

Embracing AI in LitRPGs: Co-creativity and its discontents

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AUTHOR BIO

Henry Zhou is a high school junior from Sheffield, Massachusetts. Henry enjoys rowing, football, skiing, reading, Latin, and video games. He is on the football team at school and has spent the past two summers serving as a camp counselor at the YMCA. At school, he is part of the chess club and the newspaper team. He is an avid member of the Literary Role Playing Game (LitRPG) community, having read and promoted hundreds of web serials. His interest in Artificial Intelligence, philosophy, and the LitRPG genre inspired him to research AI's integration into LitRPG and its co-creativity. He hopes to contribute to the evolving discourse on AI, co-creation, and storytelling in literature and web novel communities.

ABSTRACT

The rise of artificial intelligence has transformed creative industries, offering new possibilities for human-machine collaboration. This paper explores the potential impact of AI on the creative processes of the Literary Role-Playing Game (LitRPG) genre, a primarily online-based growing subgenre of fiction that blends traditional storytelling with video game mechanics. Based on an interview with prominent LitRPG author Gliglith, and a review of over 100 LitRPG novels, this paper argues that the genre is particularly well-suited for AI integration. Drawing on theories of co-creativity that offer a blueprint for humans-AI collaboration, the paper outlines a framework for strategic AI usage, emphasizing a division of labor where AI handles repetitive tasks and synthesizes large databases while authors focus on aesthetic judgment. Such modes of responsible adoption of AI not only enable LitRPG authors to enhance productivity, generate innovative content, and expand global readership, but also preserve the human element of artistic expression in an increasingly automated world. Thus, the stakes of meaningful AI integration in LitRPG extend far beyond the genre: co-creativity offers a powerful model for leveraging technology to amplify human creativity and safeguard its unique contributions.

Keywords: LitRPG, artificial intelligence, generative AI, co-creativity, creativity, AI-assisted writing, human-AI collaboration, AI in literature, web novels, literature and technology, storytelling, and technological innovation

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A LITRPG?

A Literary Role Playing Game (LitRPG) is a subgenre of fictional writing that combines traditional storytelling with elements often seen in computer Role Playing Games (RPGs). These works typically follow protagonists who consciously emerged in a virtual, game-like world, with video game elements – system messages, detailed statistics on health, strength, or intelligence, and level-up notifications – integrated within the narrative (Campfire Writing, n.d.). For instance, following the protagonist's defeat of a monster, the text may include videogame prompts such as “[Monster defeated!], [24 XP (Experience points) Gained!]”.

Following the identification and coinage of the genre by a Russian publishing initiative in 2013, LitRPG has been widely popularized in the last decade (Level Up Publishing, n.d.). Today, RoyalRoad, one of the largest hubs of LitRPG content, features over 60,000 entries. Popular works such as *The Way Ahead* by NoskDaedalus have garnered over 5 million views and 194 million visits in May 2024 (Royal Road, n.d.).

Given the LitRPG genre's growing popularity in a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, the impact of technological innovations on its creative processes warrants consideration. This paper explores the multifaceted ways in which AI may transform the LitRPG industry, arguing for its strategic incorporation to enhance productivity and creativity. This paper begins by assessing AI's role in artistic creation, and briefly outlining authors' current usage of AI. Then, I introduce a framework for conceptualizing AI-human collaboration and explore its unique benefits for LitRPG authors. Subsequently, I propose implementation strategies that pragmatically address concerns on intellectual property and equitability. Altogether, utilizing my analysis of the LitRPG industry as a point of departure, I offer an example of how technological tools can be leveraged to enhance, rather than replace, uniquely human capabilities.

Artificial Intelligence in LitRPG

In recent years, AI has taken the creative industry by storm. The increasing accessibility of generative AI tools such as Dalle-E and ChatGPT has allowed artists to enhance their creative processes in innovative ways. In cinemas, AI has been used to digitally de-age actors (Smith, 2023); in music, the Beatles released the single “Now and Then,” using AI to extract John Lennon's vocals from a demo cassette (Whiting, 2024); in visual art, Jason Allen sparked controversy by winning an art contest with an image generated by AI-tool Midjourney (Roose, 2022). These advancements have raised questions regarding technology's potential impact on the future of human artists and creators: indeed, the rapid rise of generative AI comes with the risk of unemployment for those working in the creative industry, alongside concerns regarding the replacement of human creativity with computational automation (Chiang, 2024).

The LitRPG industry is no different, both regarding the promises of AI and its discontents. LitRPG authors have also integrated AI within their creative process. In an interview I conducted with prominent LitRPG author Gliglith, he remarked that the community had long been “ahead of the curve” in adopting AI: “Years ago...LitRPG authors [had been] using AI tools for visual art in ways that I wasn't aware were possible at the time. There were even people using AI to generate content.” A brief scroll through the Royal Road affirms Gliglith's testimony, with the platform featuring a specific search category for “AI assisted” stories containing over 1300 works. However, this integration has sparked debates about what the LitRPG genre stands to gain --- or lose --- from AI.

Scholars have offered competing views on AI's role in artistic creation. In her *Artificial Intelligence: A Guide for Thinking Humans*, computer scientist Melanie Mitchell provides an overview of this topic. Mitchell describes AI pioneer Douglas Hofstadter's fear regarding AI's evolving capacity to "destroy what [we] cherished most about humanity," given AI's ability to compose music akin to those of Chopin or Bach (Mitchell, 2019, p. 10). Further, Mitchell pinpoints how the multidimensional functioning of "intelligence" --- at once "emotional, verbal, spatial, logical, artistic..." --- has not been fully captured by the computational methods that underpin AI systems (Mitchell, 2019, p. 20). The complex nature of intelligence raises questions about the tasks AI will increasingly be used for, and challenges the assumption that human creativity will necessarily be threatened. Further, Mitchell emphasizes that even complex AI models struggle with simple tasks intuitive to humans --- the development of AI has made us most aware "of what our minds do best" (Mitchell, 2019, p. 34). Ultimately, debates within the field of AI reveal the need for a focused and nuanced approach to assessing its role in creative endeavors.

In this paper, I seek to provide a tentative framework to better understand how humans can productively engage with AI in creative endeavors. Addressing these considerations through the lens of AI integration in LitRPGs, I draw on the theory of co-creativity to pinpoint venues where AI can productively assist and empower human creativity (Rafner et al., 2023). By taking this perspective, I render AI as a partner rather than a competitor in the creative process. This framework foregrounds my argument for the incorporation of AI within the LitRPG genre.

Co-Creativity in AI-Human Collaboration

Generative AI's capacity for creativity has been widely challenged. Creativity researchers define creativity as deeply rooted in novelty within the discipline, the desire and drive of the creator, and an understanding of human culture --- subjective determinations machine algorithms lack. Science-fiction author Ted Chiang echoes these findings in his *New Yorker* article "Why A.I. Isn't Going to Make Art," in which he argues that artmaking involves countless decision-making processes, both minuscule and large-scale, that are not present in automated generative tools. Indeed, rather than making intentional decisions centered toward an artistic objective, AI takes "an average of the choices that other writers have made," in turn enacting the "least interesting choices possible" (Chiang, 2024). In contrast to the meticulously executed choices that constitute the aesthetic qualities of human-made art, AI art is rapidly generated with little fine-grain control, appearing bland, basic, and ultimately unartful.

Nonetheless, in recent years, the rapid developments in the field have shown AI's increasing capabilities in creativity-adjacent domains, such as "divergent thinking." Divergent thinking indicates the ability to generate solutions to open-ended problems, such as "thinking of original uses for objects" (Rafner et al., 2023, p.1837). Psychometric creativity tests evaluate creative potential by measuring divergent thinking, commonly analyzing originality, fluency, and flexibility in thought processes. Given AI's increasing ability to generate novel outputs through pattern recognition and large-scale data processing, such traditional frameworks for assessing creativity may no longer be sufficient. As a result, creators must explore new models that account for both human and machine-driven creative processes.

The theory of co-creativity proposes a model in which AI does not supplant human creativity and instead serves as a powerful augmentative tool (Rafner et al., 2023). In other words, within human-AI co-creative systems, idea generation is enhanced by integrating AI and human capabilities. For one, tasks are often separated into prediction (AI producing content) and judgment (humans deciding whether the content is appropriate). While AI excels at quickly generating materials based on inputted examples and extensive datasets, humans retain the authority of aesthetic and cultural judgment to evaluate and refine AI contributions. A co-creative human-AI partnership maximizes these complementary areas of expertise.

Further, AI's divergent thinking abilities are rooted in its utilization of massive amounts of human-generated data to transform human-only tasks into prediction problems. Thus, as AI models improve to create increasingly human-like predictions, AI inputs can be integrated into the idea-generation process. In other words, creators may leverage AI's ability to identify complex patterns to augment the elements of surprise and novelty necessary for "creative genius." Ultimately, co-creativity posits a vision of AI-human collaboration in which AI offers insights, patterns, and assistance while human creators reserve ultimate oversight over creative intents and production. This framework thus challenges traditional notions of creativity as an exclusively human domain, synthesizing the elusive qualities of human artmaking with generative AI to put forth a new conceptualization of "creativity."

Co-Creativity in LitRPG Writing: Benefits of AI Integration

This section outlines three potential benefits of integrating AI within the LitRPG genre, detailing its potential uses and advantages for authors and readers alike.

Executing Formulaic Tasks to Increase Productivity in a Fast-Paced Market

The LitRPG genre is particularly well-suited for AI-Human collaboration due to its reliance on repetitive game-like elements that lend themselves to automated creation. Indeed, AI can be used to handle the formulaic aspects of LitRPG literature, such as system notifications and detailed character statistics. It can also be used to streamline other repetitive tasks such as grammar checking, formatting and layout, and proofreading assistance. The delegation of time-consuming tasks to AI assistants conforms to the collaborative model imagined under the co-creativity framework. By strategically utilizing AI capabilities, authors are better equipped to maintain a consistent and rapid publishing schedule without sacrificing attention to idea generation and content development.

The usage of AI for repetitive tasks is particularly relevant given the high demands of productivity under LitRPG's rapid publishing cycle. Stories on Royal Road are published in chapters, at rates as fast as daily. This fast-paced production is deeply rooted in the genre's market structure, which revolves around two primary revenue channels: Patreon and publishing. Patreon is a platform where content creators can, according to their website description, "launch their own digital shop or run a paid membership." Through Patreon, authors can offer paid access to a portion of the unpublished chapters, among other access and engagement perks. The second revenue channel for LitRPG authors is publishing. When a story is "stubbed" --- removed from RoyalRaod --- it signals that the author has decided to publish through official means. The author then begins earning revenue through the sale of the book on platforms like Amazon. By publishing frequently, authors attract more Patreon subscribers, efficiently complete high-quality works for publication, and altogether boost revenue. Authors with higher productivity are also better positioned to offer "read ahead" subscriptions that grant paying members early access to upcoming chapters.

On readers' end, the flexibility and rapidity of web-novels are essential components of their appeal. "Like drafts that can be immediately seen by readers and updated by authors," the consistent publication of new chapters fosters a dynamic interaction between writers and their audiences, rewarding those who can produce content at a fast pace (Bilbao, 2024). Altogether, the rapid publishing cycle of the LitRPG genre align well with AI integration. By streamlining content creation, AI empowers authors to produce stories faster, maximizing reader engagement and revenue generation.

Promoting Idea Generation for the Production of High Quality Content

Beyond handling menial tasks, AI-creator collaboration, as imagined under the co-creativity framework, promises the production of innovative LitRPG content. AI's ability to synthesize large quantities of information can assist authors in producing consistent world-building descriptions. LitRPG authors may also utilize AI to experiment with narrative possibilities by generating plausible scenarios they may not have envisioned otherwise. For instance, authors eager to diminish the predictability of their work may collaborate with AI to brainstorm surprising endings rarely witnessed in other LitRPG narratives.

In fact, such modes of collaboration between AI and authors have already occurred with promising outcomes. For example, Paul Bellow, renowned LitRPG author and AI-Developer, frequently utilizes GPT-3 to generate character backstories and ideas for world-building. Bellow inputs examples into the AI model before prompting it to write similar backstories and descriptions. Then he selects, edits, and incorporates the most compelling options. In addition, when Bellow encounters writer's block, he turns to AI: "I might not agree with what direction it takes me in, but, sometimes, it has some really good ideas" (Penn, 2021). His methodology embodies the co-creativity model, as he enacts artistic decision-making and fine-tuning upon AI-generated materials, while leveraging ChatGPT's extensive database to brainstorm potential narrative events; human judgement reserves a guiding status throughout his writing process. The integration of AI has helped Bellow double his word output, further affirming its improvement of productivity (Penn, 2021). Bellow has since developed his own GPT-4 powered character backstory generator, titled "LitRPG Adventures." Trained upon over 100,000 RPG content entries, LitRPG adventure provides an accessible opportunity for other LitRPG authors to co-create with AI (LitRPG Adventures, n.d.).

Altogether, the two forms of author-AI proposed collaborations pose strong counterarguments to those who perceive AI-generated materials as inherently inferior to those of human creators. These views are well-captured by a comment from a writing community Reddit thread: "AI cannot write good literature, and nobody wants to read garbage churned out by a machine" (Maumimic, 2024). Such perception of AI as an emotionless, mechanical tool --- producing content that lacks depth or creative nuance --- underscores the skepticism surrounding its writing capabilities. Nonetheless, perceptions of "AI-assisted" texts as scripts entirely produced by generative AI tools are overly narrow; it dismisses the potential for a fruitful division of labor between AI and human authors that could ultimately improve LitRPG content. A co-creative relationship between LitRPG authors and AI precisely preserves human oversight and creative discretion while delegating specific administrative and/or idea generation tasks well-suited to machine-learning models, promoting productivity and quality control.

Further, this mode of collaboration addresses the fear of AI as a threat to human creativity. Creative endeavors such as painting, acting, and writing are typically understood as expressions of personal experience, emotion, and subjectivity. As novelist Theodore Dreiser put it, "art is the stored honey of the human soul, gathered on wings of misery and travail" (Wikiquote contributors, n.d.). Artmaking, the ultimate task of creativity, is perceived to be inherently tied to the human condition; AI-generated art troubles this conventional understanding by removing the human element from the process. Nonetheless, as a central tenant of the co-creativity framework, the utilization of AI in creative processes need not diminish human involvement. Authors reserve the autonomy to utilize AI-tools insofar as they support their artistic intentions, one that remains grounded in subjectivities and human culture. Further, by viewing AI's advancing generative capabilities as an augmentative tool to human creativity, co-creativity challenges the competitive dichotomy assumed by such critiques. Hence, the integration of

AI tools by LitRPG authors --- and artists more broadly --- into their artmaking processes does not diminish their innately human creative capacity; rather, it enhances it.

Expanding Reader Bases Through Real-Time Translations

AI usage in the LitRPG genre extends far beyond AI-generated stories. It can also be used to address a significant gap in accessibility for LitRPGs: language barriers. In fact, the emergence of the American LitRPG genre can be itself traced to the proliferation of the translated Russian “Phantom Server” series, with many authors endeavoring to write their own works after confronting frustrations with linguistic particularities that could not be adequately understood in English (Sky, 2018). Today, translation remains a relevant challenge in the LitRPG industry. Though established authors sometimes hire translators for published books, few offer real-time translations due to cost and logistical difficulties, namely the fast-paced publication schedule of LitRPGs. For example, *Salvos* by MelasD has a Spanish-translated version on Kindle, but lacking real-time Spanish updates limits the global reach of its ongoing content. AI offers a solution through its capacity to rapidly provide high-quality real-time translations, allowing non-English-speaking readers to follow updated chapters as they are released. While translating, AI emerges as a co-creator alongside the author, as it actively interprets and analyzes the author’s original work to map it onto another linguistic landscape. In this form of co-creative collaboration, AI-assisted translations improve the global accessibility of LitRPG stories and widen authors’ reader base. In this case as well, of course, a human must remain in the loop: just as in other forms of co-creativity, it is crucial for a human to supervise the process of creation --- in this instance, the process of translation --- to ensure that sufficient standards of quality are met.

The translation capacities of AI tools further augment the significant community engagement aspect of the LitRPG genre. LitRPG authors often foster strong relationships with their readers through platforms such as Discord or Reddit. On these platforms, creators interact directly with their audience, cultivating a sense of connection and loyalty among fans. These online communities provide numerous benefits for authors, enabling them to gain insight into how their work resonates with target audiences, while providing a sense of belonging and connection for readers. Beyond promoting the accessibility of LitRPG novels, AI’s real-time translation capacities allow creators to personally engage with a larger, global community of readers.

These considerations refute opponents who state that AI-integration undermines the community-bonding aspects of the LitRPG genre. While it is highly improbable that the utilization of AI tools would diminish authors’ willingness to engage with readers (particularly under the co-creativity model where humans maintain authorial status), many would be empowered to connect with a larger population of readers across linguistic and cultural barriers. Ultimately, AI may strengthen and globalize the social fabric that makes the LitRPG community unique.

In sum, I propose several means to integrate AI within LitRPG authors’ creative processes. First, AI may be used to handle repetitive and administrative tasks such as tracking system notifications and detailed character statistics. Second, authors may capitalize on AI’s divergent thinking capabilities and access to expansive data to engage in a co-creative process of idea generation. Together, these two modes of AI-human synergy provide strong rebuttals to concerns regarding the inferiority of AI writing and, paradoxically, its potential replacement of human authors. Further, AI’s real-time translation capabilities also provide notable benefits to LitRPG creators, enabling them to expand their reader base and foster global fandoms.

AI'S DISCONTENTS IN LITRPG: CHALLENGES AND PATHS AHEAD

Co-creative partnerships between humans and AI hold promising potential. Nonetheless, the integration of AI into the LitRPG genre cannot occur without ethical guidelines surrounding plagiarism and intellectual property rights. This section explores notable challenges and proposes practical solutions to promote equitable AI use.

AI models are trained by analyzing vast amounts of text, art, or other content created by human authors and artists. Training data sets are used to teach AI to recognize patterns, replicate styles, or mimic certain narrative structures. However, many creators whose works are incorporated into these datasets may not be aware of or have not explicitly consented to such use. For one, the AI program Mid Journey is facing a lawsuit for the unauthorized use of over 16000 artists' work (Caleb, 2024).

In the LitRPG genre, as creators leverage AI for generative tasks such as ideation and content creation, they risk unknowingly plagiarizing the works of others. For example, certain plotlines could be regenerated and reused in AI-assisted stories. The boundary between inspiration and plagiarism is further blurred for creators who directly utilize AI to generate entire chapters. Such concerns underscore the need for transparency in AI training processes and the establishment of ethical guidelines to safeguard the rights of creators within the LitRPG community.

To address the need for regulation, an ethics body can develop guidelines on the responsible integration of AI into the creative process, fulfilling several essential roles. First, the organization could establish clear standards of "AI-assisted" writing. These guidelines would define standards for transparency, attribution, and the use of copyrighted material in AI training. For example, authors who use AI tools could be asked to disclose the extent of AI involvement in their work, ensuring that readers are informed when a story is partially AI-generated. The ethics body can form partnerships with major publishing/web novel sites to acquire the membership of an extensive network of authors. Furthermore, a strike system can be implemented to enforce regulations. If an author is found in breach of AI guidelines, the ethics body may issue a public strike on their story. This incentivizes authors to appropriately and transparently utilize AI tools in their work.

Second, the organization could monitor advancements in AI technology and recommend best practices. This might include advising authors on ways to effectively integrate AI tools into their creative process while maintaining a focus on human originality and developing co-creative partnerships that maximize productivity. Additionally, the committee could assess new AI tools for compliance with established ethical standards and issue certifications to those that meet these benchmarks.

Lastly, the organization should prioritize education as a cornerstone of its mission. By offering resources, hosting symposiums, and fostering discourse on AI ethics and creative practices, the organization could help authors stay informed about the latest developments and ethical considerations. This initiative could extend to training programs for authors and publishers, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to use AI responsibly. Such education is crucial given the growing concerns surrounding AI-generated content. Indeed, AI's ability to generate creative works has sparked complex legal debates over ownership and fair use, with scholars emphasizing the need for clearer regulatory frameworks (Bown, 2024; Heikkilä, 2022). Educational efforts can ensure that LitRPG authors navigate AI integration with both ethical responsibility and legal awareness. In turn, the organization would cultivate a culture of informed and ethical AI practices within the LitRPG community, ensuring that technological innovation complements rather than compromises creative integrity.

CONCLUSION

The co-creativity framework envisions a form of human-AI collaboration in which AI serves as a powerful augmentative tool to human creativity. By integrating AI's divergent thinking and predictive capacities with human's elusive cultural and aesthetic judgments, AI-human synergy puts forth a new conceptualization of "creativity." This paper utilizes the co-creativity framework to promote the integration of AI into the LitRPG genre. Namely, it cites three major benefits of AI usage in LitRPG. First, given the frequent inclusion of repetitive elements in LitRPG--- such as system notifications and player statistics --- AI could be used to streamline these formulaic tasks, leaving authors more time for idea generation without sacrificing production cycles. Second, authors may leverage AI's predictive and divergent thinking abilities for ideation, brainstorming unexpected plot twists using the analytical prowess of AI. These forms of collaboration expedite authors' creative processes while reducing costs. Third, authors may utilize AI for real-time translations, in turn expanding their reader base. Altogether, these advantages address key refutations to the integration of AI, such as the inherent inferiority of AI-generated works and their infringement upon human creativity. Nonetheless, the integration of AI must occur alongside the establishment of an ethics body. This body would regulate the use of AI in light of concerns surrounding intellectual property ownership and plagiarism. Ultimately, this paper promotes an inclusive view of "creativity" that welcomes advancements in generative AI technology. In the words of Karim Lakhani, "AI won't replace humans --- but humans with AI will replace humans without AI" (Lakhani, 2023). While the technological landscape of today's world continues to evolve, one must learn to embrace new tools and partnerships that augment their uniquely human capacities.

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