CHAPTERS OF LITERARY GAME UNLOCKED WITH MICROPAYMENTS

RETAIL

Black Crown is a web-based story-game that will use micropayments to unlock extra narratives and social elements.

In such a tough industry — and with extra competition from digital alternatives — it's no wonder that even larger publishing institutions are looking for new business models for their output. We recently wrote about Random House Australia's Mailbooks For Good scheme, and now it seems the UK branch of the company is also innovating. Black Crown is a web-based story-game that will use micropayments to unlock extra narratives and social elements. Although only a few mysterious clues about the project have so far been revealed, the story appears to be set in a dystopian world where a kind of deadly chemical or virus has been released. Users can already sign up to become involved in the plot through the website, which uses a bespoke version of Failbetter Games' StoryNexus platform. Like other text-based games or interactive novels, readers will be able to make decisions to drive the narrative. Unlike other StoryNexus titles however, which are free to play and are created by the community, Black Crown is written by a debut author signed to Random House — to be announced upon launch later this month — and users will be able to "unlock story strands, expedite the narrative and acquire items and status within the world" using micropayments, the creators say. Rather than paying a flat fee up front, the model means that readers essentially pay to keep reading — much like Total BooX's pay-per-page e-book service. Random House hopes it will provide a new option for monetizing digital reading, using interactivity as well as premium content to entice consumers. Could micropayments work for other episodic forms of entertainment? Spotted by: Alexia Maury

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