Ideas for Exploring the Novel

**Railhead by Philip Reeve**

*Railhead: About the Book*

The Great Network is the place of the thousand gates, where sentient trains criss-cross the galaxy in a heartbeat. It is a place of drones and androids, maintenance spiders and station angels.

Zen Starling is a petty thief, stealing to support his family and living by his wits. When mysterious stranger Raven sends Zen and his new friend Nova on a mission to infiltrate the Emperor's train, he jumps at the chance to traverse the Great Network.

But it could be that the key to the whole universe rests on finding out what else he is...

*Railhead* is the first title in a new trilogy from Carnegie Medal winning author Philip Reeve.

*Railhead - The Author: Philip Reeve*

Philip Reeve worked in a bookshop for a number of years while also co-writing, producing and directing a number of no-budget theatre projects. He then began illustrating, and has provided illustrations, cartoons and comic strips for around forty children's books, including the best-selling *Horrible Histories*, *Murderous Maths* and *Dead Famous* series.

It was while working on these that he wrote his first novel, *Mortal Engines*, a gripping adventure story set in a future world where moving cities trawl the globe. A magical and unique read, it immediately caught the attention of reviewers and book buyers. It was the Gold Award winner at the Nestle
Smarties Book Prize 2002 and the winner of the 2003 Blue Peter Book of the Year. *Predator’s Gold, Infernal Devices and A Darkling Plain* are the following three books in the *Mortal Engines* quartet.

In 2008 Philip won the CILIP Carnegie Medal for *Here Lies Arthur*. This is set in the Dark Ages and explores how a myth can be created simply through spin-doctoring and story-telling.

Philip also collaborates with the illustrator and comics creator Sarah McIntyre. Their books together include *Oliver and the Seawigs, Cakes in Space, Pugs of the Frozen North* and *Jinx and O’Hare Funfair Repair*.

See the ‘Further Reading’ list at the end of these notes for information on the rest of Philip’s books or visit his website [www.philip-reeve.com](http://www.philip-reeve.com)

**Railhead: What Readers Say**

‘There is plenty here to please fans: vivid world-building, extraordinary beings and a story of epic proportions.’ *Fiona Noble, The Bookseller*

‘Its greatest pleasures are its details, which are as richly imagined as in the best adult science fiction... Above all, he delivers an unflaggingly propulsive narrative that is never derailed by world-building. Rather, it rattles along like an interstellar express, leaving you eager for the next thrilling ride.’ *SF Said, The Guardian*

‘Intelligent trains, humanity ruled over by near-omniscient AI, worlds full of vibrant life or devoid of everything, and the insect Hive Monks all blend into one amazing, fabulous even, universe that - science fiction aside - is totally believable.’ *Matthew Sylvester on Amazon*

‘This book was so good; I loved every second of it.’ *Megan Chambers, age 14, for lovereading4kids.co.uk*

**Thinking and Talking About the Book**

**Reading the Book:**
Look at the cover and the blurb, and set the scene. You could show this introductory film clip from Philip Reeve’s website:
http://www.philip-reeve.com/blog/page/17/
Read aloud the first chapter and pick up on any questions, and then read the book all the way through, either reading aloud to everyone together, or letting everyone read and experience the book for themselves.

Keep the flow of the story and at the end allow time for people to reflect on it and think about their responses to it.

Talking About the Book: Some Book Talk Questions

Get everyone to share their first responses to this book. This could be with the whole class/group – or children could discuss in small groups, and then share their main feelings and questions with everyone.

Ask lots of open questions to get people talking and encourage discussion about feelings and responses to the story, the characters, and the writing. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers – we’ll all have our own feelings and thoughts about the book, and the things we like, or don’t like.

Here are some questions you might use.

- How did you feel when reading this book? And when you’d finished it?
- Which parts of the story do you remember most?
- Did you skip any parts? Which ones?
- Was there anything that took you by surprise?
- Were there any parts you didn’t make sense of?
- What was the thing you most liked finding out from the book?
- What kind of a book did you think it was going to be?
- If you gave up on this book can you say why?
- What would you say about this book if you were telling someone what you’ve just read?
- Does the story work for you? What does the book say to you?
- Has reading the book changed or affected you? At the end of the story did you feel as if you’d shared a real experience?
- Did you stop and start, or did you want to read it all through in one go?
- Are there parts you want to read over again?
Would you recommend the book to your friends? Why? Or why not?
The National Curriculum in England

The discussion and activity ideas in this pack can be used to support and inspire students’ work towards a range of national curriculum aims, particularly in English, Science and Art & Design, including the following:

**English**

*The overarching aim for English in the national curriculum is to promote high standards of language and literacy by equipping pupils with a strong command of the spoken and written language, and to develop their love of literature through widespread reading for enjoyment.*

...The national curriculum for English aims to ensure that all pupils...

- write clearly, accurately and coherently, adapting their language and style in and for a range of contexts, purposes and audiences
- use discussion in order to learn; they should be able to elaborate and explain clearly their understanding and ideas
- are competent in the arts of speaking and listening, making formal presentations, demonstrating to others and participating in debate

The English curriculum programme also highlights the importance of pupils ‘continuing to develop with their skills in working collaboratively with their peers to discuss reading, writing and speech across the curriculum.’

**Science**

*Science has changed our lives and is vital to the world’s future prosperity, and all pupils should be taught essential aspects of the knowledge, methods, processes and uses of science. Through building up a body of key foundational knowledge and concepts, pupils should be encouraged to recognise the power of rational explanation and develop a sense of excitement and curiosity about natural phenomena.*

**Art & Design**

*A high-quality art and design education should engage, inspire and challenge pupils, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to experiment, invent and create their own works of art, craft and design*
Discussion and Activity Ideas

Here are ideas for students’ discussion and activities, including research, creative writing, art, and further reading.

There are activities for work with the whole class, for collaboration in groups and pairs, or working individually.

Railhead Quiz

You could use this quiz as a way of taking students through the story, picking up on key themes, characters and events, and talking through the answers together.

For each question choose an answer – occasionally there is more than one correct option!

1. **Why is Zen running at the start of this story?**

   a. To catch a train
   b. He has stolen a necklace
   c. He is practising for an inter-galactic sports day

2. **What is Ambrosai?**

   a. The moon where Zen grew up
   b. A flower
   c. Something to eat

3. **What’s the local name for Cleave, Zen’s home town?**

   a. Cliff Town
   b. Thunder City
   c. Canyon City

4. **What is the name of the great railway network?**

   a. The K Network
   b. The K-Bahn
c. The Galactic Railway

5. **What is a K-gate?**

   a. A portal to the Underworld
   b. A kissing-gate
   c. A portal through which a train can pass from one world to another

6. **What are the Motoriks?**

   a. Humanoid robots
   b. Top Gear fans
   c. Train mechanics

7. **Who is the girl in the red raincoat who is chasing Zen?**

   a. Threnody Noon, a daughter of the Emperor
   b. Nova, a humanoid robot
   c. Myka, Zen’s sister

8. **What is the name of the artificial intelligences who guide and control human beings?**

   a. The Defenders
   b. The Protectors
   c. The Guardians

9. **What does a Hive Monk look like?**

   a. An ordinary human being
   b. A humanoid robot
   c. A paper face being held up by a mass of beetles

10. **What is the name of the railway lines which the Hive Monks believe exist beyond the known network ‘where the nests of the shining ones lie’?**

    a. The Bee Lines
b. The Insect Lines  
c. The Hive Network

11. What are the Station Angels?
   a. Strange light-forms flickering alongside trains  
   b. Winged train drivers  
   c. Helpful people on station platforms

12. What is found in the Datasea?
   a. Old diaries  
   b. Fish  
   c. Information

13. How did Raven get to have so many lives?
   a. A Guardian fell in love with him and to keep him with her she gave him the power to keep cloning himself  
   b. Deep in the Datasea he discovered a cloning formula  
   c. He isn’t a human being

14. What does Raven want Zen to do?
   a. Pretend to be a member of the powerful Noon family  
   b. Steal the Pyxis and the sphere it contains  
   c. Bring it to Raven who will set the sphere in place to trigger the creation of a new K-gate to other worlds

15. Who uses each of these trains?
   a. Thought Fox  
   b. Damask Rose  
   c. Wildfire

16. Why does Kobi want to go hunting with Zen?
a. To kill an archaeopteryx  
b. To explore Jangala together  
c. To kill Zen  

17. **What are the rays?**  
   
a. Powerful beams of light shining from the K-gates  
b. Powerful, genetically-engineered, winged predators with barbed tails to harpoon their prey  
c. Powerful carnivorous fish which swim in seas deep below the ice of frozen moons  

18. **The Spindlebridge is:**  
   
a. A long tube with a K-gate at each end, which orbits the planet Sundarban  
b. A long narrow bridge left behind on Old Earth  
c. A spindly suspension bridge on Cleave across the canyon  

19. **What is the Worm?**  
   
a. A creature living in a wormhole in space  
b. A device which becomes a K-gate when the special sphere is put in place to trigger the opening of a portal  
c. A genetically-designed megasnake living in the Jangala forest  

20. **What happened to Nova?**  
   
a. Hit by grapnel she was left damaged and floating in space  
b. Zen found and rescued her  
c. With Zen on the *Damask Rose* she went through the new K-gate to worlds yet unknown  

**Discussion Topics**  

*Science Fiction Novels and Films*
‘... with the resurgence of public interest in space, the publishing landscape has changed. Many children’s authors are now writing science fiction stories, and the next few years will see a huge expansion in the field.’


What is science fiction? Talk together about this genre of imaginative fiction: what kind of themes does it explore?

Collect a list of SF themes such as space travel, time travel, parallel universes, and futuristic science and technology.

What are people’s favourite SF novels and films?

Data, The Datasea, and Communication

‘...a massive information system made from the interlinked internets of all the inhabited worlds.’

Talk about the concept of the Datasea in Railhead, with its Data Rafts and Data Divers, and transference of data between worlds via the minds of trains flashing through K-gates – and the communication devices used in the story by humans and Motorik: dataslates, wallscreens, headsets.

Compare this with the ways in which information in our present world is collected and accessed.

Being Human

Motorik are humanoid androids – robots – who have been built to carry out monotonous or dangerous work which might be risky to humans. In Railhead some of the Motorik are beginning to realise what they are capable of – like Flex, and Nova, who says ‘...I have feelings and dreams, like humans do.’ (Page 46)

Talk about what you think are differences between humans and robots.


**Cloning**

*He (Malik) was starting to realise that you only got one chance at life, and that his was half over. But not Raven. When Raven started to feel age slowing him down he just discarded that body and cloned another. (Page 69)*

Talk about Raven and his ability to continue living - seemingly for ever. Would you like to be to be able to clone yourself like this? What do you think would be the advantages and disadvantages?

Raven chooses to have the same body each time: would you continue as you are or would you choose to clone yourself as someone different?

What other bodies might you choose to have? Why?

**Phobias**

*The bugs were all over him now, pouring into his mouth, scuttling down his throat while he gagged and struggled, down on his knees, choking, bug-blind, bug-smothered. (Page 259)*

A bad dream? A challenge from ‘I’m a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here’?! As a result of this experience with the Hive Monk Uncle Bugs, Zen is left with a ‘phobic reaction to insects’.

Talk about phobias – fears which can cause great distress so that sufferers will go to great lengths to avoid the thing or situation which upsets them.

Do you have a particular fear? How do you deal with it?

People may have a phobia about anything – here are the names of just a few phobias. Rearrange them so each has its correct description.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phobia</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agoraphobia</td>
<td>a. Fear of spiders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ornithophobia</td>
<td>b. Fear of being enclosed in small spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claustrophobia</td>
<td>c. Fear of dentists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobia</td>
<td>Fear of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arachnophobia</td>
<td>sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somniphobia</td>
<td>open spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoophobia</td>
<td>numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentophobia</td>
<td>birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arithmophobia</td>
<td>animals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Change**

*The Guardians are just as scared of change as humans are.* (Page 269)

‘Maybe everything needs to change,’ said Zen. (Page 295)

*Just because you have a chance to change everything, it doesn’t mean you should.* (Page 295)

Look at these three quotes about change: what do people think about them? When is change a good thing? When might it not be the best choice? Think of examples of when changes have been beneficial, and of times when change hasn’t worked.

**Starting Afresh**

‘Move on. Start afresh. It’s frightening, but it has to be done.’ (Page 269)

..they were just themselves: lovers, heroes, railheads, riding their old red train towards new lives... (Page 299)

Talk about the challenges of doing new things, and how they turned out – maybe a new sport or interest, a new school or a job. What feelings do you have? Nervousness perhaps? Or determination? Or hopefulness?

**More Themes to Explore Through Activities and Discussion**

*Trains, Stations, and Journeys*
Trains
‘And best of all he loved the trains, the great locomotives, each one different, some stern, some friendly, but all driven by the same deep joy that he felt at riding the rails.’ (Page 7)

Make a list of all the trains in Railhead – e.g. the Thought Fox, the Damask Rose, Time of Gifts – and how they all have feelings and personalities. Which is your favourite? What do you think about their names? (A chance to have a look at Ted Hughes’ poem The Thought Fox!) Do you know of any trains with names – such as the Orient Express, the Flying Scotsman, the Golden Hind. Invite students to create their own train – thinking about its personality and designing its shape, decoration and equipment. What sound would it make and what would you call it?

A Station
‘Ambersai station: grand and high-fronted like a great theatre, with the K-bahn logo hanging over its entrance in letters of blue fire. Booming loudspeakers reciting litanies of stations...beggars and street kids too, and buskers, and vendors selling fruit and chai and noodles, and rickshaw captains squabbling..’ (Page 4)

Talk about how the author builds up this picture of Ambersai station.

Ask students to think of a station which they know and make notes about it – and then write a paragraph describing their station in the same style as above.

An Abandoned Station
‘This place was shut down fifty years ago’. That felt right. Fifty years of dust and debris under Zen’s boot soles. Fifty years of seeping water staining the tiles...’ (Page 32)

On some of the worlds in Railhead the Dog Star Line stations are buried deep and Raven and the Thought Fox make use of these.

Talk about any abandoned stations which you know – perhaps those closed in the cuts by Beeching in the 1960s and now often converted to homes, or London Underground stations shut when the need for them changed, or new
stations were built. You can find out more about these abandoned Tube stations at [http://www.abandonedstations.org.uk/](http://www.abandonedstations.org.uk/)

**The End of the Line**

At the end of the Dog Star Line, on the water-moon Tristesse, is Desdemor, once described as ‘The jewel of the western branch lines’ but now almost a ghost city only inhabited by some Motorik, reactivated by Raven. Have a look at the descriptions on pages 43 & 62 onward.

Take the title ‘The End of the Line’ and ask students to write up to 500 words, interpreting the title in whatever way they choose.

**Places**

(Illustration of Desdemor by Jaguar)

**Where Are These Railhead Places?**

Match each description to its correct place-name!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description from Railhead</th>
<th>Place-name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ...all he could see were trees: big trees and small, leaves like spiked fans...All he could hear was the river, and the rustle of unseen beasts in the undergrowth. (Page 119)</td>
<td>Adeli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. An old world, he thought, and empty; the mines scraped bare. A good place for fugitives to hide and lick their wounds. (Page 232)</td>
<td>Cleave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3....a four-hundred-kilometre tube of ceramic and diamondglass hanging in space with a K-gate at either end. (Page 127)</td>
<td>Desdemor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4....a sheer-sided ditch of a place.... (Page 8)</td>
<td>Jangala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It was the Noon’s hometown and they had built it to</td>
<td>Winterreise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
impress. Proud towers rose into the afternoon haze... (Page 189)

6. A sleepy white city dozed there beside the K-bahn tracks... ‘We’re safe’, said Myka. ‘They won’t find us here.’ (Page 153) Spindlebridge

7. ...a world of mists. Life took place on mountaintops, and all around them stretched seas of flickering fog... (Page 79) Summer’s Lease

8. ‘Jewel of the western branch lines!’ ... Buckets and spades lay half-buried in the drifts of sand inside, like treasures in desert tombs. (Page 44) Sundarban

**Building a World**  
*Railhead* is set in a future where humans have left Earth and now inhabit many worlds, connected by sentient trains travelling the Great Network of the K-bahn and the K-gates.

What would your futuristic world be like? How would it work? What would be in it? You could do this collaboratively or individually, first of all brain-storming and shaping up your ideas, and then setting it out in words and/or pictures.

Have a look at author Philip Reeve’s website blog which gives lots of background to his writing of *Railhead*. There is a section called ‘Building New Worlds’ ([http://www.philip-reeve.com/blog/page/4/](http://www.philip-reeve.com/blog/page/4/)) which gives suggestions for how you might go about planning your world of the future, thinking about things such as ‘new materials’, ‘names’, ‘memories’, ‘insects’, and building in things in which you are especially interested.

**Making a Model**  
‘Cleave’s houses and factories were packed like shelved crates up each wall of a mile-deep canyon ... Space was scarce, so the buildings huddled into every scrap of terracing, and clung to cliff faces, and crowded on bridges... ‘(Page 8).
‘Of all the strange stations of the Network, there was none stranger than the Spindlebridge. Above the planet Sundarban, two naked K-gates hung in orbit.’ (Page 127)

In *Railhead* there are several detailed descriptions of places in the Network. Choose one for making a model, create a design and work out and gather together the materials you’ll need – and then have a go!

**Characters In The Story**

**Acrostics!**

An acrostic is a series of lines in which certain letters—usually the first in each line—form a name or message when read in sequence.

Look at the ‘RAILHEAD’ acrostic on the back cover, describing Zen and come up with evidence from the story which demonstrates each of these aspects of his character. See too if you can think of other words which might replace some of those here – for example you might have ‘Lover’, instead of ‘Liar’, to show how Zen cares about Nova.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rebel</th>
<th>Evidence from the story about Zen’s character……</th>
<th>Alternative word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adventurer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liar</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enemy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destination Unknown</td>
<td></td>
<td>Daring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Create acrostics for other characters, using their names, or a word describing them – e.g. Flex, Malik, Myka/Angry, Nova, Raven, Threnody/Brave.

Here’s a suggestion for one about Flex:

Female?
Loved by Myka
Entrepreneurial
Xtremely good at painting graffiti on trains!

You could also have a go at an acrostic using your own name – e.g: for Sarah:

Sensitive
Artistic
Realistic
And
Happy
## Who Am I?

Match each description to the correct name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. I’ve never been good at understanding people but I’m good at watching them – and at stealing things.</td>
<td>Anais Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. I think of myself as a freedom fighter. I was in love with a Guardian and have lived for hundreds of years in dozens of cloned bodies.</td>
<td>Flex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. I have a scarred face and am on a mission to kill Raven for the Guardians. I hate to leave a job unfinished.</td>
<td>Kobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. I’m Zen’s sister. I took part in the anti-Moto riots and am usually angry with everyone, but not with my mother.</td>
<td>Lyssa Delius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. I am a Guardian and have an interface with blue skin and high golden antlers.</td>
<td>Malik</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. I’m a Hive Monk. My ‘body’ is made up of a swarms of big brown beetles clinging to a ‘skeleton’ of sticks, string and chicken bones,</td>
<td>Myka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. I am heir to a Sundarbani asteroid-mining company and engaged to Threnody – but I’m not just a spoiled rich boy.</td>
<td>Nova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. I was a daughter of the Emperor. I met Zen on our Noon family train; after my father was killed I was made Empress of the galaxy.</td>
<td>Raven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. I am a Motorik who is neither male nor female; I am a skilled graffiti artist.</td>
<td>Threnody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. I work for Railforce Command; I grew up with Malik but I am now happily settled, playing politicians’ games.</td>
<td>Uncle Bugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. I am a Motorik, created by Raven. I can programme myself and I have freckles and feelings and dreams. I care about Zen.</td>
<td>Zen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Do Railhead’s Characters Think About Each Other?

Choose a pair of characters who are linked together in the story – e.g. Threnody & Kobi, Myka & Flex, Raven & Malik, Zen & Nova – and imagine what one of them would say about the other. From the book collect evidence of thoughts, feelings and actions and then write a description in your chosen persona – e.g Kobi writing about Threnody, or Raven about Malik.

Travelling Between Worlds

*You step aboard a train, and the train goes through a K-gate, and you step off on another planet... (Page 6)*

On the Great Network special trains, with feelings and characters, travel from one star-system to another through the K-gates. Imagine yourself in the future, able to travel through constellations – making a journey for example around Orion or the 5 brightest stars of Cassiopeia.

Choose a Constellation and Find Out More About It

Draw your constellation and plot a journey around the stars. Give each star a name – this could be their real names or ones you have made up. What is each star like? Is it inhabited or barren? Forested or frozen? Beautiful or bleak? How will you travel? Spaceship? Supercar? Space-surfer?!

Invent your own travelling machine. Talk about what will it look like, how does it work - how might it take you effortlessly through light-years of time?
**Railhead: Spreading the Word**

**Telling the Story to Your Children**

Imagine you are Zen or Nova – after you went through the new K-gate aboard the *Damask Rose* you found a new and good place where you could settle and bring up a family. Your children love to hear about the adventures that brought you to this new world!

**Script your story and make a recording** – audio or video. Before writing your script, think about and discuss what you want to include, for example:

- Your life before you met each other
- What the Great Network was like
- How you first met
- Being with Raven and the *Thought Fox*
- On Desdemor
- Zen on the Noon train, stealing the Pyxis
- Destroying the Noon train
- The Hive Monks
- Raven’s creation of a new K-gate
- Going through that gate

**Power Point Presentation**

You want to tell your classmates about this book: **create a power point** telling them about *Railhead*, and why you think they will enjoy the book. You want to attract their attention and interest, so that they get the book and read it – and get more people reading it too.

First make a plan of what you want to say and what could go on each slide. Why do you think people will want to read this book? Include in your presentation:

- An attention-catching title and first slide
- Simple, clear bullet points
- Excerpts from the story
Writing a Review of the Book

Have a look at some book reviews on websites such as Books for Keeps [http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/reviews](http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/reviews) Then write your own review of Railhead – make it at least 100 words in length.

- Give the essential information about the book: Title, author, publisher
- Give a brief outline of the story: its genre and setting, the main character, his mission. No need to tell the whole story!
- Describe how the story is told: e.g. the writing style, different characters’ points of view, pace, imagery, humour
- Most important of all! - What are your feelings and thoughts about the book? What do you like best about it? Is there anything that doesn’t work for you? Do you recommend it to other readers?

Bio-buildings

‘The houses there (in Cleave) were all bio-buildings, grown from modified baobob DNA…Most had run to seed, sprouting random balconies and bulbous little pointless extensions.’ (Page 11)

What kind of bio-, eco- or green-building is done today?

Find out about house-building where attention is paid to making a home as ecologically sound as possible.

And research the features of such houses – e.g. solar panels, grass-covered roofs – and about the best materials to use – e.g. straw, wood. What benefits do they bring? Do we use live plants at all, as in the Cleave houses, for building or making furniture?

When you’ve gathered your eco information, have a go at designing your own eco-house – you could use the template below for this: annotate the diagram and fill in the details for each part of the house.
Game reserves and hunting

‘The Jangala game reserve is stocked with heritage megafauna. All kinds of Old Earth critters recreated by the Noons’ geneticists.’

...‘What else do you hunt in here?’...‘Old Earth animals,’ said Threnody. ‘Some of the classics. Deer. Bears.’

See what author, Philip Reeve, says about Jangala in his Railhead A to Z on his website blog, and find out more about game reserves – their pros and cons.
Activity: Debate

‘Zen had never understood before why rich people went hunting. It had seemed just part of the cruelty of them. They enjoyed lording it over other people, and they enjoyed harming animals…

He knew how the first hunters must have felt, back in the first forests on Old Earth, when they matched themselves against such monsters, and defeated them.’ (Page 123)

In England fox-hunting is banned though there are currently moves to relax the Hunting Act.

Have a debate about hunting, using a formal debate structure with four speakers, proposing, opposing, seconders and summary speeches, and questions and voting from the floor.

You could debate this suggested proposition: This house supports fox hunting— or you could imagine you are in Railhead times and debate a proposition such as: This house is against the hunting of Old Earth animals on Jangala.

Tips for debating:

- Research your facts thoroughly – for both sides of the argument. Think of the arguments around cruelty; animal rights; our civil liberties; the economics of fox hunting
- Have notes, but just refer to them, don’t read them out like an essay
- Make your points clearly, with persuasive arguments
- Be confident in your speech and body language
- Listen carefully to opposing arguments

Art & Design

Book Design
Talk about the book jacket for Railhead. What do you think about the front cover? Does it give you an idea of what the book is about, and get you wanting to read it?

Create a new design for a new edition of Railhead. Think about:

- Overall design style: colours, type face/s
- Front cover: Picture/s, title, author
Create a Network Map

‘...a holographic map...It was the same rail map you saw in every K-bahn station, lines intersecting and branching... ‘(Page 35)

Talk about the designs at the beginning of each chapter in Railhead. What do you think they represent?

Then look at the London Tube Map (https://tfl.gov.uk/maps/track/tube) designed in 1933 by Harry Becks and now acknowledged as a design classic. It doesn’t emphasise distance or geographical accuracy but with its coloured criss-crossing lines it gives a clear and understandable map of the London Underground network.

See too this Devon Rail map of an overground rail network:

Have a go at creating a K-Bahn Network map in the style of one of these maps – you could choose to map just a part of the network, such as the Dog Star Line, the Orion Line, or the Silver River Line.

Or imagine what the Insect Lines are like, which the Hive Monks talk about – another network of K-gates on the far side of our galaxy: ‘... the untold shining stations of the Angels’ (page 268). What stations might there be and what would you call them?

- Collect together information and clues from the book, and then use this information - and your imagination too! – to design your interpretation of the Network.
- Think about stations (used and unused), lines, junctions and gates.
- Decide on your symbols and colours for these.
- How could you show the Spindlebrige? And the shuttle between Spindlebridge and Sundarban?
- Aim to include some key places from the story: e.g. Ambersai, Cleave, Cleave-B, Summer’s Lease, Jangala, Sundarban, Desdemor, Winterreise, Grand Central, Golden Junction – and Worm and the Island!

**Railhead in Pictures**

1. **Choose a scene** from *Railhead* which really catches your imagination and draw or paint a picture of it.

Here’s one which you might use:

‘And they were in a battle. Malik looked at the window and saw the sky around his speeding train fill suddenly with chrysanthemums. They were yellow and red and ginger, and every blossom was the blast of a missile, and the gentle sea was painted with hot reflections and then speckled with white splashes as the wreckage of shattered drones showered down.’

2. **Choose a Railhead character** to draw – a human or a Motorik; a Hive Monk, Station Angel or Guardian!

3. Imagine you are Nova, skilled graffiti artist and **create a graffiti design for your favourite Railhead train.**

**Make and Play this Railhead Game – or Design Your Own!**

Here is a simple *Railhead* board game you can make and then play. It’s about a race between *Railhead* trains to get to the new K-gate - feel free to add in your own variations and enhancements!

1. **Make your board:**
   - On a good-sized piece of cardboard, draw a layout like this
(You’ll find other board game templates on the internet.)
Decide which K-Bahn station will be your start – and at the end is the new K-gate. Add in other stations and Railhead features along the route.

2. **Make your ‘tokens’:**
These are Railhead trains. Make 4 to 6 train shapes or mini-models which can be moved along the spaces on your board. Give them each a different colour and name them after the trains in Railhead – e.g.
*Thought Fox, Damask Rose*

3. **Make your cards:**
These tell you how many spaces you can move forwards – and backwards! – along the board. Have a set of at least 40 cards – you could have multiples of some of the actions, and you could include cards for ‘Miss a Turn’ and ‘Have an Extra Turn’. Below are some suggestions for
the actions on your cards. What other successes, struggles or accidents might you include?

4. **Play your game!**
Shuffle all the cards and place face down in the middle of the board. Each player chooses a train token. Use dice throws to see who will start the game. The first player takes the top card and moves/stays according to the action on the card. Then the other players follow in turn, taking a card from the top of the pack and moving as instructed by the card. The winner is the first train to reach the new K-gate!

**Suggestions for your Cards & Suggested Scores**

- Blasted off the track by trainkiller virus – go back to Start
- Stuck in Cleave-B abandoned station – miss a turn
- Go through a K-gate (have several of these) – move forward 2 spaces
- Hive Monks hitch a ride – go back 1 space
- Station Angels flickering round - go forward 1 space
- Some no point cards: ‘stay where you are’ – train is on time; maintenance spiders at work; Ukotec, Ukotec, Ukotec
- Getting a Flex graffiti – forward 2 spaces
- 2 million light years late arriving at a station – back 1 space
- Hand in a fraudster to Railforce – forward 1 space
- Sing for joy! – forward 3 spaces
- Breakfast at Grand Central – forward 1 space
- Delayed by a ferro-ceramic barrier blocking a tunnel – back 2 spaces
- Wait for the Noon family to reurn from sight-seeing – miss a go
- Fall in love with another train – have another turn
- Cut short journey to take injured Kobi home to Sundarban – miss a turn
- Cry in grief for the death of another train – back 3 spaces
- Put in extra security against a trainkiller virus – forward 2 spaces
- Help Worm to lay new lines towards the new K-gate – forward 3 spaces
- Chased and attacked by Bluebodies – back 4 spaces
- Waiting for instructions from the Sirius Rail Company – miss a turn
You could also have a go at designing your own game, inspired by *Railhead* – a different board game perhaps, or train top trumps, or maybe a computer game?

Here’s a *Railhead* poster to inspire you!

---

**Gentlemen take polaroids**

“You get to step off the ride now. It’s time to go home.”

**Noon train**

“Best of all, he loved the trains, the great locomotives, each one different, some stern, some friendly, but all driven by the same deep joy that he felt at riding the rails.”

**High town crow**

“Raven had survived somehow, un-ageing, for centuries.”

**Time of gifts**

“The Wildfire and the Time of Gifts were filling the fog-lit night with trainsong.”

**Galactic unlimited**

“Night time on a world in some nebula where the sky was a peacock’s tail of tulle stars blazing... dawn over seas of methane under a shattered moon.”

**Wildfire**

“Night time on a world in some nebula where the sky was a peacock’s tail of tulle stars blazing... dawn over seas of methane under a shattered moon.”

**Daisy rose**

“Only trains can ride the K-Rahn. The old, wise trains of the Empire, barracuda beautiful, dreaming their dreams of speed and distance, as they race from world to world.”

**Thought fox**

“Only trains can ride the K-Rahn. The old, wise trains of the Empire, barracuda beautiful, dreaming their dreams of speed and distance, as they race from world to world.”

Design a robot
‘He could see that...she wasn’t a real girl at all, just a Motorik – a wire dolly – an android.’ (Page 29)
‘She did not act like a Motorik. No bow, no pre-set smile....’ (Page 30)
The Motorik are humanoid androids created to do boring and risky tasks, in place of humans.

What would you design a robot for? What would it look like? What would it be able to do?

What Happens Next?
‘In the carriage, Nova and Zen sat down together. The Damask Rose revved her engines...’ (Page 298)
Nova and Zen are off through the new K-gate to new worlds – look out for the next book in the Railhead trilogy **Black Light Express** to read about their adventures!

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Quiz answers
1b, 2a, 3b, 4b, 5c, 6a, 7b, 8c, 9c, 10b, 11a, 12c, 13a, 14a,b &c, 15a: Raven b: Zen & Nova c: the Noon family 16c, 17b, 18a, 19b, 20a, b & c

Places: answers
1. Jangala
2. Winterreise
3. Spindlebridge
4. Cleave
5. Sundarban
6. Summer’s Lease
7. Adeli
8. Desdemor

Who am I?
A. Zen
B. Raven
C. Malik
D. Myka
E. Anais Six
F. Uncle Bigs
G. Kobi
H. Threnody
I. Flex
J. Lyssa
K. Nova