

## 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?

