



Mutants invade Strathmore, Calgary, in apocalyptic thriller starring Kim Coates



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Kim Coates, Holly Deveaux, Jason Cermak and Megan Tracz in *Mutant World*

Courtesy, Superchannel

It's a frosty April morning on the Strathmore set of *Mutant World* and Jason Cermak is trying to wrap his head around a new line of dialogue.

Sporting army fatigues and a helmet and sitting in a muddy M35 military vehicle that has been lovingly named “Uma,” the actor is supposed to be reporting the climate anomalies of a post-apocalyptic world to his fellow doomsday preppers.

“It looks like we’re staring down the barrel of some erratic weather patterns,” Cermak yells into a CB radio.

“That’s because it’s ALBERTA!” whispers director David Winning after a few takes of the scene.

Granted it’s not supposed to be Alberta. While today’s scene is being shot in a nondescript cul-de-sac in Strathmore, east of Calgary, the setting of *Mutant World* is mostly post-apocalyptic small-town Middle America after a meteorite crashes into a nuclear reactor and ends civilization.

But in April, Alberta was offering its own “erratic weather patterns” to the production, which shot in Strathmore, Calgary and the CL Ranch near Springbank. One day it was sunny and summer-like, the next it was a winter wasteland. So the new line was hastily thrown in as cameras rolled.

“We added it a few days ago when the weather was just horrible,” says Winning. “Then it was sunny. We never know what the weather will be.”

Which certainly makes continuity a bit of a challenge. But the ability to adapt quickly and go with the flow is a key requirement for low-budget horror films, a world that the Calgary-born filmmaker knows very well. This is his third TV movie for Syfy and all have followed a certain formula: take a supernatural, action-packed premise, add an established character actor (his past Syfy films featured Bruce Dern, Robert Englund and Kevin Sorbo) and shoot it all cheaply and efficiently.

For *Mutant World*, which begins airing Thursday on the Superchannel, the star power comes from *Sons of Anarchy* actor Kim Coates. He has a small but meaty role in the film. Of the 15-day shoot, the Saskatoon native only worked for three. In his trailer, Coates cheerfully admits that he has spent at least part of that time composing grumpy tweets about the erratic weather. He was asked to star in the film by its Calgary producers, Chad Oakes and Mike Frislev of Nomadic Pictures, who have a past relationship with the actor after casting him in 2008’s coming-of-age drama *45 R.P.M.* Nevertheless, he only agreed to take part after the script was changed to give his character a more poignant arc.

At the time of this interview, he seemed supportive but a touch skeptical that making a sci-fi-horror film involving mutants, post-apocalyptic landscapes, military vehicles named Uma and lots of gunplay is possible given the tight time frame.

“We are shooting this puppy in 15 days,” he says. “Fifteen f—ing days! Are you kidding me? So the proof will be in the pudding. What worries me is we’re taking less and less and less time to shoot. When I read the script and (heard) it was going to be done in 15 days, I lost my s — t.”

Nevertheless, Coates took his character seriously, keen on probing the strange mind of a paranoid doomsday prepper. He plays Marcus King, a hard-boiled ex-marine intent on preparing his children, Geoff and Melissa, (played by Cermak and Spun Out's Holly Deveaux) for the worst-case scenario. This proves helpful when the worst-case scenario occurs in the form of a meteorite racing toward a nuclear reactor.

“He’s doing this to the government,” says Coates, lifting his middle finger. “He’s very savvy, very tough. We’ve seen this. It’s in reality shows. There are zany people out there who are preparing for the apocalypse. They have their guns and their gasoline and are bunkered down and ready, which kind of freaks me out. But this guy is like that. And, wouldn’t you know it, a comet is two hours away.”

King, having tracked said comet with elaborate equipment he keeps in his garage, quickly organizes his small group of highly militarized doomsday preppers. Most of them make it to the bunker — played by the old Telus science centre in Calgary — and lock themselves in for a decade. When supplies run low, Geoff and Melissa lead an expedition into the post-apocalyptic wasteland in search of food and medicine. But, as the title suggests, one of the side-effects of the nuclear meltdown is that the world is overrun by glowing mutants. The resulting adventure is funny, entertaining and action-packed, occasionally recalling John Carpenter’s scrappy sci-fi cult movies such as *Big Trouble in Little China* and *Escape from New York*. R& B singer Ashanti shows up as a mysterious character named The Preacher, while Heartland’s Amber Marshall has fun playing against type as a gun-packing soldier.



Holly Deveaux in *Mutant World*. Courtesy, Superchannel

And, other than the as-yet scientifically unproven theory that a nuclear meltdown would result in hordes of murderous mutants, Toronto screenwriter Matthew Campagna apparently took pains to ensure that many of the ideas in *Mutant World* have a grounding in real science.

For Cermak, a Drayton Valley native who won an Alberta Film and Television Award last year for his role in the family drama *Common Chord*, the film also offers character arcs that are deeper than they might initially seem.

“Ten years takes a toll on him,” says Cermak about Geoff. “He’s burdened with this responsibility of keeping what’s left of humanity alive. He becomes quite introverted. His journey in coming to the surface, aside from just being attacked by mutants and such, he has to find himself again and try to answer questions about what his future looks like.”

On the other hand, Cermak admits that being paid to “run around with guns” is pretty cool.

His onscreen sister, Deveaux, agrees. It’s empowering to play a female character who “kicks ass,” she says.

“I always played Lara Croft on my computer, so this is a dream come alive for me,” she said. “I get to wear a thigh holster and everything. I took way too many selfies.”

Spotlight

Mutant World debuts on the Superchannel on Thursday at 6 p.m. and runs throughout January and into February.