

Sesame Street And Interactive TV

It was like Super TV. I was sitting in a folding chair in the Grand Ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Tampa, Florida. In front of me was a giant TV screen. Behind me was an audience numbering in the hundreds. Nearby were all sorts of mysterious high-technology devices. Writhing across the floor, like rainbow-colored pythons from a tropical rainforest, were dozens of cables.

The room darkened. The screen grew bright.

A big, blue, scruffy-looking creature appeared on the screen. It was Cookie Monster. He was wearing a chef's hat and munching a chocolate chip cookie. Crumbs flew in all directions.

It wasn't TV after all. It was a new computer game from the Children's Computer Workshop (CCW). CCW is a new division of Children's Television Workshop (CTW), the producers of *Sesame Street*, *Electric Company*, *3-2-1 Contact* and other children's educational programs and materials.

Last year CCW released its first four electron learning disk packages:

Ernie's Quiz (For children 4 to 7)*

Instant Zoo (Ages 7 to 10)*

Spotlight (Ages 9 to 13)*

Mix and Match (For the whole family)

Each package contains four programs that run on a 48K Apple. The starred packages (*) require Integer BASIC. The unstarred package (*Mix and Match*) requires Applesoft BASIC. *Ernie's Quiz* and *Spotlight* require paddles. All packages are more effective if you have a color TV. The packages each cost \$49.95. For more information, contact your local Apple dealer, or write:

Apple Computer Company
20525 Mariani Avenue
Cupertino, CA 95014
408/996-1010

Cookie Monster Munch

Barbara Stewart, a project manager from CCW,

had brought Cookie Monster to the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Tampa. The occasion was the third annual Florida Instructional Computing Conference, one of the largest regional educational computing conferences in the country, held from March 28-30.

Barbara was the conference's keynote speaker. In her speech, she announced that CCW was producing a new line of educational programs for the Radio Shack Color Computer (16K) and for the Atari 2600 VCS computer and game system. CCW plans to develop each cluster of programs on a particular machine and have the computer manufacturer distribute them through its standard outlets. Eventually, at least one set of CCW packages will be available for many of the bestselling computers. In 1983, CCW will be producing 24 children's learning games. Half of the games will be for classroom use, half for home use.

Cookie Monster Munch is typical of the new Atari games. The game is a numerical maze game for kids ages three to seven. It comes with a colorful booklet explaining how the game works. The Table of Contents and other sections are all hand printed, as if by Cookie himself. I like the "Note to Parents" at the beginning of the booklet. Also, a symbol of a parent with his or her arm around the shoulders of a child is used throughout the booklet. The symbols are accompanied by suggestions to increase and enrich parent-child interactions with the computer and *with each other*.

And how do the kids and their parents interact with the computer? They use the new Atari Kid's Controller. CCW worked with Atari to develop the Controller. It's a large numerical keypad with big buttons and is very sturdy. It plugs into the left controller jack at the back of the Atari 2600 VCS and is an easy-to-use keyboard or joystick for game play. Each CCW package contains a colorful plastic overlay that fits atop the Kid's Controller.



Cookie Monster's Munch for the Atari.

Cookie Monster Munch is a maze game, so the child has to make characters in the game move up and down, left and right, through the maze. Accordingly, the overlay has a big picture of Cookie Monster and designates buttons (hidden underneath the overlay) as movement buttons with big arrows for all four directions. It's so easy to use that even toddlers with small hands and adults with keyboard phobia will be able to play.

Another nice feature of the games is the Read Aloud Story in the beginning of each booklet. With personal computer graphics (especially VCS graphics) still at a relatively primitive level, the images of the Sesame Street characters, like Cookie Monster, are nowhere near as nice looking as they are on TV. But the story helps remedy this problem. *It engages the child's and the parent's imagination, and it gives the simple looking game on the TV display meaning and depth.*

Cookie Monster discovers a chocolate chip cookie garden. He begins running around the garden picking up cookies. He takes the cookies and puts them in his cookie jar. Cookie's intentions are sensible, but he can't resist eating the cookies before he makes it to the jar. A little kid appears - the Cookie Kid. Cookie Kid tries to collect the cookies and put them in the jar before Cookie can eat them.

The paths in the cookie garden are like a maze. There are ten different game levels and mazes. The easier games are one-person games. The harder games are one- and two-person games.

Like the *Sesame Street* TV program, the games are designed as entertaining ways to teach kids prereading skills. The kids get to move Cookie Monster or the Cookie Kid through the mazelike

cookie garden. Tracing the maze pattern while remaining within its borders helps kids practice the hand-eye coordination they'll need for beginning reading and writing. Also they learn to follow directional arrows and become familiar with the relational concepts of up, down, left, and right.

Peanut Butter Panic

Here are some other new CCW games:

- *Ernie's Magic Shapes*. This is a home game for kids ages three to six that runs on the TRS-80 (16K) Color Computer. Kids help Ernie zap geometric shapes and use them to build colorful figures. The games help kids develop classification skills including matching shapes, recognizing embedded figures, structuring parts of an object into a meaningful whole, and discriminating between similar and different shapes.



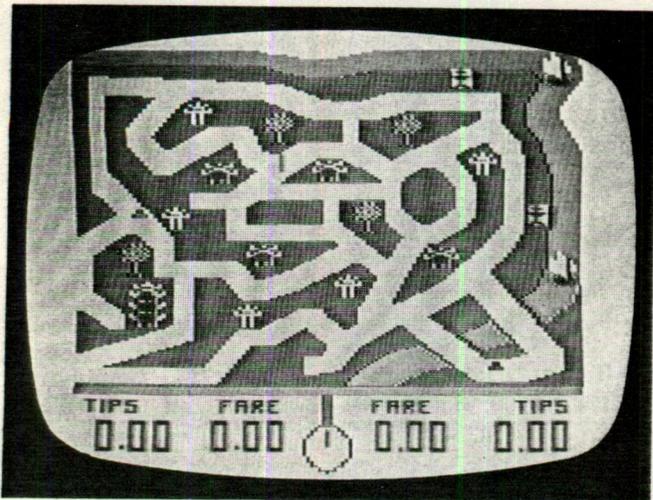
Ernie's Magic Shapes on TRS/80 Color Computer 16K.

- *Grover's Number Rover*. This is a home game for kids ages three to six that runs on the (16K) Color Computer. Grover floats across the top of the screen in his Number Rover. The child helps Grover find the answer to his arithmetic problem. When the child discovers the number that solves Grover's problem, Grover picks up that number of Twiddlebugs. This is a humorous part of the game. The Twiddlebugs are upside down.



Grover's Number Rover on TRS/80 Color Computer 16K.

• *Taxi*. This is a home game for kids ages seven and up that runs on the 16K Color Computer. This is a junior adventure game. Kids get to operate a two-cab company in any one of six cities around the world. They pick up passengers, deliver them to their destinations, and earn fares and tips. The game encourages visual problem-solving in a cooperative environment.



Screen from *Taxi* game on TRS/80 Color Computer 16K.

• *Peanut Butter Panic*. This is another funny game. It is a home game for kids seven and up that runs on the 16K Color Computer. Two little nutniks try to catch stars that zip by above them in the sky. Kids control the nutniks and launch them from a platform that resembles a giant seesaw. The nutniks can jump up and down on their own, or two kids can launch them from the seesaw.

When the nutniks jump up and down they lose weight and get real skinny. When they get skinny, they can't jump as high. To get fat again they have to eat peanut butter sandwiches. They build a peanut butter sandwich by catching stars. They have to watch out for mean snarfs who swoop down out of the sky and steal their sandwiches.



Screen from *Peanut Butter Panic* on TRS/80 Color Computer 16K.

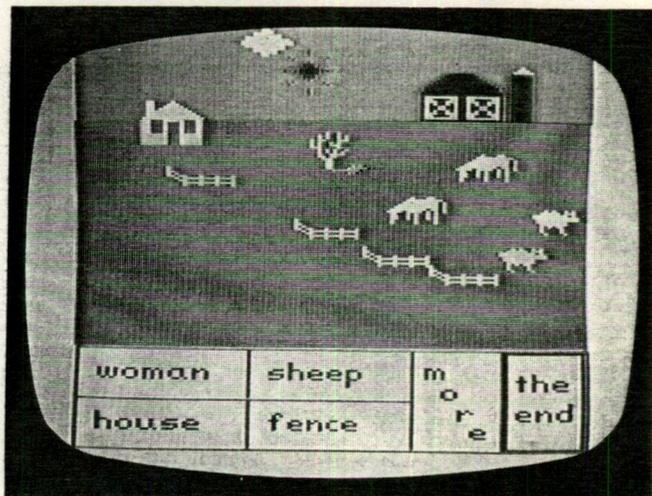
The primary objective of this delightful game is teamwork and cooperation.

• *Picture Place*. This school game is for kids ages five and up. (I think that it is a good game for preschoolers, too.)

Kids get to choose a picture from a library of six background scenes, including a city and a countryside. At the bottom of the screen are word boxes with words inside like dragon, car, bicycle, family, and castle. Kids choose a word by moving a joystick and positioning a big "cursor box" so that it overlaps with one of the word boxes. They pick up the word box and move it up the screen and position it on the background scene. Then, when they press the RETURN button, the word transforms into a picture. For example, the word "dragon" becomes a picture of a dragon, set in the world pictured in the background scene.

CCW's Values And Goals

Barbara Stewart thinks that personal computers will evolve into "interactive TV." She wants to create programs for TV that will accomplish the same goals as the *Sesame Street* programs on regular TV. The programs will focus primarily on developing math and reading readiness skills. But they will also stress certain fundamental *Sesame*



Screen from *Picture Place* on TRS/80 Color Computer 32K.

Street values, including teamwork, cooperation, and nonsexist, nonviolent, pro-social play.

The programs are to be appropriate to their target age group and appealing to both girls and boys. They should meet educational goals for children of each age group and development level. They should be easy to understand, easy to play, and nonjudgmental. They should not frustrate children. Instead, they should encourage a child to grow and improve his or her self-image.

If these games prove to be as thoughtfully and as creatively executed as *Sesame Street* itself, children (and parents) everywhere can look forward to exceptionally rewarding educational experiences via "interactive television."