

# Mortal Engines



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PHILIP REEVE

Philip Reeve was born in Brighton, England. He studied illustration at Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology and Brighton Polytechnic, contributing to a comic strip and occasionally doing sketch comedy. His first books were for children, and he worked as both a writer and an illustrator. In 2001, his first young adult novel, *Mortal Engines*, became his best-known work, spawning three sequels as well as a prequel trilogy. In addition to books set in the *Mortal Engines* universe, Reeve has written the *Larklight* trilogy, the *Railhead* series, and several standalone novels for children and young adults. His works drew new attention in 2018, with the release of a film version of *Mortal Engines*.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Mortal Engines* is a steampunk novel, meaning that while it includes futuristic technology, it also takes strong inspiration from the 19th century (when steam powered much of the technology). In particular, this was the time period when the British Empire expanded, violently taking land and resources from other parts of the world in a process called colonialism (which is similar to how the fictional Traction City of London devours smaller cities in the book). The concept of “Municipal Darwinism” is a parody of Social Darwinism, a similar real-life concept that used scientific language (drawing from Charles Darwin’s evolutionary theories) to hide darker ideas and was essentially a form of eugenics (the idea that some races are superior to others).

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*Mortal Engines*—particularly its setting—takes inspiration from the science fiction novels of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Jules Verne (*Around the World in 80 Days*) and H.G. Wells (*The War of the Worlds*). *Mortal Engines* was published in the middle of a boom in the young adult fantasy genre, with the first *Redwall*, *Harry Potter*, and *His Dark Materials* books coming before it, and with the *Twilight* and *Hunger Games* series starting shortly after it.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Mortal Engines*
- **When Written:** c. 2000
- **Where Written:** Dartmoor, England
- **When Published:** 2001

- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Young Adult Fantasy, Steampunk
- **Setting:** London, several centuries in the future
- **Climax:** The super-weapon MEDUSA blows up London.
- **Antagonist:** Thaddeus Valentine and Magnus Crome
- **Point of View:** Third Person Omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**What’s in a Name.** Philip Reeve has said he enjoys naming characters and places. Some, like Tom Natsworthy, have personal significance (“Natsworthy” is a place near where Reeve lives), while others like Hester Shaw just “sound right.”

**A MEDUSA-Sized Box Office Bomb.** By some estimates, the film version of *Mortal Engines* is one of the top five least-profitable movies of all time.



## PLOT SUMMARY

In a futuristic steampunk world, humanity has rebuilt technology from scratch following a cataclysmic event called the Sixty Minute War. Cities like London have giant tracks that let them move at speeds of up to 100 miles an hour, catching smaller towns and stripping them for resources in a system called Municipal Darwinism.

Tom Natsworthy is a 15-year-old orphan and an apprentice at the Museum of Natural History in London. He idolizes the head Historian Thaddeus Valentine. One day a mysterious scavenger girl from the muddy area outside London boards the city and attempts to assassinate Valentine. Tom stops her at the last minute, chasing her when she flees. The girl has a large **scar** on her face and reveals that her name is Hester Shaw. Before jumping down a trash chute, Hester warns that Valentine isn’t who he seems to be. When Tom brings up Hester Shaw to Valentine, he pushes Tom down the same trash chute, attempting to kill him.

Tom survives the fall and finds himself outside London, in the mud next to Hester. She curses him for stopping her assassination attempt, but since they’re both trying to make it back to London, they agree to travel together. Meanwhile, back in London, Valentine’s daughter, Katherine, slowly begins to learn that her admired father may have a dark side.

Tom and Hester struggle to catch up with London, traveling on foot across the muddy area known as the Hunting Ground. After some initial setbacks, they meet a helpful airship pilot named Miss Anna Fang who is willing to take them to London.

Their journey gets interrupted, however, when Shrike catches up with them. Shrike is a Resurrected Man, meaning he is a soldier from a previous era whose dead human brain powers a robotic body. He took in Hester for a while after Hester's parents died, but now he seems to be a ruthless hunter. Lord Mayor Magnus Crome of London has sent him to kill both Tom and Hester.

To escape Shrike, Tom and Hester steal a hot air balloon while Miss Fang stays back to distract him. They can't evade him for long, however, because he has heat-seeking vision and can track Hester's scent. When he catches up with them, Shrike reveals that, while he does intend to kill Hester, Crome has promised Shrike that he will allow Hester to become Resurrected like him. Although Hester tentatively agrees to this, Tom intervenes, killing Shrike with a sword.

Meanwhile, back in London, Crome makes plans to use a super-powered weapon called MEDUSA that can obliterate whole cities. He wants to use it on the **Shield-Wall**, a giant barrier that protects the people in the Anti-Traction League from predatory moving Traction Cities like London, so that London can expand its hunting. Crome sends Valentine out in his airship on a secret mission.

After Shrike's death, Tom and Hester reunite with Miss Fang. She takes them in her airship to a settlement behind the Shield-Wall. Tom realizes that the stories he heard in London are wrong and that the people behind the Shield-Wall aren't evil. While Tom is exploring the settlement, he notices Valentine in disguise. Tom tries to catch him but can't stop Valentine from sabotaging the settlement's whole fleet of airships. Miss Fang confronts Valentine in the hangar and he tricks her during a sword fight, killing her.

Tom and Hester head back to London in Miss Fang's old airship to try to stop Crome from using MEDUSA. Tom drops Hester off so that she can finally get her revenge on Valentine. At the same time, Katherine, horrified by MEDUSA's destructive power, collaborates with some members of London's Guild of Historians to attempt to sabotage it.

While Tom is flying around above London, waiting to pick up Hester, another airship attacks his. Tom fires back, and the ship falls down to London, starting a fire. Meanwhile, Crome's guards catch Hester and bring her to Valentine. On her way to sabotage MEDUSA, Katherine sees Valentine and Hester. Before Valentine can kill Hester with his sword, Katherine leaps in the way, saving Hester but getting mortally wounded herself. As Katherine falls, she hits the controls from MEDUSA, causing it to malfunction. With no target entered, MEDUSA starts firing at London itself. Tom comes back in the airship and picks Hester up just in time to escape before London blows up. The two fly off to get their ship repaired, unsure what to do next but happy to at least have each other.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Tom Natsworthy** – Tom Natsworthy is a 15-year-old apprentice museum worker who has lived in the Traction City of London his whole life. His parents died when he was young in an accident called the Great Tilt. Growing up, Tom's hero was the famous head of the city's Historian Guild, Thaddeus Valentine, but Tom gets his illusions shattered after he learns about Valentine's criminal past from Hester Shaw. Soon after, Valentine tries to kill Tom by pushing him down a trash chute. Tom is a classic example of a reluctant hero, someone who prefers to live a quiet life (only daydreaming about heroics in London) but who transforms over the course of his journey into someone who fights for a cause and puts others' needs first. By spending time outside London with the scavenger Hester, Tom learns how privileged and isolated his old life was. He literally sees what the city of London looks like from the outside and finds that it doesn't match with his expectations, and so he decides to switch allegiances and help the Anti-Traction League, who oppose big moving cities like London. Tom represents how people can grow and change when they break out of their normal lives to meet new people and see new places.

**Hester Shaw** – Hester Shaw is a teenage girl about Tom's age who has a large **scar** on her face from the night when Thaddeus Valentine murdered her parents and left her for dead. After losing her parents, Hester spent a lot of time with Shrike, an emotionally distant cyborg who nevertheless seemed to care about her. She devoted years of her life to tracking Valentine and attempts to assassinate him at the beginning of the novel, but Tom interferes with her plans at the last minute, forcing her to run away. Soon after, when Valentine throws Tom off a trash chute in an attempt to murder him, Tom and Hester end up as traveling companions in the Hunting Ground, trying to reach London together. Unlike the more cautious Tom, Hester is willing to risk her own life from the very beginning of the book. Although she doesn't have much formal education, she is clever and frequently sees solutions to problems that the more conventional Tom misses. Whereas Tom learns to be brave from being with Hester, Hester learns how to accept help from others instead of trying to do everything alone. She thinks of herself as "ugly" because of the massive scar on her face, but she proves that external looks can be deceiving and that what's even more important is how a person acts.

**Thaddeus Valentine** – Thaddeus Valentine is the head of London's Guild of Historians as well as the father of Katherine Valentine and possibly also Hester Shaw. Young Historian Tom Natsworthy idolizes Valentine, but in reality, Valentine holds several dark secrets. He murdered his former assistant and lover Pandora Shaw and seriously injured Hester, all to get his hands on a powerful weapon known as MEDUSA to take back

to the Lord Mayor of London, Magnus Crome. Throughout the story, Valentine continues to resort to violence, killing Miss Fang and attempting to kill Tom. Valentine justifies his actions to himself by claiming that everything he does is for the benefit of his daughter, Katherine, but he's forced to realize that this isn't true when he ends up accidentally killing Katherine with his own sword. Unlike Crome, Valentine does have a conscience, but he follows it too late and ends up dying with the rest of London when MEDUSA malfunctions. Like Hester, Valentine shows how external appearances can be deceiving—in his case, showing how a person who appears to be kind and successful on the outside can actually be violent and ruthless on the inside.

**Katherine Valentine** – Katherine Valentine is the daughter of Thaddeus Valentine and an unknown woman from outside of London who died when Katherine was very young. She was then sent to live with her father in London, and Valentine pledged his loyalty to Lord Mayor Crome in exchange for the privilege of raising Katherine as a member of upper-class society. Despite Katherine's refined upbringing, however, she keeps a pet wolf named Dog, showing that she is not quite the typical upper-class lady she appears to be. Katherine's isolated lifestyle leaves her naïve, and she continues to admire and trust her father even after seeing substantial evidence that he is a murderer. But witnessing what happens in London's underworld and befriending a convict worker named Bevis Pod helps Katherine understand her father's true nature. By the end of the book, she opposes her father and even dies in the process of defending her father's archenemy, Hester. Like Tom, Katherine represents the dangers of naïvely believing in the great reputation and respectable appearances of people like Valentine, but she also shows how empathy can lead people to change for the better.

**Miss Anna Fang** – Miss Anna Fang (also called Feng Hua) is an aviator who works as a spy for the League of Anti-Tractionists. Although this technically means she is an enemy of the Londoner Tom Natsworthy, Miss Fang takes a liking to Tom and Hester, helping them along on their journey back to London in her airship, the *Jenny Haniver*. Miss Fang is one of many orphans in the story, and she managed to escape slavery by building the *Jenny Haniver* out of scraps that she scavenged. She speaks Airsperanto, the language of the sky, and shares a bond with fellow aviators like Khora, who all admire Miss Fang's daring work as a spy. Although Miss Fang is generally heroic, she is willing to use violent tactics like bombings and assassinations if she believes it's for the greater good. When Thaddeus Valentine infiltrates an Anti-Tractionist settlement to sabotage its fleet of airships, he also kills Miss Fang in a sword fight. Tom and Hester take over the *Jenny Haniver*, and so Miss Fang represents a passing of the torch, showing how leaders in one generation can help guide and inspire the people who come after them.

**Shrike** – Shrike is a “Resurrected Man,” meaning that he was a soldier who died in a war long ago and was turned into a deadly cyborg. While parts of Shrike, including his brain, are organic, much of him is metal, and he has a deadly blade on his one arm. Before the main events of the novel, Shrike took Hester in after the death of her parents. But when Hester leaves to get revenge on the man who killed her parents (Valentine), Shrike goes ahead of her, voluntarily offering himself as a research subject to Mayor Crome of London for an opportunity to make Hester herself Resurrected. But after undergoing experiments with Crome's Engineers, Shrike loses his old self and becomes a ruthless hunter, dedicated to fulfilling Crome's wishes. Shrike symbolizes the dangerous, dehumanizing effects of technology and also embodies the power of obsession to drive a person and warp their perspective.

**Magnus Crome** – Magnus Crome is the evil Lord Mayor of the Traction City of London. Unlike previous mayors, he is thin, suggesting that times have gotten tougher for London and that its predatory practice of eating other cities for resources can't sustain it forever. As the head of the Guild of Engineers, Crome represents the future, and he is obsessed with keeping London moving forward at all costs (literally moving on its wheels, but also metaphorically seeking out the next big conquest). Crome shows no regard for human life, willing to kill people outside London indiscriminately with his MEDUSA superweapon and even allowing many Londoners themselves to die in the awful work conditions in the city's Gut. But Crome's grand ambitions aren't sustainable, and in his rush to conquer new lands with MEDUSA, he accidentally destroys all of London when MEDUSA malfunctions. Crome embodies the dangers of ruthlessly pursuing forward momentum, showing how violence and technology can be a double-edged sword that hurts the one who wields it.

**Bevis Pod** – Bevis Pod is a convict who is sentenced to perform hard labor in London's lower part: the Gut. But after Pod accidentally witnesses an exchange between Hester Shaw and Thaddeus Valentine, Katherine Valentine seeks Pod out, hoping he has information. Although Pod is reluctant to cause trouble at first, eventually he opens up to Katherine, and they become friends. As Pod reveals more about himself to Katherine, he proves that he isn't as timid as he first seemed. Pod has a lot of scientific knowledge and is brave in times of crisis. Ultimately, Pod sacrifices his own life to save Katherine, proving that a person can rise above their circumstances and that a person's low social status (like Pod's status as a prisoner in the Gut) doesn't have to define them.

**Chudleigh Pomeroy** – Chudleigh Pomeroy is Tom's boss at the Museum of Natural History in London. He can be a strict boss, punishing Tom for being late or daring to venture outside the Museum when he should be on duty. But the end of the story reveals that when times get tough and the Engineers attempt to take over the city, Pomeroy is willing to fight back with the

other Historians. In particular, he and the other Museum workers try to stall the Engineers long enough for Katherine and Pod to disable the deadly MEDUSA weapon. Pomeroy represents how people show their true nature in times of crisis.

**Dog** – Dog is Katherine’s pet wolf. Valentine found him as a cub and shot his mother but didn’t have the heart to kill him, mirroring how Valentine killed Pandora Shaw but didn’t kill her daughter, Hester. Dog’s wild nature reveals that Katherine is not quite the typical high-society London girl that she appears to be.

**Pandora Shaw** – Pandora Shaw is the mother of Hester Shaw. She used to be Thaddeus Valentine’s assistant, and it’s possible they were lovers and that Hester is Valentine’s daughter, but when Pandora finds the super-weapon MEDUSA, Valentine murders her and her husband to take it. Pandora’s death is what causes Hester to set off on her revenge journey in the first place.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Captain Khora** – Captain Khora is an aviator who captains a gunship for the Anti-Traction League. He is a friend of Miss Fang’s who helps Tom realize that people in the League can be kind and generous, despite what he’s heard about the League in London.

**Herbert Melliphant** – Herbert Melliphant is a bullying Historian apprentice who uses words rather than physical force, often in an attempt to impress fellow Historian Clytie Potts. Melliphant contributes to the destruction of London by snitching to Lord Mayor Crome about Katherine and Pod’s plan to stop MEDUSA.

**Clyde “Clytie” Potts** – Clytie Potts is a pretty Historian girl who seems to like Tom.

**Nikolas Quirke** – Nikolas Quirke is the historical figure who first turned London into a Traction City that can move. Although he died long ago, he survives in statues and in expressions that characters sometimes say (like “By Quirke!”).

**Chrysler Peavey** – Chrysler Peavey is the captain of a pirate suburb. He takes an interest in Tom because Tom’s fancy London accent allows Peavey to live out his own fantasies of being more respectable.

**Orme Wreyland** – Orme Wreyland is the mayor of a small townlet called Speedwell who seems at first to help Tom and Hester, but who really drugs them in order to sell them into slavery.

**Mungo** – Mungo is the pirate who kills his former boss, Chrysler Peavey. Shortly afterwards, Shrike kills Mungo.

**Dr. Evadne Twix** – Dr. Twix is one of Crome’s Engineers who studies Shrike to learn how to make more Stalkers like him.

**Governor Ermene Khan** – Governor Khan is the leader of

Batmunkh Gompa, an important settlement in the Anti-Traction League.

## TERMS

**MEDUSA** – MEDUSA is a giant, computer-controlled laser that is about as powerful as an atomic bomb, able to destroy entire cities. Its name comes from the mythological figure Medusa, who could turn people to stone with a single glance. If the name is an acronym, it doesn’t get defined in the novel, although the “USA” in its name seems to hint at its origin in the United States (which, in the story’s timeline, is an extinct empire from several centuries ago).



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



## SOCIAL CLASS

The world of Philip Reeve’s *Mortal Engines* has strictly defined social classes. Much of the story takes place in the Traction City of London, where people live in different Tiers based on their social class. Class also plays a role in “Municipal Darwinism,” where the big urban predator cities like London have an advantage against smaller rural and suburban prey cities, consuming them to take their resources—and where wandering scavengers rank below even prey cities, struggling to survive on scraps. The various class distinctions in the book all serve the same function, benefitting the people in the higher classes and giving them a way to control the people in the lower classes. Crome, for example, keeps his position at the top as Lord Mayor of London by sending anyone who opposes him into the prison labor camps in the Gut, at the very bottom of London’s social hierarchy.

But while social class defines many aspects of the lives of the characters, it doesn’t necessarily reflect a character’s personality or morals. While some upper-class characters like Katherine are kind and caring, most are more like her father, Thaddeus Valentine, who is the most esteemed Historian in London, and yet is willing to kill anyone who gets in his way—even Hester Shaw, who might be his own daughter. On the other hand, Bevis Pod is a lowly prisoner in the Gut who seems simple-minded when Katherine first meets him, but he eventually reveals himself to be surprisingly good at science. Both Valentine and Pod claim to want to protect Katherine, but while the lower-class Pod actually gives his life to save her, Valentine is the one who ends up accidentally killing his



daughter. With a couple of exceptions (such as the small-town slave-trader Orme Wreyland), the lower-class characters tend to act more nobly than the actual nobles. *Mortal Engines* explores the arbitrary nature of class systems, generally depicting the upper class as hypocrites who did nothing to deserve their lofty positions and depicting the lower class more sympathetically as victims of an unjust system.



### SACRIFICE

Near the beginning of Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines*, Hester Shaw attempts to assassinate Thaddeus Valentine for killing her parents, willing to give up her own life for a chance to end his. This commitment to her ideals—even at the expense of her own life—defines Hester's character, and it similarly motivates other heroic characters in the story, like Bevis Pod, Miss Fang, and Katherine. Each of these characters dies in the process of sacrificing themselves, either for a cause or to save another person's life. By spending time with Hester and the others, Tom too learns the value of sacrifice over the course of the book, putting his own life at risk to rescue Hester from burning London, even after she tells him to let her die.

But while sacrifice is often a heroic gesture, it can also be morally ambiguous. Shrike, for example, voluntarily submits to painful experiments by the Engineers, all so that he can make Hester Resurrected like him. Although he cares for Hester, he doesn't consider whether she even wants to be Resurrected (which involves dying first), making his sacrifice selfish. Similarly, Valentine dedicates himself to serving Crome so that people will treat his daughter Katherine like a lady, but this causes him to abandon his own morals, murdering Pandora Shaw and helping Crome get his hands on the deadly weapon MEDUSA. In the end, Valentine feels so guilty for his decisions that he stays in London as MEDUSA destroys it, sacrificing his own life but accomplishing nothing in the process. *Mortal Engines* portrays how true heroes will sacrifice themselves for a greater cause when necessary, but it also suggests that not all sacrifices are heroic, especially when those sacrifices have selfish goals or allow people to escape the consequences of their actions.



### DANGERS OF TECHNOLOGY

Philip Reeve's *Mortal Engines* takes place in a far-future world where humanity destroyed civilization as it currently existed in a conflict known as the Sixty Minute War, then developed new technology from scratch in the centuries after the war. Although the future London is an engineering marvel—a Traction City that can travel at speeds of 100 miles per hour—the technology in the story also has a dark side. Crome, the Lord Mayor of London, wants to get his hands on MEDUSA, a powerful weapon from

the past that can level cities like an atom bomb. As leader of the city's Engineering Guild, Crome rarely considers the moral implications of technology, using London's superior size to gobble up smaller towns and having his Engineers research how to make zombified super-soldiers called Stalkers that will eventually terrorize London's own residents.

Not all technology in the book is evil. Miss Fang, for instance, escapes slavery by using her ingenuity to improvise an airship from materials she scavenges. The defensive Shield-Wall also helps protect people in the Anti-Traction League from the aggression of Traction Cities like London. But in general, more advanced technology leads to deadlier warfare. The book ends with Crome attempting to use MEDUSA against the Shield-Wall but accidentally destroying all of London in the process, showing how the more powerful technology gets, the costlier a glitch can be. While *Mortal Engines* doesn't demonize all technology, it does portray how technological "advancement" can make people's lives worse, increasing levels of violence and raising the dangers associated with inevitable malfunctions.



### THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

Tom, the main character of *Mortal Engines*, starts the story as an Apprentice Historian at the Museum of Natural History in a futuristic steampunk version of London. While members of the Engineering Guild, like Lord Mayor Crome, only care about excavating weapons technology from the past, the members of the History Guild care more about culture, extinct animals, and nonviolent technology. The Guild of Historians and the Guild of Engineers are the two most important Guilds for the story, representing the past and the future, respectively. The London that Tom lives in clearly values the Engineers more—they have their own impressive Guild building, and at one point the Engineers even take relics from the museum to burn in order to fuel London's movement. But the Engineers' focus on the future is short-sighted, and by ignoring the past example of the Sixty Minute War (a catastrophe that decimated old civilizations), Crome repeats the same mistakes as the old civilizations, accidentally destroying London when he tries to activate the ancient super-weapon MEDUSA.

The members of the Guild of Historians aren't always heroic. Beyond their corrupt and murderous leader, Thaddeus Valentine, even regular Historians play a role in the cruel practice of Municipal Darwinism, salvaging the remains of prey cities that London devours. In many ways, the fictional Historians struggle with the same problems as real curators and archaeologists, who want to preserve the past for future generations but who, particularly during the height of colonialism, have sometimes benefitted from violence and dealt with relics obtained by force. Some of the Historians also get too attached to their work, worrying about artifacts and relics while forgetting about human lives. In the end, however, even

the stern Chudleigh Pomeroy is willing to risk his life by fighting Engineers to buy Katherine time to attempt to stop MEDUSA. This shows that despite the Historians' shortcomings, they remain a necessary counterbalance to the relentless Engineers, who only focus on forward movement. *Mortal Engines* imagines a future world where people fail to learn from the past and repeat the same mistakes, suggesting that preserving the past and learning from history are both important steps for ensuring a better future.



### PREJUDICE AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

*Mortal Engines* is full of characters whose external appearances hide their inner nature. The most noteworthy example of this is Hester Shaw, who

has a massive **scar** on her face and is missing an eye. Because she is not traditionally beautiful, some characters assume that she is evil, as Tom does when he first sees her. He instinctively tries to stop Hester from attacking Thaddeus Valentine, who has a dashing appearance and a high reputation in London. As it turns out, however, Hester is correct about Valentine: he is a murderer who personally killed Hester's family and is willing to help kill many more with the super-weapon MEDUSA. Despite only having one eye, Hester can see people's true natures better than Tom can, and despite not looking like a princess, she is nevertheless the hero of the story.

Over the course of the story, Tom has to confront many of the other prejudices that he picked up from living in London. At the beginning, he believes that London is a splendid mechanical marvel, but when he finally sees his city from the outside, he realizes that it's ugly and not so different from any other city. Similarly, he believes at the beginning that the people from the Anti-Traction League, who live on the other side of the **shield wall**, are backwards and uncivilized. But when he sees the settlement of Batmunkh Gompa up close and gets to meet Anti-Tractionists like Miss Fang and Captain Khora, he realizes that they're people too and that, in fact, their opposition to London seems to be justified. *Mortal Engines* explores how first impressions can be misleading, but it also explores how exposure to new people and places can help a person overcome initial prejudices and see beyond superficial appearances.



### FRIENDSHIP

Like many young adult novels, *Mortal Engines* centers on the power of friendship. At the heart of the story is the friendship (and perhaps later romance) between Tom Natsworthy and Hester Shaw. Running parallel to this friendship is a similar one between Katherine Valentine and Bevis Pod. Both of these friendships involve people from very different backgrounds: Tom and especially Katherine are both part of London's privileged upper class, but Hester is a scavenger from outside London and Pod is a

convict-worker in the Gut (the very lowest part of London). In fact, however, these differences become strengths in their respective friendships, helping all of these characters survive longer in the dangerous post-apocalyptic world they live in. Tom's caution and level-headed thinking balance out Hester's more impulsive and decisive actions, while Katherine's leadership abilities complement Pod's practical knowledge. *Mortal Engines* shows that not only do opposites attract; they can also help create balanced relationships in which people learn to trust and rely on each other, overcoming their weaknesses in the process.



### SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### SHIELD-WALL

The Shield-Wall divides the world of *Mortal Engines* in two and symbolizes the difference between the aggressive colonizers in London and the more peaceful Anti-Traction League. The Wall symbolizes stability and the defensive nature of the Anti-Traction League. Unlike London and other predator cities, the members of the Anti-Traction League don't need to "eat" others to survive. This doesn't mean that the League is full of pacifists—spies like Anna Fang are willing to use violent tactics, and settlements like Batmunkh Gompa have extensive fleets of combat airships. Nevertheless, the Wall suggests that these settlements would prefer to live in peace and have only adapted to avoid being destroyed by big cities like London. While London attempts to destroy the Shield-Wall and seems to have exactly the right weapon to do it with MEDUSA, ultimately this effort fails and London ends up destroying itself instead. This suggests that the more sustainable, peaceful lifestyle that the Shield-Wall represents is ultimately more durable than the fast and dangerous lifestyle of London.



### SCAR

Hester Shaw's facial scar symbolizes how sometimes a person can look like a "monster" (a word Hester uses to describe herself) on the surface, but actually be kinder and braver than people who look more conventionally beautiful. The scar also symbolizes the dark side of Thaddeus Valentine, who looks like a dashing hero on the surface, but who gave Hester that scar and who is willing to resort to murder to get what he wants. Hester lost one of her eyes when she got the scar, but in spite of that, she is often better than Tom at seeing people's true nature, since Tom continues to believe in Valentine's goodness even after

Valentine attempts to murder him. The trauma of her parents' murder is so central to Hester that it's visible on her face, and this helps explain why she is so eager to exact revenge on Valentine. By spending time with the scarred Hester, Tom realizes that superficial beauty doesn't count for much and that true friendship and love are more important than outward appearance.





## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scholastic Press edition of *Mortal Engines* published in 2017.

### Chapter 1 Quotes

☝ It was a dark, blustery afternoon in spring, and the city of London was chasing a small mining town across the dried-out bed of the old North Sea.

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 3

#### Explanation and Analysis

This quote is the first line of the novel. Rather than describe a character, it focuses on the setting, which is an important part of a fantasy/science-fiction novel like *Mortal Engines*. At first the image is surreal: it seems impossible for a city like London to be chasing another one, since cities typically don't move. The opening imagery is supposed to be surprising and jarring, but only for a little while, because the narration soon describes how London is a Traction City that has enormous treads on it like a tank. The opening scene—of London chasing a smaller town like a predator—immediately establishes some of the themes, in particular the divide between urban and rural, which is itself a reflection of the sharp class divide in the world of the novel. The opening passage also hints at the later idea of Municipal Darwinism, showing how the cities in the story live in an eat-or-be-eaten kind of world, and how many of the characters have internalized this idea for themselves.

### Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ Thaddeus Valentine was Tom's hero: a former scavenger who had risen to become London's most famous archaeologist—and also its Head Historian, much to the envy and disgust of people like Pomeroy. Tom kept a picture of him tacked to the dormitory wall above his bunk, and he had read his books, *Adventures of a Practical Historian* and *America Deserta—Across the Dead Continent with Gun, Camera and Airship*, until he knew them by heart.

**Related Characters:** Tom Natsworthy, Thaddeus Valentine, Chudleigh Pomeroy

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 15

#### Explanation and Analysis


This passage introduces the character of Thaddeus Valentine, who goes on to become one of the main villains of the story but who appears at first to be a hero. Valentine's books suggest that he is a romantic adventurer. The setting of *Mortal Engines* may be the distant future, but it also takes inspiration from the 19th century, and Valentine seems to be an explorer in the same mold as famous 19th-century explorers like Henry Morton Stanley. But just as these real-life explorers often had a dark side (due to their connections to colonialism that led to the exploitation of places they explored), Valentine also has a dark side that his shining reputation helps hide. In the end, it turns out that Pomeroy is right to hate Valentine, who is willing to kill in order to get what he wants, while Pomeroy himself is willing to sacrifice his life to help others. Additionally, the titles of Valentine's books help fill out the world-building by noting that in this future world, the United States no longer exists.

### Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ "Ask him!" she screamed. "Ask him what he did to Hester Shaw!"

**Related Characters:** Hester Shaw (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Thaddeus Valentine

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 27

#### Explanation and Analysis

This dramatic scene comes shortly after a mysterious scavenger girl named Hester Shaw attempts to assassinate Thaddeus Valentine, but Tom intervenes. In Tom's eyes, what he did was heroic. Valentine is the well-respected hero of the Guild of Historians, while Hester is an unknown girl from outside London whose heavy facial scarring makes her look like a villain to Tom (who expects all heroes to look as dashing as Valentine).

Despite only having one eye (due to her scar), Hester nevertheless sees Valentine's true nature more clearly than Tom does. This passage is important because it's the first time that someone asks Tom to question the life he lives in London. At first, Tom resists change, dismissing Hester as a deluded scavenger. But shortly after this passage, when Tom mentions Hester to Valentine and Valentine responds by attempting to murder Tom, Tom realizes that Hester might have had a point after all. And so, this passage represents the start of Tom's long journey to coming of age and becoming a new, wiser, more mature person.

## Chapter 4 Quotes

☝☝ "The *law!*" she scoffed. "Valentine is the law in London. Isn't he the Lord Mayor's favourite? Isn't he the Head Historian? No, he'll kill me unless I kill him first."

**Related Characters:** Hester Shaw (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Thaddeus Valentine, Magnus Crome

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 33

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote by Hester Shaw comes after she and Tom are forced to travel together, since they're both heading back towards London and the Hunting Ground can be dangerous to navigate alone. This passage captures how Tom and Hester have different viewpoints, particularly at this early stage of the novel.

The disagreement between Hester and Tom is deeper than simply the issue of whether Valentine is a hero or a villain. At the heart of it is Tom's belief that the world is a fundamentally just place and that he can trust a legal system like London's to always do the right thing. By contrast, Hester has lived as an outsider for so long that she is skeptical of justice systems like London's which she feels can't be trusted. Ultimately, the events of the novel will prove that Tom is naïve—that London truly is a place where wicked people like Valentine can commit murder without

suffering any consequences. Nevertheless, Hester also changes from her time with Tom, learning to soften some of her cynical views in order to rely more on others.

## Chapter 5 Quotes

☝☝ Magnus Crome had been ruler of London for nearly twenty years, but he still didn't look like a Lord Mayor. The Lord Mayors in Katherine's history books were chubby, merry, red-faced men, but Crome was as thin as an old crow, and twice as gloomy.

**Related Characters:** Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw, Thaddeus Valentine, Katherine Valentine, Magnus Crome

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 37

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes Katherine's impression of Lord Mayor Magnus Crome when he comes to visit her father, Thaddeus Valentine. Valentine has just attempted to murder Tom by throwing him down a trash chute, but as far as Katherine knows, her father is still a good man and Tom's disappearance is Hester's fault. Nevertheless, while Katherine can't yet see her father's flaws, she has a much easier time seeing the flaws in her father's boss, Crome.


Crome's thin physique compared to past mayors suggests that London has fallen on hard times. The problem isn't necessarily what Crome himself has done—it's that the merry, decadent lifestyles of the past mayors weren't sustainable, and now it's Crome and the current generation of Londoners that have to face the consequences. Crome's thinness perhaps also symbolizes his inability to be satisfied—that no matter how many cities London eats or how much power Crome himself attains, Crome will always stay thin, ready to consume even more.

## Chapter 7 Quotes

☝☝ "Mr Shrike!" says Crome, sounding almost cheery. "How are we today? I hope you were not asleep?"

"I DO NOT SLEEP," replies a voice from the darkness. It is a horrible voice, sharp as the squeal of rusty cogs.

**Related Characters:** Shrike, Magnus Crome (speaker), Hester Shaw

**Related Themes:** 



**Page Number:** 54

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage introduces Shrike, a Resurrected Man (also called a Stalker) who is a cyborg with the brain of a long-dead soldier in him. Shrike begins as a mysterious character, and so this passage reveals details of him slowly. In fact, Shrike's introduction in the text doesn't mention much about his physical appearance or even about what sort of creature he is. Shrike starts out as just a voice in the darkness, a menacing, single-minded force that doesn't even need to sleep. Shrike's name comes from a type of predatory bird, and this reflects the way that he focuses on his mission, while also providing a parallel with the city of London, which itself acts like a predatory animal.

By contrast, Crome's jovial tone shows that he doesn't seem bothered by Shrike's menacing nature. Crome doesn't consider the consequences of working with a deadly hunter like Shrike, and while Shrike himself doesn't end up causing problems for Crome, Crome's carelessness will lead him to put all of London at risk later on.

## Chapter 8 Quotes

☞ “Yes, I know, and I'm terribly sorry about it, but what can I do?” said Wreyland sadly. “Times are hard, you know.”

**Related Characters:** Orme Wreyland (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw, Thaddeus Valentine, Magnus Crome

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 62

### Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Orme Wreyland apologizes to Tom and Hester for drugging them to knock them out, then locking them up to sell them into slavery. Wreyland is the mayor of a small town called Speedwell, and he is one of the first people (other than Hester) that Tom meets outside of London. Like Thaddeus Valentine, Orme Wreyland appears to be a kind, helpful person on the surface, but in reality, he is ruthless and willing to exploit people around him. Witnessing Wreyland's deception helps Tom come closer to accepting that his beliefs about Valentine and about London in general are wrong.

While Wreyland's actions aren't sympathetic, his motivations are at least understandable. Unlike Crome, who is motivated by greed and pride, Wreyland is just trying to

survive—and is willing to do whatever it takes to do so. Nevertheless, Wreyland's difficult situation doesn't excuse what he does to Tom and Hester.


## Chapter 9 Quotes

☞ “It's made of junk!” he gasped.

“Junk?” laughed Miss Fang. “Why, the *Jenny Haniver* is built from bits of the finest airships that ever flew! An envelope of silicon-silk from a Shan Guo clipper, twin Jeunet-Carot aero-engines off a Paris gunship, the reinforced gas-cells of a Spitzbergen war-balloon... It's amazing what you can find in the scrapyards...”

**Related Characters:** Tom Natsworthy, Miss Anna Fang (speaker), Hester Shaw

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 71

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes Tom's reaction upon seeing the *Jenny Haniver*. The *Jenny Haniver* is the ship of Miss Anna Fang, an aviator that Tom and Hester meet in Airhaven when they are trying to book a trip to London (since neither of them can fly themselves). Tom's description of the airship as junk reflects his comparatively privileged upbringing in London, where he was used to seeing nice new things. But Miss Fang sees her ship as a combination of some of the best ships in the world, offering a perspective on the ship that is the exact opposite of Tom's.

In some ways, the ship is like Hester Shaw—it looks like “junk” and Hester's scar makes her look like “a monster,” but each reveals surprising hidden depth. Tom will learn to value the *Jenny Haniver* over the course of his journey, just as he will learn to see beyond Hester's external appearance and appreciate her as a person.

## Chapter 12 Quotes

☞ “I WORK FOR THE LORD MAYOR OF LONDON NOW,” said Shrike. “HE HAS SENT ME TO KILL YOU.”

Tom whimpered again. Hester gave a brittle little laugh. “But ... you won't do it, will you, Shrike? You wouldn't kill me?”

“YES,” said Shrike flatly, still staring down at her.

**Related Characters:** Hester Shaw, Shrike (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Thaddeus Valentine, Magnus Crome

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 91

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the moment when Shrike catches up with Hester, and then Hester surprisingly steps forward to speak with Shrike as if she knows him. The passage seems strange at first, and Hester seems to be acting recklessly, but as Hester explains later, she actually knows Shrike and even used to live with him.

Despite Shrike's history with Hester, he remains willing to kill her. Shrike is literally part machine, but his commitment to following Crome's orders shows how ideology can make someone even more machine-like, turning against people they used to know. As much as Shrike tries to turn off his emotions and become Crome's perfect bounty hunter, his actions over the course of the book show that he nevertheless remains conflicted about his feelings toward Hester. Just like with Valentine, Crome promised Shrike that he could have whatever he wanted, but Shrike and Valentine both discover that the cost of achieving their goals is higher than they ever expected.

## Chapter 13 Quotes

☝☝ "We don't stand a chance against Shrike in the air," she explained. "Hopefully on the ground I can outwit him."

**Related Characters:** Hester Shaw (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Shrike

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 102

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the moment when Hester and Tom are fleeing from Shrike in Airhaven on a hot-air balloon that they stole. Hester knows that Shrike will have the advantage in the sky (he's named after a predatory bird, after all), so Hester decides to head back toward the mud, where she'll at least be more familiar with her surroundings.

Hester's choice here shows how she has managed to survive for so long on her own by relying on tricks and strategy rather than trying to fight people with brute force. Her choice also reflects her humble personality, since unlike the greedy Crome in the Top Tier of London, Hester feels



most at home in the dirt, not even in a city. As it turns out, Hester's trick doesn't even fool Shrike, but he lets her have some extra time anyway because he admires her style. This hints that, once again, beneath Shrike's scary, rigid exterior, a part of him may still be fond of Hester.

## Chapter 15 Quotes

☝☝ Above it flapped a black and white flag; a grinning skull and two crossed bones.

"Great Quirke!" gasped Tom. "This is a pirate suburb!"

**Related Characters:** Tom Natsworthy (speaker), Nikolas Quirke, Chrysler Peavey

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 118

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the moment when Tom realizes that in his attempt to escape Shrike with Hester, they have accidentally ended up in a pirate suburb. "Great Quirke!" is a common expression that many characters (mostly Londoners) use in the story. It suggests that Nikolas Quirke (who first turned London into a Traction City) is like a god to the people of London, since the meaning of "Great Quirke!" is similar to the meaning of "By God!" (which, like many old interjections, was originally a religious oath). This ties into the overall theme of technology replacing the role of religion in future London, with the weapon MEDUSA being housed inside St. Paul's.

With the pirate suburb, Reeve combines a familiar element of adventure stories (pirates) with the new *Mortal Engines* setting. The black-and-white skull on the pirates' Jolly Roger flag shows that Reeve is willing to take familiar ideas and images and then blend them into a new context.

## Chapter 16 Quotes

☝☝ "What does she mean, K Division?" asked Katherine.

**Related Characters:** Katherine Valentine (speaker), Thaddeus Valentine, Bevis Pod

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 126

### Explanation and Analysis



This quote comes from Katherine's first visit to the Gut, where she meets the convict-worker Bevis Pod, another worker who's seriously sick, and some supervisors who respect Katherine's authority as Valentine's daughter but who don't like her intruding on their territory. When the sick worker near Pod dies, one of the supervisors mentions K Division, which turns out to be a division where dead workers go to undergo further experimentation. The fact that the Gut supervisors have dedicated slang for when people die suggests that death is a frequent occurrence in the Gut and that supervisors expect it from the convicts.

Seeing the Gut firsthand and learning about the K Division helps Katherine realize how sheltered her life on Tier One is. Although it takes her a long time to see the connection between her father's work and atrocities like K Division, Katherine's visit to the Gut nevertheless kicks off a journey of discovery for her, as she keeps taking bolder and bolder chances in an attempt to find out the truth.

## Chapter 17 Quotes

☝☝ "I want Tunbridge Wheels to turn into a city, a proper big city wiv me as Lord Mayor, sumfink I can 'and down to me sprogs. And you Tommy, I want you to tell me how a city ought to be, and teach me manners. ETTYKET, like. So I can hob nob wiv' other Lord Mayors and not 'ave them laugh at me behind my back."

**Related Characters:** Chrysler Peavey (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Magnus Crome

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 137

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote from the mayor of the pirate suburb Tunbridge Wheels, Chrysler Peavey, explains Peavey's surprising reason for letting Tom travel with him instead of forcing him to work in the slave labor pits in the lower part of his suburb. Peavey's strong accent shows that he is not a typical London gentleman, but he has dreams of becoming a powerful leader just like Crome. Because Peavey doesn't really understand what it's like to be a gentleman, however, he humorously assumes that Tom is more refined than he actually is.

At first Tom is confused and perhaps even amused by Peavey. But as Tom spends more time with Peavey and the pirates, he learns that perhaps London isn't so different from Peavey's pirates after all. Tom witnesses Municipal


Darwinism firsthand and on a smaller scale as he watches Tunbridge Wheels eat smaller settlements. This helps Tom to realize that despite the refined outer appearance of men like Crome, their politeness simply disguises violence that isn't so different from Peavey's—meaning that Peavey's dream to be like a mayor perhaps isn't so ridiculous after all.

## Chapter 21 Quotes

☝☝ "Nor will we have to go chasing after scraps like Salthook," Crome continued. "In another week London will be within range of Batmunkh Gompa, the Shield-Wall. For a thousand years the Anti-Traction League has cowered behind it, holding out against the tide of history. MEDUSA will destroy it at a single stroke."

**Related Characters:** Magnus Crome (speaker)

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 174

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from a public speech Crome gives when he describes London's plan to expand its hunting area by breaking through the formidable Shield-Wall with the super-weapon MEDUSA. The Shield-Wall symbolizes the divide between Traction Cities like London and the stationary settlements of the Anti-Traction League. Notably, the members of the Anti-Traction League don't head out hunting and antagonizing other cities. Their wall suggests that their focus is on protecting and maintaining their own settlements rather than attacking others, contrasting with the design of London, where the whole city resembles a tank.

Crome's language about swiftly wiping out an inferior enemy has strong traces of fascism in it, suggesting that he is meant to be read as a wholly evil character—and yet most of London is still willing to go along with him. Crome's hyperbolic language also suggests a total confidence in his own abilities and perhaps even recklessness, as he places his trust in new technology without considering the consequences.

## Chapter 23 Quotes

☝☝ “No!” Katherine heard herself say. “Oh, no, no, no!” She started to run across the garden, staring towards the lightning-flecked cloud which wreathed the wreckage of the conurbation. From Circle Park and all the observation platforms came the sound of wordless voices, and she thought at first that they were crying out in horror, the way she wanted to—but no; they were cheering, cheering, cheering.

**Related Characters:** Katherine Valentine (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Magnus Crome

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 189

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the moment after Crome conducts the first test of MEDUSA by using it to destroy the Panzerstadt-Bayreuth (a rival city that seems to be German). The speed of the destruction, combined with the dramatic flash of light, make it clear that while MEDUSA seems to be some sort of laser, it also has a strong resemblance to an atomic bomb. Although Katherine doesn't know anyone in Panzerstadt-Bayreuth, she nevertheless feels sympathy for the sheer number of people who die in the MEDUSA blast. She is surprised, however, to find out that not everyone shares her reaction and that most people cheer the destruction of the rival city.

The crowds' enthusiasm for destruction demonstrates that the real problem with the city is much bigger than just Crome's leadership—it involves almost everyone in the city. The repetition of the word “cheering” three times at the end of this passage emphasizes just how widespread the positive reaction was, particularly from Katherine's perspective. Just as Tom has his own journey to rejecting his past life in London, Katherine goes on her own journey of self-discovery, and in this pivotal passage, she learns how different she is from most of the other people in her city.

## Chapter 24 Quotes

☝☝ “I may be no better than Valentine,” she went on, “but there is a difference between us. Valentine tried to kill you, and I want to keep you alive. So, will you come with me?”

**Related Characters:** Miss Anna Fang (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw, Thaddeus Valentine

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 197

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes shortly after Tom confronts Miss Fang about being an Anti-Tractionist spy who has killed people. Somewhat to Tom's surprise, Miss Fang doesn't try to deny killing anyone but instead makes the argument that everything she did was justified. She concludes that, even if she and Valentine are morally equivalent, she wants Tom alive and Valentine wants Tom dead, so that should be all Tom needs to know in order to decide whom to trust.


In many ways, Miss Fang's cynical yet pragmatic view of the world represents a more developed version of Hester's views that she's shared with Tom. Like Hester, Miss Fang also distrusts traditional institutions and prefers instead to take action on her own. Ultimately, Tom has no choice but to trust Miss Fang when she claims that her violent actions helped prevent even greater suffering. While Miss Fang's character remains morally gray, the positive nature of her character suggests that sometimes doing the right thing may involve making difficult choices that can look like the wrong thing.

## Chapter 26 Quotes

☝☝ “I try to be nice,” she said. “Nobody's ever made me feel they like me before, the way you do. So I try to be kind and smiley, like you want me to be, but then I catch sight of my reflection or I think of him and it all goes wrong and I can only think horrible things and scream at you and try and hurt you. I'm sorry.”

**Related Characters:** Hester Shaw (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Shrike

**Related Themes:**    

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 209

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage includes Hester Shaw's apology to Tom after she got mad at him earlier for killing Shrike (even though Tom saved Hester's life in the process). In her apology, Hester admits that she didn't really dislike Tom's actions—she just isn't used to people being nice to her and so she doesn't know how to react. Hester's isolated upbringing has made it hard for her to socialize with people around her. Although Tom himself is also an orphan, he

socialized with his peers in the Guild of Historians, as the early chapters of the book showed.

Hester also reveals that despite her brave exterior, she remains self-conscious about her scar and anything that reminds her of it (like her reflection in the mirror). As Hester gets to know Tom better, she feels more comfortable being vulnerable around him and less pressure to always appear strong (such as earlier in the book when she was trying to power through a limp).

## Chapter 28 Quotes

☞ And light burst down from above; the harsh beam of an airship's searchlight raking across the snow. The aviatrix reeled blindly backwards, and Valentine leaped up, snatching his sword, pulling her hard against him as he drove it home. For a moment the two of them stumbled together like drunken dancers at the end of a party, close enough to Tom's hiding place for him to see the bright blade push out through the back of Miss Fang's neck and hear her desperate, choking whisper: "Hester Shaw will find you. She will find you and—"

**Related Characters:** Miss Anna Fang (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw, Thaddeus Valentine

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 233

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes how, after Miss Anna Fang seemingly defeats Thaddeus Valentine in a sword fight, Valentine stalls for time, then uses a trick to kill Miss Fang instead. The death of the mentor figure is a common plot device in adventure stories, and Miss Fang certainly fulfilled that role for Tom and Hester, introducing them to the skies in the *Jenny Haniver* and introducing them to the people of the Anti-Traction League.

Valentine's victory over Miss Fang shows that he is willing to resort to whatever dirty tactics are necessary to win. Although Tom himself was already a victim of Valentine's deception, witnessing Valentine's trickery from a distance helps Tom understand how truly two-faced Valentine can be, strengthening Tom's resolve to stop London and MEDUSA. While some elements of *Mortal Engines* can be humorous or satirical, the death of Miss Fang is a straightforward, classic example of a melodramatic scene that raises the stakes right before the final confrontation.

## Chapter 30 Quotes

☞ He said, "You must understand, Kate, I did it for you..."

**Related Characters:** Thaddeus Valentine (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw, Katherine Valentine, Miss Anna Fang, Magnus Crome, Pandora Shaw

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 242



### Explanation and Analysis

This quote is what Thaddeus Valentine says to his daughter Katherine after she accuses him of murdering several people, including Pandora Shaw (Hester's mother). Surprisingly, the tricky Valentine doesn't resort to lies like usual but instead confesses the truth to Katherine (or at least his version of it), hoping that he can convince her to see things his way. In many ways, Valentine's confession to Katherine mirrors Miss Fang's confession of her past murders to Tom—Miss Fang even admitted in her speech that she knows she's not so different from Valentine. But while Tom respects Miss Fang's decisions (even if he isn't sure he fully agrees with them), Katherine doesn't find her father's arguments convincing. This suggests that perhaps Valentine and Miss Fang are not so similar after all and that Valentine's actions and their justifications are less convincing. Although Valentine never fully repents of his past actions, he has a crisis of conscience in the last few chapters that suggests that his motivations are more complicated than Crome's and go beyond simple greed.

## Chapter 31 Quotes

☞ "So, Apprentice Melliphant, I gather you have something to tell us?"

**Related Characters:** Magnus Crome (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Katherine Valentine, Bevis Pod, Chudleigh Pomeroy, Herbert Melliphant, Clyde "Clytie" Potts

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 251

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage from the very end of Chapter 31 reveals that Melliphant, an apprentice who was previously a very minor character in the story, has just snitched to Lord Mayor Magnus Crome about Katherine and Pod's plan to stop MEDUSA, which will have major consequences during the




climax of the novel. Melliphant (whose name sounds like “elephant,” to signify his big eavesdropping ears) was always a bully, but he seemed like a harmless one, unable to impress Clytie Potts and unable to hurt Tom in any way that mattered. Nevertheless, his betrayal of Katherine and Pod shows that within Melliphant’s minor everyday cruelties, he also held the potential for an even deeper type of evil. During the end of the novel, a crisis forces all of the characters to show their true natures. While some, like Chudleigh Pomeroy, rise to the occasion, Melliphant demonstrates that some people will never be able to rise above their own petty and selfish desires, acting without concern for others.

## Chapter 32 Quotes

☝ She had come to think of Bevis Pod as a sweet, clumsy, rather useless person, someone who needed her to look after him, and she suspected that that was how the Historians all thought of him as well. But that afternoon she had begun to understand that he was really much cleverer than her.

**Related Characters:** Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw, Katherine Valentine, Bevis Pod

**Related Themes:**     

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 252

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes how, after seeing Bevis Pod among the Historians of the Museum rather than down in the Gut, Katherine realizes that she underestimated him. Many plotlines in the story run in parallel, and the growing relationship between Katherine and Pod resembles how the relationship between Tom and Hester has grown over the course of the novel. Although Pod doesn’t have any physical markings as dramatic as Hester’s scar, his low status as a convict in the Gut nevertheless set Katherine’s expectations for him low. Katherine always liked him, but initially it was more in a patronizing, pitying way. But Pod proves that, when given the opportunity, he’s actually very clever, demonstrating how London’s rigid class system holds lower-class people back and stops them from reaching their true potential. Katherine’s greater understanding of Pod, as well as her new respect for him, both help her to form a deeper relationship with him.

## Chapter 33 Quotes

☝ “I’ll be dead in twenty minutes, Tom,” she said. “Just get yourself safe away. Forget about me.”

“I’ll circle back…”

“I’ll be dead.”

“I’ll circle back anyway…”

**Related Characters:** Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw (speaker), Thaddeus Valentine, Miss Anna Fang

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 269

### Explanation and Analysis

The passage includes a brief argument between Hester and Tom as they prepare to approach London in the *Jenny Haniver* (which they acquired after the death of Miss Fang). Hester wants to take another shot at her original plan—to assassinate Valentine personally without worrying about the consequences, even accepting her own death if need be. But Tom refuses, insisting that he will turn back, making her feel a greater sense of obligation to stay alive, since he will be risking his own life on her behalf.

Tom and Hester’s return to London shows how much has changed since the last time they were both there. Now instead of stopping Hester’s assassination attempt, Tom has come along to help her. At the same time, Hester’s plan has also changed, and now instead of engaging in a desperate suicide run, she realizes that it’s worth trying to protect her own life too, instead of focusing solely on revenge.

## Chapter 35 Quotes

☝ Hester was stumbling backwards, lifting her bound hands to ward off Father’s blow, and Katherine flung herself between them so that suddenly it was she who was in his path, and his sword slid easily through her and she felt the hilt jar hard against her ribs.

**Related Characters:** Hester Shaw, Thaddeus Valentine, Katherine Valentine, Bevis Pod

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 286

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes the shocking moment when Valentine is about to kill Hester with his sword, but all of a

sudden Katherine leaps out from her hiding place, saving Hester's life but taking a blow from her father's sword in the process. Valentine himself is shocked, since he didn't realize Katherine was nearby. Katherine's actions show her selfless nature, and she may have been at least partly inspired by Pod's own sacrifice of his life for her.

As Valentine learns, one of the biggest consequences of violence is that it isn't always possible to aim or contain it. This concept will soon play out on a much bigger scale when the whole city of London, which cheered the first launch of MEDUSA, will learn the consequences of relying on such violent and unstable technology. This passage shows how the world of *Mortal Engines* can be cruel, with innocent characters like Katherine getting hurt, and also showing how all of Valentine's violent actions, which he justified for Katherine's sake, were ultimately for nothing.

## Chapter 36 Quotes

☝☝ He gently moves a stray strand which has blown into her mouth, and holds her close, and waits—and the storm-light breaks over them and they are a knot of fire, a rush of blazing gas, and gone: the shadows of their bones scattering into the brilliant sky.

**Related Characters:** Tom Natsworthy, Hester Shaw, Thaddeus Valentine, Katherine Valentine

**Related Themes:**     

**Page Number:** 293

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage describes Thaddeus Valentine as he holds his dead daughter Katherine and waits for MEDUSA to destroy London, all while Tom and Hester ride away in their airship, the *Jenny Haniver*. Tom and Hester seemed potentially willing to let Valentine onto their airship, but Valentine chose to stay behind, perhaps unable to live with the guilt of having killed his daughter Katherine. The scene around Valentine as he dies is apocalyptic, full of references to forces of nature like fire, storms, and lightning. This suggests that for all of London's technological prowess, it


was never any match for the even stronger forces of nature, and the city must now pay the consequences of putting its faith in technology instead. Once again, the imagery recalls a nuclear blast, with the shadows of Valentine and Katherine's bones resembling the so-called "nuclear shadows" of human forms at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The references to real-world violence suggest that despite being a fantasy story, *Mortal Engines* portrays dangers that also exist in the real world.

## Chapter 37 Quotes

☝☝ "But we're alive, and together, and we're going to be all right."

**Related Characters:** Hester Shaw (speaker), Tom Natsworthy, Thaddeus Valentine

**Related Themes:**      

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 296

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote by Hester Shaw is the last line of the novel. Despite the potentially bleak ending, with almost every remaining character except Tom and Hester presumably dying in MEDUSA's destruction of London, Hester's last line is optimistic. This is particularly noteworthy, since she is typically more pessimistic than Tom and since just a few chapters ago, she was willing to trade away her own life for one last chance to assassinate Valentine. Hester knows that the destruction of London is more difficult for Tom, partly because he lived there most of his life and partly because he feels responsible for shooting down Valentine's airship and starting the whole chain of events that led to MEDUSA misfiring. And so, she temporarily reverses their roles, insisting that the world is a fundamentally worthwhile place right when Tom is at his most cynical. And so, the final line of the story emphasizes the value not just of surviving in the face of adversity, but also of friendship and relying on other people.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## CHAPTER 1

One windy afternoon in spring, the Traction City of London goes hunting after a small mining town across a barren stretch of land that used to be the North Sea. Big cities like London can move around on tank-like tracks, and they eat up smaller, rural cities in a place known as the Hunting Ground. The mining town sees London coming and tries to flee.

At London's Museum of Natural History, a 15-year-old apprentice named Tom Natsworthy feels the city begin to move under him. He's lived in London his whole life and knows this feeling well. Tom's boss, Chudleigh Pomeroy, comes in and asks what's going on. Like all Guild members, Pomeroy has a Guild-mark on his forehead. Tom explains to Pomeroy that a chase has begun. Tom asks to go see the chase, but Pomeroy forbids him.

After Pomeroy leaves, however, Tom decides that since the museum is closed to the public, he'll go ahead and watch the chase anyway. As he slips out of the museum, he passes 35th-century ceramics and a 21st-century exhibit of the ancient gods Pluto and Mickey from the lost country of America. As Tom exits the museum, he goes from the street-level Tier Two of London to Tier One near the rooftops. There, he joins a crowd of people watching a camera at Tier Six, where an announcer describes the action. The announcer says London is moving toward the mining town of Salthook at a rate of 80 miles per hour.

*The opening lines of the book help establish its unusual setting. The tracks that London moves around on resemble the treads on a tank, recalling the World Wars when tanks moved around Europe. In this passage, London hunts a smaller rural mining town, metaphorically representing the conflict between urban and rural with violent imagery.*



*This novel follows the familiar pattern of many young adult fantasy novels, depicting the normal daily life of the protagonist before he is summoned to adventure. The story continues to slowly introduce new fantasy concepts, including Guilds. Guilds are associations of workers dating back to medieval times, but which take on even more significance in this future London, as shown by the fact that people get permanent markers of their Guild applied to their foreheads.*



*Mortal Engines is a "steampunk" novel. While steampunk often refers to alternate history versions of the 19th century with more advanced technology, the author establishes early that this book actually takes place in the distant future. The relics of Pluto and Mickey (popular Disney characters) in the museum are humorous, suggesting one of two possibilities: that the people of the distant future don't understand the artifacts they discover in America, or perhaps they do understand and have decided that Mickey (embodying entertainment and corporations) really must have been the most important "god" in America.*



Tom decides to go to an observation deck so he can watch the chase in person instead of on camera. He heads to Bloomsbury Park, which isn't a real park anymore but a place to produce food, mainly cabbage and algae. The crowd at the park is even bigger, and a fellow apprentice named Herbert Melliphant sees Tom and greets him. Melliphant cheers London on as it goes after the salt-mining town. Tom doesn't like Melliphant because he's a bully, albeit a subtle one who uses words instead of physical violence. Tom knows Melliphant is only talking to him because Melliphant wants to impress Clyde "Clytie" Potts, another Historian standing near them. Historians are one of the four Great Guilds that rule London.

As London approaches Salthook, airships of Salthook residents flee their city. Clytie is a more advanced Historian than Tom or Melliphant, so she seems bored by the hunt. Tom watches tiny people scurrying around down in Salthook and reminds himself that he shouldn't feel sorry for them, since it was the natural order for big cities like London to eat small towns like Salthook. This is also known as Municipal Darwinism. It's been this way ever since Nikolas Quirke made London the first Traction City. Soon, Salthook loses a wheel, slowing down, and the Jaws of London close around it.

People on the observation deck cheer the capture. Clytie invites Tom to a celebration party, which annoys Melliphant. Melliphant tries to explain that Tom is lower-class, with parents who lived on Tier Four until one day an accident called the Big Tilt killed both of them. Tom gets angry and hits Melliphant without thinking. But Melliphant is much bigger and hits back hard. Tom tries to run away, but as he does, he runs into Pomeroy.

## CHAPTER 2

Pomeroy lectures Tom about obedience and gives him extra chores. He sends him to the Gut where workers take apart the towns that London eats. Work in the Gut is grueling and some of the workers are convicts. Machines have already started tearing apart Salthook. Tom makes his way to the Historian warehouse. Salthook doesn't have much in the way of historical salvage, with no museum or library. When Tom makes it to the supervisor's office, he's surprised to see that the person on duty is Thaddeus Valentine, a famous archaeologist and the Head Historian. He is also Tom's personal hero.

*Many of the landmarks from real London show up in this future London, but as the cabbage and algae plots in Bloomsbury Park show, these landmarks have transformed to fit the new setting. The bully Melliphant cheers to London to devour the smaller town, suggesting that London itself may be the bully in the situation, although Tom himself hasn't reached this realization yet. Notably, Melliphant himself doesn't physically bully people, signifying how the way London eats other cities may not seem violent to the people in London.*



*"Municipal Darwinism" is a parody of the real 19th- and early 20th-century concept of "Social Darwinism," which claimed to apply scientific Darwinian ideas to human populations, but which was more often just an excuse for racist beliefs like eugenics and colonialism. The term Municipal Darwinism makes the whole process sound less violent, and Tom's distance from the action (the people of Salthook look like little ants to him) help him justify London's actions.*



*Earlier parts of the book have hinted at a rigid class system in London (for example, the Guild-Mark that Pomeroy has but Tom doesn't yet). The reference to Tiers suggests that class is so important to future London that it literally defines the layout of the city, with people of lower social classes forced to live in the lower tiers.*



*The Gut extends the metaphor that London is a living creature that needs to eat and digest food (even though that's not actually the case, and in fact London is just all machinery). The presence of convict-workers in the Gut suggests that, while Tom might not be at the very top of London society, there are also people who fall far below him in the social ranks.*



Tom met Valentine a couple years ago when Tom won an essay contest. To Tom's surprise, Valentine still remembers him. Valentine seems amused by Tom's black eye (from the fight with Melliphant). He asks Tom about his background and Tom tells about how his parents died in the Big Tilt when he was so young that he barely remembers them. Valentine tells him his parents were talented Historians.

Just then a large wolf walks into the office, scaring Tom. A girl tells the wolf to behave, and it becomes meek. She is Katherine, Valentine's daughter, and the wolf is Dog, a creature that Valentine brought back from an expedition. Dog likes Tom, and Katherine says this is a good sign. Valentine tells Tom that they just have a few things to look at, but Tom should be able to leave the Gut soon.

Valentine, Tom, Dog, and Katherine all go down several sets of stairs to the Digestion Yards. As they survey the remains of Salthook, Tom hopes to find something impressive in the wreckage to impress Valentine and Katherine. He finds a "seedy" (CD) that the Ancients used to store information. According to Valentine, Ancients had electronic machines much more advanced than anything that exists in the current era, although they didn't have Traction Cities.

There are also some scavengers who came aboard when London caught Salthook. They live on land and move around on foot, a lifestyle that horrifies Tom. They wear ragged clothes as they search for old technology to scavenge. One of the scavengers is a girl in a black head-scarf. She says she has something interesting for Valentine, then all of a sudden, she pulls out a knife.

## CHAPTER 3

Just in time, Tom stops the scavenger girl from stabbing Valentine in the heart. She squirms away from Tom and flees, while Valentine orders someone to catch her. Tom goes after her as she heads for the furnace district. When she hesitates at an intersection, Tom reaches out and manages to pull off her pack. He gets a look at her face and sees that her face has a giant **scar** and that she only has one eye. She asks Tom why he didn't let her kill Valentine. When Tom protests that Valentine is a kind man, the girl says he should ask Valentine what he did to Hester Shaw. With that, the girl (who seems to be Hester Shaw herself) jumps down a garbage chute.

*Tom's initial impression of Valentine is that he's kind and thoughtful. Valentine takes the time to remember Tom, even though Tom himself is much less important in the city and in the Historian Guild than Valentine is. For now, that seems to confirm Tom's impression of Valentine.*



*Although Katherine seems like a refined young lady, being the daughter of the city's most distinguished historian, her connection to the wild creature Dog suggests that she might not be exactly who she appears to be on the surface.*



*Like the statues of Pluto and Mickey in the museum earlier, the CD is another relic from the past that the people of the future don't quite understand. This future London seems to be both more technologically advanced than the real world yet also behind in some ways. In particular, computers play less of a role in Traction Cities than readers might expect.*



*The scavengers show that the class system extends even beyond the limits of London, with people outside the city falling into their own category of people. As the action of the novel picks up, chapters will often end on cliffhangers, like here.*



*In fiction, outer physical deformities often symbolize an evil inner nature, but Mortal Engines subverts this idea. This passage plays with the stereotype that a character who is "ugly" on the outside will also be ugly on the inside, reflecting Tom's belief in this conventional way of thinking. But when Hester mentions that Valentine may have done something awful, this hints that perhaps appearances are misleading and Valentine is not as heroic as he seems on the surface.*





When Valentine catches up, he asks what happened to the girl, and Tom tells him that she's dead, even though it was too smoky to see what really happened to her. After some hesitation, he brings up how the girl mentioned her name was Hester Shaw. At this, Valentine just smiles sadly. All of a sudden, Valentine shocks Tom by pushing him down the garbage chute where Hester went.

*This passage captures Tom's conflicted feelings. On the one hand, he still doesn't trust Hester enough to believe her fully. On the other hand, something Hester said resonated with him, and he can't help asking Valentine about it. When Valentine pushes him, Tom learns very suddenly that perhaps Hester was right after all.*



## CHAPTER 4

Tom wakes up feeling achy. He seems to be lying in mud. Hester is there with him, and she's taken part of his shirt to treat a wound on her leg. Tom's angry that she took part of his shirt without asking, but Hester just says he should have let her kill Valentine and limps off.

*Tom's fall down the garbage chute is not just a literal fall but also a metaphorical sign of how abruptly he has just lost his old position in London society, banished to become an outcast.*



Although Tom doesn't like Hester, he doesn't want to be alone, so he follows her. He asks where she's going, and she says back to London. She complains it took her two years to find London on foot the first time. Tom starts to cry, and Hester gets angry at him, saying she didn't even cry when Valentine murdered her parents. Tom isn't sure if he believes her, but he offers to travel with her back to London. He feels that if Valentine has done anything wrong, the law will take care of it. Hester scoffs at this but allows Tom to join her anyway.

*Although Hester and Tom are different from each other and don't even like each other much, the harsh conditions outside London make it much smarter for them to stay together, showing how difficult situations often force people to cooperate. Hester reveals that she is more cynical than Tom, who still has faith in institutions like the legal system.*



## CHAPTER 5

The next morning, Katherine wakes up in Tier One of London, reflecting on how sad it is that Tom died while chasing Hester. She has never seen her father (Valentine) look as shaken as he did that day. She gets out of bed and goes to see Valentine, who is taking his coffee. They discuss Tom, and Valentine says they haven't found a body, meaning Tom likely drowned in mud or got crushed under London's tracks.

*This passage shows how sheltered Katherine is from the things her father does—she has no idea, for example, that Valentine pushed Tom and that it wasn't Hester who dragged Tom down the garbage chute. This lack of awareness connects to her privilege as a member of Tier One in London, the highest tier below the official government buildings on Top Tier.*



Valentine tells Katherine that the city's Lord Mayor (Magnus Crome) isn't happy about the assassin (Hester), so he's coming to visit Valentine personally. On the table next to Valentine's breakfast, Katherine happens to see an identification form and recoils when she notices the photo of a girl with a **scar** and one eye. Just then, there's a knock at the door, and a man announces that the Mayor has arrived.

*In spite of Katherine's naivety, she still catches glimpses of her father's darker side, like the identification photo of Hester on the table. Katherine begins to recognize that something unusual is happening, but like Tom, she's not ready to give up her old beliefs.*



Magnus Crome, the Lord Mayor of London for the past 20 years, comes into the house, looking thinner and gloomier than the previous mayors in Katherine's history books. Katherine doesn't like him, even though he's good to her father.

*The thinness of Crome compared to previous mayors symbolically suggests that London has fallen on rough times and that predators like the Traction City of London will eventually run out of prey.*



Katherine leaves the room but listens in by the door. In his cold voice, Crome tells Valentine that he thought Hester and her whole family had already been “dealt with.” Katherine can’t hear everything, but she does hear her father saying he doesn’t know how Hester escaped the first time, but she finally seems to be dead.

Crome scolds Valentine that unless he saw Hester dead there could be serious problems, especially if Hester tells another city that London has MEDUSA (a term that Katherine doesn’t recognize). Valentine volunteers to go search for Hester’s body, but Crome tells him he wants him to take his airship somewhere else. Kathrine goes back to her bedroom, unsure what to make of the conversation she just overheard.

*Katherine overhears a conversation that suggests pretty clearly that her father murdered Hester’s family and attempted to murder Hester, and yet because Katherine isn’t ready to hear this yet, she doesn’t allow herself to grasp Crome’s real meaning here.*



*MEDUSA is an important concept in the book, but it remains mysterious here, in part because the naïve Katherine doesn’t know what it is (even though Crome and Valentine do). This highlights how the book’s changes in perspective often focus on a specific character in order to heighten the suspense.*



## CHAPTER 6

Tom and Hester travel across the muddy Hunting Ground toward London, but the city keeps getting smaller. Hester curses Tom for making her lose her pack, which had food in it. When they pause in the afternoon, Hester scavenges some leaves and catches a frog to eat but doesn’t offer Tom anything.

Hester occasionally tells Tom about her life, including how her mother hated Traction Cities. Tom doesn’t agree with her but finds the stories much more interesting than silence. Hester says she was born on bare earth (as opposed to a Traction City) in a place that used to be greener than it currently is. She lived in a city called Dunroamin’ that used to be mobile, but over a hundred years ago, its people took off the wheels and engines.

According to Hester’s story, Dunroamin’ was peaceful until seven years ago, when Hester woke in the middle of the night and saw Valentine demanding that her mother give him MEDUSA. Valentine used to be her mother’s friend, but that night he looked frightening. When Hester’s mother refused, Valentine drew his sword and killed both of Hester’s parents and even her dogs. He attacked Hester too but left her for dead. Hester managed to escape Dunroamin’ on a boat her father owned, but she passed out on the water and woke up somewhere on the shore of the Hunting Ground.

Tom wonders aloud what MEDUSA might be. All Hester knows is that it’s a piece of old technology that her mother found somewhere and that it looks like an old, dented soccer ball. Tom feels conflicted: He wants to help Hester, but he doesn’t want to let her kill Valentine. They rest for the night, and Tom expects to reach London by the next evening.

*Hester’s willingness to eat frogs and leaves suggests that she has adapted more to the scavenger lifestyle and is willing to do whatever it takes to survive, even it’s unpleasant.*



*Although Hester and Tom are still far from friends, Hester begins opening up to Tom, showing how time spent together can help people to grow closer. Some places in the story have whimsically on-the-nose names, like Dunroamin’, whose name (like “done roaming”) suggests a place that has stopped moving, while also sounding like a plausible name for a British town.*



*Many of the characters in the novel are orphans. This lack of parental guidance means that the characters must find their own way in the world, introducing the novel’s recurrent emphasis on coming-of-age and independence. This passage portrays how despite his innocent appearance, Valentine is capable of extreme violence, showing how a polite exterior can hide a dark side.*



*Like many other objects from the past (Mickey Mouse and CDs), MEDUSA mystifies people in this future setting, and its purpose is still deliberately left vague.*



But when Tom and Hester wake the next morning, London has drifted even further away and Hester's limp gets worse. As they travel, they reach a small single-tier townlet on wheels and meet a man named Orme Wreyland who welcomes them aboard. The town doesn't have much in the way of supplies, but Tom trades his "seedy" for some food. Wreyland invites them back to his home, where they eat a type of algae soup.

*The introduction of Orme Wreyland helps expand the world of the novel, showing what the people are like in towns like the ones that London typically eats. Suddenly, the people in these towns aren't just ants that Tom watches from a distance, but people he can see up close and talk to.*



Wreyland discusses the difficulties of running a traction town. At one time, his town of Speedwell was too small to attract attention, but now that times are leaner, Speedwell has to be fast to avoid bigger cities like London. Tom asks if Wreyland can take them to London, perhaps picking up some supplies from London's discarded scraps along the way, but Wreyland says it's too dangerous and London rarely drops anything worthwhile anymore.

*The town of Speedwell has adapted to avoid London, similar to how some species in nature have adaptations that allow them to better avoid predators. Tom asks Wreyland for help, but Wreyland reveals that his town has to place its own survival above all else.*



Instead, Wreyland says that Speedwell is heading toward "trading-cluster" where small towns gather to trade resources. Tom and Hester might be able to find an air-trader there who will take them to London. But all of a sudden Tom doesn't feel well. He looks over and sees that Hester has fallen out of her chair. Wreyland's wife mentions something about using a higher dose next time.

*This chapter ends on yet another cliffhanger. The conversation between Wreyland and his wife suggests strongly that they've drugged the soup that they fed Tom and Hester, showing how cutthroat life is in the towns outside of London.*



## CHAPTER 7

Above Tier One is an even higher tier of London called Top Tier. Top Tier consists of just three buildings: Guildhall, where all the Guilds meet once a month; the Engineerium, a big back building for the Guild of Engineers where the city's *real* power resides; and St. Paul's, an ancient Christian temple that Quirke elevated when he converted London into a Traction City but which currently needs scaffolds to stand. Crome heads into the Engineerium and asks to see Doctor Evadne Twix.

*The juxtaposition of the Engineerium with St. Paul's suggests that in this future version of London, science (specifically a version of engineering focused on forward progress) now plays the role that traditional religion once played in London society.*



A monorail inside the Engineerium takes Crome to the heart of the building. He is satisfied to see his Engineers at work on new experiments. Crome reflects how, back in his apprentice days, people thought Traction Cities like London would run out of prey, but Crome advanced his career by promoting strong recycling and anti-waste laws to help London survive. But he has yet to unveil his real plan to keep London functioning.

*Monorails have a strong association with theme parks, suggesting that for people like Crome, science is a playground. The slightly whimsical nature of the Engineerium suggests that the Engineers neglect to account for the possible downsides of their research.*



Crome arrives at the lab of Dr Twix. She and her team of Engineers have spent years studying Stalkers, a type of Resurrected Men (cyborgs from a prior era) who sometimes appear in the earth outside London. Crome asks if Dr Twix has finished her research on Shrike, one of the Stalkers. She says yes, and leads Crome to Shrike.

Shrike speaks in a harsh, metallic voice, asking if Crome has encountered Hester. Crome explains everything, then says Shrike must go out and either kill Hester and Tom or retrieve their already-dead bodies. In exchange, Crome will grant Shrike's greatest wish.

Meanwhile, London continues to move quickly across the Hunting Grounds, despite the lack of nearby towns to devour. At her home, Katherine complains to Valentine about how he has to leave on an airship reconnaissance mission, but Valentine promises he won't be gone more than a month.

Katherine and Valentine head toward the airship hangar. It's been millennia since a catastrophe known as the Sixty Minute War, and though the war destroyed old technology, some of the new technology has far surpassed the old. Katherine tries to get Valentine to take her with him, but he wants her to stay behind and become a proper lady.

Valentine isn't supposed to tell anyone where he's headed, but Katherine convinces him to reveal he's going to Shan Guo. Shan Guo is the leader of the Anti-Traction League, which controls land in what used to be China and India, outside of the Hunting Ground. Katherine fears what would happen to London if it heads toward Shan Guo, but Valentine assures her he's only going on a recon mission. Katherine can tell he's hiding something. The two of them watch as an airship leaves the Engineerium.

## CHAPTER 8

In his daze, Tom dreams of Katherine. He wakes in a small room with wooden walls and flooring. Hester sits awake nearby. She explains that Wreyland drugged them and now they're locked in the wooden room. About an hour later, Wreyland opens a small hatch on the door that looks like a cat-flap. He apologizes for locking them in but says times are hard, so he has to sell them as slaves in order to afford new engine parts.

*Shrike and the Stalkers remain mysterious at this point in the story, but Shrike's origin will be explained in greater detail later. The appearance of the Resurrected Men in the dirt suggests that they are relics from a previous era, a type of old technology like the CDs and like MEDUSA.*



*Bounty hunters and mercenaries are common character archetypes in fantasy, and in this novel, Shrike fulfills that role. Despite his apparently strong desires, Shrike seems to be partly robotic, which raises questions about what it means to be human.*



*Katherine knows more about Valentine's upcoming trip than she lets on (due to the conversation she overheard earlier), but she doesn't want to let on what she knows.*



*The Sixty Minute War is a fictional conflict that nevertheless recalls fears of what might happen in the real world during an all-out nuclear war. The shortness of the war reflects how powerful weapons technology was at the time of the conflict.*



*Shan Guo has a Chinese-inspired name but may also be a corruption of the English phrase "shan't go," since it's the place where London can't hunt. In the real-world past, Britain established colonies in China and India, often violently, and in this fictional world, London seems to be preparing to do the exact same thing.*



*Wreyland illustrates how desperate situations often cause people to resort to desperate measures. While the novel doesn't necessarily portray Wreyland as a favorable character, it nevertheless provides some context for why Wreyland chooses to betray Tom and Hester.*



Tom and Hester decide they have to escape. Tom manages to pry a wooden plank off the wall and sticks his head out. He sees that Speedwell has made it to the trading cluster. Just then, he hears Wreyland shouting that he has two nice slaves on sale as well as other supplies. Tom tries to make his hole in the wall bigger. Hester stays back, looking sick, but all of a sudden, she comes over, gathers her strength, and knocks a whole section of planks down with a few kicks.

Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away, Shrike finds part of the torn piece of Tom's shirt that Hester used as a bandage. He tries to find Hester's scent to follow her.

*Hester reveals that she has surprising strength even when she seems to be weakened. Her actions in this scene show how her circumstances have forced her to be strong to survive. The flimsy wooden planks of the prison show how little power Wreyland has compared to the mayor of a big city like Crome in London.*



*Shrike's reliance on his sense of smell makes him seem more animal than human, emphasizing how instinct drives his character.*



## CHAPTER 9

As Tom and Hester escape, they're lucky that no one sees them at first. But as they cross the threshold of Speedwell into the market town parked next to Speedwell, someone spots them and yells to Wreyland. They run, and Hester suggests they try to find an air-harbor, and fortunately, they do. They can't steal a ship because neither knows how to fly, so they go to a café to try to book a passage.

Tom and Hester try to book a ride by asking a man polishing glasses at the café. But the man tells them that only licensed merchant ships go to London and none of them would be at this trading cluster. An Asian woman in a red coat (Miss Anna Fang) interrupts and says that perhaps she could take them part of the way, to a place called Airhaven that might have licensed pilots. She asks if they have money. Unfortunately, all Tom has is a few dirty pieces of paper currency that are only valid in London.

Just then, Wreyland comes in with some allies, shouting that Tom and Hester are his slaves. They flee and lose Wreyland but end up trapped with nowhere to go. They listen as Wreyland approaches. All of a sudden, the injured Hester comes to life again and leaps out with a broken metal lever that she found. She knocks Wreyland out and nearly kills him before Tom intervenes telling her there's no need. The Asian pilot in the red jacket comes over and agrees with Tom. Her name is Miss Anna Fang.

Tom asks Miss Fang how he knows she won't get between him and Hester. Miss Fang says she'll just have to trust him, then shows Tom and Hester that she has already knocked out Wreyland's allies. Although they don't have money for a flight, she takes them to her airship, the *Jenny Haniver*. Tom says it looks like a heap of junk, but Miss Fang is proud of all the materials she found in scrapyards.

*Despite Hester's experience on the ground, neither she nor Tom has ever been in the air before. This passage sets up a journey into the unknown for the two of them where they will be on equal footing.*



*Miss Fang represents a world that neither Tom nor Hester has ever seen before. The fact that Tom's London currency has no value to Miss Fang suggests that he is starting to leave more and more of his past life in London behind. It also hints that, despite its predator status, London has limited power and reach.*



*Hester demonstrates that she's willing to do whatever it takes to survive. In some ways, her willingness to resort to violence makes her more similar to Valentine than she'd like to admit, although unlike Valentine, Hester acts in self-defense to a direct physical threat.*



*Miss Fang's junky airship hints at her status as an outsider. This passage also suggests that Tom still has some lingering snobbery from his time in London and doesn't fully understand what life is like for people outside the city.*





Inside Miss Fang's ship, it smells like spice. She speaks in an unusual language as she gets the ship set up, which worries Tom, but she explains that it gets lonely in the air, and so she often speaks to herself in Airsperanto, a language many pilots use. A voice comes over the radio saying that the *Jenny Haniver* isn't cleared for takeoff, but Miss Fang just switches it off, and her airship blasts out of the harbor.

*Airsperanto is a parody of Esperanto, a real invented language that was supposed to help people from different countries communicate. Miss Fang's refusal to listen to the radio further establishes that she is a rebel.*



## CHAPTER 10

After a rainy night in London, the air clears, and that morning, it's time for Valentine to leave. Katherine and Dog wish Valentine goodbye, along with a crowd of other people, including Crome. His ship takes off, and Katherine starts crying. While Valentine is gone, she plans to find out more about the mysterious girl (Hester) who seemed to scare her father so much.

*Much of the middle of the book shifts perspective between London and Tom and Hester's adventures abroad. Katherine doesn't understand much of what she sees in London, but she is able to put together bits and pieces of what Crome has planned for the future.*



## CHAPTER 11

From up in the *Jenny Haniver*, Tom looks down on the mountains below. Hester is resting in the ship's medical bay. Miss Fang curses Valentine for hurting Hester. She tells Tom that despite Valentine's reputation as a great Historian, he's really just a henchman for Crome. Tom defends Valentine, but he is also ashamed of how much he used to admire Valentine.

*With both Hester and Miss Fang telling Tom that Valentine is evil, Tom is now outnumbered. Nevertheless, Tom hesitates to condemn Valentine himself (even after Valentine tried to murder him), illustrating how difficult it can be to let go of the past, especially in a case where there's deep admiration..*



Miss Fang asks Tom if he knows where London is headed. He hesitates, unsure if he trusts Miss Fang, but at last lies to her, saying that he heard from the Head Navigator himself that London is probably moving toward the central Hunting Ground to find more prey.

*Tom's decision to lie to Miss Fang once again suggests that he remains loyal to his old life in London, despite everything he has recently suffered after Valentine pushed him down the trash chute. This suggests that changing one's loyalty isn't simply a matter of gaining new information; it takes time.*



Miss Fang lowers the altitude of the *Jenny Haniver* as they fly over some landmarks, including the remains of a dead Traction City called Motoropolis that is full of scavengers. When they make it to the central Hunting Grounds and see nothing, Miss Fang reveals that she knew Tom was lying. He confesses that he is only a low-ranking apprentice who doesn't even know the Head Navigator. Miss Fang says Hester told her something about MEDUSA.

*Miss Fang is smarter than Tom realizes, suggesting that he remains prejudiced against her. Hester trusts Miss Fang more than Tom does—although she is more cynical than Tom, she and Miss Fang seem to share a history as outsiders.*



Eventually, Miss Fang, Tom, and Hester reach Airhaven and disembark. It's a busy town with airships coming and going everywhere. Miss Fang promises to buy them all dinner, then find them a captain headed to London. None of them notice Shrike's ship circling up above them, waiting for a chance to land.

*Shrike's ship signals trouble ahead. With the way that it flies in circles as if stalking its prey, the ship somewhat resembles a real shrike (the predatory bird that gives Shrike his name and is also sometimes called the butcherbird).*



## CHAPTER 12

At an inn called the Gasbag and Gondola, Miss Fang runs into an old friend, a handsome young African man named Captain Khora who also speaks Airsperanto. Tom thinks he overhears Miss Fang mention something about MEDUSA to Khora.

*The introduction of Captain Khora suggests that perhaps Miss Fang isn't quite as much of an outsider as she seems and that there are other aviators like her.*



Khora is part of the Anti-Traction League and is headed toward Shan Guo. Tom is surprised at how kind Khora is for a member of the League. They have dinner with some other pilots, and Khora reveals to Tom that the *Jenny Haniver* is made of junk because Miss Fang and her family lived in a town that got eaten and were enslaved. Miss Fang's parents died, but she scavenged parts for an airship and managed to escape.

*Tom believes that the people in the Anti-Traction League are evil because that is what he learned in London. Seeing Khora in person, Tom has to reckon with the fact that Khora doesn't match Tom's stereotype of an Anti-Tractionist. Miss Fang's traumatic backstory reveals that, like Hester, she is resourceful and willing to do whatever it takes to survive.*



A loudspeaker announces that a ship has just arrived from London, and Tom worries they're after him and Hester. All of a sudden, the power goes out across the whole town. Outside, people in the streets are screaming. A metallic voice shouts "Hester Shaw!" Into the doorway steps a Stalker. He's seven feet tall and has a lot of tubes that go into his chest. Stalkers have human brains but mostly metallic bodies, with some pale flesh. Tom is shocked because he thought Stalkers disappeared centuries ago. The Stalker is Shrike.

*While previous passages hinted at Shrike's robotic appearance, this is the first time in the book that he is fully described. Shrike's pale flesh recalls a zombie, and in fact, he is a sort of living dead creature, with a single-minded focus that also recalls zombies.*



Hester says she knows Shrike, so she steps forward to talk to him. She tries to convince Shrike not to hurt anyone, but he says Crome has commanded him to kill her. While Hester distracts Shrike, Miss Fang throws a razor-sharp Battle Frisbee at Shrike's neck. It hits his throat and sticks there but doesn't stop him. Tom and Hester run, while the airship pilots try to hold back Shrike.

*Hester seems surprisingly eager to greet the dangerous Shrike. This suggests that perhaps she and Shrike have a shared history. Shrike's indifference to an attack that would kill a normal human suggests that Shrike himself is no longer quite human.*



When Tom and Hester make it to the *Jenny Haniver*, they find that Shrike has already sabotaged it. Hester spots a hot-air balloon of sightseers just landing, and once they get off, Hester hijacks it, telling Tom to jump in. He does, and they throw everything overboard to make the balloon go up as fast as possible.

*The hot-air balloon helps further establish the steampunk setting of the book, juxtaposing futuristic technology (the cyborg Shrike) with more archaic technology (the hot-air balloon). It also establishes Tom and Hester as underdogs, competing against Shrike's more fearsome airship.*



## CHAPTER 13

Stalkers are a relic from before the Traction Era. During previous wars, scientists from the old empires took dead soldiers and turned them into Resurrected Men by fusing their flesh with technology. For Tom, Stalkers were just another monster he heard about as a child.

As Tom and Hester's balloon rises above Airhaven and heads eastward, Hester reveals that Shrike was actually an old friend of hers. She first met Shrike the day after her parents died, right after she escaped on a boat, fell asleep, and woke up on the shores of the hunting ground. When she woke up, scavengers from a very small town were already taking apart her boat. Shrike seemed to be leading the scavengers. He told Hester she couldn't stay, but took her aboard their town, which was called Strole.

Hester continues her story. She wasn't sure why Shrike saved her, since he never seemed to show pity or softness in anything else he did. He did, however, keep a collection of relics from the old times, and Hester wondered if she was also part of his collection. She lived with him for five years. One day, Hester heard stories about Valentine and realized he was the same man who killed her parents. She told Shrike she wanted to track Valentine down, but Shrike forbade her. He refused to come with her because he feared Crome would capture him and dissect him as a research subject. So, one day Hester snuck out on her own.

Back in the present, Hester says she's never seen Shrike look as violent as he did when they saw him recently. She thinks that Crome wiped Shrike's memories and emotions when he turned him into a Stalker. She also thinks, however, that Shrike is probably too focused on his mission to bother killing Miss Fang and the other aviators. While they try to escape Shrike, Hester and Tom guide their balloon toward London.

Just then, Tom and Hester notice an airship chasing them. Based on how fast it's going, they figure it must be Shrike. Hester abruptly starts lowering the balloon's altitude, hoping they'll have a better chance against Shrike on the ground. When they're close to the ground, they jump into the mud. The balloon rises up and Shrike's ship goes after it. Meanwhile Tom and Hester start walking toward London.

*The Stalkers represent how even before the Traction Era, governments treated soldiers as expendable, not even allowing them to rest in death.*



*The previous chapter hinted at a prior relationship between Hester and Shrike, and now Hester expands on it. The fact that Hester met Shrike right after her parents died suggests that in a way, he served as a surrogate parent figure to her, as strange as that may seem.*



*Shrike's collection of old objects resembles the museum that Tom used to work at. Shrike's obsession with preserving things will ultimately be his undoing. Many characters in the story grow and change, but Shrike's inability to do that is what ultimately leads him to become the obsessive bounty hunter that he currently is.*



*Hester also confirms that the Shrike they saw recently may not be quite the same Shrike as the one she knew, even if he is still in the same physical body. The Resurrected Men raise questions about identity and what makes a person truly themselves.*



*When in trouble, Hester seeks out what's most familiar to her: the mud. Although Hester sometimes shows surprising strength, her even greater talent is for deception and cleverness, and she has learned to emphasize her advantages to compensate for her disadvantages.*



## CHAPTER 14

Katherine arranges a meeting with Crome to find out more about what her father, Valentine, is doing. She goes to meet him at his office at the Guildhall. When Katherine arrives for her meeting, Crome tells her he just received a radio message from her father saying that his mission is going well. He asks if she wants to talk about anything else. After some hesitation, Katherine brings up Hester.

Crome frowns and says if Valentine didn't tell Katherine who Hester was, he probably had a good reason. Katherine wonders if any of this has to do with MEDUSA. Crome looks even more alarmed at this. He tells her not to look into the matter anymore. Katherine leaves the mayor's office but doesn't want to give up. Suddenly, she remembers another apprentice who was nearby when Tom fell down the waste chute. She wonders if that apprentice knows anything.

## CHAPTER 15

After jumping out of their balloon, Tom and Hester walk all night toward London. In the morning, they realize they're at the edge of the Rustwater Marshes, nearly a thousand miles away from London. They keep walking for the rest of the day but aren't sure what to do next. That night, after Tom goes to sleep, Hester suddenly wakes him up. They hear the engine of an airship and realize it must be Shrike.

In the airship, Shrike can indeed see Tom and Hester with his heat vision. Shrike's pilot complains that if Shrike can do this, they shouldn't have wasted time chasing the empty balloon. But Shrike wanted to reward Hester for cleverness, although he doesn't tell the pilot that.

Below, Hester and Tom run from the airship. Shrike calls out to them, saying the hunt is over. Hester asks how Shrike even ended up in London. He reveals he sold his collection of old relics in order to charter an airship and make it to London before Hester. In London, Crome took Shrike to the Engineerium for experiments, which Shrike expected. He endured being taken apart all because Crome promised him his "heart's desire," in exchange for killing Hester.

All of a sudden, there's a loud rumbling sound. A town comes out of the fog and runs over Shrike and his airship. Tom and Hester are both shocked for a moment. They wonder what the town is running away from so quickly. Soon, a second town races their way. Hester and Tom dodge the wheels and grab a ride on the new town.

*Katherine's decision to bring up Hester to Valentine is clearly a bad idea, given what happened when Tom did the very same thing to Valentine. Her decision to bring up the topic with Crome shows her naivety, but it also shows her privilege, since unlike Tom, Katherine seemingly faces no consequences for bringing up her question.*



*Katherine knows that something unusual is going on, but she also doesn't seem to realize the potential danger she's in. Readers, however, know that Crome is dangerous, and so this passage uses Katherine's ignorance to build suspense.*



*Tom and Hester are even farther away from London than when they started, representing how Shrike's sudden appearance was a major setback for them. The predatory nature of Shrike mimics the predatory nature of the city of London itself.*



*Although Shrike might seem totally ruthless, a part of him seems to still care for Hester. He doesn't quite know how to process these feelings, however, so he acts like a predator playing with its prey.*



*Shrike gave up everything for his "heart's desire," which hasn't been revealed yet. This passage builds suspense for the eventual reveal of Shrike's goal by detailing all of the suffering he went through in order to achieve his goal. Shrike's single-minded focus on his goal shows how obsession can consume people.*



*Although the sudden appearance of these towns helps Tom and Hester make a convenient escape, it also warns them that something big and dangerous is headed their way.*



The town is Tunbridge Wheels, and it's small, more of a suburb. The place seems deserted and large parts of it are rusting away. Tom notices a flag and realizes it must be a pirate suburb. Men and women with large guns emerge from the fog. Meanwhile, a still-alive Shrike tries to work his way out of the mud, tracking the movement of Tunbridge Wheels with his heat vision.

*The pirate suburb of Tunbridge Wheels (named after the English town of Tunbridge Wells, about 30 miles outside London) suggests yet another type of life outside of London. Like the slave-trader Wreyland, the pirates have had to become ruthless in order to survive in the difficult world outside of London.*



## CHAPTER 16

London moves across the region once known as Europe. Crome stops for nothing, not even the scavenger towns along the way. Meanwhile, down in the Gut of London, Katherine goes with Dog to talk with Apprentice Engineer Pod, who may have witnessed Tom's fall into the trash chute. She pretends to be interviewing Pod on behalf of her father (Valentine).

*Because of her father's high position, Katherine is used to being able to do whatever she wants. Her recent interview with Crome and her trip into the Gut will test the limits of what she can get away with, however.*



Katherine visits a part of the Gut where work conditions are particularly harsh and the workers stand around in excrement all day. A supervisor explains that the workers are all convicts. When they find Pod, he is trying to help another worker who is sick. Sick workers get sent to "K Division," but the supervisor refuses to say what that means, and so Pod does too.

*Katherine sees firsthand the conditions of the Gut, which as a member of Tier One she has only heard rumors about. Pod seems to know more than he lets on, but the presence of the supervisors makes him stay quiet, showing the low status and lack of freedom of workers in the Gut.*



When Katherine finally gets to talk with Pod alone, he refuses to acknowledge that he saw Hester and Valentine, apologizing that he can't help. All of a sudden, the sick worker near Pod sighs heavily, and Katherine realize he's dead (and that the people in "K Division" work with corpses). Katherine is horrified, and the supervisor tries to rush her out.

*Conditions in the Gut are so bad that death seems unexceptional to the supervisors down there. Katherine's shock indicates how ignorant many people in London are about the work that goes into keeping their city moving.*



## CHAPTER 17

Aboard the pirate suburb of Tunbridge Wheels, Tom and Hester watch the suburb catch up with a small townlet. Tom is horrified that the pirates ignore the rules of Municipal Darwinism and start ripping the townlet up without giving the survivors a chance to escape. Hester, however, feels that the pirates are more honest about what they do than London. All of a sudden, Hester sees the mayor of the pirate suburb and recognizes him: Chrysler Peavey.

*As Tom continues on the journey, he sees more and more things that he never had to see from the relative safety and comfort of London. Seeing Municipal Darwinism up close, Tom realizes that it's not the civilized practice it appears to be when the victims are just the size of tiny ants in the distance.*





Peavey used to trade in Shrike's old town of Strole. Hester knows he is a ruthless killer, but she calls to him anyway. Peavey recognizes her and is shocked. He tells her about how he became the mayor of Tunbridge Wheels after it ate his old town one day, and he came aboard and staged a coup, turning Tunbridge Wheels from a normal town into a pirate suburb.

Hester tries to get Peavey to release her and Tom, saying they'll work for him. Peavey regretfully says the only place he needs them is in the "slave pits" of the engine rooms. Tom, however, refuses to go, calling Peavey a coward. Peavey recognizes Tom's London accent. He changes his mind and says a gentleman like Tom should be able to stay with him on the surface instead of going to the engine rooms. He offers Tom tea. Tom is shocked, but quickly requests that Hester must stay on the surface with them too.

Tom thinks Peavey wants strategic information about London, but he soon realizes that Peavey just likes having someone around who's upper class (at least compared to Peavey). Peavey gives Tom a tour and explains he doesn't want to be a pirate forever—he'd like to become respectable someday. Hester encourages Tom to play along and pretend to be more of a gentleman than he is.

## CHAPTER 18

London continues its journey across what used to be Europe. It runs into some towns where people speak Slavic languages, and it eats many of them up. Soon, however, the people of London notice an even bigger city called Panzerstadt-Bayreuth, and they fear London is in danger.

Meanwhile, Katherine doesn't pay attention to what's going on outside London. After what she witnessed in the Gut, she feels like she can't just go back to school and pretend everything is normal, so she stops going. Then, three days into London's retreat from Panzerstadt-Bayreuth, she gets a letter from someone who claims to be "A Friend" with information to tell her. The letter requests a meeting at a place called Pete's Eats by Belsize Park.

Although Katherine distrusts the letter at first, eventually she heads to Pete's Eats at Belsize Park. There, she sees Pod sitting at a table. He introduces himself, saying his first name is Bevis. Katherine is happy to see him, although she finds that the food in the restaurant looks disgusting and even the tea tastes chemical.

*Peavey is a violent character, but although his actions aren't necessarily justified, his motivations are somewhat sympathetic because his own town was destroyed. Many characters outside London live in similar moral gray areas, with some nevertheless trying to be good people and others becoming more selfish and cynical (like Peavey).*



*Peavey's change of mind is so sudden that it isn't clear at first whether Peavey is being serious or making fun of Tom. As it turns out, however, Peavey is genuinely impressed by Tom's status as a Londoner. Tom makes the most of the situation, trying to use his own status to help Hester, which demonstrates a growing connection between the two of them after all their shared hardships.*



*Although Peavey is a relatively respectable pirate, what he wants most is what he can't have: respectability. Tom gives Peavey a way to live out his fantasies. Although Peavey is well below London on the food chain, he shares a similar desire to keep obtaining more and more.*



*The name Panzerstadt-Bayreuth suggests a city that is from what used to be Germany. The panzer was the name of a German tank in World War II, and so "Panzerstadt" roughly translates to "tank city."*



*The secret and serious nature of the letter Katherine receives contrasts with the less serious restaurant name Pete's Eats, suggesting that perhaps her informant is not the master spy that they're pretending to be.*



*Pete's Eats is supposed to be a futuristic version of fast food. For the lower-class Pod, the food is a special treat, but for Katherine the food is barely edible, showing how a person's class can affect their perceptions.*



Pod reveals to Katherine that actually, he did see Hester when Tom was chasing her. He confirms that she jumped down a waste chute but didn't drag Tom with her (despite what Valentine said). Just then, smoke clouded the area, and Pod didn't see any more until the police started to arrive.

*Although Pod did witness some important events, the bad timing of the smoke means that he didn't see the crucial moment when Valentine pushed Tom down the trash chute. Even if he had seen everything, at this point in the story, Katherine might not be willing to accept that her father would do such a thing.*



Still at the restaurant, Pod asks Katherine if Valentine can do anything to help prisoners in the Gut. Katherine assures him that if Valentine knew what was going on, he'd do something. Pod explains more about the Gut, including that the K Division is an experimental part of the Engineerium where dead bodies go. Rumor has it, the dead bodies become Stalkers. But the new Stalkers won't be soldiers like the Resurrected Men from before—instead, they will be workers to replace the dead ones in the Gut.

*Just as the old civilizations did before the Sixty Minute War, Crome and the Engineers are trying to make it so that not even death stops them from exploiting people below them. The new workers would blend the line between living and dead, showing just how expendable the old workers are in the current system.*



Katherine asks Pod if the new Stalkers have anything to do with MEDUSA. Pod goes pale and says MEDUSA is supposed to be a Guild secret. Supervisors talk about MEDUSA as if it will be the answer to all of London's problems. Katherine learns about an upcoming Guild meeting, and after Pod refuses to pose as a Guildsman for it, Katherine decides she must infiltrate it instead, to see what MEDUSA is and why it's causing her father trouble.

*Katherine is more willing to be bold because she is less likely to face consequences for her actions than Pod. Nevertheless, this passage shows that she has a growing awareness of her responsibility to try to help people like Pod who are stuck in the Gut.*



## CHAPTER 19

Tunbridge Wheels heads toward the Rustwater Marshes. It takes over a week for the pirate suburb to make it through the muck. Tom sees the pirates violently devour more small towns and begins to question everything he knows about Municipal Darwinism. Nevertheless, Tom and Hester continue to be Peavey's honored guests, even though Peavey mistakenly believes Hester is Tom's girlfriend and tries to convince him that he could find someone much more respectable.

*Peavey's comment that Tom should try to find a more respectable girlfriend shows how Peavey views relationships as transactional. He encourages Tom that rather than looking for love, he should prioritize social advancement, demonstrating one thing that he does perhaps have in common with the upper class of London.*



Tunbridge Wheels makes it out of the marshes and come to the Sea of Khazak. Peavey hopes to raid some of the Anti-Tractionists who live in towns that don't move so that he can finally turn his pirate suburb into a proper town. After taking damage during Shrike's attack, Airhaven has landed to refuel with some Anti-Tractionist allies on Black Island, and the pirates want to eat Airhaven too.

*Also like London, Peavey prefers to target Anti-Tractionists, who are stationary targets. Peavey's actions help to reveal how London itself is a bit like a pirate colony, acting in similarly selfish ways despite an outwardly more respectable appearance.*



As Tunbridge Wheels prepares to attack, suddenly an airship lands on it: the *Jenny Haniver*. Tom is happy to see Miss Fang's ship, but Peavey warns that she is a dangerous spy who has murdered thousands of people with her bombs. After the *Jenny Haniver's* surprise attack fails to do serious damage, it retreats. Tunbridge Wheels keeps going, planning to eat some fishing boats outside one of the towns.

The fishing boats, however, are a trap to lead Tunbridge into rocky, shallow water. The pirate suburb lurches, and the engines give out. Peavey shouts that everyone will have to abandon the town. Tom ends up on a raft with Hester, Peavey, and a couple other pirates as the suburb goes down.

*Tom already has doubts about Miss Fang, and so he is willing to listen to Peavey's warnings about her. While it's possible that Peavey is lying about Miss Fang, this passage once again shows that life in the Hunting Ground can be morally gray.*



*Peavey becomes a victim of his own pride and greed. Shallow waters are a common literary trope suggesting danger, and Peavey's rush into the shallows represents his reckless nature.*



## CHAPTER 20

Shrike walks through the marshes, admiring the wave of destruction Hester has left behind her. Meanwhile, Peavey's raft lands on Black Island, and Peavey watches Anti-Tractionists raid his suburb. Hester tells Tom they should try to sneak away to Airhaven to see if Miss Fang can help them. Hester knew all along that Miss Fang was a spy, but she trusted her anyway.

Peavey leads the group up a slope overlooking Airhaven. Tom senses that Peavey is frightened about trying to attack Airhaven with so few resources but doesn't want to show it. Before they can attack, however, Airhaven begins filling its gasbags, meaning it's preparing to fly away. Peavey rushes to catch the town in vain, getting stuck in the mud. Another pirate named Mungo shoots Peavey and kills him. Mungo says it's Tom and Hester's fault that they didn't make it to Airhaven in time.

*This passage hints at an impending confrontation between Shrike and Tom and Hester, leaving open the question of whether Shrike's past sympathy for Hester will cause him to show mercy on her now.*



*Peavey dies suddenly, illustrating the consequences of living a violent lifestyle like his. Without Peavey's protection, Tom and Hester suddenly find themselves in a precarious position, surrounded by pirates who outnumber them, and with Shrike closing in, too.*



## CHAPTER 21

Back in London, the city continues to flee from Panzerstadt-Bayreuth. Crome sends Beefeater guards to put down riots in the Gut. Meanwhile, disguised in goggles and a rubber suit, Katherine and Pod infiltrate the Engineerium, where many Engineers are gathering for an important meeting.

Inside the Engineerium, Katherine and Pod manage to successfully convince the people around them that they're Guild members. Katherine overhears some Engineers talking about an upcoming test of MEDUSA. They mention that Valentine himself found MEDUSA and brought it to Crome. Eventually, Katherine and Pod make it to an auditorium where Crome is standing at a lectern on stage. He tells everyone to be seated.

*Beefeaters are the name of the real royal guard in Britain today, and so the fact that the term Beefeater survives in this future London suggests that ideas from the past can remain but take on new forms.*



*Katherine continues to get bolder and bolder about the ways that she investigates what's going on with her father. Pod has the most to lose if he gets caught, so his agreement with Katherine's plan shows that he is brave and that he trusts Katherine.*



A slide projector shows a diagram behind Crome of a big, complicated-looking machine. Crome proclaims that it's MEDUSA. He explains how MEDUSA will be able to turn rival cities into dust and how it will even allow them to breach the **Shield-Wall** of the Anti-Traction League. He says they're about to do a test-firing of the weapon. All of a sudden, Katherine feels that she has to get out of the auditorium, and Pod follows her.

Katherine is angry, believing that Crome lied and that Valentine never wanted anything to do with old weapons, but Pod isn't sure why Crome would lie about that. They try to find a way out of the Engineerium, but they need to take a monorail and there are none in sight. Suddenly, they hear a rumble. They look out and see the dome of St. Paul's opening.

*After teasing MEDUSA for the first half of the book, Crome is about to give a full presentation, cluing readers in to what the weapon is and what it does. Katherine has a very negative reaction to the prospect of MEDUSA's violence, recalling her disgust earlier when she witnessed the conditions in the Gut. Her negative reaction may also be because her father helped contribute to finding MEDUSA.*



*Like Tom, Katherine has a hard time accepting the truth about Valentine because she still wants to trust Valentine's kind outer appearance. In fact, she has a harder time than Tom because Valentine isn't just an admired figure, but her own father. The opening of St. Paul's suggests that MEDUSA is inside and that in this new London, MEDUSA and massive weapons like it have taken over the former role of religion.*



## CHAPTER 22

Back on Black Island, Shrike approaches the pirates and claims that Hester and Tom belong to him. The pirates open fire on him with their guns. Although Shrike flinches and starts to bleed, he keeps moving. Mungo tries to switch from his gun to his sword, but Shrike decapitates him in one blow of his bladed hand.

Hester asks Shrike if he's going to kill her. He says yes, but only temporarily. He plans to have Crome turn her into a Resurrected Man, since Crome's Engineers learned how to create new stalkers by studying Shrike. Hester doubts Crome will Resurrect her, and she refuses to let Shrike kill Tom. After some hesitation, Shrike agrees to pretend that Tom died and his body couldn't be retrieved.

As Shrike goes to kill Hester, Tom grabs a sword and intervenes. Shrike knocks Tom back, but the sword goes through Shrike's chest. As Shrike dies, he remembers who he used to be and reaches a hand toward Hester, but then he goes still. Hester gets angry at Tom for killing Shrike and for stopping her from becoming Resurrected so that she could take down Valentine. Tom tries to justify his decision, but he gets interrupted when, suddenly, the sky fills with light as if there's a new sun.

*This chapter presents a complicated state of alliances, where Hester and Tom have multiple enemies but their enemies are also enemies of each other. Mungo's quick death once again shows the consequences of a violent pirate lifestyle.*



*Shrike's plan reveals that he does still care about Hester in one sense, but in another sense, his own obsession with Hester is so overpowering that he doesn't even consider her own feelings. Hester herself has often been reckless with her own life (like when she tried to assassinate Valentine), so she is surprisingly willing to go along with Shrike's plan, particularly if it helps save Tom.*



*Tom gets extremely lucky to succeed in killing Shrike when more experienced fighters like Miss Fang failed. Luck will continue to be an important element throughout the rest of the novel, particularly near the end when Tom's luck goes in a very different direction.*



## CHAPTER 23

Watching from inside the Engineerium in London, Katherine and Pod realize that the Engineers have built MEDUSA inside St. Paul. But as they're watching, another Engineer notices that the Guild-mark that Katherine painted on her forehead is beginning to fade and drip. She and Pod run. They hear an alarm bell going off.

Katherine and Pod manage to get out of the Engineerium by losing their pursuers, then pretending Katherine has an injury and needs to go to an infirmary. But Beefeater guards come looking for them. Just then, Katherine notices Chudleigh Pomeroy and goes to him, asking for help. Pomeroy seems hesitant at first, but when Beefeaters come to interrogate the three of them, Pomeroy says he hasn't seen anything. The Beefeaters move on.

Pomeroy takes Katherine home. She tells him to take Pod to an elevator back to the Gut, but Pomeroy warns that after everything that happened in the Engineerium, there's probably a lockdown, meaning it would be dangerous for Pod to go back. Katherine volunteers to let Pod stay with her, suggesting her father can sort everything out when he's back. But Pomeroy says that's also dangerous—the best option is for Pomeroy himself to take Pod in at the museum.

Just then, Pomeroy points over at St. Paul's, where MEDUSA is crackling like lightning. A beam fires out at Panzerstadt-Bayreuth, and the giant city comes crashing down. Katherine expects people to be horrified, but instead, she hears cheering throughout London.

## CHAPTER 24

On Black Island, Anti-Tractionists ride over on horseback to Tom and Hester. One of them seems ready to kill Tom, but another intervenes, and Tom realizes it's Miss Fang. She hugs Tom and Hester, glad to see they're still alive.

*Katherine and Pod have been lucky so far to avoid detection, but this passage shows just how quickly that luck can turn around. The alarm bell suggests that soon the whole building will be looking for them.*



*Pomeroy didn't necessarily come across as a favorable character in the first part of the novel, but his willingness to help Katherine and Pod escape the Beefeaters reveals that his character might have hidden depth.*



*By choosing to help Katherine, Pod has put himself in constant danger. Pomeroy himself shows courage by volunteering to help house the fugitive Pod. His unexpected selflessness contrasts with the unexpected selfishness of characters like Wreyland, emphasizing how first impressions don't always reflect the full truth.*



*The destruction of Panzerstadt-Bayreuth, with the flash of light and with the suddenness of the destruction, resembles the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in World War II. Perhaps the giant laser-like weapon also suggests the Death Star from Star Wars, making it clear that London is in fact the villain of the story and not the hero as Tom originally thought.*



*Miss Fang's intervention shows that, while parts of her might be morally gray, she remains loyal to friends, particularly Tom and Hester.*





Miss Fang rides back with Tom and Hester, taking them to a doctor at an Anti-Tractionist town, while somewhere above them Airhaven hovers. Miss Fang talks about taking Tom and Hester with her, but Tom confronts her about being a spy for the League of Anti-Tractionists and trying to get information about London out of him. Miss Fang defends her actions. She admits that she has committed assassinations and even planted bombs, but she says her choices saved hundreds more people from being killed or enslaved.

Miss Fang says she may kill people like Valentine does, but one big difference between them is that Valentine wants to kill Tom and she doesn't. She asks again if Tom will come with her to Shan Guo. She believes London intends to break through the **Shield-Wall**, and she wants to warn the people behind the wall. Finally, she reveals that she spoke to Hester earlier and she'll only come along if Tom agrees to come too. Tom blushes and realizes Hester is the closest thing he has to a friend anymore. He agrees to come.

## CHAPTER 25

It's raining in London, but Panzerstadt-Bayreuth continues to burn. Crome listens to a report from a security chief who flew an airship near Panzerstadt-Bayreuth and is pleased to hear there are few survivors. The chief warns him that the League of Anti-Tractionists will know London is coming now. Crome isn't worried, since he's already given Valentine orders about how to deal with the League.

Sometime after the first MEDUSA demonstration, Katherine goes to the Museum of Natural History to visit Pomeroy and Pod. Pod seems to be getting along well, and the other Historians have accepted him, since many of them are also skeptical of Crome. Some other Historians are in the Museum when Katherine visits, and they lament what happened to Panzerstadt-Bayreuth, which was full of history and had a famous museum of its own.

Katherine says they have to do something to stop Crome from killing more people in Shan Guo. She wants to tell everyone in the city, but Pomeroy points out that most of them cheered the destruction of Panzerstadt-Bayreuth. She says they'll get help from her father, who will surely be horrified at what Crome's done when he gets back. Pomeroy is doubtful but hopes for the same.

*Somewhat surprisingly, Miss Fang admits that Peavey didn't lie and that she did kill several people, believing that the ends justified the means. Miss Fang's violence seems to be more targeted and less random than Peavey's and the novel leaves open the question of to what extent her actions may have been justified.*



*Miss Fang casts her own actions as self-defensive. Although many characters have tried to deceive Tom and Hester throughout the story, there isn't necessarily anything here to suggest that Miss Fang is lying. Hester has an easier time expressing her feelings for Tom indirectly to Miss Fang, showing how Hester's many years of solitary revenge-seeking have left her unable to handle normal friendship and romance.*



*The burning Panzerstadt-Bayreuth may be a reference to the firebombing of Dresden in World War II, an attack by the U.S. and Britain that also had high civilian casualties. Crome ignores the Historians, making Valentine his servant instead of his advisor, and this means Crome's London is doomed to repeat history.*



*Pod reveals that his old environment in the Gut was holding him back and that when given some encouragement, he is capable of being a good Historian. The loss of important historical and cultural artifacts is a common side effect of war, and so the Historians' concerns here parallel the concerns of many historians and curators in the real world.*



*Even after everything Katherine has witnessed with the horrors of MEDUSA, she continues to believe her father is a good person. In fact, her belief in her father seems to be a defense mechanism to avoid confronting the truth that her father helped bring MEDUSA about.*



## CHAPTER 26

Far away on the *Jenny Haniver*, Miss Fang realizes that the smoke they see in the distance must be MEDUSA (although she still isn't sure what MEDUSA is). They land in an air-harbor, and the residents there gossip about how London has destroyed Panzerstadt-Bayreuth, possibly with a weapon that the old American Empire used during the Sixty Minute War.

The people in the air-harbor accept Tom's London money, so he buys a shawl for Hester. She doesn't know how to react because people rarely give her gifts. She admits that Tom might have done the right thing by killing Shrike.

The *Jenny Haniver* takes off again the next morning. Miss Fang gives Tom and Hester a red paste to help them deal with the altitude as they fly over some mountains. It takes several days, but they finally make it to the **Shield-Wall**. After flying over the wall, they come to the static settlement of Batmunkh Gompa, and Tom is surprised to see that it looks beautiful, since he learned in London that all static settlements were backward slums. Soon after landing in the settlement, they all meet Khora, who says the leader of the settlement, Governor Ermene Khan, is eager to hear Miss Fang's report.

Governor Khan welcomes back Miss Fang and her guests, Tom and Hester. But he doesn't believe at first that London poses a threat, even with MEDUSA. Khora mentions that scouts have reported an unfamiliar black airship in the mountains, which likely belongs to Valentine. Miss Fang suggests bombing London before it gets in range for MEDUSA but Tom protests that innocent people will die. He starts arguing until, at last, Miss Fang sends him away.

On his own, Tom decides that he'd like to see Batmunkh Gompa before London gets there. He takes a balloon-taxi down into the main part of the city. As he explores the city, he notices a holy man in a red robe. While these men are common in the city, something about this one catches Tom's attention. Tom follows the red-robed man until finally he catches a glimpse of a London Guild-mark on the man's forehead. The man is Valentine.

*The passage draws further parallels between MEDUSA and the atomic bomb, with both of them originating in the United States (as the "USA" in MEDUSA suggests). The Sixty Minute War suggests that such powerful weapons can have spiraling consequences.*



*Tom's gift signifies the growing bond between him and Hester. Hester's response shows how the two of them are making a greater effort to understand each other.*



*Tom has already begun to leave behind some of his old prejudices from growing up in London, but seeing Batmunkh Gompa and the people behind the Shield-Wall is a major turning point for him. Tom's growth isn't a linear journey, and he hasn't fully turned against London, but he finds it impossible to deny that Batmunkh Gompa isn't the ugly, backwards place he grew up believing it was.*



*The presence of Valentine's airship suggests that he has arrived on his secret mission from Crome. Despite Tom's revelation earlier that the people in Batmunkh Gompa aren't the stereotypes he learned about in London, he still resists fully abandoning his old city, showing the difficulty of drastically changing one's outlook.*



*Tom's curiosity about seeing Batmunkh Gompa suggests that he hasn't necessarily committed to London's side, despite his words earlier. Valentine's disguise as a holy man is one of many other ways that evil characters in the story have used the external appearance of religion to disguise their real intentions (such as how St. Paul's houses MEDUSA).*



## CHAPTER 27

As London heads toward the **Shield-Wall**, Katherine spends most of her time in the Museum. She likes spending time with Pod more and more, and she wonders if she's even falling in love with him. One day when Katherine is in the museum, Dog takes an interest in the fossil of an extinct animal called the blue whale. As Katherine examines the display case, she notices that the discovery is credited to Pandora Shaw.

Katherine tries to remember why Pandora's name sounds so familiar. She realizes that Pandora is Hester Shaw's mother and that before, when her name was Pandora Rae, she was Valentine's assistant. Katherine hears from the other Historians that Pandora was murdered with her husband about seven years ago, around the exact same time when Valentine was away in America looking for MEDUSA. Suddenly, Katherine starts to cry, realizing that her father killed Pandora and that's why Hester wants to kill him.

## CHAPTER 28

In Batmunkh Gompa, Tom is frightened to see Valentine—who tried to murder him—but he also admires how daring Valentine must be to conduct a secret mission among enemies. Tom follows Valentine through the city, hesitant to tell Hester, since Tom isn't ready to betray London.

The more Tom watches Valentine, the more he realizes he needs to protect Batmunkh Gompa. He shouts out Valentine's true identity, but as he unmask the red-robed monk, he realizes it's the wrong person and that he lost the real Valentine back at the city's main square. He takes a taxi at once to Miss Fang and tells her what he saw.

Miss Fang, who is having tea with Khora and another aviator, guesses that Valentine wants to sabotage Batmunkh Gompa's fleet of airships. Khora doubts one man can do that much, but Miss Fang says they shouldn't underestimate Valentine. Tom says he needs to go find Hester, but Miss Fang forbids it, saying she needs Valentine alive for questioning. Nevertheless, when Miss Fang leaves, Tom goes to find Hester anyway.

Tom tells Hester everything. They run to find Valentine, but when they see fire rising from one face of the Wall, they realize it's too late and that Valentine has already sabotaged the fleet. They run to investigate. Khora is bleeding from a sword wound Valentine gave him. Hester runs ahead into the burning airship hangars, and Tom goes after her.

*Katherine's friendship and possible romance with Pod is similar to Hester and Tom's slowly unfolding, unlikely relationship. The fossil of the blue whale suggests that pollution has caused species that used to exist to go extinct, filling in more details about the postapocalyptic world these characters inhabit.*



*Like MEDUSA, the name "Pandora" also comes from Greek mythology. Although she isn't from the same legend as Medusa, Pandora famously opens a box that unleashes all of the evil into the world. The mythological Pandora acted not out of malice but out of curiosity, matching with how the character Pandora also didn't plan to use MEDUSA for evil.*



*In spite of everything, Tom feels one last flicker of admiration for Valentine, and this seems to be what makes him hesitate to betray London. His hesitation goes to show how difficult it is to abandon a long-held loyalty.*



*As Tom has more time to think, he realizes that he's finally ready to leave his home city behind. But his hesitation cost him his chance, and Valentine manages to slip away in the crowd.*



*Although Tom has decided to trust Miss Fang over Valentine, his strongest allegiance remains to Hester, showing how their bond has grown after a relatively short amount of time traveling with each other.*



*Although Valentine is a violent character, he commits much of his violence without being seen, like the burning of the airships, and this is how he maintains his public reputation as a respectable person.*



Tom gets lost in the hangar tunnels. Suddenly, he comes across Miss Fang and Valentine in a sword fight. The two fight fiercely while Tom watches from the shadows. Eventually, Miss Fang knocks Valentine's sword away and levels her blade at his throat. Valentine stalls for time. All of a sudden, the searchlights of his ship turn on, blinding Miss Fang. He picks his sword back up and slits her throat.

*Valentine tricks Miss Fang after she won fairly, suggesting that, like many other characters in the story, he is ruthless and willing to do whatever it takes to personally survive. This passage suggests that sometimes simply being heroic, like Miss Fang, isn't enough to prevail.*



## CHAPTER 29

Valentine escapes in his ship, not noticing Tom because of all the smoke and noise. Tom wonders what to do next and whether he should flee Batmunkh Gompa before London arrives with MEDUSA. He wishes he had let Hester kill Valentine after all. Hester arrives and is sad and furious to see that Valentine killed Miss Fang. Tom takes the key to the *Jenny Haniver* off Miss Fang and says they need to go get revenge.

*Although Miss Fang's death is a sad event in the story, it also represents a passing of the torch as her ship, the *Jenny Haniver*, becomes Tom and Hester's new ship. This passage offers a glimmer of hope suggesting that even a defeat can inspire others to act.*



Tom and Hester head for the *Jenny Haniver*. Hester isn't sure they know how to fly it, but Tom says Miss Fang showed him some of the controls in the mountains. At the air-harbor, people try to stop Tom and Hester from taking off, but Khora tells everyone to stand back and wishes Tom and Hester luck. They take off in the *Jenny Haniver* and head for London.

*Tom prepares to end his journey by going right back to where he started, echoing a trope that has survived in adventure stories since the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of ancient Greece.*



## CHAPTER 30

The next afternoon, Valentine lands back in London. Katherine watches from her bedroom window. She feels grief because she used to want to see Valentine, but now she dreads it. She watches him talking and laughing with Crome. Finally, Valentine comes inside, eager to tell Katherine about his travels.

*This is Katherine's first time seeing Valentine since she learned the truth about him and MEDUSA, although she still hasn't quite accepted that Valentine isn't the kind father that he seems to be when he's around her.*



Katherine isn't happy to see Valentine again. She tells him she knows what he did to Hester. Furthermore, she says she knows about how Valentine murdered Pandora. Katherine hopes Valentine will prove her wrong, but he doesn't. Instead, he tries to claim that he did it all for Katherine, so that Crome would allow her to grow up as a lady.

*Valentine's defense of his actions resembles Miss Fang's own defense of violence in that he portrays it as a form of self-preservation, although notably, he seems less convincing, even though Katherine herself is supposedly the one who benefits from all of Valentine's actions.*



Valentine admits that after he and Pandora parted ways, she married a farmer, then at some point went back to America and found the computer-brain that could control MEDUSA. Valentine admits he killed Pandora for MEDUSA but says he had to in order to stop her from turning it over to the Anti-Traction League. He reveals that he was close with Pandora once and that it's even possible Hester is her sister.

*Valentine's honesty with his daughter is striking. It suggests that, as much as Valentine tries to hide his dark side, he nevertheless believes that his actions are all justified—or so he tells himself. The reveal that Hester might be Valentine's daughter makes Valentine's attempted murder of Hester all the more chilling.*



Valentine reveals that MEDUSA will blast a path through the **Shield-Wall** that evening. Katherine says they have to stop it. Valentine argues that would leave London vulnerable in the middle of the Hunting Ground, but Katherine intends to find some way to stop MEDUSA anyway.

*This conversation reveals how Valentine has fully internalized the eat-or-be-eaten mentality that Crome preaches, but Katherine nevertheless remains selfless, willing to put the welfare of the people behind the Shield-Wall above even her own city's safety.*



## CHAPTER 31

People in London excitedly gather at observation decks, hoping to be the first to see the **Shield-Wall**. Meanwhile, in the Museum, Katherine tells Pod about the impending MEDUSA attack. She disowns Valentine and says he won't help them. Pod suggests that if they really want to destroy MEDUSA, they'll need something big, like a bomb. Pod thinks maybe they could put something together with materials from the Museum. Meanwhile, the Historian bully Herbert Melliphant, who is still loyal to Crome, listens in on their conversation.

*Katherine's willingness to turn against her father—even using a bomb to stop MEDUSA—shows how far she's come in such a short period of time. Katherine and Pod's use of a bomb resembles Miss Fang's tactics, suggesting perhaps that Miss Fang's actions were justified or perhaps simply that desperate times sometimes call for morally gray actions. Melliphant (whose name sounds like "elephant") lives up to his name by using his big ears to eavesdrop on a conversation.*



Valentine can't find Katherine, so he asks around and finds out that she's been spending a lot of time at the Museum. He decides maybe it's better to just leave her there where she'll be safe for the moment. He regrets giving MEDUSA to Crome. Meanwhile, at his dinner, Crome greets Melliphant, who has just come into his office.

*The more Valentine thinks about his past actions, the more he regrets them, but with MEDUSA already in Crome's hands, there's not much Valentine can do. Meanwhile, Melliphant lives up to his reputation as a bully, showing how people who are cruel in small ways might be capable of even bigger cruelties.*



## CHAPTER 32

Katherine is surprised to learn how clever Pod is as he works on constructing a bomb. When he finishes, he explains that the bomb won't make a huge blast, but it can destroy MEDUSA's computer-brain if it's close. Katherine plans to use her status as Valentine's daughter to get close to MEDUSA.

*Pod reveals that he has hidden depth, and that the oppressive nature of the Gut was preventing him from reaching his full potential. At the same time, Katherine uses her class privilege to help save others, showing how much she's grown.*



All of a sudden, Katherine and Pod hear shouting from somewhere else in the Museum. Dog growls. A security team of Engineers comes down the stairs. Dog won't calm down, so the Engineers shoot him and Dog dies. One of the Engineers comes forward and discovers Pod's bomb. They take Katherine and Pod prisoner, planning to send Pod back to the Gut and to take Katherine to Crome's dinner party.

*The death of Dog, even though it wasn't directly Valentine's doing, suggests the death of the last shred of Valentine's conscience and humanity.*



Valentine pulls up at Guild-hall for Crome's party. He orders two of his henchmen to take his airship up and go patrolling for any resistance from the League of Anti-Tractionists.

*With Tom and Hester planning to arrive in London by airship, the launching of Valentine's airship represents a significant obstacle.*





As the Engineers march Katherine and Pod out of the Museum, Pomeroy shows up with a giant blunderbuss. Other Historians also hold antique guns. Pomeroy orders the Engineers to let the captives go. The Engineers laugh and refuse, so the Historians fire. About half the Engineers go down while the remainder scramble to fight back with their more advanced weapons. Pod himself grabs an antique gun and joins in. When the dust clears, the Historians have defeated all the Engineers.

*The Historians don't have the most advanced weapons, but they know the territory in the museum and they are willing to fight for their cause. The Engineers make the mistake of underestimating the weapons of the past, suggesting that in general the Engineering Guild of London has hurt itself by ignoring the Guild of Historians and the history that they represent.*



Clytie comes into the Museum and warns them that some Engineers escaped outside and have gone to raise the alarm. Pomeroy promises Katherine and Pod that the Historians will keep the Engineers busy at the Museum so that the two of them can sneak up Cat's Creep, an old secret stairwell that leads to Top Tier, with the bomb.

*The Historians represent knowledge, and so they know about a secret passageway to Top Tier that many others don't know about. The escaping Engineers suggest that the battle is far from over and that things will only intensify once word gets out about what happened in the museum.*



## CHAPTER 33

Aboard the *Jenny Haniver*, Tom and Hester look around and find that Miss Fang was rich with old treasure. They continue on their course toward London.

*Miss Fang didn't necessarily act like a rich person, suggesting that even after her death, she has the ability to surprise people.*



Meanwhile, at Crome's party, Crome greets Valentine. He informs Valentine of the fighting at the museum. Valentine worries about Katherine, but Crome warns him not to leave, since security teams are currently barricading the lower Tiers. Reluctantly, Valentine agrees to stay.

*As the novel builds toward the climax, the perspective jumps quickly between different characters to provide a panoramic view of the events and show how all of the characters intersect.*



Pomeroy show Katherine the secret wall in the Museum that leads to Cat's Creep. Katherine suggests that Pomeroy should come with her, but Pomeroy says he has to stay behind and defend his Museum with the others.

*Pomeroy is willing to fight to the death for his values, suggesting that his stern treatment of Tom at the beginning of the novel may have just been because Pomeroy cares so much about their work.*



In the air, Tom sees London from the outside for the first time and realizes that it's uglier than he expected it to be, looking just like any other town rather than the grand city he expected. He and Hester notice activity on Top Tier. Just then, a radio call from London demands their identification number. Hester remembers hearing the number for Shrike's ship, so she gives it. Tom says he'll drop Hester off, then circle London and pick her up in 20 minutes. Hester tells him to leave because she plans to be dead by then, but Tom insists he's coming back.

*Although Tom has already turned against London by this point, his first view of London from the outside is still significant, because it shows how much Tom has changed since the last time he was in London. Tom literally sees London from the outside soon after learning how to metaphorically "see" London from the outside (by talking to people and going to places outside the city).*



At his party, Crome gets word from an Engineer that an Anti-Tractionist ship may have landed in Top Tier. Crome says it's a good excuse to try out the next line of Stalkers. He wants the Stalkers to bring him the intruders alive.

*The party atmosphere around Crome contrasts with the extremely violent act he's planning to commit with MEDUSA.*



## CHAPTER 34

As Tom flies above London, all of a sudden, something hits the side of the *Jenny Haniver* and punches a hole in it. Valentine's ship is flying near him.

*The damage to Tom's ship doesn't seem to be enough to cause a crash, but it's a wake-up call for Tom about the dangers he faces in the sky with a hostile airship.*



Crome and his party guests have headed out to a square where they'll have a better view of MEDUSA. As they're getting ready, however, Valentine stands in Crome's way. He worries that breaching the **Shield-Wall** will result in massive loss of life, not just for the Anti-Tractionists but also for London, when it has to face the many strongholds inside the Wall. And even if London is successful, it will run out of prey at some point. But Crome just smiles and says he's already thought of a plan that will allow London to keep moving forever.

*Valentine seems to be telling the truth here—he really does seem to be having some last-minute regrets about his cooperation with MEDUSA. But his objections come too late, and unlike Valentine, Crome has zero conscience, thinking in totally selfish terms, and so he doesn't find any of Valentine's arguments persuasive. Moreover, Crome remains convinced that he himself is always correct.*



As Hester crouches to avoid Stalkers, Katherine and Pod emerge from Cat's Creep not far from the square where the crowd has gathered to watch MEDUSA. Meanwhile, Tom searches for the *Jenny Haniver's* guns. He finds them and fires, managing to hit Valentine's ship, but the shots mostly bounce off its armor. Then Tom remembers the rockets he saw Miss Fang fire earlier. He finds the rocket controls and fires. The other ship catches fire and starts to go down.

*Tom once again seems to get lucky, finding the rockets just in time and managing to shoot down the enemy ship, even though it struck the first blow against him. As it turns out, however, Tom's seeming good luck here will lead to a cascade of events that suggest his luck isn't so good after all.*



Valentine's ship comes crashing down toward London. Pod pushes Katherine away in time, but the burning ship hits him. Katherine recognizes it as her father's ship. She looks through the wreckage and finds Pod's body. A nearby man who works at one of the elevator stations tries to reassure Katherine by telling her that Valentine wasn't on his ship when it crashed.

*Even though Pod only knew Katherine for a short time, he is willing to give his life for her, possibly suggesting how much he cared for her and how much he appreciated her getting him out of the Gut, or possibly just reflecting his selfless personality, which contrasts sharply with the greed of men like Crome.*



Hester witnesses the crash as she heads toward Guild-hall. She comes across a Stalker who was seriously wounded by the crash, then all of a sudden, several more Stalkers surround her. The dome of St. Paul's begins to open.

*This passage suggests that things are taking a turn for the worst, with Hester presumably captured by Stalkers and MEDUSA getting ready to fire.*



## CHAPTER 35

In the *Jenny Haniver*, Tom regrets seeing the devastation that his rockets caused. Then he remembers his promise to pick Hester up, so he starts heading back to dock at Top Tier.

Katherine is dazed after watching Pod die. She makes her way near the central square and hides, watching as Valentine reluctantly stays with Crome instead of investigating the fires from the crash. Crome says they have to fire MEDUSA at once, in case the fires damage it. Katherine thinks maybe she could activate and throw the bomb now, but she doesn't want to do it with Valentine standing right there.

While Crome's Engineers put in MEDUSA's input codes, some Stalkers bring back Hester to him. Katherine watches from her secret place, shocked to witness for the first time what Valentine's sword did to Hester's face. Katherine sees a horrible expression on Valentine's face and realizes he's about to draw his sword. Katherine leaps to intervene, and Valentine ends up slashing Katherine in the ribs instead of Hester. Katherine falls and her head hits a keyboard, making MEDUSA's computer-brain give an error message.

Valentine cradles Katherine and shouts for help, but the Engineers around him are more worried about MEDUSA, which keeps building power even though it rejected their targeting coordinates. At last, Hester comes forward and helps Valentine staunch Katherine's bleeding. Hester looks up and sees the *Jenny Haniver* with Tom in it. Katherine needs a doctor, and Hester remembers that the *Jenny Haniver* has a medical bay. The airship can't land, however, because of all the flames around. Valentine orders everyone not to fire on the *Jenny Haniver*. Meanwhile, Crome shouts at Valentine to get MEDUSA under control again.

## CHAPTER 36

As the fires spread through Top Tier, Hester climbs up to the top of MEDUSA and waves to the *Jenny Haniver*. Tom recognizes her shawl in the distance. On the ground, Katherine wakes up feeling cold and sees the *Jenny Haniver* landing. Valentine starts carrying Katherine toward the airship, but she dies in his arms. Valentine tells Hester to go on without him, so she and Tom take off again.

*Tom learns that violence, even when justified in self-defense, can sometimes have unexpected and unfortunate consequences as he sees the fire spreading from the downed airship.*



*After witnessing the death of Pod firsthand, Katherine goes on to see firsthand proof of her father submitting to Crome instead of going to help other people. Yet even in spite of all that, she refuses to put Valentine in danger by activating her bomb near him.*



*Inspired by Pod's example, Katherine offers her own life in order to save Hester. Valentine ends up accidentally hitting Katherine, the one person he was supposedly doing everything for. This shows how all of Valentine's concessions to Crome were ultimately self-defeating, leading him to this moment when he strikes Katherine with his sword. Katherine's head hitting the computer keyboard is yet another random act that will have big consequences.*



*Katherine's severe wound causes even the mortal enemies Valentine and Hester to put aside their differences, suggesting that on some level each sees a little bit of the humanity in the other—or at the very least, they're both willing to put Katherine's needs above their own. The growing fires symbolize how the situation is getting out of control, deviating from Crome's original plans.*



*Tom's shawl, which began as a simple gift, becomes important later as it helps him identify Hester at a distance, showing how small acts of kindness can have unexpected benefits. Katherine's death confirms the futility of all of Valentine's efforts to appease Crome for her benefit. Seemingly unable to deal with his own guilt, Valentine doesn't join the airship as Tom and Hester prepare to escape.*



All of a sudden, London's motors in the Gut go out and the whole city slows down. In the Museum, Pomeroy marvels that perhaps he and the other Historians won after all. On Top Tier, Valentine watches Tom and Hester fly away while fire builds around him. He holds Katherine's body close as sparks come from St. Paul's, and they both get turned to ash.

*Due to a malfunction, MEDUSA fires on London itself. One of the recurring ideas in the story is that violence can be a double-edged sword, and this idea reaches its extreme when the entire city of London faces the consequences of its violent predator Traction City ways.*



## CHAPTER 37

Lightning seems to strike all over London. The city burns and explodes, and even the escaping airships get caught in the blast. Only the *Jenny Haniver* survives. Tom blames himself for destroying London by firing the rockets, but Hester says the blame lies with many more people, including Crome, the Engineers, and Valentine. She kisses Tom and tells him it'll be okay.

*This passage complicates the role of luck in the story. On the one hand, the destruction of London seems to be a freak accident caused by one stray rocket blast. But as Hester explains, it isn't fair to blame everything on Tom. London exploded because men like Crome failed to consider the possible consequences of their actions, making some sort of catastrophe almost inevitable.*



As they fly away, Tom tries to observe London from a distance and see if anyone survived, but there's no sign of life anywhere in the destroyed city. Hester suggests that they should fly to Batmunkh Gompa, where people will welcome them as heroes. But Tom doesn't want to do this because he doesn't feel like a hero. Hester understands and says there's no rush. They can repair the *Jenny Haniver* at Black Island, then take it as far away as they want. She says Tom might not be a real hero and they might not live happily ever after, but everything will be okay because they're still alive and together.

*The novel ends on a somewhat dark note, with most of the characters other than Tom and Hester either dead or presumed dead. Nevertheless, as the two of them take to the skies, they realize that there's so much more to the world than just London, offering hope that as long as the two of them still have each other, there is hope for both their future and for the future of the world in general.*





## HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

### MLA

Gahr, Tim. "Mortal Engines." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 25 Feb 2023. Web. 25 Feb 2023.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Gahr, Tim. "Mortal Engines." LitCharts LLC, February 25, 2023. Retrieved February 25, 2023. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/mortal-engines>.

To cite any of the quotes from *Mortal Engines* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

### MLA

Reeve, Philip. *Mortal Engines*. Scholastic Press. 2017.

### CHICAGO MANUAL

Reeve, Philip. *Mortal Engines*. New York: Scholastic Press. 2017.