pay table as used for the mechanical reels or a different pay table altogether. The bonus game may be interactive and require a player to select one or more selectable elements **28** to earn bonuses. Also, the bonus game may depict one or more animated events and award bonuses based on an outcome of the animated events. Furthermore, the bonus game may be depicted by the video image **18** alone or in conjunction with a video image depicted on an optional secondary video display **40** (see **FIG. 1**). The two video images may be linked to appear like one unified image. Upon completion of the bonus game, the central processing unit shifts operation back to the basic slot game.

[**0024**] As shown in **FIGS. 8***a-c*, **9***a-c*, and **10***a-c*, the video image **18** may be used to modify one or more symbols printed on one or more of the stopped mechanical reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c*. For example, in response to a predetermined random or non-random event, the video image **18** may transform a reel symbol into a different symbol, such as a symbol needed to complete a winning combination. The different symbol is generated by the video image **18**. In **FIGS. 8***a-c*, the video image **18** depicts an animation transforming (e.g., "morphing") a blank symbol on mechanical reel **12***b* into a BELL symbol to form a winning combination of three BELL symbols along pay line **22***c*. In addition, referring to **FIGS. 9***a-c*, in response to a predetermined random or non-random event, the video image **18** may depict an animation in which a video indicator **29** is moved from a periphery of the display area (e.g., a corner of the display area away from the mechanical reels) to one or more of the symbols on the reels. The moving indicator **29** may identify the reel symbols to which it moves as a special symbol to be evaluated as, for example, a wild symbol or a scatter pay symbol. In **FIGS. 10***a-c*, a video indicator **29** has moved to a CHERRY symbol on mechanical reel **12***c*. If the CHERRY symbol is thereby designated a wild symbol, the displayed symbol array includes a winning combination of three MELON symbols along pay line **22***c* where one of the three MELON symbols is formed by the wild symbol. Further, in **FIGS. 10***a-c*, the video image **18** depicts an animation transforming a BELL symbol on reel **12***c* into a SEVEN symbol to form a winning combination of three SEVEN symbols along pay line **22***c*. The replacement SEVEN symbol generated by the video image **18** is sufficiently opaque or translucent to substantially cover the BELL symbol printed on mechanical reel **12***c*.

[**0025**] The slot machine is preferably designed to adjust the appearance of the video image **18** in terms of transparency, translucency, or opacity depending on the purpose of the video image **18**. On the one hand, to permit clear viewing of the mechanical reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c* underlying the video image **18**, the portion of the video image **18** directly overlying the reels is made more transparent.

[**0026**] On the other hand, to facilitate viewing of the video image **18** without visual interference from the underlying mechanical reels, the video image **18** is made more opaque through proper selection of colors and their level of brightness. Also, to accentuate the video image **18** relative to the underlying reels following a reel spin, any lamps illuminating the reels during a reel spin may be turned off or dimmed following the reel spin. In addition, if the reels include blank symbols (e.g., solid white areas), any video graphics over such blank symbols will be readily visible. Similarly, any video graphics alongside, just above, or just below the underlying reels will be readily visible. Further, in the direct image embodiment of **FIG. 2***a*, the transmissive video display **14***a* may be backed by an extendable opaque shade during the bonus game. The shade is retracted from the display area **16** during the basic slot game. When the central processing unit shifts operation from the basic slot game to the bonus game, the shade extends through the display area to separate the transmissive video display **14***a* from the underlying reels and thereby completely shield the underlying reels.

[**0027**] **FIG. 11** is a block diagram of a control system suitable for operating the slot machine. The control system includes a central processing unit with a microcontroller **30** and system memory **32**. The memory **32** preferably comprises a separate read-only memory (ROM) and battery-backed random-access memory (RAM). It will be appreciated, however, that the system memory **32** may be implemented on any of several alternative types of memory structures or may be implemented on a single memory structure. For example, the read-only memory may be replaced or supplemented with a mass storage unit such as a removable flash memory or a hard drive. The system memory is used to store game-related data associated with the chance games played on the slot machine. The game-related data may, for example, include game code, math tables, a random number generator, audio resources, and video resources. The player may select an amount to wager and other game play functions via the touch screen keys **26** (if provided) or button panel **24**. The wager amount is signaled to the microcontroller **30** by a coin/credit detector **34**. In response to the wager, the microcontroller **30** executes the game code which, based on a randomly selected outcome, rotates and stops the mechanical reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c* at the selected outcome. Also, the microcontroller **30** selectively accesses the video resources to be included in the video image **18** provided by the video display **14***a* (**FIG. 2***a*) or **14***b* (**FIG. 2***b*) and the audio resources to be played through one or more audio speakers **36** mounted to a housing of the slot machine. If the outcome corresponds to a winning outcome identified on the pay table, the microcontroller **30** instructs a payoff mechanism **38** to award a payoff for that winning outcome to the player in the form of coins or credits.

[**0028**] While the present invention has been described with reference to one or more particular embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that many changes may be made thereto without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. For example, instead of the video image **18** depicting a bonus game triggered by a start-bonus outcome on the mechanical slot reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c*, the roles of the video image **18** and the slot reels may be reversed. The video image **18** may depict a basic game including a start-bonus outcome for triggering a bonus game involving spins of the slot reels. Each of these embodiments and obvious variations thereof is contemplated as falling within the spirit and scope of the claimed invention, which is set forth in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A spinning reel slot machine, comprising:

a plurality of mechanical rotatable reels that, in response to a wager, are rotated and stopped to randomly place symbols on the reels in visual association with a display area; and