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## DREAM JOB

### Work is play for gaming guru Marc Saltzman

By Lisa Fattori  
Special to The Toronto Sun

Marc Saltzman plays games for a living, and consumers and the media are glad of it. Saltzman's passion for gaming became a full-time career seven years ago, when he began reviewing video games and taking on freelance assignments writing about the burgeoning gaming industry.



**"My passion for gaming has snowballed into a career that is so much fun," says game tester**

**Mark Saltzman.**

Today, the 32 year old Richmond Hill resident enjoys the unique position as one of North America's leading experts in gaming and consumer technology.

"When the Web was born, I knew that it would change the world," Saltzman says. "I foresaw that this would be a revolutionary medium that would rival Hollywood box office entertainment."

Saltzman predicted correctly, and as the multimedia industry grew, so did his opportunities to be a commentator in print, radio and television. In addition to being a syndicated columnist and author (seven books and three CDs), Saltzman contributes to more than two dozen prominent publications, including USA Today, Playboy and Electronic Gaming Monthly.

He has a regular spot on CNN as a consumer technology expert, and he hosts two radio shows, Tech Talk with Marc Saltzman on CFRB and Cyber Escapes with Marc Saltzman on Edge 102. In April, Saltzman will be hosting a new television show on Global called TKO (Technical Knock Out).

By his own admission, Saltzman was no computer whiz destined to become a gaming guru. His interest in video games didn't take hold until after he obtained a bachelor's degree in psychology at U of T in 1993.

"I was working as a bill collector during the day, and at night, played drums in a band that was going nowhere," he says. "I was very frustrated and playing video games was my escape."

Saltzman says that his new career began as a ruse to get free products. "I was fed up with paying \$80 for a game," he says, "so I contacted Toronto Computes and asked if I could review games for them. They agreed and I became a writer to feed my habit."

Today, Saltzman is showered with video games and high-tech gadgets by companies all vying for the Saltzman nod of approval. He receives thousands of games a year in various stages of development, and spends anywhere from five to 50 hours playing a game before writing his review.

Jetsetting around the world on promotional junkets and invitations to lavish product launches (including a chance to parachute from a B52 Bomber) are among the many perks of the job. However, since the birth of his twin

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babies six months ago, Saltzman has cut down on travelling to spend more time at home.

"My friends think I'm crazy to turn down a free trip to Hong Kong or to the Superbowl," he says. "Travelling may sound glamorous, but it isn't after a while."

Even with less travelling, Saltzman's schedule is full. When he is not making a TV or radio appearance, Saltzman is up at 7 a.m. and writes for the first half of the day. He prepares for the following day in the afternoon -- answering e-mail, setting up interviews, playing games and testing new gadgets. Most days, he doesn't finish until 11 p.m.

"It's a lot of hard work, but when you truly love what you do, you're very lucky," he says. "My passion for gaming has snowballed into a career that is so much fun."

Saltzman takes his job seriously in giving consumers a heads up about what products they should or shouldn't buy ("80 bucks is 80 bucks"), but he still loves to play games for the sheer fun of it.

"If it's done well enough, I can turn off the critical eye and lose myself in the fantasy," he says. "I play games every day and there are so many that I still want to play.

"I love interactive entertainment and, with the Internet, we can play games with thousands of people, at any time, in beautiful digital landscapes."

(Lisa Fattori ([rosswords@rogers.com](mailto:rosswords@rogers.com)) is a Toronto-based freelance writer.)

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