



COURTESY JEFF FRIDAY, L. PHEE WEYMAN, COURTESY NINTENDO



Let the kids go to **Sexy City, U.S.A. for Memorial Day weekend**; save June 23–26 for adult play and

movie watching at the 14th annual **American Black Film Festival** (ABFF). For four days, you can watch the best of independent film created by filmmakers of color. You also might be the first to catch a rising star. In fact, Will Packer Jr., of *Trois* and *Obsessed* fame, presented movies at the ABFF and like fine wine, his talents only get better with age.

"Ten years ago, Rob (Hardy) and Will submitted their first film, *Trois*, to us," says Jeff Friday, creator of the ABFF. "You take two unknown guys who didn't even go to film school. There's a long way between *Trois* and *Obsessed*, and they've grown along the way because they have had this platform called the ABFF."

Friday started the film fest because he was tired of seeing us portrayed on TV as only destitute, poor or stupid.

"My mother always talks about how I would watch *Good Times* and shows like that, and one day I said to her, 'Why do Black people always suffer on TV? Why is there some element of just getting by?'" recalls Friday, 45, of New Jersey. "That led me to a career of trying to change it. I went to Howard and then NYU's film school. At the beginning I wanted to make movies, then I realized that was not what I wanted to do; I wanted to influence change in the movies."

He has. The ABFF welcomed 3,000 visitors last year in sunny Miami and this year has named Idris Elba the fest's ambassador. The event is often a who's who of Black stars, upcoming directors and scouts from the likes of HBO, TNT and Lifetime. Many of the films shown at the fest will be purchased for cable.

How does Friday get through some 50 movies to determine which will actually air at the fest? He holds to the 15-minute rule: If it's not interesting at the top, it gets dropped. Winners walk away with at least \$5,000 in prizes.

