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Cities on Wheels and Other Mechanized Fantasies. The Wondrous Steampunk World of the Film *Mortal Engines* (2018)

Abstract: This study undertakes a critical investigation of the cinematic adaptation *Mortal Engines* (2018) directed by Christian Rivers, situating it within the broader theoretical and aesthetic framework of the steampunk genre. Tracing steampunk's origins alongside its evolution into a fully realized visual mode, the study interrogates the film's deployment of retro-futurist aesthetics and techno-fantasy logic. Particular attention is paid to the symbolic function of mobile urbanism, embodied most vividly in the traction city of London, which appears as a symbol of relentless consumption, exemplifying the steampunk paradox of marvel and menace. Through a close reading of the film's archetypal characters and of its visual motifs, the paper examines how *Mortal Engines* dramatizes the promises and perils of technological invention, casting the past's imagined future as both a mythic space of wonder and a cautionary example of hubris.
Keywords: Steampunk Films; Victorian Aesthetics; Retrofuturism; Techno-fantasy; Fantastic Cities.

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1. Introduction

Christian Rivers' *Mortal Engines* (2018) emerges at a pivotal juncture in the evolution of steampunk culture, being positioned between its so-called "first wave" of the 1980s-1990s and the ongoing "second wave" that crystallized after 2007. As part of a broader transmedia constellation – including creations such as *Howl's Moving Castl*e (2004) or *The Golden Compass* (2004), *Mortal Engines* participates in the revitalization of a neo-Victorian, anachronistic aesthetic, transposed into the speculative imaginary of a fantastic universe.

The film represents a compelling case study for the exploration of steampunk's expressive possibilities in cinema. Adapted from Philip Reeve's 2001 eponymous novel, the movie constructs a post-apocalyptic world where the remnants of human civilization have reorganized themselves in nomadic cities that traverse a devastated Earth in search of essential resources for survival. The most formidable of these is London – a vast, mobile metropolis whose mechanical appetite for life-sustaining reserves is insatiable and relentless. Within this fractured

world, archetypal figures such as the mad scientist Thaddeus Valentine, the cyborg Shrike, the explorer Tom Natsworthy and the rebel heroines Hester Shaw and Anna Fang navigate with determination, propelled either by a desire for retribution or by an aspiration toward a better life.

The present research offers a critical examination of these central archetypal figures, whose roles are interpreted through the lens of genre conventions and ideological symbolism. The study also focuses on the film's technological landscape, identifying how steampunk's signature features, including anachronistic machinery and techno-fantasy logic, are embedded within its *mise-en-scène* and worldbuilding strategies. The research explores how the visual architecture of *the film* – with its exposed gears, retrofitted superweapons and airships defying physical logic – constructs a cinematic landscape where the aesthetics of invention function simultaneously as a spectacle and as a cautionary example. Special attention is given to the city of London, reconceived in the film as a mobile metropolis and as a mechanical embodiment of conquest-driven ambitions; the city is analyzed through the prism of critical discourse in order to reveal how steampunk's imagined technologies operate as allegories of industrial consumption and technological hubris.

The study demonstrates that *Mortal Engines* employs steampunk not simply as a decorative aesthetic or as a kind of nostalgic escapism, but as a means of ideological inquiry and imaginative exploration. Thus, the research reveals how the movie both celebrates and interrogates the mythos of progress that steampunk frequently brings to the forefront.

2. The Steampunk Genre

Steampunk anchors itself in the industrial milieu of the 19th century, drawing extensively from the visual, cultural and technological iconography of Victorian England. This era – demarcated by the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901) and characterized by Britain's ascendancy as a maritime and economic hegemon – serves as the quintessential backdrop for steampunk narratives. Within this temporal frame, retro-futuristic inventions and deep-rooted societal contradictions are reconfigured, inviting both critical inquiry and playful reimagining.

At its ideological core, steampunk articulates a complex nostalgia for a bygone vision of technological heterogeneity. The genre's titular "punk" component operates as a critique of late modernity's alienation, of its overreliance on mass production, and of the abstraction inherent in contemporary digital technologies. In contrast to the ephemeral and disembodied nature of cybernetic futures, steampunk exalts a tactile, mechanical world in which technology is not sealed off behind opaque algorithms, but remains visibly accessible, open-ended and physically constructed – amenable to tinkering by the individual hand. The gleaming brass gears, exposed pistons, steam turbines and articulated joints that populate the genre constitute a visual grammar of "retro-tech" that aims to restore intimacy between the human and the machinic. Thus, technology is not an invisible force but a visceral and imperfect extension of the body and mind.

Within these alternate industrial realities, the steam engine reigns supreme, powering ironclad warships, mechanized battlefields, dirigibles and flying vessels

– all emblematic of a speculative Victorian modernity. These technologies often reflect anachronistic asymmetries; cutting-edge weaponry may coexist alongside rudimentary electronics, underscoring the genre's speculative ethos. Rather than being tethered to historical verisimilitude, steampunk technologies operate within a logic of imaginative plausibility, frequently drawing upon unrealized designs and conjectures by 19th-century scientists and authors. Their legitimacy lies not in empirical accuracy but in their resonance with the aesthetic, intellectual and cultural spirit of the period.

By reconstructing the 19th century through the lens of speculative invention and alternate timelines, steampunk invites the audience to contemplate experimental modernities. Its narratives illuminate not only the paths taken by history but also the potentialities that were abandoned. Yet, this technological reimagination, with its majestic mechanical contraptions, is inextricably linked to the ornately wrought architecture and to the socioeconomic stratifications of Victorian London. As the largest metropolis in Europe and as an epicenter of imperial power during the 19th century, London becomes the archetypal locus of technological innovation and social complexity, being simultaneously idealized and problematized within steampunk's aesthetic and narrative frameworks.

Its rigid class hierarchies – embodied by aristocrats, the burgeoning middle class and the industrial proletariat – are frequently reified or challenged within steampunk fiction. Accordingly, the character construction within the genre reflects both Victorian social roles and the modern critiques of them, producing a constellation of archetypes that oscillate between historical fidelity and postmodern subversion. Thus, the archetype of the *mad scientist* embodies both innovation and hubris. Whether experimenting with technologies, or attempting to rewrite history through mechanical means, this character represents the ambivalent power of science, toing the porous line between genius and insanity. The *explorer* channels the romanticized ethos of 19th-century expeditions, motivated by curiosity or subversion. This type of character traverses unmapped territories in airships or unlocks archaic technologies – gestures that echo the ambitions of the Victorian time. The *action heroine* combines feminine aesthetics with masculine action, often assuming male-coded roles. Her appearance – often overtly stylized – functions as both a narrative challenge and a visual provocation, transforming the eroticized female body into a symbol of autonomy, agency and subversion. The *peacekeeper* archetype embodies the genre's radical potential, using technical means to protect the vulnerable or to construct egalitarian communities. His machines are not tools of domination but symbols of restorative technology.

Perhaps the most philosophically charged figure in the steampunk pantheon is *the automaton* – a mechanical being fashioned in humanity's image. Whether designed to write poetry, wage war or serve tea, the automaton blurs the boundaries between performance, identity and consciousness. The steampunk's cyborg is an augmented body, a fusion of vulnerability and enhancement that metaphorizes the human-machine relationship as one of tension. Through these richly symbolic and narratively versatile characters – the mad genius, the brave explorer, the warrior heroine,

the sentient machine, the utopian pacificator – steampunk stages stories of resistance and reconfiguration, stating that the past is not static but infinitely reinterpretable. In doing so, it extends an invitation to question the dominant technological paradigms and to envision futures grounded not in inevitability, but in choice and creativity.

3. Christian Rivers' *Mortal Engines* (2018)

3.1. Mapping the Heroes' Journey

Drawing on steampunk's fascination with imagined futures, *Mortal Engines* functions as a cautionary tale that translates contemporary anxieties – environmental collapse, technocratic control and ruthless capitalism – into a richly layered visual feast. The film probes the ethical void left in the wake of scientific overreach and unregulated technological development. Set in the aftermath of the apocalyptic "Sixty Minute War", *the movie* envisions a world rebuilt upon the ruins of technological excess. From the remnants of an old civilization arise vast mechanized metropolises known as "Traction Cities", that rove across the desolate "Great Hunting Ground" in search of resources. This new order is governed by "Municipal Darwinism", a techno-political doctrine that reimagines evolution as predation: larger cities consume smaller ones in a mechanized parody of natural selection. Opposing this mobile empire is the Anti-Traction League, a coalition of static settlements centered in Shan Guo, protected by the Shield Wall and devoted to rootedness and ecological balance.

The film begins with London's predatory consumption of a small Bavarian town, during which the audience is introduced to the scarred and enigmatic protagonist Hester Shaw. Her failed attempt to assassinate London's historian, Thaddeus Valentine, leads to an unlikely alliance with Tom Natsworthy, a naïve apprentice cast out for learning about one of Valentine's crimes. Together, they traverse the devastated land, fleeing both from Valentine's agents, who seek to eliminate them, and from Shrike, a reanimated cyborg who relentlessly pursues Hester.

As Valentine reconstructs a superweapon called MEDUSA in order to conquer Shan Guo, Hester and Tom attempt to thwart his plans for subjugation with the aid of Anna Fang, agent of the Anti-Traction League and revolutionary pilot of the *Jenny Haniver*. In the climactic confrontation of the film, Hester deactivates MEDUSA using her mother's pendant, ending Valentine's war. After the historian's death and the city's disarmament, survivors find refuge in Shan Guo, while Hester and Tom set out toward an uncertain, redemptive horizon.

3.2. Human and Mechanical Archetypes in the World of Steam

The archetypal characters of *Mortal Engines* not only propel the action but also reflect the philosophical tensions central to steampunk: progress versus regression, humanity versus machinery, resistance versus complicity. Thaddeus Valentine, the principal antagonist, represents the quintessential "mad scientist". Outwardly, he is a distinguished historian and an influential member of London's ruling elite. Beneath this polished veneer, however, lies a man consumed by a technological fixation and by an inexorable ambition to

re-establish London's supremacy. His reactivation of MEDUSA demonstrates how science, untethered from ethics, becomes an instrument of unprincipled conquest. In his obsession with dominion, Valentine personifies the peril of scientific overreach, where brilliance is eclipsed by moral disengagement and genius curdles into madness.

Hester Shaw, the character who opposes him, is a young woman whose physical and emotional wounds testify to the trauma of Valentine's ambition. Disfigured as a child when Valentine murdered her mother to protect the secret of MEDUSA, Hester emerges as a vengeful action heroine who combines fierce autonomy with emotional depth, her facial scar being emblematic of her survival spirit. Her body, which subverts the traditional eroticization of the female form, becomes the symbol of a type of resistance that redefines strength as rooted in endurance, not in spectacle. She moves through pain without being defined by it, challenging the viewer to reconsider what true heroism looks like.

Tom Natsworthy, who travels alongside Hester, is a young historian apprentice who embodies the explorer archetype. Initially a passive participant within London's imperial machinery, Tom is cast out after trying to stop Hester's assassination attempt on Valentine. Exiled into the dangerous world beyond London's steel ramparts, he traverses a series of desolate terrains and fantastical metropolises, each imbued with the spectral presence of a forgotten past. In the tradition of 19th-century explorers, Tom navigates the unknown not for conquest but for revelation. As he grapples with the moral contradictions of his upbringing, his transformation becomes a journey of ideological deconstruction.

His evolving bond with Hester illustrates how intimacy and awakening often emerge through shared adversity, which turns personal discovery into political dissent.

The ideological heart of the resistance is Anna Fang, the charismatic leader of the Anti-Traction League, who is a dazzling aviator and a revolutionary. With her vivid red trench coat, martial prowess and magnetic authority, she epitomizes the action heroine in a more stylized and visually arresting form. Yet, beneath this aesthetic flair, lies a deep commitment to justice and emancipation. Anna's climactic battle with Valentine pits liberation against domination, framing the conflict as one not merely of power, but of principle.

A quieter but equally profound counterpoint to Valentine is Governor Kwan, who protects the Shield Wall in Shan Guo. As a representation of the peacekeeper archetype, Kwan uses science not to subjugate but to safeguard. His leadership is marked by restraint, humility, and by a vision of coexistence, representing a direct ideological antithesis to Valentine's authoritarian rule. In a world obsessed with mechanical escalation, Kwan offers a model for ethical engineering – one grounded in preservation rather than consumption. His technology exemplifies how machines, when guided by ethical intent, can promote stability and resilience rather than function solely as instruments of destruction.

Perhaps the film's most philosophically resonant figure is Shrike, the undead cyborg known as a "Stalker". Once a human soldier, Shrike has been resurrected through ancient technology into a biomechanical killer. Yet, embedded in his metal frame is a flicker of human emotion, which can be visible in his paternal

bond with Hester. As a cyborg archetype, Shrike straddles the liminal space between man and machine, memory and mechanism. His desire to transform Hester into a fellow Stalker is an unsettling expression of love, an effort to protect the girl from pain by stripping her of humanity. In this tragic logic, Shrike becomes a metaphor for the posthuman condition, where identity, emotion and autonomy are mediated through circuitry. The cyborg's ultimate gesture to respect Hester's choice reclaims his lost human side, revealing him as a being capable of profound moral choice.

In *Mortal Engines*, each archetypal character – the mad scientist, the action heroine, the explorer, the peacekeeper and the automaton – illuminates a facet of the story's central inquiry: how to recover one's humanity in a realm shaped by machines. In the ashes of the old world, the film invites us to reconsider what progress may mean – and to imagine what might be built in its place, should we dare to choose differently. Thus, *Mortal Engines* becomes a meditation on transformation – both personal and collective.

3.3. Steampunk Futures: Technology in the Age of Gears

At the heart of this cinematic world-building lies not merely the grand spectacle of nomadic metropolises and of steam-driven conveyances, but the prevailing implication that such technologies are governed less by the tenets of empirical rationality than by the principles of techno-fantasy. The amalgamation of mechanical visibility with functional implausibility epitomizes a central paradox of steampunk: the staging of technology as ostensibly scientific while it clearly operates according to the narrative logic of dream.

The film abounds in intricate, baroque devices whose inner workings are made visually accessible but remain conceptually opaque. Its visual lexicon – brimming with pipes, conduits, steam-powered engines and lavishly adorned airships – constructs a mechanical environment that appears ordered and precise. Yet, the technology depicted in *Mortal Engines* disregards the fundamental principles of thermodynamics and classical mechanics. Rather than conforming to scientific plausibility, these machines function according to the demands of narrative logic, symbolic resonance and aesthetic impact.

The genre's preference for visually decipherable mechanisms over hidden circuitry represents a refusal of the modern technological imaginary, which often veils complexity within minimalist exteriors and inaccessible software code. Steampunk literalizes its machines, demanding visibility in order not to explain, but to enchant. The omnipresence of airships in the films of the genre illustrates this thematic orientation, the vessels gliding across the stratosphere with a fluidity that eschews the pragmatic constraints of propulsion or fuel sustainability. Their hybridized design merges the stately grandeur of early 20th-century zeppelins with the kinetic sleekness of modern fighter aircrafts, producing a visual grammar more aligned with innovative reverie than with technical feasibility.

These vehicles, which are emblematic of a short-lived era of aerial optimism, are signifiers of technological defiance and imaginative resistance. They represent a modality of flight that is slower, more deliberate and more legible than

jet propulsion – a romanticized vision of aviation unburdened by realism. Thus, in *Mortal Engines*, the *Jenny Haniver* transcends its own materiality to become a vessel of resistance and escape, a symbol of insurgency and freedom. It is not merely a conveyance but a sanctuary in motion, a powerful statement, and a narrative anchor for a defiant stance.

Such imaginative constructs are undergirded by retro-futurism, understood not only as a pensive glance toward how previous generations envisioned the future, but as a layered act of recreating the past's dreams through a contemporary cultural lens. *Mortal Engines* does not simply extrapolate from Victorian-era dreams of scientific progress; it constructs an alternative historical consciousness infused with a yearning for a technologically enchanted world that never quite came to pass. This is not merely a reproduction of 19th-century optimism regarding societal advancement, but a melancholic evocation of a retro-mechanical sublime – a world of gears, levers and human agency.

However, this extraordinary vision is far from being neutral. The technological aesthetic presented in *Mortal Engines* is inextricably bound to discourses of violence. The peripatetic cities, particularly London, function as mechanized agents of conquest, consuming lesser settlements in a literalization of the Darwinian survival metaphor. The machinery does not simply process raw materials, it consumes populations, identities and cultural memory. Technology here is not impartial, it is a vector of domination. Nowhere is this more chillingly manifest than in the MEDUSA superweapon, clandestinely installed within the sanctified architecture of

St. Paul's Cathedral. This apocalyptic apparatus, resurrected from the detritus of the pre-cataclysmic warfare, epitomizes the apogee of technological nihilism.

The MEDUSA device illustrates steampunk's paradoxical reliance on the aesthetics of functional machinery without fidelity to scientific rationality. Its mechanics remain opaque; its quantum energy source is never explained in physical terms. Rather, the weapon's significance is symbolic – it materializes contemporary latent anxieties surrounding nuclear annihilation, revealing the hubristic overreach of scientific ambition. Its emplacement within a religious edifice accentuates the film's post-secular mythology: a belief not in divinity, but in the mysterious authority of reactivated machines.

This convergence of myth and mechanism is also evident in the narrative treatment of seemingly minor technological artifacts. The "crash drive" pendant inherited by Hester functions not unlike a talisman in a high fantasy epic – a repository of secret power, passed intergenerationally, whose activation alters the course of empires. Its provenance remains deliberately vague, emphasizing its status as a magical object cloaked in pseudo-technological trappings. Thus, *Mortal Engines* participates in a broader steampunk tradition that privileges symbol over system, mythology over infrastructure.

The visual and thematic dichotomy between the traction cities and the static settlements of the Anti-Traction League articulates a broader dialectic between two futurist imaginaries: one predicated on relentless motion, conquest and resource consumption; the other invested in tranquility, memory and ecological balance. This juxtaposition situates technology as the medium

and metaphor of ideological conflict. The former paradigm celebrates kinetic, mechanized dominance, while the latter venerates restraint, continuity and sustainable stewardship. Hence, *Mortal Engines* embodies a technological allegory in which machines are both instruments of oppression and tools of emancipation. The rust on these devices is not merely corrosion – it is sedimentation over time, bearing the weight of accumulated failures, ambitions and violences. In this sense, the film's retro-machinery serves as a palimpsest of modernity's discontents. It invites spectators to interrogate the ethical and epistemological underpinnings of technological progress and to consider the myths – both utopian and dystopian – that scaffold our collective engagement with invention.

Ultimately, *Mortal Engines* constructs a speculative world in which locomotion becomes destiny, airships glide across impossible skies, and quantum weapons slumber in ecclesiastical vaults. It is a world where empirical science dons the vestments of fantasy, and antiquated technologies achieve the miraculous through sheer narrative imperative. The film does not ask us to believe in the plausibility of its machinery; rather, it seduces us into a suspension of disbelief by appealing to a deeper cultural longing – for an age in which invention was visible, legible, and suffused with wonder. In the ruins of speculative futurism, it is the past – mythologized, mechanized and reimagined – that holds the final word.

3.4. Engines of Conquest: The Moving Capital

In *Mortal Engines*, London is recreated as a technological leviathan devouring weaker municipalities for fuel and resources.

Thus, the capital is presented not merely as an icon of industrial modernity but as a mobile, predatory city literally uprooted from its geographical and historical foundations. Its ultimate goal – to penetrate the Shield Wall safeguarding the tranquil realm of Shan Guo –, illustrates the destructiveness inherent in unchecked industrial expansion. London, anthropomorphized as a devouring colossus, is portrayed as a machine of relentless consumption, one that produces waste without cessation and, in so doing, transforms fertile environments into desolate, lifeless wastelands.

At the core of this dystopian vision lies the city's vertically stratified architecture, a central visual and thematic motif within the film. Towering into the sky atop massive caterpillar treads, the mobile metropolis is meticulously segmented into social castes, with its spatial hierarchy mapping directly onto the socio-economic divisions of its populace. The elite reside in the opulent upper echelons of the city, basking in luxury and detachment, while the working classes and disenfranchised masses are crammed into the grimy tiers below. This physical stratification literalizes class inequality in stark visual terms, thereby enacting a critique of capitalist structures in which the labor of the many sustains the privilege of the few.

This spatial logic transforms the city into both a material and a symbolic space. London is not merely a mechanized giant of steel and steam – it is also an ideological construct, operating simultaneously as a technological entity and as a repository of cultural meaning. The city's steampunk aesthetic, rooted in the iconography of Victorian modernity, straddles the historical and the speculative. Iconic structures

such as Big Ben and St. Paul's Cathedral are reassembled into a new, mobile configuration, forming a palimpsest of idealized remembrance and dystopian futurity. This bricolage of temporalities produces an uncanny effect: London is both familiar and estranged, a city haunted by its own past even as it surges toward an apocalyptic future. Thus, the film participates in what Darko Suvin terms "cognitive estrangement"[1]: it renders the familiar unfamiliar in order to encourage our critical reflection.

The anachronistic juxtaposition of Gothic architecture, airships and steam-powered mechanisms imbues the capital with a majestic grandeur, but also with a profound existential dread, transforming it into a sublime entity in the Burkean sense[2]. This urban sublime is equally rendered through the city's immense scale, maze-like complexity and eerie lighting, as well as through the ceaseless mechanical groans that echo through its metallic corridors. The viewer is drawn into a dream-like space where the boundaries between the historical and the fantastical are blurred: the city is not simply built; it is alive, terrifying and overwhelming.

The city's architecture, its monumental machinery, its weaponized history – all serve to encode and reproduce systems of domination and environmental harm. The capital is more than a setting; it is a character in its own right, the titular mortal engine whose relentless pursuit of power and expansion underscores the film's central critique of modernity. As both predator and parody, London dramatizes the contradictions of capitalism and technological utopianism. It is a city that consumes the world even as it collapses inward, warning us against the perils of mistaking progress for salvation.

Metaphor becomes literal within the film's diegesis: London hunts; it chases, captures and consumes smaller settlements, incorporating their materials and populations into its own system. The phrase "feeding the beast", which recurs throughout the cinema work, encapsulates this dynamic of conquest and consumption. At the same time, in cheering the subjugation of smaller towns, the capital's citizens also enact a troubling complicity which reflects a normalization of violence and an erasure of empathy specific to a society morally desensitized by spectacle.

Drawing from the tradition of the imaginary voyages, *Mortal Engines* frames the city as both an object of exploration and a crucible of ethical inquiry. The protagonists' movements through the capital – sabotaging its industrial infrastructure, exposing the machinery of oppression beneath its gleaming façade, navigating secret passageways or zip-lining across its monumental architecture – evoke the narrative strategies of Victorian adventure literature. London thus becomes both a realm of discovery and a battleground, a place where hidden resistances emerge beneath the surface of an engineered order. The city's labyrinthine quality, its dense layering of spaces and secrets, amplifies the tension between visibility and invisibility, power and subversion.

Envisioned as a mobile island, London engages with – and ultimately subverts – a longstanding literary and philosophical tradition associated with the island trope[3]. Historically, islands have been imagined as liminal spaces: as utopian enclaves, as sites of isolation or ideological experimentation. In this context, London ostensibly aligns with that lineage through its self-contained

nature. However, rather than fostering innovation, refuge or societal renewal, the capital operates as a satirical manifestation of capitalist logic and territorial ambition. Its technologically enforced insularity does not herald advancement but instead hastens its moral and environmental deterioration. Thus, London emerges not as a symbol of civilizational triumph, but as a dystopian island – an itinerant monument to systemic collapse.

4. Conclusion

Far from being a mere exercise in speculative spectacle, *Mortal Engines* emerges as a complex meditation on the seductive mythologies of modernity. Anchored in the steampunk tradition, this cinematic creation deploys its retro-futurist imagery not simply for visual grandeur but to interrogate the very ideologies that underpin industrial progress and economic ambition. London, as a mobile colossus, is more than a feat of imaginative engineering – it is an allegorical device that embodies the perils of unsustainable consumption and unchecked innovation.

The film's protagonists and antagonists serve to animate the genre's archetypal tensions. Characters like Thaddeus Valentine and Shrike reveal the dangers of dehumanized reason and mechanized affect, while figures like Hester Shaw and Anna Fang disrupt patriarchal codes through stylized acts of resistance. The technologies they encounter and use, such as airships that defy physics or weapons that obliterate cities, are not governed by empirical plausibility, but by the principles of techno-fantasy: a narrative system wherein machines operate according to emotional or symbolic logics rather than according to scientific rigor. This deliberate defiance of realism allows steampunk to envision alternate pasts that speak to our collective futures.

Ultimately, *Mortal Engines* occupies a generative space within the genre's discourse. It does not merely replicate its conventions, it intensifies them, foregrounding the ethical stakes of invention. In its layered portrayal of moving cities and hybrid heroes, the cinema work prompts its audience to reflect on the stories we tell about technology and on the machines that continue to shape our world. In doing so, the film re-affirms steampunk's enduring capacity to imagine not only different futures, but also different relationships between humanity and the mechanisms we build.

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