A Deletion of Editors

Comment:
I hate your magazine. Its stupid.

Comment:
The writing is really bad. And the articles are boring. –J, Abu Dhabi

Comment:
Why you are publishing this?
–Aysha, Epco Petroleum

Comment:
This is nonesense. Your writers cant write.
This is crazy! I saw a million typos. –Des, Al Ain

Comment:
You are making an effort, I can see this, but the grammar is atrocious and the content is desultory. Oh, and the visual layout is weak. This is the first of its kind magazine in Al Ain so I do give you credit for this. I’m sure you will be one of the best magazines in the country if you clear up a few problems. Spelling, punctuation, word choice, capitalization, etc. –Mohammed A., UAE University, groundskeeper
We’ve had a great response from the website! Piers said.

Really?

Yeah, read this one. Piers handed the woman an 8 x 11 paper, which was blank, except for a sliver of text: “You are the best magazine in the country! –Mohammed A., UAE University.”

A professor? Peace asked.

Uh, yeah. Looks that way. Piers fingered the thick gold cross hanging between her breasts [outside the shirt]. This made her think of her daughter, Samantha, who was being fed by her nanny in Piers’ office. The nanny had a name, but no one was sure what it was, because Piers never introduced her to people. She was just a nanny.

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Piers Ang
Box 14441
Al Ain, UAE

Experience: 2010-Present The Date Palm magazine Editor-in-Chief, Publisher
I founded this ‘free’ magazine by myself last year with start up money from The Al Suhaida Group. It is first magazine in Al Ain for and about the city. I have international staff of 5 and have total control over content and visual layout.

2001-2010 Hong Kong Public Schools teacher, Grades 6 & 7

Education: Hong Kong Polytechnic 1995-2001
Teacher Training

Skills, Interests and Misc, Etc:
I am native Cantonese speaker, computer literary, very serious about my faith (Christianity.)
Huh, where am? Rough night. I should probably feel ashamed of something...

But what, exactly?

Coffee.

Am I grunting? I seem to be making groans and wheezes while I walk. And sighs. Do I always do this? Must be getting old. Something needs scratching.

I’m watching the coffee percolate. Percolate? No, brew. My parents had a percolator, what?, mid-70s? Earlier?

You might want to take a cigarette break, go for a walk, whatever. Nothing to see here.

Okay, coffee, cigarette, sofa. It’s all good.

Or is it? Paco’s…? I remember Steve and Ann and…that other guy…and…the band…oh, yeah, and…uhm…that’s no good. One-two-three-breathe-and-forget about it.

What’s this? Why is it behind the cushion? Oh, right. The Date Palm. Piers’ “magazine.” Piece of utter utter utterly-crappy crap. Still hasn’t paid me for my contribution. What’d I give her…?

I’m staring at the wall now, trying to remember. My memory gets worse every day.

A trivia quiz, a book review and a cryptic crossword. She said she was going to pay 50 fils a word. That’s about, what?, 10¢. Was expecting around $200 all told. Then she says, “Oh yeah, I spoke to my backer and he says we are not paying for reviews or puzzles. Sorry!”

Sorry? Yeah, right. [Sorry “!” Is that sarcastic punctuation?] She was never going to pay me. Said she’d “look for some petty cash” to give me, but she’ll be looking about as hard as OJ Simpson is out there looking for the “real” murderer.

Let’s look at this thing. Broken English, misspelling, can’t really…see what this photo is all about. Grammar, grammar, spelling, couple words mashed together, here we go. Matthew Arlington. Huh? I didn’t write that. I didn’t…who edited this?

Jesus H. Christ, what’s going on around here. Where’s the cryptic? In back, beautiful. Oh. My. God. They published it with the answers right in the grid. How fucking stupid…?
Andrew Madigan

It took me a really long time to make up that crossword.

This is a farce. They’re guilty of excessive farce.

I need to see the masthead. Piers, right. Peace Ngegwi. What kind of name…? Senior editor/staff writer. Web designer, Enron Malsharb. Lessee…secretary, accountant, marketing…where are the editors? Just Piers and Peace? That’s it? Two non-native speakers for a whole magazine? My god. They’re a veritable deletion of editors. And she ruined my review of Jonathan Baumbach. Destroyed it. Utterly obliterated it. I mean, sure, have a go at the article by…Reem Mansouri, who has…lemme see…three consecutive sentences with no verbs and no prevailing sense of…meaning…but leave my stuff alone. I’m doing you guys a favor. Writing content that you don’t have to hack away at… Coffee. I need more coffee. And cigarettes. A shower, lunch, Paco’s.

Piers, looking over the new issue, chews on her cross. No, a different one. Tiny, silver, flaked with gold. She is not a native speaker, but she makes several unkind comments, in the coffee klatch of her interior monologue, about Peace, Peace’s writing, her status as a non-native speaker, her incompetence. Why did I hire her? Her grammar is not well. She write no good English at all. [See, like that.] And: I am gonna hafta letter go. I just felt so bad for her. She told me her life story and it was so…so…you know? I just could not not hire her. I will fire her today.

At no time during this lone and silent bull session did Piers alight on the irony of her own non-nativity, her own lack of experience as a writer, editor, publisher. She did not question the logic of starting a magazine without knowing how to do so. And being quite ill-at-ease in the language of publication. And launching the magazine before having a staff. And choosing staff members who were also inexperienced non-native speakers who had no expertise writing or editing, not even in their own native languages.

No, she did not [permit herself to] wonder about these things. We can wonder about these things, though. You can. I know I will, am, have.

Why does she do these things? Why? It doesn’t make a lick of sense. She should hire me to edit this thing. I
have a full-time job, sure, at Emirates University, teaching poetry to spoiled bluebloods, but that hardly takes up my time. I mean, hell, I could do that job in my sleep. Many professors do. Jim Dagish, for example. Well, not sleep. More of an alcohol coma. An alcoma.

This whole thing about Emirates University may not sound like genuine Interior Monologue. I mean, he wouldn’t tell himself this. Not in so many words. Not in full unfragmented sentences.

No, of course not.

Except that he would, really. He’s like that. It’s not just clunky heavy-handed exposition on the author’s part.¹

And no, I wouldn’t assume that you would like the guy. I don’t either. But hey, he’s the hero, so what can we do about it?

The “hero.”

You know what I think? Matthew, which is the guy’s name, the pre-narrative-intrusion guy, continues to think, still sitting in his boxers, blowing Camel smoke toward the ceiling fan, cradling the fifth coffee between his horizontal-to-ground right leg and the flank of his crossed-over-the-right left leg. I think she knows that she doesn’t know what the hell she’s doing. And she knows that she needs someone like me—well, me: it’s Al Ain; who the hell else could she get?—to set the ship of (discursive) state on the right tack (is that the word?), but she also knows that, if someone like me came aboard (Aye, Mateys!), he’d completely take over.² He’d [be forced to] tell her [either directly or indirectly or both] just how badly she was doing the job. But the thing is, Piers is way too insecure for that. She’s just secure enough to admit, to herself, that she doesn’t know what she’s doing, but she’s not quite secure enough to actually hire someone who does know what he’s doing because this would make her lose face. So instead, she surrounds herself with morons and incompetents.

¹ Eds. It’s true. We’ve fact-checked the hell out of this.
² Eds. Again, this rendering of Matthew’s stream-of-consciousness might bruise plausibility, but it’s the honest to god’s truth. This is the way he thinks, as if William James himself had urinated in said stream.
A thought, a realization, a burgeoning epiphanic event rose to the surface of Piers’s consciousness and threatened to erupt, but she quickly, deftly put a lid on it. The lid of embarrassed repression. And she sealed it with the duct tape of delusion and put it inside a ziplock baggie of projection.

Only in Al Ain, Matthew thought. Only in Al Ain. Only in this crazy dump.

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*Al-Ain city*

*United Arab emirati*

**Work Experience**—Al Ain water plant, Al Ain Zoological resource centre and habitat wildlife resort and park (formerly ‘Al ain zoo’)

- Hili Fun City
- Hilton hotel and resort

**Highlights**—forth biggest city in U.A.E.

— means ‘The Garden” in arabic-language.
— special place for H.H. Sheikh Zayed Al nayhan (PBUH).
— Birthplace of HH Sheikh Zayed (PBUH).
— Many famous roundabouts around the world such as Deer roundabout and Dallah Roundabouts!

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Peace? We need to talk? Can you come in here for a minute?

Sure, Piers. Just a minute.

Maybe sooner?

I’m just finish up this article on Sheikh Zayed (peace be upon him). He was born in Al Ain, you know.

I do know. But no, don’t worry about the article… [sotto voce] …it’s not like we’ll be running it.

Okay.

Peace made her way to Piers’ office and sat in the big soft cushy armchair. Piers came around from behind her desk and sat on the big soft cushy couch. She had once read that this is a more approachable way to address subordinates, on their level, especially when delivering bad news or “coming down on” them.
Remember how I told you that I hire you because I feel really connected to your story?
Yes, mum.
And to your whole family and— Piers was staring at the ceiling, not Peace, and she was waving her arms around as if she were juggling two bowling pins and a chainsaw. —And to your childhood in Uganda and the poverty and civil war and political unrest and all the things you saw and that happen to you?
Yes, mum.
Okay, good.
Well, I still feel connected to you, and to— She made an abrupt lurching sort of motion, with her arms on one side of her body and her neck craning in the opposite direction, as if trying to push someone who smelled very bad out the door. —all those other things.
Yes, mum.
But that was not reason to hire you. I never should have done that. Piers laughed with what sounded like ironic distance.
Mum?
I am afraid I am gonna hafta let yugo.
Mum?
You really cannot write, can you?
I'm trying, mum.
Or edit. This— Piers held up the latest issue. —is not very good, is it?
I will get better, I swear to you, mum.
No, I am so sorry, Peace. This is your last day.
Peace threw her head into her hands, pushing them almost all the way down to her lap. She spoke, muffledly: But what about my family back home?
Oh, do not worry. Do not worry, Peace. I still feel, you know, really connected to them.
Is that all? Peace sat up.
My prayers are with them, really. Piers leaned over and touched Peace’s arm, with a reassuring smile that she’d read about in a management textbook.

So Harvey, we liked your piece last month. On the sanitation department.
Thanks.
Do you want some water? Cuppa coffee?
No, I’m good.
Okay.  Piers smiled, twisting her WhatWouldJesusDo bracelet with the index finger of her left hand.

So… Harvey Gears looked around the room, but he couldn’t find anything to provoke conversation. He had worked in Thailand for seven years, teaching ESL to elementary school children, but, soon after he got married, his wife had insisted that they leave Southeast Asia. Too many distractions, she had argued, too many young women. Harvey had grown up in rural Canada and had a BS in marketing from a community college that had been granted, through some sort of semantic alchemy, “university” status. He was a husky 220 pounds with a drooping pelican-beak beer gut, but, when he looked in the mirror, through some sort of ocular prestidigitation, saw only muscle, despite the fact that his “musculature” was soft, wobbling, flabby and lacking in the type of marbled definition one typically associates with muscle. In his mind’s eye, or perhaps his eye’s mind, Harvey Gears saw the hulking yet washboard-abbred star football player he once might have been, according to his memory. Or his personal mythology. Or his liberally edited, manifestly expurgated and thoroughly incomplete anthology of distorted self images.

Piers was leaning way over toward her new potential employee. She was smiling, creepily he thought. Harvey was getting a funny feeling. So…why am I here…?

Thought you could help out. Some staff writing, editing, you know?

I’m not really an editor or writer. Well, actually, I am definitely not either one of those things.

Huh, Piers said.

So…

When can you start?

I–

—I have got a feeling about you, Harvey.

You do?

Yes. I do. Are you religion? Sorry, religious?

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Yes, we know. This subordinate-phrase-with-metaphor is syntactically identical to the subordinate-phrase-with-metaphor in the preceding sentence. But on their own, each phrase is fine, good even. [Eloquent? Rhetorically opulent? Maybe.] Point is, why should one be judged inferior because of its proximity to the other? By that logic, we should loathe the second twin, detest the multiple orgasm, abhor the beastly simulacrum of the xerox copy or burned DVD!
Uh….yeah? Sure?
Super. Piers smiled.

Harvey? Piers called out, her voice an absence floating down the overly-air-conditioned space of The Date Palm. Harvey, hearing this voice, moved through the empty office, past the immense and polychromatic ENVIRONMENT FIRST! posters, 16 of which Piers had put up that morning. They flanked the narrow corridor like violence-prone bouncers guarding the red velvet ropes in the VIP room of Piers’ misplaced eco-enthusiasm.

Harvey did not float, though. He bounded and clanked from his nook in the open-plan workroom toward Piers’ office, following the absence of her disembodied voice to the presence of her even more highly-air-conditioned and fully walled and doored personal office.

Remember Aisha? Piers asked. The secretary?
Uh hu. She’s the other person who works here, aside from Enron and me and you. And the guys downstairs who I never see.

Exactly. Except no, she does not work here any longer.

Harvey had heard about The Date Palm. The staff dropped like flies. They either quit or got fired. Once a week. Peace was the…seventh editor? Eighth? That’s why the office was so empty. He fully expected to get fired himself, any day now. But it was a good gig while it lasted. Piers’ nanny, what’s her name, when she wasn’t with the baby—where was the baby when it wasn’t with what’s her name? That’s weird…it, she, Maybelle, sure wasn’t with Piers—would wash his car, fetch coffee, get lunch, and all at no charge. It was awesome.

Well, Aisha got married a few months ago.
I did not know that.

She did, yeah. But—Piers began to whisper, loudly—she did not bleed on the first night, and this really upset her husband, Rashid, so he kept, you know, making sex with her every night, harder and harder and rougher and more violent each time, raping her essentially after the first two or three nights, and then she did bleed.

Wow. What happened then?
Rashid was happy then, because she bled. That mean she was a virgin. His mother told him to look for blood.
Andrew Madigan

Huh.
Right? I know. Piers made restive eye contact.
She told you this?
Piers’ eyes grew wide, she was sitting up plank-
straight, her chin dipping down so that it wasn’t a chin
anymore, but rather a walrussy neck fold, and she nodded
shortly but quickly.

Tell me, Harvey. Do you think she expects to be paid
for the whole month? I do not know about this one…I mean,
she only worked 26 days, and the last few she was just crying,
you know. Not very productive. Piers straightened her extra-
long t-shirt or tunic, which was festooned with a graffiti-art-
ish representation of Jesus Christ, whose crown of thorns
appeared…if you leaned over and squinted real hard…to be a
coil of computer cables.

I do not know the answer to that one, Piers.
Hm.

Hello?
Is this Matthew Arlington?
Yes.
This is Piers Ang.
Hi, Piers.
Hi. I sorry to do this over the telephone, but I was
wondering if you could help us out?
Sure, what can I do? They’re finally asking me to
edit! My big break!
We need some help with the editorial department
here at *The Date Palm*. I thought maybe you could help.
Well…I’m pretty busy down here at the university.
I know, I know. But you wouldn’t have to come in
much. Just edit the articles from home.
I thought you had a new guy, an English-speaker?
Yes, Harvey. He is o-kay…
Not working out?
Not really… Piers laughed. Since he started with us,
the number of grammar mistakes has dropped from about nine
to about two per article. At least that is what people tell me.
Everything look okay to me.
Mm.
Senior Editor? How does that sound?
Not bad.
Terrific. We will keep Harvey as the staff writer and then fire him when I find someone, you know, who is qualified.

Why didn’t you just hire someone qualified in the first place?

We don’t pay very much.

Then start paying more. Anyway, you can’t just fire him the second you find someone else.

Sure we can. They are practically no labor laws here in the UAE.

This sounded vaguely wrong, slightly exploitative, but it was a good opportunity. Matthew accepted.

Harvey, come in here for a sec, okayyy?

Okay, Piers.

This is Matthew Arlington. He is going to be working here from now on, sort of on the editorial side. Give you more time to write.

Hi, Harvey.

Hey. What’s your position, exactly?

Senior Editor.

I thought that’s what I was?

You were Senior Editor/Staff Writer, but you cannot do two jobs, Harvey! [sotto voce] You cannot barely do one…

Huh.

This will give you more time to write. Matthew will be a big help to all of us. Piers looked from Matthew to Harvey.

Sure, but will my—

—You will be taking a small pay cut.

Oh.

Matthew and I need to talk, so…

Nice to meet you, Harvey.

Yeah, same.

Now, I thought we would do a “Ladies” theme for the next issue, Piers said.

Matthew pulled a face, as if he’d inadvertently drunk his own urine. I don’t like themes. Tacky.

Oh, but I do like them so… Anyway, this will be about what a real woman means and— You know, according
Andrew Madigan

to my faith, a woman should support her husband and let the man make the decisions.

Okay… Then why, he thought, are we going with your crappy theme idea?

A woman should be at home with the kiddies.
Then why are you here, Piers?
It’s complicated
How?
Oh, you know. It just is.
Your husband makes a lot of money, I’m sure, so…
Yeah, I know.
Then why? Matthew was confused.
You know…
I don’t.
It is what it is.
That’s a tautology.
Piers paused, as if thoughtfully. We have had a really great response from the internet. Wanna see the reader comments?

Matthew went to his “office,” which was a white desk in a white room, across from Harvey.

Hey, Harv. Why don’t you give me all the submissions we have for the upcoming months.

Sure. It’s not a lot. I put them into two piles, Yes and No.

Good.

Matthew inspected the work. He started with the Yes pile. Harvey had blue-penciled the top piece, primarily by taking poorly written sentences and making them worse. He seemed to be inserting, rather than fixing, grammar mistakes, content errors and egregious clangers.

What’d you do before coming here, Harv?
Teacher.

Mm. A fatuity of professors, he thought, and a deletion of editors.


Matthew read another one. It looked familiar. Who wrote this crap…? James Taylor Dagish. My old friend and colleague, of course. Hasn’t shown up to work sober since 1984. Got lost on his way to the classroom a few times last
week. And this, this, this whatever it’s supposed to be. It sounds like the minutes of our last faculty meeting.

What is this, Harv? This piece by James Dagish?
He shrugged.
But it’s in the Yes pile? Matthew asked/said.
I had to put something there.

Matthew threw the article in the trash. “Next,” he called out, in the improv space of his consciousness, impatiently, like the big, goateed, scowling counter guy at a Brooklyn deli.4 Reem Mansouri. “A Few Words Bout zheikh Zayed (PBUH).”

What’s with all this Poo-bah stuff, Harv?
Hm? Oh, PBUH? Peace Be Upon Him. You have to say it after the Prophet or Allah. Or Zayed. He’s like George Washington to them.

Matthew grunted. He read on: “He born al-Ain city in—”

Harvey. Did you fact-check this piece?”
Yes.
Well, the first fact is wrong. He wasn’t born in Al Ain.

That’s what Piers said.
Asking Piers isn’t fact-checking. Why are we even publishing this woman’s… nonsense?

Harvey shrugged. She’s got some deal with Piers.

The guy who gave her the money for the magazine? It’s her uncle, or husband, or…

I see. This is both cutting edge journalism and cutting edge professional ethics.

I don’t know about that, Matthew.

I was being sarcastic.

Oh.

Matthew read a few more lines.
Piers? Can you come in here, please?

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4 Author’s Note: Quiet down, please! Shush! We can hear you all the way down the hall, in the staff room. I know, I know. Catachresis! Abusio! A metaphor and a simile canoodling in the tiny airless room of a single sentence. Bad form, we’ve all been told, like a million times. This ill-advised, overstuffed, incestuous coupling will produce nothing but deformed offspring, three-headed figures with fat tongues and googly punctuation. None the less, I can’t help myself. Mea Culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa…
A few moments later she materialized, a web-page having loaded, the floating digitized hourglass of her stilettos clack-clopping against the marble floors. What is it, Matthew? You sound upset.

This is all wrong. All these facts. We can’t publish this.

Give me an example, Matthew.
Zayed wasn’t born in Al Ain.
Reem said he was, and she comes from here.

Another Emirati person said it was true, also.

That’s not how you check facts. Here, let’s google it. Matthew waited in quietly-boiling anger while the page loaded. These people…, he thought. Okay, here we go. See?

Sheikh Zayed was born in—

—Well, this must be wrong. Reem says he was born here, so I must go with her.

It’s not just that, Piers. Every fact is wrong.

No, they are not wrong. Piers crossed her arms [petulantly? aggressively? unconsciously?] and asked her lisp to sulk.

I haven’t even shown them to you yet.

Piers looked at something else, while Matthew tried to look her in the eye.

I quit, Matthew said. Period.

You cannot just quit because you do not agree with something.

I’m quitting because I can’t be a part of publishing lies. It’s the most basic component of journalistic integrity.

Matthew stormed off. Piers and Harvey watched in silence. Although they didn’t know it, Enron had already left the country, for good. They hadn’t found a new secretary yet, either.

Piers watched him retreat, silently, for several moments, staring at the place where his back used to be, then:

Do you think he expects to be paid for the whole month, Harvey?

I do not know.

Piers smiled, fingering her titanium cross. She thought of all the money she was saving. With a staff of only one person, the magazine would cost almost nothing to

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5 Note to A.: Heavy-handed and too-frequent religious images? We get it already. She’s pharisaical. Delete some of this.
publish. This made her immensely happy. She did not stop to consider what this manpower-reduction meant in terms of the magazine’s quality. In her defense, Piers did not have time for thoughts such as this. She was going to go to Al Ain Mall, which was right across the street, conveniently, to buy some new clothes [a whole new wardrobe?] with all the money she was saving.

Piers asked herself:
what kind of shoes would Jesus buy—heels or pumps?