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Knock-off DVDs are packaged to look much like the legitimate product.



STAFF PHOTO/FRANK KING

Buyers escape raids

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\$24.99 movies for about \$5 a piece, Markham's Sharon and Harry Volk politely declined.

"First of all, I think the quality is probably lousy and second of all, I don't want to get arrested," Mrs. Volk said. "I'd rather buy legit."

Markham's Bill Andonov concurred.

"The sound, the picture, they can't be guaranteed," he said. "Here, if I have a problem, I can always bring it back."

Not surprisingly, Gary Osmond, director of anti-piracy investigations for the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association, says the Best Buy customers are absolutely right about the quality of bootleg DVDs.

Most of the first-run flicks are shot with a home video recorder, then mass copied and sold, Mr. Osmond said.

"The quality just isn't there," he said. "What can you really do with a camcorder?"

While rumours abound that many of the films are industry copies leaked to bootleggers, Mr. Osmond said evidence of that has only been found once, when copies of *Star Wars Episode 3: Revenge of the Sith* somehow ended up online before the movie was released.

However, while the picture is a little grainy and somewhat shaky on most DVDs bought at Image and Sound, they were certainly watchable (and, no, the ending hasn't been taped over with Elaine dancing, as in the infamous *Seinfeld* episode).

They might not be the best use of the \$5,000 you spent on home theatre equipment this year, but the clerk at Image and Sound was honest about the standards and tried to steer customers toward the three for \$20 just-out-of-home-video DVDs, which he guaranteed were legitimate quality.

Police tell you not to buy the knockoffs because it's against the law.

You could face a \$5,000 fine and up to six months

in jail.

But no charges were laid against the customers of shops busted Saturday, at the Stouffville Flea Market raid in July or the six other raids this year.

York Regional Police, who assisted in the raids this weekend, have admitted they're not really in the anti-bootleg business these days and were just helping the other forces, which were Canada Customs, RCMP and Toronto police.

It's hard to sympathize with multi-million-dollar Hollywood studio executives, but Mr. Osmond hopes consumers will look a little deeper and find the loss of revenues from pirated DVDs mean fewer jobs for local film crews on this side of the border and even for teenagers working at your neighbourhood movieplex.

"People who buy one or two knock-off movies don't feel they're affecting the motion picture industry," he said. "But people aren't going to theatres, they're buying less DVDs at legitimate stores and that has an effect."

So you don't care about the big box store's bottom line or the Hollywood studio's revenues, but what about the little guy?

Bill Bruder, the owner of The Movie Store in Markville, one of the few independent DVD retailers around these days, said he has enough trouble competing with the multi-national corporations without pirated DVD operations just up the block.

"The Christmas season should be 30 to 40 per cent of my year, but with these guys in business, it doesn't help," he said. "All I know is they can't supply the quality or the service that we can. Here's hoping last weekend's busts help us."

Mr. Osmond would love to help Mr. Bruder out, but he expects by Friday most of the knock-off retailers busted at Pacific Mall and First Markham Place will have burned enough copies to replenish their supply and be back in business.

The only question is are you still buying?

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Shop Local... Shop Uxbridge Rules & Regulations: Must be 18 years of age or older. One ballot will be issued for every \$20.00 purchase to a maximum of 10 ballots per person, per day, per business. Ballots will be issued starting Nov. 15, 2005 until the close of business on Dec. 24, 2005 and must be deposited at any participating business no later than Dec. 27, 2005. Ballot issuance will be based on pre-tax total. Winners of the shopping spree must spend their winnings at BIA member establishments (details to be determined with winner). Draw will take place Dec. 31, 2005 at the Mayor's New Year's Levee.