

Pirated copies of Orwell books pulled from Kindle

July 18 2009, By HILLEL ITALIE , AP National Writer

(AP) -- A pirated e-book of "1984" led to an Orwellian moment for Kindle customers.

Users of Amazon.com's [e-reader](#) device were surprised and unsettled over the past day to receive notice that George Orwell works they had purchased, including "1984" and "Animal Farm," had been removed from their Kindle and their money refunded.

It was conspiracy time on the Internet. Big Brother's revenge? Pressure from the publisher? No, says an Amazon spokesman - the deletion of pirated copies that had been posted to the Kindle store.

"These books were added to our catalog using our self-service platform by a third party who did not have the rights to the books," spokesman Drew Herdener said Friday.

"When we were notified of this by the rights holder, we removed the [illegal copies](#) from our systems and from customers' devices, and refunded customers. We are changing our systems so that in the future we will not remove books from customers' devices in these circumstances."

Herdener's explanation differed from what Kindle users were told by Amazon's customer service, which made no reference to piracy, but implied that the removal was the publisher's choice.

"Published by MobileReference ... (the books) were removed from the Kindle store and are no longer available for purchase," according to an e-mail sent to customers. "When this occurred, your purchases were automatically refunded. You can still locate the books in the Kindle store, but each has a status of not yet available. Although a rarity, publishers can decide to pull their content from the Kindle store."

Herdener said the customer service statement was incorrect, and reiterated that the works were pulled because of legal issues. MobileReference is a digital publisher that offers a wide range of literary titles, although Orwell's books were not mentioned on the company's Web site as of Friday night.

An e-mail message sent to the publisher's owner, SoundTells, was not immediately returned.

The Orwell ordeal highlighted two concerns in the virtual world - that a book already paid for and acquired can be revoked by the long arm of an e-tailer (the Kindle operates on a wireless connection that Amazon ultimately controls); and the difficulty of stopping bootlegged texts.

The digital library is rapidly growing, but numerous classic works, from "Catch-22" to "Lolita," remain unavailable as e-books. Piracy has been one concern for rights holders, although illegal works have yet to have a measurable impact on sales.

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