

Woman: 'Matrix' movies riffed from her works

By Henry Allen Hurst
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — As patrons in a crowded movie theatre watched a woman named Trinity single-handedly dismantle police and, with supernatural abilities, jump from one rooftop to the next as she made her getaway, they were amazed. One woman, however, in the audience felt cheated: not because she thought the movie was bad, but because, as she shouted in the theatre, "I wrote that!"

On April 24, 2003, screenwriter Sophia Stewart filed a copyright infringement case charging that Andy and Larry Wachowski, directors of The Matrix movies, 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros. and director Joel Silver infringed upon her copyrights for two manuscripts — both titled "The Third Eye" — and used them to create the Matrix and Terminator trilogies.

The defendants have filed several unsuccessful motions in their attempts to have the pending copyright infringement lawsuit dismissed. Stewart and her lawyers are preparing for a July trial against the Hollywood tycoons. If successful, Stewart will receive damages from

both trilogies.

With the gross receipts of both films and their sequels totaling over \$2.5 billion, she could receive one of the largest payoffs in copyright infringement history — over \$1.5 billion.

Stewart, who has only seen the first Matrix movie, says, "It hurts too much" to see the movie's sequels.

Born and raised in New York City, Stewart was known to be very articulate and creative as a child. By the ninth grade, her academic skills were so developed she was allowed to bypass high school and take the State of New York Board of Regents Test. Scoring well on the exam, she was given the choice of five colleges to attend, but choose to attend City University of New York, where she earned a bachelor's in broadcast journalism.

In the mid-1980s, Stewart submitted her manuscripts in response to an ad placed by the Wachowski Brothers requesting new sci-fi works. She had written "Third Eye" while attending the University of South California Film School, and has held federal copyrights since 1981.

"The Third Eye" is an epic — plotted in the past, present

and future — about a woman whose baby is part of a prophecy — or "The One." There is also a Terminator-like figure — who comes from the future to protect the baby so that the prophecy is fulfilled.

One of the few plot differences is that "The Third Eye" does not end with 'the chosen one's' death. There's another big difference: "I intended for the movie's main characters to be Black."

Considering herself a very conscious observer of society, Stewart wrote the scripts as a counterbalance to the impressions left by the "Blaxploitation" films of the 1970s.

"I am 'the oracle,'" she said. "I write myself in my work. I know two White boys are definitely not 'the oracle.' I created 'The Third Eye,' to have Black superheroes."

Stewart has received skepticism from all angles, Matrix and non-Matrix fanatics alike.

"I can't believe a Black woman wrote the Matrix," she said, mocking her critics. "That's why this case is so important. It goes beyond me. Black America has to stop letting others buy out their dreams and legacies or we won't have anything to give

to our kids."

Stewart also said the Terminator movies were a by-product of her manuscripts and contends that the famous line uttered by Arnold Schwarzenegger, "I'll be back," was also lifted from "The Third Eye."

"I'm a master writer," she proclaimed. "When Picasso painted his first masterpiece, did he need any help with his other paintings? You're not a master if you need help. There were so many changes made and ghost writers for "The Matrix" and "Terminator." James Cameron had no part in conceiving "The Terminator" — ever, period!"

"I'm sending a strong message to Hollywood," she said.

"Some of them have got to go to jail. People got to know that their copyrights mean something. That's why they never entered the copyright into the court system. Not to mention that it comes after my copyright."

"The rich steal because they're greedy; the poor steal because they're needy," asserted Stewart. "The greater crime is when the rich steal because they can afford what they're stealing."

Many of Stewart's supporters have donated to her

legal fees, which range from \$1,000 to \$12,000 per day. Ironically, the bank that she uses to accept her donations is called Zions Bank.

Stewart says upon her victory, she will buy a satellite company and name it Global Digital Communications because "Satellites are going to be the machines that rule the world. Everything will be connected to satellites; it'll be like the eye in the sky," she said. Along with her much-thought-out global empire, she is also working on a script for a movie

entitled "Soulless" and a record company.

"When I came public, some people said they were just validated because they could not believe it was the Wachowskis because they would never explain anything about the movie," she said. "They never went on any talk shows. The first Matrix had been through seven different plot changes and seven different copyrights."

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he thought it was very important to do the film for fear that no one else would take steps to tell these individuals' stories. "It was very important. It turns out that it is the only story that was done. So, if we didn't do this, they would be forgotten."

Kelly will be in Las Vegas on Sunday to take questions from the audience. Benson will be traveling overseas to a film festival where she will promote the documentary.

The New York City Fire Department lost 12 Black firefighters that day, 11 from Rescue One. The loss of these men also represented a significant reduction in the number of African-Americans employed as firefighters for the city of New York. The department's history of hiring African-Americans is tumultuous, which the documentary shows Kelly said.

For more information on Sunday's screening, contact Bertral Washington with the United Firefighters of Southern Nevada at 702-303-5705.

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