

Game On: Video Games Turn 40

BY CHRISTOPHER BORRELLI
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CHICAGO — The video game is 40.

Its exact birthday is arguable. Cultural historians likely would date its origins further back, roughly a decade or two; prototypes of arcade games flourished in university computer labs in the 1950s. But "Pong," the first viable mainstream video game, blipped and blooped into bowling alleys and bars in 1972, and the Magnavox Odyssey, the first home gaming console, arrived 40 autumns ago. So, let's agree, 40 years old.

It may be the last time we agree.

Because chances are you find the video game a marginal presence in your life, at best a time-killing commuter distraction, somewhere on the cultural scale between Honey Boo Boo and "Ice Age" sequels. But you would be wrong. The video game at 40 is having a midlife identity crisis, albeit one that is redefining what the medium itself means. If you haven't touched a joystick in decades, you would be disoriented: Metaphorically speaking, Mario's Kart is a Passat now. Donkey Kong more of a tweedy Dr. Zaius. The video game at 40 is often thoughtful, aesthetically sophisticated, more diversified than ever and rigorously thought about. Lately, it's been wondering whether it's art or should even aspire to the label; often, the reply is, yes.

But it's complicated. The video game at 40 is also self-conscious and stuck in its ways, its direction uncertain. It loses its car keys a lot now. Financially, it's unstable. Creatively, it's not sure what anyone expects of it anymore. It can be flautent, frustrating, juvenile, insular and needlessly abrasive — as technologically innovative as it is intellectually inert. But here's the thing: Those contradictions are OK, even welcome. Because, in the life span of any art, 40 is like 15, and while rock 'n' roll considers retirement, the movie wonders about senility and the book ponders the grave, the video game, four decades old and more ubiquitous than ever, is maturing.

Ripening. Even rebelling. "You can't deny video games increasingly do what art does," said Julian Dibbel, a University of Chicago law student who once literally made his living buying and selling virtual items in online gaming worlds. "Video games shape identities now, they have ideas that carry weight in the world. There's a culture there, and games with larger meanings. In many ways they are a tighter fit with contemporary culture than more traditional arts. In fact, they even hold up novels or films as what games should aspire to when, if we think of art as central to the way we live, the interactive nature of games is more relevant? Why aren't other arts more like games?"

Nobody said puberty was pretty. The problem is, try getting anyone to settle on what maturity should look like here. Does a mature video game culture mean a culture that is grim, serious and ambitious? A culture that accepts itself as broad entertainment? Or a culture that, as with film, literature and theater, reflects multitudes? "You can't expect the video game or video game culture to ever be entirely mature," Nolan Bushnell said when I asked what he thought of the medium he more or less created 40 years ago. In 1972, Bushnell and programmer Ted Dabney started Atari, then developed "Pong," which popularized video games in general a few years later when Sears sold a home version. "Considering all the threads that exist now in video game culture, I think it would be impossible for the video game to be entirely mature. Would you even want it to be?"

Of course not, though surely he had loftier aims for the video game than gobbling quarters? "There was theoretical stuff in-

MONDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT

BROADCAST STATIONS	NOVEMBER 12, 2012																				
	3:00	3:30	4:00	4:30	5:00	5:30	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30	12:00	12:30	1:00
PBS KUSD 2 8 (2)	Arthur (DVS) WordGirl (DVS)	Wild Kratts The Electric Company	Martha Speaks	Nightly Business Report	PBS NewsHour (N) (In Stereo) Kratts (DVS)	Antiques Roadshow Appraisals featuring cats and dogs. (N)	Antiques Roadshow Appraisals featuring cats and dogs. (N)	Market Warriors Antiques Garage in New York. (N)	Independent Lens Luxurious apartment building. (N)	The Red Green Show	BBC World News	Charlie Rose (N) (In Stereo)	Tavis Smiley (N)	Cloagh Irish	Antiques Roadshow Appraisals featuring cats and dogs. (N)						
KTVI 4 4 (4)	Jeff Probst Sh.	Ellen DeGeneres	News 4	News	News 4	Ent	The Voice (N) The top 12 artists perform. (N)	The Voice "Live Top 12 Performances" The top 12 artists perform. (N) (In Stereo Live)	Revolution (N) The	Revolution (N) The	Jay Leno	Jimmy Fallon	Daly	News 4							
NBC KDLT 5 5 (5)	The Doctors (In Stereo)	Judge Judy	Judge Judy	KDLT News (N) KDLT News (N)	NBC Nightly News (N) KDLT News (N)	The Big Bang Theory	The Voice "Live Top 12 Performances" The top 12 artists perform. (N) (In Stereo Live)	Revolution (N) The	Revolution (N) The	Revolution (N) The	KDLT News (N) KDLT News (N)	The Tonight Show With Jay Leno (N) (In Stereo)	Late Night With Jimmy Fallon (N) (In Stereo)	Last Call With Carson Daly	Paid Program						
KCAU 6 6 (9)	Dr. Phil	The Dr. Oz Show	News	ABC News	News	Inside	Dancing With the Stars: All-Stars (N)	Castle "Swan Song"	Castle "Swan Song"	Castle "Swan Song"	News Nightline	Jimmy Kimmel Live	My Pillow	Inside	ABC World News						
CBS KELO 11 3 (11)	Dr. Phil (In Stereo)	The Dr. Oz Show (In Stereo)	News	CBS Evening News	News	Entertainment Tonight (N)	How I Met Your Mother	Partners (N) Mike & Molly (N)	Hawaii Five-0 Danny accidentally activates a bomb. (N)	Hawaii Five-0 Danny accidentally activates a bomb. (N)	News	Late Show With David Letterman (N) (In Stereo)	The Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson (N) (In Stereo)	News	The Insider (N) Up to the Minute (N)						
ABC KSFY 13 7 (13)	Jeopardy! (N) Be a Millionaire	The Ellen DeGeneres Show (N) (In Stereo)	KSFY News at 5 in HD	ABC World News	KSFY News at 6 in HD	Wheel of Fortune (N)	Dancing With the Stars: All-Stars (N) (In Stereo Live)	Castle "Swan Song" A guitarist is murdered. (N)	Castle "Swan Song" A guitarist is murdered. (N)	KSFY News at 10 (N) KSFY News at 10 (N)	Nightline (N) KSFY News at 10 (N)	Jimmy Kimmel Live (N) Paid Program	Extra (N) Paid Program	Best Pil- low Ever! (N) DermaWand							
KMEG 13 6 (13)	The Doctors	Jdg Judy Jdg Judy	KMEG 14 CBS	Jeopardy	Wheel	Mother Partners	Broke Mike	Hawaii Five-0 (N)	Hawaii Five-0 (N)	News	Letterman	Ferguson	Paid	Paid	Minute						
FOX KTTW 21 9 (7)	Steve Harvey (In Stereo)	Anderson Live (N) (In Stereo)	America's Funniest Home Videos Favorite home videos.	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	Bones A man who died in a terrorist attack. (N) (In Stereo)	The Moby Doctor "Complications" (N) (In Stereo)	The Office "Fire" (N)	The Office "Fire" (N)	Dish Nation (N)	Friends (N) Friends (N)	Baggage (N) Maury (In Stereo)	Excused	Excused							
KLKN	The Dr. Oz Show	Dr. Phil	News	ABC News	News	Ent	Dancing With the Stars: All-Stars (N)	Castle "Swan Song"	Castle "Swan Song"	News	Nightline	Jimmy Kimmel Live	Katie (N)	ABC World News							
KOLN	Ellen DeGeneres	First Four	Jeopardy	10/11	CBS	News	Wheel	Hawaii Five-0 (N)	Hawaii Five-0 (N)	News	Letterman	Ferguson	Paid	Minute							
KPTH	Jerry Springer	Maurly	Big Bang	Two Men	Big Bang	Two Men	Bones (N) Mike	The Moby Doctor (N)	The Moby Doctor (N)	News	Office	Office	30 Rock	Mother	Mother	Paid	American				
KSCB 97	Reflex	Winston Love-	Gary	Guillermo	Creflo D. P. Stone	J. Hagee	Parsley Joni L.	Celebration	Duplantis Alive	Van Impe	Copeland	Life To J. Meyer	Celebration	Jonni L.	Reflex						
KSIN 99 (12)	Arthur	Martha Wild	WordGirl	Curious	PBS NewsHour (N)	Mystery	Antiques Roadshow	Market Warriors (N)	Market Warriors (N)	Magic of Audrey	Veterans Day 11.11.11 (N)	Stories (Off Air)									
KXNE 8	Curious Super	Arthur	WordGirl	Wild	Electric	PBS NewsHour (N)	Antiques Roadshow	Market Warriors (N)	Market Warriors (N)	Magic of Audrey	Veterans Day 11.11.11 (N)	Stories (Off Air)									

TUESDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT

BROADCAST STATIONS	NOVEMBER 13, 2012																				
	3:00	3:30	4:00	4:30	5:00	5:30	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30	12:00	12:30	1:00
PBS KUSD 2 8 (2)	Arthur (DVS) WordGirl (DVS)	Wild Kratts The Electric Company	Martha Speaks	Nightly Business Report	PBS NewsHour (N) (In Stereo) Kratts (DVS)	American Masters "Woody Guthrie: Ain't Got No Home" Woody Guthrie's music. (N)	Frontline "The Suicide Plan" Assisted suicide in the U.S. (N) (In Stereo)	Keeping Up	BBC World News	Charlie Rose (N) (In Stereo)	Tavis Smiley (N)	Rick Stevens	Small Town Soldiers North Dakota Veterans in World War II.								
KTVI 4 4 (4)	Jeff Probst Sh.	Ellen DeGeneres	News 4	News	News 4	Ent	The Voice (N) The	Go On Normal	Parenthood (N)	News 4	Jay Leno	Jimmy Fallon	News 4	Extra							
NBC KDLT 5 5 (5)	The Doctors (In Stereo)	Judge Judy	Judge Judy	KDLT News (N) KDLT News (N)	NBC Nightly News (N) KDLT News (N)	The Big Bang Theory	The Voice "Live Results elimination." (N)	Go On (N) (DVS) Normal (N)	Parenthood Adam and Kristina face difficulties. (N)	KDLT News (N) KDLT News (N)	The Tonight Show With Jay Leno (N) (In Stereo)	Late Night With Jimmy Fallon (N) (In Stereo)	Last Call With Carson Daly	Paid Program							
KCAU 6 6 (9)	Dr. Phil	The Dr. Oz Show	News	ABC News	News	Inside	Dancing/Stars	Happy	Private Practice (N)	News	Nightline	Jimmy Kimmel Live	Paid	ABC World News							
CBS KELO 11 3 (11)	Dr. Phil (In Stereo)	The Dr. Oz Show (In Stereo)	News	CBS Evening News	News	Entertainment Tonight (N)	NCIS "Shell Shock, Part 1" A Navy lieutenant is murdered. (N)	Happy Endings (N) Kate (N)	NCIS "The Real Thing" A dentist is murdered. (N)	News	Late Show With David Letterman (N) (In Stereo)	The Late Late Show With Craig Ferguson (N) (In Stereo)	News	The Insider (N) Up to the Minute (N)							
ABC KSFY 13 7 (13)	Jeopardy! (N) Be a Millionaire	The Ellen DeGeneres Show (N) (In Stereo)	KSFY News at 5 in HD	ABC World News	KSFY News at 6 in HD	Wheel of Fortune (N)	Dancing With the Stars: All-Stars (N) (In Stereo Live)	Happy Endings (N) Kate (N)	NCIS "The Real Thing" A dentist is murdered. (N)	Private Practice Sam's reality show begins taping. (N)	KSFY News at 10 (N) KSFY News at 10 (N)	Nightline (N) Jimmy Kimmel Live (N) Paid Program	Want more sex? (N) Extra (N) Paid Program	Tummy Tuck (N) Paid Program							
KMEG 13 6 (13)	The Doctors	Jdg Judy Jdg Judy	KMEG 14 CBS	Jeopardy	Wheel	Mother Partners	Broke Mike	Hawaii Five-0 (N)	Hawaii Five-0 (N)	News	Letterman	Ferguson	Paid	Paid	Minute						
FOX KTTW 21 9 (7)	Steve Harvey (In Stereo)	Anderson Live (N) (In Stereo)	America's Funniest Home Videos	How I Met Your Mother	How I Met Your Mother	Bones A man who died in a terrorist attack. (N) (In Stereo)	The Moby Doctor "Complications" (N) (In Stereo)	The Office "Fire" (N)	The Office "Fire" (N)	Dish Nation (N)	Friends (N) Friends (N)	Baggage (N) Maury (In Stereo)	Excused	Excused							
KLKN	The Dr. Oz Show	Dr. Phil	News	ABC News	News	Ent	Dancing/Stars	Happy	Private Practice (N)	News	Nightline	Jimmy Kimmel Live	Katie (N)	ABC World News							
KOLN	Ellen DeGeneres	First Four	Jeopardy	10/11	CBS	News	Wheel	Hawaii Five-0 (N)	Hawaii Five-0 (N)	News	Letterman	Ferguson	Paid	Minute							
KPTH	Jerry Springer	Maurly	Big Bang	Two Men	Big Bang	Two Men	Raising Ben-Kate	New Girl (N) Mindy	Vegas (N) Vote	30 Rock	Office	Office	30 Rock	Mother	Mother	Paid	American				
KSCB 97	Reflex	Winston Love-	Gary	Guillermo	Creflo D. P. Stone	J. Hagee	Parsley Joni L.	Celebration	Joel Osteen (N)	J. Hagee	Copeland	Life To J. Meyer	Celebration	Jonni L.	Reflex						
KSIN 99 (12)	Arthur	Martha Wild	WordGirl	Curious	PBS NewsHour (N)	Woods.	American Masters (N)	Frontline "The Suicide Plan"	Frontline "The Suicide Plan"	Business	Wine	Globe Trekker (Off Air)									
KXNE 8	Curious Super	Arthur	WordGirl	Wild	Electric	PBS NewsHour (N)	Big Red Wrap-Up	Johnny Carson: American Masters (N)	Frontline "The Suicide Plan"	Big Red	Off Air										

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