

Geek Out! Library Con 2023 Presenter/Vendor bios

Presenters

Authors:

KJ Backer: K.J. Backer (b. 1986), originally from Oregon, is an American writer, wife, mother, teacher, singer, and world traveler who currently resides in Montana.

K.J. began writing *Nav'Aria* while substitute teaching and then continued while working as a high school history teacher. In 2017, she "retired" from teaching to begin her journey to motherhood through adoption. She credits her writing inspiration to her miracle daughter, able to relate to her characters and book (with adoption themes) in a new way. The words flowed and *Nav'Aria: The Marked Heir* released in 2019, followed by *Nav'Aria: The Pyre of Tarsin*, and the final book, *Nav'Aria: The Winged Crescent*.

Since then, K.J. went back and taught high school history for one year ('20-'21), and then began writing a new series for a younger audience. One her daughter, friends' kids, and students could read filled with adventure, funny animal antics, and heartwarming moments of love and friendship along the way. *The Legend of Tiny Tails* is the first of the Pet Legends series which published in 2022. *The Legend of the Colosseo Cat* just released in August 2023.

Besides writing, K.J. loves chatting with readers and encouraging others to chase after their big dreams. She also reads a freakish amount of Fantasy, eats way too much pizza, randomly decided to run a marathon in 2021 and survived, enjoys binge-watching shows with her hubby, and spends far too much time talking to her pets. Though she loves doing many things, nothing makes her happier than spending time with her husband, daughter, two pomeranians, chihuahua, senior rescue dog, and tortoise (oh, and some fish too).

Follow Backer at kjbacker.com to learn more about her exciting Fantasy series, *Nav'Aria*-- intended for mature audiences--and her Middle Grade Pet Adventure Series, *Pet Legends*, intended for kids ages 8-12, families, and animal lovers everywhere!

Jonathan Fetter-Vorm: Jonathan Fetter-Vorm is an author and artist. His first book, *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb* was selected by the American Library Association as a Best Graphic Novel for Teens in 2013 and has been translated into half a dozen languages. His other books include *Battle Lines: A Graphic History of the Civil War*, co-authored with historian Ari Kelman, and the Eisner Award nominated *Moonbound: Apollo 11 and the Dream of Spaceflight*. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Slate*, and *Guernica*. Jonathan lives with his wife and son in Montana.

Tahani Nelson: Tahani Nelson is an author and English teacher in Billings, Montana. With hundreds of 5-star reviews and an ever-growing army of Faoii at her back, Nelson has become a common attendee at author events, Renaissance festivals, news programs, and conventions across the US-- always wearing full armor and a face resplendent with warpaint. While her most notable appearances have been at the

Indie Audiobook Awards and Fantasycon discussion panels, she most frequently gives presentations about empowerment and creating strong, healthy female role models in modern media.

Almedia Ryan: Almedia Ryan was born and raised in Southeast Texas, spending most of her early years barefoot and exploring the outdoors. Her love of nature took her to the beautiful state of Montana, where she now lives with her husband, two children, and a spoiled rotten husky named Boulder. She used her education of art and dance to teach art to special needs students and as a performance arts choreographer for public schools. After one too many dance injuries, she left teaching and hung up her dancing shoes so she could dive back into another passion—writing.

Mike Thayer, author of *The Double Life of Danny Day*, is a proud father of three, lucky husband of one, passionate author, budding podcaster, lifelong gamer, viral blogger, degreed engineer, decent impressionist, inept hunter, erstwhile jock, and nerd. He has cast a ring on the slopes of Mt. Doom, eaten a feast at the Green Dragon Inn, cemented Excalibur in a sandstone block, tasted butter beer at Diagon Alley, built a secret door to his storage room, and written a few fantasy books. What else is left, really?

M.H. Van Keuren once quit a perfectly good job to write science fiction in Montana. He is the author of 5 books, including *Rhubarb*, *Gnatz!*, and *Trash: A Love Story*. His trilogy, the *Vanilla Cycle*, includes *Legitimacy*, *Belief*, and the soon to be published *Impetus*. He lives with his wife in Billings.

Presenters:

Andrea Vacek/Bluebird Sweets: Bluebird Sweets got its start in 2013 from a dessert contest held at Andrea's former workplace. She won by doing the "rainbow inside" cake you see all over Pinterest. She had no aspirations to be a cake decorator at the time, but the thrill of making delicious food for friends and family sparked an interest in cooking.

Sugar artistry has given Andrea a creative outlet and provided me rich opportunities to meet new people and make their events even more special. Better yet, it provides the opportunity to work from home and be there, day to day, for her three littles. Bluebird Sweets is truly a small family business.

Dan from Crooked Line Studio: Daniel Granger (Doodlen Dan) Hi there! I am an artist here in Billings, Montana. I grew up in Sheridan, Wyoming. I traveled around the U.S.A after graduating high school and moved to Billings in 2018. I am a dreamer and very passionate. My life mission is not only to survive life but to thrive! I want to live passionately, compassionately, with lots of humor, and some original style. I hope that my life work helps others connect, discover themselves, and leave the world better than how they found it. I am on a personal mission to create a positive impact by helping inspire others to get curious and do more of what they love. My goal is to help the community live with passion, connection, and vibrancy. My overall motive and ambition to 'Create More Art and Connect More People' comes from a deep heart-felt idea that we can all become anything we desire IF we get curious about the world

around us, chase those little nuggets of curiosity, and see where those nuggets take us (and who they connect us with along the way).

Come draw some fun silly characters with me!

At ***Crooked Line Studio***, we have fun while practicing being in the moment, pushing through self-imposed limits and quieting our fears about creating art. Experience the pure joy of creating without the fear of failure. We offer a wide variety of fun art classes and painting events for the first-time, aspiring and experienced artist taught by professionals. *No rules - No Mistakes - No Judgment.*

Haan Puppets: Samantha Pfeifer started making puppets while attending college at Rocky Mountain College. She immediately fell in love with the craft. She started making puppets under her business name Haan Puppets. Since then, she has made countless puppets, taught many kids about puppets, and has been a puppet master for a handful of shows both in Billings and beyond. Her next big project is writing and performing with her friend, Brianna West, along with the Billings Symphony in January. Follow her Instagram @HaanPuppets to get updates on her latest work.

Kaoru Mori works in Montana State University Billings as Japan Outreach Initiative (JOI) Coordinator. She was born and raised in Wakayama, Japan. JOI promotes awareness and understanding of Japan in the US with plentiful Japan-related activities and opportunities for exchange cultures. She hopes to provide many kinds of Japanese cultural outreach activities and foster strong relationships between Montana and Japan. For Library Con, she will be giving a Pikachu Origami Workshop! Manga and Anime are popular Japanese pop culture. Let's learn the history of manga, famous anime and onomatopoeia used in manga, and make Pikachu with origami paper together!

Wise Wonders: Stop by Wise Wonders booth at LibraryCon. Our 14-18 year old Robotics team will be bringing you all things STEAM. Did you know you can play music on bananas, blow rings out of smoke, make a cloud in a bottle or program legos to move? We will show you how!

Our mission at Wise Wonders Science and Discovery Museum is to engage curious, creative, and scientific minds in a playful learning environment for all children and families. Central to this mission is supporting STEM education through fun and interactive exhibits that support learning through play. Come see us Tuesday through Saturday 10am-5pm @ 30242nd Ave North.

Groups:

The 501st Legion: "...The 501st Legion is an international costuming organization dedicated to celebrating STAR WARS™ through the creation and use of quality costumes that portray the villainous, morally ambiguous, or non-partisan characters from the STAR WARS™ universe. The Legion promotes interest in STAR WARS and facilitates the use of these costumes for STAR WARS-related events as well as contributes to the local community through costumed charity and volunteer work..." -Article I of the 501st Legion charter

The Mandalorian Mercs: The Mandalorian Mercs Costume Club is an international STAR WARS™ costuming organization dedicated to celebrating the STAR WARS™ universe through the creation, display, and wearing of quality character costumes that represent the Mandalorian characters and culture from the STAR WARS™ sagas.

The MMCC unites individuals with a common love for STAR WARS™ and the Mandalorian culture/characters while encouraging self-improvement, personal growth, family involvement, and fellowship with peers.

The MMCC promotes interest in STAR WARS™ and facilitates the use of these costumes for STAR WARS™-related events as well as contributing to the local community through costumed charity and volunteer work. *-from the Mandalorian Mercs charter*

The Rebel Legion: The mission of The Rebel Legion is threefold. First, we offer the costume enthusiast of the Star Wars hero characters a global community to enjoy, express, and share their costume talents. Secondly, the Legion also promotes the quality and improvement of Star Wars costumes. Thirdly and most importantly, we follow the lead of Lucasfilm Ltd. by giving back to the community through works of charity and volunteerism. *-from the Rebel Legion charter*

Star Wars Panel: *This is the Way: Star Wars Costuming Clubs and Creating Screen Accurate Armor* This panel introduces the different Lucasfilm recognized costuming clubs including the Beskar Gett'se Clan of the Mandalorian Mercs, the 501st Legion, and the Rebel Legion and discusses the differences between each club. Members will share different examples of armor and the techniques used in their creation, some general story-telling, and time at the end for Q&A!

The Barony of Bronzehelm (Billings, Montana) is a medieval re-creation group which exists within the Kingdom of Artemisia as part of a world wide organization known as the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). Education and research of all aspects of medieval life is our focus. Members of the group enjoy activities such as armored combat, rapier combat, sewing, needlework, cooking and illumination.

Bronzehelm was founded in the winter of 1982 and became a Barony in January 2018. We currently host several events within our borders, including our birthday event, 12th Night, which takes place in January, an Arts & Sciences event known as Schola held in May, and Conquest of the Wastelands--our local WAR--takes place in August. We also participate in local events such as the Montana Renaissance Faire.

For further information regarding the barony and our activities, please visit our website at Bronzehelm.org or our Facebook page under Barony of Bronzehelm. For information on the SCA as a whole, please visit their website at SCA.org

The Council of Westmarch-A Montana Smial of The Tolkien Society

The Council of Westmarch (TCofW) is a Montana-based, not-for-profit group dedicated to the appreciation and study of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, and is an official Smial of the UK Tolkien Society. TCofW meets regularly (typically monthly) to discuss and celebrate Professor Tolkien's writings in a spirit of fellowship, and strives to promote interest in his works. We also have celebratory events, public engagements, and participate in larger community events when applicable.

Delorean Club of Montana- Our group is full of several Montana DeLorean owners as well as fans of the car. We use the group to coordinate gatherings and events. We are simply a group of passionate delorean owners that are keeping John DeLorean's dream alive.

Vendors:

Billings Best Balloons: Hello! My name is Violet Mentzer. My husband and I have been making balloon art in the Billings Community for close to a decade. I specialize in large scale decor and entertainment, and am always up for trying something new!

I am most excited for Comic Con at the Library because I love being challenged to make people their favorite characters, out of twisting balloons. This event is going to be amazing and I am so excited to perform next to so many great businesses, authors and artists! See you on September 30th!

This House of Books: This House of Books, named in honor of Ivan Doig's seminal memoir This House of Sky, is a member-owned, indie bookstore in the heart of downtown Billings. In addition to books, THoB sells toys, board games, puzzles, journals, and other gift items. We love our local library, and we are thrilled to be part of Library Con 2023!

Dandelion Fluff Leatherwork: I love leatherwork. I make bags, masks, cosplay items, book covers, gaming accessories, backpacks and more. My favorite things I've made are custom high top sneakers and a large Mimic chest from D&D.

Dragon Egg Games, Billing's premier source for Magic: The Gathering, has walls full of games, trading cards, miniatures, books, paints, dice, and so much more (including an awesome snack area). There are tons of tables ready for you to play our shelf of demo games, Friday night Magic Gatherings, or a new Saturday Board game night. Find the store on Instagram @dragon_egg_games or visit their website, <https://www.dragon-egg-games.com/>

Needy Creature Crochet: Hello, I'm Serena Cuts The Rope the creator for Needy Creature Crochet. My work includes plushies, bags and hats! When most people think of crochet it's blankets and socks, but for me, it's amigurumi and magical hats that make you feel a part of Middle Earth. I love giving the opportunity to people to have a piece of work that makes their inner child thrive!

McTee Crafts makes a variety of handmade items including fabric hair clips/bands, faux leather earrings, necklaces, table runners, felt plushies, and wooden crafts. I have a few items that I upcycle candle jars and wine bottle lights. I can also make custom orders if there is a certain style or character you want.