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Orwell's '1984' Named Most-Stolen Book in Russia in 2023

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Sergei Kiselev / Moskva News Agency

George Orwell's "1984" has earned the distinction of being the most stolen book from the shelves of Russia's Chitai-Gorod bookstore chain in 2023.

The dystopian classic, which was stolen from Chitai-Gorod stores 460 times, was also among the top 10 most-purchased books from the chain this year, the company said in a press release cited by the RBC news website.

In "1984," the totalitarian government uses surveillance, propaganda and paradoxical slogans like "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, and Ignorance is Strength" to maintain control over the population.

Masha Karp, author of the book "George Orwell and Russia," has likened the novel's fictional nation of Oceania to wartime Russia, where "the word 'war' was instantly banned and ordered to be replaced, on pain of prosecution, by the phrase 'a special military operation'."

Related article: Explainer: How Orwell's '1984' Looms Large in Wartime Russia

While sales of the novel in Russia jumped following the February 2022 invasion, it has been one of the country's top sellers since at least 2010.

Despite its widespread availability, two people who distributed free copies in Moscow in March 2022 were detained and charged with discrediting the Russian army.

In total, almost 300,000 books were stolen from Chitai-Gorod in 2023, down 10% from 2022.

This year's most-stolen nonfiction book was "Loneliness Vaccine: Stories to Fix the Brain," by mental health blogger Nika Nabokova.

Other commonly stolen items included school books for children, books on raising children, and collections of fairy tales.

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