

***“The fair was integrated into the actual town of Lucca.”***

Interview with Drew Karpysyn, writer special guest at lucca Games 2014

**LG:** *Hi Drew, it was a pleasure to have you as guest during Lucca Comics & Games fair. Let's start with the questions. First of all, introduce yourself to our readers. We would like to know about your background in comics, games, movies, books and other hobbies, since your childhood.*

**DK:** I think my first introduction to this world was when I saw Star Wars (the original film) when I was 7. From then on I was a big fan of fantasy and science fiction. As a teenager I became interested in video games and pen and paper Dungeons & Dragons, which fueled my interest in those kinds of books and films. But it took almost 10 years after I graduated from high school before I actually started working in those fields. In the same year I sold my first novel to Wizards of the Coast and I also started working at BioWare, which allowed me to make a living by doing something I truly loved.

**LG:** Tell us how and when you started to work professionally for the video games market. Was it your conscious decision, your dream come true, or somebody offered you the job and you said “Why not?”.

**DK:** After high school I had many unsatisfying jobs – I drove a newspaper truck, I moved furniture and eventually I went into banking and became a loans and mortgage specialist. But after several years of this I decided to go back to school and pursue a Masters degree in English. While I was in graduate school, I saw a small add in the English department newsletter from a video game company looking for writers to work on a D&D style video game. I had just sold my first Forgotten Realms novel to Wizards of the Coast, so this seemed like a good fit. Little did I know, the company was BioWare, and the game was Baldur's Gate II. I applied, and when they offered me a full time job as a writer, I jumped at it.

**LG:** To everybody who wants to build a career in writing video games. Do you have some suggestions on how to start? What kind of experience do you need? How to craft your skills? I think there's no school for this out there...

**DK:** It's hard to offer any useful advice, because I just sort of stumbled into the industry by being in the right place at the right time. As a writer, you would want to make sure your writing and story telling skills are strong, and you can take classes in creative writing to help with that. But games are very specific, and it's hard to transfer those skills over for some people. But even if you have the skills, getting

your foot in the door is difficult. It's hard to start with a big company like BioWare now- they were much smaller when I went to work for them. Most candidates have to get experience by working with smaller projects and companies, some of which do not pay very well. I would also recommend looking at gaming related websites, like Gamasutra – they often have job postings, and forums where people can discuss things like this.

**LG: You worked on some very important brands, like Star Wars and Mass Effect (more than one agrees that Mass Effect is the best sci-fi story coming to video games). What are the differences, and the similarities, in working on these two titles? What do you prefer and why?**

**DK:** Obviously Star Wars and Mass Effect have a lot in common: a sci-fi setting with interstellar travel, many different alien species and cultures and a powerful form of “magic” represented by the Force and biotics. But these elements are common to many sci-fi franchises; fans like to explore these kinds of ideas and themes, so they come up again and again. However, I think Star Wars has a much stronger fantasy feel than Mass Effect. Star Wars is more focused on universal, mythical story elements, like the eternal struggle between light and dark. Mass Effect, on the other hand, is closer to hard sci-fi. There is a lot of moral ambiguity and it's hard to tell the good guys and bad guys apart. But I don't think one is necessarily better than the other, and I'm glad I got the chance to work on both.

**LG: In this period you're not working for video games, and you decided to write a fantasy trilogy, Chaos Born. Tell us about these books: how did you create this fantasy universe? What is your inspiration? More Conan or Bilbo?**

**DK:** The “Chaos Born” trilogy is my tribute to the classic Sword & Sorcery fantasy books I read growing up. It's an epic quest in the style of Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, Terry Brooks' The Sword of Shannara or David Eddings' The Belgariad, with a dash of dark horror inspired by Stephen King and Clive Barker. It follows the lives of four children born from the spell of a banished God; cursed by the Chaos in their blood to have lives of violence and turmoil. Various factions in the world seek to discover and control these children, who are they key to the banished God's return... or his ultimate destruction.

**LG: I know that you are almost a “pro” golf player. How and when did you start golfing? Tell us about this passion that is very important to you...**

**D:** I think I have a long way to go before I could ever turn pro! But I do play a lot of golf – 4 or 5 times almost every week. It's a very difficult sport to learn, but that's why I enjoy it. It challenges you both mentally and physically and allows you to test yourself against the course, another player or even your own previous scores. You can play alone or with others, and it's a good way to

get outside and get fresh air and exercise. It's also a good excuse to visit different places around the world, since it is a very popular game across many, many countries.

**LG: Let's play a "What if?" game. You're not a writer, you're not into video games and you don't play golf. Who is Drew Karpysyn in this alternate world? An FBI agent, a movie maker or what else?**

**DK:** I like to think I'd be a story teller of some sort – that's what I'm best at. So I suppose I'd be in movies, or maybe writing plays. But if I couldn't do that, I don't know where I'd be. I was building a career in banking and finance, and I do enjoy numbers. But I didn't find it very rewarding. I guess I'm lucky I stumbled into a career that lets me do the thing I love most.

**LG: Last question has to be about Lucca Comics & Games fair and Italy in general. You told me that this fair is very different from the other ones you've attended: in which way? You visited Italy for 10 days, together with your lovely wife, Jennifer: what are your impressions? And is the Italian food the best in the world?**

**DK:** I loved how closely the fair was integrated into the actual town of Lucca. When you go to most cons, most of the activities are inside a giant convention center – you don't get to see much of the actual city. But Lucca combines an amazing medieval town with thousands of fans dressed up as their favorite characters from games, comics and movies. It's surreal to walk down an old medieval street and see modern costume characters wandering past you. Lucca was also my and my wife's first visit to Italy, so we finally got a chance to see some of the amazing country. We went to Venice, Florence, Pisa and Rome, and loved every minute of our trip. In North America, we don't have the thousands of years of history still standing around every corner – most of what we see is only a few hundred years old. So it's exciting for us to see how modern society has blended with the ancient cultures to create something so unique. And of course, I loved the food – I think we ate prosciutto at every meal; I'm a little bit addicted now! Though I have to admit, I did miss my Tex-Mex and BBQ by the end of the trip. I'm not a chef, but maybe there's a way to combine Texas BBQ and Italian into some new kind of amazing taste sensation?