

Intelligent Narrative Generation: From Cognition to Crowdsourcing Mark Riedl

riedl@cc.gatech.edu @mark_riedl





College of Computing School of Interactive Computing



Intelligent systems versus stories

- Understanding stories
 - Question answering
 - Distant reading
- Information retrieval
- Story generation









Why study story generation?

- Stories are everywhere
- Humans make up stories
 all the time, but computers
 do not
- Cognitive science
- Computational creativity

Robot With Mechanical Brain Thinks Up Story Plots

FORMERLY robots were merely mechanical devices that could perform a variety of stunts under the guidance of a human being, but now a robot has made its appearance that thinks, has a soul of a kind, creative imagination, and other qualities necessary for writing a modern stereotyped short story. This robot, the invention of Wycliffe Hill, a Los Angeles scenario writer, is declared to be able to build up millions of plots, no two alike, for magazine stories or movie plays.

Mr. Hill has equipped his robot with an index chart, divided into eight sections, one devoted to each of the eight elements of a story background, character, obstacle, problem, predicament, complication, crisis and climax—and with an assortment of variations. The



Mr. Wycliffe Hill demonstrating his new story writing robot, which can think up any kind of plot with its mechanical brains.

robot selects the material as required from this inexhaustible source and builds plots that could never be imagined by the author

without the aid of the mechanical brain. Now if you want to become a successful author simply obtain a robot and put it to work.

© Popular Mechanics, 1931





Stories exist on the page and in the mind

NLP and story generation took different paths

Mea culpa

There is a woman named Jasmine. There is a king named Jafar. This is a story about how King Jafar becomes married to Jasmine. There is a magic genie. This is also a story about how the genie dies.

There is a magic lamp. There is a dragon. The dragon has the magic lamp. The genie is confined within the magic lamp.

King Jafar is not married. Jasmine is very beautiful. King Jafar sees Jasmine and instantly falls in love with her. King Jafar wants to marry Jasmine. There is a brave knight named Aladdin. Aladdin is loyal to the death to King Jafar. King Jafar orders Aladdin to get the magic lamp for him. Aladdin wants King Jafar to have the magic lamp. Aladdin travels from the castle to the mountains. Aladdin slays the dragon. The dragon is dead. Aladdin takes the magic lamp from the dead body of the dragon. Aladdin travels from the mountains to the castle. Aladdin hands the magic lamp to King Jafar. The genie is in the magic lamp. King Jafar rubs the magic lamp and summons the genie out of it. The genie is not confined within the magic lamp. King Jafar controls the genie with the magic lamp. King Jafar uses the magic lamp to command the genie to make Jasmine love him. The genie wants Jasmine to be in love with King Jafar. The genie casts a spell on Jasmine making her fall in love with King Jafar. Jasmine is madly in love with King Jafar. Jasmine wants to marry King Jafar. The genie has a frightening appearance. The genie appears threatening to Aladdin. Aladdin wants the genie to die. Aladdin slays the genie. King Jafar and Jasmine wed in an extravagant ceremony.

The genie is dead. King Jafar and Jasmine are married. The end.













Outline

- A brief history of story generation
 - Cognitive influences and narratology
 - Computer game influences
- Some work on story generation systems
- Next steps





Once upon a time...

Down the rabbit hole

- Want computers to interact and communicate with humans
- "I was on my way back from Lisbon. When I got to my gate, I discovered that my airplane was surrounded by firetrucks. Needless to say, I missed my connection in Amsterdam..."
- Story understanding: how does one make sense of stories?





Cognitive influence

- Studies show that readers remember the general gist of stories but do not remember the specific words (or images)
- Focus on concepts instead of words
- Narrative intelligence is knowledge-intensive
- Conceptual dependency theory?

The Ordering Scene of the Restaurant Script	
Sequence of events	Action
S MTRANS signal to W	
W PTRANS W to table	S asks for the menu
S MTRANS "need menu" to W	
W PTRANS W to menu	
W ATRANS menu to W	
W PTRANS W to table	W brings the menu
W ATRANS menu to S	
S MTRANS food list to mind	
S MBUILD choice of Food F	S decides what to order
S MTRANS signal to W	
W PTRANS W to table	
S MTRANS "I want F" to W	S tells W
W PTRANS W to C	
W MTRANS (ATRANS F) to C	W tells C
C DO (prepare F script)	



Story generation is born

- Tale-Spin (Meehan, 1976)
 - Physical and social simulation
- Author (Dehn, 1981)
 - Considers story generation from author's perspective
- Universe (Lebowitz, 1985)
 - Early version of hierarchical task network planning
- Minstrel (Turner, 1992)
 - Early version of case-based reasoning







Modern influences on story generation

- Narratology
- Cognitive studies of story comprehension





Structural narratology

- Fabula
 - The events that occur in the fictional world (the ground truth)
 - Includes inferred events not presented to the audience
 - Temporally ordered and can have co-occurring events

Sjuzet/discourse

- A selection of the fabula to be presented to the audience
- Linear recounting
- Can re-order the events for dramatic effect

• Text/media

Words, images, etc. that the audience directly observes











Sjuzet







Text/Media









- Causal enablement (how) and character goals (why)
- Validated using question-answering protocols



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ng

roods



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Cognitive models of story comprehension

- Causal enablement (how) and character goals (why)
- Validated using question-answering protocols



Story generation reloaded



Computer games

- Sense of immersion
- Interaction with virtual characters
- Stories in games are mostly linear (no significant player agency)
- Could humans be participants in an interactive drama?
- Can the player join the bad guys?



Bates et al. CMU Oz Project, c.1992



Interactive narrative

A form of digital entertainment in which the player influences a dramatic storyline through actions

You're taking customers away from me, Hassan!

Leave me alone, Saleh!

Riedl, Automated Story Director





Thue, PaSSAGE



Then meet me forthwith at the notarys; give him direction for this merry bond.



Behind the screen

- Narrative branches in response to player actions
- Combinatorics of authoring
- Story generator: elaborate on human designer's authorial intent







Experience (drama) manager

- An omniscient, disembodied agent
- Observes a virtual world
- Intervenes to drive the player's narrative experience forward...
- ...according to some model of quality of experience
- Experience manager is a surrogate for the human storyteller



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1. Cognitively inspired planning

2. Crowdsourcing



1. Cognitively inspired planning

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Cognitively inspired story generation

- Construct a sequence of events that can be told as a story---that meets some set of given criteria for success
 - Need computational model of "good"
 - Dramatic arc? Emotional impact? Makes a point? Sense of engagement?
- Two nearly-universal properties of story:
 - Causal progression
 - Character intentionality







Computer as author

- Creative writing is a problemsolving activity
- Author goals vs. character goals
- Model: plan out the events that should occur in the narrative







Narratives as plans

- Partial-order plan is a good representation of plot
 - Action, temporality, causality
 - Functionally equivalent to story comprehension models
- Planning: find a sound and coherent sequence of actions that transforms the initial state into one in which the goal situation holds







• But, is planning a good model of story creation?





- But, is planning a good model of story creation?
- Narrative Planning:
 - Multiple characters
 - Goal state describes outcome of the story
 - Outcome is not necessarily intended by any characters





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 Augment planning algorithm to reason about author goals and character goals







- Conventional causal dependency planning
 - Provides logical causal progression

- Reasoning about character intentions
 - Use a cognitive model to determine whether characters appear intentional and revise the plan otherwise
 - Insert actions that explain character goals



Riedl & Young. Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research, 39, 2010.



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Insert actions that explain character goals



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Marry (Vizier, Jasmine, Castle)

Slay (Aladdin, Genie, Castle)



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The genie is dead. King Jafar and Jasmine are married. The end.





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Effect on reader comprehension?

- Fabulist vs. conventional planner
- Question-answering protocol to elicit readers' mental models
 - Enablement (how questions)
 - Intention (why questions)
- Compared readers' answers to the computer's answers

Q: Why did Aladdin travel from the mountains to the castle?

A: Because the genie wanted to cast a spell on Jasmine.

4: Very
Good3: Good2: Bad1: Very
Bad

	Questions computer thinks are "good" (closer to 4)	Questions computer thinks are "bad" (closer to 1)
Fabulist	3.20	1.19
Control	2.99	1.30





Riedl & Young. Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research, 39, 2010.



The "goodness" question

- Does the story generator know that it is creating something good?
- How can a computational system generate a suspenseful story?



Automated story director

- Use a story generator to construct alternative branches
- Start with an exemplar narrative (generated or hand-authored)
- Exceptions: player actions that derail the narrative plan
- How to detect exceptions?
- How to respond to exceptions?


























Automated story director

- Pre-compute tree of contingency narratives
- Semi-autonomous virtual characters









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Open story generation

- Narrative intelligence is knowledge-intensive, resulting in micro-worlds
- Can we overcome the knowledge engineering bottleneck?
- Can an intelligent system learn to tell stories about any imaginable domain?





Sociocultural storytelling

- Humans rely on a lifetime of experiences from which to explain stories, tell stories, or act in the real-world
- Just-in-time domain model learning
- Approaches:
 - Read natural language corpora & websites
 - Mine commonsense knowledge bases
 - Learn from humans







Story grammar learning



Finlayson. Dissertation, 2012.

Unsupervised script learning



row	\mathbf{s}_1	\mathbf{s}_2	\$ 3	\mathbf{s}_4
1	\oslash	walk into restaurant	\bigotimes	enter restaurant
2	\oslash	\oslash	walk to the counter	go to counter
3	\oslash	find the end of the line	\oslash	\bigcirc
4	\oslash	stand in line	\oslash	\oslash
5	look at menu	look at menu board	\oslash	\oslash
6	decide what you want	decide on food and drink	\oslash	make selection
7	order at counter	tell cashier your order	place an order	place order
8	\oslash	listen to cashier repeat order	\oslash	\oslash
9	pay at counter	\oslash	pay the bill	pay for food
10	\oslash	listen for total price	\oslash	\oslash
11	\oslash	swipe credit card in scanner	\oslash	\oslash
12	\oslash	put up credit card	\oslash	\oslash
13	\oslash	take receipt	\oslash	\oslash
14	\oslash	look at order number	\oslash	\oslash
15	\oslash	take your cup	\oslash	\oslash
16	\oslash	stand off to the side	\oslash	\oslash
17	\oslash	wait for number to be called	wait for the ordered food	\oslash
18	receive food at counter	get your drink	get the food	pick up order
19	\oslash	\oslash	\oslash	pick up condiments
20	take food to table	\oslash	move to a table	go to table
21	eat food	\oslash	eat food	consume food
22	\oslash	\oslash	\oslash	clear tray
22	\oslash	\oslash	exit the place	\oslash

Chambers, Jurafsky. Proc. ACL/HLT 2008 Conference. Regneri, Koller, Pinkal. Proc. ACL 2010 Conference.



Story generation from corpora

• Fairy tale corpus

• Blogs

the dog chases the duck				
the dog barks	the duck run	ns away		
the dog catch	nes the duck	the duck escapes		

I saw it behind the door. The guy near the door put his gun at his side and reached for the knife. We would have to cut it open instead. I was overly excited and came very close to slicing open my finger, too. Luckily the blade narrowly missed my finger and stuck in the wall next to me. Elick to select the sentence that should go next. *A grown man unwilling to sleep when he clearly needs it?" I regretted unbuttoning my shirt because his fingers were now gently caressing my collar bone where the chain traveled. A girl in a "little black party dress" and a domino mask came out and was like, "Hey, who are you?" and I thought that question was, like, totally inappropriate. Jack ripped the gun from her hands. *I panicked. Or potentially even getting involved in it. Now there are lots of spiders around our front door, so they're not necessarily black widows, but I'm still scared. She looks up at me and gives me a tired smile. *Aw you missed!" I whined. "That was supposed to end my affected inner anguish!" This time I thought I was smarter and finangled it to lay down the stairs, so it wouldn't get stuck in the ceiling again.	Your story so far I saw it behind the door. The guy near the door put his gun at his side and reached for the knife. We would have to cut it open instead. I was overly excited and came very close to slicing open my finger, too. Luckily the blade narrowly missed my finger and stuck in the wall next to me.		
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Jack ripped the gun from her hands. Image: Comparison of the stain of the st	A girl in a "little black party dress" and a domino mask cam question was, like, totally inappropriate.	e out and was like, "Hey, who are you?" and I thought that	
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McIntyre & Lapata. Proc. ACL 2009 Conference. Swanson & Gordon. ACM TIIS, 2(3), 2012.





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Crowdsourcing narrative intelligence

- A crowd of humans on the web → a supercomputer
- Crowd as a massive distributed knowledge base
- Insight: humans learn from stories
- Use a crowd to simulate a lifetime of experiences by asking people to tell stories about a given situation
- Crowdsource a highly specialized corpus of narrative examples and learn a generalized model of sociocultural situations





Story generation pipeline





Story generation pipeline

- Just-in-time model learning
 - Crowd workers write typical stories about a given situation
 - Learn domain model from what was written
 - Human narratives implicitly encode causality and obey the maxims of quality and relevance (and quantity)





Sociocultural knowledge representation

- Model a situation as a **script**
 - Representation of procedural knowledge
 - Tells one what to do and when to do it
 - Correlated with expertise
- Set of temporally ordered events
- What are the primitive events?
- How are events ordered?



- 1. Query the crowd
- 2. Identify the salient events
- 3. Determine event ordering
- 4. Mutually exclusive events

- Crowd control:
 - Segment narrative
 - Use one verb per sentence
 - Avoid conditionals and compound structures
 - Avoid using pronouns

Story A	Story B	
a. John drives to the restaurant.	a. Mary looks at the menu.	
b. John stands in line.	b. Mary decides what to order.	
c. John orders food.	c. Mary orders a burger.	
d. John waits for his food.	d. Mary finds a seat.	
e. John sits down.	e. Mary eats her burger.	
f. John eats the food.		



- 1. Query the crowd
- 2. Identify the salient events
- 3. Determine event ordering
- 4. Mutually exclusive events

- Crowd control simplifies NLP
- Compute semantic similarity between sentences
- Cluster sentences into events



- 1. Query the crowd
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- Seek evidence for temporal relations
- Binomial confidence testing
- Search for the most compact graph that explains the stories



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- 1. Query the crowd
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- Measure mutual information between events
- Mutual information is high and co-occurrence is low
- Generalization of "or" relations









Narrative generation

- Script defines a space of linear sequences
- Random walk, preserving temporal order and mutual exclusion
- Evaluation shows generated stories statistically indistinguishable from human-authored stories



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Interactive narrative generation



Li, Lee-Urban & Riedl. Proc. Intelligent Narrative Technologies 2012 Workshop.



The road ahead

- Starting with basics: causality, character believability, typicality
- Progressively layering complexity
- Better models of story "goodness"







Observations

- Just-in-time generation of a corpus
- Crowd control circumvents some NLP challenges
- Causal-like structure from data
- Concepts grounded in language
- Points in a direction where cognitive and NLP approaches may come together







Conclusions

- Story generation is a key capability that unlocks many practical, real-world applications
 - Create and manage user experiences in virtual worlds
 - Games, interactive narratives, training simulations, narrative learning environments, virtual characters
- Narrative intelligence is a step toward human-level intelligent systems
- What can I do to help?





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riedl@cc.gatech.edu @mark_riedl













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Ninth AAAI Conference on Artificial Intelligence & Interactive Digital Entertainment



Sixth Workshop on Intelligent Narrative Technologies

Papers due: July 3, 2013

http://aiide.org

http://www.int6.gatech.edu

October 14-18, 2013, Boston MA



