

An Epic Romance Between Enemies “Love Never Dies” Films This Fall in Culpeper

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Virginia Morton’s acclaimed Civil War novel, “Marching Through Culpeper,” celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, is coming to life as a feature film.

“[Love Never Dies](#)” will be shot entirely in Culpeper County in October.

Film crews, actors and actresses will be Marching Through Culpeper for a retelling of the dramatic love story set amid the carnage and destruction of a war more than 150 years ago that made enemies of brothers and lovers from opposing sides, according to a recent publicity.

In a 21st century twist, movie scenes will be created using the latest in AI technology to recreate buildings and scenes long gone, with live actors adding a realistic layer. Now in pre-production, “*Love Never Dies*” unites Morton with two award-winning, faith-based filmmakers with deep ties to the region—Stephen Pappas, director of “Treasure in Heaven,” and George Escobar, co-founder of Advent Film Group and 3 Days Studios.

Escobar directed the historical drama “*Alone Yet Not Alone*” from 2013. The movie was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song.

Pappas was director of media for Cornerstone Chapel in Leesburg and has worked on feature films with Advent Film Group. Christian corporate and entertainment attorney Joel Bunkowske is also listed as a producer.

“This is a dream come true to finally produce this film right here in Culpeper,” said Morton in the release. “This community inspired the story. Now we get to bring it home—and involve our neighbors and friends in the making of it. We will be filming where history happened and re-creating downtown buildings through AI.”



In a May 29 interview with Escobar in the Star-Exponent office, Morton said the prayers she has lifted for the past 25 years have finally been answered. A Culpeper resident since 1969 born and raised in Richmond, she said she’s been part of a prayer group since 2007 praying for the movie to be made.

“*Marching Through Culpeper*” was made into a stage play in 2012 based on a script she wrote focusing on the love story aspect of her sweeping novel from 2000. That script is the basis for the movie the local author, an active octogenarian, has long dreamed to make.

Asked if it was a Christian film, Morton said it would uphold Christian values. It is a timeless love story between a young Culpeper woman, Constance Armstrong, and Union officer Aaron Ames, whose life she saves on the battlefield, she said.

An active octogenarian, Morton created her own production company, His Dream Productions LLC, for the film, on which she is credited as producer and writer.

“It’s the dream God has given me,” she said. “He put the book in my head years ago and planted the dream.”

She met Escobar 15 years ago, has been a fan of his movies, attended his moviemaking seminars and acted in Pappas’s first film, “Treasure in Heaven.” Morton met Pappas the set of another Escobar film, “Hero,” and they became good friends

“I learned the whole process. It makes you understand what it takes to film a movie,” Morton said, calling Pappas a technical genius. “He encouraged me from the beginning, after the play, it needed to go to film. I decided now or never I will do it. I am fortunate to have such a good team.”



“Love Never Dies” is a story of faith, sacrifice, and redemption during the most turbulent time in American history. It is told by the people who know this region best, according to the release.

“This epic tale of love between enemies will send a message of unity to our divided nation.”

It will use the future of filmmaking to tell a story from the past through a hybrid production model blending live-action performances with AI-generated sets and digital environments. This will allow for cinematic scale on a modest budget, according to the producers.

A 15-day green screen shoot with actors will be followed by several months of advanced post-production to create historically accurate, visually stunning scenes. Morton said she is all about using AI to make her movie on a budget.

“We are going to film the interior scenes live with the actors performing and then their image will be used to generate the AI characters in the outdoor scenes,” Morton said.

Besides cost savings, using AI will allow them to recreate historic buildings in downtown Culpeper and really bring Civil War Culpeper to life, she said, including the long-gone Shackelford House in the center of town.

“That little front porch faced Main Street and the whole Civil War marched right past it,” she said. AI will also be used to recreate the circa early 1800s courthouse that sustained heavy damage during the war and was torn down.

Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee and Union commander Ulysses Grant both marched on Main Street in Culpeper during the war, camped there and set up headquarters.

“It was a window to the world, the most marched up and most camped on,” Morton said, stating 160 battles were fought in the county. “They were constantly skirmishing across the rivers.

“When we look at our country today, we are so divided and I just feel like this story should send a message—if two enemies can love each in the midst of a brutal war surely we can come together in unity as a country,” said the author. “When you realize how horrendous that war was, we don’t want it again. What this community suffered most people cannot comprehend.”



Culpeper resident Frank Stringfellow, a Confederate spy known in history for his daring and ingenuity, is portrayed in the film, along with Capt. Ames, a fictional character, in his 20s, and Miss Armstrong, the protagonist, aged 18-22.

Filmmakers will be casting for the parts of the lovers: Aaron, a Harvard-educated office from Boston, Mass., and Constance, a fiercely intelligent, proud Southern woman with unwavering resilience, in the near future. The parts of Sadie and Frank will be played the stage play actors.

It will be a star-making role for whoever plays Constance, said Escobar. Casting notices are going out nationwide, he said, with video auditions the standard. They hope to do live auditions in town later this month. He envisioned 12-15 days filming this fall followed by a big chunk for time for the AI and effects.

Escobar and Morton were finalizing shooting locations in late May and are asking for the community's support to make *"Love Never Dies"* come to life around Culpeper County. The love story, forged in the fires of war, transcends time featuring two lovers who dared to defy the odds, according to the website.

In the story, Stringfellow is a surrogate brother to Constance, Morton said, while Ames is based on one of soldiers in Culpeper during the war from the 10th Maine. The actual northern unit took heavy casualties at the Battle of Cedar Mountain, especially cavalry, Morton said. Ames ends up on the staff of Custer, the Union counterpoint to JEB Stuart, she said.



The movie will feature the Great Union Ball held in Culpeper County during the massive Union winter encampment 1863-1864. The scene will be portrayed using AI to show how huge it was, Morton said.

"They built their palace of pleasure at base of Hansbrough's Ridge, put a canvas roof on it and then tore it down," she said.

The real event in history attracted dignitaries from D.C. including the Vice President and Supreme Court Justices, Morton said.

The producers are calling on local businesses, landowners, and history enthusiasts to contribute to the film's success. The team is currently seeking local investors, donors, and location sponsors—especially those who may be able to offer climate controlled warehouse space or unused corporate offices (to build indoor sets and for screen green

filming) and historic homes or farm locations for visual reference taking photographs of interior and exterior and building A1 scene from it.

Producers also seeking support in the form of period props, costumes, or reenactor resources as well as meals and beverages from local restaurants during production in October, and financial support or in-kind services to keep the film in Culpeper.

“This is more than just a movie,” said Escobar. “It’s a chance for Culpeper to shine on the big screen, to showcase our people, our landscapes, and our history—using technology that’s breaking new ground in independent filmmaking.”



The timing is so important, Morton stressed, with the state of affairs in America.

“God has put it together,” she said. “I am very excited and hoping I have the energy and strength to get through it at my age.”

A “Love Never Dies” soundtrack is in the works with the title track by Rod Stone already composed. The title has a double meaning, Morton said.

“It’s the message Jesus sends us every day—his love will never die,” she said. “The whole world loves a love story. The whole world may have not heard of Culpeper, but they will after this movie.”

The goal is to release “Love Never Dies” in time for the Virginia Film Festival in Charlottesville next October, Escobar said.

“The ones that succeed are the ones that have romance,” he said. “This story has never been told, especially with respect to Culpeper, from a feature film perspective. We have a lot of unique aspects to this that people should find very interesting, the legacy of the book is another.”

“Marching Through Culpeper” remains available online in paperback; the hardcover is out of print, Morton said. People are still discovering her story based here during the Civil War. The book gives both sides, she said. Morton hopes the movie will spur more people to read it.

“This story has the heart of the civilians of Culpeper in it and what their struggles were and their courage,” she said.

The producers intend to hold school and church previews and a red-carpet hometown premiere once the film is complete.

For more information or to offer support, contact vamorton@comcast.net or gdescobar@gmail.com and see loveneverdiesfilm.com