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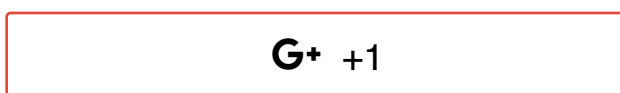
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## The future's bright: the dazzling new wave of solar tech

Vikki Knowles (<https://collectively.org/en/contributor/vikki-knowles/>)

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Check out these mind grenades of new solar tech. Spoiler alert: the outlook on your phone's battery life is about to get way sunnier.

Nothing to see here: Ubiquitous Energy's smart glass

### A see-through solar panel

Most of us know what a solar panel looks like. They're bluish and rectangular and... \*falls asleep\*... but what if you couldn't see them at all? Whaaa..? Silicon Valley-based Ubiquitous Energy (<http://ubiquitous.energy/>) is the firm behind this 'invisible' energy. It works by letting visible light pass through while absorbing ultraviolet and infra-red wavelengths and converting them into electricity.

Cue a host of applications such as smart windows – imagine a skyscraper full of them? – and electronic shelf labels that power themselves through clear solar rather than batteries. Best of all, why not put one on your smartphone so that – gasp – the battery life is effectively never-ending? No wonder UE won the 2015 Display Innovation Award. Ain't nothing shinier than invisible sun.

Bookmark this page: the YOLK solar charger

### A solar panel so small it can fit in a book

Yuh, yuh, we like charging on the go. But where's the socket when you really need it? So when your smug mate says he's got a powerful solar charger tucked away in his cute little manbag, we're impressed. Design firm YOLK (<http://yolkstation.com/>) have delivered: they've come up with the world's thinnest and lightest solar charger, brought to life by over \$1m from backers on Kickstarter ([https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1398120161/solar-paper-the-worlds-thinnest-and-lightest-solar?ref=category\\_popular](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1398120161/solar-paper-the-worlds-thinnest-and-lightest-solar?ref=category_popular)).

Sleek and discreet is the name of the game. It's about the size of a \$2 bill and weighs a teeny 4 oz. You can put it in your pocket. You can use it as a bookmark. Hey, you can even charge your phone with it. On a sunny day, it'll do the job for an iPhone 6 in about two and a half hours (the same as a wall charger).

Apparently conventional solar chargers get a bit freaked out when the voltage drops (i.e. when a cloud passes overhead, not like that's a regular occurrence or anything), but YOLK have designed their solar paper so that it automatically resets and continues charging, rather than you having to do that manually. Sleek, discreet *and* effective. Still impressed.

A global solution: the Rawlemon Spherical Solar Energy Generator

### Moon power – yes, it's solar from moonlight

What if solar energy could be derived from the moon? \*Howls\*. That's exactly what the Rawlemon Spherical Solar Energy Generator (<http://www.rawlemon.com/>) does – it sounds like a mouthful, but it basically looks like a giant marble in a catapult.

German architect Andre Broessel is behind the invention, which uses a massive ball lens to focus light from both the sun and moon onto a solar cell. While your typical photovoltaic panel only manages 15% efficiency, the Rawlemon can get up to 70%, by combining the ball lens with a dual axis tracking system. In addition, the design allows the solar cell surface to be shrunk to a mere 1% of the size of its conventional so-called 'ugly' cousin.

The Beta.ray generators as described above start at a cool €6,000 with the tallest in the range standing at 180cm and capable of generating up to 3.4kWh a day. The more accessible 10cm Beta.ey range sits on your desk and charges your USB devices, starting at a more reasonable €149. Apparently it can charge your phone 1.5 times in a day. Broessel says that if everyone did this with a device like Beta.ey, we could close a nuclear power plant. Yay!

On the right path: Holland's SolaRoad

### The sun beneath your wheels...

Putting solar panels on roofs is a great idea, until we start running out of, er.... roof. In fact, even if all the roofs in the Netherlands were equipped with solar panels, it would only supply about 25% of the country's electricity needs. Luckily there's plenty of room on the roads. So imagine coating them in a solar surface.

The aptly named SolaRoad (<http://www.solaroad.nl/en/>) is doing just that. It's piloted a solar cycle path in the North Holland town of Krommenie. This has generated 9,800kWh in one year – enough to power three houses – but also cost (<http://www.fastcoexist.com/3038404/the-worlds-first-solar-bike-path-keeps-bikers-safe-powers-surrounding-neighborhoods>) a chunky \$3.75 million for under 100 metres. But this is very much an experiment. Now it's proved in practice, the dream is to use large parts of the Netherlands' road network – and hopefully sunnier climes elsewhere – to power households, street lighting, traffic systems and electric vehicles. And it should be a lot cheaper once economies of scale kick in.

Bulgarian beach brollies: Kashalot's Sea Sunflowers

### Sun power from beach brollies. Obviously.

If you were lucky enough to be sunning yourself in Varna, Bulgaria last summer, you might well have plonked yourself under a sunflower – a sunflower beach brolly, that is. And you may have noticed that these 'Sea Sunflowers' were equipped with a small flexible solar panel. That means while you're lapping up the Zzz, you can charge up not one but *two* small devices in the meantime.

I mean, who doesn't like the beach and sun, and who can argue with a friendly sunflower? Developed by Kashalot (who doubtless hope to cash... oh never mind), the aim is to bring the Sea Sunflowers to most of Varna's city beaches by 2017.

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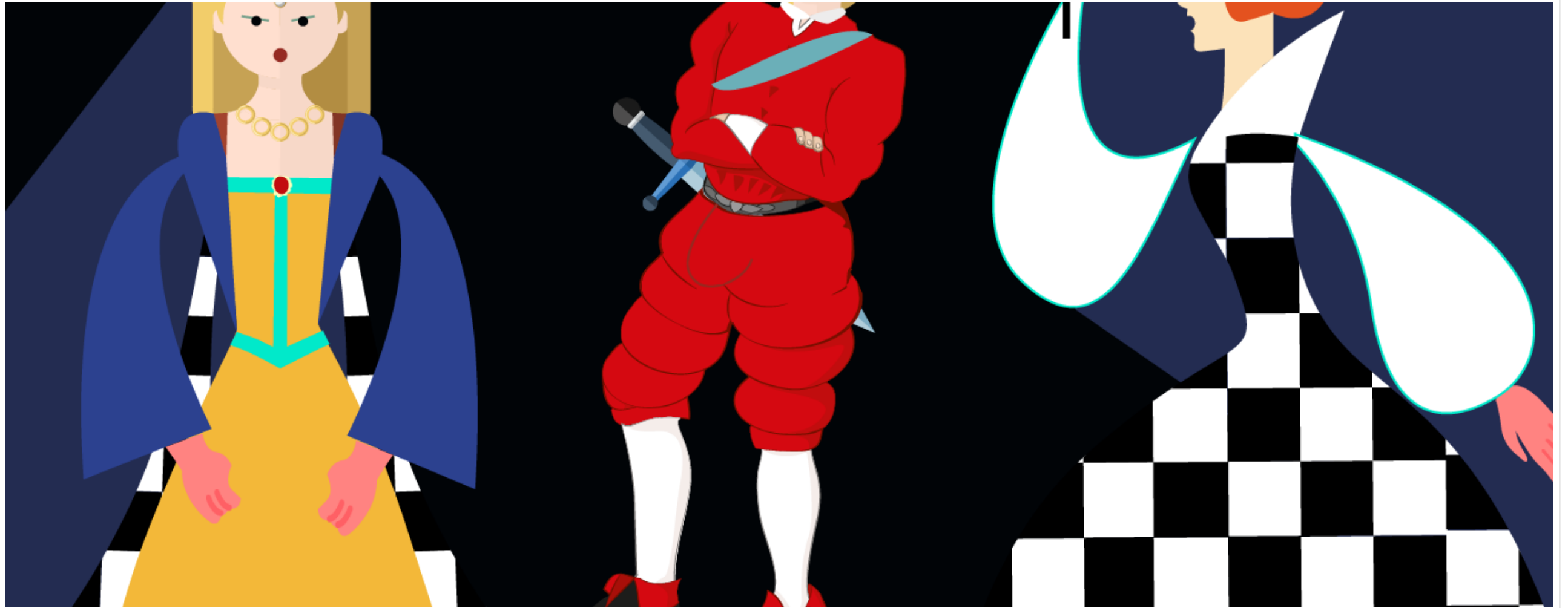
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