

[0039] Referring to FIG. 3A, an initial game outcome 230 is shown on the display screen 210 of a gaming device 210 according to one embodiment of the present invention. The game outcome 230 includes a plurality of array symbols 232A-2320 which may be arranged in one or more rows 234A-234C and one or more columns 236A-236E which columns represent, and will be referred to herein as reels. The array symbols 232A-2320 are selected and positioned by random upon a player placing a wager and activating the gaming device 200.

[0040] In the particular embodiment shown in FIG. 3A, at least one additional symbol 238, referred to herein as a non-array symbol, or alternatively a symbol in a non-arrayed position, is shown. As indicated by its name, the non-array symbol 238 is not necessarily positioned in any particular location on the array of the game outcome 230 and is moveable about the display screen 210 and may even perceptibly move on and off of the display screen 210. Alternatively, the non-array symbol may continually move about the display screen perceptibly ricocheting off of the outer boundaries 240 of the display screen 210.

[0041] One or more paylines 242 (shown in broken lines) may also be associated with the plurality of array symbols 232A-2320 to indicate potential payouts associated with the symbol array. Different paylines 242 may be associated with different levels of payouts and different levels of wagering as will be understood and appreciated by those of skill in the art.

[0042] In the game outcome 230, symbol 232H operates as an interactive symbol. The interactive symbol may interact with another symbol (either another array symbol, or a non-array symbol otherwise introduced onto the display screen 210) to produce a new outcome, to launch a second screen such as a bonus-type game, to win credits or otherwise potentially enhance the winnings associated with the game outcome 230 of the primary game.

[0043] In the embodiment shown in FIGS. 3A through 3D, the interactive symbol may be controlled by a player via the interactive symbol controller 214A for interaction with other symbols on the display screen 210, and in this particular embodiment, with the non-array symbol 238. Referring now to FIGS. 3A through 3D in sequential order, upon the occurrence of a gaming outcome (such as the game outcome 230 shown in FIG. 3A) which includes the display of the interactive symbol 232H, the non-array symbol 238 appears on the display screen 210. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 3A through 3D, the non-array symbol 238 is shown as a meteor or an asteroid while the interactive symbol 232H is shown as a space ship. For convenience and ease of understanding, the following example will be discussed in terms of a space ship 232H and an asteroid 238.

[0044] As the asteroid 238 moves about the display screen 210 a player may control the orientation of the space ship 232H through proper operation of an interactive symbol controller 214A such that the space ship 232H is directed toward the asteroid 238. The player may then fire a weapon 244 at the asteroid in an attempt to destroy it as shown in FIG. 3B. If the player has properly aimed and fired the weapon 244, a collision or explosion 246 will occur with the asteroid 238 as is seen in FIG. 3C. The explosion may destroy the asteroid 238 revealing an award 248 such as, for example, a multiplier or a specified number of credits as is

shown in FIG. 3D. It is noted that the resultant award may be based upon random selection, or alternatively, may be based on other criteria such as, for example, how quickly the player was able to destroy the asteroid.

[0045] Additional asteroids 238, or other non-array symbols in different forms may also be displayed requiring the player to respond in a similar manner in an attempt to destroy them or otherwise interact with them. For example, a second, differently styled space ship may appear on the display screen and fire weapons at the interactive symbol 232H. In such a case, the player may have the option of activating a "shield" or attempting to maneuver out of the firing line to avoid being destroyed itself. The destruction of the interactive gaming symbol 232H may then carry associated penalties, such as a loss of credits wagered or loss of some or all of the winnings associated with the game outcome 230. It is noted that destruction of the interactive gaming symbol might occur in other ways as well, such as the asteroid or other non-array symbol 238 crashing into it.

[0046] It will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that other variations may be implemented and that the embodiment shown in FIGS. 3A through 3D is exemplary. For example, the interactive symbol 232H need not be a space ship, nor need the non-array symbol 238 be an asteroid. Additionally, the interactive symbol 232H may be configured to perceptibly move from its location within the array rather than being constrained to any particular position among the rows 234A through 234C or reels 236A through 236E. Another alternative may include the asteroids reducing in size upon being hit with a weapon 244 rather than disappearing. In such a case an award may be progressive, (i.e., the award growing in size each time the asteroid is reduced) or an award may be delayed until the asteroid is ultimately destroyed after a predetermined number of size reductions.

[0047] Also, various mechanisms may trigger the interactive mode of play. For example, the appearance of the interactive symbol 232H at any position on the array of the game outcome 230 may start the interactive mode of play. Alternatively, the interactive symbol 232H may appear numerous times before a non-array symbol 238 randomly appears and triggers the interactive mode. Additionally, initial criteria may be required in order to enable the possibility of interactive play. For example, an initial criteria might include the placement of a maximum wager. Thus, the interactive symbol may appear on the display screen 210 but not subsequently interact with any other symbols due to the fact that enabling initial criteria, such as the placement of a maximum wager, has not been satisfied. Other initial criteria might include, for example, the placement of a predetermined wager greater than the minimum required wager but less than the maximum allowed wager, or a predetermined rate of wagering by the player.

[0048] Referring to FIGS. 4A-4C, another embodiment of the present invention is shown. Similar to the embodiment discussed above with respect to FIGS. 3A-3D, a game outcome 330 is shown on the display screen 210. Again, the game outcome 330 includes a plurality of array symbols 332A-3320 which may be arranged in one or more rows 334A-334C and one or more columns or reels 336A-336E. The array symbols 332 may be randomly selected and positioned upon placement of a wager and activation of the