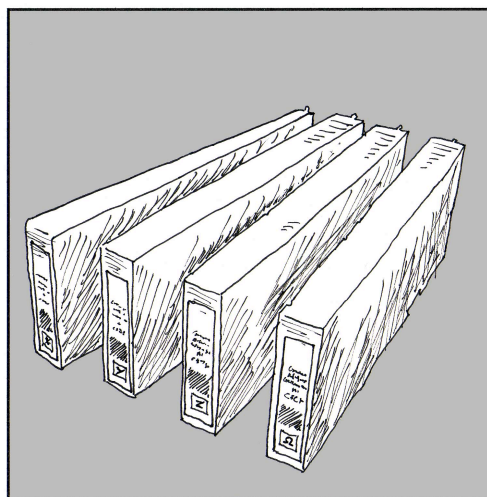


Game Cartridges

An early, but alarming, signal of the Prime administration's downfall was the standardization of format throughout the town. The dust settled and the game cartridge stood alone. The Bear and his staff had thrived behind the smokescreen of competition, but their machinations were brought front and center as public interest in the glut of formats dwindled (some of these formats were perhaps superior to game cartridges. The Bear organized and response and he put Optimus Prime on stage. Before all the eyes of the town, Optimus Prime feigned admiration for the victorious format and claimed to have believed in it all along. But, then, he made the greatest misstep of his mayoral career. Right up on stage, for public display, he inserted a game cartridge — upside down.



The Bear thought it best to confront the waiting ears head on. He gave Jenny Mews an exclusive with the Mayor, and that's when Optimus Prime made his daring confession: in all years, until that horrible day on the stage, he had never once used a game cartridge. Even when the other formats began to die away, he refused to admit the inevitability of the game cartridge's stand alone status. Surrounded by the paisley wallpaper of his breakfast nook, he lived in stubborn bliss, refusing to admit to the realities of the lifestyle of the very town it was his duty to govern. At one point, Jenny Mews reached out and touched Optimus Prime's hand. Although her signature motion, it was a gesture she would come to regret.

The Bear knew the interview was a risk, but its complete failure was impossible to predict. Not a single citizen could reconcile the fact that the man they chose to lead them neither believed in the wonder of game cartridges nor knew how to use them. His penitent tears provided no additional assurance. A referendum was circulated on the black market and a consensus of NO CONFIDENCE was reached. Still, according to their civic duty and civic pledge, the audience continued to attend Tuesday night gatherings beneath the tent. They held back their boos and hisses, but Optimus Prime couldn't stop himself from apologizing between each item on the agenda.

The truth of the matter was that Jenny Mews had a bigger collection of game cartridges than almost anyone in town. It was her preferred format since the beginning. Having a nose for news, she knew that game cartridges would prevail. But, during the prime slot, she had caressed the hand of the mayor during his darkest hour. She would forever be seen as a collaborator with The-Mayor-Who-Didn't-Know. As a result of a Conscious Boycott, her ratings went through the floor. Once the town darling, the allied consumers sent her packing. If she ever hoped to charm audiences again, it would be beyond the foothills in whose shadow she had always stood. She set off alone, while a rerun played in her forfeited time slot, a box of her favorite game cartridges tucked snugly against her breast.

The Bear had ridden enough trends in his time to not believe that all was lost. He thought the Optimus Prime's reelection was certainly possible. His boss even stood a chance at an uncontested race. So he set to his own chambers to spend his nights plotting a renaissance. Perhaps it was within the gray light of the Bear's own ascetic confines, that his once keen understanding of the minds of his fellow citizens began to whither. When morning light told him it was time to salvage some sleep, he settled his oversized frame into his twin bed. The only thought that could bring him peace was this: despite the confusion around him, the Bear had yet to possess a single game cartridge.
