

NEWS

Wesley Snipes wants \$1.7 million default judgment set aside

By **DAILY NEWS** ||

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Wesley Snipes is asking a judge to set aside a \$1.7 million default judgment to the talent agency that formerly represented the “Blade” trilogy star and claims it’s owed commissions for getting him movie roles.

Lawyers for Los Angeles-based United Talent Agency Inc., which brought the suit against the 45-year-old actor, filed papers yesterday stating the company wants the issue decided at trial.

UTA attorney Bryan J. Freedman said he is happy to see Snipes “engaged” in the litigation rather than continuing to ignore it. A hearing on the motion is set for Nov. 14.

UTA filed suit against Snipes in Los Angeles Superior Court in July 2006, four months after parting ways with the actor, alleging breach of oral contract. He did not respond to the suit, though a summons was published in two newspapers, according to UTA’s court papers.

Los Angeles Superior Court Judge David Workman signed the judgment against Snipes on Sept. 13.

Snipes states in a declaration filed Oct. 3 that he was unaware of the judgment against him until shortly after it was signed.

“I had absolutely no idea that UTA had commenced formal legal action against me until after I heard about the judgment,” Snipes states, and adds that he never tried to evade service.

“It is my regular practice to promptly address legal issues when they arise,” his declaration says.

Snipes says in his court papers that he spent part of 2006, when the suit was filed, in Namibia, Africa, shooting the film “Gallowalker.” He says his primary home is in Florida but that he spends most of his time at his Geneva, Switzerland, apartment when not working.

Snipes acknowledged he saw an Internet tabloid posting in July 2006 stating that UTA had made “some sort of claim against me,” but “took it for rumor and nothing more.”

According to UTA’s lawsuit, Snipes and the company entered into a verbal agreement in November 2002 in which the agency was to be paid 10 percent of any money the actor received for movie roles that UTA obtained for him.

The plaintiffs said Snipes received \$13 million for his role in “Blade III.” Four former talent agents with the company were principally responsible for him getting the role, the suit alleges.

The firm claims it also helped Snipes land parts in the movies “Chaos,” “Middle Man” and “The Shooter,” but the actor did not pay the commissions he owes for those performances either.

After UTA was unable to serve Snipes with notice of the lawsuit personally, the company says it obtained approval last May from Commissioner Barry D. Kohn to publish a summons giving notice of the litigation in two newspapers.

The summons was published in May and June in the Daily Journal, because Snipes has done business in Los Angeles, and in The Record in Fort Lee, N.J., near where Snipes has a home, the UTA court papers state.

Snipes also is facing trial early next year in Ocala, Fla., on tax charges that carry a potential 16-year prison term. He has denied that he fraudulently claimed tax refunds of \$12 million and claimed he is being made a scapegoat.

His trial in the tax case was to begin Oct. 22. But shortly before then, Snipes fired attorney Billy Martin, whose clients include Atlanta Falcons quarterback Michael Vick and Idaho Sen.

Larry Craig. Snipes said in court papers that Martin was too busy working on Vick’s behalf to give proper consideration to his case.