

eBooks—Not Tree Books

The digital revolution comes to literature.

By Emile Andre

In March, 400,000 readers bought Stephen King's *Riding the Bullet* the very first day it was available. Doesn't sound like such a big deal for America's best-selling author—right? Wrong. All 400,000 of them downloaded the electronic version.

Many print publishers are doing electronic editions as well as hardcover paperback and audio books. Not every book is available in eBook format yet—but that day is not far off.

The eBook phenomenon began in the '70s, with Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.net) an early effort to make the classics available electronically. Other attempts to make the classics available online include the MIT site dedicated to Shakespeare (<http://tech-two.mit.edu/Shakespeare>). When dedicated eBook devices like the Rocket eBook Reader and SoftBook Reader came out in late 1998, it inspired publishers to make thousands of titles available. And with software like ActiveSync and Microsoft Reader, which make eBooks available for handheld devices, eBooks are now widely available for personal digital assistants.

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If size matters to you, two slimmed down versions are the Handspring Visor Deluxe (\$249) and the Palm IIIe (starts at \$129; HotSync software is extra). Most users like the Palm III

for the price. As an eBook device, it's just a starter kit. The Visor Deluxe costs a bit more, but has lots more memory. Unfortunately, we did not receive the HP Jornada 545 in time for review. It lists for \$499, and uses Microsoft Reader for its eBook downloads, and looks like it's loaded with options.

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