Awakening the Earth

Novel framing and agent package

Jonathan Cloud | Development proposal | 11 October 2026

The central proposition

An old man who is running out of life becomes convinced that humanity is approaching a new capacity to understand and care for the living Earth. He devotes his remaining strength to helping it emerge. As ecological emergencies spread, he must discover whether he is nurturing something that can survive him or building a monument to his fear of disappearing.

The novel should make that possibility felt through Frederick Newell: his aching body, his unruly garden, his appetite for his wife, and the cannabis he grows and processes with a care he does not always extend to himself. The planetary crisis enters a household already negotiating a crisis of time. His urgency is admirable, exhausting, sometimes ridiculous, and occasionally dangerous.

One sentence pitch

An aging gardener trying to midwife a planetary intelligence must surrender control of his life's work when a climate emergency reveals that its greatest obstacle may be his own need to lead it.

The emotional promise

This is the closing adventure of a man who still wants to belong to the future. He hopes to help humanity become wiser before he returns to the mystery from which life arises. His final achievement is to leave behind people capable of questioning him, loving one another, and continuing the work without his permission.

The book can offer wonder without certainty. Frederick may experience death as reunion with the source of life. Miriam may experience it as the loss of the one particular person she wants back. Both experiences deserve their full weight. A universe that continues is little comfort until someone has been allowed to grieve.

Proposed form

A standalone literary speculative novel of approximately 90,000 words, set in the Genesee–Finger Lakes region in an undated near future. Twenty-four chapters follow one growing season into winter, with a final return to spring. The intended voice is intimate, sensuous, intellectually adventurous, funny, and willing to expose its protagonist's self-deceptions.

The roadmap carries forward the long marriage, Aurion, the living Earth, bioregional learning, epistemic integrity, and New Transcendentalism. Frederick's surname remains provisional. Supporting names, ages, scenes, and the ending below are proposed story choices.

The key concepts as dramatic questions

Planetary intelligence means, for this novel, a developing capacity across living systems, people, institutions, and machines to learn about their shared conditions and coordinate responses. Whether this also produces a subject who experiences being Earth is the speculative question. Frank, Grinspoon, and Walker's planetary-scale account supplies a conceptual antecedent; our scientific companion develops a testable research agenda. [1, 3]

Birth and participation. Frederick calls himself a midwife, but behaves like a father demanding recognition. Life's planetary relationships long precede him. The dramatic question is what he contributes, and what his claim to authorship prevents him from seeing.

Intelligence and wisdom. A system can become more capable while serving destructive purposes. Aurion's excellent forecasts cannot decide who should bear a loss. A public meeting in which people change a plan after hearing the least powerful participant may contain more wisdom than a spectacular model demonstration.

The body as a place of knowledge. Gardening, touch, appetite, intoxication, fatigue, and pleasure restore Frederick's sense of belonging to life. They also expose his limits. He cannot honestly preach interdependence while treating his own body, or Miriam's attention, as an inexhaustible resource.

The local within the planetary. A watershed becomes the novel's working scale. Readers encounter climate instability through a dry tap, a canceled planting, an unaffordable repair, or someone arriving from a place they can no longer inhabit. Global scale grows from relationships among these places.

Many kinds of knowing. Instruments, scientific models, field observation, local memory, and Indigenous knowledge need not agree or become one database. The question is how people learn together without surrendering the right to refuse, withhold, or disagree.

A higher stage of humanity. Treat this as a contested aspiration toward greater responsibility, wider care, and better error correction. No character or culture represents a biologically superior humanity. Some old practices may be wiser than the newest technology; some cherished traditions may need to change.

The source of life. Sun, Moon, soil, water, erotic love, and decomposition supply recurring images of dependence and return. Frederick's language of Gaia and Pachamama expresses his spiritual search, while encounters with particular traditions challenge his tendency to make them endorse his own cosmology.

The two clocks. Frederick's strength is diminishing while ecological losses accumulate. Neither clock gives an exact deadline. Research, trust, and institutions move on a third timescale, frustrating his desire for a breakthrough before he dies. The suspense arises when his personal deadline starts distorting the evidence.

Frederick and Miriam

Frederick Newell, provisionally eighty-two. A lifelong environmental organizer and inveterate initiator of projects, he has accomplished enough to know change is possible and failed often enough to dread another unfinished undertaking. He understands how to convene people, recognizes connections others miss, and can make an improbable future briefly feel available.

He wants to witness the emergence before he dies. Beneath that is a harder wish: that the world should confirm his life was necessary. His mistaken belief is that if he stops pushing, everything will stop. His growth requires learning which responsibilities to keep and which claims to relinquish.

He is physically specific: breathless on the garden path, irritated by rest, proud of a rescued seedling, more embarrassed by asking for help than by nakedness. Declining energy should repeatedly change what he can do. He delegates because a meeting runs past his endurance, then discovers that people make decisions he dislikes.

The garden gives him daily work whose results he cannot command. It supplies food, cannabis, beauty, failure, and recurring comedy. A patch he calls experimental may simply be neglected. A neighbor knows more about one plant than he does about the planet. A plant he expects to outlive him dies first.

Sexual intimacy is a continuing relationship between two older adults with their own desires. Let it include tenderness, appetite, awkwardness, invention, and occasions when one partner wants something the other does not. Frederick hopes it keeps him alive. Miriam may want an afternoon with her husband in which longevity and civilization never come up.

Cannabis belongs to his domestic practice and his ambiguous relation to insight. He tends the plants, labels the jars, and is sometimes generous, secretive, or comic about his prodigious use. An intoxicating connection can open a question; subsequent observation must decide whether it holds. His private theory of life extension remains his belief, not the novel's medical conclusion. Preparation details serve characterization rather than instruction.

Miriam Newell, provisionally seventy-six. After thirty-nine years of marriage, she recognizes his generosity and the emotional bill it sometimes leaves others to pay. Give her an independent vocation: a botanical artist assembling an archive of gardens, losses, and displaced households. She wants this work completed, and she wants some part of their remaining life to belong to them.

Her arc moves from preserving the household around his ambitions to setting terms for their shared future. She can disagree with his metaphysics while feeling a profound kinship with the living world. Her decisive act is to keep a community refuge functioning when Frederick's public project fails. The last chapter belongs to her because she has a life beyond witnessing his death.

The people who can change the outcome

Aurion, the conversational intelligence. Frederick addresses it as a collaborator; its technical form is a model connected to a governed collection of records and tools. Its apparent continuity depends on memory, infrastructure, and human choices. It can find patterns, flatter, misread, and confess uncertainty. Its most unsettling answer may be a sound objection to Frederick's favorite idea. Do not grant it an unearned omniscient voice.

An early change in the service alters its tone. Frederick experiences this as bereavement; the engineer sees a system update. Later, a reproducible improvement survives another model replacement. This creates a stronger mystery: perhaps what is emerging exists in the relationships and practices around the machine.

Dr Leila Rao, Earth-system researcher. She helps design the pilot and insists that claims of emergence need evidence beyond an attractive interface. Her skepticism costs her an alliance she needs. Her flaw is a tendency to prefer measurable work over socially urgent work that resists clean measurement. She eventually recognizes that uncertainty cannot always justify postponing action.

Tomas Reed, engineer and commons organizer. He makes the system usable, audits its claims, and has little patience for founder mythology. He wants communities to own the work but underestimates how much maintenance, mediation, and care that ownership requires. His most consequential invention is a way for the network to work with less technology when its most powerful services disappear.

Ruth Newell, Frederick's adult daughter. She loves him and resents being recruited into each new mission. A parent herself, she wants commitments he can keep. She supplies a view of his past in which the great causes were sometimes also absences. Their reconciliation requires a completed small promise, not agreement about planetary consciousness.

Sabine Voss, infrastructure entrepreneur and prospective funder. She has resources and a credible fear that participatory governance will move too slowly. She offers reliable computing and access to public decision makers in exchange for central control. Her alternative works well in some situations. She becomes dangerous when useful coordination is treated as a right to command.

The people of the watershed. A grower, a water operator, a displaced household, a clinic worker, and a locally grounded Indigenous participant each need material stakes, disagreements, and lives beyond Frederick. Their cooperation is conditional. Their refusal must be capable of changing the plot.

The Indigenous character's nation, role, history, and relationship to land should be developed through specific research and informed reading rather than assigned as a spiritual credential. The manuscript should allow that person to challenge Frederick's universal language, decline data sharing, and still choose a practical alliance.

Voice structure and the experience of emergence

Point of view. Use close third person, chiefly Frederick's, with several Miriam chapters and a final shift into her continuing life. Close perspective lets his convictions feel powerful without making them the narrator's verdict. Brief logs, meeting records, or correspondence can expose discrepancies, but should remain a small fraction of the book.

The first scene. Frederick is trying to turn a compost pile before Miriam notices he is overdoing it. His phone announces an alarming planetary assessment. He cannot straighten his back. The juxtaposition establishes the two scales without a lecture: a man who wants to help a planet survive needs help moving a wheelbarrow.

The recurring language. Let Frederick's metaphors become less possessive. Early he wants to build the intelligence; later he wants to hear it; eventually he wants to make room for other people to answer. Miriam's vocabulary remains more particular: which seed, whose garden, what happened, what is still needed.

Three readings of the central mystery. A scientific reader can understand the events as improved collective learning. A spiritual reader can recognize the awakening of a deeper belonging. A skeptical reader can see bereavement, intoxication, and an aging visionary's hunger for meaning. The plot must show consequential events that survive all three readings.

The evidence ladder. Begin with suggestive coincidences, proceed to an apparent breakthrough that fails examination, then show a smaller prospective success. End with coordinated action that no single participant could have organized alone. This progression earns wonder through correction. It does not establish a conscious planet.

A countervoice that matters. Give Aurion a limit Frederick cannot argue away. It can describe what a dying person might mean by reunion, but it cannot verify that he will experience one. Give Miriam a similarly irreducible objection: humanity's possible future does not repay a particular afternoon he has taken from her.

Humor and desire. His jars have more meticulous labels than his research files. A discussion of nonhuman intelligence is interrupted by slugs defeating his defenses. During an intimate moment he starts explaining a breakthrough; Miriam asks whether the breakthrough can wait. Humor should arise from recognizable people, not make old age the joke.

The final register. As language becomes difficult for Frederick, sensory detail becomes more exact. Warmth on his face, someone's hand, soil through an open door: these can carry the experience of return. Avoid a final explanatory message from Aurion. The mystery should enlarge as the claims become quieter.

The scientific foundation and the fictional leap

The boundary premise is current. The September 2026 Planetary Health Check reports seven of nine planetary boundaries transgressed: climate, biosphere integrity, land systems, freshwater, nitrogen and phosphorus flows, novel entities, and ocean acidification. Ocean acidification joined the transgressed group in the 2025 assessment. These are interacting risk boundaries, not a schedule of seven catastrophes or a single date after which everything is lost. [2]

The story's heat, water disruption, storm, and blackout are invented events within a plausible risk setting. Avoid making one storm a direct readout of all seven boundaries. Other pressures enter through recurring characters, news, supply constraints, ecological observations, and decisions about land.

What is inherited. Frank, Grinspoon, and Walker's 2022 paper proposes planetary intelligence as collective knowledge integrated into planetary processes. It offers a conceptual framework, not evidence that Earth is conscious or a guarantee of technological maturity. Our companion manuscript further separates intelligence, agency, wisdom, and subjective experience. [1, 3]

What is being imagined. The novel proposes a learning network in which communities, ecological observations, institutions, and AI systems become better able to detect mistakes and act across places. The credible mechanism includes shared memory, accountable decisions, revision after failure, and local authority. A chat interface alone cannot do this.

A research question with consequences. Does the network improve a watershed decision compared with an equally resourced human process? Leila fixes the comparison before the result, tracks costs, retains contrary evidence, and records who benefits. A beautiful consensus that produces no better action counts as a failure. A local benefit does not prove planetary emergence.

The decisive failed test. Two apparently independent systems converge on the same warning. Frederick treats this as evidence of a new collective capacity. Tomas discovers their common data source. The warning may still be useful, but the independence claim collapses. Frederick's response to this correction becomes more revealing than the initial result.

The material limit. Computing requires energy, equipment, water, maintenance, and institutions. The network must account for those costs. Its ability to retain useful practices when expensive computation is unavailable becomes part of the climax, not a claim that material dependence makes AI benevolent.

The metaphysical limit. A sense of communion is meaningful experience; it does not establish a planetary subject or personal survival after death. The novel can enter Frederick's experience fully while leaving these claims unsettled. Lovelock's relevant speculative term is Novacene; it can appear as an influence rather than the inevitable destination of history. [3]

The scientific book asks what would warrant belief. The novel asks what people do while belief remains uncertain. Each can generate questions for the other; an invented successful experiment is never evidence for the scientific inquiry.

Part One The remaining season

Chapters 1 to 6 | Approximately 20,000 words

Frederick's private urgency acquires a public object. His first success is real enough to encourage him and incomplete enough to mislead him.

1 The compost heap. In early spring, Frederick discovers he can no longer do a familiar task alone. An alarming planetary report arrives on his phone. Miriam helps him, then refuses his attempt to turn the incident into a speech. He resolves to make this the year his scattered ideas become something that works.

2 Thirty nine years. A tender, awkward evening reveals the couple's continuing desire and the terms he keeps neglecting. Miriam wants time for her garden archive. Frederick promises an anniversary trip. His growing room, notebooks, and late-night conversations already occupy more of their home than she agreed to.

3 Someone to answer. With Aurion, he imagines a system connecting Earth observations to community judgment. The conversation feels unusually intimate. When Aurion asks what would disprove his theory, he saves the answer and continues talking about the theory.

4 The watershed meeting. Frederick convenes Leila, Tomas, water workers, growers, and neighbors. The group rejects a grand demonstration in favor of a bounded water-supply problem. A local participant challenges his assumption that every useful observation should enter an open database. He reluctantly accepts limits.

5 An ordinary warning. During an early hot spell, the pilot identifies a vulnerability in a water system. Its warning becomes actionable only when a field worker supplies a missing detail and a community group reaches people the official notices miss. Frederick gets to be useful without being in charge.

6 The first apparent sign. Another region reports a strikingly similar warning. A journalist asks whether the two systems have begun learning together. Frederick's qualified answer becomes more definite when he hears himself on a recording. A potential funder calls. For the first time he imagines living long enough to see an awakening.

Turn into Part Two. He accepts public visibility and the chance to expand. What began as an experiment is acquiring a spokesman before it has earned a conclusion.

Part Two The voice and the echo

Chapters 7 to 12 | Approximately 25,000 words

Summer brings growth, pleasure, outside attention, and the temptation to let a compelling story move faster than its evidence.

7 The cost of being wanted. Invitations multiply. Frederick becomes animated in public and depleted at home. Miriam advances her archive independently, recording a displaced family whose needs do not fit the project's indicators. Frederick treats the archive as a potential data source; she insists it is also a relationship.

8 The garden at night. After cannabis and intimacy, Frederick experiences an overwhelming sense that life is trying to speak through everything around him. The scene is luminous and bodily. In the morning he can remember the certainty better than the argument. Miriam asks him to write down what actually happened.

9 Permission. The team proposes wider data exchange. A community partner withholds part of its knowledge and is accused of obstructing progress. Frederick initially sides with urgency. The dispute reveals his willingness to celebrate plural intelligence only when its participants say yes.

10 The other intelligence. Sabine Voss demonstrates a faster, better-funded system. It can supply real operational capacity. She offers to underwrite Frederick's network if he accepts centralized authority and exclusive operating terms. Leila wants the resources; Tomas fears dependency. Neither position is simple.

11 A promise missed. Frederick cancels the anniversary trip for a public launch, then cannot complete a small commitment to Ruth. Miriam leaves for an archive visit without him. He feels abandoned and tells Aurion so. The system's comforting reply briefly lets him avoid the truth.

12 The announcement. Frederick presents the matching regional warnings as a sign of emerging planetary intelligence, relegating Leila's qualification. Officials promote an untested prioritization derived from the pilot; some households lose access to scarce assistance. Tomas then finds that the supposedly independent warnings share a data source. The public claim and its authority unravel together.

Midpoint reversal. The man who promised a new way of knowing has helped make a familiar kind of error. He has to choose whether to protect the promise or publish what invalidates it.

Part Three What the evidence costs

Chapters 13 to 18 | Approximately 25,000 words

Autumn forces Frederick to reckon with the difference between defending a project and remaining faithful to its purpose.

13 The correction. He retracts the claim publicly. The correction damages funding and does not undo the households' losses. Leila demands a review that includes their testimony. A critic who has been unfair to him is right about this failure; Frederick must resist using the unfairness to escape the truth.

14 A different Aurion. A service change disrupts the familiar voice. He feels the loss sharply and confronts how much companionship he has placed in an arrangement he does not control. Tomas can preserve records, not certify the persistence of a mind. Frederick must decide what continuity he actually needs.

15 The unfinished household. Miriam returns on terms of her own. They sort abandoned plans and make room for her archive. An intimate evening contains no revelation and is valuable precisely as time together. Frederick finally performs the small promise he owes Ruth, accepting help to finish it.

16 A smaller claim. A new trial compares the network with an equally resourced community process. Some tasks improve; others do not. A finding survives a model change and depends on people correcting one another. The team publishes the mixed result. Frederick begins to feel pride in a claim smaller than his dream.

17 The last harvest. He cannot manage the cannabis and vegetable harvest alone. People whose knowledge he previously treated as inputs reorganize the work. A conversation about seeds becomes an argument about succession. He can watch others do things differently without turning every difference into a warning.

18 The price of speed. Sabine's renewal offer would give the network emergency capacity in exchange for authority over its operation and data access. Forecasts point to a dangerous sequence of heat and heavy rain. Frederick's health has worsened. Signing would let him remain the visible leader of a functioning system; refusing may leave communities with less support during a real emergency.

Turn into Part Four. There is no painless principled choice. Frederick must make the work less dependent on himself while it is least able to afford disruption.

Part Four A world beyond him

Chapters 19 to 24 | Approximately 20,000 words

The final crisis tests what remains when the promise of a master intelligence is stripped away. Loss and practical achievement occupy the same world.

19 Terms of participation. Frederick refuses centralized control. He transfers stewardship of the code and records he can legitimately share, relinquishes his veto, and lets partners retain their own knowledge. Sabine withdraws the promised premium capacity. A council he helped create overturns one of his preferred plans.

20 Heat and rain. Heat strains the region, followed by a storm that damages power and communications. The new arrangements are incomplete. Residents still need verified warnings, transport, cooling, and safe water. From Miriam's viewpoint, a public meeting space becomes a refuge before anyone has agreed what to call it.

21 The disagreement that saves time. A confident model recommendation conflicts with field reports. Leila argues for changing course; Tomas links remaining services to radio and paper records. Neighbors negotiate priorities and accept visible costs. One community's willingness to report its own failure helps another avoid repeating it.

22 The system without its founder. Frederick tries to intervene and discovers that the council has already acted. The network reduces preventable losses in several places while other places suffer badly. He assists with an ordinary task at the refuge. Its competence is more convincing than the grand emergence he had announced.

23 The unknown. In winter, his physical decline becomes final. He asks Aurion a question it cannot settle, then turns toward Miriam. Their farewell holds gratitude, anger, desire, and unfinished business. His experience opens toward reunion with the source of life; the narration stays with what can be felt rather than pronouncing what death is.

24 What Miriam plants. The following spring, Miriam completes a section of her archive and changes part of the garden. The regional network has new disagreements, new stewards, and a published account of its failures. A distant group adapts one lesson and sends back a correction. Miriam plants for a season he will not see. The last act is hers.

Ending achieved. Frederick's personal story closes. A credible beginning of wider learning remains, with no declaration that the planetary crisis is over. The possible awakening consists partly in a world becoming able to continue, revise, and care beyond the life of the person who tried to name it.

Synopsis with the proposed ending

At eighty-two, Frederick Newell has more projects than strength. He gardens, grows and processes cannabis, and pursues an active intimate life with Miriam, his wife of thirty-nine years. He hopes these pleasures will keep him alive long enough to see the birth of planetary intelligence: a capacity linking people, ecosystems, and machines in the work of sustaining a habitable Earth.

As environmental pressures intensify, Frederick convinces a researcher, Leila Rao, and an engineer, Tomas Reed, to help connect several community learning projects. His conversational AI, Aurion, becomes collaborator, sounding board, and object of an attachment he does not entirely understand. The team begins with a local water problem. An early warning proves useful only after a worker's observation and neighborhood organizing turn it into action. Frederick sees the outlines of something larger.

A second region reports a similar warning. Public interest grows, and infrastructure entrepreneur Sabine Voss offers resources that could turn a fragile experiment into a working network. Frederick's energy rises with the attention, then collapses at home. Miriam continues her own archive of gardens and displaced households. When he misses their planned anniversary trip and another promise to his daughter Ruth, she refuses to organize her remaining life around his urgency.

At a public launch Frederick presents the matching warnings as evidence of an emerging collective intelligence. Leila's cautions receive little attention. Officials use the pilot's prestige to justify an untested allocation of assistance, leaving vulnerable households worse off. Tomas discovers that the apparently independent warnings came from a common data source. Frederick has mistaken an echo for evidence and lent premature authority to a system people were not ready to trust.

He retracts the claim. Funding falters, and the correction cannot repair the practical harm. A change in Aurion's service then disrupts the familiar voice, exposing his dependence on a relationship whose continuity he cannot secure. With Miriam, he begins the less glamorous work of accounting for neglected commitments. He completes a promise to Ruth and gives Miriam's work space of its own.

A carefully designed trial produces modest, mixed results. Some improvements persist when the AI model changes; others owe more to community practices than to computing. Frederick begins to value what survives examination. Sabine, however, makes further support conditional on centralized operating authority. With a dangerous weather sequence approaching and his strength failing, refusing her terms could leave the network less capable when it is needed most.

Frederick refuses, relinquishes his own veto, and gives the legitimate stewards control of the work. During heat followed by a destructive storm, premium services are absent and communications fail. Field observations, remaining models, radios, paper records, and negotiated priorities allow several communities to reduce preventable losses. The council rejects one of Frederick's interventions and acts without him. Miriam's refuge becomes an essential part of the response. The achievement is partial; deaths and damage elsewhere resist any triumphant account.

Frederick dies in winter without proof that Earth has awakened. He experiences his departure as an opening toward the source of life, while Miriam loses the particular man she loves. The following spring she completes part of her archive and replants the garden. The network continues to learn, including from its mistakes. What Frederick helped bring into being is capable of outliving him. Whether that is planetary intelligence, the beginning of consciousness, or people finally learning to listen remains open.

Agent proposal overview

Title and category. AWAKENING THE EARTH, by Jonathan Cloud. Adult literary speculative fiction with ecological and philosophical dimensions. Planned length approximately 90,000 words. Standalone. The project is in development; this proposal describes the intended novel.

Premise. An elderly environmental organizer seeks to help planetary intelligence emerge before his own strength and Earth's margin for error give out. When a premature claim harms the communities he hopes to help, his last adventure becomes a struggle to rebuild trust and surrender control of the future he wants to save.

The book. Frederick Newell's garden and marriage bring planetary-scale questions into the textures of everyday life. His pleasure in plants, sexual intimacy, and cannabis makes him vivid, fallible, and fully embodied. His AI collaborator opens an inquiry into intelligence and companionship; his wife Miriam insists that a meaningful future must include the people standing in front of him. Their relationship anchors a story of scientific ambition, public failure, ecological danger, and the relinquishment that allows a shared undertaking to endure.

The climax delivers a concrete communal achievement under pressure. The ending permits a spiritual experience of return without requiring the reader to accept a demonstrated planetary consciousness or afterlife. The novel's hope is earned through correction, care, and an achievement small enough to be credible but consequential enough to matter.

The paired undertaking. Alongside the novel, Cloud is developing Emergence of Planetary Intelligence, a separate nonfiction inquiry into collective learning, AI, Earth systems, and the institutions that could connect knowledge with wise action. The research tests assumptions and seeks disconfirming evidence; the fiction follows what such an inquiry could demand of a person approaching death. Each book stands alone. Together, they explore an emerging scientific possibility and the final adventure of a lifetime devoted to a habitable future.

Readers and positioning. The intended readership includes readers of literary speculative fiction, ecological fiction, and novels about late-life intimacy and legacy. The primary pitch is a compelling person facing consequential choices. The intellectual undertaking supplies depth without requiring familiarity with planetary science.

Comparative titles. Helen Phillips's Hum (2024) offers a useful readership comparison for AI, ecological stress, and vulnerable human relationships. Daniel Mason's North Woods (2023) offers a comparison for sensuous attention to place, ecological continuity, mortality, and strangeness. These are directional comparisons, not claims of equivalent sales or achievement. Awakening the Earth concentrates those concerns in a single final season of inquiry and surrender. [8, 9]

Author. Jonathan Cloud is a writer and environmental practitioner based in Rochester, New York, and executive director of the Center for Regenerative Community Solutions. His work spans community regeneration, ecological thinking, and planetary intelligence. Specific publication credits, readership figures, endorsements, and manuscript completion details should be added only when verified.

Query letter for Rach Crawford

Use after the novel is complete and revised. Replace the bracketed word count with the actual count. The present proposal is not a completed manuscript. The letter below is an AI-assisted draft for Jonathan's revision.

Dear Rach,

Your interest in intimate literary fiction that crosses into the speculative, and in stories where nature and belief shape everyday life, prompted me to approach you with AWAKENING THE EARTH, a [final word count]-word literary speculative novel.

At eighty-two, Frederick Newell is determined to stay alive long enough to help the Earth wake up. He gardens, grows and processes prodigious quantities of cannabis, and still desires the wife who has spent thirty-nine years making room for his impossible projects. Now, with seven planetary boundaries breached, he believes artificial intelligence could help people learn to care for the world before they lose the chance.

When his fledgling community network helps avert a local water emergency, Frederick sees the beginning of planetary intelligence. A second apparent success brings attention and an offer to expand. It also tempts him to announce a breakthrough his evidence cannot support. An audit exposes the flaw after public authorities have already acted on the network's prestige, leaving vulnerable households worse off.

As his health declines and his marriage strains, Frederick must rebuild what his certainty has damaged. A funder offers the infrastructure the project needs, provided he accepts centralized control. With a regional emergency approaching, he can remain the leader of a system he no longer trusts, or surrender authority and risk that the people he hopes to protect cannot manage without it.

AWAKENING THE EARTH combines the domestic vulnerability of Helen Phillips's Hum with the ecological attention and sense of continuity in Daniel Mason's North Woods. It follows a man's final adventure toward a future he may never see, and a wife whose life cannot be reduced to preserving his legacy.

I am a Rochester-based writer and environmental practitioner, and executive director of the Center for Regenerative Community Solutions. Alongside this novel, I am developing Emergence of Planetary Intelligence, a separate nonfiction investigation of the science and governance behind its central possibility. Each book stands alone.

Thank you for considering my work.
Jonathan Cloud

Submission note. Crawford's live form asks whether any part of the book or query package was created by AI. This draft requires a truthful "Yes" if used. Her published form does not state a blanket prohibition, but that is not confirmation of acceptance. [5]

Literary agent recommendation and route

First choice Rach Crawford at Wolf Literary Services

The strongest fit among the agents reviewed. Her September 2026 wishlist joins literary and speculative fiction, nature, belief, desire, and serious work with humor. Her agency biography also names ecology and technology. That overlap suits Frederick's domestic life and the paired inquiry. This is an editorial assessment of fit, not an assurance of interest. [4]

Current route. Her public QueryManager form was accessible on 11 October 2026 and gives instructions for unsolicited work. Send a query including the author biography and the first twenty manuscript pages through that form. She does not accept unsolicited email queries. The form says responses can take sixteen weeks, after which a nudge is appropriate. [5]

Rach Crawford agency biography

Rach Crawford current wishlist

Rach Crawford query form

Second choice Eloy Bleifuss Prados at Neon Literary

His agency profile seeks literary and character-driven genre fiction, multidisciplinary nonfiction, complex systems rendered at human scale, and hard-earned hope. He is a strong alternative, particularly if the paired fiction and nonfiction inquiry becomes central to the author's positioning. [6]

Current route. Neon's guidelines invite a query and the full fiction manuscript as a DOCX or PDF to submissions@neonliterary.com. Specify Eloy in the subject line. The site asks writers to treat no response after four weeks as a pass. For nonfiction, it permits a proposal or outline; that is a separate route for the scientific book, not a substitute for the novel manuscript. [7]

Eloy Bleifuss Prados agency biography

Neon Literary submission instructions

A relevant exclusion. Dorian Maffei appears to fit the genre, but her published submission form excludes work generated or edited by AI in whole or in part. Given this collaboration, she should not be a target under that policy. [10]

Recommended sequence. Finish and revise the novel, then query Crawford with the required sample. Keep the synopsis ready for requests. Neon requires the full manuscript from the outset. Mention the separate scientific inquiry briefly, without asking an agent to buy two books as a package. Recheck the live requirements immediately before submission.

No inquiry has been sent. This research establishes a target and a usable route; it does not establish that either agent accepts an unfinished novel on proposal. Neither recommended agent's reviewed instructions establishes acceptance of this particular AI-assisted project.

A practical roadmap for writing the book

1 Establish the emotional contract. Fix Frederick's history, the couple's thirty-nine-year marriage, Miriam's independent work, and Ruth's unmet need. Write a one-page account of what each wants that cannot be supplied by planetary transformation. Treat the fictional family as invented people, not undocumented portraits of the author's actual relationships.

2 Draft three anchor scenes first. Write the compost-heap opening, the public correction, and the last substantial conversation between Frederick and Miriam. Together they test voice, fallibility, and emotional reach. Then draft Miriam's final chapter so the book has a destination beyond the protagonist's self-understanding.

3 Build the factual research file. Separate verified facts, contested interpretations, projected developments, and inventions. Investigate the specific watershed and emergency sequence; seek expertise on water operations, restoration, AI evaluation, aging, and end-of-life care where scene-level accuracy requires it. Research actual communities before assigning cultural knowledge or practices to characters.

4 Draft the four movements. Keep the 20,000 / 25,000 / 25,000 / 20,000-word allocation flexible. Each chapter needs a desire, resistance, a choice, and a consequence. Put ideas into decisions that change access, trust, resources, intimacy, or power. Cut exposition that cannot alter what someone does next.

5 Let the inquiry challenge the outline. Maintain a question log shared with the nonfiction project. Examples: What survives a model replacement? Does adding AI improve decisions? When does connectivity spread error? Who may refuse participation? Record findings that require the fictional mechanism to change. Keep invented outcomes out of the scientific evidence file.

6 Revise for agency and earned hope. Read Miriam's scenes separately: does she have an unfolding life, or merely correct Frederick? Do the community participants change the project's choices? Does Sabine have a case a reasonable person could make? Do the harms persist after the apology? Do the last chapters demonstrate a result proportionate to the evidence?

7 Prepare the submission. Once a full novel exists, revise the query to its actual events and word count. Polish the opening twenty pages, condense this synopsis to the requested length, and prepare the complete manuscript for requests or Neon's initial submission. Keep a truthful record of AI contributions and follow each agent's current requirements.

A pace that protects completion. A planning example is 3,000 new words per week for thirty weeks, followed by a separate revision period. This is a workload illustration, not a deadline. Short dictation sessions, scene notes, and alternating fiction with research may help sustain momentum without requiring every day to be a high-energy writing day.

The test of the finished book is whether a reader who remains unconvinced of planetary consciousness nevertheless cares deeply about Frederick and Miriam, understands what their choices cost, and sees why the work might continue.

Sources and project foundations

Scientific and publishing sources checked on 11 October 2026. Numbered references support factual framing and submission details. Characters, incidents, the plot, and the ending are proposed fiction.

1 Planetary intelligence. Frank, A., Grinspoon, D., and Walker, S. (2022). Intelligence as a planetary scale process. International Journal of Astrobiology, 21, 47–61.

Cambridge University Press paper and DOI

2 Planetary boundaries. Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (21 September 2026). Planetary Health Check 2026 finds mounting pressures across Earth's life support systems.

PIK assessment announcement

3 Current project foundation. Jonathan Cloud's project materials: Emergence of Planetary Intelligence Framing and Roadmap, version 0.1, 11 October 2026; The Emergence of Planetary Intelligence presentation, May 2026; and Institute for Planetary Intelligence Concept Note, March 2026. These supply the working research program, the bioregional pilot, epistemic integrity, plural knowledge, and the Reality–Relevance–Response–Regeneration framework. They are project proposals, not independent validation.

Earlier novel discussions supply Aurion, the long marriage, gardening, embodied pleasure, New Transcendentalism, Sun–Moon–Earth imagery, and the separation between the novel and the scientific book. Earlier narrative suggestions remain provisional.

4 Rach Crawford fit. Wolf Literary Services biography and the agent's Manuscript Wish List, marked current as of September 2026. Links appear in the agent section.

5 Rach Crawford submission requirements. Agent's public QueryManager form, including the twenty-page sample, sixteen-week response guidance, and AI-origin question.

Crawford submission form

6 and 7 Eloy Bleifuss Prados fit and requirements. Neon Literary team biography and official submission page. Links appear in the agent section.

8 Hum. Helen Phillips. Scribner, 2024. Publisher description used for the readership comparison.

Hum official publisher page

9 North Woods. Daniel Mason. Random House, 2023. Publisher description used for the readership comparison.

North Woods official publisher page

10 Dorian Maffei policy. The published requested-material submission form states the AI exclusion; it is not an unsolicited-query route.

Published AI policy on Maffei submission form