

Railsea Study Guide

Railsea by China Miéville

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Plot Summary

Railsea is a young adult novel by China Miéville. It details the journeys and exploits of Sham Yes ap Soorap, a boy somewhere in his late teens, as he lives his life on the railsea. When the novel begins, Sham is a doctor's assistant on board the Medes, a mole-hunting train, captained by Abacat Naphi, who has her eyes set on one goal in life –to hunt down and destroy Mocker-Jack, a massive moldywarpe. Sham is not thrilled with his work, though, and believes he may want to be a salvor, to collect salvage instead. While exploring the wreck of an old train, Sham discovers a camera's memory card which has photographs that depict a boy and a girl and a single rail line that leads across empty ground –a stunning sight.

Sham ultimately tracks the boy and girl down –Dero and Caldera Shroake –whose parents were lost at railsea years before. They decide to set out to see what their parents wanted to see. They ultimately end up on the Medes. After battling pirates, a rogue naval train, and angel trains, the Medes heads out across a bridge which crosses a deep gorge. Continuing on by foot, Sham, the Shroakes, and Naphi discover an old town where the rail lines end. The town is where companies built rail lines all across the world to compete and make money eons ago. It ultimately collapsed, leaving the rails behind. On the other side of the town is an ocean that has been blocked off by a massive dam. Ultimately, Sham, Naphie, and the Shroakes decide to sail across the ocean to see what is on the other side.



Part I - Part II

Summary

Part I

Prologue

The prologue centers around the bloodied form of Sham, standing tall above puddles of his own blood. He has many questions that must be answered.

Chapter 1

Weeks before, in the cold, Sham (Shamus Yes ap Soorap), an overweight young man, watches penguins. Sham is on board the Medes when a voice over the intercom compels everyone to the guardrails and the windows. A great dark beast emerges from the earth –a moldywarpe. Great numbers of moldywarpes dig in Streggeye Bay, between the iron tracks. Sham recounts learning about the giant moles –including the one they now faced down, a great southern moldywarpe. Trainspeople look on. Sunder Nabby, the lookout, confirms the moldywarpe is a good specimen. Captain Abacat Naphi confirms the Medes will take down the moldywarpe. Dr. Lish Fremlo, who teaches Sham, tells him to stay out of the way because it is Sham's first great southern.

Rye Shossunder, the cabin boy is younger than Sham. However, since he has already been at rail before, he gets to wear fur. Boyza Go Mbdendy, the first mate, confers with Captain Naphi, a woman. Before them are endless, countless rail lines known as the railsea. Harpoonists, including Kiragabo Luck, try to hit the moldywarpe, but they miss. Danjamin Benightly attempts to fire, but his harpoon is jammed. Hob Virunam, the young trainswain, curses. Benightly throws a javelin by hand, and spears the moldywarpe. Kiragabo scores on his own second attempt. The moldywarpe is killed.

Chapter 2

The moldywarpe is dragged to the Medes and cut up for meat. Its pelt is removed. Everyone is in a celebratory mood. Sham wanders around, seeing everyone at work. Since no one is injured or needs healing, Sham is not needed. He brings food and drink to the crew. Exhausted and a little tipsy from sneaking drinks himself, Sham is sent to bed by Dr. Fremlo.

Chapter 3

Sham's cousin, Voam yn Soorap, had gotten Sham the job on the Medes, because Sham is a nice kid and deserves a life away from Streggeye. The crew's mood the following morning is still good. It puts even Sham in a good mood. Two star-nosed moles are caught. Sham studies medicine and anatomy with Dr. Fremlo. As the Medes travels, the mood on the train grows dour once more. The Medes passes another train



with its flags signaling it is from Rockvane. Signaling one another by kite and letter, messages are exchanged through Medes second mate Gansiffer Brownall. The reply from the Rockvane is, "Sorry, no."

Chapter 4

Sham speaks to Vurinam about the messaging. It is apparent the captain is looking for something, but Vurinam reveals that the Rockvane crew on the Bagsaft hasn't seen it. What is being searched for has only been seen by Vurinam in a flatograph, and it is ivory or bone-colored.

Chapter 5

There are four layers to the earth. The sub-terrestrial layer includes digging beasts, caverns, salvage, and rail tracks from previous generations. The second level is the flat earth, on which the railsea sits. The lands, islands, countries, and continents are on the third level – the grundnorm –ground that is too hard to be dug. Above these are the highlands, mysterious and dangerous places shrouded in fog and mystery.

Chapter 6

Sham sees birds being used to fight one another for the entertainment of the crew and wonders about them. He then wonders about himself wondering. He then grabs two fighting roosters and flees with them through the train. He is chased by Brank and Zaro. But the lookout sounds stations, and Sham surrenders the birds, with Zaro promising he will be dealt with later. Trainsman Unkus Stone and Mbenday look off toward some atolls. They see a train wreck. The Medes heads over to see what has happened. No survivors are expected. Sham is on the cart sent to go investigate. Weapons are checked. Sham is forced to wait in the cart. The wreck has been there awhile, and no one is found.

Chapter 7

Sham is brought in to get through a tight part of the wreck. He finds stubs of writing and piles of ash. This makes Sham wonder about his own father's death on a wreck long ago. He finds the captain's skeleton. But a naked mole rat lunges for Sham, up from where the wreck gives way to earth.

Chapter 8

The sub-terraneous earth is full of man-eating monsters, and few herbivores.

Chapter 9

The mole rat slams into the wall as Sham avoids it. More rats rise up from the earth. Vurinam helps Sham escape, and everyone leaps up onto furniture and remains of whatever can be found to fight off the colony of mole rats. A rush is made to the cart, and safety seems assured. But then everyone sees what has become of Unkus.



Chapter 10

Unkus is badly injured in both his legs. Dr. Fremlo stabilizes him. Sham collects a day bat, injured in the attack, from the corner of the cart. Captain Naphi questions Sham on the wreck. He says nothing was found except the dead captain and rubbish. He gives the captain a small piece of salvage he has found as ordered. A storm can be seen coming. Sham cares for the bat and helps Dr. Fremlo tend to Unkus. Fremlo tells Sham that he is not necessarily bound to obey orders, and this makes Sham want his small card of salvage back. Vurinam blames Sham for the attack on Unkus. Captain Naphi announces the Medes will make a detour to Bollons, for a hospital for Unkus. Sham looks down at his bat, who looks scared and confused. Sham vows to take care of the bat.

Part II

Chapter 11

Mole trains on the hunt beat out systematic rhythms as they travel, their wheels and engines the cause. But the Medes beats out another kind of rhythm –that of racing under emergency.

Chapter 12

he Medes moves north as fast as it can on wild rails. Maps of the area are contradictory. Three days pass. Bollons is rumored to be a dangerous place close to poisonous uplands. To the people of Streggeye, every other place and port has its problems. Rockvane is too snooty and intellectual; Cabigo, a land of weak monarchies, is constantly at war with itself; Kammy Hammy is full of brutal warlords; Clarion, run by priests, is too pious; Mornington is too irreligious; Manihiki, the most powerful city-state, throws its weight around with war trains, its democracy is a sham, and it is deeply in debt. However, it is the only place that does not do Streggeye, one of several islands in the Salaygo Mess archipelago, wrong. Sham continues to care for his daybat. Sham asks Vurinam about Cambellia, a large, large land mass, which is near the Nuzland, a land far up a plateau, bigger than anything, full of cities of the dead. Vurinam apologizes to Sham, who accepts. He calls Sham a gent. Sham has set the fracture in the daybat's wing. Sham decides to name the daybat Daybe. Unkus will survive if the Medes can make Bollons fast enough.

Chapter 13

Finally, the Medes reaches the town of Bollons, perched on a craggy island. The Medes runs up its identifying flags and sets in on the port. They go past a ship full of explorers wearing electrically-enhanced goggle-glasses, supposedly manufactured by the warlords of Kammy Hammy. Chances are, the explorers are headed to Cambellia because Bollons is closest to the place.

Chapter 14



Bollons allows the Medes in. They see a Manihiki wartrain. Bollons subcontracts its defense and offense, as do many other powers, to Manihiki. While Unkus Stone is treated, the crew is eager to explore Bollons. Sham travels with some of the crew from one pub to the next. Sham gets so drunk he nearly passes out.

Chapter 15

Sham wakes up in the yard of the last pub that is visited. Most of the other crewmembers are still sound asleep. Sham suffers from a bad hangover, but believes he will get through it.

Chapter 16

At the railsea front is a place called the Tekniqall Noshhouse, an eaterie, announcerie, chatterie, and technickerie where captains, explorers, important people, and others, whispered business and ate food. Captain Naphi is seen by Sham handing a flyer to the owner, gesturing about something with obvious size. She asks if the establishment has ordinators, and she is directed to them. Sham is invited along by the captain to the computer-like machine. She inserts the metal card Sham has salvaged, and digital images pop up on screen. Some are personal; others are of a port and a place never before seen, where the railsea winds its way through a forest in the autumn. Also seen is an angel-like sacred engine rolling tracks to save others. Beyond that is more railsea, and dusty tan and brown environment –where there are no rails, except one. Sham is stunned.

Chapter 17

The Medes heads back home, to hunt more, leaving Unkus behind to recover. But Sham hopes the captain will take them to Manihiki instead, to where the personal family photographs appear to have been taken. He wants to know what secret the single rail line holds. The captain has destroyed the card and says it does not concern molers or doctors' assistants. Sham believes the children should know of their father's passing. The harbormaster tells Vurinam that it is good the Medes is setting out soon, for there is chatter about. Sham knows he needs to persuade the captain to go to Manihiki, but he is unable to bring himself to try to persuade her on two occasions.

Chapter 18

On the way home, the Medes comes across other Streggeye ships, such as the Murgatroyd, and news is exchanged. Captain Skaramash comes over for tea. Skaramash tells her he will keep his eyes open for the old-tooth colored moldywarpe. Sham knows then why Naphi is not going to Manihiki, because she will not stop her hunt of the moldywarpe –her philosophy of life, to capture and kill that particular moldywarpe. Meanwhile, Daybe can fly again, and is beginning to learn how to hunt once more. The Medes clears the gap on high rail bridges to get back into Streggeye.

Chapter 19



The Medes returns to Streggeye. Cousins Voam and Troose are present to see Sham. Everybody is in a good mood. Sham reflects on the years past, after the death of his father, when his mother left to travel the islands of the archipelago, too heartbroken to continue on with Sham, or so Voam has explained. Voam and Troose now view Sham as an adult, and it makes Sham proud. They invite Sham to the Vivacious Weevil, a pub.

Chapter 20

Captain Naphi is also at the Vivacious Weevil, listening to Vajpaz, a captain whose philosophy was about speed and acceleration. Naphi gets up and speaks about her own philosophy –the old-tooth-colored moldyrat, known as Mocker-Jack –has evaded her. Sham wonders what Naphi will do if she catches the beast.

Chapter 21

Since mankind first got together, people have told stories. It is no different in Streggeye. Sham has grown up with stories.

Chapter 22

Being home means Sham has more free time, and former classmates are interested to hear about his time on the high rails. Daybe has further recovered, and has remained with Sham. Streggeye is not a backwater place. It is known for its mole meat, philosophy, and Stonefaces, rock figures that top the highlands. Streggeye has its rich and nicer areas. Salvage trains come through every so often. Sham wonders about salvage: about who finds it, where, and what ends up happening to it.

Chapter 23

At Straggeye's Eastern Rim, there is an old wreck that Daybe flies around, while Sham, and his friends Timon and Shikasta, twin brother and sister, sit on the pebbly beach. Shikasta shows Sham a piece of salvage she has, which can track based on a signal thing. They try it out on Daybe. The best salvage is from Manihiki.

Chapter 24

Sham seeks out Captain Naphi in her favorite café, where she is journaling. He shows her Daybe and the tracking device. He thinks it could help her track down Mocker-Jack. Such devices are found in Manihiki, he explains. Just then, Unkus Stone walks in.

Chapter 25

Stone reveals he worked his way back on a mail train. He reveals that rumors have abounded after them. He says they have been followed. In Bollons, people asked about the wreck, and possibly something that has been found on the wreck. The mail carrier was later followed. She invites Stone on the next trip, saying whoever is following them



will be disappointed. She says that they will be hunting to the south, but it may be a long trip, and it is impossible to tell where they might end up.

Chapter 26

Logs on trains are very carefully kept, whether digitally or by hand. But long days between ports and hunts mean boredom with keeping logs.

Chapter 27

The Medes puts back out to the rails soon after, with Naphi taking on much of the same crew as last time. Sham is happy to be back out at rail. Daybe accompanies him. A few days out, they head through rolling ground with some forests. They head west, with the captain explaining that they have equipment to pick up. Sham says good morning to Zhed, a female soldier from Kammy Hammy who is now a harpoonist. She notices that the rails on either side of them have been used, as if they have been tracked, or if someone is waiting for them. Sham has nightmares that evening about a rail angel.

Sham asks Dr. Fremlo if he has ever seen a rail angel. Fremlo says he has. He says that rail doctors are not as good as land doctors, for rail doctors, always traveling, or years out of date. Treasure hunting off Colony Cocos, where the racks went into a darkened hole in the cliff. Something horrible came out, and the crew all rushed to get away. That evening, the beautiful and awe-inspiring city of Manihiki comes into view.

Analysis

When China Mieville's novel "Railsea" begins, Sham Yes ap Saroop is a doctor's assistant on board the mole-hunting train Medes. Sham is overweight and somewhere in his late teens. Sham is not thrilled with his life as a doctor's assistant and wants more. But, what "more" is he does not yet know. In the world of Railsea, there seem to be no oceans, only rivers and smaller bodies of water. Instead, large stretches of earth have been built over by a series of rail lines for trains, in the thousands. Beneath the earth, large moles and carnivorous creatures have evolved from smaller ancestors. Stepping foot on the ground itself is dangerous beyond compare, for tremors upon bare earth are easily sensed by the giant creatures.

The reader is confronted with many questions early in the novel, mainly about the existence of the railsea. Who built it and why? The answers are not immediately forthcoming. Indeed, the mystery only deepens with Sham's discovery of the memory card for the camera inside the wrecked train. Images of a far off place with one single rail line, and unknown children, lead Sham to want to find them for two reasons: First, to tell them what has happened to their parents; and second, to figure out where the single rail line is, to see where it goes. Such a thing is unbelievable to many, that there should be a single rail line beyond the railsea –or that there should be anything beyond the railsea at all.



Sham, however, is determined out what there could possibly be. But, he cannot get there alone. So, he employs subterfuge to do so, by insisting that a good tracking device for Mocker-Jack can be found in Manihiki –where the brother and sister in the photo live. Since Naphi is obsessed with hunting the moldywarpe, she consents to head the trip.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Sham unhappy being a doctor's assistant on a moletrain? What would he rather do? Why?

Discussion Question 2

What equipment does Naphi want to pick up? Why? Will this help Sham in any way?

Discussion Question 3

What is the railsea? What information is known about it thus far in the novel? Do you have a theory behind the railsea's existence?

Vocabulary

Fervor, macabre, peremptory, meritocracy, truculent, ribaldry, excoriations, boisterous, hypochondriac, dubious, pugnacious, imprecations, rumbustious, belligerents, trundled, eurocthonous, voracity, assiduously, fastidious, prodigious, ecumenical, lugubrious, elucidating, rejoinder, camaraderie, undulating, ostentatious.



Part III - Part IV

Summary

Part III

Chapter 28

Manihiki is the center of the world. Trains from every corner of the railsea are streaming towards Manihiki. They pass a galleytrain, powered by slaves, and this disgusts the crew of the Medes. While Manihiki permits no slavery on its shores, it can do nothing about slavery on the rails. Each train obeys the laws of its home on the rails. The hustle and bustle and wealth of the Manihiki stuns Sham. Captain Naphi is well-known in the book, ordinator, and arts districts. Naphi and Sham go to Scabbling Street Market for salvage.

Chapter 29

Sham is given the task of going to fetch books for Naphi, to bring them back to the train. He has many hours to complete this task. She even gives him an advance in his pay for lunch. Sham uses the time to ask around about the two children and the arch they pose in front of in the photos. No one has any idea. He speaks to a tough-looking salvage woman. She recounts two young children coming in asking questions, who knew their salvage. They bought too much for them to carry, and so arranged for delivery north of the old city, in Subzi. The woman tells Sham her name is Travisande Sirocco. She has heard people mentioning Sham. She tells him to stick with his crew. With books in bag, Sham heads out, but is attacked by a ganglet who reaches for his bag and his money.

Chapter 30

Sham's attack is not so much a fight as it is a mugging.

Chapter 31

Daybe swoops in to defend Sham as another boy steps in as well. Daybe chases the muggers down the street. Robalson, the boy, has mugged before, but he intervened in this instance because eight against one is not a fair fight. In an alley ahead, they recover the bag of books. Sham thanks Robalson, and they agree to get food together the next day at The Dustmaid on Protocol Abyss Street at eight. Robalson will not tell Sham the name of his own train, because Robalson is a pirate.

Chapter 32

Daybe returns looking very happy and proud of himself. Sham tells Daybe he is a good bat. Sham fills in Daybe about Robalson. Sham finds the arch, constructed of old washing machines, old salvage. The place is a land for bits and pieces of salvage.



Sham follows a path to an old brick house. A security camera with an intercom watches Sham from a tree, and he explains he is looking for a boy and a girl. He says he is from Streggeye Land and has information on a lost train. He is invited in by the boy and the girl, who wear strange outer clothes, but peel them off to talk to Sham. Sham tells them of the wreck. The siblings say nothing and are on the verge of crying. The siblings introduce themselves as Dero and Caldera Shroake. He explains about the metal memory card from the camera. He explains the photo of the single rail and says the train was coming back from that.

Chapter 33

The symbol “&” which has replaced the word “and” in the language spoken by those about the railsea is the best way to describe the railsea, for it takes people here and there and back and forth.

Chapter 34

Sham wonders what the train was doing. He explains he is a doctor’s assistant on a mole train. Dero and Caldera thank Sham for coming. They also introduce him to Dad Byro, a writer who looks after them. Dad Byro tells Sham he is welcome. Sham and the Shroake siblings speak of salvagebots –robots –but both brother and sister think such things are a myth.

Chapter 35

Sham leaves the Shroakes’s house. He already wants to come back and visit. Sham notices he is being followed by a man in a large gray overcoat and wide hat. He rushes away and bumps into a woman who tries to apprehend him, but Sham stomps on her foot and rushes away. Sham hides until both the man and the woman are no longer in sight, and then heads back to the docks. He goes to see the captain. Naphi has purchased receivers and transmitters. Naphi is prepared to move out to find good mole grounds.

Chapter 36

Sham returns to visit Dero and Caldera, who decide to leave Manihiki. He recounts their house being watched. They say it is normal, because they are the Shroakes, and their “sort-of-salvaging” family has gone and done things and been places that make most people curious and wonder. The Shroakes eep to themselves and look after Dad Byro because they fear that anyone coming in could be a spy. Sham says that no one knows where the railsea has come from, but Dero and Caldera believe it is not just something that happened – it was created or designed. It did not always exist. The railsea came from years and years of builders competing with each other for money, through public works. But, their production polluted the sky and the ground. The railsea is the aftermath of business bickering, with the businesses long since collapsed and forgotten. Dero and Caldera have to finish the work their Mom and Dad started.

Chapter 37



Sham meets Robalson at the Dustmaid. Sham thanks him for his help the previous day. Robalson is impressed to hear that Captain Naphi has a philosophy, because it is something to aspire to. He also says there are rumors about of a brother and sister who are out to find treasure in some mythical land, and are always being watched. Sham asks Robalson if he would like to know the truth about the railsea and the edge of the skies, but Robalson dismisses it all as just stories.

Chapter 38

The crew of the Medes are primarily interested in earning money, and in glory to their names and their train. The loyal crew is excited to head out on the next hunt shortly. But Sham just doesn't feel excited, as he explains to the Shroakes. He tells them about the rumors that circle about them. They have a private beach, and they want to head out not only in search of treasure, but to see what there is to see. Caldera shows Sham a printed photo of a hard land, and an escalating staircase.

Chapter 39

Caldera says their parents took them there once. Jumping onto the escalator, you go down into a salvage mine lit with lights, full of centuries and layers of junk and salvage. Scholars want to study that past; salvors want to sell it and use it for whatever it can be used for. Caldera explains that there is more to life than chasing buried rubbish. She tells him he has an hour or two to decide, because that is when Dero and Caldera are leaving.

Chapter 40

The Shroakes have Dad Byro, who is mentally unbalanced, temporarily committed to the sanatorium. They go about their house, packing and preparing. They explain they have begun a rumor of their going to Engineday, so people begin to look in the wrong place, buying time. There is more to life than making an animal a philosophy and a life's work, Caldera explains. And there are places where rail rivers run right up into the uplands. Dero pulls up their own little train, a small, tough-looking assemblage. Sham does not go. As he watches Dero and Caldera leave, he changes his mind, but it is too late. He calls himself stupid and useless.

Chapter 41

Sham tells Robalson that he is stupid and useless because he didn't do what he could have done. He confesses to Robalson he did not go with the Shroakes. Robalson tells Sham he really is a pirate, and it is a good thing that Sham did not go. Sham is then accosted and knocked out with a wet cloth over his nose.

Part IV

Chapter 42



Questions are important. Minds are made from history, and they turn chaos into story. When the primary window is closed, another window should be looked through.

Chapter 43

The Shroakes head out, dressed in their best for the occasion. The foremost carriage is a home away from home, with everything from a bathroom, bunks, furniture, to books, papers, and salvage. While Dero naps, Caldera controls the train. She drives until she is tired, then stops the train –though it can run by ordinator –and sets the train's defenses. The route they follow is one established by their parents, secret and full of old ways.

Chapter 44

Everything in the world is a function of the rails, including individual people. The rails, at the end of which are everything from different religions to different ideas, dream up people, not the other way around.

Chapter 45

The Medes recalls its crew, but Sham does not return. A note to Fremlo arrives from Sham, detailing that he has signed on to work with the salvor Sirocco. Everyone misses Sham, but no one can believe that he has become a salvor. News is passed to Naphi from Admiral Shiverjay, revealing that the quarry has been spotted. They track down Mocker-Jack, and spear it, and Naphi shoots a tracking device into the mole.

Chapter 46

Dero and Caldera arrive in the middle reaches of the railsea. Dero wants to enjoy the trip, but Caldera is more concerned with being cautious. They reach the inner-outer stretches, with reefs of rock, fields of jagged salvage, and narrow passages between hard lands. As they near a lighthouse, they stop, for wreckers have smashed out the old lighthouse, and erected a new one, in order to topple boulders and destroy passing trains to loot.

Chapter 47

Here, a red signal is thrown that stops the story. Days past are returned to.

Chapter 48

Days are returned to Sham, who is held in a tiny train cabin. Robalson comes in to untie Sham, and give him food. Sham demands to know where Daybe is, and Robalson says the bat took off. Captain Elfrish appears. He wears glasses and looks kindly, not like a pirate. He explains a note has been sent to the Medes, saying he is following his dream. Elfrish wants to know all about the wreck and what led Sham to the Shroakes. But despite Elfrish's kindly looks, there is menacing undertone to his words. He wants to know where the Shroakes are going, or Sham will be cut open and dragged alongside the train.



Chapter 49

The Shroakes avoid the trap and continue on. Dero worries about the rickety lines over which they now pass, but Caldera says the angels will have kept them alright. The rearmost train cabin is detached to let go and slow the progress of a pursuing clockwork train. They succeed. Caldera comments that that is why they never leave anything essential in the last carriage of the train.

Chapter 50

Sham tells Elfrish he does not know where the Shroakes have gone. Sham tells Elfrish that he has seen photos, not maps. Elfrish has been after the Shroakes for a long time. Elfrish brings Sham to Juddamore, who will draw everything Sham recollects. Based on those images, Elfrish and his men study maps.

Chapter 51

Questions are to be had about the railsea, and about the wood from trees that make them up.

Chapter 52

The pirate train is a modern diesel train, and moves faster than the Medes. Robalson continues to bring Sham food. Sham studies the ins and outs of the train on which he travels. Elfrish has Sham brought up to look at the trees and sand-and-brick colored earth, asking him if this is what has been seen in the photos. Sham wonders how he should answer, realizing that these pirates must have been the ones to pursue the Shroakes in the first place. Elfrish tells Sham that what is keeping him alive are his directions. As Sham thinks, he sees Daybe with the rail gulls flying about the train. Sham confirms the ground ahead is what is seen in the photo. Robalson also notices the bat, but says nothing. From his cabin, Sham allows Daybe to sit on his arm.

Chapter 53

Up ahead of them, Dero and Caldera see pirates. Lots of people are called pirates, even the ones who don't do anything bad and only look after their coasts –but Dero knows the pirates following them are real, bad pirates. To get over a river, Dero and Caldera decide to go underneath it, through tunnels. They come across burrowing owls, who come after them. They escape the owls just in time. But another massive burrowing owl swoops in from above.

Chapter 54

The Medes continues on over icy ground. They continue to track the great moldywarpe, Mocker-Jack.

Chapter 55



Daybe perches on Sham's cell window, but will not come in. Sham is brought up time and time again to verify the position of the pirate train, the Tarralesh. They end up chasing another small train, what appears to be a merchant train. The Tarralesh overcomes them after a short fight. Some of the crew are left to live, others are executed. Sham is very upset about this. He writes a plea for rescue on a paper and sends Daybe out with it.

Chapter 56

The burrowing owl takes out another car, but the Shroakes escape.

Chapter 57

The Tarralesh heads through an old train boneyard. Daybe's departure has left Sham saddened. But from in the distance emerges a massive Manihikian ferronavy train, ordering the Tarralesh to halt for inspection. Robalson tells Sham not to make a sound. Sham is ordered brought out by the navy train's captain, Reeth. Reeth knows all about Sham and the events leading up to the departure of the younger Shroakes. The Tarralesh, however, has a letter of marque from Manihiki. Reeth then knows that Elfrin is a tax evader, and he will claim Sham in place of the tax. Things get out of hand and shooting begins. Reeth and his men return to their ship as the guns of the ferronavy train are trained on Elfrish's train. They try to get away, but are run aground by the Manihikian train, where Sham, who has scrambled to hide in the crow's nest, comes crashing down.

Analysis

The arrival of Sham, Naphi, and the Medes in Manihiki is both a catalyst and symbolic. Manihiki is the center of the world in Railsea, from which all other nations head, and from which all people head elsewhere. It brings together disparate peoples and then provides them a launching pad for new adventures or a return home. Manihiki is essentially a hub. Sham comes to Manihiki as part of a crew, but leaves against his will as a captive to pirates under Captain Elfrin. The Medes also sets out on its own task from Manihiki, as do Dero and Caldera. Three separate stories branch out from Manihiki –that of Naphi, that of the Shroakes, and that of Sham. Yet, like the railsea, they are all inextricably intertwined and interconnected.

The Shroakes are well-known throughout Manihiki, for their theories and their ideas. It is rumored they know the way to a vast treasure, and this has the attention of pirates. Elfrish has Robalson help kidnap Sham in order to find out where the Shroakes are headed. But the pirates are overtaken by a rogue Manihiki wartrain, under the presumption of securing Sham's release, but with the ultimate idea of getting to the Shroakes. Sham becomes an unwitting pawn in the battle that erupts between the pirates and the Manihiki navy, and the pirates are ultimately –and soundly –defeated.

The Shroakes, meanwhile, are off in pursuit of what their parents wanted them to find. Naphi is off in pursuit of Mocker-Jack. All are totally unaware of Sham's true fate. The



only one who is aware of Sham's fate is Daybe, the loyal and rugged little day bat. It is Daybe who comes through for Sham when all seems lost.

Discussion Question 1

What is the railsea? Where did it come from? How do you believe the Shroakes know this information?

Discussion Question 2

Why do the pirates kidnap Sham? What do they believe the Shroakes know?

Discussion Question 3

What is the real reason Captain Reeth wants to take custody of Sham? On whom can Sham rely at this point?

Vocabulary

Locomotion, emissary, dastardly, polyglot, filigreed, ponderously, dubious, frenetic, reclamation, scintilla, coagulum, indubitably, paradox, arcane, posthumous, resonant, assiduous, itineraries, transubstantiated, extrapolate, subterfuge, appurtenances, expostulations, ostentatious, pecuniary.



Part V - Part VI

Summary

Part V

Chapter 58

Life in different parts of the railsea is very difficult, as tracks, switches, and junctions do not behave as they do. These places are not impassable, but very difficult to pass through.

Chapter 59

Naphi's determination to subdue Mocker-Jack has infected her crew. Dr. Fremlo misses Sham, and knows that Sham would have enjoyed the chase. Meanwhile, Sirocco sees she has a guest on her salvage train.

Chapter 60

Sham hides while the rest of the battle occurs. He is marooned on the island. The remnants of the Tarralesh can be seen off the coast. All around, he can see wrecks of other trains. Sham sets out to walk across the rails to another island. Halfway across, the earth moves and he is chased. He makes it safely to the other island.

Chapter 61

The Shroakes deserve to have their story told as well, says the narrator, and they will – all in due time. Their story is now inextricably plaited together with Sham's.

Chapter 62

The Medes continues to zero in on Mocker-Jack. They are met by a series of obstacles, including a massive sinkhole which has swallowed up many rails, and it is toward this gorge that the Medes heads.

Chapter 63

The Medes switches tracks at the last second, but the captain sees more danger, shouting all to come to arms. Seven snakelike creatures come at the train. But Dr. Fremlo realizes they are all part of one giant creature. The Medes gets away safely, but the crew is not happy by and large. They believe Naphi is too fixated on Mocker-Jack, and is becoming reckless in the process. Naphi has been injured during the fight, however. The arm everyone thought was fake is now bleeding. She says that she has both refused to make, and has made a sacrifice to follow her philosophy. Daybe then arrives.



Chapter 64

It is not yet time to hear more about the Shroakes.

Chapter 65

Sham goes from one wreck to the next with a makeshift cart. A year passes. He fantasizes about planting crops with seeds from the wrecks of one of the trains, and building a small fortress of iron and metal. He instead finds an ancient, hand-powered rail cart. He batters the handle with a rock to make it move through years of rust. He travels on through the night. Up ahead, he sees sails approaching.

Chapter 66

Naphi and her crew converse with Sirocco, the salvor. She has been chasing after the Medes following the note delivered by Daybe. She confirms that she did not have Sham join her crew. She is only there to deliver the message. Naphi, who is unbearably close to her prey, decides to go rescue Sham instead.

Chapter 67

The Bajjer, the rescuers of Sham, have taken him on in their hunt for moldywarpes. They are rail nomads. They have heard of the Shroakes before, as best Sham can tell through speaking in broken tongue with them.

Chapter 68

At night, the Bajjer nomads circle their trains and cook and eat on the earth itself. Soon after, a message is sent to the Bajjer by way of purposely spilling oil on the ground to prevent their crops from growing in the future. Near the site of the attack, Sham sees the Medes coming on, with Daybe leading the way.

Part VI

Chapter 69

The Shroakes pass an old, battered train, but it is still not time to learn more about the Shroakes.

Chapter 70

The Medes and the Pinschon, Sirocco's ship, arrive. The reunion between Sham and his old trainmates is happy. But the happiness is gone when Sham learns of the deaths of crewmates Limy and Teodoso. The oil, according to Sirocco, is a particular kind, used by the Manihiki ferronavy. The Manihiki train must be after the Shroakes, and the Shroakes must be found. The Bajjer have been punished for presumably helping the Shroakes.



Chapter 71

It is at last time to return to the Shroakes. Their train has been battered and bruised, as have been the Shroakes, by countless attacks from pirates and creatures. But on they go. They even see an angel train. They are being pursued by the Manihiki train. With only their engine left, the Shroakes are living, sleeping, and operating in the engine room. They decide to camouflage their engine, believing the Manihiki ship has not yet seen them.

Chapter 72

The Manihiki train does not see them and come after the Shroakes. Another train comes after the Shroakes. It is bombarded with missiles and saved by Sham's train.

Analysis

The fates of Sham, the crew on the Medes, Sirocco, and the Shroakes, all ultimately come together because of the heroics of Daybe, who has flown countless miles and through countless hardships to find those who will rescue his master. Daybe first finds Sirocco, who then seeks out the Medes while following Daybe, and then both trains ultimately follow Daybe back to Sham. Sham, though, is not consigned to his own apparent fate, as he takes to the railsea by small cart in order to escape the island he has been marooned upon. He falls in league with a group of Bajjer nomads, who sail across the railsea, the sails being an utterly archaic way of traveling the rails. But, it gets them by. However, the reader should note that the form of travel by the Bajjers is not something utterly archaic, but rather, that there is something different, something unusual, about it. They have the means and ability to salvage or craft engines for their carts, but they choose to go by sail.

While the fates of Sham and his friends may have come together once more, the Manihiki train is on the warpath for the Shroakes, going so far as to destroy valuable cropland for the Bajjers in retaliation for aiding the Shroakes. Whatever knowledge the Shroakes possess, wherever it is that they are headed, a ship from the most powerful city state in the railsea –whether by official orders, or by acting rogue at this point is unclear –is after them. What knowledge the Shroakes must possess must be so powerful that no one will stop at getting to them at whatever cost there may be. Considering the information the Shroakes already possess concerning the railsea itself, and the history of the railsea, it is little wonder why they are so hunted, especially by those who do not see beyond the bounds of the railsea.

Discussion Question 1

How does Sirocco find Naphi and the Medes? Why does Sirocco go out of her way to help Sham?



Discussion Question 2

Why does Naphi temporarily abandon her philosophy in order to go and save Sham?
What are the consequences of this decision?

Discussion Question 3

What is so peculiar about the nomadic Bajjers? Why?

Vocabulary

Carapace, elan, pandemonium, chitinous, requisite, exhortations, monstrosities,
prodigies, moribund.



Part VII - Part VIII

Summary

Part VII

Chapter 73

Sham tells everyone else that he will be going on with the Shroakes. The Bajjers want revenge on the Manihiki ferronavy train. Sirocco wants to continue on with the Shroakes at least a while. Vurinam is also interested in continuing on. Naphi will stay on with her train and go with the Shroakes.

Chapter 74

At night, up ahead, a Bajjer scout sees something. They see winged creatures, which ultimately scatter. Naphi does not look ahead, but behind, sensing something beyond them there. Mocker-Jack is coming after them. Naphi realizes the creature has been toying with them, made them believe they were hunting it, when all the while, it was the other way around. The beast is only a few hours off. But, even closer draws the Manihiki navy.

Chapter 75

At dawn, the people on the Medes see the wrecks of other trains. They are headed to a place that Caldera believes her parents were trying to avoid. The Shroakes even see one of their parents' train's cars. The Medes races on, and the rails grow sparser. The Manihiki ship, captained by Reeth, continues on in pursuit. Many of the Bajjer cars hook themselves to the Medes by rope. The Medes travels according to directions from Caldera. There is something that her parents turned away from, something that kept people out. An angel train roars out of the earth. It has kept people from the edge of the world for an unimaginable amount of time. They are all on the single rail line –the angel train chasing the Manihiki wartrain chasing the Medes. The Manihiki train is literally devoured by the angel train, though it tries to fight it. It now zeroes in on the Medes.

Chapter 76

Angels have their tasks, though it may seem to everyone else that they are insane.

Chapter 77

The angel train continues after the Medes, while Mocker-Jack closes in as well. Sham has Sirocco increase the size of the Medes's signal, causing Mocker-Jack to head on faster.

Chapter 78



Mocker-Jack draws closer, rearing up through the earth and then back through it. Up ahead, the rail line heads out across a bridge into darkness –the end of the railsea. Benightly hurls the train's receiver into the mouth of the angel train, which shuts its mouth. On the bridge, the Medes stops. Mocker-Jack tumbles the angel from the rail, and then pushes it into the abyss, casting a final glance at the Medes.

Part VIII

Chapter 79

With her philosophy dead, Naphi intends to jump over into the darkness, but is saved by Sham. Sirocco and the others help cuff the captain to avoid her committing any self-harm. They look at the bridge and the rail line over it, believing it to be the stuff of which Heaven is made. They head out onto the bridge even further. By the morning of the second day, they find a dead angel train. It is very old.

Chapter 80

Sirocco claims the dead angel for salvage. It is all she wants. She wants to make everyone rich. But Dero and Caldera want to continue on by foot –and so does Sham. Only Naphi goes along with them, saying she needs a philosophy to follow. After a few days of travel, they reach land.

Chapter 81

Heaven's land is gray, and there is a large, windowless tower in the distance, beyond which lies a quiet, cold city. The world in which they now tread is very empty and very long dead. They discover that the rail line stops just shy of a building. It is the end of the line, what the Shroake parents were seeking. Sham wonders if this is perhaps where the railsea begins. They go inside the building and find cabinets with pages that are blackened and aged, with ticket prices, destinations, and other items. Dero brings the others to the other side of the city, where a vast expanse of water waits.

Chapter 83

Everyone is surprised by the ocean before them. They realize the shore is a concrete dam meant to keep the water back, to open up land for use in railways. The world they live in used to be underwater. Suddenly, more than a dozen people surround them, gray and thin and excited looking. The lead man among them gives Sham a wad of papers, with numbers and lists. They speak in broken Railcreole. The papers are a bill for use of the land rails. The people must believe Sham, Naphi, and the Shroakes have arrived to settle the account. They are the remnants of a company presiding over ruin. When Sham says this is not what will happen, the Heaven-dwellers become enraged and tie them up. But, then the old angel train, brought back to life by Sirocco and the others, comes barreling into town, startling away all the dwellers, except for the leader, who grapples with Sham and takes him down into the water.

Chapter 84



The story will soon be done, for both Sham and the Heaven-dwellers.

Chapter 85

The water into which Sham is taken is saltwater. As Sham loses consciousness, he is saved by Naphi, and much celebration is had that night. It is revealed that the crew of the Medes wanted to see how the others were getting along before leaving. So, they took a vote and decided to come and see. Sham tells the Shroakes he will keep going with them, to see what their parents wanted them to see. He brings up the last carriage of their parents' train by the bridge.

Analysis

The journey for the Shroakes, Sham, and even Naphi, appears to have come to an end. With the death of her philosophy –her guiding point in life –Naphi attempts to commit suicide, for it appears as if she has nothing left to live for. But she ultimately decides to continue on with Sham so that she may have something to live for by following someone else's philosophy. Ultimately, even Sirocco and the Medes follow along on the bridge in order to see what is at the end, and to see how Sham, Dero, Caldera, and Naphi are making out. Their arrival is most opportune, for it stops the four from being murdered by the descendants of the company that built some of the railsea.

The ending appears bittersweet. There is some disappointment among all that there is no treasure. Also, there is no special place the railsea seemingly ends. However, the fact that they have found the end of one of the rail lines at all does interest many. No one had previously thought that any of the rail lines would end anywhere –but it does. It is because of this that there are likely to be many more rail line ends in other places, should one go far enough. It seems like it is the end of the journey for everyone. However, ironically, Sham decides it cannot possibly be the end of the adventure.

Discussion Question 1

What is at the end of the railsea? Is this what you were expecting? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Sham handed a bill by the descendants of the rail company? What do they expect? How does Sham respond?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the end of the railsea, the ocean, and the small town and dam between? Why is this so?



Vocabulary

Winnowing, hubris, incarcerating, disputation, maelstrom, quizzical, precipice, exudations, incomprehensible, bifurcated, antithesis, exhilarated, degenerate, feral, venality, dissipated, ministrations.



Part IX

Summary

Part IX

Chapter 86

In the Shroakes' parents' train car are materials for sailing on the water. They put the thing to sea using techniques the Bajjers have perfected with sails. Naphi, Caldera, and Dero all look to the future with Sham, who smiles.

Analysis

The end of the novel "Railsea" by China Mieville involves the setting out of Sham, Naphi, Dero, and Caldera over the open water –the ocean –to places unknown. At first, it appeared as if the Shroake parents wanted their children to find only the end of the rail line, but the discovery of the ocean beyond –and of the strange looking train car before the bridge –convinces Sham otherwise. The Shroake parents may not have known exactly what they would find beyond the ocean, but it was their intent that the end of the line of the railsea was not their own end of the line.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Naphi continue on in the journey across the ocean?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Sham decide not to return to the mole-train, or to Streggeye? Is this a wise decision? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What do the Shroakes, Sham, and Naphi travel in across the water? What is its similarity to the method of transportation of the Bajjers?

Vocabulary

Revels, streamlined, expertise, techniques.



Characters

Sham Yes ap Saroop

Sham Yes ap Saroop, the principal protagonist of the novel "Railsea" by China Mieville, is a slightly overweight, unhappy boy in his late teens who serves as an assistant to Dr. Fremlo on board the moletrain Medes. Sham is a kind young man who does his best to look after the crew, with whom he is on relatively good and friendly terms. Yet, he is unhappy. He is not content with being a member of a moletrain. It is not how he wants to spend his life. Sham ultimately comes to care for an injured day bat, whom he names Daybe. Daybe ends up being his little buddy.

When Sham discovers a memory card with photos of a distant land with one single rail track, he becomes obsessed with finding it. He tracks down two children pictured in the photos, Dero and Caldera Shroake, and ultimately, ends up seeking out the single rail line with them, and with Captain Naphi. They discover the single rail line leads to an old, crumbling factory town, and the ocean. Ultimately, Sham, Naphi, and the Shroakes decides to sail across the water to see what is on the other side.

Daybe

Daybe, a day bat injured by Sham in self-defense, is healed by Sham and comes to be his loyal little companion. It is Daybe who carries word of Sham's capture by pirates to Sirocco so that he may be rescued by Naphi and the Medes.

Dero Shroake

The orphaned brother of Caldera Shroake, Dero is an inquisitive and adventurous young man who sets out with Caldera,=. He is later joined by Sham and Naphi. They search for what their dead parents wanted them to see. Dero ultimately decides he will head out across the water, along with Caldera, Sham, and Naphi, to complete his parents' journey.

Caldera Shroake

The orphaned sister of Dero Shroake, Caldera is a resourceful, cautious, and kind young woman who sets out with Dero to finish the journey of her dead parents. She, along with Dero, Sham, and Naphi, ultimately head out across the water to complete that journey.



Dr. Lish Fremlo

The kind and learned doctor aboard the moleship Medes, Dr. Lish Fremlo has taken on Sham as an assistant, and is training him in medicine. He becomes something of a pseudo-father figure to Sham, allowing him to follow his passions as well as keeping him grounded so that he might learn.

Abacat Naphi

The captain of the Medes, Abacat Naphi is a female leader whose sole philosophy and focus in life is to hunt down and destroy Mocker-Jack, a massive moldywarpe. Nothing else compels her. When Mocker-Jack kills itself while fighting with the angel train, Naphi attempts suicide, but is saved by Sham. She, along with Sham and the Shroakes, decides to sail across the ocean to see what is beyond, in pursuit of a new philosophy.

Robalson

As a pirate on board the Tarralesh, Robalson is a young man who helps gain Sham's trust. Then, he helps kidnap Sham in order to be led to the Shroakes. He is ultimately killed during the fight with the Manihiki wartrain.

Reeth

Reeth is captain of the Manihiki war train that appears to go rogue in pursuit of the Shroakes. Reeth destroys Elfrith's pirate ship. As Reeth pursues the Medes, he has his own train and life taken by an angel train.

Elfrith

Elfrith is a pirate and captain of the Tarralesh. He has Sham kidnapped to help him find where the Shroakes are going. He is ultimately killed in ferronaval combat.

Sirocco

Sirocco is the female captain and salvor aboard the salvage train Pinschon. It is to Sirocco that Daybe first flies, encouraging her to follow him and seek out the Medes.



Symbols and Symbolism

Salvage

Salvage abounds throughout the railsea. Primarily, it consists of metals and anything that can be used again. Salvage is studied, collected, transformed, and sold. It is a very lucrative business. Sham initially believes he wants to be a salvor.

Memory Card

Hidden in the wreck of a train run by the parents of Dero and Caldera, the memory card is discovered by Sham. Its contents are examined by Sham and Naphi. The memory card contains photos of the Shroake children and of a single rail line at the edge of the railsea.

Rail Lines

As the core component of the railsea, rail lines extend all over in every direction, crossing back and forth, connecting at junctions, switches, and merging areas. They are the primary method of transportation across the railsea. They are beyond the reach of monstrous moles and other underground creatures.

Diesel

Diesel fuel is the energy source that powers moletrains and wartrains alike. Only the newer, most advanced trains have diesel engines.

Trains

As the primary way to travel, trains consist of an engine car and any number of carts and cars behind. Some are massive, being several stories high; others are small, simple, and straightforward. Trains are outfitted for the tasks they perform, from mole trains to passenger trains to salvage trains to war trains.

Settings

The Railsea

Covering the earth, and with tracks, junctions, and switches in every direction, the railsea is a complex network of innumerable rail lines that connected hard lands and islands. They are originally constructed by companies who drained and dammed the oceans to create speedier land travel, and to make money. When the companies fell down under their own weight, the railsea was left for posterity to use and wonder about.

Streggeye Land

Streggeye Land is the home port, and home of, the Medes and her crew, including Sham. It is a relatively peaceful land, but full of hard work and less-than-scrupulous places.

Manihiki

At the center of the railsea world is Manihiki, a vibrant, wealthy, and militarily dominant city state. As such, it is the most powerful because of its democracy, but it is also heavily in debt. It is in Manihiki that the Shroakes live, and the Medes heads to collect tracking devices.

The Bridge

The bridge is located at the end of the single rail line and empty earth, and it conducts the single line from one end of a massive gorge to the other. On the other side of the bridge is an old company town, cut off for untold years by a dead angel train blocking the bridge, and by a living angel train on the other side.

The Ocean

Just beyond the bridge and the company town is the ocean. It has been dammed and drained from the lands before it. It is on the ocean that Sham, the Shroakes, and Naphi set sail to see what lies on the other side.



Themes and Motifs

Philosophy

Philosophy is a major theme in the novel “Railsea” by China Mieville. Philosophy (love of wisdom), is the study of knowledge and all its effects, and often provides guiding principles by which to live. In the novel, philosophy provides such guiding principles and motives by which to live one’s life. And such philosophy affects the characters in the novel in various ways.

The clearest form of philosophy in the novel is that of Abacat Naphi’s. Her philosophy is to hunt down and destroy Mocker-Jack, the giant, old-tooth-colored moldywarpe that has been evading her for years. Nothing else motivates Naphi beyond this task. It is her sole purpose in life: live by the philosophy of killing Mocker-Jack. But when Mocker-Jack is killed fighting the angel train, Naphi, suddenly without a life philosophy, tries to kill herself as well, but is saved by Sham.

Philosophy exists in a less extreme form with the Shroakes, Dero and Caldera. Their guiding philosophy is to complete the journey of their parents, to see what their parents wanted them to see. While they are driven on by this philosophy, they are not consumed by it in the way that Naphi is consumed by her own philosophy.

The lack, or near-lack thereof, of philosophy, rests with Sham. Sham, a doctor’s assistant, is unhappy with the choices he has in his life. He wants more. He wants something better. But just what that is, he does not yet know, though his search for something better is a philosophy in and of itself. His is a vague philosophy, open-ended and without a seeming way to be concluded. Nevertheless, this philosophy –or lack of philosophy –drives Sham on to adventure with the Shroakes.

Friendship

Friendship is a dominant theme in the novel “Railsea” by China Mieville. Friendship includes platonic affections, compassion, care, and loyalty. Emotional, spiritual, and physical support systems are important in friendships. Friendship in the novel occurs in different ways between different people, including mainly Sham.

Though Sham is averse to animal fighting on the Medes, and although he is not the quickest or the brightest member of the crew, Sham is still accepted and cared for by everyone on board. When it comes time to rescue Sham, and to pursue the single rail line because of him, there is no contest. Out of friendship and loyalty to sham, the captain and the crew of the Medes are determined to seek him out and rescue him – even at the risk of their own lives.

Sham is a likeable and honest character, and because of this honesty, he strikes up a quick friendship with Dero and Caldera Shroake. Indeed, the friendship is so quickly



formed that the brother and sister Shroakes invite Sham out to sea with them in order to finish the journey of their parents –and they have only recently met sham.

Perhaps the most shining example of friendship in the novel comes between Sham and his pet day bet, Daybe. During a fight, Sham injures Daybe, only to heal Daybe and take care of him. A loving bond is formed between the two, so that Daybe becomes Sham's constant companion and guardian. This friendship is borne out by Daybe's relentless quest to seek allies to rescue Sham from the pirates. Daybe succeeds.

Adventure

Adventure is a major, dominant, and overarching theme found consistently throughout the novel "Railsea" by China Mieville. Adventure includes exciting, exhilarating, and unusual experiences that can lead to greater self-growth, discovery, or enrichment in some way, shape, or form. Three characters in the novel are primarily arbiters of such adventure –Sham, Dero, and Caldera.

Sham, without knowing it, has a desire for adventure. The work he has taken on as a doctor's assistant is simply busy work to be able to do something to improve his life in some small way, but he dreams of something more, something bigger than the railsea. And so he sets out to discover what is beyond the railsea following the discovery of the photos on the memory card from the train wreck. His journey leads him beyond the Medes to Manihiki, being nearly mugged, taken hostage by pirates, nearly killed in a battle, marooned on an island, and nearly drowned –all the while discovering the end of the railsea, and the beginning of the ocean.

It can be argued that the zeal for adventure is in the blood of Dero and Caldera, whose parents were adventurers in their own right. Dero and Caldera want to head out to see what it is that their parents wanted them to see. And so they leave their home in Manihiki, risking their lives and their well-being by traveling out into the railsea on their own. They face down pirates, various tunneling and flying creatures, as well as the Manihiki navy. Ultimately, they come to discover through Sham that the end of the rail line is not the end of the line, but that they are meant to cross an ocean –and the adventure begins anew.

Styles

Point of View

China Mieville tells his novel “Railsea” from the third-person omniscient perspective. This is done for several reasons. Since the novel exists in a dystopian setting, the omniscient narrative allows asides or pieces of the narration to the readers which describe the context of any particular situation, as well as history. The third-person allows the reader as well to see events transpiring with the Shroakes, the Medes, Daybe, and Sirocco, all apart from Sham –especially when he is captured. Due to the futuristic setting, as well as the diverse places and characters that populate the novel, the third person narrator acts as a unifying voice, tying everything in together into one common thread, and allowing the reader to follow the plot based on that commonality.

Language and Meaning

China Mieville tells his novel “Railsea” in language that is simple, rustic, and lyrical. The simple language allows the reader to navigate the plot with ease, while the rustic and lyrical aspects of the narration make the plot more believable. For example, in years past, the ampersand symbol (&) was a common replacement for the word “and”. Mieville resurrects the ampersand in his novel as an example of the simplification of the future of language in the future –one symbol for three letters. The lyrical aspect also makes the story seem as if it is being told or related by someone to whom the story has been recounted –such as a railman or a rail traveler eating in a local pub. As such, the narration is more personal than ordinary third-person narration, and adds a touch of reality to things.

Structure

China Mieville divides his novel “Railsea” into nine consecutive, chronological, and linear parts, with each part further subdivided into consecutive, chronological, and linear chapters. Illustrations of the creatures that populate the plot appear at each of the parts, and each part is devoted to a larger story arc within the plot. For example, Part II involves Sham’s efforts to get Captain Naphi to set a course for Manihiki. Every few chapters, the narrator removes the reader from the plot to explain something of some importance in a chapter, such as how ships logs can be kept or how the railsea operates.



Quotes

This is the story of a bloodstained boy.
-- Narrator (Prologue paragraph 1)

Importance: The very first sentence of the very first chapter of the novel sets the stage for the entire plot. This first statement reveals that the novel is about a boy, who will be bloodstained and endure unspeakable hardships throughout his travels.

What was all this, he thought? He spectated himself, as if his body was a puppet. What is Sham up to? Sham wondered.
-- Narrator (Chapter 6 paragraph 33)

Importance: Sham, who is unhappy with his life aboard the mole train Medes, wonders what else is there beyond the railsea. He often feels disconnected, and sad, as though he were simply being controlled, or going through the motions, rather than actually living at all.

The secret of that line, that solitary line, leading, it seemed -& it still felt like curse words even to just think it! –out of the railsea.
-- Narrator (Chapter 17 paragraph 88)

Importance: After seeing a photo of the single rail line beyond the edge of the railsea, Sham is determined to find out where it goes and what it means. But to even think it seems unthinkable that there could be anything beyond the railsea.

Her bleeding philosophy! That was why she was ignoring those pictures, Sham thought.... She would not spare the time out from her molehunting philosophizing!
-- Narrator (Chapter 18 paragraph 95)

Importance: Here, Sham reflects angrily on why Naphi refuses to follow up on such an obvious mystery as the single rail line. She is too focused on capturing Mocker-Jack. Nothing else matters beyond only her philosophy.

Sham's own cunning has startled him out of understanding it. He does not understand how he can be going where he wanted to go.
-- Narrator (Chapter 26 paragraph 124)

Importance: Sham, who has wanted so badly to get to Manihiki, can barely believe he is finally going. It seems surreal, like a dream. His own destiny seems to be unfolding before him, and seems to be his to reach out and take –if only he will reach out and take it.

...& tacks & yaws switches on its way to where it's going, as we all must do.
-- Narrator (Chapter 33 paragraph 164)



Importance: Here, the narrator describes the functions of the railsea, and all that it does with is moving tracks. In relation, any action or path a human being may take, may lead it to anywhere new; or, if a plan is known, the right paths and actions must be taken to get there. The railsea is symbolic of humankind.

Our minds we salvage from history's rubbish, & they are machines to make chaos into story.

-- Narrator (Chapter 42 paragraph 211)

Importance: Drawing from, and learning about history and the world around, the minds of people are like salvage, culling memories and ideas and chaos to make some kind of order, to make some kind of sense of it all.

We hunt one young trainsmate, name of Ham am Soorap.

-- Naphi (Chapter 67 paragraph 322)

Importance: In a radical departure from her all-consuming philosophy, Captain Naphi decides that Sham's rescue is above all else now. Mocker-Jack will have to wait due to Naphi's respect and friendship with Sham.

But yeah, of course I'm going on." He smiled. "With them.

-- Sham (Chapter 73 paragraph 360)

Importance: Here, with the bridge blocked by a dead angel train, the crew of the Medes decides it will go back, taking Heaven salvage as a way to become rich with Sirocco. But Sham does not care about money, and so he goes on to continue exploring with Dero and Caldera.

You remember that last carriage your parents left behind?... Can't get it out of my head. I think that's what they wanted to happen.

-- Sham (Chapter 85 paragraph 418)

Importance: As the novel comes to an end, Sham suggests that he, Naphi, and the Shroakes return to the old carriage from the Shroakes' parents' train. It is actually a boat, which they will use to sail across the ocean, only to continue the journey and the adventure.