

we wonder



What on earth Madonna's new film project will be like. Called W.E., it examines the relationship between Wallis Simpson and Edward VIII alongside a modern-day parallel. The cast boasts both James and Laurence Fox and Andrea Riseborough and it started filming last week. Intriguing

Summer projects
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Murtuza Kaizar visits a video shop to get Arabic films to watch as part of his language course. Delores Johnson / The National

The final hurdles

They are entering the final stretch of their eight-week missions to learn Arabic, start a business, write a script and get physically fit. Katie Boucher checks up on the four participants in our summer challenge

Murtuza Kaizar is branch manager of Hafele, a German company that supplies the construction industry with door hardware. He is studying level three Arabic at Berlitz Language School in Abu Dhabi.

At the weekend, besides doing hard-core revision, I suddenly became curious about other ways of enhancing my language skills. I had had a couple of bad experiences recently trying to converse with people in Arabic and I just wanted to find a way – a quick way – of progressing. But having looked around on the internet, I came across very similar reviews: Arabic is not so simple. One stranger suggested memorising at least 50 new words every week to speed up the learning process. But having consulted my tutor, I've decided to stick with my current programme.

I then thought of something else: in order to create a "forceful" environment for myself – I have only one Arab-speaking colleague and none of my close friends are fluent Arab speakers – I should visit some local clubs, meet some Arabs and pretend I don't know any language except my native one and a little Arabic. This way I will force them and myself into speaking. I put this to my tutor as well but he said that I have to take things slowly. I still have seven more levels to complete

until I am fluent, which could take two more years. It is a case of one step at a time.

I also tried to watch an Arabic movie this week. It was a documentary about the Israel-Palestine conflict called *The Good Samaritan*. I gave it my best shot but since there were no English subtitles I only managed to understand about 10 per cent of it. It was all in classical Arabic and at the moment I am studying modern Arabic. I haven't given up though. Today I got myself another four DVDs to watch. But I made sure these ones had subtitles.

Julie Meer is starting up Body Balancers, a wellness, sports and physiotherapy centre, in Jumeirah Lake Towers, Dubai.

It's been a busy week, with us mainly trying to finalise the trade licence. We've also started to put out some advertisements through online recruitment agencies to look for staff. Because we have fairly specific requirements and most of the people who are trained in the Dorn method (which involves correcting spinal misalignments through manual and holistic therapy) are based in Germany, we will have to recruit some staff from there. For others we'll hire locally. We can't think about bringing people over and employing them until

our licence gets finalised, though, because of the visa situation.

Perhaps most excitingly, we've selected our contractor and they have started to move forward with the licensing process from their side. That has been our biggest delay so far, so it's great that that's now moving forward. We've taken two office spaces, which gives us more room for future growth. If you have the vision to expand it's always more difficult to try to do that later. We have also more or less decided on how the space is going to look. So of the two offices, one, which will be dedicated mainly to massage therapy, will have more of a zen feel, so lots of earth tones, while the other side will be more of an active area where light exercise can take place and the physical therapists will work. This part will be lighter and brighter.

It feels like things are moving along quite quickly now. We want to get as much done as possible before Ramadan comes, because things will start to slow down then. We've had a lot of interest in the company already from people who have been reading the articles, so we should be going live with a temporary web page very soon. They're wondering who we are and what we do, so they need somewhere to find that out. It's been a busy week and I must admit I've found it tiring. But

it's good to see things start to materialise and be able to scratch them off the to-do list.

Steve Watson used to work in media but has, since arriving in Abu Dhabi last August, been a house husband. He is writing his first screenplay.

My research has moved from the pavement to the page this week. I had to go to hospital after I felt unwell during a running session. Just the experience of going to the hospital was quite interesting from a storytelling perspective. On the upside, being laid up has given me the chance to do more reading.

I've been doing lots of exercises from this book called *Write Screenplays That Sell: The Ackerman Way*. One of the opening paragraphs says that if you follow this 10-week programme, you'll be able to write a screenplay. Unfortunately, I don't have 10 weeks so I've been trying to squeeze it all into five days. Each chapter has this writer's gym exercise. It's like being an athlete – you've got to practise your skill. They've been really helpful. Having spent some time with my friend Greg Unrau from the Abu Dhabi Film Commission last week, who lent me all these books, and seen how to do it the Ackerman way, I realised that all I'd done so far was write a story. Now I needed to cre-

ate a screenplay using cinematic conventions. It's a completely different thing. Now I can see how people take books and create a screenplay from it. And I can see why the film version of Harry Potter isn't necessarily fully reflective of the book version.

The challenge for me was that I've never written a screenplay – I barely even passed English. I think I was quite naive when I took this challenge on. Writing and re-writing a story and then putting it into a screenplay context is not as easy as I first thought. But then once you sit down and really focus, it starts to flow. I find that I have to assign time to sit down and write. Luckily, at this time of year there are fewer distractions. In fact, the heat is almost an incentive.

Jeanne LeSage is managing producer of the Abu Dhabi Film Festival. She is doing Original Fitness beach boot camp.

After a great first month, last week was my Waterloo. For the first time it was difficult for me to balance a very busy work schedule and three early mornings a week. Whether it was because I missed sessions last week while I was on vacation, or because I had a number of late work nights, or because my knee is acting up; but for whatever reason,

everything felt hard this week. I tried to make sure I forced a smile and got out on the course, and for that reason I don't think Corey and Phil (the instructors) noticed.

My boot camp team-mates have been so supportive, though. It's always great to spend the morning with a group of smart, committed, strong people, and there's always an encouraging word, and buckets of support. I was completely surprised by one of my team-mates, though. She's amazingly fit and strong, and she told me after a session how inspired she was by me. I was sure I had sand in my ears, but she explained how when she was struggling, or thought about how hard things were, she watched how determined and focused I was, and that made her keep going. I was completely bowled over by that, since I have never seen myself in an athletic light. But it was great to hear.

Because this week was the start of a new four-week cycle, there were some new faces, including a couple who had started because they'd seen the article. You kind of see that look in their eyes, like "are you serious?" and you just wish them well and hope that they stick with it. Even if we old-timers got going it never gets easier, we're not going to tell them that.