Research Journal in Advanced Humanities

RJAH

https://doi.org/10.58256/21tgc759

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism*

Environmental sustainability and collective responsibility in Anglophone solar-punk fiction: A critical utopian approach to strategic foresight in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

Renewable energy can change the material basis of a society without changing who is entitled to shape its future. This article examines that discrepancy through a critical utopian reading of three Anglophone solar-futures stories: Brenda Cooper's "For the Snake of Power," Andrew Dana Hudson's "Under the Grid," and Cat Rambo's "Big Rural." Drawing on Tom Moylan's account of critical utopia and Ruth Levitas's conception of utopia as method, it considers how narrative perspective, spatial organisation, and closure expose tensions between environmental improvement and collective responsibility. The argument is that solarpunk becomes useful to strategic foresight when its desirable futures remain open to disagreement, especially about essential services, the distribution of maintenance work, and the authority to revise collective decisions. The article develops an interpretive procedure for bringing these questions into Saudi sustainability deliberation without treating American fictional settings as evidence about Saudi society. Sustainable Development Goals 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 15 provide the environmental scope, while the Saudi National Water Strategy supplies a concrete contextual reference. The proposed procedure combines literary interpretation, contextual scrutiny, alternative scenario construction, and explicit tests of responsibility. Its contribution is a model of anticipatory reading in which the value of an imagined future depends partly on its capacity to accommodate those who cannot perform its preferred version of responsible citizenship. Literary plausibility, policy feasibility, and demonstrated public benefit remain separate standards of judgement.

KEYWORDS: solarpunk, critical utopia, Anglophone fiction, collective responsibility, strategic foresight, Saudi Arabia, Sustainable Development Goals

Research Journal in Advanced Humanities

Volume 7, Issue 4, 2026

ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)

ARTICLE HISTORY

Submitted: **28 June 2026**

Accepted: 23 **August 2026**

Published: 13 **September 2026**

HOW TO CITE

Almotiry, O. N., & Khan, A. S. (2026). Environmental sustainability and collective responsibility in Anglophone solarpunk fiction: A critical utopian approach to strategic foresight in Saudi Arabia. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 7(4). https://doi.org/10.58256/21tgc759

Published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global, an imprint of Royallite Publishers Limited

Introduction

A sustainable future is easy to recognise in an illustration. Solar panels catch the light; vegetation softens buildings; pedestrians occupy streets previously surrendered to traffic. It is harder to recognise in a dispute. Someone cannot afford the required equipment. A neighbourhood rejects an inconvenient resident. A project delivers electricity elsewhere while retaining control of local water. These situations complicate the visual vocabulary of sustainability because their solution requires decisions about authority and obligation. The problem is not whether a future looks environmentally desirable, but whether its institutions can answer the people whose lives make that future possible.

Solarpunk offers a productive literary setting for examining this problem. Its association with renewable energy, ecological repair, and cooperative social arrangements makes it relevant to sustainability research, but these associations should not function as a certificate of political virtue. Johnson (2020) presents solarpunk as a resource for imagining green futures and questioning environmental injustice. Gillam (2023) places anarchism, ecology, and justice at the centre of its social aspirations. Together, these accounts explain the genre's appeal while raising a difficult question: what happens when a narrative depicts technological renewal alongside institutions that remain coercive, unequal, or inattentive to dependence?

The present article approaches that question through critical utopian studies. It understands a desirable future as something that must remain disputable. Environmental improvement does not remove conflicts over land, care, work, or collective membership. Indeed, new infrastructures may generate unfamiliar conflicts by changing the conditions under which people can remain in a community. Responsibility therefore requires more precision than a general appeal to cooperation. A collective can coordinate effectively and still place unreasonable burdens on some of its members. Conversely, an individual who resists a collective rule may be defending a legitimate need rather than obstructing sustainability.

The Saudi application follows from this distinction. Strategic foresight can explore how environmental objectives interact with everyday arrangements before those interactions become expensive commitments. Fiction contributes situations, perspectives, and unresolved questions to that exploration. It cannot establish how Saudi residents think, forecast their behaviour, or determine which institutional arrangements would work. Those claims require contextual evidence and, where appropriate, empirical research. The literary contribution is earlier and more specific: it helps identify assumptions about responsible inhabitants that might otherwise remain concealed within an attractive description of progress.

Three questions organise the inquiry. How do selected solar-futures narratives distribute the authority to define environmental responsibility? Which tensions between collective purposes and particular lives become visible through their literary form? How can those tensions inform Saudi foresight while preserving the distinction between a fictional possibility and a locally defensible proposal? The analysis develops a single argument across these questions: collective responsibility becomes credible when shared environmental obligations are accompanied by differentiated capacities, accessible means of contestation, and institutional willingness to revise an arrangement that produces harm.

This argument contributes to literary scholarship by reading the movement towards sustainability as an unfinished social process. It also qualifies claims about fiction's practical usefulness. Milkoreit (2017) connects collective imagination with power and agency; Bina et al. (2017) investigate fiction as a means of reflecting on societal challenges and future options. Building on that conversation, the article locates a contribution in the friction between narrative resolution and continuing responsibility. A story may end after an agreement, an escape, or a change of heart. The obligations created by the imagined infrastructure would continue. Reading beyond that ending is where critical interpretation can begin to inform foresight.

Critical utopia and the meaning of collective responsibility

A literary approach to unfinished futures

Moylan's (2014) concept of critical utopia emerged from readings of speculative fiction that combined transformative desire with criticism of utopian closure. Its value here is methodological: an imagined alternative can challenge the present without claiming that social contradiction has disappeared. The critical reader consequently attends to the terms on which improvement becomes possible and to the conflicts that a narrative resolves too readily or leaves unsettled. This approach suits solarpunk because the appeal of its better worlds

can coexist with uncertainty about the institutions required to sustain them.

Levitas (2013) develops utopia as a provisional, reflexive method of imagining social reconstruction. Her archaeological, ontological, and architectural modes direct attention, respectively, towards assumptions embedded in social visions, the kinds of persons those visions presuppose, and their institutional arrangements. Applied here, they generate questions about the hidden account of a good life, the capacities expected of responsible inhabitants, and the rules governing common resources. The reading procedure developed below adapts these questions; it does not present itself as a direct transcription of Levitas's method.

The distinction between approach and genre matters. Solarpunk identifies a developing cultural and literary formation, whereas critical utopian studies provides a way of interpreting it. A text can belong to that formation without portraying a fully emancipated society. Restricting the corpus to harmonious communities would remove precisely the contradictions the argument needs to investigate. Conversely, the mere presence of solar panels does not make a story solarpunk. The relevant texts must make the relationship between ecological change and social organisation consequential to their imagined futures.

Such a definition also resists an easy dismissal of hope. An affirmative narrative can be demanding when it reveals how difficult cooperation is. A bleak episode can serve a utopian purpose when it exposes a preventable injustice rather than naturalising it. Tone alone cannot decide the political work a story performs. Martens's (2023) critical examination of the solar premise in solarpunk is useful in this respect: the energy source should itself remain a question within the interpretation, rather than becoming an unquestioned guarantee that the future has escaped its inherited problems.

Responsibility without compulsory sameness

Collective responsibility is used here to mean a shared obligation to sustain the material conditions of common life, distributed with attention to unequal capacities and powers. The concept includes responsibility for decisions, for implementing them, and for correcting their harmful effects. These responsibilities need not belong to the same actors. A resident may reduce consumption but have little influence over infrastructure procurement. A contractor may control maintenance practices without setting the governing policy. Treating both simply as members of an undifferentiated public would obscure the decisions that matter.

Young's (2011) account of structural injustice provides a basis for distinguishing shared political responsibility from an exclusive search for individual blame. Participation in ordinary social processes can connect people to harms without making every participant equally culpable. For the present argument, that insight also requires a positive differentiation of obligations. Shared responsibility cannot mean that the person least able to alter an arrangement must compensate for those with the greatest influence over it. Institutions should make the distribution of authority visible alongside the distribution of environmental duties.

Energy justice offers a complementary set of questions. Jenkins et al. (2016) distinguish concerns with distribution, recognition, and procedure. In literary analysis, these concerns direct attention to who receives benefits, whose needs become intelligible, and how decisions are made. Their relationship is consequential. An invitation to attend a meeting does not settle whether its timing excludes carers. A low average electricity price does not settle whether an interruption disproportionately harms a person dependent on cooling. A collective rule may look uniform while producing very different conditions of participation.

Ostrom's (2010) account of polycentric responses to environmental problems challenges the assumption that collective action must occur at one governing scale. However, multiple decision centres do not automatically produce justice. A neighbourhood can be accessible to residents yet intolerant of a minority; a national institution can be distant yet necessary for redistribution or common standards. The relevant question is how authority is connected across levels and how an adversely affected person can seek correction. This prevents the article from equating localism with solidarity or centralisation with failure.

Infrastructure as a literary and social relation

Infrastructure supplies the material connection between the argument's environmental and social terms. Larkin (2013) examines its political, aesthetic, and sensory dimensions. A power network carries promises as well as electricity: security, modernity, belonging, or independence. Fiction can make a gap between promise and experience available to interpretation by locating a character on the wrong side of an otherwise successful

system. Perspective then becomes central. What appears coherent from a planning office may become exhausting or inaccessible when encountered through a body, a household, or a working day.

Graham and Thrift (2007) bring maintenance and repair into accounts of modern social life that often neglect them. Their argument helps distinguish an infrastructure's inauguration from its continued operation. For literary criticism, the corresponding distinction is temporal. A description can display a finished installation; a plot can interrupt its functioning and reveal the labour that sustains it. The analytical question is whether repair becomes another occasion for a heroic individual to save the system or whether the narrative makes visible a durable organisation of competence, resources, and care.

These theoretical commitments produce an account of critical hope grounded in revisability. The desirable society should be capable of discovering that its existing definition of responsibility is inadequate. Revisability does not mean that every complaint defeats a collective purpose. It means that disagreement can trigger an intelligible examination of the evidence, the burden imposed, and the alternatives available. Environmental obligations remain substantial, but their interpretation is accountable to people's actual circumstances. The following readings ask where such accountability becomes imaginable and where a story's resolution leaves it uncertain.

Corpus and interpretive procedure

The primary corpus comprises Cooper's "For the Snake of Power," Hudson's "Under the Grid," and Rambo's "Big Rural," published in the online edition of *The Weight of Light: A Collection of Solar Futures* (Eschrich & Miller, 2019). The collection grew from a collaborative exercise involving fiction writers and specialists in energy and society. Its contrasting urban and rural, centralised and distributed configurations provide a deliberate basis for comparing alternative solar futures. The present study uses three stories because they foreground distinct problems of public provision, local regulation, and development in a host community.

The selection is purposive and interpretive, not representative of Anglophone solarpunk as a whole. It treats these stories as a critical solar-futures strand within solarpunk's broader field. Their incomplete transitions and compromised institutions are analytically relevant rather than disqualifying. The selection nevertheless creates a geographical limitation: all three stories are set in the United States and come from one commissioned collection. Anglophone therefore denotes their language, not a claim that they represent the full range of English-language writing or the experiences of Saudi society.

The complete publisher-hosted stories were read, with attention to focalisation, images of infrastructure, conflicts over obligation, and narrative endings. Quotations use paragraph numbers counted from the first narrative paragraph, excluding editorial notices. Hudson's online edition warns that some emojis render incorrectly. The interpretation consequently rests on the verbal narrative and does not make claims about the placement or visual operation of those symbols.

The procedure moves from a textual observation to an interpretive claim, then to a separately identified foresight question. Counterreadings test each claim: collective rules may protect legitimate interests; a sympathetic protagonist may remain institutionally privileged; and an apparently successful compromise may postpone rather than resolve a conflict. The Saudi discussion then considers whether the question corresponds to a documented environmental concern. This sequence guards against extracting policy recommendations directly from plot. No interviews, reader experiment, workshop, or assessment of Saudi institutional performance was conducted. The resulting contribution is a critical literary argument and an explicitly prospective procedure for deliberation.

Three readings of responsibility under solar power

Public provision and the limits of rescue

Cooper's story begins with damaged infrastructure in Phoenix, but its causal explanation gradually moves beyond storm damage. Rosa, a maintenance worker, discovers that a contractual commitment continues to divert electricity during a local emergency. Her instruction to "Look beyond the engineering" captures this change of explanatory scale (Cooper, 2019, para. 5). Collective mobilisation eventually accompanies an intervention that stops an outgoing transmission and cancels brownouts. The achievement remains unsettled: Rosa faces consequences, and the story does not establish a durable replacement for the arrangement that produced the

emergency. Read critically, its closure joins immediate relief to continuing institutional uncertainty.

The distinction between rescue and responsibility is the interpretive problem. A system may survive because particular workers act with unusual courage. That outcome does not establish that the system distributes responsibility well. If essential protection depends on exceptional personal sacrifice, the conditions of ordinary work deserve scrutiny. An institution should be judged partly by whether a conscientious employee can raise a substantiated concern without having to choose between employment and the people the service exists to support. This is a normative proposal arising from the reading, not a claim that the fictional intervention supplies an administratively transferable solution.

Narrative focalisation nevertheless creates a further difficulty. Following a worker's discovery encourages readers to experience disclosure as an advance towards justice. It can also make the resulting coalition seem more comprehensive than the narrative has demonstrated. The phrase "the public" should therefore remain open to examination. Who depends on electricity at the other end of an interrupted connection? Who could contest the intervention? These questions do not invalidate emergency action. They ask whether local solidarity can acknowledge obligations that exceed the spatial and emotional boundaries of the scene.

The corresponding foresight exercise would separate three decisions that a rescue plot can compress: identifying the cause of a shortage, deciding whose needs have priority, and specifying who may authorise corrective action. Different evidence supports each decision. Engineering data can diagnose available capacity; an assessment of vulnerability can clarify unequal consequences; an agreed procedure can assign authority. Literary criticism contributes by noticing when a persuasive sequence makes these decisions appear to be one morally obvious act. An alternative scenario should then test whether the desired protection can be secured through procedures that remain accountable after the emergency passes.

Participation and the person who does not fit

In "Under the Grid," environmental participation is organised through household obligations, algorithmic oversight, and neighbourhood decision-making. Ingrid attempts to protect her mother Krystal's home and bird habitat from new rules. The neighbourhood manager privileges "energy and peace" (Hudson, 2019, para. 94), while the meeting's duration makes sustained attendance difficult for some supporters. The proposed amendment fails, Krystal moves, and Ingrid subsequently seeks work on multispecies projects. The ending preserves an impulse towards change without undoing the loss. This combination gives the story its critical utopian force: the possibility of a better arrangement survives a collective decision that remains painful and exclusionary.

The strongest counterreading concerns the obligations of common life. A neighbour's attachment does not necessarily override other residents' needs. Maintenance burdens, safety, and the performance of shared infrastructure are legitimate matters for collective decision. Treating any regulation as oppression would remove the very possibility of a common environmental undertaking. The harder issue is whether a procedure distinguishes an avoidable burden from an inconvenient form of life. Does it compare accommodation with exclusion? Does it count the cost of compliance to the person whose home is at stake as carefully as it counts disruption to everyone else?

Recognition and procedure meet at this point. Formal opportunity is insufficient if using it requires spare time, confidence, specialist knowledge, or support that some participants lack. Deliberation itself consumes resources. A defensible foresight scenario would therefore ask who can remain until a meeting ends, who understands the alternatives, and whose absence gets interpreted as consent. These are proposed tests of a process, not observations about Saudi meetings. Their significance lies in making the supposedly generic participant visible as a person with work, care, mobility, and linguistic circumstances.

The reading also challenges an easy equivalence between care for an individual animal and sound environmental management. Ecological consequences require evidence beyond a sympathetic encounter. A critical utopian approach should preserve the emotional claim of care while allowing specialists and affected residents to question its practical effects. The aim is an accountable accommodation process, not automatic exemption from environmental duties. In foresight, this would mean developing alternatives before deciding that a person must leave or that an ecological concern must be ignored. The collective's capacity to consider such alternatives becomes a substantive part of its sustainability.

Rural belonging and conditional reconciliation

"Big Rural" places a solar development beside a community whose relations with the project have deteriorated. Trish returns as a company representative, initially interpreting conflict through the problem of vandalism. Her changing understanding connects local hostility with the project's control of resources and limited reciprocity. The closing proposal combines agricultural production with solar infrastructure and the recovery of water rights (Rambo, 2019). The story's perspective makes corporate success answerable to an inhabited landscape. Its reconciliation, however, is prospective: a negotiated possibility appears, while the continuing arrangements required to deliver it remain outside the completed narrative.

The homecoming structure makes place legible through an unsettled relationship rather than an empty map. For the critical reader, the methodological lesson is to question how a scenario establishes its starting landscape. Calling land available can conceal the need to investigate existing uses, attachments, and ecological relations. This is a warning about a category of description, not evidence that a particular Saudi development has disregarded local claims. An environmental assessment and a social account of land use would have to establish those claims independently. Fiction makes the question difficult to overlook.

Reconciliation creates another problem: an imaginative compromise may acquire the authority of a demonstrated solution. Agricultural production beneath or around solar installations cannot be assumed beneficial in every climate or configuration. The appropriate crops, water requirements, maintenance methods, and contractual arrangements all require assessment. A critical reading should therefore resist treating a narratively satisfying combination as a validated design. The proposed benefit must survive the same scrutiny that exposed the earlier problem. Otherwise, an optimistic ending simply exchanges one unexamined promise for another.

What would make such a compromise credible over time? A foresight exercise could distinguish a personal assurance from an enforceable obligation, identify who receives any new income, and ask what happens when management changes. It could also consider who is represented by the spokesperson credited with achieving agreement. Community members may differ over employment, water use, or acceptable disturbance. Their differences do not disappear when a protagonist learns to listen. The resulting principle is that recognition must become an arrangement capable of surviving beyond the sympathetic encounter that first made it possible.

Reading beyond the successful ending

The comparison suggests that literary closure should itself become an object of foresight. A moment of solidarity can be persuasive without resolving the distribution of future obligations. A participatory procedure can be recognisable without accommodating everyone it affects. A compromise can establish a direction without determining whether the resources and authority to sustain it will exist. These are different problems, and the proposed approach keeps them distinct. Its purpose is not to turn every ending into failure, but to identify what would have to remain true for an apparent success to endure.

Three tests follow from this interpretation. The maintenance test asks who performs and finances the work after the memorable event. The representation test asks who can challenge the definition of the common good, including those who appear only as background beneficiaries or obstacles. The revision test asks how a harmful arrangement can change without requiring another exceptional rescuer. These tests are this article's proposed synthesis. They are not a validated scale, and no numerical score is assigned to the stories or to Saudi institutions.

Their literary value lies in redirecting attention towards narrative selection. A protagonist concentrates experience; a setting establishes what can be seen; an ending closes some questions while leaving others open. Reading these formal decisions critically does not require a writer to supply a complete constitution or a technical appendix. Rather, it makes the reader responsible for distinguishing what the narrative renders compelling from what its imagined society would still need to justify. This preserves the autonomy of fiction while identifying the limited, demanding work that interpretation can contribute to public deliberation.

The comparison also makes care difficult to separate from political competence. All three narratives position women between an institutional role and personal attachments. That pattern invites a question about the distribution of repair itself: who is expected to notice that an arrangement has become intolerable and to undertake the additional work of correcting it? A future that relies on such work without recognising it

may reproduce inequality within an otherwise cooperative project. Further literary research could investigate whether this distribution recurs across a larger corpus, including stories that assign care differently or refuse a reconciliation centred on an unusually capable mediator.

Saudi sustainability as a context for critical comparison

Saudi Arabia supplies the context in which the proposed questions would be tested, not a setting secretly represented by the American stories. The relevant comparison concerns problems of environmental provision and responsibility. It does not presume equivalent political institutions, property systems, or community histories. Jasanoff and Kim (2009) show how technological projects and collectively imagined social orders can be understood together within different national settings. Their analysis supports attention to contextual specificity; it does not establish a ready-made description of Saudi environmental aspirations.

The National Water Strategy offers a concrete starting point. The Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (2025) identifies scarcity, demand management, service affordability, environmental protection, and governance among the concerns that its strategic objectives address. These concerns connect water provision with institutions and everyday use. They also demonstrate why an attractive image of greenery is insufficient evidence of sustainability. The water source, competing demands, operating costs, and responsibility for continued provision remain necessary questions. The strategy is cited for its stated objectives, not as proof that every objective has been achieved.

The Saudi Green Initiative identifies a target of generating half the Kingdom's power from renewable sources by 2030 (Saudi Green Initiative, n.d.). A target describes an intended direction rather than a completed transition. For a literary foresight exercise, it creates an occasion to compare different social arrangements consistent with increased renewable generation. Essential questions include access to benefits, maintenance capacity, and the relationship between national objectives and particular places. Alshuwaikhat and Mohammed's (2017) earlier assessment of Vision 2030 also emphasises stakeholder involvement and assessment mechanisms. Its historical analysis should not be mistaken for an evaluation of current performance.

An unresolved political tension remains. Solarpunk's criticism of hierarchy cannot simply be absorbed into a celebration of national development. Doing so would retain its attractive technologies while weakening the critique that gives those technologies a social purpose. Yet importing a fictional political order would ignore the history and institutions of the receiving context. The proposed approach keeps this tension open by transferring questions rather than institutional answers. It asks how power becomes answerable for environmental obligations without assuming that one governing arrangement exhausts the available responses. Participants should also be able to question the developmental objective itself, including whether a proposed expansion serves the needs invoked to justify it. This does not make literary deliberation a substitute for public decision. It preserves a space in which the terms of the decision can be examined before discussion narrows to implementation. A reading that permits criticism only of delivery would be weaker than the critical utopian approach proposed here.

The environmental scope comprises SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 15: water and sanitation, clean energy, sustainable settlements, responsible production and consumption, climate action, and terrestrial ecosystems. These goals establish concerns against which scenarios can be examined (United Nations, n.d.-a, n.d.-b, n.d.-c, n.d.-d, n.d.-e, n.d.-f). They are not treated as independent boxes whose benefits automatically accumulate. A scenario that increases clean generation may also alter land use, require material replacement, or affect water demand. Its contribution must be assessed across those relationships.

The literary corpus most directly illuminates SDG 7, with strong connections to SDG 11. Its relevance to the other goals varies. Water access and habitat provide identifiable bridges to SDGs 6 and 15; materials, repair, and replacement create questions for SDG 12; and collective preparation under changing conditions connects the exercise to SDG 13. These are analytical mappings, not claims that the authors intentionally illustrated UN targets. In particular, the materials question extends beyond what the stories develop in detail and must be supplemented by external evidence in any applied project.

Saudi universities could provide one setting for exploring these relationships through cooperation between literary scholars, environmental specialists, and people responsible for everyday services. A proposed exercise might examine a campus or neighbourhood before attempting a national scenario. It should invite residents and operational staff to identify what the initial description overlooks. Participation would need

to accommodate different language preferences and levels of technical familiarity. Such arrangements remain proposals. The article supplies no evidence that a particular university has adopted them or that reading these stories would change participants' environmental behaviour.

From literary interpretation to strategic foresight

Establishing the decision and its uncertainties

The proposed procedure begins with a decision sufficiently specific to be examined. A broad invitation to imagine a sustainable Saudi Arabia would permit agreeable descriptions without exposing choices. A more useful question might concern how a campus should provide outdoor shade, use reclaimed water, and maintain solar installations over the next decade. This example is hypothetical. Its purpose is to identify a bounded setting in which environmental goals interact with shared services and everyday work. The appropriate horizon would depend on the actual decision rather than on a date selected for rhetorical effect.

Scenario planning investigates alternatives under uncertainty, rather than simply extending one preferred trajectory (Amer et al., 2013). At this stage, participants would assemble evidence about existing provision, resource constraints, users, and responsibilities. Uncertainties might concern future demand, replacement costs, or the availability of maintenance skills. Those are questions for investigation, not assumed conditions. Inayatullah's (2008) distinction between inherited futures and alternatives also invites participants to ask which images they have accepted without examining their origins. A visually impressive installation may already dominate the discussion before its purposes have been specified.

Reading for assumptions and excluded perspectives

Participants would next read the selected stories, with literary facilitation that preserves ambiguity. The task would identify who perceives the problem, which explanations become persuasive, and where the ending stops. A reading record should distinguish an explicit textual detail from an interpretation or an unanswered question. Disagreement would be retained where the text supports more than one judgement. This is essential because the exercise should not reward participants for arriving at a predetermined message about cooperation, technology, or Saudi development.

The reading would then be tested against a perspective absent from the initial account. A scenario written from the position of a project manager could be rewritten through a maintenance worker, a resident with limited mobility, or someone whose access depends on another household member. These are proposed writing positions, not claims about what such people would actually say. Where real participants occupy those positions, their accounts should challenge the exercise's imagined versions. The value lies in exposing which assumptions change when the same infrastructure is experienced through a different location in its organisation.

Constructing alternatives with comparable obligations

The third stage would produce contrasting scenarios around the same documented decision. One might rely on a central provider, another on distributed provision, and another on a negotiated combination. Each should specify who pays, who maintains the system, how interruptions are managed, and who can request a review. Without comparable information, a decentralised future may appear preferable simply because its costs are left undescribed. A centralised alternative may appear efficient because its difficulties have been assigned to unnamed staff. Symmetry of scrutiny matters more than symmetry of narrative attractiveness.

Merrie et al. (2018) demonstrate a connection between science fiction prototyping and scenario development in an ocean context. Their work supports experimenting with narrative methods, but an environmental setting cannot be transferred without adaptation. For the proposed Saudi exercise, specialist review would separate imaginative social arrangements from unsupported technical assumptions. A scenario may deliberately explore an ambitious possibility; it should still identify what would need to change for that possibility to become feasible. Technical objections should be recorded precisely, including whether they concern current limitations, uncertain costs, or a genuinely incompatible proposal.

Testing responsibility across the SDGs

The alternatives would then undergo the maintenance, representation, and revision tests. For the hypothetical

campus, the maintenance test would examine cleaning, repairs, replacement, water monitoring, and the continuity of skilled work. It would ask whether an environmental improvement merely transfers an unrecognised burden to another group. The representation test would identify users who are easily omitted from a meeting or survey and consider how their needs could affect the decision. The revision test would require a named process for investigating harm, changing an arrangement, and explaining why a requested change was accepted or rejected. For example, a design that meets its generation target but repeatedly leaves repairs unfunded should trigger review. The review would examine the financing arrangement and decision authority before attributing the failure to individual residents' insufficient environmental commitment.

Environmental assessment should accompany these tests. A proposal for shade and planting would need evidence about water use and habitat effects; a solar proposal would require attention to materials and disposal as well as generation. Pereira et al. (2020) develop the Nature Futures Framework to accommodate plural relationships between people and nature in scenario construction. Their approach provides a reason to preserve different accounts of environmental value rather than reducing every benefit to a single measure. The present procedure does not adopt their framework wholesale; it uses that plurality to resist an exclusively energy-centred definition of success.

Trade-offs should be made discussable without suggesting that all losses are interchangeable. A gain in aggregate performance does not automatically justify removing essential access from a small group. Participants would therefore need to distinguish negotiable preferences from minimum protections and to explain the evidence supporting that distinction. The procedure should also record a remaining disagreement instead of manufacturing consensus. A useful output could be a revised option accompanied by unresolved questions, responsible actors, and the additional information required before a decision. Narrative coherence would contribute to understanding, while evidence would determine the defensibility of the proposal.

Evaluating the contribution of reading

The final stage would examine whether literary interpretation added anything that ordinary scenario discussion did not. Immediate enjoyment, enthusiasm, or agreement with sustainability goals would provide weak evidence. More relevant indications would include a previously overlooked group, a clearer distinction between capacity and obligation, or a material revision to an option following criticism. These are proposed criteria for future evaluation, not reported outcomes. Assessors should be able to trace each claimed improvement to a change in the deliberative record rather than infer benefit from the presence of fiction in the exercise.

A comparative pilot could examine a literary workshop alongside an otherwise similar workshop using only conventional scenario materials. The purpose would be to investigate differences in reasoning, perspective, and revision while accounting for language proficiency and prior environmental knowledge. Schneider-Mayerson et al. (2023) provide an example of empirical research on responses to environmental literature; the existence of such research does not establish an effect for this corpus or population. Any subsequent study would need an appropriate design, consent procedures, and an account of what its measures can legitimately show. Improved discussion would still be different from improved environmental performance.

Critical implications and limits

The first objection to this approach is that it risks making literature serve a managerial purpose. If a story is used only to encourage acceptance of an existing programme, its unresolved meanings become inconvenient distractions. Critical utopian reading requires a different relationship: literature must retain the capacity to question the purpose, distribution, and assumed beneficiaries of the programme. The proposal therefore depends on an institution's willingness to hear criticism, including criticism that complicates a favoured option. No workshop technique can supply that willingness by itself.

A second objection concerns the selection of texts. A single American collection cannot establish a general theory of Anglophone solarpunk. Its commissioned format and close relationship with energy research may make infrastructure unusually prominent. Other solarpunk writing might organise responsibility through kinship, food, migration, or forms of spiritual belonging. Comparative work should examine those differences rather than treat the present selection as a settled canon. The claim advanced here is narrower: these three texts sustain a useful critical argument about the relationship between environmental provision and the authority to

define common obligations.

A third limitation is the distance between interpretation and reception. The article identifies possibilities for reading; it does not know which readers will take them up. An English-language story can invite reflection while excluding participants who would express themselves more precisely in another language. Translation, bilingual discussion, and alternative materials may therefore be necessary in an applied setting. Their effects would need investigation. A disagreement attributed to values might arise from wording, unfamiliar cultural references, or unequal confidence in speaking. Literary education and deliberative design should make those differences visible.

The approach also cannot resolve technical disputes through imaginative sympathy. Water requirements, ecological disturbance, energy reliability, and material waste demand relevant evidence. The force of a scene may make one harm memorable while leaving another difficult to picture. Critical reading should expose that imbalance rather than assume that narrative attention follows the distribution of real-world risk. Equally, quantitative assessment cannot determine every question of belonging or acceptable sacrifice. The relationship proposed here is one of mutual scrutiny, with each form of inquiry making the other's omissions easier to identify.

Finally, collective responsibility can become a language of moral pressure. A person who cannot contribute in the expected way may be judged insufficiently committed to a shared future. The article's proposed safeguards address that possibility by requiring explanations of capacity, authority, and accommodation. They do not promise agreement. Their purpose is to ensure that environmental commitment remains open to criticism from within, including criticism by those who endorse the objective but contest the arrangement through which they are expected to support it. Such disagreement can be evidence of responsibility rather than its absence.

Conclusion

Anglophone solarpunk can contribute to strategic foresight by making the social conditions of a sustainable future available for criticism. The argument developed here concerns a tension between desirable environmental change and the distribution of obligations needed to sustain it. Collective responsibility becomes inadequate when it assumes that everyone possesses equal resources, equal authority, or equal capacity to comply. A critical utopian reading asks whether an imagined society can recognise those differences and revise its arrangements accordingly.

The proposed Saudi application retains the environmental scope of SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 15 while treating local relevance as something to investigate. Fiction supplies no evidence that a particular arrangement will succeed in the Kingdom. It can help formulate better questions about who maintains essential services, who participates in decisions, and how harmful outcomes become correctable. Those questions become useful only when they encounter contextual knowledge, technical assessment, and the experience of affected people.

The resulting conception of hope is demanding. A future earns confidence through its capacity to respond when its own promises prove incomplete. Literary endings can make that incompleteness visible, even where they offer relief or reconciliation. Strategic foresight can carry the inquiry further by asking what responsibilities would continue after the ending and which institutions would be answerable for them.

Funding:
The author extends their appreciation to Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for funding this research work through the Project number (PSAU/2026/02/41196).

Declarations

Data availability: The article analyses public institutional webpages. The source register and representative Romanized excerpts are included. A reusable corpus should be archived only after checking institutional copyright, webpage changes, and journal data-sharing requirements.

Ethics: The corpus contains no private or personal data. Institutional texts are quoted briefly for scholarly analysis.

Conflict of interest: No conflict of interest is declared.

Author contribution note: The manuscript is a research-development draft. Before submission, the named author should verify all primary pages, add independent second coding, and adapt formatting and disclosure statements to the target journal.

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