

or an optical card reader, and may be used to read data from a card offered by a player, such as a credit card or a player tracking card. If provided for player tracking purposes, the card reader **58** may be used to read data from, and/or write data to, player tracking cards that are capable of storing data representing the identity of a player, the identity of a casino, the player's gaming habits, etc.

[0038] The gaming unit **20** may include one or more audio speakers **62**, a coin payout tray **64**, an input control panel **66**, a color video display unit **70** for displaying images relating to the game or games provided by the gaming unit **20**, and a light valve **71**, as described below. The light valve **71** may be coupled to the front face of the cabinet **50** and may enclose a secondary display device **73**, which may be, for example, any known video monitor, television screen, dot matrix display, CRT, LED, LCD, physical display, or electro-luminescent display. Moreover, the secondary display device **73** may permanently display fixed gaming indicia, or may be capable of dynamically changing the gaming indicia, as is described below. The audio speakers **62** may generate audio representing sounds such as the noise of spinning slot machine reels, a dealer's voice, music, announcements or any other audio related to a casino game. The input control panel **66** may be provided with a plurality of pushbuttons or touch-sensitive areas that may be pressed by a player to select games, make wagers, make gaming decisions, etc.

[0039] FIG. 2A illustrates one possible embodiment of the control panel **66**, which may be used where the gaming unit **20** is a slot machine having a plurality of mechanical or "virtual" reels. Referring to FIG. 2A, the control panel **66** may include a "See Pays" button **72** that, when activated, causes the display unit **70** to generate one or more display screens showing the odds or payout information for the game or games provided by the gaming unit **20**. As used herein, the term "button" is intended to encompass any device that allows a player to make an input, such as an input device that must be depressed to make an input selection or a display area that a player may simply touch. The control panel **66** may include a "Cash Out" button **74** that may be activated when a player decides to terminate play on the gaming unit **20**, in which case the gaming unit **20** may return value to the player, such as by returning a number of coins to the player via the payout tray **64**.

[0040] If the gaming unit **20** provides a slots game having a plurality of reels and a plurality of paylines which define winning combinations of reel symbols, the control panel **66** may be provided with a plurality of selection buttons **76**, each of which allows the player to select a different number of paylines prior to spinning the reels. For example, five buttons **76** may be provided, each of which may allow a player to select one, three, five, seven or nine paylines.

[0041] If the gaming unit **20** provides a slots game having a plurality of reels, the control panel **66** may be provided with a plurality of selection buttons **78** each of which allows a player to specify a wager amount for each payline selected. For example, if the smallest wager accepted by the gaming unit **20** is a quarter (\$0.25), the gaming unit **20** may be provided with five selection buttons **78**, each of which may allow a player to select one, two, three, four or five quarters to wager for each payline selected. In that case, if a player were to activate the "5" button **76** (meaning that five paylines were to be played on the next spin of the reels) and

then activate the "3" button **78** (meaning that three coins per payline were to be wagered), the total wager would be \$3.75 (assuming the minimum bet was \$0.25).

[0042] The control panel **66** may include a "Max Bet" button **80** to allow a player to make the maximum wager allowable for a game. In the above example, where up to nine paylines were provided and up to five quarters could be wagered for each payline selected, the maximum wager would be 45 quarters, or \$11.25. The control panel **66** may include a spin button **82** to allow the player to initiate spinning of the reels of a slots game after a wager has been made.

[0043] In FIG. 2A, a rectangle is shown around the buttons **72**, **74**, **76**, **78**, **80**, **82**. It should be understood that that rectangle simply designates, for ease of reference, an area in which the buttons **72**, **74**, **76**, **78**, **80**, **82** may be located. Consequently, the term "control panel" should not be construed to imply that a panel or plate separate from the housing **50** of the gaming unit **20** is required, and the term "control panel" may encompass a plurality or grouping of player activatable buttons.

[0044] Although one possible control panel **66** is described above, it should be understood that different buttons could be utilized in the control panel **66**, and that the particular buttons used may depend on the game or games that could be played on the gaming unit **20**. Although the control panel **66** is shown to be separate from the display unit **70**, it should be understood that the control panel **66** could be generated by the display unit **70**. In that case, each of the buttons of the control panel **66** could be a colored area generated by the display unit **70**, and some type of mechanism may be associated with the display unit **70** to detect when each of the buttons was touched, such as a touch-sensitive screen.

[0045] Furthermore, although one possible display unit **70** is described above, it should be understood that different embodiments could be utilized in the display unit **70**. For example, the display unit **70** may be a plurality of physical reels controlled by stepper motors as commonly known in the art. In that case, a player initiates spinning of the reels through any number of means, including pushing the spin button **82**. The physical reel may then be rotated and observed by the player through a display glass. The spinning reel may then be stopped and the outcome of the game determined.

[0046] FIGS. 2B-2D illustrate an embodiment of the light valve **71** in operation. Specifically, FIG. 2B illustrates the light valve **71** in a substantially transparent configuration, FIG. 2C illustrates the light valve **71** in a semi-opaque configuration, FIG. 2D illustrates the light valve **71** in a substantially opaque configuration, as will be described in detail below. The light valve **71** may be operatively coupled to the front face of the cabinet **50** of the gaming unit **20**, as shown in FIG. 2. The light valve **71** may enclose the secondary display unit **73** to form an apparatus for hiding and revealing the secondary display unit **73**.

[0047] Specifically, the light valve **71** may be a suspended particle device or similar device. As is known in the art, a suspended particle device may comprise a plurality of light-absorbing microscopic particles that are suspended between two conductive-coated surfaces such as glass or