

FAST TALK

Interviews by Kate Rockwood

> The Good Book
The Kindle is not the only way
technology is changing—and
saving?—book publishing.

The Virtual Book Clubber

JOSH HUG, 30, cofounded Shelfari, a social-networking site devoted to generating conversations and recommendations around books. Amazon acquired the bibliophilic company in the summer of 2008.

"Our mission is to improve the reading experience. Short of sitting next to a reader with a warm cup of coffee and turning the page for him, the most powerful way to do that is to add a social component. What are other readers of this book thinking? If you liked this book, what are some other favorites of people who did too? With almost 300,000 new titles being published each year in the United States, people need guidance. Even as innovations like the Kindle change how people read, reading tends to be solitary. But we can add things around it that are powerful."

Josh Hug
> CEO and Cofounder, Shelfari
AMAZON
> SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

FAST TALK

> Book Tech

The Experimenter

JULIA CHEIFFETZ, 30, edits books at HarperStudio, a new imprint of HarperCollins that's trying to rethink both the format of books and the business model. HarperStudio will publish just two books a month and offer authors 50-50 profit sharing, rather than a traditional 7% to 15% royalty.

"There's this sense of doom and gloom in the publishing business, but this is an amazing moment. Ultimately, technology is going to not only enable people to read more but also enable new art forms. At HarperStudio, there's an R&D element to what we're doing. For instance, we gave all of our authors Flip cameras and asked them to start video blogging, opening up their writing process and cultivating an audience as soon as a book is acquired. We're looking at multimedia packaging, such as including a DVD of Isabella Rossellini's Green Porno films along with her new photo book. Dynamic e-books may incorporate video or narrative asterisks, in the same way that you'd go into a museum, put on headphones, and listen to an explanation of the art on the wall. With each project, we think about what kind of experimentation is appropriate. We don't want to sprinkle Cheetos on top of foie gras."

Julia Cheiffetz
> Senior Editor
HARPERSTUDIO
> NEW YORK, NEW YORK

FASTTALK

> Book Tech

The New Storytellers

JOHN YOO, 39, DAVID LEVITHAN, 36, and RACHEL GRIFFITHS, 33, created the children's series *The 39 Clues*, which weaves its story through 10 books, an online game, and trading cards. The first three books sold more than 2.5 million copies, DreamWorks bought the movie rights, and the fourth title will be released in June.

LEVITHAN: "We want to find as many readers as possible and use technology to tell stories in different ways. From the beginning, we knew the story would encompass books, a Web site, and cards. It was minutely choreographed that we'd reveal 10 clues in print and 29 online."

YOO: "We're always fascinated with how kids deal with the virtual version of a physical piece."

LEVITHAN: "Kids don't make a distinction between loving the book version of this story or the online game. The perceived gap between readers and gamers is just not that big."

YOO: "A new book rolls out every three months, and we try to create a similar pacing with the online game, so there's a constant desire and need to return to uncover more clues. In the first six months, we've had more than 300,000 registered users, and on average, kids came back 3.2 times each week."

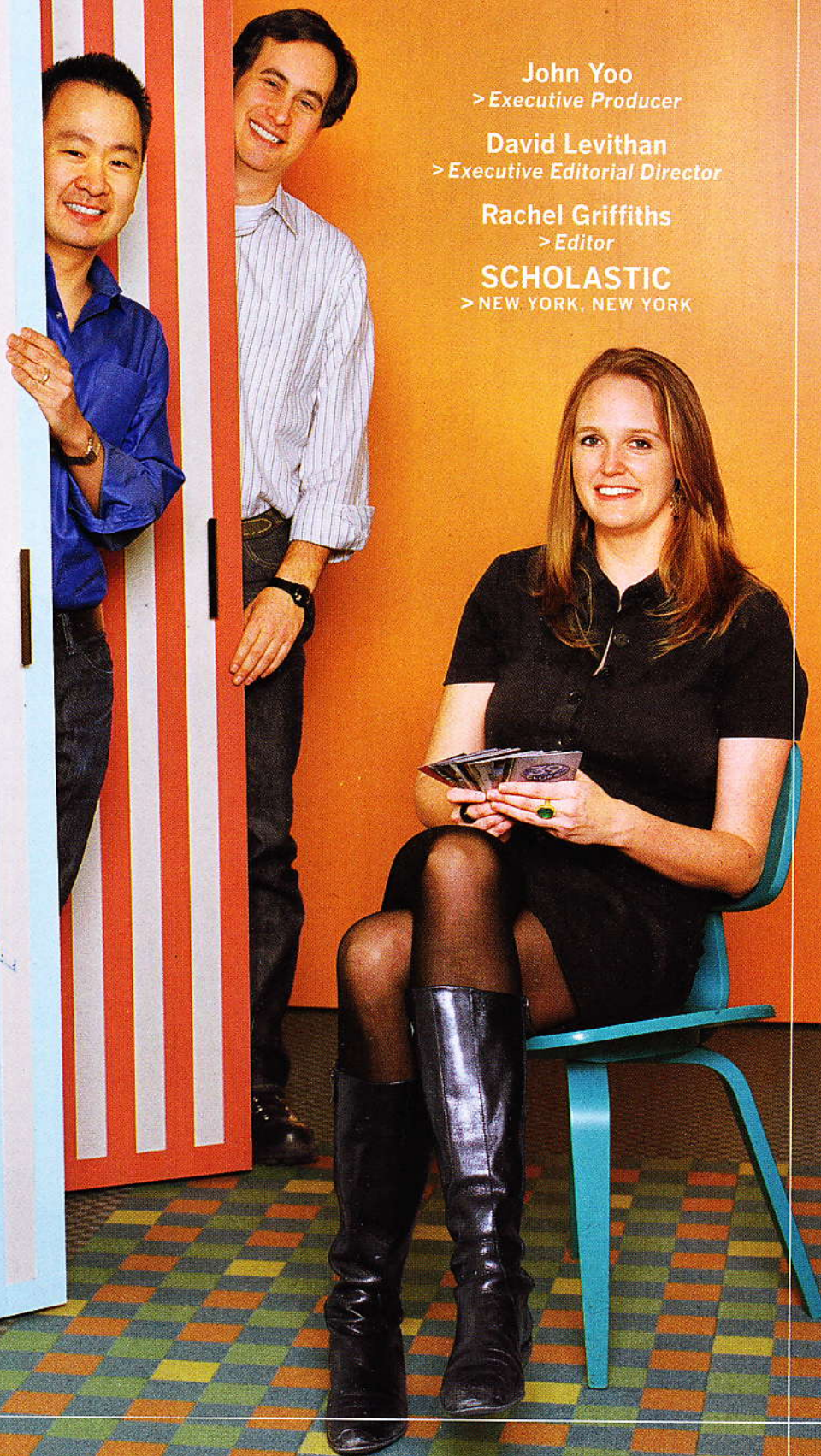
LEVITHAN: "This structure isn't going to supplant traditional publishing, but it's going to broaden it. There are things you can do in a multidimensional format that you just can't do on 200 printed pieces of paper."

John Yoo
> Executive Producer

David Levithan
> Executive Editorial Director

Rachel Griffiths
> Editor

SCHOLASTIC
> NEW YORK, NEW YORK



The Format Buster

STEVE HABER, 48, developed the Sony Reader, an electronic reading device. The Reader tripled its sales last holiday season; the third-generation Reader (complete with touch screen, and highlighting and notation features) debuted last November and is available at Best Buy, Target, and Wal-Mart.

"E-book readers will largely dominate the industry, and it could happen in less than 10 years. Every time I give a Reader to someone to test, I never get it back. It's just like when TiVo or digital cameras came out. At first, people didn't know they needed it. But once they have it, they can't live without it. When I headed Sony's U.S. digital-imaging division, people said, 'I don't like digital. I like the warmth of film.' And then we continued to improve the product. Now Americans buy 40 million digital cameras each year.

The book is really perfect for the same technology shift. It's paper, it's heavy, it's environmentally taxing. When we introduced our Reader, the biggest resistance I heard was, 'I like the smell of books, and I like the smell of paper. I can't go digital.' That was the confirmation for me that this change will happen. If the smell of paper is the biggest push back, then we're good to go."

Steve Haber
> President, Digital Reading
SONY ELECTRONICS
> SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



The Do-It-Yourselfer

EILEEN GITTINS, 54, runs *Blurb*, a profitable print-on-demand startup that sold \$30 million worth of books last year.

"People are producers now, not just consumers. They have whole mountains of digital content—images, recipes, and poetry from wikis, blogs, and Flickr—that want to find their way into books. There's a lot of content that wants to be shared and remembered, and you can't gift a Web site.

I realized—*hello!*—e-commerce should meet desktop publishing and print-on-demand technology. Once we could limit the options down to a manageable number, we could get massive scale out of the operation. We're able to make money off of a print run of just one book, we were profitable in our second year, and our numbers are up 25% in 2009, without advertising. Our business spreads naturally by word of mouth. Moving from the digital world to print as everything else moves in the other direction may seem contrarian. But people want physicality, especially as more and more of our lives are lived virtually."

Eileen Gittins

> CEO

BLURB

> SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

