

NY publisher releases Deveraux novel as video book

1 October 2009, By HILLEL ITALIE , AP National Writer



In this video screen image released by Simon & Schuster, the title page for the online video book, "Promises," by Jude Deveraux, is shown. "Promises" is one of four online video books being published Thursday by Simon & Schuster in collaboration with Vook, a San Francisco-based startup that integrates text, video and social networking. (AP Photo/Simon & Schuster)

(AP) -- The latest novel from best-selling romance author Jude Deveraux isn't exactly a book. "Promises" is a reading and viewing experience, a digital text in which videos not only complement the narrative but add to it.

"Promises" is one of four online video books being published Thursday by Simon & Schuster Inc. in collaboration with Vook, an Emeryville, Calif.-based startup that integrates text, video and social networking.

Deveraux's novel, a romance-mystery set on a 19th-century South Carolina plantation, runs 131 pages, punctuated with 17 short videos, including images of the plantation and of a young soldier running through the woods, Simon & Schuster says.

"This is not a substitute for print, but we see the role of the publisher changing from being a book publisher only to offering different ways to tell stories and convey ideas," says Ellie Hirschhorn,

chief digital officer of New York-based Simon & Schuster, which is releasing the video texts through its Atria Books imprint.

Also coming out Thursday are Richard Doetsch's thriller "Embassy" and a pair of nonfiction works: Pete Cerqua's "The 90-Second Fitness Solution" and Narine Nikogosian's "Return to Beauty," which offers advice on skin care and diet.

For centuries, the essence of the reading experience has been the mind creating its own pictures, but bringing books and videos together has become attractive, if not yet lucrative, to publishers as book sales suffer and reading shifts from paper to the screen.

Vook founder Brad Inman said Internet video exists throughout the news and entertainment businesses and it would be "arrogant to think that publishing is exempt."

Disney Publishing, Scholastic Inc. and the Perseus Book Group are some of the publishers experimenting with multiplatform texts, which combine words, audio, video and Internet links. Promotional videos and online video interviews have become increasingly common. The impact on sales is still undetermined, but Randy Pausch's million-selling "The Lecture," a Hyperion book about the Carnegie Mellon University professor's last talk to students as he faced death from pancreatic cancer, began as a video that became an online sensation.

Executives at Simon & Schuster and Vook acknowledge that guidance for such everyday activities as exercise and cooking makes for an easier fit with video than does a work of fiction. The novelist is accustomed to working only in words, while chefs, trainers and dietitians often have parallel careers in publishing and on television.

"I would say that in fiction we're like Lewis and

Clark, stuck in Missouri and we don't know where we're going," Inman says. "With the how-to books, it's pretty obvious that we're a lot farther along. We're close to the Oregon border."

Bob Miller, publisher of HarperStudio, a HarperCollins imprint, which also has plans to release video books, says he thinks there will be a market for video books, sometimes called vooks, but it will take years of experimentation to determine what kind people might want to read and watch.

"It's easier to imagine cookbooks that include a video demo of each recipe, for instance, than a novel with dramatized scenes," he said.

Much of the work on the Atria books was done over the summer, with the two video novels written specifically, and quickly, for the video project. Cerqua's video book adds video to an abridged text of a traditional book released last year, while "Return to Beauty" eventually will come out as a paper book, with pictures instead of video.

The new books cannot be downloaded through such leading e-book devices as the Kindle or the Sony Reader, neither of which can handle video. They can be purchased through standalone applications for the iPhone and iPod touch or through the Web sites of Simon & Schuster and Vook.

Video books are unlikely to become standard in the near future if only because of the expense of filming. Executives at Vook and Simon & Schuster would not say how much it cost to shoot video for the four books, although Inman says the budget for an individual title was less than \$100,000.

The suggested price for each vook is admittedly low, \$6.99, which is \$3 less than for top-selling e-books. Hirschhorn says any adjustment in cost, up or down, depends on initial sales.

"This is not for every writer, and it's not for every book, but I think it's important that we try different things and see what's working and what isn't," Hirschhorn says.

Inman says publishers realize they have to take some risks to lure readers but not everyone is in favor of video books.

"I've walked into meetings with publishers," he said, "and the people there say, 'You're insane.'"

On the Net:

Simon & Schuster:

<http://www.simonandschuster.com/aboutvook>

Vook: <http://www.vook.com>

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