Author Protests 'Cyber-Stalker'

By Theresa Vargas
Washington Post Staff Writer
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There's no mystery about it. Patricia Cornwell knows whodunit, and she wants him to stop.

The best-selling crime author has filed a federal lawsuit against a lesser-known Virginia author, asking the court to force him to stop writing "defamatory and contemptuous" material about her on the Internet, including calling her racist and claiming she stole part of his novel.

An injunction was issued against author Leslie R. Sachs in 2000, after he began writing on his Web site that a Cornwell novel, "The Last Precinct," had a plot much like the one in his "The Virginia Ghost Murders," and affixed stickers to his book that read: "The book that famous PATRICIA CORNWELL threatened to destroy."

After the injunction was issued, Sachs was legally bound to stop his behavior toward her. But he didn't, and instead his blogs grew to include new libelous claims against her, hurting her reputation and causing her emotional distress, according to the most recent suit filed in U.S. District Court in Richmond on April 23.

"This has been extremely hard on her," said Cornwell attorney Joan A. Lukey. "She fears for her safety, frankly. And she is very concerned that there are people out there who believe if something appears on the Internet, it must be true."

Cornwell had never met or heard of Sachs before this incident began, Lukey said.

"Why he has this rather obsessive attitude against her we don't know," Lukey said. "This is, in essence, a form of cyber-stalking."

On one of Sachs's Web sites, he calls himself Cornwell's biographer and writes: "Here is the REAL story of Patricia Cornwell -- the criminal sleaze, the scandals, the truth, fully backed by documents that you can see for yourself."

On another, he writes, "Patricia Cornwell is a woman of many hatreds, a woman who boasted in Vanity Fair magazine that she can get away with murdering people."

Although Cornwell's attorneys say that the Internet sites have been up for a few years and that Sachs has violated the injunction in that time, the latest suit came about after he claimed Cornwell was under investigation by a U.S. special prosecutor.

Lukey said that is not true.
Sachs's claims that Cornwell is trying to harm him or that she bribed a federal judge or that she hates Jews are all false, Lukey said.

Sachs, who is listed as having lived in Woodbridge, could not be reached for comment. According to his blog, he now lives in Belgium, where he "was forced to take refuge" because of Cornwell, he writes.

Cornwell's attorneys said that there is no record of Sachs registering with Belgian authorities to live there and that they searched for him in Virginia, sending the sheriff's office to his last known residence, but no one there knew him.

A judge allowed them to serve him with the lawsuit by e-mail, a first for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 4th Circuit, Lukey said.

Lukey added that she knows Sachs received the e-mail because he replied immediately.

On Sachs's blog, the latest posting is dated Sunday, and it focuses on the recent suit.

"The case, somewhat hilariously, also involves Cornwell's continually being robbed and defrauded by her own lawyers," he writes. "But that's typical of U.S. lawyers, given a client like Cornwell, who is full of emotional hatred."

The case is set for court next Tuesday.

Lukey said the primary hope is that the judge will enforce the injunction, forcing Sachs to stop mentioning Cornwell on his Web sites.

Cornwell, who once lived in Virginia and based her lead character on Virginia's chief medical examiner, Marcella Fierro, has written 21 books since 1990.

Sachs's other published books are "How to Buy Your New Car for a Rock-Bottom Price" and one he co-authored titled "Cheap Wheels: The Complete Guide to Buying, Selling and Enjoying Used Cars."

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