CLAIMS

The invention is claimed as follows:

1. A gaming system comprising:

at least one display device;

at least one input device;

at least one processor; and

at least one memory device which stores a plurality of instructions, which when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor to operate with the at least one display device and the at least one input device, for a play of a game, to:

display a plurality of reels to a player, each reel having a default reel strip including a plurality of different symbols;

determine if a reel upgrade trigger randomly occurs during the play of a game while at least one of the reels is spinning, and if the reel upgrade trigger randomly occurs during the play of the game while at least one of the reels is spinning, for each of at least one of the reels:

cause said reel to be upgraded for said play of the game from the default reel strip of said reel, said upgrade causing one of:

(i) the player being more likely to obtain a winning symbol combination of said symbols in the play of the game, and

(ii) a higher award associated with one of the symbols on that reel in the play of the game,

determine any awards associated with the displayed symbols on the reels for the play of the game: and

provide any determined awards to the player.

2. The gaming system of Claim 1, wherein the reels are independent reels.

3. The gaming system of Claim 1, wherein the reels are dependent reels.

4. The gaming system of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of instructions, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor to determine any awards associated with displayed outcome of the play of the game based on at least one of: (a) a payline evaluation; and (b) a ways to win evaluation.

5. The gaming system of Claim 1, wherein the reel upgrade trigger includes at least one upgrade symbol on the reels.

6. The gaming system of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of instructions, when executed by the at least one processor, cause for at least one of the reels, the upgrade of said reel to occur while one or more of the other reels are spinning during the play of the game.

7. The gaming system of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of instructions, when executed by the at least one processor, cause for at least one of the reels, the upgrade of said reel to occur while said reel is spinning during the play of the game.

8. The gaming system of Claim 1, wherein the plurality of instructions, when executed by the at least one processor, cause for at least one of the reels, the upgrade of said reel to occur after said reel has stopped spinning during the play of the game.

9. The gaming system of Claim 1, wherein the reels have the same default reel strips.

10. A gaming system comprising:

at least one display device;

at least one input device;

at least one processor; and

at least one memory device which stores a plurality of instructions, which when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor to operate with the at least one display device and the at least one input device, for a play of a game, to:

display a plurality of reels to a player, each reel having a default reel strip including a plurality of different symbols;

determine if a reel upgrade trigger randomly occurs during the play of a game while at least one of the reels is spinning, and if the reel upgrade trigger randomly occurs during the play of the game while at least one of the reels is spinning, for each of at least one of the reels which are spinning for said play of the game:

(a) cause said reel to be upgraded for said play of the game from the default reel strip, said upgrade causing the player being more likely to obtain a winning symbol combination of said symbols in the play of the game,

(b) use said upgraded reel strip for determining one of the symbols on said reel to display for the play of the game, and

(c) display said determined symbol for the play of the game;

determine any awards associated with the displayed symbols on the reels for the play of the game: and

provide any determined awards to the player.

11. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein the reels are independent reels.

12. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein the reels are dependent reels.

13. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein the plurality of instructions, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor to determine any awards associated with displayed outcome of the play of the game based on at least one of: (a) a payline evaluation; and (b) a ways to win evaluation.

14. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein the reel upgrade trigger includes at least one upgrade symbol on the reels.

15. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein the plurality of instructions, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor for each upgrade trigger which occurs during the play of a game while at least one of the reels is spinning, for each of the reels which are spinning for said play of the game cause the upgrade of said reel to occur while said reel is still spinning.

16. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein the reels have the same default reel strips.

17. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein, for at least one reel, the upgrade of said reel includes changing a probability associated with generating two or more of the symbols on the reel, such that a higher value symbol on the reel has a higher likelihood of occurring.

18. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein, for at least one reel, the upgrade of the reel includes adding one or more additional higher value symbols to the reel strip to increase the probability of that symbol occurring in the play of the game.

19. The gaming system of Claim 10, wherein at least one of the reels can be upgraded multiple times in each play of the game.

20. A gaming system comprising:

at least one display device;

at least one input device;

at least one processor; and

at least one memory device which stores a plurality of instructions, which when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor to operate with the at least one display device and the at least one input device, for a play of a game, to:

display a plurality of reels to a player, each reel having a default reel strip including a plurality of different symbols;

determine if a reel upgrade trigger randomly occurs during the play of a game while at least one of the reels is spinning, and if the reel upgrade trigger randomly occurs during the play of the game while one of the reels is spinning, for each of at least one of the reels, cause said reel to be upgraded for said play of the game from the default reel strip, said upgrade causing one of the displayed symbols on the reel to be associated with a higher award in the play of the game;

determine any awards associated with the displayed symbols on the reels for the play of the game: and

provide any determined awards to the player.

21. The gaming system of Claim 20, wherein the reels are independent reels.

22. The gaming system of Claim 20, wherein the reels are dependent reels.

23. The gaming system of Claim 20, wherein the plurality of instructions, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor to determine any awards associated with displayed outcome of the play of the game based on at least one of: (a) a payline evaluation; and (b) a ways to win evaluation.

24. The gaming system of Claim 20, wherein the reel upgrade trigger includes at least one upgrade symbol on the reels.

25. The gaming system of Claim 20, wherein the reels have the same default reel strips.

26. The gaming system of Claim 20, wherein at least one of the reels can be upgraded multiple times in each play of the game.