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**NATIONAL news**

**OUT FALLOUT**

**The controversial James Collard takes a long leave of absence amid a flurry of speculation** by Rex Wockner

**T**he controversial editor of *OUT* magazine, James Collard, has taken an extended leave of absence.

Sources at the magazine suspect Collard will not return to his job, but *OUT* President Henry Scott says otherwise.

"There's no real mystery," Scott says. "He's on a personal leave. We've granted leaves before, but no leave has ever sparked such curiosity."

Scott says because Collard's leave is related to personal business, it isn't "proper" for him to discuss it.

"But you can call James...although I suspect he's also unlikely to want to elaborate on 'personal.' That's why it's called personal," he says.

Collard did not respond to messages left on his home voice mail.

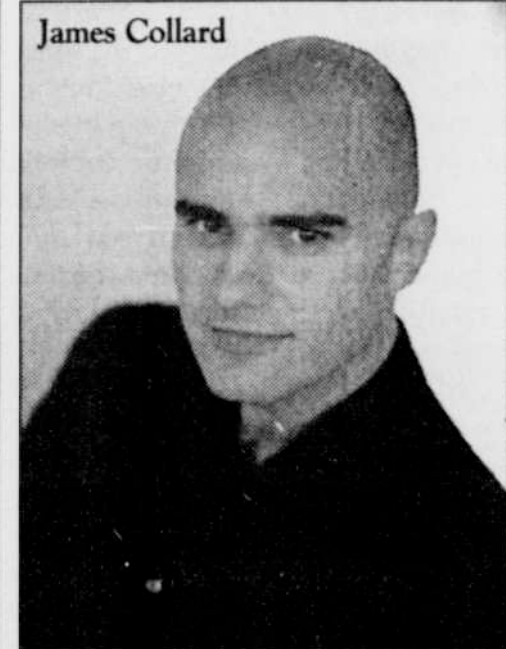
Scott says Collard will return to the magazine by May 1.

"I can't afford to let him take more time because we're a small operation and can't stretch

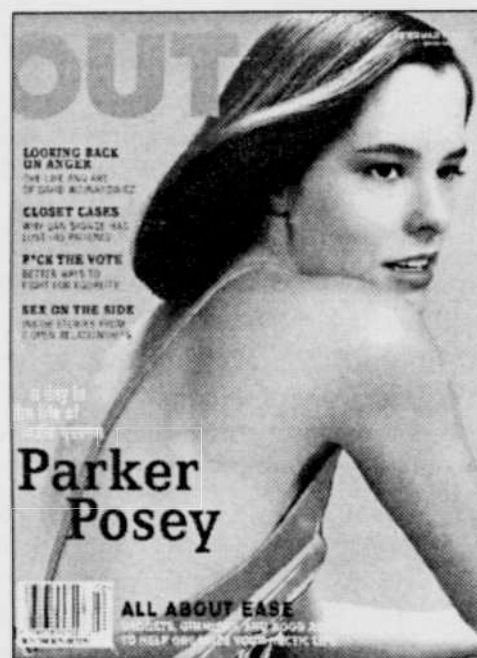
Asked to confirm that the figures he had provided were seven months old, Scott answered: "They're the latest available. Should see a modest drop in the upcoming audit, I predict. That's partly seasonal. And it's partly because we expect to shed some subscribers because of the redesign—something we intended, and indeed one of the reasons for the redesign. The idea is to improve our demographics and make us a more attractive vehicle for some advertisers."

The controversy over Collard's *OUT* revamp saw its most dramatic moment last August when columnist Michelangelo Signorile quit his position at the magazine and flung a glass of water on Collard at Manhattan's Blue Water Grill.

"We had a heated discussion and he insulted my sensibilities," Signorile said at the time.



James Collard



for long to cover his absence. His contract has another year to go," he says.

Sources in Manhattan claim Collard and Scott are on the outs because the magazine's circulation is down.

Asked to comment on that, Scott responds: "We've just closed our best year ever. Revenues are going to come in at about \$9.3 million [up from \$4.2 million in 1995 and about \$8 million last year]. And while we haven't finished totaling the numbers, it looks as if we'll break even—compared to a loss of \$3 million in 1995. That's an impressive accomplishment for a magazine that's only 6 years old."

He continues: "Our latest [Audit Bureau of Circulations] audit shows a circulation of 133,000 and change.... That makes us larger than the next two biggest publications in our field. We've had some sorry newsstand issues, but we've hit on a new cover design that James and creative director Dan Lori implemented with the January issue that looks to be going gangbusters for us."

A former employee of the magazine, who did not want to be named, claims the "circulation figures Scott is putting forth are from the June 1998 ABC audit, which is not at all indicative of Collard's performance since he'd just arrived at the time."

The source adds, "The December 1998 audit will be official and public in a few weeks and it appears those numbers, as well as recent newsstand sales, are way down and may have in fact precipitated this rush to get Collard out of the picture while they find a replacement and/or change direction."

"They did not want me to write biting commentary and opinion.... He told me I should tone down the column and said it had lost passion, which is ludicrous."

In an interview on Feb. 6, Signorile commented: "I have such fondness and affection for *OUT* and—regardless of my disagreements with James—I hate to see the magazine in trouble. Henry Scott is valiantly trying to put on a good face, claiming that it's somehow routine for new editors-in-chief to take three months off for personal business that's not even remotely described as a family or medical emergency—but I'm afraid it seems clear to most people. I hope they can pull themselves out of this."

Another vocal critic of Collard's editorship has been author Larry Kramer, who last October wrote to Scott: "If your ears ever told you that I ever said anything complimentary about that nitty twit who edits your repulsively banal and useless magazine, then you are even more out of touch with the realities of today's gay world than even its last three issues has led our world to witness. Have a nice life and if you ever regain your intelligence please inject some of it into *OUT*."

Others critics have accused Collard of dumbing down the magazine and have complained they can't distinguish the ads from the articles.

Last fall, in the *Philadelphia Gay News*, Collard defended his approach, saying: "There's nothing incompatible with fashion and delivering in other issues.... We have to do all of those things. Once you make the decision to come out, that makes you automatically a different person in the way that you read popular culture, the way that you shop. We're very conscious of exciting new things. In a way, that is part of being gay. It's not sinful. It doesn't mean that we're less serious."