

Director Simon Hunter steps before the camera as one of the less mutated characters.



## "MUTANT CHRONICLES" The future is violent

When veteran producer Ed (American Psycho) Pressman bought the rights to the Paradox Entertainment role-playing board game *Mutant Chronicles* in 1993, he had no idea it would take him nearly 13 years to get it in front of the camera. Originally planned as a follow-up to *Death Machine* for director Stephen Norrington in 1996, the project went into turnaround over budget and casting fights with 20th Century Fox. John Carpenter was also attached to the movie for a while, but it lay dormant, Pressman says, "until this young man named Simon Hunter contacted me five years ago and talked me into reviving it."

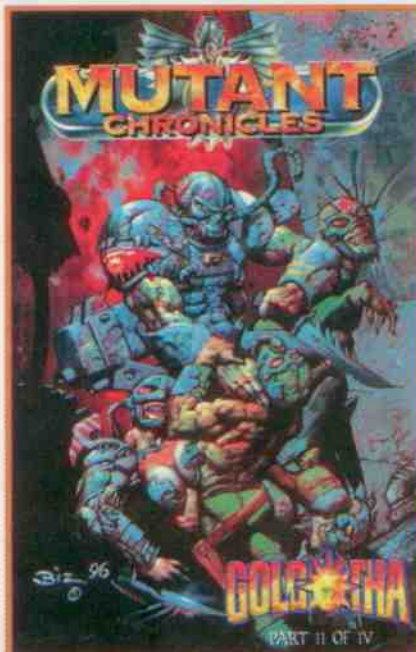
Hunter had just directed his debut feature *Lighthouse* (a.k.a. *Dead of Night*), a low-budget British slasher that attracted film-festival interest and critical acclaim. "Simon convinced me he had found a new approach to *Mutant Chronicles* that would make the would-be franchise different from anything else out there," Pressman continues. "His method evolved from experience using all the new technology in his post-*Lighthouse* commercials career. Would I give him \$70,000 to fund a seven-minute trailer to show what he intended to do, how the mutants would look and what could be achieved using cutting-edge greenscreen expertise? I'm always up for a challenge, and Simon's insistence was both intriguing and commanding."

That web trailer proved to be the turning point for the languishing *Mutant Chronicles* concept. *Lighthouse* producer Tim Dennison (whose credits also include *Evil Aliens*) oversaw its shooting at London's Bray Studios in summer 2005, and points out, "As Simon's audition, it couldn't have gone better. Prospective distributors at the American Film Market could see the look Simon was going for, positioning it as a dark, gritty, adult-oriented hard-R-rated violent adventure thriller, and understand its basic style and themes. The buyers just lined up after that."

The demo also made an impact on action

star Thomas (*The Punisher*) Jane. Pressman had given him a major break in *The Crow*, and the actor was the first person sent Hunter's revised script. "I love doing these kinds of movies as much as I love watching them," Jane says. "When I saw the very dark, grimy trailer, I instantly thought of pulp science-fiction fantasy. I told Ed to count me in. I see my lead character Mitch Hunter as a throwback to those '40s space adventure magazines. I love stand-up heroes like old Gary Cooper characters and Howard Hawks-style fighter pilots, and I viewed *Mutant Chronicles* in those terms—except set in the distant future!"

*Mutant Chronicles* is set on a postapocalyptic 23rd-century Earth where the only remaining



Prior to the movie, *Mutant Chronicles* made the leap from the game world to comics.

fuel is coal. Everything is powered by steam, from spaceships to monorails, and continents no longer exist. Instead, four giant corporations rule the world, and they suddenly have to unite against a common enemy: a marauding army of NecroMutants who have reappeared from the depths of the famous British Stonehenge landmark, where aliens buried a mutant-making machine in Celtic times. Back then they were defeated, and the secrets of how this was achieved have been handed down through the ages in the "Mutant Chronicles" guarded by a monastic brotherhood. Now, each megaconglomerate has supplied its best soldiers for a task force to vanquish the menace once and for all.

"In this world, morality has gone astray, spirituality has been lost and it's all about the dollar," says Jane. "Natural resources have all been exhausted—apart from coal discovered on a nearby planet—society is inefficient and everything has the look of an alternate-universe Victorian Industrial Revolution. There are no real good jobs for the working man, and soldiers are the grunts of this hugely wasteful 'steampunk' world."

Shot at London's Shepperton Studios and on the Isle of Man during summer 2006, *Mutant Chronicles* also stars Ron (*Hellboy*) Perlman, John (*Shadow of the Vampire*) Malkovich, Devon (*Sin City*) Aoki, Benno (*The Order*) Furrmann, Pras Michel of the Fugees and Sean (*Dog Soldiers*) Pertwee. The stapled-together, Frankenstein-type mutants, who use switchblade arm-bone weaponry, were the creation of *Lighthouse* and *The Descent* special makeup designer Paul Hyett.

The movie was lensed using the Thomson ViperStream System—"Not filmed," Hunter points out, "as all the images are digitally stored as uncompressed camera data on D mags, ready for detailed electronic enhancement"—an innovative technique that is allowing the \$22-million project to look like it cost at least four times that amount. "It's all about creating the right environment," Hunter continues. "We are looking to our past to create our future. I'm more concerned with showing 50 people with gas lamps shoveling coal into starship boilers than 10,000 mutants battling humans *Lord of the Rings*-style. The one word I never wanted to hear during preproduction was *Aliens*. Not that I don't adore that movie, but we've been down that road before. Who wants to see another *Blade Runner*? I honestly believe that *Mutant Chronicles* takes an entirely different approach to the genre from anything done before. Even if you may not like it, there's no way I can be accused of clichéd blandness.

"Sure, the tone is risky," he says of *Mutant Chronicles*, which at presstime had yet to nail down U.S. distribution. "I refuse to shy away from the gore, because I'm not making a summer blockbuster, despite the perception out there. Think *Saving Private Ryan* with mutant monsters, set in a world gone awry as opposed as to come. The trailer was just a tiny taste of what's in store. *Mutant Chronicles* is not fun for all the family—it's fun for the hardcore horror/fantasy fan."

—Alan Jones