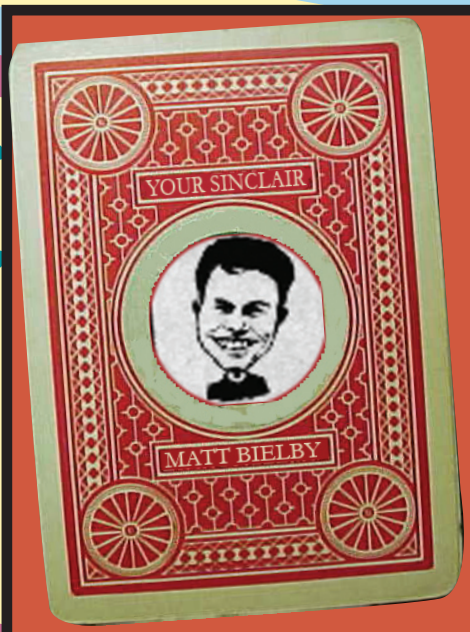
THE ROGUE

They made us laugh. They made us cry. They made us use words like "wibble". They were, of course, the salty seamen (and sea-women) at the helm of the good ship Your Sinclair, and they steered a bold course through the rocky shallows of the ZX Spectrum lagoon. They were the people who made it happen. Heroes. Scoundrels. Legends. Some claim these intrepid few are merely the half-remembered remnants of some fog-wreathed myth, etched into the primeval human consciousness like King Arthur, Robin Hood or Jeff Minter. Others believe they were the vessels for some benign other-worldly intelligence intent on planting the seeds of global harmony like ET, Starman or Jeff Minter. But they were real. They exist. They live! We found them; we quizzed them. Here's the whole sordid story in their own words…



MATT BIELBY

"Look! You can see sheep in those fields!"

Your YS nickname?
Oh God, I thought I'd escaped them at last. But as I recall, I was variously The Swoon King, because the ladies reputedly fell at my feet, a power that for some reason doesn't seem to work any more; Matt 'Goss', Your Sinclair's answer to Danny in The Partridge Family; and, eventually, Gadgy the Mutant Duck – this was when I was going a bit mad with power in my last few months on the magazine. I have, naturally, missed out the *really* embarrassing ones.

What did you do on YS?
Well, I was Deputy Editor for two or three months, having arrived from Computer & Video Games, where I'd been a Staff Writer for most of a year. Then I became Editor. This was all from about Spring '89 to the beginning of '91, a significant time in the life of YS. For one thing, we became Britain's No.1-selling Speccy mag for the first time, and remained that way from then on (much more to do with the sterling work of many others than anything I had to offer, I hasten to add). For another, this was the period when Future Publishing bought the title, which meant moving lock stock from central London to Bath ("Look! You can see sheep in those fields!" we'd gibber, looking gobsmacked out of the window every day). It was pretty chaotic, all told, especially the bit in 1990 when we had to find a whole new team to replace the people we'd left behind in London.

What have you done since?
I became Group Senior Editor at Future Publishing for many years, which was about as high up the editorial tree as you could go at the time, and personally launched a lot of the Future magazines in that period, including (deep breath): Amiga Power, Super Play, PC Gamer, .net, SFX, Total Film, Arcade, and Official PlayStation 2. I also did some work abroad for Future, including launching PC Gamer in the States. More recently, I've worked on various magazines for assorted companies, including the launch of Emap's Zoo.

What is your abiding memory of the Your Sinclair years?
Tiny offices – so small, at first, that David Wilson and I had to share the one desk, so one of us had to stand around like a lemon while the other typed, then vice versa. Great people – I learned about 80% of everything I know about magazines at YS, including the most important lesson of all: it's perfectly possible, and perhaps essential, to be both funny and serious at the same time. Pride – we looked at Crash (then past its best, admittedly) and Sinclair User, and knew we were the best. That was a nice feeling to have. And Whistlin' Rick Wilson's 'Hold My Hand Very Tightly (Very Tightly)' being played on Radio One. The boy's a star!

Favourite Spectrum game of all time?
I always liked my platform games, so maybe Rainbow Islands, or going back a bit further, Manic Miner. But it's the stuff that seemed truly original or groundbreaking that lingers: Skool Daze, Head Over Heels, Ant Attack. And who could forget Duncan MacDonald's truly hypnotic Advanced Lawnmower Simulator? Put it in a big installation at the Tate Modern, and it's a possible Turner Prize winner.

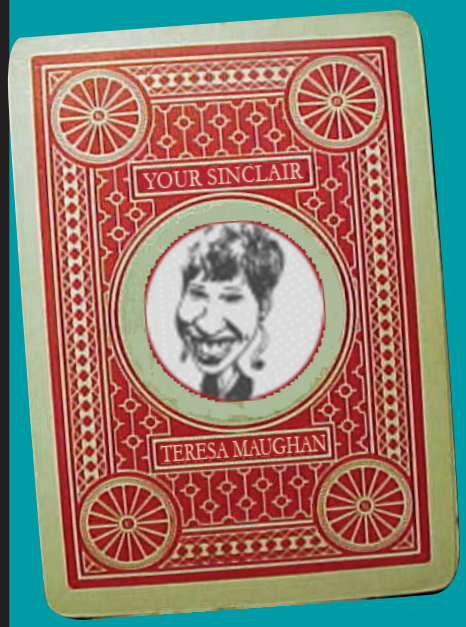
Tell us a YS secret that you can now share with the world…
Contrary to popular belief, I was never a world-class games player. Indeed, to call my skills 'average' would be kind. Oh, and we never were based in a shed, as such. Artistic licence that one, I'm afraid.



Some sheep, in a field, yesterday

E'S GALLERY

TERESA MAUGHAN



"Nobody croons like David Wilson"

Your YS nickname?
T'zer

What did you do on YS?
Production Editor, Deputy Editor, Editor and then Publisher. In reality, anything and everything.

What have you done since?
All sorts, including cleaning up poo (I now have three children aged 11, 9 and 4), writing loads of pop books on everyone from Robbie Williams to Justin Timberlake, writing and editing the Channel 4 book on Model Behaviour, editing coffee-table book Mohammed Ali: The Glory Years, launching and packaging Star Pets magazine (aimed at girls and all about celebrities and their pets and pop) and a host of other more boring business stuff including doing production on Linux User magazine for a year or so.

What is your abiding memory of the Your Sinclair years?
Laughing like a drain for four years solid. Listening to Snouty and Berkmann swap jokes continuously – some of them were actually funny. Dressing up in ridiculous outfits in the name of work. Young boys asking me to sign their T-shirts (and other things!) at the Earl's Court games shows – I could never understand why, as I didn't feel famous. Wondering whether Duncan MacDonald was going to show up for work or whether he was out on one of his 'jaunts'. Hold My Hand Very Tightly – nobody croons like David Wilson.

Favourite Spectrum game of all time?
Prince of Persia – I loved the way he moved. Otherwise it has to be Advanced Lawnmower Simulator designed by Duncan McDonald.

Tell us a YS secret that you can now share with the world…
Kevin Cox is a transvestite and likes to be known as Kylie to his friends.



The thriving T'zer fan club continues to this day



DAVID McCANDLESS

"I was routinely and ruthlessly beaten"

Your YS nickname?
Macca

What did you do on YS?
Hacking Away, then Program Pitstop, then reviews, then, apparently, everything.

What have you done since?
After spells on PC Zone and other computer rags, I managed, somehow, to make the transition from specialist computer-spod writer to proper journalist. Over the last few years, I've written a bunch of articles for Wired, The Guardian, and the BBC about games, technology and drugs. I kept playing games. My eerie skills won me the title UK Doom Champion 1995. I went on to compete in the world deathmatch and lost in the first round to a 14-year-old boy from New Jersey with a moustache. I retired from gaming shortly after. As a musician, I recorded an album, Smoother & Faster, which won a Q Magazine Unsigned Artist award in 1997. It then went on to sell 40 copies.

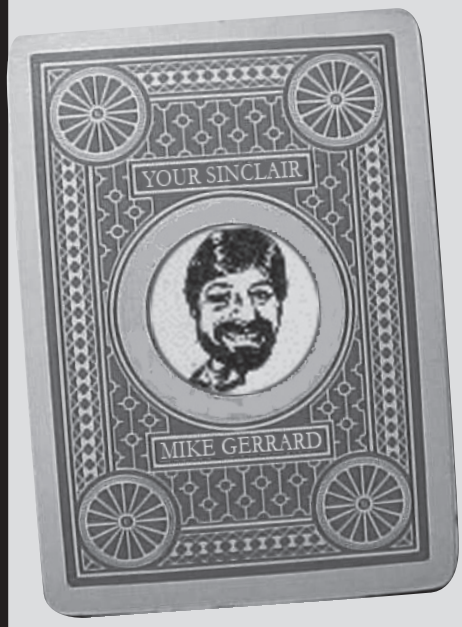
Taking the piss, though, is my true love. I wrote and edited seethru.co.uk, the satirical webzine that accompanied the BBC2 drama series Attachments. That was fun. It also featured the short-lived resurrection of Duncan MacDonald writing about his life on the dole in the South Coast Diaries. Currently, I'm writing screenplays that are hilarious in their terribleness. And still doing the odd bit of Web comedy. And whoring myself for the Government and the papers. Check out my shit at **www.davidmccandless.com**.

What is your abiding memory of the Your Sinclair years?
The coppery excitement of visiting the hallowed YS offices for the first time. 15 years old, I wore a tie and had my mum in tow. Meeting the Gods from the mag – Phil South, T'zer, and Marcus Berkmann – in the flesh. They took me trembling to the pub. I had a shandy.

Favourite Spectrum game of all time?
Dragontorc of Avalon.

Tell us a YS secret that you can now share with the world…
The competitions were often rigged so friends of staff members won. Very few Program Pitstop programs worked (not my fault!). Having my 15-year-old face in a national magazine did not go down well with my peers at school. My bragging about it all the time didn't help. I was routinely and ruthlessly beaten and still bear the scars today. WARREN McKILWAYNE – I KNOW WHERE YOU LIVE! ONE DAY – WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT… 'SPECCY TWAT' WILL BE COMING…


David thinks back to the days before jealous bullies smashed his specs



MIKE GERRARD

"I didn't only play adventure games"

Your YS nickname?
Did I have one? I was maybe referred to as the Bearded One, or something like that.

What did you do on YS?
Wrote the adventure pages.

What have you done since?
Become a travel writer, written three radio plays and shaved off my beard.


Mike Gerrard, sans beard, looking a lot less like Matthew Kelly these days

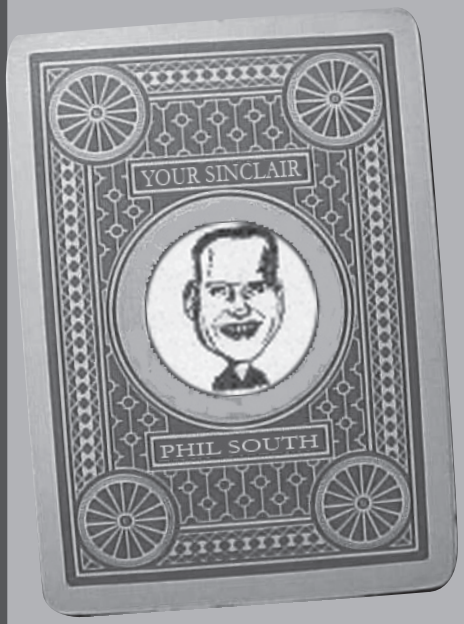
What is your abiding memory of the Your Sinclair years?
Fun.

Favourite Spectrum game of all time?
Manic Miner – just to prove I didn't only play adventure games.

Tell us a YS secret that you can now share with the world…
Phil South often worked in the nude.

PHIL SOUTH

"I was some kind of small probing creature in the undergrowth, like a shrew"



Your YS nickname?
Snouty. Marcus Berkmann started that one, because I was always nipping out for a pack of cigarettes, and being as this was London we were fond of prison slang, so I would always say "just going out for some snouts", and it kinda stuck. Plus I think there was some joke about my nose, and it made it sound like I was some kind of small probing creature in the undergrowth, like a shrew or something.

What did you do on YS?
I was the Staff Writer but later on the Technical Editor. I would do hardware reviews mostly but also my fair share of game reviews as did anyone we could grab who happened to be passing. As the years rolled on it was odd how many people happened to be passing all the time.

What have you done since?
I wrote a game with John Molloy called FISH! for Magnetic Scrolls. After YS I moved out of London and landed in Frome in Somerset. A huge amount of writing – technical books on AMOS and other Amiga topics, plus writing and editing books on Lightwave 3D. After that I became a computer graphics and 'new media' guru, making websites for corporations. After a bit of bad luck my business went down the pan, so I had to go looking for a job, and got a really good one at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, maintaining the computers, designing programmes and posters, and teaching film and video studies. It's one of the most respected drama schools in the world, and I'm honoured to be part of the family. Plus I get to be a film-maker half the time which has always been my dream.

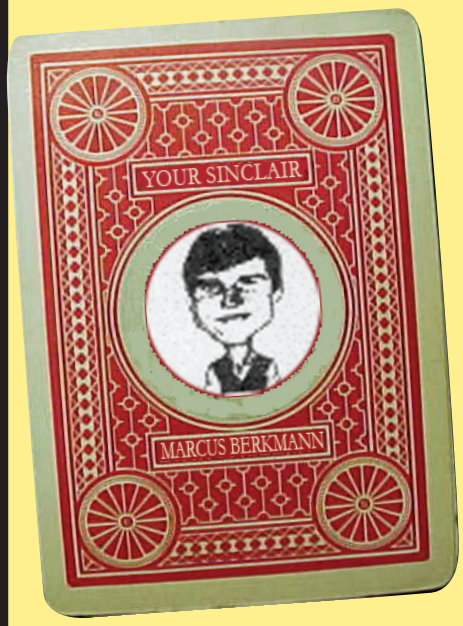
What is your abiding memory of the Your Sinclair years?
It has to be the time we did a panto spread one year. Pete Shaw and some of his buddies from the Madame Jo-Jo's gay piano bar made Marcus and I dress up as panto dames, except we looked more like drag queens for obvious reasons. It was a funny spread – I nearly popped a vein in my skull at the time laughing. Oh, and the time I was sitting there on my own one morning, at about 8am, in our office right behind the reception area, and a car came crashing through the front window. Fortunately the receptionist was making coffee in the back at the time, and the only casualty was my nerves.



That's Phantom Phil to Mingey Marcus behind all that slap

Favourite Spectrum game of all time?
Oh man, so many games! It's a toss up between Tetris, Head Over Heels or Sentinel. I think Sentinel was a work of genius, by far the furthest extension of the game makers art at that time. I mean how in blue blazes do you fit all that *game* into 48Kb?

Tell us a YS secret that you can now share with the world…
On the whole I think the lid should stay on that particular box. Outing all the gay guys has been done, saying that I was in love with every female art editor I ever worked with is both a no brainer and obvious because I'm so transparent and juvenile. The people who were total bastards to work with… don't exist, as most people were kind, professional, scarily smart and lovely people to be around. It was the time of my life and I think most people who lived through that era would say that if a meteor had crashed through YS while we were working there (instead of some silly woman who couldn't drive her car) we would have died happy.



MARCUS BERKMANN

"I have never been more constantly sozzled before or since"

Your YS nickname?
I'm not sure I ever had one, at least not while I was working there. Only Snouty and T'zer had nicknames, as I remember. Any more and I think people might have started throwing up.

What did you do on YS?
I started in about November 1986 as Staff Writer, and I think my first issue was January 1987. There were four of us on the editorial staff – me, Snouty, T'zer and Sarah Biggs, the Production Editor. The first two were still there when I left, but Sarah went off before I did, for reasons I can no longer remember (other than she was pissed off with the whole thing). We had several replacements, none of who were much good until Jackie Ryan came along. I rose through what we laughingly called the hierarchy until reaching the extraordinary heights of Deputy Editor. I left in June 1988.

What have you done since?
I went because my freelance career, which I only had time for at evenings and weekends, was earning me more than the pitiful wages Dennis Publishing had to offer. For several years afterwards I was first pop critic and then TV critic of the Daily Mail. I have also written a column about pop music for The Spectator since 1987. I later wrote sports columns for Punch, The Independent On Sunday and the Daily Express; I'm now film critic of The Oldie and contribute regularly to Private Eye.

Between 1993 and 2003, I was a regular voice on LBC in London, usually talking about TV. I have published several books, including Rain Men (1995 – about cricket) and Brain Men (1999 – about pub quizzes), and I edited a Private Eye book last year. I've just finished a book on fatherhood (out in Feb) and have started a follow-up to Rain Men (out next June). And I wrote a small but pleasingly lucrative proportion of the first two series of Monkey Dust. There's another series in production but the books have got in the way. Is that enough? Or far too much?



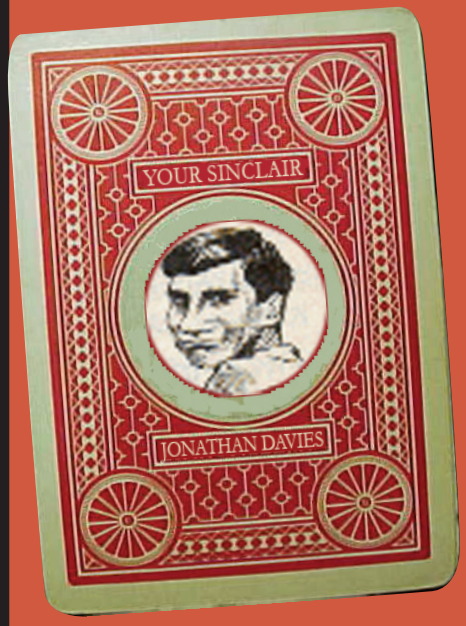
Carry on again doctor up the Khyber etc etc

What is your abiding memory of the Your Sinclair years?
Mainly the vast amount of lager we drank. I have never been more constantly sozzled before or since. We used to work long hours and go straight to the pub afterwards and sit there all evening. It was totally absorbing. After 18 months I was exhausted. But I had learned a hell of a lot. I'm sure it's helped my writing since. Also I made a couple of good and long-lasting friends.

Favourite Spectrum game of all time?
Head Over Heels. But you must understand that I binned the Spectrum many, many years ago, and stopped playing all computer games five years ago when my daughter was born. So my memory is hazy.

Tell us a YS secret that you can now share with the world…
Hmm. I'm sure you know that Rachael and Gwyn were the same person, John Minson, although for the life of me I can't remember why. Also, we genuinely thought we were the best Spectrum magazine out there, and I think that made us the best Spectrum magazine out there. I don't think it was ever as good after Teresa left, but then I think its time had passed. But I'm rather fascinated, and thrilled, that YS seems to have meant so much to so many people, which I think shows that we were doing something worth doing. Even if we seemed to do it half pissed and half hungover…

JONATHAN DAVIES



"I've no idea if any of those hex dumps actually worked"

Your YS nickname?
Jonathan. All the good nicknames had already been taken.

What did you do on YS?
I ran the YS Tip Shop for a while, and also found myself presiding over Program Pitstop, the pages no one at YS understood. Including me. I've no idea if any of those hex dumps actually worked.

What have you done since?
Since YS I've done various other mags, like Amiga Power, Super Play, PC Gamer and N64 Magazine. I also did the website for Top Gear, the telly programme. But generally it's been a gradual and, I'd like to think, dignified descent into obscurity.

What is your abiding memory of the Your Sinclair years?
Blimey. Erm. Let's think. It would probably be "blimey" and "erm", two words you don't see often enough in magazines these days. And most reviews beginning "Driving games, eh?" (or whatever) and then sort of rambling on till they reached the bottom of the page. And the competition to win a radio-controlled Ferrari Testarossa, illustrated by Jackie Ryan clutching the prize below the heading "I've Got a Big Red Testie!".

Favourite Spectrum game of all time?
The one I played most was Jet Set Willy (after poking it with infinite lives, of course). I also loved all the Ultimate games up until Nightshade (ugh), and Costa Panayi's games were brilliant – TLL, Highway Encounter and the like. And I wasted hours annoying the undead in Zombie Zombie.


YS/DOMARK HARD DRIVIN' COMPO

I'VE GOT A BIG RED TESTIE

Brian May (or is it Anita Dobson?) gives away a radio-controlled Ferrari

Tell us a YS secret that you can now share with the world…
Remember Farty the Warthog? Well… he didn't actually exist! It's true! You read it here first.



The team emerges from the shed for one final photograph, professing that YS is crap (in a funky skillo kind of way)