g. an EEPROM). Further, different parts of the computer software can be executed by different devices, such as, for example, in a client-server relationship. Persons skilled in the art will appreciate that computer software provides a series of instructions executable by the processor.

[0098] While the invention has been described with respect to the figures, it will be appreciated that many modifications and changes may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit of the invention. Any variation and derivation from the above description and figures are included in the scope of the present invention as defined by the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An electronic gaming system comprising:

an electronic gaming machine configured to present a wagering game; and

a progressive system server communicatively coupled to the electronic gaming machine, the progressive system server configured to:

establish a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots, the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots including a first jackpot that is increasable to a first cap value, a second jackpot that is increasable to a second cap value greater than the first cap value, and at least one intermediate jackpot that is increasable to at least one intermediate cap value greater than the first cap value and less than the second cap value; and

allocate, in response to wagers received by the electronic gaming machine and based upon a plurality of wager allocation rules, portions of the wagers to one of i) the first jackpot, ii) the at least one intermediate jackpot, and iii) the second jackpot, whereby:

the first jackpot is incrementally increased, if the first jackpot is below the first cap value, until the first jackpot reaches the first cap value,

the at least one intermediate jackpot is incrementally increased, if the at least one intermediate jackpot is below the at least one intermediate cap value and after the first jackpot reaches the first cap value, until the at least one intermediate jackpot reaches the at least one intermediate cap value, and

the second jackpot is incrementally increased, if the second jackpot is below the second cap value and after the at least one intermediate jackpot reaches the at least one intermediate cap value, until the second jackpot reaches the second cap value.

2. The electronic gaming system of claim **1**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to:

i) allocate, based upon the wager allocation rules, a first percentage of the wagers received only to the first jackpot if a value of the first jackpot is less than the first cap value;

ii) allocate, based upon the wager allocation rules, a second percentage of the wagers received only to the at least one intermediate jackpot if the value of the first jackpot is equal to the first cap value and a value of the at least one intermediate jackpot is less than the at least one intermediate cap value, wherein the second percentage is greater than the first percentage; and

iii) allocate, based upon the wager allocation rules, a third percentage of the wagers received only to the second jackpot if the value of the first jackpot is equal to the first cap value, the value of the at least one intermediate jackpot is equal to the at least one intermediate cap value, and a value of the second jackpot is less than the second cap value, wherein the third percentage is greater than the second percentage.

3. The electronic gaming system of claim **1**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to:

award one of the first jackpot, the at least one intermediate jackpot, and the second jackpot to a player; and

allocate portions of subsequent wagers received by the electronic gaming machine only to the awarded jackpot if the awarded jackpot is a lowest uncapped jackpot and until the awarded jackpot returns to a cap value associated therewith.

4. The electronic gaming system of claim **1**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to sequentially add portions of wagers received by the electronic gaming machine to one progressive jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to fill the progressive jackpot to its respective cap value, wherein the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots are filled, in order, from the first progressive jackpot until the first cap value is reached to the second progressive jackpot until the second cap value is reached, and wherein a progressive jackpot is not filled to a respective cap value until a progressive jackpot lower in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a respective cap value.

5. The electronic gaming system of claim **1**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to allocate the portions of the wagers received by the electronic gaming machine to an escrow account if the value of the second jackpot is equal to the second cap value, whereby the escrow account is configured to store a value that is incremented in response to portions of wagers received when the values of each respective jackpot are equal to their respective cap values, and wherein a percentage allocated to the escrow account is less than a percentage allocated to at least one of the first jackpot, the second jackpot, or the intermediate jackpot.

6. The electronic gaming system of claim **5**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to:

award one of the first jackpot, the at least one intermediate jackpot, and the second jackpot to a player; and

add, in response to awarding one of the first jackpot, the at least one intermediate jackpot, and the second jackpot, the value of the escrow account to the awarded jackpot.

7. The electronic gaming system of claim **1**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to determine, based upon the plurality of wager allocation rules, the portions of the wagers allocated to one of the first jackpot, the at least one intermediate jackpot, the second jackpot, and an escrow account based upon at least one of i) a value of the wager and ii) the jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots receiving the wager allocation if the jackpot receives the wager allocation.

8. An electronic gaming system comprising:

an electronic gaming machine configured to present a wagering game; and

a progressive system server communicatively coupled to the electronic gaming machine, the progressive system server configured to:

establish a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots, each jackpot increasable to a respective cap value, the cap values increasing, in tiers, from a lowest cap value associated with a lowest paying jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to a highest cap value associated with a highest paying jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots; and

add portions of wagers received by the electronic gaming machine to one jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to fill the jackpot to its respective cap value, wherein the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots are filled, in order, from the lowest paying jackpot until the lowest cap value is reached to the highest paying jackpot until the highest cap value is reached, and wherein a jackpot is not filled to a respective cap value until each lower paying jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a respective cap value.

9. The electronic gaming system of claim **8**, wherein the electronic gaming machine is configured to present a simulated plurality of rotating reels during the wagering game, each reel of the simulated plurality of rotating reels including a plurality of symbols, and wherein the progressive system server is further configured to award one jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to a player in response to a predefined symbol combination occurring on the simulated plurality of rotating reels during the wagering game.

10. The electronic gaming system of claim **8**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to:

award one jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to a player during the wagering game; and

allocate portions of subsequent wagers received by the electronic gaming machine to the awarded jackpot if the awarded jackpot is a lowest uncapped jackpot and until the awarded jackpot returns to a cap value associated therewith.

11. The electronic gaming system of claim **8**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to allocate portions of wagers received by the electronic gaming machine to an escrow account if each progressive jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a respective cap value, whereby the escrow account is configured to store a value that is incremented in response to portions of wagers received when the values of each respective jackpot are equal to their respective cap values, and wherein a percentage allocated to the escrow account is less than a percentage allocated to at least one jackpot of the tiered plurality of jackpots.

12. The electronic gaming system of claim **10**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to:

award one jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to a player; and

add, in response to awarding the jackpot, the value of the escrow account to the awarded jackpot.

13. The electronic gaming system of claim **8**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to determine portions of wagers to allocate to one jackpot of the tiered plurality of jackpots or an escrow account based upon values of the wagers.

14. The electronic gaming system of claim **8**, wherein the progressive system server is further configured to allocate a smallest portion of a wager received by the electronic gaming machine to the lowest paying jackpot when the lowest paying jackpot receives the allocation, and wherein the progressive system server is further configured to allocate a largest portion of the wager received by the electronic gaming machine to the highest paying jackpot when the highest paying jackpot receives the allocation, whereby each progressive jackpot in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots receives an allocation relative to, and based upon, a cap value associated therewith.

15. A method of establishing and maintaining a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots, the method comprising:

establishing, by a progressive system server, a tiered plurality of progressive jackpots, the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots including a first jackpot that is increasable a first cap value, a second jackpot that is increasable to a second cap value greater than the first cap value, and at least one intermediate jackpot that is increasable to at least one intermediate cap value greater than the first cap value and less than the second cap value; and

allocating, by the progressive system server and in response to wagers received by an electronic gaming machine, portions of the wagers to one of i) the first jackpot, ii) the at least one intermediate jackpot, and iii) the second jackpot, whereby:

the first jackpot is incrementally increased, if the first jackpot is below the first cap value, until the first jackpot reaches the first cap value,

the at least one intermediate jackpot is incrementally increased, if the at least one intermediate jackpot is below the at least one intermediate cap value and after the first jackpot reaches the first cap value, until the at least one intermediate jackpot reaches the at least one intermediate cap value, and

the second jackpot is incrementally increased, if the second jackpot is below the second cap value and after the at least one intermediate jackpot reaches the at least one intermediate cap value, until the second jackpot reaches the second cap value.

16. The method of claim **15**, further comprising:

i) allocating, by the progressive system server and based upon a plurality of wager allocation rules, a first percentage of the wagers received only to the first jackpot if a value of the first jackpot is less than the first cap value;

ii) allocating, by the progressive system server and based upon the wager allocation rules, a second percentage of the wagers received only to the at least one intermediate jackpot if the value of the first jackpot is equal to the first cap value and a value of the at least one intermediate jackpot is less than the at least one intermediate cap value, wherein the second percentage is greater than the first percentage; and

iii) allocating, by the progressive system server and based upon the wager allocation rules, a third percentage of the wagers received only to the second jackpot if the value of the first jackpot is equal to the first cap value, the value of the at least one intermediate jackpot is equal to the at least one intermediate cap value, and a

value of the second jackpot is less than the second cap value, wherein the third percentage is greater than the second percentage.

17. The method of claim **15**, further comprising:

awarding, by the progressive system server, one of the first jackpot, the at least one intermediate jackpot, and the second jackpot to a player; and

allocating, by the progressive system server, portions of subsequent wagers received by the electronic gaming machine only to the awarded jackpot if the awarded jackpot is a lowest uncapped jackpot and until the awarded jackpot returns to a cap value associated therewith.

18. The method of claim **15**, further comprising:

sequentially adding, by the progressive system server, portions of wagers received by the electronic gaming machine to one progressive jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to fill the progressive jackpot to its respective cap value, wherein the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots are filled, in order, from the first progressive jackpot until the first cap value is reached to the second progressive jackpot until the second cap value is reached, and wherein a progressive jackpot is not filled to a respective cap value until a progressive jackpot lower in the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots is filled to a respective cap value.

19. The method of claim **15**, further comprising allocating, by the progressive system server, the portions of the wagers received by the electronic gaming machine to an escrow account if the value of the second jackpot is equal to the second cap value, whereby the escrow account is configured to store a value that is incremented in response to portions of wagers received when the values of each respective jackpot are equal to their respective cap values and wherein a percentage allocated to the escrow account is less than a percentage allocated to at least one jackpot of the tiered plurality of jackpots.

20. The method of claim **19**, further comprising:

awarding, by the progressive system server, one jackpot of the tiered plurality of progressive jackpots to a player; and

adding, in response to awarding the jackpot, the value of the escrow account to the awarded jackpot.

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