

2024

Royal Palm Literary Award Winners

Grand Awards

Published Book of the Year

Strange Timing: A Story From the Files of Alexander Strange by J.C. Bruce

Alexander Strange has an unusual guardian angel. She's from the future. And she needs his help. J.C. Bruce is a Florida journalist and author of The Strange Files series of mysterious adventures, which features Alexander Strange, America's only full-time reporter covering news of the weird.

Runners-Up:

1st Runner-Up: **The Lost Dresses of Italy** by M.A. McLaughlin

2nd Runner-Up: **The Gullwing Colony** by Antonio Simon, Jr.

3rd Runner-Up: **The Hidden History of Amelia Island** by Jeff Suwak

4th Runner-Up: **Searching for Lilly** by Eugene R. Milhizer

Unpublished Book of the Year

Before the Thunder by Katherine Nelson-Born

After a 1972 ambush of New Orleans police, two teenagers with special powers foresee another mass shooting plus bombs and inhuman creatures and collaborate to stop a supernatural race war. Katherine Nelson-Born's New Orleans roots flavor writing refined in MFA and PhD studies and now seasoned by decades as a Floridian, serving as Northwest Florida Poet Laureate 2020-2023.

Runners-Up:

1st Runner-Up: **The Whispering Chamber** by Chet Meisner

2nd Runner-Up: **Rainbow Shakes the Tree** by Susan Dobson

3rd Runner-Up: **The Reality Rescue** by David M. Pearce

4th Runner-Up: **All the Gray In Between** by Aimee Hill

Children's Book of the Year

Dressing for Dreamtime by J.E. Rogers

Two young lizard friends in the Outback of Australia want to wear their best for the Dreamtime ceremony. They discover that enhancing their natural markings may not be the answer. Jeanne E. Rogers is an award-winning author who writes under the pseudonym J.E. Rogers. By anthropomorphizing unusual animals, she teaches children about endangered animals and environmental issues.

Best Short Prose of the Year

Five O'Clock Shadows by Scott Rosch

On the morning of his family-mandated move to assisted living, Gus McKendree slips away. He retraces his boyhood footsteps across an unrecognizable North Florida landscape, searching his fragmented life for meaning.

Scott Rosch is an award-winning writer of fiction. His third book, Alligator Jacks, won the 2023 RPLA Gold for best unpublished suspense thriller. Appalachian State University, N.C. State University, BSME.

Best Poem of the Year

A Later-in-Life Love by Steve Biersdorf

A nostalgic turn about meeting the right person later in life and riding it out together to the end.

Steve Biersdorf has written professionally as a general assignment reporter, editorial writer, PR flak, freelance grant writer, fiction writer, and poet. He is a resident of Gulf Breeze, FL, and an alum of Florida State University.

NextGen Writing Excellence Award

Mitten's Story by Charlotte Ledwell

The childhood story of my pet feral cat, Mittens.

Charlotte enjoys art, reading, and writing. She loves drawing tiny people or animals and making little stories about them.

This award was established in memory of Candice Coghill, an active member of the Florida Writers Association and a youth writing advocate. She was instrumental in the establishment of FWA's Youth program.

Genre Awards

Published Book-Length Fiction

Blended Genre

Gold – **The Murder Plague** by Scott Michael Powers. An engineered virus spreads from a research lab, causing infected people to go into psychotic, homicidal rages. A small cadre of scientists rebel against establishment protocols to stop it.

Silver – **Rem's Chance** by Dave J. Andrae. Rem seeks a way forward to a better day.

Fantasy

Gold – **The Gullwing Colony** by Antonio Simon, Jr. Hapless messenger Marco Gullwing is pressed into a guerilla war against ruthless pirates dead-set on turning his friends' island kingdom into a tacky beach resort.

Historical Fiction

Gold – **The Lost Dresses of Italy** by M.A. McLaughlin. Two women's stories of love and deceit intertwine nearly a hundred years apart within Verona, Italy, in this rich, atmospheric historical novel.

Mainstream or Literary

Gold – **Neena Lee Is Seeing Things** by Sheila Athens. The last thing Neena needs is to start seeing things, but then JFK, Jr. asks for her help. The problem is that he's been dead for twenty-five years.

Silver – **Seeking Sarah** by M.A. Robinson. Don is shocked to discover his wife Sarah's secret life after her death from alcoholism. Can his efforts bring peace to himself or to Sarah's restless soul?

Bronze - **Godspeed, Cedar Key** by Michael Presley Bobbitt. When a flash of human derangement

topples civilizations around the world, a tiny island in the Gulf of Mexico leans on community and the wisdom of its ancestors to survive.

Mystery or Crime

Gold – **Searching for Lilly** by Eugene R. Milhizer. This joins a very small number of novels detailing the inner workings of a court case that work just as well as a gripping page-turner or as the basis for an entire course on criminal law or professional responsibility.

Silver – **Bones Under the Ice** by Mary Ann Miller. While sledding, two boys find a hand sticking up in the snow.

Bronze – **In the Crosshairs: The Body on Leffis Key** by M.S. Spencer. Someone is killing people with a crossbow—who will be next?

Novella

Gold – **Dark Days on Bear Creek, The Depression Years, 1929-1939** by Harry T. Barnes. This is the story of the author’s family surviving the Great Depression in the Appalachian Mountains of Western Maryland as told by the author’s parents and grandparents.

Romance

Gold – **The Road Home** by Carol J. Post. She believes he started the fire that left her scarred. Her accusations got him run out of town. Now he’s back. Can they uncover the truth and find reconciliation?

Science Fiction

Gold – **Strange Timing: A Story From the Files of Alexander Strange** by J.C Bruce. Alexander Strange has an unusual guardian angel. She's from the future. And she needs his help.

Silver – **The Feather’s Push** by Noel Zamot. A woman who can alter emotions by touch and is being pursued by brainwashed fanatics must ally with her former target, racing to discover the reason for their shared affliction.

Thriller or Suspense

Gold – **Strange Timing: A Story From the Files of Alexander Strange** by J.C Bruce. Alexander Strange has an unusual guardian angel. She's from the future. And she needs his help.

Silver – **Killer State of Mind** by Dr. Leanna Floyd. Dr. Brooke Douger has just learned that her childhood friend and one true love, Jacob Connor, is the notorious Surfside Killer. Will Brooke see through the surface of lies and events before it is too late? To stop her evil adversary, does she dare put herself in a killer state of mind?

Bronze – **Mia’s Journey** by Diane Byington. Astronaut Mia Gray is involved in a serious car accident that ends her career at NASA, but she is determined to go to space, regardless of the risks.

Women's Fiction

Gold – **The Disappeared** by Rebecca J. Sanford. Inspired by the real mothers and grandmothers who spoke out against Argentina's military dictatorship, *The Disappeared* is a story about identity, family secrets, and those who endured decades of hardship to expose the truth.

Silver – **Not So Little Things** by Kyle Ann Robertson. Haunted by childhood memories, Tina Edwards, a successful miniaturist with a thriving business, must confront family secrets and unravel the truth about her father's death when her estranged mother resurfaces, forcing Tina to reevaluate her life, identity, and the sacrifices made by the women who raised her.

Bronze – **Neena Lee Is Seeing Things** by Sheila Athens. The last thing Neena needs is to start seeing things, but then JFK, Jr. asks for her help. The problem is that he's been dead for twenty-five years.

Young Adult or New Adult

Gold – **The Dead Can Be Stubborn** by L.H. Davis III. We can be friends as long as you promise to never forget I'm dead. I don't want to be friends with some creepy guy who is in love with a dead girl.

Unpublished Book-Length Fiction

Blended Genre

Gold – **Before the Thunder** by Katherine Nelson-Born. After a 1972 ambush of New Orleans police, two teenagers with special powers foresee another mass shooting plus bombs and inhuman creatures and collaborate to stop a supernatural race war.

Silver – **All The Gray In Between** by Aimee Hill. When two abusive mothers turn up dead in a small Florida town, a young psychologist must make life-altering decisions and untangle a web of deceit before another client dies.

Bronze – **London Knot** by K.M. Stull. In an alternative present London, a young worker and his two new employers travel the boundaries of friendship and what it means to be free in their stratified system.

Fantasy

Gold – **Handsome and Hideous** by Maria Fox. In this gender-reversed *Beauty and the Beast*, a prince must help a sorceress break a curse. Yet when he brings her to his kingdom, will her magic protect or destroy?

Silver – **Witch's Daughter** by Kevin Murphy. If you had to kill your mother to save your town, would you?

Historical Fiction

Gold – **Blood of the Inkas** by Madeline Izzo. An Inka princess fights to survive the greed and violence of the Spanish conquest. After losing everyone she loves, will she harden her heart or redefine her place in the world?

Silver – **All The Broken Angels** by Pat Black-Gould and Steve Hardiman. As the Vietnam War rages, tensions flare between peacenik Cate and her cousin Albie, who is gung-ho for God and country and can't wait until he graduates so he can enlist.

Mainstream or Literary

Gold – **My Life in So Many Words** by Tom LaMarr. Newly widowed, Maggie inherits a mystery: how prestigious orchestras knew of her husband's magnificent new music when she did not. What will her quest reveal about trust, love, and truth?

Silver – **The Last Verse** by Eric Kline. Miles Cooper is assigned to neutralize Molly Barlow, a wanted ISIS terrorist. Yet when he meets her, he determines she is an innocent target and agrees to help her find justice.

Bronze – **Anhinga** by Lynn Taylor. Nora Bennet, a veteran journalist from Atlanta, arrives in Anhinga, Florida, to investigate a legal battle over the ownership of a Black cemetery and uncovers more than she ever anticipated.

Mystery or Crime

Gold – **Rainbow Shakes the Tree** by Susan Dobson. Thirty years after a fertility scandal separates triplets, the siblings' paths collide, and strangers-turned-allies join forces to expose the twisted roots of their family tree and bring their biological father to justice.

Silver – **West Texas Nightmare** by Frances Hight and Mark McWaters. Someone is murdering young Native American girls around Midland, Texas, and posing them as grotesque clues, with fingers fixed in place and pointing at something in the distance.

Bronze – **The Body in the Malibran Theater** by Barbara Marangon. A mummy is found in the Malibran Theater in Venice during a restoration. A detective and professor are called to discover the woman's identity and how she died.

Novelette

Gold – **Bloodhound** by Mark McWaters. Imagine you could find anyone on earth, anytime. Zac McWilliams has an app for that. He's bet his life it works. Some very bad people want him to prove it.

Silver – **Bad Things Happen in the Dark** by Nicci Rothe. A high school girl is molested by her English teacher. She is blamed for the incident, but can her science-fiction-loving friend help?

Novella

Gold – **Five O'Clock Shadows** by Scott Rosch. On the morning of his family-mandated move to assisted living, Gus McKendree slips away, retracing his boyhood footsteps across an unrecognizable North Florida landscape, searching his fragmented life for meaning.

Silver – **Policewoman: Redux** by Steve Biersdorf. A fun, poignant, and irreverent story about the first patrolwoman with a Florida coastal police department.

Romance

Gold – **Those Who Can, Date** by Barbara Meyers. When dating coach Kellar Kennedy accidentally lands on top of The Sexiest Man Alive, the paparazzi goes crazy, and a brilliant idea is born.

Silver – **The Elevator Glitch** by Cassandra Alexander. When Vivian begs the universe for a do-over after a failed investor event, she never expects to spend the repeating days with her former college sweetheart.

Bronze – **Return To Me** by Stephen Leitschuh. Marco is not happy when his wife Jen, who is an Army reservist, is called up to serve in Afghanistan.

Science Fiction

Gold – **The Whispering Chamber** by Chet Meisner. The world's foremost expert in artificial intelligence and his ex-Marine wife are hunted as terrorists in a world where technology blurs the distinctions between humans, genetics, and intelligent computer programs.

Silver – **The Reality Rescue** by David M. Pearce. When a fanatical group of robots kidnaps a child, reality show director Ian MacIntyre must lead his group of actors in a rescue.

Bronze – **Planet of Souls** by C.P. Swift. A dying energy healer enlists a down-on-his-luck galactic medic to transport her to a distant planet where souls don't pass on.

Thriller or Suspense

Gold – **Saving Grace** by Richard Drummer. The greatest challenge for Grace Cummings will be to solve her own murder.

Silver – **Zeruzeru** by L. Reynolds Andiric. This is a story about the plights of albinism in Tanzania—the prevalence in the overall population and the superstitions that involve the spirit world. Persons with this genetic disability are continually threatened or in peril.

Bronze – **Blue Magic on Mushroom Island** by David C. Edmonds. Adriana Alvarado, an American journalist in Nicaragua, falls into a dangerous spiral of romance, murder, and magic mushrooms on an island populated with runaway criminals and inmates from a mental institution.

Women's Fiction

Gold – **Chasing Shiny Objects** by Marisa Glassman. CHASING SHINY OBJECTS is contemporary women's fiction about a young lawyer who must defeat her cheating ex-fiance's lawsuit so she can fulfill her dad's dreams and save his reputation.

Young Adult or New Adult

Gold – **Planet of Outcasts, Moon Crusher 2** by Susan Kite. Diego and his friend are forced to assassinate leaders of the Seressin Empire. There is one chance to thwart the plot, but it will exile him on a remote planet.

Silver – **The Megaclub Soldiers** by Colleen Mueller. Shannon Marks and her two best friends are whisked away from New York to the magical land of Cardronia and must stop an artificial army

of Megaclub Soldiers from destroying their new home.

Published Book-Length Nonfiction

Autobiography or Memoir

Gold – **Lost the Plot: Finding Our Story in a Confusing World** by David S. Wisener. How do we make sense of life? What's our identity? Weaving deeply personal experiences with explorations of concepts like perception and love, the book offers unique insight into the struggles and questions we face in understanding life and what it means to be human.

Silver – **Exiled, A Refugee's Story** by Kenneth R. Overman. Between 1960 and 1962, over 14,000 unaccompanied Cuban minors fled Castro's Cuba to the open arms of America's Catholic Refugee Services in Miami. The children were known as Pedro Pans, and this is one story.

Educational or Informational

Gold – **Everglades: Exploring a Wetland like No Other** by Anne Edge Ake. Explore the vast Everglades ecosystem--its history, environmental significance, flora and fauna, invasive species, current issues, and its importance to the South Florida economy and water supply.

History

Gold – **The Hidden History of Amelia Island** by Jeff Suwak. Beneath the sands and cobblestones of Amelia Island lies a richness of history disproportionate to its small size. Characters strange, dreadful, and inspiring have left their mark in this island's psychic currents dead in some ways, still here in others. Let's find them.

Unpublished Book-Length Nonfiction

History

Gold – **She Soars: Trailblazing Female Pilots in Florida** by Bridges DelPonte. This anthology profiles fourteen pioneering women pilots, either native Floridians or others drawn to the state's sunny skies, who chalked up impressive distance, altitude, speed, aerobatic, military, and space records.

Published and Unpublished Literature for Youth

Published Children's Picture Book

Gold – **Grandpa Heaven** by Shutta Crum. Grandpas in Grandpa Heaven tell jokes, tinker, bowl, and have pet mammoths. Best of all, they keep watch on the grandchildren of Earth, reassuring young worriers that love never dies.

Silver – **Diego the Donkey by Lolisa Marie Monroe**. Diego is a sad little donkey who cannot find one animal on the farm that he can understand. Will he ever find someone who speaks his language?

Unpublished Children's Picture Book

Gold – **Avery and Goober** by Colleen Reiser Heitmann. Avery's bulging-eyed goldfish won't stop staring at her, and she can't stand it. Will Goober have to spend his life in the closet?

Silver – **Just Enough Room for Christmas** by Robin Currie. Bethlehem Barn has just enough room for Old Hannah, the Cow. In this cumulative tale, cold drives more animals inside, creating a

rollicking racket. Knock! A man and woman enter.

Bronze – **Cone and Skate** by Amy Nicolai. Cone (a forgotten construction cone) is comfortable in her usual spot by the road, but things change when Skate (a skateboard) arrives, taking Cone on the wildest ride.

Published Early Reader or Chapter Book

Gold – **Dressing for Dreamtime** by J.E. Rogers. Two young lizard friends in the Outback of Australia want to wear their best for the Dreamtime ceremony. They discover that enhancing their natural markings may not be the answer.

Silver – **Brothers & Sisters: Friends and Foes** by Sue O’Halloran. A bird saves a family from being lost at sea, siblings bicker over who does the most work, and twin boys compete to be named chief of their clan.

Unpublished Early Reader or Chapter Book

Gold – **Moving Madison: A Texas Love Story** by Frances Hight. Madison had the perfect life in Santa Barbara with her beloved horse, Bailey. But when she's forced to move to Texas and leave Bailey, she finds an even greater love.

Published Middle-Grade Fiction

Gold – **If You Meet the Devil, Don't Shake Hands** by Sylvia Whitman. Military kid Gavin Baker has every worry covered until he meets his friend’s roguish grandfather and discovers that the worst trickery imaginable can sometimes bring out the best in people.

Silver – **Dog Days: An I, Clawed Adventure** by Cindy Foley. After he's injured by a dog terrorizing the woods, all Clawed can do is dream about his favorite spot. When lizards and cats come together, Clawed discovers that having friends who can forgive bullies may be his best medicine.

Bronze – **Chocolate Andy** by John Hope. Andy has a strange condition: his skin produces chocolate. Andy and his fellow preteens must escape the ex-mayor to fix Andy’s affliction before the entire town is infected.

Anthology

Published Anthology Poetry or Prose

Gold – **Popcorn Icons and Other Poems Celebrating Movies** by Linda Kraus. The anthology of poems is a love letter to cinema as well as to its inherent problems and complexities.

Silver – **If It Comes To That** by Marc Frazier. If It Comes to That explores an individual’s search for identity within and without the bonds of a relationship.

Bronze – **Bone Geometry** by Katherine Nelson-Born. Readers experience a deep-south journey through poems rich in folklore, ancestral tales, bayous, swamps, and cemeteries, finding the beauty in being broken and the healing power of poetry.

Published & Unpublished Creative Nonfiction

Published Creative Nonfiction

Gold – **The Shoe, A Cuban Girl's First Days in The U.S.A.** by Amarilys Gacio Rassler. First days in the U.S. are very hard for an eleven-year-old girl who escapes Cuba without her parents. But a much-disliked shoe provides a new perspective.

Unpublished Creative Nonfiction

Gold – **Black Scholarship** by Loren Leith. Through grit and determination, a 21-year-old student acquires a college scholarship, though one not meant for a girl like her.

Silver – **The Guilt Trip** by Bethanie Gorny. A mother and her adult son set off on a road trip together to Chicago where he is starting a new life. During their time together the mother learns the truth about a misconception she has held for thirty-three years.

Published & Unpublished Short Entries

Published Poetry

Gold – **Chelyabinsk-65** by Steve Biersdorf. Graphic depiction of a post-nuclear production site in the Soviet Union.

Unpublished Poetry

Gold – **A Later-in-Life Love** by Steve Biersdorf. A nostalgic turn about meeting the right person later in life and riding it out together to the end.

Silver – **The Four Seasons** by Kenneth Boyd. Four short ekphrastic poems.

Bronze – **Pilgrimage** by Karen Wilson. A elderly woman decides to take a creative writing class at the local community center. The instructor tells the class to write a short poem about aging.

Unpublished Short Story

Gold – **Soulmate** by Jackie Fenn. Awakening In an afterlife unlike anything she imagined, a woman navigates her new world while coming to terms with a haunting secret from her past.

Silver – **I Have More Questions** by Kate Newton. A young woman's lifelong trait of curiosity is put to the test when she learns her boyfriend is keeping secrets.

Bronze – **Connection** by Jane Ellen Freeman. A ghost wanders historic McMurrin Hall in Shepherdstown, WV, waiting and watching. A woman enters the hall nearly 150 years after his death. Finally, she has arrived.

Unpublished Flash Fiction or Short-Short Fiction

Gold – **A Fortune Cookie for Breakfast** by Sharon Ketts. An undecided Claire must make a choice about the rest of her life, and a leftover from her takeout dinner guides her decision.

Silver – **Shadow of a Doubt** by Barbara Rein. She wanted to believe her nightmare from childhood was just her imagination. What else could it be?

Bronze – **A Lunchtime Indiscretion** by Clayton Hutcheson. Senior boys in high school, a car, a box of explosives, and an hour at lunchtime. What could possibly go wrong?

NextGen Awards

Unpublished Short Fiction – Age 9-11

Gold – **Mitten’s Story** by Charlotte Ledwell. The childhood story of my pet feral cat, Mittens.

Unpublished Poetry – Age 16-17

Gold – Her Words by Andrea Malca. Facing seclusion, a young woman's voice may falter, yet her words persist, leading her spirit onward.