

Interview: Young Actors in ‘The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 19, 2013 - 4:32pm

- [Angels](#) [2]
- [Cassandra Clare](#) [3]
- [CCH Pounder](#) [4]
- [Demons](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Interview](#) [7]
- [Jamie Campbell Bower](#) [8]
- [Jared Harris](#) [9]
- [Jonathan Rhys Meyers](#) [10]
- [Kevin Zegers Robert Sheehan](#) [11]
- [Lily Collins](#) [12]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [13]
- [The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones](#) [14]

CHICAGO – Fantasy young adult films, popularized by the Harry Potter series and exploding with other hot literary offerings, is about to go to the Shadowhunters and demons. “The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones” opens August 21st, and features Lily Collins (Clary), Jamie Campbell Bower (Jace) and Kevin Zegers (Alec) in the lead roles.

Based on the mega-best-selling series of books by Cassandra Clare, “The Mortal Instruments” are fantasies that have elements of nearly every creature available in the literary canon. Shadowhunters are fighting demons, but there are vampire and werewolf covens, and mysterious elements about how they all walk among us. “City of Bones” is the first book adaptation in the movie series.



Jamie Campbell Bower (Jace) and Lily Collins (Clary) in ‘The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones’
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

Lily Collins, Jamie Campbell Bower and Kevin Zegers are all veterans of TV and film, despite their young age. Collins made a splash in “The Blind Side” in 2009, and starred along Julia Roberts in the recent “Mirror, Mirror” (2012). Bower is a fantasy veteran, having scored parts in Harry Potter films (young Gellert Grindelwald), the Twilight series (Caius) and the 2011 TV mini-series “Camelot” (King Arthur). Zegers has had high profile parts as Felicia Huffman’s son in ‘Transamerica’ (2005) and as Damian Daalgard in TV’s “Gossip Girl” (2009-11). The three young lead actors of “The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones” are about to embark on a new character adventure, and spoke to HollywoodChicago.com on a recent promotional tour.

HollywoodChicago.com: What quirks did you gain regarding your characters when you read the books, that was different from the screenplay or suggestions from the director, that you kind of made your own? And since this was the first in the series, were you able to use character elements from the five other books to create your persona?

Lily Collins: Something I noticed that I wanted to stay away from for Clary’s character, and Harald [Zwart, the director] agreed upon it, even Cassandra [Clare, the source author] did as well. We didn’t want Clary to seem too google-eyed regarding the romance, between Simon and

Jace. Yes, there is a love triangle between us, but we didn’t want romance to define the film. It’s important to follow those threads, obviously, and Jamie helped to follow through on that by adding subtleties, but it wasn’t that romance defined Clary’s journey.

That’s not to say that Cassandra wrote her that way, but there have been other franchises in which a girl is involved in a love triangle, and that tends to overwhelm the story, and makes the female character more vulnerable and weak. I didn’t want Clary just to be a girl between two guys, I wanted her to propel the story forward, and not allow the romance to define her.

Jamie Campbell Bower: What struck a chord with me is that it’s sort of a reverse from your question. It was the vulnerability of Jace, because in the book he quite jovial, sarcastic, rude and arrogant – it’s a light character. With the adaptation we have to condense the book, so I specifically focused on the vulnerability that I saw he had – which was the underlying cause of his arrogance and rudeness. That’s what stuck out for me. In the film, he opens up to Lily’s character, Clary, and it becomes obvious why he’s like that. I made him much darker.

Kevin Zegers: When we read the book, there is a sense in the subtext about how the characters are thinking while they’re doing things, and you don’t have that luxury in a film. To me, part of what makes an interesting character is their enigma, that you don’t have an idea of what’s going on. I read the book, but the script is the script, and if I try to digest each nanosecond of what Alec’s history is, I think the interpretation can get cluttered.

The main thing I focused on in the book, is that there is a lot of focus on Alec’s sexuality. and I understand why people talk about it and why its important. But to me it seemed a bit silly that because he is gay, that it’s the forefront of who he is. I found it slightly offensive that people think, ‘well, he’s the gay guy.’ There are so many more important characteristics about Alec, that to me were more interesting to play than just the sexuality.

HollywoodChicago.com: What are the main challenges in playing such broad mythical characters, and what absurdities did you have to overcome in order to embrace them?

Bower: Absurdities? My whole life is an absurdity. [laughs] The fact that I get paid to dress up and wield a sword is absurd enough. I suppose the challenge of playing mythical characters is to find a way to ground them in reality. I think that’s what the movie does – yeah, we’re fanciful and all that, but we work within reality. That’s what I wanted for Jace – yes, he’s a half angel and yes, he goes out and kills demons – but underneath that there is a humanity to him.

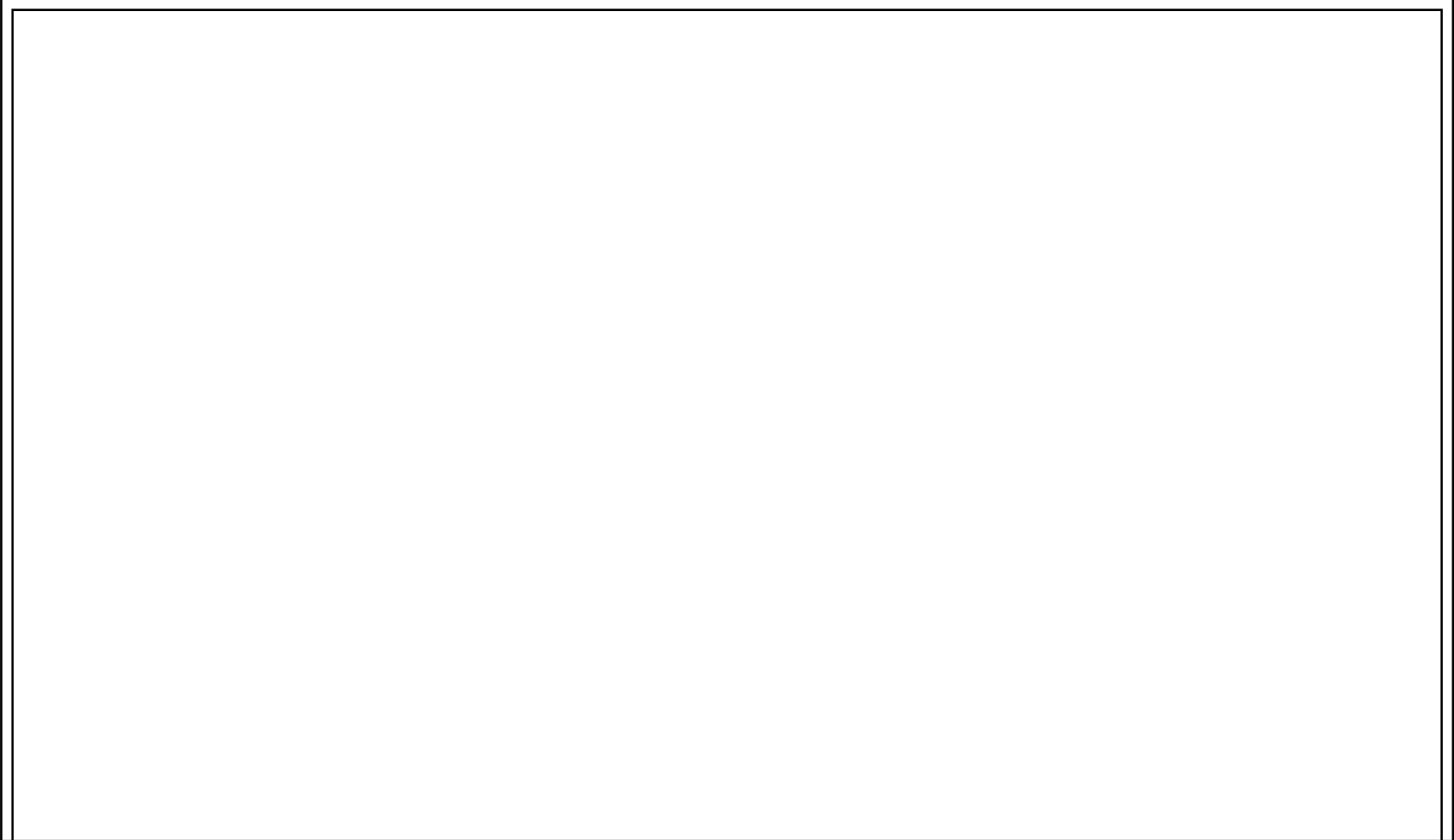
That challenge for me was to step out of him. Because I made him so dark, that it crept into me a bit. My colleagues here can testify I got pretty moody on set, that bit of darkness got into me. Stepping out of that became difficult sometimes.

Collins: Well, I’m a normal teenage girl when the film begins, so it’s super cool to go back to my teenage years. [laughs] My character questions what is going on, as the audience is, so I’m with the audience as to the confusion or absurdity of what’s going on. When I find out I’m a Shadowhunter, I’m forced to fit in, and to meet the character of Magnus. In order to meet him, you have to look the part, so I’m dressed by Isabelle, the other female Shadowhunter.

This makes me feel incredibly self-conscious and awkward – it’s all leather and thigh high boots, and then I had to do stunts in the outfit. The boots become a hindrance, I take them on and off during moments in the film, and Clary is aware of how absurd it is. I get to voice the absurdities in their world to the audience. It grounds the story more because I openly recognize the absurdities as to what my new job is.

Zegers: The reason the film film works is that the audience isn’t forced to buy into anything without seeing it through Clary’s eyes first. It’s not like, ‘hey there are vampires and werewolves everywhere.’ These are elements in the film, but you’re not introduced to them until Clary sees them.

The bottom line is that movies are about people. No matter what bullsh*t you put around them, invariably it’s about characters and people. If you want to create a series of films, you need the audience to care about the people in them.





Kevin Zegers as Alec in 'The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones'
Photo credit: Sony Pictures Releasing

HollywoodChicago.com: There is a branding of good and evil within the story, which has a religious basis. Do you think this type of evil is present in our real world, or do you think the dividing of good and evil has a more gray area than 'The Mortal Instruments' concept?

Bower: I don't think that the good-and-evil aspect is necessarily black and white in the film. I've played bad guys in the past, and I've always said, 'well, he's not bad, he's just misunderstood.' [laughs] Do I think that the element of black and white, good-and-evil, is in everyone? We all have lightness and darkness, it's what we choose that determines how we are. Kids can be super evil sometimes, and it's not malice, it comes from a place about not really knowing. I suppose ignorance breeds evil.

Collins: I think the character of Jace represents good-and-evil to Clary. He's bad for her in many ways, but on the other side she's never felt more alive than when she's with him. It's that bad side that intrigues her, and she's afraid of that, but also confronts it. It's the teasing with the cat and mouse of good-and-evil that intrigues her to him. She acknowledges when he's not right for her, but it doesn't mean she doesn't love him. That is the gray area that keeps her in suspense, not knowing which way to go.

Zegers: I think there is a bit of bad in the best of us, and a bit of good in the worst of us. I think it's very comfortable to say, these are the bad people and these are the good ones. I love to read about history, for example, and it was very easy during World War II to say, 'well, these guys are obviously bad and these guys are good.' It's more gray now.

The film isn't so black and white, in the way Jamie played the character there is a sense he does feel he's doing the right thing. It's true of the world today, there are a lot of people who do bad things in the name of what they believe it's right.

HollywoodChicago.com: I'll ask you some separate questions now. Kevin, you've been acting since you were a kid. In your observation, did you feel you missed out on anything because you were working, or do feel an advantage for having understood the acting profession for that long, especially now?

Zegers: It's both. There is a lot of benefit to having grown up on set. I'm very comfortable there, I don't have any anxiety because it's something I've always done. Thankfully, there were times – in my late teens and early twenties – when I took a break from acting, and was able to live, make mistakes and fall on my face. [laughs] But sure, I didn't go to college, and this is my life. I don't particularly think there is one right way to do it. It has caused some problems in my life, not having experienced what people do, in the confines of a college or in the safety of being protected. But thankfully I've come out the outside fairly intact.

HollywoodChicago.com: Lily, you are also a journalist, even majoring in that capacity briefly at USC. What has been your greatest adventure as a journalist or writer?

Collins: When I covered the presidential campaign and the inauguration in 2008 for the Nickelodeon channel. I was the on-air correspondent for 'Kids Pick a President,' it was really amazing. It was my first year I could vote, so I was asking questions that I wanted answered. I got to travel all over, go to the conventions and watch the inauguration, and go to the Inaugural Ball.

It was a huge life experience, because before that politics was something I wasn't particularly interested in, so to be witnessing history, and showing kids what it was like through my eyes as a first time voter, was really special. And it wasn't something that I had to be an expert on, because all the kids were asking the questions. So I learned along with them.

HollywoodChicago.com: What did that fulfill in you that acting maybe does not?

Collins: I've always been curious and inquisitive. My whole point of being a journalist during that year was to express a younger voice. It was a way of offering an opinion that wasn't heard in other avenues.

HollywoodChicago.com: Jamie, you've been on some pretty cool movie sets. Which set was the most interesting to you and why – 'RocknRolla,' 'Sweeney Todd' or the 'Twilight' series?

Bower: Not of the above. [laughs] They were all incredibly dull. I did a television series called 'The Prisoner' for the AMC network. We shot in Africa from four and half months, and I got the opportunity to work with some incredible actors. There was Ian McClellan, Ruth Wilson, Hayley Atwell, Lennie James – who are incredible British talent – and there were international actors as well.

I, like Kevin, didn't go to school, and just started working when I was 17. I moved out completely from home, and it was an experience to go somewhere and work somewhere which was completely different, and be nurtured by these amazing performers – especially Ian, who took me under his wing and became a father and brother to me.



Nothing Mundane: Kevin Zegers, Lily Collins and Jamie Campbell Bower in Chicago, July 31st, 2013
Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: One final question to the whole crew. What was that moment in your career so far, that you were standing somewhere, and you thought, 'how the hell did I get here?'

Zegers: I sat next to Felicia Huffman at the Oscars on the night she was there, nominated for Best Actress in 'Transamerica.' And I also got to walk her up the stairs when she won the Golden Globe in the same category. Those moments made me aware that I was in a film that was recognized.

Collins: It was in 'Mirror, Mirror' [as Snow White] towards the end of the filming, when Julia Roberts comes back as the witch, and I give her the apple back. I remember vividly staring into her eyes, and improvising a line from the beginning of the film, that they ended up keeping in the end. I just remembered staring at Julia's character, just hating her. When they called cut, Julia said, 'wow, I must have treated you pretty bad.' It was just a surreal moment.

Bower: Every day, right now. [laughs]

'The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones' opens everywhere on August 21st. Featuring Lily Collins, Jamie Campbell Bower, Kevin Zegers, Jemina West, Robert Sheehan, CCH Pounder, Jared Harris and Jonathan Rhys Meyers. Screenplay Adapted by Jessica Postigo. Directed by Harald Zwart. Rated "PG-13"



[15]

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