

Say Anything: A Demonstration of Open Domain Interactive Digital Storytelling

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Abstract. Say Anything is a text-based interactive digital storytelling application that differs from other systems in its emphasis on the ability of users to create a narrative in any domain that they wish. The user and computer take turns in writing sentences in an emerging fictional narrative where sentences contributed by the computer are selected from a collection of millions of personal stories extracted from Internet weblogs. In this demonstration, we will present the latest version of the Say Anything application and allow conference participants to author their own original stories using the system.

Keywords: interactive storytelling, interactive fiction, collaborative writing, social media, weblogs, information retrieval.

1 Say Anything

Say Anything [4] is an open domain story generation engine that is unlike most other contemporary interactive storytelling systems. Say Anything diverges from current systems in two key areas. First, most state-of-the-art systems rely heavily on rich, 3D graphics to help engage the user with the story and virtual environment. However, similar to the early interactive storytelling systems such as TALE-SPIN [3], the virtual world in Say Anything is brought to life entirely through textual language. Second, in any interactive storytelling system there are two somewhat contradictory objectives: to maintain a strong coherent narrative and to allow the user the freedom to do anything they please. While the ultimate goal is to simultaneously achieve both, most compelling systems have focused on improving the narrative aspect by restricting the user's ability to interact with the world in various ways. Say Anything on the other hand emphasizes the ability for the user to create a narrative in any domain without any restrictions, other than the limits of a keyboard.

Stories are authored with Say Anything in a turn-based fashion where the human user and the computer alternate writing sentences of the developing narrative. The user always begins a story with the first sentence. The system then analyzes what has been written and returns a sentence that tries to continue the story in a coherent and entertaining way. If the user is satisfied with this sentence they may continue by writing another sentence. However, if the sentence does not make sense or is objectionable for another reason they may click on the returned sentence and be presented with

nine other alternative sentences from which they can choose. This alternating writing process continues until the user feels that the story has reached a natural conclusion or has deviated so far off track that recovering a coherent narrative is impossible. Figure 1 presents a screenshot of the system's primary authoring interface. The following passage is an example of a successful story written in collaboration with the system:

The weather broke, so we sailed out of the harbor. As Victoria grew nearer, the waves grew larger and we furled some foresail and turned to run. We sailed at about 9 knots with good trim, but the storm eventually caught up with us. With its big open cockpit and heavy nose, I didn't like its chances in the kind of sea you get out there almost continuously that time of year. Sure enough the boat was completely inadequate, and we were tossed into the cold ocean. Everyone in our group of seven tourists -- five locals and a Japanese couple -- was pretty excited about the experience. The Japanese couple were the ones that saved us though, with their expert swimming abilities. as far as that goes it was just the four of us. The last tourist was lost at sea, never to be found. Drowned or murdered, the bloated, stinking bodies that turn up by the hundreds will look much the same. Such is the way with storms like that!



Fig. 1. The main writing interface for the *Say Anything* application. The user can write a new sentence, swap one computer-contributed sentence for another, or allow the computer to continue generating sentences.