

Date

Dear Agent's Name

I am seeking a literary agent to represent a novel-length manuscript, titled "The Augur in the Arbor Inn" by David J. Keffer. This is a unique manuscript of literary fiction that engages readers both intellectually and emotionally through a compelling narrative. Please find below a synopsis of the novel (1,000 words), followed by a paragraph on each of the following topics: writing style, literary precedents, target market and the author. An electronic copy of the manuscript (202,000 words) is available upon request, as is a chapter-by-chapter synopsis (5,000 words).

I thank you in advance for your time and attention in considering this manuscript.

Sincerely,

David J. Keffer

Synopsis of the Novel

The Augur in the Arbor Inn is a novel about people who are seeking to understand their role as conscientious, moral beings in a world that is governed by physical laws, which are at odds with their goals for self-realization. Particularly, the protagonists seek to reconcile their drive to reduce the level of misery in the world with the primary precept of evolution, which promotes precisely an opposite philosophy, namely survival of the fittest at the expense of the vulnerable.

This story is woven through the actions of five protagonists. A monk and her acolyte represent the champions, called upon to confront the Great Enemy of the Future, which is either (1) evolution taken to a brutal extreme or (2) the elimination of the evolutionary process, resulting in an unchanging stasis. Both outcomes seem threatening and their understanding of this enemy evolves during the novel. To better make the point, the monk is a changeling or shape-shifter, able to adapt with ease to different circumstances. The acolyte has Down syndrome (possessing three copies of the twenty-first chromosome), representing a genetic dead end in the mutation process that underlies evolution.

The two heroes are set a task by a group composed of a grandfather, father and son, who respectively work as an archivist, a geneticist and a mathematician. The mathematician is active in the field of forecasting (and is thus identified as an augur). The premise of the story is that the augur, through mathematical manipulation, has been able to identify a looming threat in the future. While the particular nature of the threat is, at this point, intentionally kept ambiguous to the reader, the three men recognize that the task of confronting this threat is beyond their capabilities. They require the services of a champion, whom they identify as the changeling monk, though it later appears possible that it is her acolyte who may be better suited to the task. The task set before the monk and her acolyte is to gather specimens from eight trees, which the

geneticist will combine into a perfect tree, in defiance of the laws of evolution. Because the Great Enemy is an ideal, the monk and acolyte must travel beyond the physics-based reality to mental realms where exotic (perhaps outlandish) trees reside, from which the necessary genetic ingredients can be collected. These eight realms include a realm of mirrors, an aberrant realm, Faerie, a ghostly realm, an undead realm, Heaven, Hell and a realm of swamps. How the example of this perfect tree, once assembled, combats the Great Enemy provides the final resolution of the novel.

About the Author

David Keffer is a professor at the University of Tennessee, where he has published numerous papers in archival journals and teaches a course titled, “The Golden Age of Non-Idiomatic Improvisation”. He received a Fulbright Grant to teach for a year in Seoul (2010-11). He has largely pursued the autodidact’s path in his study of world literature and music. Through the Poison Pie Publishing House, he has previously published fifteen novels, six illustrated books and two prayer books. His most recently published book is “A Bestiary of East Tennessee”, a co-authored encyclopedia of the local creatures, mundane and fantastic, illustrated in felt. He maintains a creative blog at poisonpie.com.

Writing Style

The author is a student and teacher of improvisational creative processes. Jazz, an improvisational idiom, is historically regarded as the single most significant cultural contribution of America to the world of arts. Through careful study of the creative habits and writings of improvisational musicians, the author, also an American, has sought to generate this novel by adhering to an analogous improvisational creative process. The goal was not to create a novel in the mold of a classical composition, such as Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, but rather an improvisational work, along the creative lines of John Coltrane’s *Ascension*. This process emphasizes the stylistic literary principles of lightness, quickness and multiplicity, per Italo Calvino’s *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*.

Literary Precedents

The Augur in the Arbor Inn is a fantasy for a thinking reader looking for a compelling story. There are literary precedents, new and old. One of the realms explored by the monk and her acolyte is Faerie. Thus there is some similarity to the exploration of the realms of Faerie provided by Susanna Clarke in *Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell*. Two other realms visited by the monk and acolyte are Heaven and Hell, recalling the guided tour that Dante provides of Heaven, Purgatory and Hell in the *Divine Comedy*. Just as the narrative in the *Divine Comedy* also serves as an illustration of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, so too does *The Augur in the Arbor Inn* serve as an investigative tool of a modern description of evolution per Darwin. This investigation plays a secondary role relative to the narrative, which stands on its own merits.

Target Market

The Augur in the Arbor Inn is written by an author and for an audience who possesses “an impatience with the gruesomely predictable” (Derek Bailey). I think there are many readers who would readily apply this description to themselves. This novel would appeal to such readers.