



AU9943488

(12) PATENT ABSTRACT (11) Document No. AU-A-43488/99
(19) AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE

- (54) Title
GAMING CONSOLE WITH TRANSPARENT SPRITES
- International Patent Classification(s)
- (51)⁶ A63F 009/22 G07F 017/34
- (21) Application No. : 43488/99 (22) Application Date : 10/08/99
- (30) Priority Data
- (31) Number (32) Date (33) Country
PP5184 10/08/98 AU AUSTRALIA
- (43) Publication Date : 02/03/00
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- (57) Claim



10/182318

DTID: 2010/01/01/PTO 26 JUL 2002

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AUSTRALIA
Patents Act 1990

Aristocrat Leisure Industries Pty Ltd

ORIGINAL

**COMPLETE SPECIFICATION
STANDARD PATENT**

Invention Title:

Gaming console with transparent sprites

The following statement is a full description of this invention including the best method of performing it known to us:-

3/PRTS ●

10/182318

● Rec'd PCT/PTO 26 JUL 2002

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Introduction

The present invention relates to gaming machines of the type generally referred to as slot machines, fruit machines or poker machines, and in particular the invention provides an improvement to a game played on such a machine.

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Players who regularly play gaming machines quickly tire of particular games and therefore it is necessary for manufacturers of these machines to come up with innovative game features that add interest to the games provided on such machines in order to keep the players amused and therefore willing to continue playing the game.

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Description of the Prior Art

Gaming or poker machines have been well known for many years and have more recently gained considerable popularity, with quite substantial amounts of money wagered on these machines. There is a growing tendency for Governments to legalise the use of gaming machines by licensing operators, with resulting revenue gains through licence fees and taxation of monies invested. The licensed operation of gaming machines is the subject of legislation and regulation. This regulation almost always dictates a minimum percentage payout for a gaming machine. For example, a minimum of 85% of monies invested must be returned as winnings, and manufacturers of gaming machines therefore must design their machines around these regulatory controls.

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

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Many various strategies have been tried in the past to make games more enticing to players, including the commonly known double-up feature, whereby, if a player wins a particular game, they can then risk the winnings of that game in a double-or-nothing mode in which they gamble on a subsequent, and often different, game such as whether a red or black card will be the next card drawn.

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Other techniques adopted in the past have been to provide complexity in the numbering and combinations of indicia which would result in a win, thereby hoping to convince the player that there is a greater chance of winning and to keep their interest in a particular game.

5 Many gaming control authorities do not permit images to be superimposed over a game image if they obliterate a part of the game image that would be used to display the outcome of a game. In the past, game designers were therefore forced to squeeze auxiliary images into small spaces on the periphery of the screen or to make the game area of the screen
10 proportionally smaller, however neither of these are desirable options as they reduce the attractiveness of the game for the player. On the one hand if feature indicators are small they might not be seen by the player and the player might not take advantage of a feature currently on offer by the console. On the other hand if the main game image is too small it will not be
15 attractive to players.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention consists in a gaming console having display means, and game control means arranged to control images displayed on the display means, the game control means being arranged to play a game
20 wherein a plurality of symbols are randomly selected and displayed on the display means and, if a winning combination results, the console pays a prize, the game being characterised in that the displayed images include a first image component which displays basic game features and a second image component which displays image features which appear superimposed
25 on the first image component, the second image component being transparent, whereby the first image component is visible through the second image component under the control of the control means.

The second image component can take various forms such as an animated or fixed character, a window or a graphic and may be used to
30 indicate a feature game or special prize, or a message to the player about an available option or feature, a condition or mode of the console, or a service message broadcast by the establishment in which the console is installed. Examples of second image components include sprites which appear during games and move about the screen to indicate special or bonus symbols,
35 function indicators such as "reserved" indicators and message text or boxes

containing message text broadcasting service messages such as operating hours, coming attractions (theatre performances etc.) or bonus prize periods.

5 The second image may be variably transparent, and may be varied in transparency from "solid" where the underlying first image is totally obliterated, to a faint ghost like image where the underlying image is clearly visible through the second image.

10 The second image may be static in the case of a "reserved" lock or service message, or may move about the screen as in the case of a sprite indicating bonus symbols in a spinning reel game. The image may also be animated such that the sprite may change shape or attitude, for example walk or run about the screen with moving arms pointing at feature symbols. Other animated effects may be used, for example in a game with a vampire or ghoulish theme, the "reserved" sign may drip blood, with an image of a growing puddle of blood at the bottom of the screen.

15 In cases where the second image takes the form of an animated character, it may further be animated such that it "reacts" to certain conditions. For example, in a game with a ghoulish theme, the second image may appear to be frightened when it is situated next to a certain game symbol, for example a ghoul. In other cases, when the second image is acting as a wild card symbol, it may appear to be happy and excited when it causes winning combinations to occur.

20 The present invention is applicable to video gaming consoles of the traditional poker machine style (also known as slot machines or fruit machines) in which the display means comprises a video simulation of a set of rotatable reels, each carrying a plurality of symbols. The invention is equally applicable to video draw poker consoles in which a poker hand is displayed on a screen, the cards of the hand being selected from a standard 52 or 53 card deck.

25 The occurrence of the second image may be triggered by the occurrence of a special symbol or a predetermined combination of special symbols displayed in a particular arrangement.

30 In cases where the second image takes the form of an animated character and acts as a wild card symbol, the second image may be moved from one location to another via an animated walking motion.

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