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# Down Lo on the Downloads: Shop-Store-Market 01/08

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CHAD SAPIEHA  
EVERGEEK MEDIA

The final month of 2007 saw the Wii's Virtual Store inch closer to its 200th title (it will likely hit that mark in the next 30 days) with classics like Bubble Bobble and Blades of Steel, while the PlayStation Store's small but increasingly impressive library of downloadable games welcomed a quartet of new titles, including the surprisingly deep highly entertaining Snakeball. But it was the Xbox 360 that really captured our attention, thanks to the launch of the Xbox Live Originals channel, which is making classic games from Microsoft's first console, the Xbox, available for a fraction of their initial price -- including our game of the month, Halo. Just one word of advice: Make sure your Internet provider doesn't charge by the gigabyte and that you've upgraded your 360's hard drive; these games, which originally filled whole DVDs, are comprised of some of the biggest files you'll ever download.



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### PICK OF THE MONTH

Halo  
(Xbox Live Originals)  
4.5 (out of five)



Presented in all its original glory, this is the game that showed the world that Microsoft meant business when it entered the console industry at the turn of the millennium. Indeed, some analysts believe that Halo -- the very definition of a so-called "console mover" -- is the sole reason why the Xbox managed to gain a foothold in a hardware industry that was, at the time, dominated by Sony and Nintendo. The only disappointing thing about Halo as a downloadable is that, like all Xbox Live Original titles, there are no enhancements to the game. That means no widescreen, no high-def, no online play, and no Keener points (Achievements) to be found. Still, if you've never played Halo before (or ceremoniously dumped it along with your Xbox in favor of a 360), this is a great way to get your hands on Master Chief's first adventure.

### Blades of Steel (Wii Virtual Console) 4 (out of five)

Back in the days when sports games didn't rely on name-dropping real world leagues and players existed Konami's Blades of Steel, an early and



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charming attempt at a hockey simulator for the Nintendo Entertainment System that remains a great game of shinny even today. The fast paced, side-scrolling action is best enjoyed between two players as each selects from the game's eight teams (which include several Canadian franchises), passes the puck around, and even gets into the occasional fight. It's no NHL 08, but it wins big points for being a cinch to pick up and play regardless of video game experience.

**Indigo Prophecy**  
(Xbox Live Originals)  
4 (out of five)

Another initial offering in Microsoft's Xbox Live Originals pool, this critically acclaimed thriller didn't do as well with the gaming public as it deserved when originally released in 2005. Players take on the role of murderer who needs to solve his own crime by exploring environments that offer extraordinary freedom to do almost anything you can imagine. It has a wonderfully engrossing story to boot, filled with rich and compelling characters that have a depth uncommon in video games. The only problem is that its unconventional design sometimes makes Indigo Prophecy feel more like a movie and less like a game. Still, if you're looking to add a little substance to your interactive entertainment, this is a good place to start.



**Snakeball**  
(PlayStation Store)  
4.25 (out of five)

With its beautiful art and simple but deep design, there are fewer more satisfying games you can buy for just a few dollars than this quasi-sport title that involves maneuvering a little hover pod around a discotheque-like arena while collecting glowing balls and depositing them in score zones. Some modes allow you to fire balls and bombs off at opponents while a single player game sees players gathering as many as 1000 balls at once - which can be challenging, since they string behind you like a serpent, and running into your own tail is a no-no. Be warned; this one has the potential to eat up dozens of hours of valuable leisure time.



**Toy Home**  
(PlayStation Store)  
3.75 (out of five)

Another PlayStation Store game employing Valve Software's powerful Havok engine to deliver extraordinarily realistic physics (see PAIN, our favorite downloadable game last month), Toy Home has players zooming wind-up play cars through the enormous looking rooms of an average house. You leap off of toddler slides and kitchen counters while plowing through intricately arranged dominoes and stacks of toy crocodiles as you race to collect coins and rack up points (think Collin McRae Rally meets Chibi-Robo, with a little bit of Toy Story thrown in). You'll zoom through several levels of mayhem in a variety of modes while tracking your best scores online relative to other players around the world. It's a great time for the most part, but finicky motion-sensitive steering controls occasionally bung up the fun.



**Bubble Bobble**  
(Wii Virtual Console)  
3 (out of five)

While its name may call to mind the hysterically popular Puzzle Bobble and Bust-a-Move puzzle games of the early nineties (and, indeed, its two main characters, Bub and Bob, did appear in those games), Bubble Bobble is more action than puzzle, requiring players to best beasties by capturing them in bubbles before popping them. Originally appearing on the Nintendo Entertainment System, it's a simple and quaint little game that nonetheless can be highly challenging (read: slightly frustrating) and somewhat addictive. Recommended for older Nintendo fans that have fond memories playing the game as a kid.



**Tempest**  
(Xbox Live Arcade)  
2 (out of five)

Some games just don't age well, and Tempest is one of them. When it first hit arcades, players were understandably impressed by its faux three-dimensional perspective, which creates the illusion that you're looking down a tunnel, and a novel game mechanic that involves navigating a shooting vessel around the edge of that tunnel. Revisiting it decades later, however, exposes Tempest for what it really is: confusing, unintuitive, chaotic, and aggravating. The gussied up "evolved" version of the game that comes bundled with the Xbox Live Arcade edition delivers the same experience with flashier graphics.



### High Velocity Bowling (PlayStation Store)

3 (out of five)

Wii Sports -- which contains a delightful little bowling game -- continues to be a favorite of Nintendo zealots, so it should come as no surprise that the only other system with a motion sensitive controller, the PlayStation3, should offer up its own kegling simulation. And, in truth, High Velocity Bowling is a much deeper and more involved game of bowling than the one in Wii Sports, providing a variety of modes, unlockable content, and more nuanced controls. The only problem is that it feels really weird to hold the PlayStation3's SixAxis controller sideways and swing it like you're throwing a ball (and keep in mind that it hasn't a wrist strap, which is a potential recipe for a busted screen in this sort of game).



### Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble

(Wii Virtual Console)  
4 (out of five)

Tongue-twisting, troublesome-to-remember moniker aside, the third Donkey Kong Country game, originally released for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System just over a decade ago, remains as fun today as it ever was. Our leads are Dixie and Kiddy, and through them, we explore the northern reaches of the Donkey Kong island chain in this exemplary platforming game as we meet a series of helpful bears that take on the roles of store owners, crack codes, and act as gatekeepers to various levels. Long story short: More silly but good-natured monkey business.



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