

Was Louis Jones Ripped Off?

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Credit, not a lawsuit, was all Louis Jones ever wanted for work like *The Lake*, above. "A phone call," he says "could have fixed it."



## When Dreams Turn to Nightmares

Artist Louis Jones calls the scenes in *What Dreams May Come* his best work — you just won't find his name mentioned in screen credits.

by Mike Kernels

**T**he stunning visuals in *What Dreams May Come*, the \$75 million version of the afterlife committed to celluloid, were so poignant that it won a Best Visual Effects Oscar.

Artist Louis Jones knows their power. He calls them three years of his best work, images he painted to be book-cover art.

But when Jones saw the movie in October, he was surprised to see Robin Williams moving through scenes that appeared to resemble his paintings; interpretations he believed were only one-dimensional had become three.

And he was also surprised by something else: No mention in screen credits that Jones created them.

"I was in shock," says the long-haired, free-spirited and self-employed Jones, 46, one of the area's most recognized artists. "By half-way into the movie I was like 'Good, God. There's no way these couldn't be mine.'"

"By the end, I felt hollow. Just like they cleaned out a closet. Your art is your soul. They took my best work, used it and cast me aside."

Polygram Filmed Entertainment Distribution Inc. and Interscope Communications Inc. — the film's distributor — con-

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tends they did not; the work is original, they say.

So Jones is suing them for \$2 million claiming copyright infringement.

His case, filed in Norfolk's federal court, goes to trial in September.

Unclear is whether four paintings Jones created from 1994-97 entitled *The Lake*, *The Lake II*, *The Lake III* and *New Dawn* appear in the movie as blatant copies or merely coincidence.

In *The Lake*, for instance, a lone figure is seen left center, standing on a precipice overlooking a lake. Snow-covered mountains loom ahead, a bluish-gray sky above.

The movie has Williams in a similar scene which is also referred to as *The Lake*.

Jones went through four drafts for *The Lake*, which became cover art for a once little-known book called *Conversations With God, An Uncommon Dialogue, Book I*, printed by Hampton Roads Publishing Co.

Then it sold 100,000 copies.

Now published by heavyweight G.P. Putnam's Sons, it has been on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 117 weeks and has had eight million copies printed worldwide.

Jones' other three images, all cover art for each *Conversation* installment, also

deal with the search for spirituality and self. In *The Lake II*, the figure dives off the precipice. *The Lake III* shows the figure entering the water. *New Dawn*, the most uplifting of them, depicts the figure back on the precipice but overlooking a lake and waterfall of incandescent color.

Again, the film shows Williams in similar scenes.

The images are important.

In fact, art is as central to the movie as its star, Williams, and draws heavily on the influences of Van Gogh, Monet and Maxfield Parrish.

And if Jones is right, him, too.

Based on the Richard Matheson novel, the movie version has Williams as a grieving husband who dies in a car accident. His idea of heaven is to be in one of his wife's paintings — an inviting world of rich texture and bright color.

The real heaven may not look this good.

But, at least on film, it might resemble Jones' work.

Jones' attorney, R. Joel Ankyne, declined to give specifics but did say: "I think the complaint that's been filed with the court speaks for itself. We wouldn't have taken the case if we didn't feel good about it."

Melise R. Blakeslee, a Washington

# UP FRONT

D.C.-based attorney handling the case for Polygram and Interscope, says their position is clear but could not elaborate further. "We don't have anything to say," she adds "beyond that."

Jones has no doubt.

He recites a litany of information about the case as if *he* were the attorney instead of plaintiff. Chief among them: the 175 different elements he says can be found in his paintings, from composition to proportion, that prove the movie versions were not accidental.

Or that the book's author, Neale Donald Walsch, is a friend of Barnet Bain, the movie's producer. Walsch even acknowledges their relationship on page 73 in *Conversation's* third book.

"I wish the case was tomorrow," Jones says. "I'm ready to get this over with. I want to be vindicated. I don't think I'm kind of right. I *know* I'm right."

But so do so many others in stories too countless to tell.

It's part of what makes Hollywood Sin City, up-and-comers claiming their ideas have been ripped off by other predators in the food chain, wanting to get their names on the marquee, or, keep them there.

A lawsuit, Jones says, is not what he wanted and could have been avoided if Polygram and Interscope just acknowledged that the movie's images came from him.