Life can be simple

Third party support for IIGS hardware is increasing all the time, as is the line up of software. I've picked three rather unusual software packages to review this month, my criterion being 'keep it simple'. Of course, simple things aren't always as simple as they seem, but it's nice not to be put off by a screen full of jargon urging you to select this and that, asking questions, and generally making life complicated.

On the hardware front there are two rather interesting products. The first is a replacement battery for the IIGS that is simplicity itself. The second is an upgrade that allows you to fit a removable media hard disk to the IIGS.

All IIGS computers use a lithium battery to power the internal clock and RAM. The battery is supposed to last 10 years or so, but life spans are averaging three years and less. So what do you do when the battery finally dies and you lose the control panel settings and the clock gives ridiculous readings? Simple! Replace the battery by taking it to your local dealer who will solder in a new one and charge you accordingly. In the meantime, you are without a computer (unless the dealer does it for you on the spot) and you will have parted with precious dollars knowing this exercise will need repeating in a few more years time.

However, now you can do it yourself, assuming you have two hands and a pair of wire cutters. The means is with a slide-on battery, which has special connections that slide over the off cut terminals of the old battery. Replacement is simply a process of removing the old soldered in battery by cutting its connecting wires so that the wires remain sticking out of the circuit board. The new battery is fitted by sliding its connectors over the old wires. In no time the job is done and you are back on the air. There may be other sources for these batteries, but the only one I know of is from Peter Watson, Nite Owl Productions, PO Box 493, Doncaster 3108 Vic. The cost is $25 per battery, and because the batteries have a 10 year shelf life, you can buy one any time in readiness for the inevitable.

CMS SCSI upgrade

CMS SCSI Card owners (presumably driving a CMS hard disk) will be glad to know a ROM upgrade is now available that allows the card to take advantage of the enhanced speed capabilities of System 5.0.

On things simple, Tetris is supreme. But then there are those who thought Rubik's Cube was simple!

The new ROM supports an Interleaving of 1:1, compared to the existing 1:1, with a subsequent faster access time. It also improves read/write times in other ways and the new interleaving is not necessary unless you want to maximise the speed. If you choose to use the new interleaving, reformatting of the disk and resetting the jumpers on the SCSI card are both necessary. The cost is $40, which includes the new ROM, disks and information. To obtain the upgrade, either try the Apple Users Group (Sydney), visit Domino Computers who will do the upgrade on the spot, or send a cheque to Domino Computers at 67 Alexander St, Crows Nest 2065 NSW. Make sure you mark the envelope 'IIGS ROM upgrade' so that the right people at Domino get your letter.

Another feature provided by the ROM upgrade is that the card will now support the CMS removable media hard disk. This RM hard disk has a 45Mb capacity, and costs $150 more than the equivalent unit for the Macintosh. Domino Computers are the agents, but these units would normally be available through an Apple dealer. Exciting stuff, as an RM hard disk is like having lots of hard disks, except you only have one at a time.

Tetris is simple. The idea is to position the block to get a full line across the open area. But watch out – it's very addictive.
Tetris GS

ON THINGS simple, Tetris is supreme. But then there are those who thought Rubik's Cube was simple! Developed in the USSR, by research analyst Alexei Pazhitnov and computer science student Vadim Gerassimov, this innovative program is available on a number of computer systems such as the IBM and, now, the IIGS.

The idea is to orientate a falling configuration of four blocks so that they land in the bottom of a blank box, and hopefully marry up with previous blocks. If you are really good, the blocks will eventually form a full line across the box, making space for more blocks and incrementing your score accordingly. The shape of the four blocks varies, and include a square, a straight line, and an L-shape. Orientation of the block is done while it falls, and is achieved by pressing the J, K, and L keys, although it becomes a battle of skill and dexterity as the pile grows. It's blumin' difficult, but so addictive it's almost criminal. (Is this a Russian plot to cause the Western World to lose track of its purpose?) When you think you have it licked, try increasing the level of difficulty.

The idea of blowing a soap bubble on a computer screen seems odd in itself, but even more bizarre when it is done by a mouse activated ghost. I mean, ghosts don't have any breath, do they?

The game Bubble Ghost is the product of a most fertile imagination, and one that certainly appeals to me. The game starts off at hall 1, which, predictably is the simplest hall of all. The ghost, which smiles and frowns depending on whether the bubble is successfully moved to the hall exit, is very cute and even changes to a flushed red as it blows harder and harder to move the bubble.

The bubble moves in a very convincing manner, and as each hall is reached, the difficulty increases to one of utter impossibility. The only tools at your disposal are the mouse button to make the ghost blow the bubble, the right and left arrow keys to move the ghost around the bubble, and the mouse itself to move the ghost.

As usual the graphics are first class and the sound effects are humorous and not at all intrusive. This is a fun game, with the emphasis on fun. There are no terrorists, guns and laser beams, just a simple little soap bubble. But, holy ghost blowers, it gets you in.

Mean 18

THEY SAY GOLF is good for you, but these days it is becoming a bit expensive to get into. And, if you have a handicap in triple figures, then it's probably better to practice somewhere privately before venturing forth. Playing sport on a computer tends to invoke thoughts of Norm and his tinny, but better this than the derision of those whose handicap is only two figures.

Mean 18, from Accolade, is one of a range of simulated sporting games, but one that seems to be more realistic than most. In fact, it is too darn realistic - with bunkers, rough areas, and a dog-gone golf ball that has a mind of its own. Not being a golfing expert, it is difficult to say if Greg Norman would fare any better, but the game is very entertaining.

You start at the first tee, and lined up for a drive down the fairway. The force of the drive is measured by the time between mouse clicks, and the orientation of the golfer is adjustable to compensate for wind and all the factors that ensure no golf ball goes where you aimed it. The computer acts as a caddy, by suggesting the appropriate club - which you can overrule of course. As the game proceeds, the graphics change to illustrate your position on the course. Altering the player's angle of attack causes the scene to move accordingly, giving a fairly convincing effect.

When the putting green is reached, the scene changes to an overview, this time enlarged to make the player's position to the hole easier to see. A successful putt is rewarded by the sound of a ball falling into a jar, with encouraging messages on the screen. Scores are maintained throughout the game, and a game can be saved for continuation at a later time. Great for a wet weekend!

These games may not be generally available in Australia, although you could try GS Sales and Imports on (02) 688 2701, who I understand import a lot of software for the IIGS that is often otherwise not available. Alternatively, Bubble Ghost and Mean 18 can be imported for around $A60 by ordering from Accolade Software Inc, 5505 Winchester Blvd, Ste 200, San Jose, CA 95128 USA. Tetris can be imported from Spectrum Holobyte, 2601 Challenger Dr, Alameda, CA 94501 USA.