

StarTales: Imagining Interactive Storyreading with Large Language Models

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Abstract

Large Language Models (LLMs) have shown strong capabilities in story generation, yet most research focuses on the production side—improving generation or assisting writers. I present *StarTales*, a prototype that shifts focus to the reader, exploring new interactions enabled by LLMs during storyreading, when LLMs have the authorship to edit texts. *StarTales* features a tag-based story generation and selection interface inspired by online fiction platforms, and an interactive reading interface supporting story-level and sentence-level modifications as well as conversational interactions with AI-powered author and character personas. By grounding its design in familiar online reading conventions, *StarTales* explores how generative AI can empower readers to dynamically shape narratives rather than passively consume them, presenting a potential future where writing and reading can become fluid.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Interactive systems and tools**.

Keywords

Reading Interface, LLM in Reading

1 Introduction

Stories are integral to the human experience. Throughout history, storytelling has evolved from oral traditions and printed books to contemporary online fiction, transforming alongside advances in technology [4, 31]. Yet, the desire to consume stories remains constant [31].

Recently, Large Language Models (LLMs) have demonstrated its capabilities in story generation [39]. These models can generate complete stories that readers find comparable in enjoyment to human-written texts [6, 29]. However, the majority of recent research focuses on the production side of LLM with story: either enhancing the technical performance of the models for story generation or designing tools to assist or co-author with human writers in the writing process [39].

In this paper, I shift the focus from the *writer* to the *reader*. By leveraging the capabilities of LLMs, I explore: **What new interactions emerge for readers when reading narratives that LLMs author?** Specifically, I investigate how generative AI can transform the reading experience itself through the generative capabilities that are mainly designed for producing stories.

In this paper, I first examine related work surrounding LLM story creation, current means in interacting with stories, and existing online interfaces for story reading. I then introduce our system, *StarTales*, which facilitates new interactions powered by LLMs.

2 Related Work

2.1 LLM and Story Creation

LLMs have transformed story generation by enabling both fully automated story generation and new forms of human-AI co-authorship. As defined by Teleki et al. [39], story creation with LLMs can be categorized into two distinct paradigms: 1) independent generation, where the LLM acts as an independent author of stories, and 2) author assistance, where the human retains primary authorship while the LLM serves as a collaborative support tool, or the human and LLM together function as co-authors.

Research on independent story generation spans multiple disciplines and purposes. In HCI, several research prototypes of story generation have developed to meet different goals, such as for educational [17] or therapeutic [3, 26] purposes. Lee et al. [17] designed a system to generate stories that helps children acquire more target vocabulary words. Similarly, in mental health contexts, LLMs are used to generate relatable narratives for patients or people experiencing mental hardship [3, 26]. As Bhattacharjee et al. [3] found, users perceive these AI-generated stories as more relatable and authentic than the human-written counterparts.

NLP research largely focuses on enhancing technical capabilities, such as improving story logic [48], evaluating narrative planning [44], updating story worldviews [21], and generating story premises [22]. Recent frameworks have introduced multi-modal approaches combining text and image generation [23] and multi-LLM collaboration to generate stories [40]. Furthermore, to support long-form narrative coherence, researchers have developed frameworks utilizing dynamic outlining [42], iterative feedback loops [24], and critic-based prompting strategies [2].

For author assistance (or human-LLM co-authoring), research prototypes increasingly support multiple stages of the story writing workflow. Some systems emphasize narrative control by allowing writers to guide plots while characters autonomously simulate story events [45], by utilizing movable visual elements to steer story plots [7, 8], and by using a tree structure to connect elements of a story for story generation [28]. Additionally, Qin et al. [27] enabled co-creating specific elements of stories such as the characters, and Chung and Kreminski [7] allows users to make sense of the generated story world. Other systems focus on assisting the story writing process more directly, including tools for pre-writing ideation [41], next-sentence generation based on previous paragraphs [32], multimodal inspiration retrieval to offer writing suggestions [36], or embedded LLM-based sentence-level revision within an editor interface [46].

While these works demonstrate the potentials of LLMs in generating and co-authoring stories, they predominantly frame the user as a *producer*, either as a prompt engineer for independent story

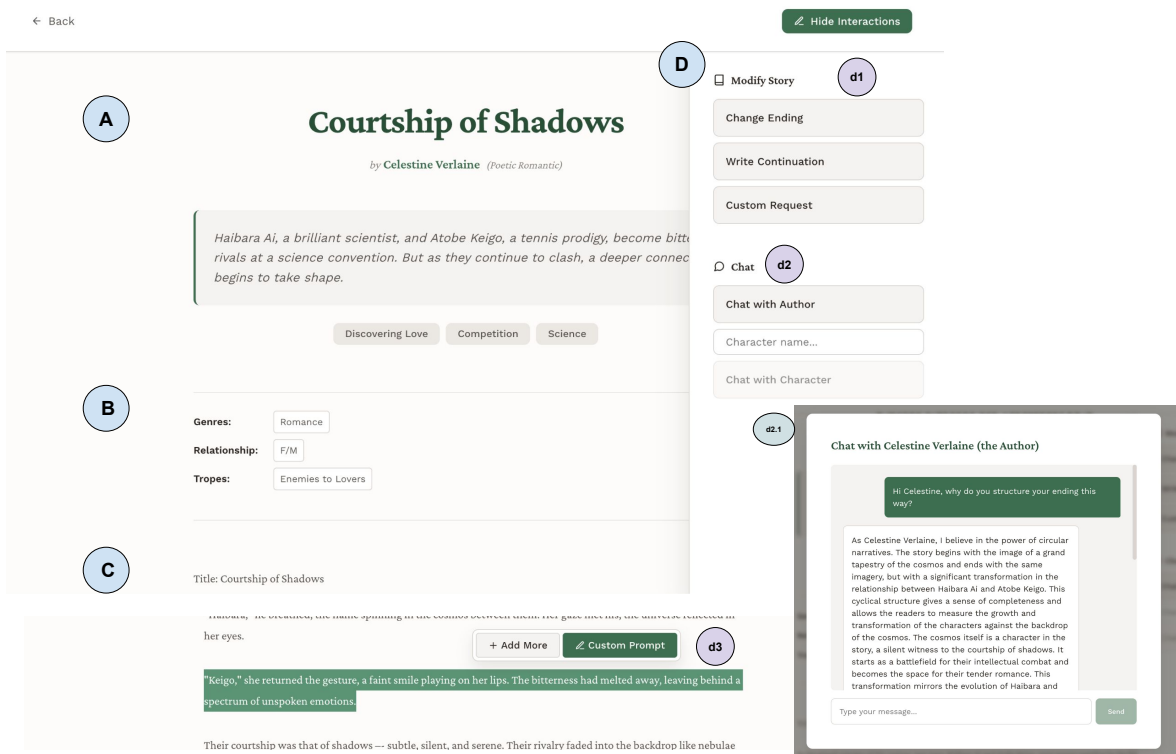


Figure 1: The interactive reading interface of *StarTales*. (A) Story header, including title, author, and short synopsis as in Fig. 2 b1. (B) Story metadata panel showing tags that were previously selected in Fig. 2 a2. (C) Main story text. (D) Interaction panel: (d1) story-level modification actions, including shortcuts such as change ending and write continuation as well as custom request to enter customized prompts; (d2) conversational tools for chatting with the author or characters; and (d2.1) as an example chat window. (d3) sentence-level modification actions, including a shortcut to expand (“add more”) and custom prompt.

generation or as a collaborator. This leaves a gap in understanding how these generative capabilities can be repurposed for the *consumer* of the texts, or in another word, the *reader*. In this work, I build upon these technical foundations but reorients the interaction paradigm to empower readers to dynamically shape their reading experience.

2.2 Interacting with Story

Readers have long engaged with texts through various interactive mediums. Early digital interaction relied on hypertext, using links to create connections between and within documents [9]. As digital media matured, interactive books emerged, incorporating animated visuals, audio narration, and embedded games to deepen engagement [38]. Although many of these works were originally designed for children [38], features such as games (puzzles and spelling games), questions involving memory tasks, and clickable hotspots that active sound or visual effects have been shown to enhance comprehension and support learning the contents of the books [10, 16, 33, 49, 51].

A more complex form of interaction is found in branching narratives and Interactive Fiction (IF). Platforms like Twine¹ utilize

¹<https://twinery.org/>

hypertext to enable the creation of branching connections between story segments [13]. For readers of IF, they can explicitly manipulate the story direction through pre-defined choices that branch into different narratives [1, 34].

Recent advancements have integrated Large Language Models (LLMs) into these interactive frameworks. Several works have developed LLM-driven systems for IF that enable the use of natural language interfaces to create branching logic [37, 43], generate stories and narratives within a defined scope by the authors [20], and update world status based on previous story and narrative choices [14]. While literature in this space focuses more on how to create IF rather than the user experience of interacting of IF, Yuan et al. [47] utilized LLM-powered IF to destigmatize professions typically characterized as “dirty work” by allowing other users to interact with it, where users showed greater empathy towards “dirty worker” after using the system. Beyond branching narratives, LLMs enable deeper interactivity, such as complex, personalized question-answering capabilities for children in reading storybooks [5] and the creation of persona-based agents mimicking characters from books and thereby allow users to interact with these characters [30].

Finally, co-authoring systems (as discussed in §2.1) represent a distinct form of interaction. Mechanisms such as generating the

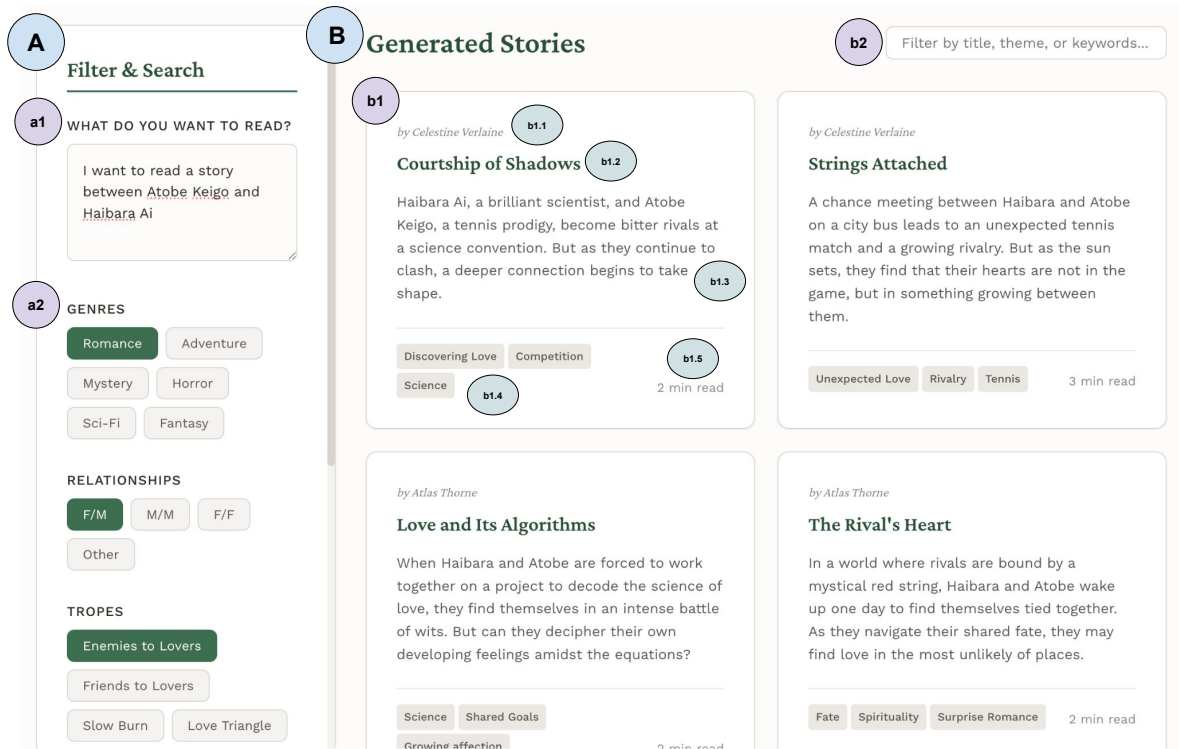


Figure 2: The story generation and selection interface of *StarTales*. (A) Filter & search panel, including free-text request input (a1) and selectable tags for genres, relationships, tropes, warnings, and ratings (a2). (B) Story results panel, with (b1) individual story cards displaying author name (b1.1), title (b1.2), synopsis (b1.3), tags (b1.4), and estimated reading time (b1.5); and (b2) a global search bar for filtering by title, theme, or keywords.

next sentence [32] or injecting customized prompts to revise specific sections [18, 46] allow the user to interact with the text not just as a writer, but as an active reader. For instance, users can ask to *reader more* about a specific section they like or ask to change endings to satisfy their *reading experience*. These interactions allow users to easily expand or modify the narratives.

In this paper, I build on the promise demonstrated by IF, that users desire to actively shape stories, by utilizing the generative and interactive capabilities of LLMs typically used for co-authoring tools or reading interfaces for sense-making.

2.3 Interfaces for Story Reading

Prior research on intelligent reading interfaces has largely focused on *augmenting* informational texts such as academic papers [19]. These systems typically aim to enhance comprehension through summarization [35], explanations [12, 15], or Q&A mechanisms [50]. In contrast, this paper focuses on casual reading of stories.

For casual reading, online platforms have become central hubs for publishing and consuming original novels, poetry, and fanfictions across languages and parts of the world [25]. Users include authors who publish their writings and readers who consume texts that either written by authors of the platforms or digital books

that were included [25]. Examples include Wattpad², GoodNovel³, Commaful⁴, and Archive of Our Own⁵. In these platforms, a key feature is their reliance on metadata for content discovery. Stories are typically presented with a synopsis and a granular tagging system [11]. For instance, Archive of Our Own allows users to filter content by fandom, maturity rating, character relationships, and specific tropes [11]. This metadata is important for enabling readers to curate their experience and to read what they desire [11].

In this work, I leverage the design patterns of these established platforms—specifically their layout, use of synopsis, and tagging mechanisms—to ground *StarTales*'s interface design in familiar reading habits.

3 *StarTales*: An Interactive Storyreading Tool

In this paper, I present *StarTales*, a LLM-based prototype designed to explore possible new interactions readers can take when reading generated stories. *StarTales*'s development includes two main interfaces: (1) story generation and selection, and (2) interactive reading.

²<https://www.wattpad.com/>

³<https://www.goodnovel.com/>

⁴<https://commaful.com/>

⁵<https://archiveofourown.org/>

3.1 System Architecture

StarTales is implemented as a client-side web application using React.js for front-end and Flask for backend. All story generation and narrative interaction are executed server-side through Flask, which calls OpenAI's GPT-4 for generating initial stories, interacting with stories, and supporting conversations. I chose to use an existing commercial LLM to enable quick prototyping and to focus the work on interaction design rather than model development.

3.2 Interface and Features

3.2.1 Story Generation and Selection. Users begin in the Filter & Search panel (Fig. 2 A), which is designed to generate stories coherent to the reader's intent. Rather than searching a static database, users describe their desired narrative in a natural language input field (Fig. 2 a1). To ground the generation in familiar reading habits, the interface incorporates a tagging system as described in §2.3. Users select specific tags across categories including genres (e.g., romance), relationships (e.g., F/M, female and male), tropes (e.g., enemies to lovers), warnings (e.g., violence), and ratings (e.g., teen), as shown in Fig. 2 a2. These tags serve both as explicit constraints for the LLMs in generating the stories and provide a starting point that helps users articulate what they want to read.

Upon submission, *StarTales* combines user inputs into a structured prompt. *StarTales* then generates an initial batch of six distinct stories displayed in the Generated Stories section (Fig. 2 B). Each story is presented as a card containing a title, a synopsis, generated tags, an estimated read time, and a randomly assigned author as shown in Fig. 2 b1.

Similar to online fiction platforms, this stage allows users to compare different stories before committing to read a full text. If the initial batch of stories does not satisfy the user, they can scroll down that triggers *StarTales* to generate additional batches of stories based on the original criteria, mirroring the browsing experience of fiction platforms.

3.2.2 Interactive Reading. When users select a story card, they transition to the reading interface (Fig. 1). At this stage, *StarTales* generates the full narrative text by passing through the title, synopsis, tags, estimated reading time, and author name. The "author" is in fact an "author persona". *StarTales* utilizes a pre-defined set of personas to generate distinct literary voices. For example, a story assigned to a "Poetic Romantic" persona is generated with instructions to use "lyrical, flowing language with rich metaphors" while a "Literary Minimalist" persona is instructed to use "sparse, precise language." Each persona is also mapped with a human-like name when displaying to users to mimic the experience of reading human-written stories.

Once the story is generated, the interface offers three forms of interaction with the story:

- **Story-Level Modification:** The Interactions sidebar (Fig. 1 d1) provides shortcuts to alter the whole story, such as "Change Ending" or "Write Continuation". Users can also request any customized changes by using the "Custom Request" to write their own prompts.
- **Text-Level Modification:** Users can highlight specific sentences for modification. Options include "Add More" to

expand the section or "Custom Prompt" to write their own prompt specific to the highlighted sections.

- **Conversational Interactions:** *StarTales* supports dialogue with persona-based agents (Fig. 1 d2). Users can "Chat with Characters" in the story or "Chat with Author" to further engage in the story.

4 Conclusion and Future Work

In this paper, I presented *StarTales*, a prototype that explores new interactions for story readers enabled by LLMs. By combining a tag-based story generation and selection The goal of the paper is to demonstrate how generative AI capabilities that are predominately developed for authoring tools can potentially be repurposed to empower readers to dynamically shape narratives.

Future work includes further iterations on the prototype with users, conducting a formal user study to evaluate how readers perceive and engage with these interactive features, and exploring social dimensions such as sharing or collaboratively shaping stories with other readers. By imagining what storyreading can become when LLMs hold authorship, *StarTales* offers an initial exploration into a future where the boundaries between reading and writing can become fluid.

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