

## 2017 Carnegie Medal shortlist Talking Points

Title: **Railhead**

Author: **Philip Reeve**

Publisher: **Oxford University Press**



### ZEN

Zen, our hero, is a petty thief. Is he an admirable character?

Zen tries to portray an image of himself: “the lone thief, all stray-cat-cool, walking solitary down some midnight street” – but do you see more to him than this?

He’s certainly in it for himself, he puts himself first, quite selfishly – but does he change over the course of the story?

What importance does his family have in his life?

### ALTERNATIVE WORLDS?

Speculative fiction is often used to comment on our own world, our own time – what might the *Railhead* world tell us about our own?

The book is full of brilliant original ideas to make the world seem complex and realistic; but it’s an imagined world founded on one basic new concept (special trains on hyperspace railways). If you think it’s an effective premise, why do you think it works?

Philip Reeve has said of the imaginative new technology in the book: “a lot of things in *Railhead* are based on things which are already happening”. Can you think of examples of this?

The book is also a response to the recent wave of dystopias in YA fiction – what makes it different?

### HUMANS AND HUMANOIDS

What’s the difference between a human-like Motorik and an actual human?

Can you imagine having robot servants in our world? How human-like can you imagine them becoming? (Having emotions? Consciousness?) Is it a comfortable prospect?



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Nova, like Zen, is a kind of outsider, who evokes some sympathy in a reader; does she make you think about what it means to be human, even if technically she isn't?

### **GOOD AND BAD**

It isn't always clear whom to trust – how do allegiances seem to shift over the course of Zen's story?

The Railhead world is watched over by "The Guardians" – do you see them as a positive or a negative force?

And what about the Hive Monks – they're pretty creepy, but are they actually hostile?

And is Raven himself just a straight-forward, two-dimensional villain, or something more interesting than that?

### **BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS**

Read the opening lines again – a good way to start a book?

Could you see clues in the way it ends to suggest that a sequel would follow?

And there is indeed a sequel! Are you keen to read it? Any predictions about what will happen next?

### **AND FINALLY...**

Does this Carnegie-shortlisted book deserve to win? Why, or why not?



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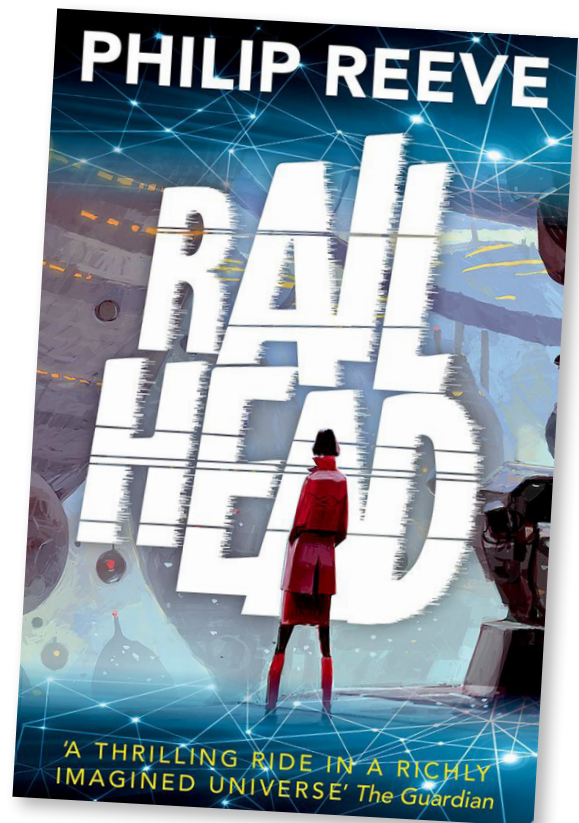
# RAILHEAD

by Philip Reeve

Oxford University Press

Shortlisted for the 2017 Kate Greenaway Medal and the Amnesty CILIP Honour

*'Engaging and fast-paced with clever use of humour. The book explores what it is to be human and some harsh criticisms of society in subtle ways'* – Judging panel



**We all have the right to take part in the government of our country.**

Article 21, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Railhead is set in a world where artificial intelligence is a reality. The Guardians control the secrets of science and technology, and Motoriks are doing jobs that humans used to. All teenage thief Zen Starling wants to do is ride the rails but he becomes embroiled in a plot. One that might liberate humanity or be the devastating actions of a terrorist.

*‘He wanted to share those secrets, and they would not allow it.’*

**Narrator**

## HUMAN RIGHTS THEMES IN THIS STORY

Mental health; gender identity; right to privacy; LGBTI rights; right to marry; right to participate in government; activism and resistance; right to safety.

## YOU CAN TALK ABOUT...

### Control and participation

- Should there be an Empire run by Corporate Families?
- If you could design a replacement system, what would it look like?

### Power and information

- Those in power choose what people have a right to know and what governments should keep secret. Why do The Guardians not want humans to know their secrets? Does this happen in our world?
- Do you think Raven was right to try to rebel against The Guardians?
- How important is it to be able to access information?

### Taking action

- Why is Raven prepared to use violence and to risk destroying everything?
- Would you describe him as a hero or a villain?
- How do you feel about Zen's tactics?

### Diversity

- Why does the author make most of the characters 'brown' or 'dark-skinned' with white people as a minority?
- Flex expresses as male and female and says 'Inside, we're not really male or female'. What are the differences between men and women?
- How do you feel when Flex asks Zen if he would change gender if he could?

### Finally...

- Are sentient droids really anything other than people made from different materials? They can think, feel and create. Should Motoriks have the same rights as humans?

### ACTIVITY

Write a Universal Declaration of Motorik Rights.

### RESEARCH

Find out about Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, so-called whistle-blowers who took great risks to expose human rights abuses.

## We are all born free and equal

The atrocities of World War II sparked a determination to protect the rights of all human beings, everywhere. On 10 December 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The preamble says it must be shared, learned by children and be a part of all our lives.

For a simplified version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights go to [www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/udhr)

For more free educational resources from Amnesty International go to [www.amnesty.org.uk/education](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/education)



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