virtual image in front of the reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c* between the reels and a player. The video display **14***b* is preferably mounted below the reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c* and is generally perpendicular to the display area **16**. The mirror **20** is preferably mounted in front of the reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c* and is oriented at approximately a forty-five degree angle relative to both the video display **14***b* and the display area **16**. The virtual image is generally parallel to the display area **16** and may, in fact, occupy the display area **16**. Also, the virtual image may be three-dimensional. In the embodiment of **FIG. 2***b*, the display area **16** includes a glass cover/window. This cover is optionally outfitted with a touch screen that contains soft touch keys denoted by the virtual image and used to operate the slot machine **10**.

[**0015**] The video display **14***b* in **FIG. 2***b* may be a CRT, LCD, dot matrix, LED, electro-luminescent, or other type of video display known in the art. Also, instead of mounting the video display **14***b* below the reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c*, the display **14***b* may be mounted above the reels with the mirror **20** still oriented at approximately a forty-five degree angle relative to both the video display **14***b* and the display area **16**.

[**0016**] Referring back to **FIG. 1**, the slot machine **10** is operable to play a basic slot game with the three mechanical spinning reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c* and a bonus game triggered by a start-bonus outcome in the basic game. The number of mechanical reels may vary, for example, to include one or more additional reels. The mechanical reels may be mounted to a horizontal axis to spin vertically as shown or may, alternatively, be mounted to a vertical axis to spin horizontally. Also, instead of each column of symbols being associated with a single reel, each individual symbol may associated with a single reel such that a symbol array of nine symbols is associated with nine distinct reels. Each of five pay lines **22***a*, **22***b*, **22***c*, **22***d*, **22***e* extends through one symbol on each of the three mechanical reels. The number of pay lines may be more or less than five and may have various configurations.

[**0017**] Generally, game play is initiated by inserting a number of coins or playing a number of credits, causing a central processing unit to activate a number of pay lines corresponding to the number of coins or credits played. As shown in **FIG. 3**, the superimposed video image **18** may depict instructional information prompting the player to insert coins or play credits. The player selects the number of pay lines (between one and five) to play by pressing a "Select Lines" key on a button panel **24**. The player then chooses the number of coins or credits to bet on the selected pay lines by pressing a "Bet Per Line" key on the button panel **24**. As shown in **FIG. 4**, the superimposed video image **18** may depict the activated pay lines and the number of wagered credits per pay line.

[**0018**] After activation of the pay lines, the reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c* may be set in motion by touching a "Spin Reels" key on the button panel **24** or, if the player wishes to bet the maximum amount per line, by using a "Max Bet Spin" key on the button panel **24**. Alternatively, other mechanisms such as, for example, a lever may be used to set the reels in motion. The central processing unit uses a random number generator to select a game outcome (e.g., "basic" game outcome) corresponding to a particular set of reel "stop positions." The central processing unit then causes each of the mechanical reels to stop at the appropriate stop position. Symbols are printed on the reels to graphically illustrate the reel stop positions and indicate whether the stop positions of the reels represent a winning game outcome.

[**0019**] Winning basic game outcomes (e.g., symbol combinations resulting in payment of coins or credits) are identifiable to the player by a pay table. As shown in **FIG. 5**, the superimposed video image **18** may depict the pay table in response to a command by the player (e.g., by pressing a "Pay Table" key on the button panel **24**). A winning basic game outcome occurs when the symbols appearing on the reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c* along an active pay line correspond to one of the winning combinations on the pay table. A winning combination, for example, could be three matching symbols along an active pay line. If the displayed symbols stop in a winning combination, the game credits the player an amount corresponding to the award in the pay table for that combination multiplied by the amount of credits bet on the winning pay line. As shown in **FIG. 6**, the superimposed video image **18** may highlight the winning combination(s) (e.g., "7,""7,""7") and its associated pay line (e.g., pay line **22***c*) and depict the award for that winning combination. The video image **18** may further include special effects such as flashing the winning pay line(s) and/or the award and providing explosions. The winning pay line(s) may flash, be accompanied by exploding flashes, and display a portion of the pay table. The player may collect the amount of accumulated credits by pressing a "Collect" key on the button panel **24**. In one implementation, the winning combinations start from the first reel **12***a* (left to right) and span adjacent reels. In an alternative implementation, the winning combinations start from either the first reel **12***a* (left to right) or the third reel **12***c* (right to left) and span adjacent reels.

[**0020**] If the display area **16** includes a touch screen mounted to either the transmissive display **14***a* in the direct image embodiment of **FIG. 2***a* or the glass cover in the virtual image embodiment of **FIG. 2***b*, the video image **18** may duplicate some or all of the aforementioned keys on the button panel **24** as touch keys **26** as shown in various Figures. A player can then enable a desired function either by touching the touch screen at an appropriate touch key **26** denoted by the video image **18** or by pressing an appropriate key on the button panel **24**.

[**0021**] Included among the plurality of basic game outcomes is a start-bonus outcome for triggering play of a bonus game. A start-bonus outcome may be defined in a number of ways. For example, a start-bonus outcome may occur when a special start-bonus symbol or a special combination of symbols appears on one or more of the reels **12***a*, **12***b*, **12***c*. The start-bonus outcome may require the combination of symbols to appear along an active pay line or may, alternatively, require that the combination of symbols appear anywhere on the display, regardless of whether the symbols are along an active pay line. The appearance of a start-bonus outcome causes the central processing unit to shift operation from the basic slot game to the bonus game.

[**0022**] As shown in **FIG. 7**, the video image **18** may depict the bonus game and any bonuses resulting therefrom. The bonus game may, for example, include free spins of a new set of video reels included in the video image **18**. Winning combinations on the video reels may be defined by the same pay table as used for the mechanical reels or a different pay table altogether. The bonus game may be interactive and