

Interview: Nadia Hilker & Bill Skarsgard for 'The Divergent Series: Allegiant - Part 1'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on March 16, 2016 - 2:09pm

- [Bill Skarsgard](#) [2]
- [Divergent](#) [3]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [4]
- [Insurgent](#) [5]
- [Interview](#) [6]
- [Jeff Daniels](#) [7]
- [Juanita](#) [8]
- [Lionsgate Pictures](#) [9]
- [Maggie Q](#) [10]
- [Matthew](#) [11]
- [Miles Teller](#) [12]
- [Nadia Hilker](#) [13]
- [Naomi Watts](#) [14]
- [Nita](#) [15]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [16]
- [Shailene Woodley](#) [17]
- [The Divergent Series: Allegiant - Part 1](#) [18]
- [Theo James](#) [19]
- [Zoe Kravitz](#) [20]

CHICAGO – The “Divergent” series of films are coming to a conclusion, with a two parter adapted from the last book. The first film is “The Divergent Series: Allegiant - Part 1,” and there are some new kids in the mix, with two actors who have made their mark overseas – Nadia Hilker and Bill Skarsgard – joining the series.

Hilker was born in Germany, and Skarsgard hails from Sweden. They began in independent and foreign language films, before landing on the big ship “Divergent.” Hilker’s biggest role before was in the horror film “Spring” (2014), which led her to Los Angeles (story below), and Skarsgard is a veteran actor with eight feature films to his credit, including supporting roles in “Anna Karenina” (2012) and “Victoria” (2013). His father is Swedish actor Stellan Skargard.



Nadia Hilker as Nita in 'Allegiant - Part 1'

Photo credit: Lionsgate

Nadia Hilker portrays Juanita (Nita) in the film and Bill Skarsgard is Matthew. They both came through Chicago for a promotional tour, and HollywoodChicago.com got an opportunity to talk to them about joining a movie series in progress, and how they think it will affect their careers.

HollywoodChicago.com: Since you both are new to the series, what clues did you get from books about your characters, and how did you

apply them to the film version beyond the script?

Bill Skarsgard: The film differs from the novel, and I've worked on several projects adapted from novels. My approach is the same – I read the book a couple months before pre-production, and then I put it aside and never look at it again. Then I focus on the script, because we're making a film adapted from the book, and it won't be the same story entirely. There are backstories in the book, and it's good to have that in the back of your mind.

Nadia Hilker: Bill pretty much said what I do as well, but in this case I also got a lot of information from Lionsgate [the production company] and the producers about the character of Nita when I auditioned. What I did is try to find her within me, then I put that on an audition tape and sent it to Hollywood. They liked what they saw, and here I am.

HollywoodChicago.com: Well, since you had done mostly German productions, what movie or TV show brought you to the attention of the 'Allegiant' production, and helped to get you the job?

Hilker: I had booked a part in a pilot in Los Angeles, and that got me my management representation. The first day I was with them, they told me about the 'Allegiant' audition, and that's when I did the audition tape.

HollywoodChicago.com: Bill, What do you find different about productions that are Swedish versus either more international productions or American based productions. Do you think there is a different approach of philosophy about producing TV or film there?

Skarsgard: If you look broadly at it, there are different tones in each instance. There are shaped by which country you work in, or the setting, or the time in history where the film is set. There are intense places and periods that create their own atmosphere and art, but at the end of the day it really is just filmmakers making films.

In Sweden, screenwriting is not a separate element in their smaller film industry. Most of the time the director writes and directs their own material. So the main difference is that most of the movies I've done there have been written by the director. When you read a script, and know that it's coming from the mind of the person who is making the film, so it's easier to find a connection to that person before we even start.

HollywoodChicago.com: Nadia, With each step up in an acting career, there are new challenges. What do you think your main challenge will be, now that you have a prominent role in a mainstream film series?

Hilker: To keep on challenging myself. I'd love to do everything, even another independent film. I want to do what feels right to me, not necessarily for money, but because the part seems right to do. Whatever I feel is right for me as both an artist and a human being.



Bill Skarsgard as Matthew in 'Allegiant - Part 1'

Photo credit: Lionsgate

HollywoodChicago.com: Bill, you've done enough lead roles in films to understand the difference between them and this role. What did you focus on when joining this 'Divergent' series, since it already was in place.?

Skarsgard: If I compare doing a lead role in a smaller film to 'Allegiant,' the first thing is I'm a part of a gigantic film in an ensemble cast. The machinery of this movie is huge, so I go in focusing on the smaller things I can do with my character, and not get in the way of that machinery,

such as asking 'what would my character do here?' [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Nadia, I've read you're fluent in three languages – your native German, French and English. What is your feeling about people who only experience things in English? Do you think there is an advantage to know three different dreamscapes in three different languages?

Hilker: I feel kind of sad for just the English speakers [laughs], but I don't judge anyone. For me, I'm proud to know more than one language, and because my English doesn't have an accent, people forget that it isn't my first language or even my second. That gets frustrating because I can't express myself in English as well as I can in German or French. Subtle topics like politics or the economy is something I can't talk about in English. I'm always afraid that people think, 'I know she's not stupid, but she sounds stupid.' [laughs] I'm getting there in English, but not quite there yet. All the languages I consider a gift.

HollywoodChicago.com: Bill, your father Stellan is a distinctive type of actor...what lessons about performance did you learn from him, either directly through his advice or by watching his work?

Skarsgard: In every interview I do, he is brought up.

HollywoodChicago.com: [Laughs] Glad I could be part of the herd.

Skarsgard: He's a fantastic actor, but the association is there, and there are always comparisons – there was actually a point when I reconsidered being an actor, because of those comparisons. It was hard to figure out what type of actor I was, apart from being the son Stellan Skarsgard. For me, it's always been important to leave him, and my actor brother, out of the process of what I do. It was important for me that I take responsibility for my own performances, and to be independent of them.

HollywoodChicago.com: Well, don't worry, John Wayne's kid got that question as well.

Skarsgard: [Laughs]



Bill Skarsgard, Nadia Hilker in Chicago

Photo credit: Patrick McDonald for HollywoodChicago.com

HollywoodChicago.com: There are physical sets in 'Allegiant,' but also a lot of post-production effects and so-called 'green screen' acting. What methods did director Robert Schwentke use to keep cast members focused when shooting scenes the required a lot of imagination to picture what was there?

Skarsgard: He would show you photos of the zones, and he would walk us through what happening, and painted a pretty clear picture regarding what was happening around us. Sometimes we had to stare at a laser pointer, but he would place some concept art around us, to show us the world. After you see it, we went in and started pretending.

HollywoodChicago.com: You are both heading into the final film chapter as part of the Divergent legacy. What do you hope to add to your characters to make them more memorable once you start filming the last movie of the series?

Hilker: So much.

Skarsgard: Maybe add a bit of Germany in?

Hilker: Nita is not particularly a fan favorite for the novel readers, so I hope they get to see that's she's not a threat, and is fighting for the good side of it all, and that she just wants to help – a good human being who wants to save the world.

Skarsgard: The thing about these films is that they are highly paced, there is not a lot of breathing room for supporting characters to do much. Hopefully, in the last installment the character will get to do something significant. In the current film, although I didn't have a lot to do, there was enough to play with some layers, even if I said something, but meant something else. All those little things are nuances that are fun to play, so I hope there is more of that coming up. It's a set up for the grand finale, and we hope to have an affect on it. That would be fun.

"The Divergent Series: Allegiant - Part 1" opens everywhere on March 18th. Featuring Nadia Hilker, Bill Skarsgard, Shailene Woodley, Theo

James, Naomi Watts, Miles Teller, Jeff Daniels, Zöe Kravitz and Maggie Q. Screenplay adapted by Noah Oppenheim, Adam Cooper and Bill Collage. Directed by Robert Schwentke. Rated “PG-13”



[21]

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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 25 2024 - 4:12am):
<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/26346/interview-nadia-hilker-bill-skarsgard-for-allegiant-part-1>

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/divergent>
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