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Mortal Engines



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Synopsis

These fourteen science fiction stories reveal Lem’s fascination with artificial intelligence and demonstrate just how surprisingly human sentient machines can be. Written in the form of grotesque folk fairy tales, these stories about robot kings, robot dragons, and robot scientists are brought to life by Scott Aiello.

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Customer Reviews

Trying to read it first time in English. Translator did great job.

The title of this assembly of stories is the translator’s clever triple pun: an allusion to Othello, "mortal engines" are manmade, impermanent, and sometimes deadly machines--robots, to be exact. Included are all the tales from Lem’s "Fables for Robots" and three other stories ("The Sanatorium of Dr. Vliperdius," "The Hunt," and "The Mask") that double the size of the book.The fables are like--well, fables. That is, the prose style resembles Aesop or Andersen ("Once there lived..."); the narrative recounts long-ago events; and each tale presents a message--or, at least, a lesson for us humans disguised as a moral for them robots. These eleven shorts recall Borges (or even Poe) at his most playful, but read in sequence they tend to become a tad formulaic (several robots are sent on a mission; each fails, but the last one succeeds). And if you’re a lover of science jokes, these stories will be your playground; Lem packs references to chemistry, physics, geology, computer science, and electronics--often in the same sentence: "self-motes came from distant lands, like the two Automatts, vector-victors in a hundred battles, or like Prostheseus, constructionist par

excellence, who never went anywhere without two spark absorbers, one black, the other silver; and there was Arbitron Cosmoski, all built of protocrystals and svelte as a spire...."If, like me, you prefer a little more story and a little less pun, you'll find that the gems of the book are the three bonus tracks. The last two, in particular, are among the best I've ever read by Lem, and have nothing in common with the fables other than the automaton theme. "The Hunt" is a rollicking adventure story featuring Lem's famous alter ego, Pirx the Pilot, on a mission to destroy a homicidal robot. "The Mask" may well be the best Lem story I've read: the haunting stream-of-consciousness of a robot who, like an otherworldly Tristram Shandy, narrates its own birth, consciousness, self-realization, metamorphosis, rebellion, and--above all--its futile pursuit of love. The opening pages have a deceptively languid pace, until the robot sheds its "mask" (in a surprisingly squeamish scene) and, during the ensuing chase, reveals its lethal assignment. These last stories are worth the price of the whole book.

A fast paced original story. Great read for my tweens and teenagers. Looking forward to the movie coming out December 2018

What an imagination. Great story telling. How the author kept all those threads together over four books is amazing. Suitable for all ages from teens to old people like me

It is a light fantasy that should definitely appeal to the younger public especially due to its resemblance with some of Studio Ghibli's work like Laputa: Castle in the Sky and Howl's Moving Castle. It had a strong hold on me even though it was a bit predictable. The overall experience was quite enjoyable. The "It's a town-eat -town world" idea is also quite novel.

This was such a wonderful story I recommend it to my teens at the library and I purchased this copy to give as a gift.

Having read the last couple Harry Potter books and hearing Peter Jackson was planning to turn "Mortal Engines" into a movie, I decided to give it a try. I think this book is definitely geared toward older kids or young adults, even moreso than Harry Potter. While both series have features in common - the kids are the heroes who have to fight against the evil adults and get the good adults to finally do something - they're written quite differently. In this book there were times I was acutely aware it was geared to young adults with rather simple dialog, particularly coming from the adult

characters.The concept was interesting, another reason I wanted to read it. It is set in the distant future after civilization has just about annihilated itself with nuclear weapons. London is one of many cities which have transformed themselves into "traction cities" which move about the landscape, preying on smaller cities. Prey has become scarce though and the mayor of London has come into possession of MEDUSA, an ancient technology he thinks will help them get through the Shield Wall - a wall built by the Anti-Traction League to protect the static settlements.The book has four main heroes - Tom, Hester, Katherine and Bevis. Hester is on a mission to kill Valentine, Katherine's adopted father, to avenge her parents. Tom is an apprentice historian. Hester and Tom are cast out of London and go on many travels trying to make their way back. Bevis is a shy apprentice engineer. Katherine is a high lady who thinks greatly of her adopted father; however, after seeing MEDUSA wipe out another town and learning its origins, she works with Bevis to try to stop the mayor's plans.The villains in the book are the engineer guild led by the mayor; they value old tech despite knowing how previous generations used it and care only for the advancement of London. The historian guild are the good guys, though they are too frightened to do anything about stopping the mayor's plan to kill masses of people, until Katherine pushes them into action. Aside from the four kid heroes and Valentine, most of the characters are very one-dimensional. The historians' dialog is very simplistic and makes them appear downright dumb at times. The engineers have very little dialog.In general, I liked the basic concept of the book with traction cities; however, it seemed to drag along at times. And suddenly at the end the writer was killing off people left and right. While I can understand a kid like Tom feeling guilty over the destruction he causes, I didn't see why the author emphasized it so much. He seemed to be indicating it was how the reader was meant to feel, which seems against the grain - after all, Tom in many ways was the hero and what he did was right.

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