

Beyond Belief

Is the Commodore 64 a dying market? Will it be overtaken by the bigger, badder and more blimmin' expensive machines? At least one budget label seems to think not, as IAN OSBORNE discovered...

'I can't see the need for panic,' insists Jim Scott, proprietor of budget newcomers Beyond Belief and ardent supporter of the C64 scene. 'Commodore 64 software's selling very well. There's only a problem when distributors listen to industry rumours.'

Rumours... 'the consoles are taking over' screams the retail chain. 'It's all 16-bit now' whines the computer page in the local rag, (usually written by a forty-year-old hack who thinks software is a pair of comfortable smalls).

JIMMY'S GRAND PRIX

It's lean, it's mean and it's coming to a C64 near you — soon! *Jimmy's Grand Prix* is a *Supersprint* variant, featuring eight tracks and three cars.

Beyond Belief aren't too happy with the movement at present — the current 16 degrees of turn will be expanded to 32, and at the moment the cars tend to 'bounce' on collision with walls. This is will be reduced, making it play more like a Formula 1 event and less like dodgems.

We've been waiting a long time for this one (eight months in development), but it looks likely to be worth it. And id its chances of success? It's got a picture of Nigel Mansell on the front, so it's bound to do well!



So if the Commodore scene isn't on its last legs, why have so many people got it so wrong? Jimmy thinks he knows...

Founded around 18 months ago, Beyond Belief entered the market as an 8-bit budget label but are now looking into 16-bit and full-price C64 titles too. How can a new company launch itself into a dying market? 'It can't,' says Jim, 'and our sales suggest the market's anything but dead.'

'There are too many software houses who develop games on 16-bit computers and throw together an 8-bit version as an afterthought. This does the scene immeasurable harm — people buy these games purely on the strength of the hype, and when they find they're crap they lose faith in the market. These days most decent releases are on budget labels.'

Blow to Biff

And that's where the company's coming from. Their first game, *Devastating Blow*, was also their best seller, shifting around 9–10,000 copies across all formats, a very respectable figure for a first release. Bearing in mind how awful it was on

the C64, this is quite a feat! Going from success to success, their next outing (a simple soccer-management sim called *Jimmy's Soccer Manager*) also sold well, but surprisingly their third and (to date) finest game, *Biff*, shifted virtually nothing! Despite rave reviews in the computer mags (C64, Speccy and Amstrad), the Dizzyesque arcade adventure starring a cheeky chimp became their worst seller.

'It's at least partly due to the lousy sleeve,' argues Jim. 'We had no idea how bad it would look until we saw it'. Soon to be relaunched in a better cover, hopefully it'll generate the sales it deserves. Like Dizzy, Biff is to be an ongoing character — his next game is *Shove Off*, a hundred-odd level puzzler, and



UNBELIEVABLE

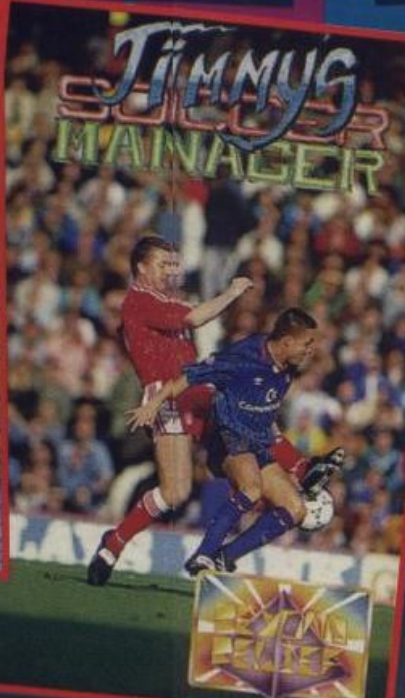


HANDS OF STONE

Not a Roberto Duran licence, *Hands Of Stone* is a horizontally scrolling beat-'em-up in the *Double Dragon* mould. Unfortunately there's no two-player option, but all the usual weaponry's there (bats, boxes, etc).

Beat-'em-ups have a chequered reputation on the C64, but if Beyond Belief get it right with *Hands Of Stone* they could pick up a fair few opportunist sales.

BEYOND BELIEF



'POOL GAME'

As yet untitled, this one's a variation on the arcade opus *Pocket Gal*, but with the digitised nudes (appearing after every victory) removed for obvious reasons. The rules are pretty complicated (and nothing like normal pool), but the table plays really well.

As you can see from the screenshots, the graphics are terrific — they move pretty realistically too. A great energy-bar system, easy-to-use ball bias (topspin, left/right side, etc), and a dotted line showing the proposed path of the cue ball make this one very easy to pick up. There's no final release date as of yet, but it should be out by Christmas — look out for a full review in **COMMODORE FORCE**.

there's also plans for a Mario-style platformer. But was it only the cover that scuppered his C64 debut?

'Well no, it's also due to poor distribution. Some people just couldn't get their hands on our games. Distributors tend to concentrate on more expensive products because it makes for higher profit margins, and if a game's more than six

REVIEWS!

SUPER WONDER DOG

Playing like *Super Wonder Boy*, this features big, colourful graphics, short-range fire, left-to-right scrolling and all the usual pixel-perfect leaps associated with the genre. Best of all, it's got a great cutesy character to hang it all on: Blot, a cuddly Jack Russell with a big friendly smile! Could he be the next Dizzy?



'SOCCER GAME'

Another untitled outing, this will be Beyond Belief's first excursion into the full-price market. Developed on the Amiga and intended as a *Sensible Soccer* beater (undisputed king of 16-bit footy sims), the Beyond Belief game will eventually make it to the Commodore 64, but not for a while.

Featuring bigger graphics than its illustrious predecessor, the control system has also been altered — unlike *Sensible* the ball sticks to the player's feet, placing more emphasis on dribbling. A short stab of the fire button sends the ball reeling goal-ward; or hold it a bit longer to pass on release.

It won't be ready for a while, but in the **COMMODORE FORCE** office the soccer game is certainly Beyond Belief's most hotly awaited release.

KUNG FU WARRIOR

Another horizontal scroller, *Kung Fu Warrior* plays a bit like *Dragon Ninja*. A revamped version of the arcade classic *Kung Fu Master*, you'll be slashing with swords, throwing shurikens, swinging nunchuku, and all the other pacifist pastimes associated with the martial-arts fraternity.

SNARE

Aha, a controversial one! *Snare*'s being rewritten at the mo', having been 'lost' when its original programmer left to work for someone else, taking the code with him! A puzzle game in the *Boulderdash* mould, *Snare* features enhanced gameplay and some of the grooviest devices ever: Look out for teleporters, slime, bombs, switches, and more.

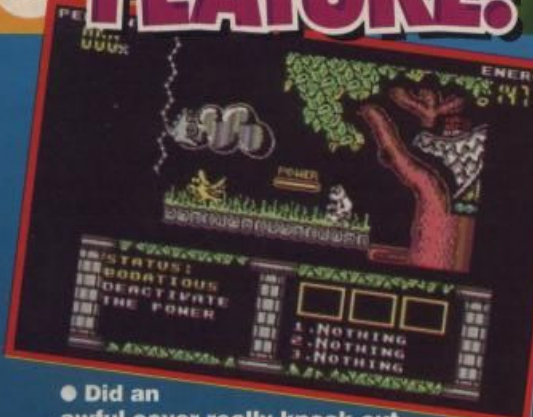
Snare was a rave on the Speccy, but can it take the C64 to its limits? Only time will tell...

snare



INCLUDES:
SAM COUPE VERSION
ON SIDE B





● Did an awful cover really knock out Biff's sales? Maybe the new one will make it into a world champion.



weeks old they don't want to know! We've also had problems because we're a relatively new company: distributors tend to stick with older, larger, more established labels.

Soaring C64

'The market's definitely there,' Jim continues. 'A recent survey indicated that a massive 87% of retailers still want to stock C64 games, and most software houses (especially budget) are only too happy to go on producing them.'

CUT OUT AND SAVE!

Not only does **COMMODORE FORCE** bring you the very best in games reviews, this month we'll also help you get 'em cheaper! All you have to do is cut out the coupon, tick the boxes for the games you require, slap it in an envelope with a cheque/PO for the correct amount, and send it to: *Beyond Belief, 19 Oaks Drive, Higham, Ferriers, Northants NN9 8EX.* Make cheques payable to Beyond Belief.



● There's plenty of monkey business in Biff, an epic arcade adventure starring a cuddly ape, out to please his mum.

He's right too — computer trade paper CTW listed C64 software as the third-best seller, outstripping the Atari ST, PC, and even the Super NES! So what's the problem? Commodore themselves did the C64 market a great deal of harm by putting out the Terminator 2 pack without a datacorder. This portrayed the C64 as a cartridge machine, which it isn't. The C64 cartridge never really took off.

That's true enough

remember the disastrous C64 GS, a cartridge-only Commodore 64 that looked like an outsize Fisherman's Friend and sold like a Bruce Forsyth album? You don't? Oh well — you haven't missed much.

'Companies who put games onto cover tapes or rerelease full-pricers as budget outings while they're still on the shelves do serious damage too.

ON THE HORIZON

A few games that are still a long way off... *Shellshock* is a *Commando*-esque shoot-'em-up with enhanced weapons and gameplay. All in all, a welcome update of a classic genre that went a bit flat after *Ikarri Warriors*.

Also for shoot-'em-up fans is *Soldier One*, a horizontally scrolling blaster in the *Rubicon/Hawkeye* mould.

Finally, there's *Kick-Start*, a horizontally scrolling, viewed-from-the-side bike game for one or two players.

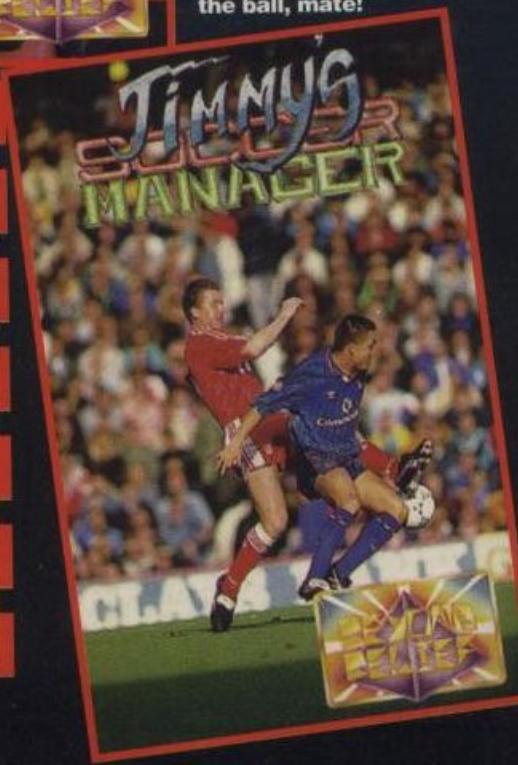
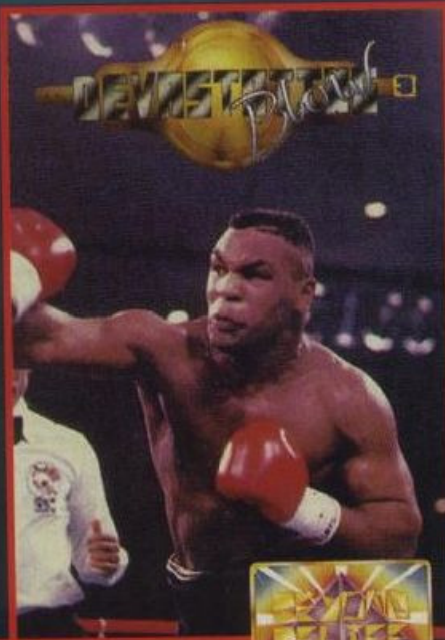
Retailers are left with unsellable stock on their hands, and will therefore think twice about stocking that company's product again, leaving fewer C64 games on the shelves.'

Into the beyond

And the future? 'Our first three releases were fairly well received, so we'll certainly be concentrating our efforts on the C64. We plan to release at least 12 games in the foreseeable future, and hope to treble the size of the company in the next six months.' Hardly the last gasp of a dying market. 'We're always on the lookout for C64 programmers too. With less and less Spectrum material being released, freelance Speccy coders aren't exactly thin on the ground, but C64 bods are extremely valuable.'

So there we have it. Think your game's got what it takes to become a Beyond Belief classic? Send it to *Jim Scott, Beyond Belief, 19 Oaks Drive, Higham, Ferriers, Northants NN9 8EX.*

● Mike Tyson's image helped to shift plenty of copies of *Devastating Blow*. Funnily enough, the game was dodgy too. Is that Vinny Jones below? You missed the ball, mate!



COMMODORE FORCE

Name

Address

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- Biff — £2.99
- Jimmy's Soccer Manager — £2.99
- Jimmy's Super League — £3.49
- Snare — £3.49

● As all these games usually retail at £3.99 they're quite a bargain!