

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR USING A LIGHT VALVE TO REDUCE THE VISIBILITY OF AN OBJECT WITHIN A GAMING APPARATUS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of and claims priority under U.S.C. §120 from co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/755,657, filed Jan. 12, 2004 and entitled, "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR USING A LIGHT VALVE TO REDUCE THE VISIBILITY OF AN OBJECT WITHIN A GAMING APPARATUS", which is incorporated herein for all purposes.

BACKGROUND

[0002] This patent is directed to a casino gaming apparatus, and more particularly to a gaming apparatus having a plurality of mechanical slot reels and one or more light valves. The gaming apparatus may be either an individual gaming unit or a casino gaming system that has a plurality of gaming units.

[0003] Conventional casino gaming units that have included mechanical slot reels sometimes experience situations where the mechanical slot reels stop spinning and display a wrong symbol. This wrong symbol could result in a display of a winning symbol combination that was different from the symbol combination that was correctly determined by the gaming apparatus. Many factors could cause one or more of the mechanical reel to stop on an incorrect symbol, including for example, a power failure, an electrostatic discharge into the housing of the gaming apparatus, a mechanical failure, etc.

[0004] Regardless of the cause of the mechanical slot reels stopping on a wrong symbol, the casinos have traditionally been forced to choose between one of several undesirable options, such as paying the player the prize corresponding to the symbol combination incorrectly displayed or refusing to pay the player the prize corresponding to the symbol combination incorrectly displayed. As could be expected, the second option would create a great deal of anger on behalf of the player and generate ill will toward the casino.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] In one aspect, the invention is directed to a slot machine having a housing, a transparent panel associated with the housing, wherein the panel has an outer surface and an inner surface, and a plurality of mechanically rotatable slot reels, wherein the slot reels are disposed in the housing so that the reels are visible to a player of the slot machine through the transparent panel. The slot machine also includes a light valve including a suspended particle device that is disposed between the inner surface of the transparent panel and the slot reels, wherein the suspended particle device is adapted to be coupled to a power source, and is also adapted to become substantially transparent when a first voltage is applied to the suspended particle device and adapted to become substantially opaque when a second voltage is applied to the suspended particle device.

[0006] The mechanically rotatable slot reels are visible to the player through the suspended particle device when the first voltage is applied to the suspended particle device, and

the suspended particle device substantially blocks visibility of the mechanically rotatable slot reels to the player when the second voltage is applied to the suspended particle device. Also included in the slot machine is a value input device and a controller operatively coupled to the mechanically rotatable slot reels and the value input device, wherein the controller includes a processor and a memory operatively coupled to the processor. The controller is programmed to allow a person to make a wager and to determine a value payout associated with an outcome of a game utilizing the mechanically rotatable slot reels.

[0007] In another aspect, the invention is directed to a slot machine as described above, and further having an electronic display unit disposed in the housing between the inner surface of the transparent panel and the slot reels, so that at least a portion of the electronic display unit is visible to the player of the slot machine through the transparent panel and the suspended particle device when the first voltage is applied to the suspended particle device, the electronic display unit being operatively coupled to the controller. The suspended particle device is adapted to also block at least a portion of the visibility of the electronic display unit to the player when the second voltage is applied to the suspended particle device.

[0008] In another aspect, the invention is directed to a slot machine as described above, and further having a mechanically moveable member disposed in the housing and located proximate the inner surface of the transparent panel, so that at least a portion of the mechanically moveable member is visible to the player of the slot machine through the transparent panel and the suspended particle device when the first voltage is applied to the suspended particle device. The suspended particle device being adapted to substantially block the visibility of the mechanically moveable member to the player when the second voltage is applied to the suspended particle device.

[0009] In another aspect, the invention is directed to a slot machine having a housing, a transparent panel associated with the housing, wherein the transparent panel has an outer surface and an inner surface, a power source, and a plurality of mechanically rotatable slot reels disposed in the housing so that the slot reels are visible to a player of the slot machine through the transparent panel. Also included is a light valve that is disposed between the inner surface of the transparent panel and the slot reels, the light valve operatively coupled to the power source and adapted to become substantially transparent when a first voltage is applied to the light valve and adapted to become substantially opaque when a second voltage is applied to the light valve.

[0010] The slot machine also includes a value input device and a controller operatively coupled to the mechanically rotatable slot reels, the light valve, and the value input device, wherein the controller has a processor and a memory operatively coupled to the processor. The controller is programmed to cause the light valve to become substantially transparent so that the mechanically rotatable reels are visible through the light valve to the player, to allow a person to make a wager, and to determine a value payout associated with an outcome of a game utilizing the mechanically rotatable reels.

[0011] Additional aspects of the invention are defined by the claims of this patent.