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Readers' Emulation of Green Behaviours in Fiction: A Case Study of *Habitat Man*.

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Increasing numbers of writers are turning to fiction as a way to engage a broader audience in the realities of climate change. Most climate fiction is dystopian and set in the future. The hope is that by raising awareness of the harmful consequences of climate change, readers will take action. However well intentioned, there have been critiques that it has not been as effective in prompting the necessary behaviour change as hoped. A key issue is that it is those who are already aware who tend to read climate fiction (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018). Also the dystopian approach can lead to counterproductive negative emotions such as denial, avoidance, depression, eco-anxiety and a kind of passive despair rather than effective action (Baden, 2019; Schneider-Mayerson, 2018). Another finding is that attitudinal effects after reading climate fiction tend to diminish to non-significance after one month (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2020)

This paper reports on 55 (UK and US) readers' responses to *Habitat Man* written to address the common critiques of climate fiction, i.e. that it preaches to the converted, and that the dystopian focus leads to denial, avoidance and eco-anxiety rather than sustained and effective behaviour change. It also draws upon research indicating the solution-focused green stories with characters readers' can identify with, engaging in green practices that are easily imitable, are the most ways for stories to inspire adoption of green practices (Baden, 2019)

Habitat Man fits within the popular and mainstream rom-com genre, combining comedy, romance and little mystery. It focuses on almost entirely solutions that readers can easily adopt, rather than problems. For example, it skips the alarming statistics relating to biodiversity loss, and instead talks in lyrical terms about the delights of a pond, what native plants will attract birds, less toxic pet treatments that are not so detrimental to bee populations and soil health etc. The addition of a body found in garden creates suspense and the opportunity to talk about natural burials. A study just completed asked 55 readers to report on their responses during and after reading the book. A month after finishing the book they are then asked about whether they adopted any of the green alternatives suggested in *Habitat Man*.

Results indicate that over 90% adopted at least one green alternative as a result of reading the book. Several said they'd changed their will and given instructions for a natural funeral. *Habitat Man* covered many practices and other typical areas of reported change were home composting, favouring wildlife friendly plants, cleaning birdboxes more regularly, growing food at home, increased use of seasonal vegetables, greater upcycling and re-use, campaigning against pesticide use etc. Attitudes also changed, with readers reporting increased feeling of kinship to nature and more critical attitudes towards high consumption and waste. It is concluded that a solution-focused novel targeting mainstream readers can be an effective tool to inspire adoption of green practices.