

Xakara

by

Moondancer Drake

Moon: What made you choose the name Xakara?

Xakara: I had a cyber stalker many years ago that made it impossible to sign up for anything with my given name. He worked for an ISP and found me over and over again. After not being online for about a year, I began to use different names, even when registering for things so he couldn't track me down. When I had to decide on a consistent name for everything Xakara was chosen from a character I was writing and using in rpg at the time. I've had it for so long that despite not being my given name, it's very much my real name.

Moon: Very scary. What sorts of things would you suggest to other's who have an active web presence to protect themselves against such predators?

Xakara: I don't think you can protect yourself 100% but you should always take the basic precautions. Don't use your real name anywhere you don't need to. Don't post information that would make you easy to find should someone take it on themselves to seek you out. Secure your domain registration. All the basics to keep your private information private. And if, as in my case, they have access to your private information, take the plunge and build a new web presence with all of the above precautions so that original person can't find you.

Moon: You mention you play(ed) RPGs. What did you enjoy playing the most and how have they influenced your writing?

Xakara: I enjoy the White Wolf system the most. There's something about The World of Darkness and other WW worlds that give themselves over to looking at the best in a character who must survive in the worst situations. I think building characters for RPGs and moving them through worlds has helped me look at them as three dimensional people, moving in a three dimensional world, even if it's a world only I can see.

Moon: When did you first start writing?

Xakara: I began as a storyteller at 5 or 6, keeping my younger cousins entertained when we were left to make our own adventures during the summer months. This eventually grew into telling my classmates stories on the

playground at school. Most were just soap operas I'd watched all summer with my grandmother turned into drama featuring my classmates as future adults. (Yeah, I was that little kid). One day in 4th grade, a classmate was out sick and came back to get the update on what happened. Frustrated when someone else who'd missed out interrupted, he asked "why don't you just write them down?". I took him up on it and haven't stopped since.

Moon: What things about how you grew up had the most impact on who you are as a writer and as a woman?

Xakara: I was told at a very young age that not everyone was going to like me, and that I didn't need to be liked. That was a very freeing concept as a child in a world that teaches girls they must always be nice. I was raised to be a good person, but I feel no obligation to be "nice", or say things in order to be liked and to keep from rocking the boat. If I have something to share and something I'm passionate about, it doesn't matter if other people like it or dislike me because of it. As long as I'm true to myself and I'm never intentionally hurtful while being truthful, I've done exactly what I needed to do.

Where I know I have to write things that someone will be willing to publish, I don't feel the need to "play it safe" with my writing. I play with gender, sexuality, spirituality and moral standing. I question what is considered normal and look at where a "new normal" can be established upon the fringe when necessary.

Moon: How are you different then you were during those creative summer months as a kid? How are you the same?

Xakara: There's more about me that's the same than different. I'm still never bored when left on my own. My capacity to self-entertain is limitless and I can be inspired by anything and everything. The greatest change is the size of my world view. Experience and knowledge have given me larger worlds to explore in my creativity.

Moon: What is your preferred genre(s) to write in and why?

Xakara: I prefer Urban Fantasy and Paranormal Romance. Urban Fantasy is a favorite because it's the natural setting of the worlds I live in in my head. I didn't know it had a title until I was trying to find out where BloodSprite fit on the shelves. It wasn't horror and it wasn't traditional fantasy, Urban Fantasy bridges that gap allowing for darkness, comedy, and sensuality where appropriate. How could I not love a genre that let me have my Vampires, Shifters and Others while giving me a modern world I could relate to?

Paranormal Romance was a complete accident. I came across the open call for a novella submission and needed to get BloodSprite out of my head after the first round of edits. I'd never been one for brevity (I'm still not, as anyone who's read

my blog can attest) so I wrote it to see if I could train myself to get out an idea in a specified word count. I was amazed when it worked. It gave me a great sense of freedom to realize that all of the ideas I had floating around my head that would take forever to become novels, could instead live as novellas if necessary rather than just being lost to The Void Of Forgotten Thought.

Moon: What about the paranormal genre(s) do you find most challenging. Most rewarding?

Xakara: Building a new world is both challenging and rewarding. It's the chance to touch on anything and everything, but you have to tread carefully and make sure it all makes sense. You want consistency and you want a true reflection of your vision, and sometimes the two don't meet as your vision wants to change over time.

Moon: What is the most difficult research you have ever had to do for a story?

Xakara: I always find historical research difficult. But I think that the most involved research I've done was on quantum physics. Trying to find a way to condense the overwhelming information into a few sentences was challenging. Then of course there was the need to make sure I understood exactly what I was trying to convey so that the reader could follow along with me.

Moon: You mentioned blogging. Do you think that's a useful marketing tool for authors?

Xakara: I think that blogging is among the most useful marketing tools an author can commit time towards. It allows an author to get more information on what an audience wants and it allows an author's audience to connect and get a feel for the person they're investing their time and money in.

Moon: Are there other tools you'd suggest as well for authors to give them a better web presence?

Xakara: Once you know your target audience you should find ways to directly interact with them. Visit the forums of similar authors, shows and movies to see what your fans/future fans are talking about and wishing to see. It gives you the chance to interact without the pressure to promote yourself. Write articles and participate in debates about the things that make you passionate so that readers can relate to you. And make sure you include your signature with your author information in everything so that you're easy to find.

Moon: What do you do when you are not writing?

Xakara: You can not be writing? How does this thing work? I must look into it. I'm

always writing in my head, but if you mean when my fingers aren't on the keyboard and there's no pen in my hand, I love movies and tv shows. I like the fact that I can experience a world in 60 to 120 minute bites and then get back to my own worlds.

Moon: What are some of your favorite Movies? TV shows?

Xakara: I'm a generous critic, I like a great many things and watch a wide variety of shows. Trying to narrow it down to a few is just crazy. Let's see...I'll start with shows. I seem to have this love of procedurals, medical shows, paranormals and sci-fi. Criminal Minds, CSI:NY, Bones are all great. House is a new one and combines my procedural and medical love. Grey's Anatomy, Private Practice, ER, all great. Then of course the buffet of paranormals and sci-fi: Stargate SG1, Stargate Atlantis, Battlestar Galactica, Eureka, Torchwood, Dr. Who, Supernatural, Ghost Whisperer, Pushing Daisies, Medium, Blood Ties, Journeyman, Reaper...I could go on.

I don't even know where to start with movies....Practical Magic, The Witches of Eastwick, Serenity, Matrix, Pitch Black, Chronicles of Riddick, Equilibrium, Spirited Away, Princess Mononoke, Lost Boys, Interview with the Vampire, Bram Stoker's Dracula...I should stop ther.

Moon: What sorts of things inspire you?

Xakara: Everything. The lyrics to songs, a stray line thrown out in a tv show that my mind takes in another direction, a movie that wasn't what it could have been but came so close. Great books by authors I love or authors I'm learning to love. Everything holds a breath of possibility to inspire me.

Moon: What about the crime/medical stuff do you think fascinates you so much?

Xakara: I could do without the bodies, but I love the process of discovery in crime procedurals and the "touchdown" win of the medical drama. Sometimes the win is in saving the patient, but just as often it's in the growth of the doctor whose character you follow from the beginning. Process and characterization sweeps me up, leaves me wanting more.

Moon: Have you thought about trying your hand at mystery writing?

Xakara: I'm not sure how to answer that. There are ideas that have come to mind where the reader would be taken along on an unraveling mystery, but I don't consider them to be mysteries per se.

Moon: Fair enough. You mentioned songs inspiring you. What sorts of music do you listen to?

Xakara: I actively listen to everything except for country and gangsta rap. And I know a handful of songs in those genres as well.

Moon: That's quite a range. Lots of inspiration to work with there.

Please tell us about what you are working on now, and what things we can expect to be available in the near future.

Xakara: SHIFTING PASSIONS, a paranormal romance set in my Therian World will be coming out February-ish and be available in e-book format through Samhain Publishing. It is currently the only concrete release, while others are pending.

Right now I'm working on the sequel to BloodSprite, along with a reimagining of Arthurian Legend as a poly romance to be released in chapters on my website. I've also started Book 1 of the Angelic Prophecies series, and the third pararomance novella in the Therian World, so I'm rather busy and awed to actually be making progress on everything I'm working on.

Moon: What do you like to read? Who are your favorite authors? And what books growing up influenced you most?

Xakara: I like to read Urban Fantasy, Paranormal Romance, unconventional Horror, some Science Fiction and general Fantasy but the last two I've fallen behind on. Among my favorite authors are Kim Harrison, Rachel Caine, Tanya Huff, Lynsay Sands, Melissa Marr, MaryJanice Davidson, Laurell K. Hamilton, Dean Koontz, Jim Butcher and Stephen King among many.

The books that influenced me the most was The Stand by Stephen King. Wait, let me do that properly, THE STAND by Stephen King. He is now and forever my favorite author, having captured my imagination and never let it go. Firestarter is another book that has stayed with me and forever shaped my ideal of non-mundane beings forced to run and hide from a government and those in a private sector out to get them.

If I had to pick a non King book....The Fifth Sacred Thing by Starhawk.

Moon: Starhawk is a heavily spiritual writer. Do you find your own spiritual views have an effect of you writing?

Xakara: Definitely. I write characters with strong spiritual views, not always those that mirror my own, but those that bring them comfort and that guide them in the decisions they make. I tend toward open, flowing spirituality that allows for a great many viewpoints to be explored while still grounding the character in a strong sense of right and wrong.

Moon: (I can't resist, this is one of my fav DK questions, and I know Xakara will have fun with it) What would your letter to God (or in your case Gaia) say if you were to write one?

Xakara: Dear Goddess, Great job! Wish we were doing more of our own part, but thanks for having the patience to let us catch up. See you at the Solstice. Love,
~X

Moon: Loved that one! What sorts of things are most important to you?

Xakara: In general, honesty, integrity and respect, I want those in all of my dealings with the world. Speaking in specifics, knowing that the people I care about are well and blessed, knowing I've done everything I set out to do or tried my best, and being able to look back on my life and know I fulfilled my purpose are most important to me.

Moon: What challenges have you faced in your writing?

Xakara: My primary challenge so far has been others wanting me to push me in a box. Whether it was based on ethnicity, perceived sexual orientation, assumed religious preference, or something else, there seems to be the need to understand me at a glance and I simply refuse to conform.

Moon: What sorts of new projects would you like to try?

Xakara: Having just kicked off some new projects, I can't answer this without the risk of adding more on a plate already too small for what it's trying to hold.

Moon: Understood. :) As a woman and an author of color, how have these two factors influenced your writing and how it's received?

Xakara: I tend to write multi-cultural character casts, headed by strong women of color. There's the assumption that all of my work must speak to the "Black Experience" or the feminist position of the world. There's this desire to label me and my writing without actually reading it and that's frustrating because my stories are paranormal and thus appeal to fans of the genre no matter their ethnic origins or specific genitalia.

Moon: How has being a bisexual woman influenced your work or how it's accepted within or outside the LGBT community?

Xakara: I tend to lean toward bisexual characters because it's something I identify with and something I find natural to write about. I think it gives the advantage that a reader is likely to find one pairing or another that appeals to them. On the other hand, there are those in and out of the LGBT community who

don't truly believe that bisexuality exists and so I'm rather an invisible construct of possibility that has yet to be proven as far as they are concerned.

Moon: (Knowing how much Xakara likes movies I can't resist this question) If a movie producer said he liked your work and wanted to make a movie out of it, what story would you choose and what actors would you like to see in it?

Xakara: I'd love to see BloodSprite as a movie, but specifically a 4 to 6 hour mini-series rather than a 90 to 120 minute big screen movie. I think that books translate better to mini-series and those new to the story aren't left lost and confused.

Who would I like to see in it? At this point, Jason Behr, just so he was in something that did well.

Moon: What are some of the biggest issues you see within the Paranormal/Urban fantasy genre nowadays? What good things do you want to see more of?

Xakara: I think that there's the misconception that the market is over-saturated when it really has yet to reach level. I know of several readers like myself constantly searching for additional povs on favorite paranormal ideas. Vampires, much like their mythos, just never get old for true fans and you can't have enough different takes on the myth to satisfy hungry readers. I think the best thing to come out of the Paranormal/Urban Fantasy genre is the play with sexuality. There seems to be a greater acceptance of homoerotic themes in Para/UF due to the fact that the reader has already opened themselves to the otherness of the world. It leaves something like same-sex attraction as the normal part of what is happening with the backdrop of vampires and shapeshifters and such.

Moon: Your first book is being published through Samhain, correct? Tell us how that came to be and what signing that contract felt like.

Xakara: Being published by Samhain was blessed serendipity. I was blog-hopping to clear my mind from edits on BLOODSPRITE and I saw mention of Samhain in an entry. I went to check them out on name alone and found an open call for an anthology. I wanted to try my hand at something else within my Therian World but without the scope of BLOODSPRITE. I didn't make the cut for the antho, but I was passed along to another editor who offered to buy SHIFTING PASSIONS. Signing that contract was surreal. It felt natural in that it was the conclusion all my hard work was headed toward; but it came so quickly that I barely had time to really take it in that someone wanted to publish what I'd written. I think it'll stay overwhelming for a long time to come regardless of how many projects I have come out in the next little while.

Moon: What things in your life get in the way of your writing the most?

Xakara: The chronic insomnia is the number one thing that interferes with writing. There is a certain flavor that being tired lends to my writing, as my mind is so near a dream state. But there's a point where tired gives way to exhaustion and I can't write a word from that place of running on empty.

Moon: What advice do you have for new writers?

Xakara: Don't consider learning your craft as a destination. It's a journey and if you stay open to learning, you'll end up taking in new things all the time that deepen your perspective and allow for your writing to flourish.

Moon: What tools do you think all authors should possess and hone to be good at their craft?

Xakara: I think that you're doomed to fail if you attempt to write in someone else's voice. You can't do another author better than they do themselves, you have to find your own voice and then hone how you convey that voice to best effect. I don't want to be the "next anything", I want to be the best me I can be as a writer because that's what's needed. My voice and viewpoint are what set me apart and exploring that difference is what will bring readers back time and again. Find good critique partners, willing beta readers, and read everything you can in your genre of choice then fine and nurture your voice and view in that genre.

For more about Xakara you can visit her website. She also has a wonderful blog called the Storyweaver's Web that she updates often as well as being a member of the Samhain community of writers: Beyond the Veil.

Come take a peek at Bloodsprite, you'll be glad you did.