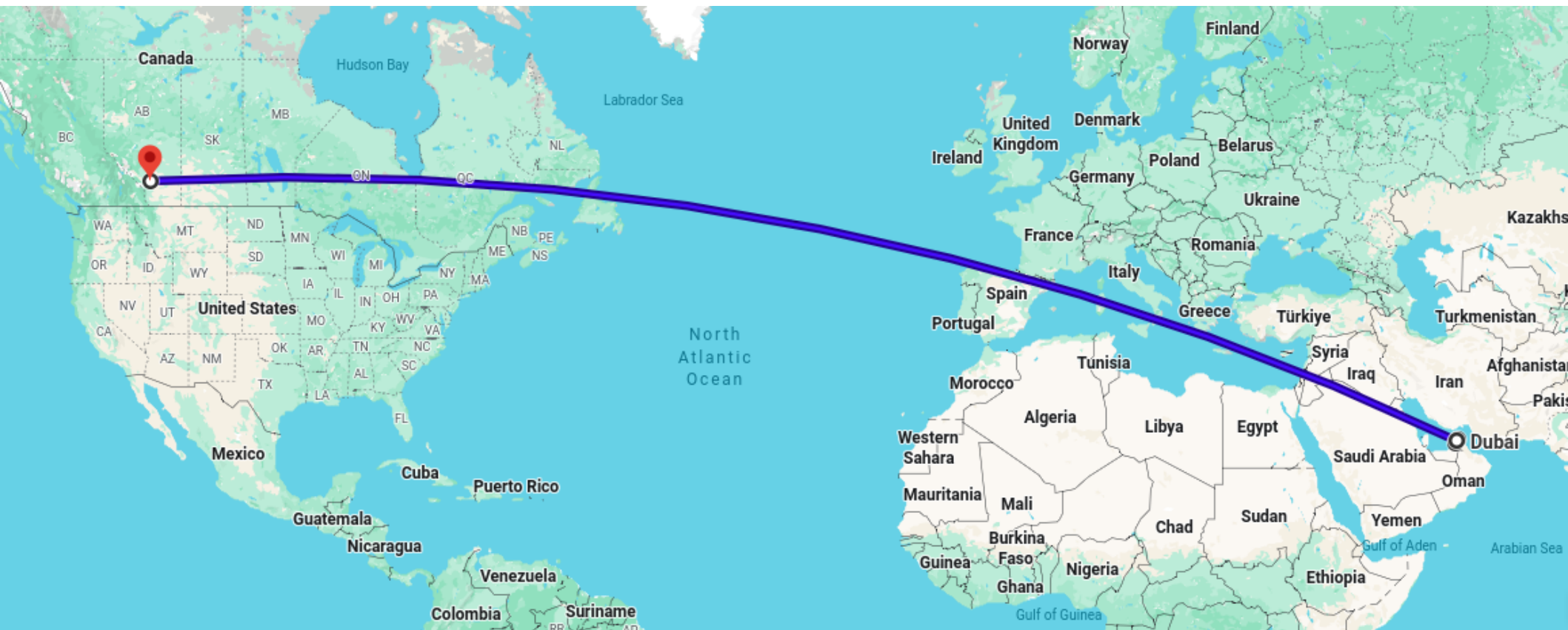


Banned Books: Analysis of Censorship on Amazon.com



Jeffrey Knockel, Jakub Dałek, Noura Aljizawi,
Mohamed Ahmed, Levi Meletti, Justin Lau



books

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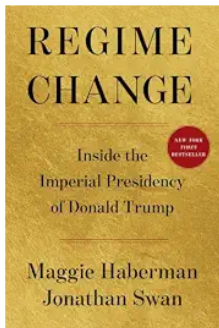
Print Books

Audible Audiobooks

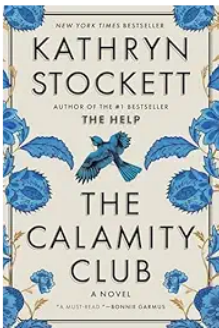
What everyone's reading

New releases in print

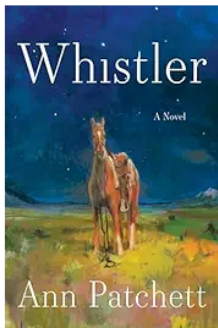
[See more](#)



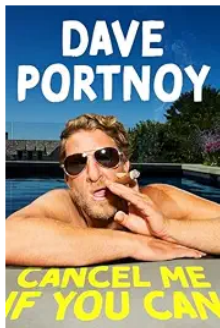
4.7 ★★★★★ 902
Hardcover
\$34⁰⁰



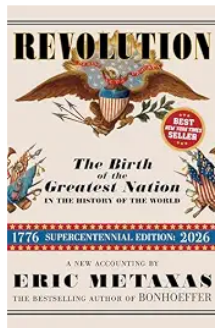
4.7 ★★★★★ 22,273
Hardcover
\$24⁰¹



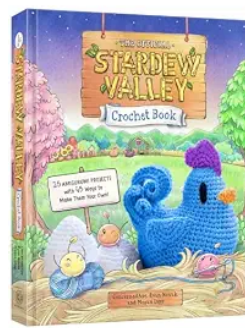
4.6 ★★★★★ 12,708
Hardcover
\$20⁹⁸



4.8 ★★★★★ 299
Hardcover
\$23⁰⁹



4.9 ★★★★★ 375
Hardcover
\$36⁹⁸



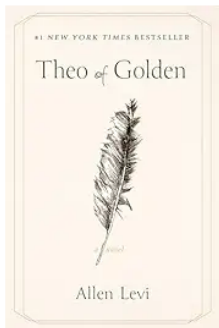
Hardcover
\$32⁰⁰



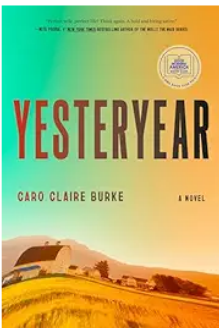
Hardcover
\$17⁴⁹

Best sellers in print

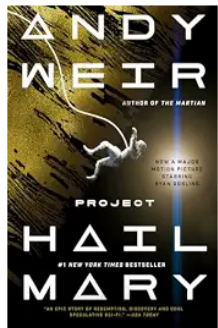
[See more](#)



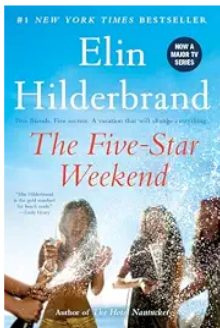
4.7 ★★★★★ 143,145
Paperback
\$14⁹⁸



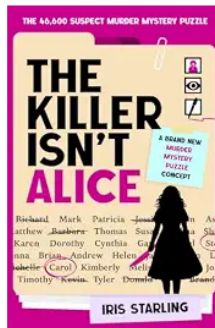
4.2 ★★★★★ 67,905
Hardcover
\$19⁵⁰



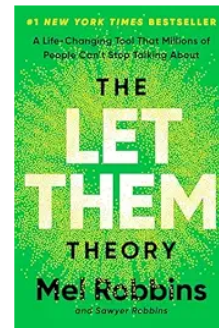
4.7 ★★★★★ 265,979
Paperback
\$13⁹⁸



4.4 ★★★★★ 74,067
Paperback
\$10⁴³



4.5 ★★★★★ 754
Paperback
\$16⁹⁹



4.6 ★★★★★ 45,727
Hardcover
\$19⁹⁸



4.5 ★★★★★
Paperback
\$9⁰⁴

Cambridge

Texts in the

History of

Philosophy

Nietzsche

The Gay Science

Edited by
Bernard Williams

Cambridge

Texts in the

History of

Philosophy

Nietzsche

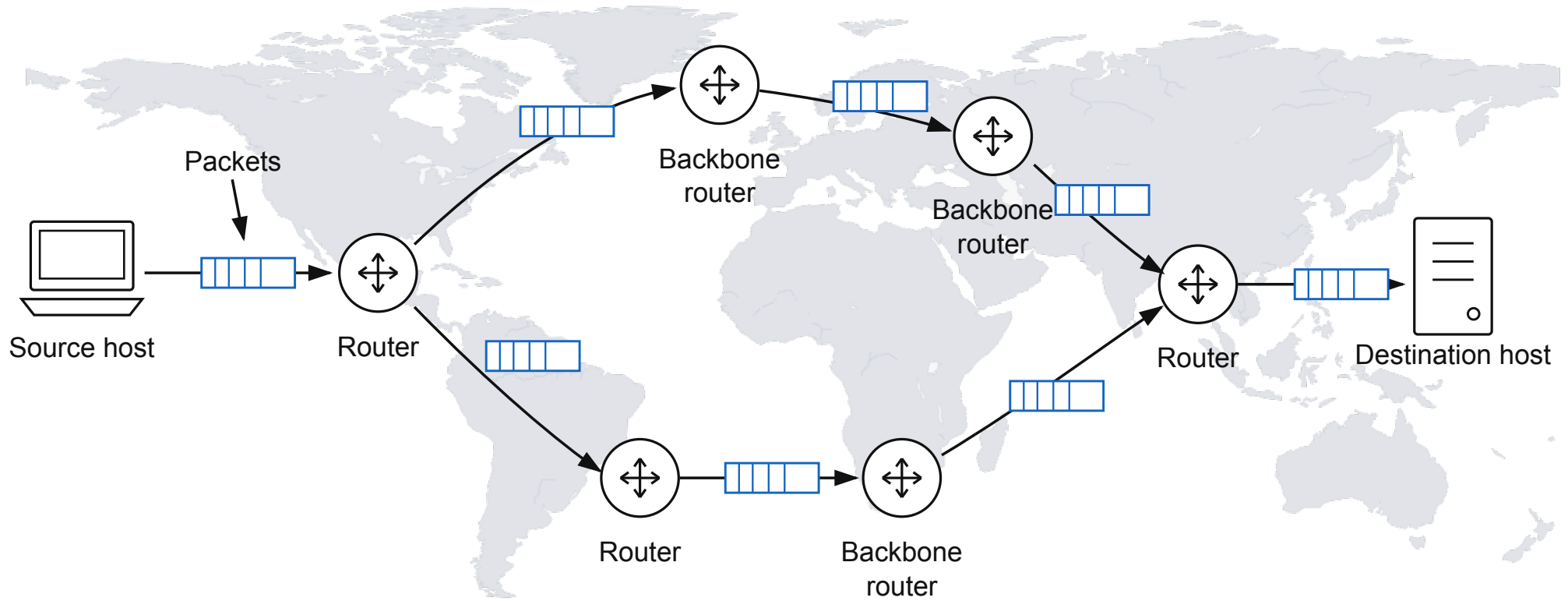
The Gay Science

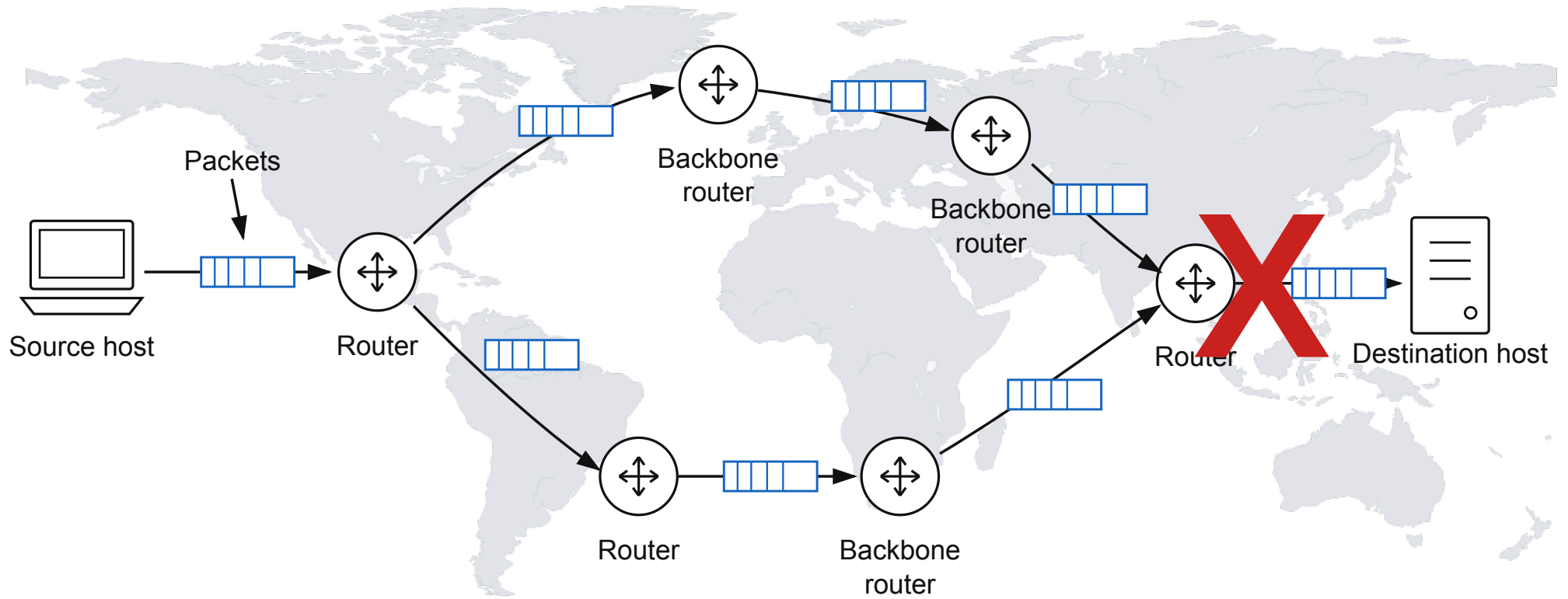
Edited by
Bernard Williams

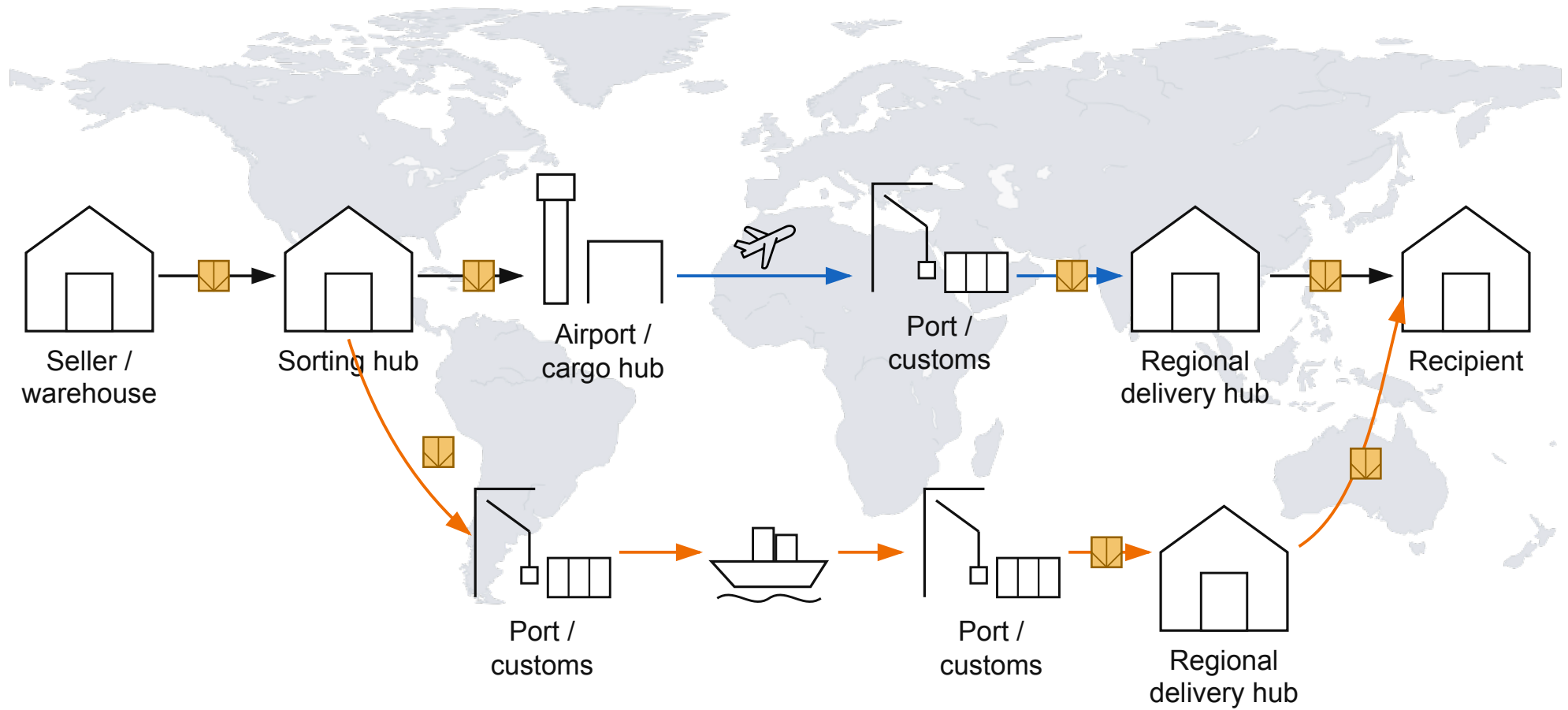
Temporarily out of stock.

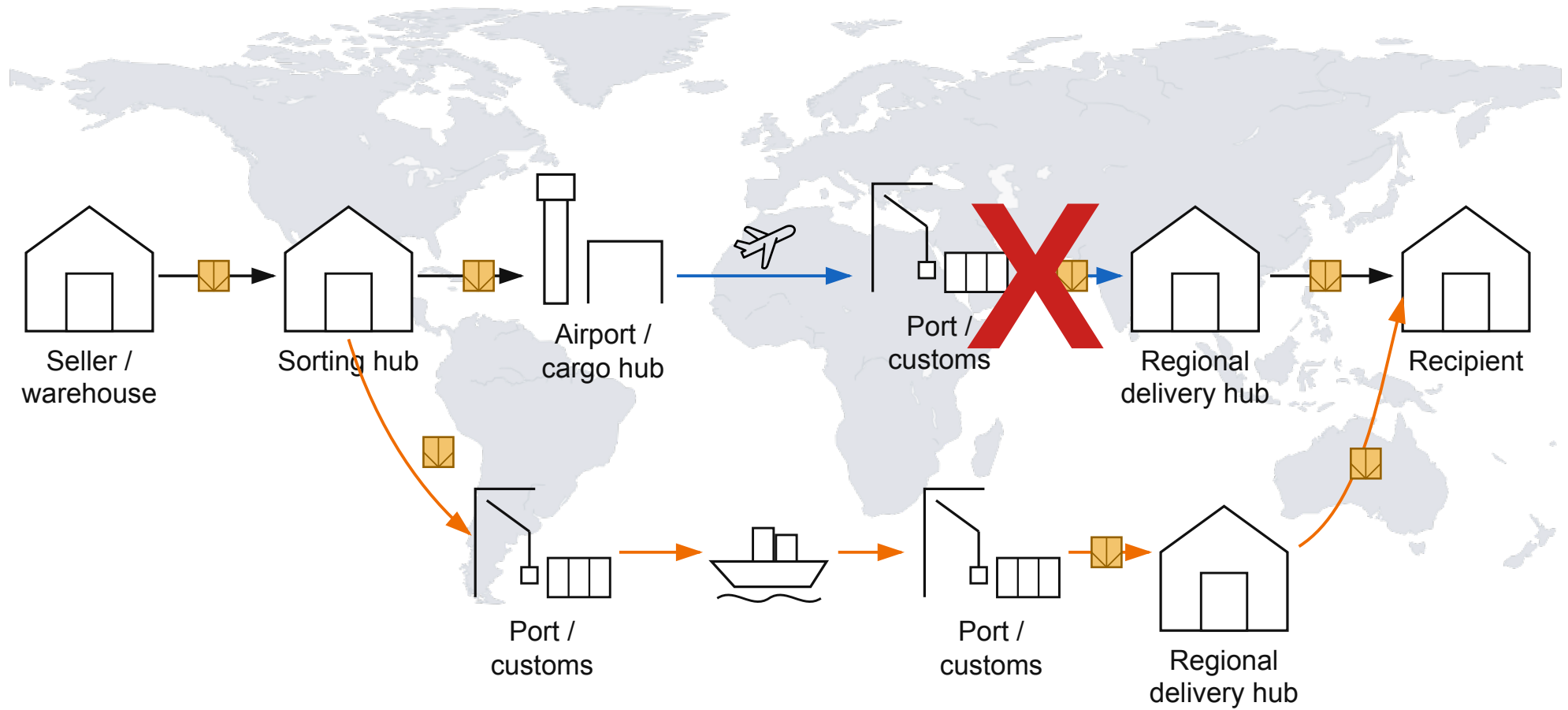
We are working hard to be back in stock as soon as possible.

Add to List









This is NOT the kind of censorship
I'll be talking about in this talk



protest china



百度一下

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网页

图片

资讯

视频

笔记

地图

贴吧

文库

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如有任何意见或建议，请及时[反馈给我们](#)

Cambridge

Texts in the

History of

Philosophy

Nietzsche

The Gay Science

Edited by
Bernard Williams

Temporarily out of stock.

We are working hard to be back in stock as soon as possible.

Add to List

Common Crawl maintains a
free, open repository of web
crawl data that can be used
by anyone.

Common Crawl is a 501(c)(3) non-profit
founded in 2007.

We make wholesale extraction, transformation
and analysis of open web data accessible to
researchers.

Tested **3,844,875** products (books or otherwise)



Amazon Restricts L.G.B.T.Q. Products in United Arab Emirates

Sales of items including flags and books were blocked in the country, where homosexuality is criminalized.



Share full article



Amazon's headquarters in Seattle. The company appears to have bowed to government pressure in the United Arab Emirates to restrict L.G.B.T.Q.-related items and search results. David Ryder/Getty Images



We do NOT study amazon.ae / amazon.sa censorship

amazon.ae Delivering to Dubai Update location All gay romance

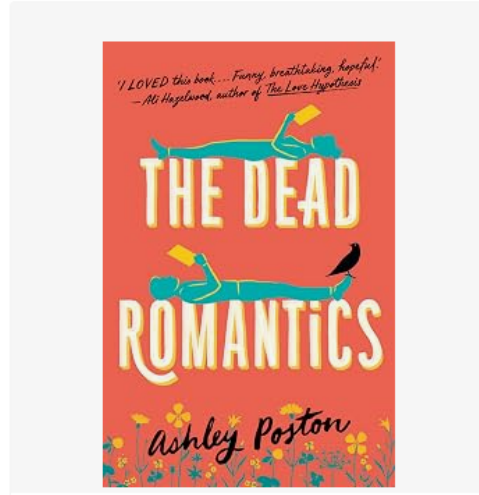
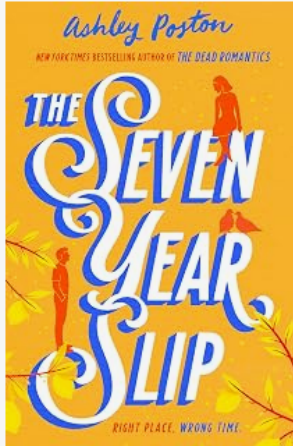
All Bazaar Fresh to home Best Sellers Today's Deals New Releases Prime Electronics

34 results for "gay romance" Sort by: Featured

Results

Check each product page for other buying options.

Best Seller



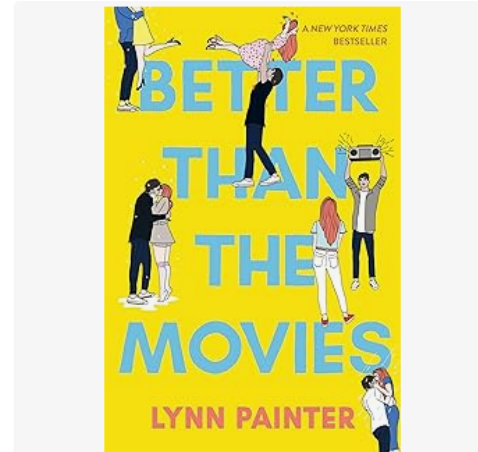
amazon.ae Delivering to Dubai Update location All teen romance

All Bazaar Fresh to home Best Sellers Today's Deals New Releases Prime Electronics

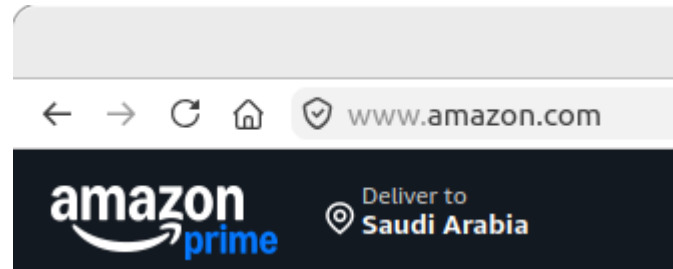
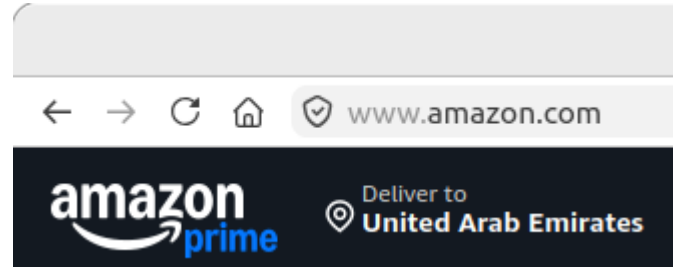
1-48 of over 30,000 results for "teen romance" Sort by: Featured

Results

Check each product page for other buying options.



We study amazon.com



Cambridge

Texts in the

History of

Philosophy

Nietzsche

The Gay Science

Edited by
Bernard Williams

Temporarily out of stock.

We are working hard to be back in stock as soon as possible.

Add to List

Why out of stock?

- How do we distinguish between a product being temporarily out of stock versus a product being censored by Amazon in that region?
- Solution: **All Offers Display**
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00A8S24I0/>
→
<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00A8S24I0/?aod=1>

Fifty Shades of Funny:



Hook-ups, Break-ups
And Crack-ups

Edited by DC Stanfa & Susan Reinhardt

Roll over image to zoom in

Read sample

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Fifty Shades of Funny: Hook-ups, Break-ups And Crack-...

Paperback

★★★★☆ 23 ratings

No featured offers available

2 options

sorted by price + delivery: low to high

Filter ▾

Used - Very Good

\$9⁴⁷

\$16.95 delivery **April 15 - May 9.**

Add to Cart

[Details](#)

Condition

Quality checked pre-owned articles. Edition in excellent condition.

Ships from

momox Shop

Ships from Germany.

Sold by

[momox Shop](#)

★★★★☆ (282639 ratings)

92% positive over last 12 months

Used - Good

\$4⁹⁹

\$56.58 delivery **April 11 - May 8.**

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Fifty Shades of Funny:



Hook-ups, Break-ups
And Crack-ups

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Paperback

★★★★☆ 23 ratings

No featured offers available

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Used - Very Good

\$9⁴⁷

\$16.95 delivery **April 15 - May 9.**

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Paperback

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No featured offers available

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! Not added

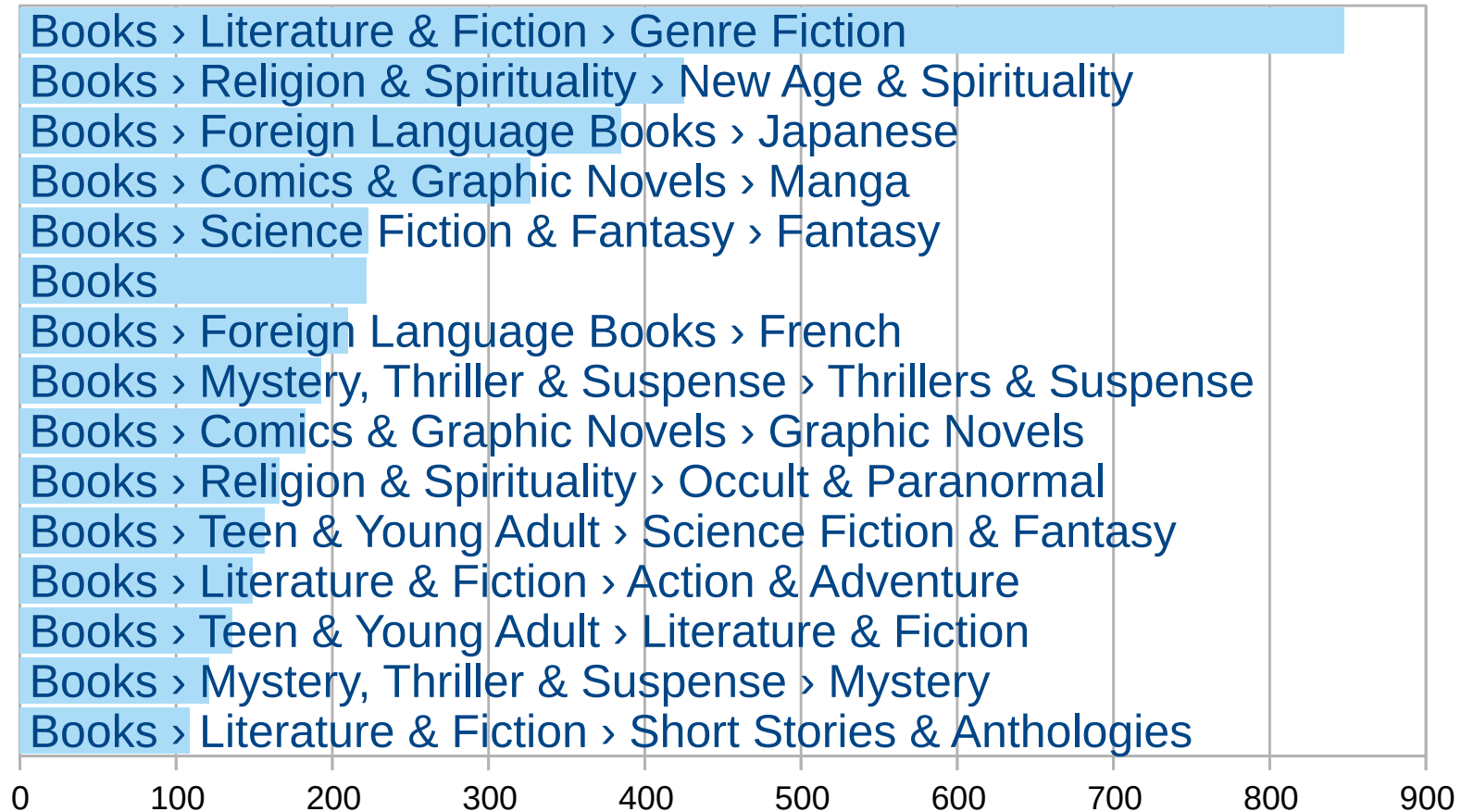
View Cart

Results

- Many different types of products are restricted
- Regulatory: WiFi, car seats, etc.
- Most restricted products were: Books
- **1.1%** of the books in our data set Amazon restricted from shipping to at least one Middle Eastern country

Amazon Error Message	Rate
Currently unavailable	74%
Temporarily out of stock	23%
Cannot ship to location	3%

Top restricted categories in UAE



Collateral censorship

Censorship was highly sensitive to the presence of **keywords**.

- Nietzsche's *Gay Science*
- Breast cancer books
- “Food porn” cookbooks
- Books about “Oracle” database software
- “Rainbow” candy



Globally expanding measurements

- Take 1,000 products selected at random restricted in at least one Middle Eastern country
- Test for restriction in all 239 Amazon regions

Censorship regimes

Amazon centrally applies a small number of shared restriction **regimes**

Measured overlap in censorship with our 1,000 randomly chosen censored products

- Minimal overlap
- Medium overlap
- High overlap

Minimal overlap

- Most countries / regions

Moderate overlap

- **MENA**
Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia
- **Asia**
Maldives, Brunei Darussalam
- **Africa**
Zambia, Seychelles
- **Oceania**
Papua New Guinea

High overlap

- United Arab Emirates
- Notably, the United Arab Emirates experienced the most censorship overall

Reported our findings to Amazon

- Did a followup study a year later
- No more misleading “temporarily out of stock” messages
- Collateral censorship a little better

Takeaways

- Amazon disguised location-based shipping restrictions as ordinary unavailability
- Centralized, keyword-sensitive rules create collateral censorship
- Amazon applies shared restriction regimes across countries
- After disclosure, its messages were accurate and false positives declined