



# The Rise of Ransom City

*Felix Gilman*

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## **The Rise of Ransom City** Felix Gilman

This is the story Harry Ransom. If you know his name it's most likely as the inventor of the Ransom Process, a stroke of genius that changed the world.

Or you may have read about how he lost the battle of Jasper City, or won it, depending on where you stand in matters of politics.

Friends called him Hal or Harry, or by one of a half-dozen aliases, of which he had more than any honest man should. He often went by Professor Harry Ransom, and though he never had anything you might call a formal education, he definitely earned it.

If you're reading this in the future, Ransom City must be a great and glittering metropolis by now, with a big bronze statue of Harry Ransom in a park somewhere. You might be standing on its sidewalk and not wonder in the least of how it grew to its current glory. Well, here is its story, full of adventure and intrigue. And it all starts with the day that old Harry Ransom crossed paths with Liv Alverhusen and John Creedmoor, two fugitives running from the Line, amidst a war with no end.

## **The Rise of Ransom City Details**

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Author : Felix Gilman

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## From Reader Review The Rise of Ransom City for online ebook

### Ryandake says

i really liked the previous book in this pair (*The Half-Made World*) despite its flaws. love the setup (the Gun vs. the Line, with the half-made world at the end of the gunpowder rainbow). Creedmoor vs. Lowry, with Liv there to witness, which, despite what most people think, is not a passive thing to do.

and so i have been looking forward to the sequel for some time, and having good thoughts and anticipation in its general direction. but this book is flawed in some quite horrible ways, and i don't think i will have the fondness for it that i do for the first.

this book does not pick up where *The Half-Made World* left off, or not quite. Creedmoor and Liv *are* struggling out of the west, but the story doesn't begin with them and they are, in fact, only a trigger for part of the events of this book. in this book, our protagonist is Harry Ransom, inventor and fast-talker and possibly snake oil salesman. this book is his autobiography.

Ransom is only an intermittently likable character. he's frequently pretty funny in a sideways sort of way. he has some insight but his insight is limited by incorrigible (and eventually tiresome) sunny optimism and a failure to confront his own shortcomings. the motives and indeed the emotional life of others is quite beyond his grasp, except where it intersects with Ransom's own wants. in some ways this is i think a valid portrait of a young man of a certain bent, and as such it's extremely well done. wanna know what goes on in the heads of obsessive, passionate, rough but eloquent boosters? i think this book accomplishes that.

but on the whole, i personally don't find such people congenial company. not for a whole novel, and particularly not one told in the first person.

about a third of the way into the book, there was a short snippet of dialogue, and i experienced it as a cool rain shower on a blazing day. which of course stopped me cold. and i realized, it was pretty much the first dialogue exchange in the book to that point. i was amazed by how much i had missed dialogue. some other point of view than Ransom's, even for those few sentences. anything other than this iffy character endlessly speaking at me.

one other issue with Mr. Ransom--he does not use contractions. ever. so the "did not" and "is not" and "will not" (there are a lot of "not"s in the book) pile up into this staccato rhythm that eventually feels like a nerve tapped on just once too often. i started reading for sentence variety--you know, some short, some long, different music--and while there is a lot of variety in the sentences, somehow it honestly doesn't feel like it.

so. again, so much going for this book, and somehow it really fails to get good traction. i like Gilman's writing--i'm convinced he is a fine writer--could be that this story has just escaped his grasp. i'll still check out his next novel, but i think i will do so from the library.

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### Nathan says

First posted here

Though I will try to avoid it, this review may contain minor spoilers from 'The Half-Made World.'

'The Half-Made World' was one of the best books I read last year. Almost impossible to put in a category, it mixed the fantasy and western genres almost perfectly, with a touch of steampunk. Gilman did so many things right in that novel, but ended it almost abruptly, leaving fans like me desperately hoping for a sequel. Obviously we got one, but perhaps not the one we hoped for. Rather than follow the main characters from 'Half-Made World', Liv and Creedmoor, the 'Rise of Ransom City' is the story of one man, the Professor Harry Ransom. Do we get a resolution from 'Half-Made World'? Kind of, but perhaps not the one readers were looking for. It didn't end up mattering to me though, as 'The Rise of Ransom City' is another great book, and fans should not be disappointed.

'The Half-Made World' was about a pseudo American West that was still fuzzy around the edges, almost as if an artist was drawing it from the inside out. It followed Liv out west as she searched for a man who held the secret of a great weapon in his head(though an injury left him without memory of anything at all). The weapon was thought to be able to finally take down the two supernatural entities that are warring over the new lands. One is The Line, intelligent train engines who run an almost hive mind society, the ultimate of an industrial dystopia(hasn't this term been around long enough for a spellchecker to recognize it?). The Second is The Gun, larger than life outlaw figures under a pseudo-control of individual daemons. The book ended without the characters ever really finding out if the weapon was workable or not.

While it's predecessor followed three main characters, 'The Rise of Ransom City' is an edited memoir written by Harry Ransom himself. This is a man who several times changed the history of the land, at least according to himself. The 'creator' of the Ransom Process, his memoirs show his rise and fall while he tries to bring his process to the world. Along the way he runs into Liv and Creedmoor(an agent of The Gun in the first outing), tying the book nicely to HMW without actually following the same characters. The voice of Harry Ransom is a treat. A completely unreliable narrator, he also isn't much of a writer. Often times details are given out of order, he talks about things he is sure he has pointed out before, and has to backtrack to give details. Gilman had to have had a blast writing this, I can picture him giggling madly as he tosses in a double negative, because it would be completely natural for his character. Because the entire story is coming from Ransom, some scenes have sketchier details than others, and some are nothing more than assumptions that Ransom makes. Though he tries to point out when he is only guessing at conversations, it gives the reader knowledge that nothing he says can ever be taken purely at face value. Readers will also never know what kind of details they are going to get. Some very important events will be glossed over quickly, some minor characters will get pages written about them. This would have driven me crazy if written from the third person, but feels natural coming from a memoir.

Ransom's story is quite an interesting one. From his early childhood that influences his feelings on The Line, to his traveling days, to his ascension to one of the best known men in the West, his life is never boring. Like all larger than life figures, sometimes he is in the middle of important events, even in control of them. Other times he is a bit player in them who gets too much credit(or blame). And sometimes, he is nowhere near the events he has attributed to him. It all feels very authentic, as many larger than life personalities of the Old West were a product of dime novels more than their actual deeds.

Plotting is harder to rate in this one. Much of it reads as a travel memoir, as Ransom describes places and people he meets along the way(even two horses get part of a chapter). Ransom and his assistant Mr. Caver try to sell this new process(and I am being intentionally vague about what the process is, because the author keeps it that way). Eventually a major event comes along, in which Ransom learns a little more about what his Process is capable of, but even that doesn't escalate the tension. Instead the pacing stays slow and steady. I don't want to imply that nothing happens, because there are some exciting confrontations with various enemies from The Line and The Gun. But Ransom's writing style is such that they are sometimes highlighted and sometimes dealt with briefly. I personally felt the pace of the plot fit the writing style perfectly, but if someone hears 'western' and goes looking for a shoot-em-up, they will be disappointed.

Being the story of Ransom, who was a great character, there is less to say about secondary characters in this one. His assistant Mr Carver is present for much of the book, but never really picks up a personality (other than strong and silent). Liv and Creedmoor show up from the first book, and while events in this one give some closure to the first outing, nothing really new is learned about them. Rival/Possible love interest Adela could be interesting, but we learn what Ransom knows about her is as unreliable as what we learn about him. It all worked for me though, showing that to Ransom, his story is the one that needs to be told.

The story ends in many ways like the first, with most of the plot lines tied up, but with one major thread left completely open. And like the first, it is open in a way that could show up in a future book, or could leave the reader forever unaware of how things really end.

Another great book from Gilman, and I do hope for another book in this world. Personally the best part was Ransom's voice, and I liked it so much I could overlook the slower pacing.

4 stars

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### **Cora says**

At some point, and without my really noticing, Felix Gilman became a "buy sight unseen" author for me. And while I enjoyed THUNDERER quite a bit, and THE HALF-MADE WORLD even more, I am happy to say that THE RISE OF RANSOM CITY is his best novel to date. THE RISE OF RANSOM CITY is a follow-up to THE HALF-MADE WORLD, but Gilman makes the bold choice to sideline his heroes, and tell the story of a new character (Harry Ransom, inventor/snake oil salesman) who gets tangentially involved in their exploits and is profoundly affected as a result. It's the kind of thing that could alienate readers, but I thought it was wonderful. Ransom's voice--the book is largely made up of his memoir, written after a life of notoriety--is at times whimsical, self-lacerating, harrowing, and devastating, and Ransom proves to be capable of a kind of heroism but also a terrible complacency.

Ransom is a great character, and he's in a great fantasy world. I've seen the term "steampunk Western" tossed around, but I think that brings to mind something superficial and jokey, some bad combination of airships and six-shooters. (Or maybe I just don't like steampunk much.) Gilman distills an impressive amount of 19th century Americana into a strange and familiar world. He can toss off memorable details seemingly with ease (Ransom off-handedly references the small town of Izar, with its unhealthy number of dentists), but he does this with a purpose. The world is torn between a war between the colorful/brutal agents of the Gun and the faceless totalitarianism of the Line, and Gilman makes you worry for what might be trampled between the two sides.

I'm being vague about the plot, for good reason. I got a lot of pleasure from discovering things right as they happened, which isn't usually the case for me, and I think you should as well. But I will say that the story holds together well and manages a genuine epic sweep in a relatively concise fashion. This is almost certainly the best novel that I've read this year. Highly recommended.

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### **David Marshall says**

This is an excellent conclusion to the duology with Half-Made World, All my best expectations were fulfilled!

<http://opionator.wordpress.com/2012/1...>

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## Adam says

Following up his *Half Made World*, Gilman does so in unpredictable style. Or maybe predictably unpredictable as *Gears of the City* his follow-up to *Thunderer* went totally postmodern. Here following Jeff Vandermeer's *Shriek: an Afterword* and he presents a memoir that is edited by another, a mix of Nabokov's unreliable narrator and Borge's faux non-fiction with a healthy dose of Mark Twain's picaresque wit. This is also one the most aggrieved skewering of Horatio Alger since Nathaniel West's *Cool Million*. With references to Twain, Alger, and the continuing quasi-western milieu obviously this is fantasy novel with its eyes set on American myths. Some would argue that the style would keep much of action distanced from the reader, but I found this an interesting literary gambit that paid off more so than Vandermeer's similar book. Gilman remains one of the most fascinating of contemporary fantasy writers to me. Where will he go next? I'm interested. On a side note how did he get Gordon Lish to blurb this? Weird. On another side note, is there a revival of the Western going on right now?

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## Ranting Dragon says

<http://www.rantingdragon.com/review-o...>

*The Rise of Ransom City* is a sequel of sorts, following Felix Gilman's *The Half-Made World*—a wonderful, genre-bending novel released some two years ago. That book concluded with a satisfying ending, but the story definitely didn't end there. In *The Rise of Ransom City*, Gilman returns to the half-made world from a completely new perspective. In a stroke of mad-genius brilliance, Gilman has created a story that far surpasses its predecessor in writing and scope, and that is in nearly every way a standalone novel while still wrapping up the events of *The Half-Made World*.

### The autobiography

Harry Ransom is an inventor with an unhealthy drive for adventure, a self-conceit that brings him way too much trouble, and a naive worldview. When his father dies, he decides to venture out in pursuit of fame and glory. Throughout his adventures, he writes pieces of his autobiography and sends them randomly out into the world. Years later, a journalist collects all the pieces, and together, those comprise *The Rise of Ransom City*.

This autobiographic narration from an utterly flawed yet extremely likeable character works extremely well. The story jumps all over the place as Harry Ransom relates his new adventures—the ones he is having while writing—and his old adventures, while constantly interrupting himself to portray a picture of the world he walked in and the people he met. Due to the nature of this story, it is easy to compare it with that other autobiographic fantasy series, Patrick Rothfuss's *Kingkiller Chronicle*—and indeed, there are many similarities. Like *The Name of the Wind*, *The Rise of Ransom City* is a chaotic character study that conveys the story of an extraordinary life. Mundane elements, like struggling with poverty and trying to find true love, are captivatingly conveyed. Gilman may lack Rothfuss's knack for beautiful, near-poetic prose, but in return, he has significantly more story-telling skills. Where *The Name of the Wind* really doesn't have much substance in the way of story, the autobiography of Harry Ransom is brimful of action and suspense.

### Scope in perspective

What sets this story apart from other novels, including *The Half-Made World*, is its scope. In *The Rise of Ransom City*, Gilman expands this uniquely flavored world with a rich history. More importantly, while reading, there is this sense of looking in while the history is being written. From the get-go, Ransom addresses his audience as a people who know their recent history. When he mentions that things were different before “the battle of Jasper City,” he clearly assumes you know what this battle was. Obviously, his audience is fictional, and we don’t know what that battle was, but we know immediately that it was something big and that we’ll simply have to continue reading to find out. This method of storytelling creates a significant amount of the suspense of *The Rise of Ransom City*, and the execution on Gilman’s part is utterly brilliant.

### **The American Dream**

The world in which Ransom’s autobiography takes place further deepens the scope of *The Rise of Ransom City*. It is a rural wild west, still largely unmade. When man brought technology to the unmade lands, the spirits of the land seized the opportunity. A steam locomotive, for example, suddenly became the vessel of an old god, and its creators became the god’s slaves. Through man-made technology, the old gods battle each other, and the creators of said technology are the unending war’s greatest victims. Yet, the wild west is also a place of opportunity where dreams can still come true and a poor man can become rich through hard work and dedication. This world paints a picture of The American Dream in which actions clearly have consequences and the modernization of the world leads to its destruction. It’s an endless cycle that, in Gilman’s voice, can only be perceived as deeply ironic.

After *The Half-Made World*—which had some serious pacing problems—*The Rise of Ransom City* is a fresh breath of wonderful story telling. It is a genre-bending story of a mundane man trying to seize any opportunity to make a name for himself. This is the study of a flawed character whose tendency to boast leads to trouble and tragedy. There are still some parts in which the pacing doesn’t work quite as well as Gilman intended, but the narration solves this problem adequately. *The Rise of Random City* never grows dull.

### **Why should you read this book?**

Whether or not you’ve read *The Half-Made World*, you should give its sequel a chance. *The Rise of Ransom City* is a unique story from a fresh perspective. This book is for anyone who enjoys the American pioneering history, westerns, steampunk novels, or contemporary fantasy. The epic wars and wonderful world building will even appeal to fans of high fantasy. This is an unparalleled and deep example of what happens when the lines between fantasy and literature start blurring, and, in writing it, Felix Gilman has established his literary craftsmanship once and for all.

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### **Terry says**

Felix Gilman is good. He’s definitely a writer on my watch-list (not in a sociopathic way of course), and there’s something about his writing that I find both enjoyable and satisfying. I generally lump him in with those writers I consider “prose stylists” though he’s not showy in any way, rather he just seems to know how to effectively turn a phrase. He also writes fairly dense (or at least long) texts, but they never seem to be weighed down by their size; things move along at the pace they need to move at, whether that be faster or slower at any given point, and they reach their destination in ways that satisfy. Finally his characters have complexity and their own voices and never come across as dull or flat.

*The Rise of Ransom City* is a sequel-of-sorts to the thoroughly excellent *The Half-Made World*. It shares the same genre-bending alternate weird-weird west world of its predecessor as well as several key characters. The most important of these is our narrator and ‘hero’ ‘Professor’ Harry Ransom, Lightbringer, etc., etc.,

discoverer of the Ransom Process, creator of the Ransom System of Exercises, businessman, inventor, and visionary extraordinaire. To call Harry a con-man would be unfair, to call him a scientist would be inaccurate, to call him an inveterate dreamer would probably be just about right. The set-up for the novel is that it is a cobbling together of letters and drafts from Ransom himself by the editorial hand of one Elmer Merrial Carson, a raconteur, journalist, novelist and sort of Mark Twain figure in Gilman's world. Readers of Gilman's previous forays into the world of the Unmade West will not be surprised by the self-aggrandizing picture that Ransom paints of himself, though his earnest intention to tell the truth (albeit a truth coloured by his own perceptions and beliefs) is genuine. We follow Ransom as he details his obscure childhood in a small backwater town, his early interactions with the Line, and hints at the seemingly fortuitous discovery of what would eventually lead to his development of 'the Process'. His early travels with the enigmatic Mr. Carver into the further reaches of the West in search of investors not only allow him to cross paths with John Creedmoor and Liv Alverhuysen (the main characters of the former novel), but also begin to lead Ransom into situations that will inevitably ensnare him in the more important events of the wider world and eventually draw upon him the unwanted attentions of both the Line and the Gun.

Throughout Ransom's tale two mysteries prove to loom large (sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly): what exactly is the nature and purpose of 'the Process', and where, if anywhere, is the dreamed-for utopia Ransom hopes to create (the titular Ransom City)? In addition to this the origins and mysteries of the eldritch forces that embody both the Line and the Gun are also speculated upon (though never revealed), and with one possible exception the Folk remain the ambiguous and off-stage presence they have always been. In many ways the book leaves us with even more questions about Gilman's world than we started with; really one could say that the book is composed primarily of enigmas and mysteries wrapped in the ambiguous words of an unreliable narrator. True to the traditions of this narrative mode we are not always told what we want to hear, and even those things we are told must be taken with a grain of salt. Digressions are frequent and mysteries are only revealed (if they ever are) slowly and almost by accident. This might be frustrating for some readers, but once you get a handle on who Harry Ransom really is sifting through his words does not become an onerous task. He also proves able to provide a valuable, if somewhat skewed, perspective on the events and people he comes across. Harry certainly grows as a character and his experiences and trials prompt his idealism to shift from the purely selfish & naïve to something more analogous to a philanthropic & hopeful melancholy.

I don't think there's much else I can say without spoiling the story...this book really is all about the journey and the little reveals that each new horizon presents to both Ransom and the reader. I still liked *The Half-Made World* better and I hope any further forays Gilman makes into this world reveal a bit more than they obscure, but all-in-all I enjoyed this book and would recommend it to anyone who loves well-written fantasy that involves complex characters in an intriguingly unique world.

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## **Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says**

*The Rise of Ransom City* is a sequel to *The Half-Made World*.... sort of. Where the first book was a quest story with worldwide implications, following three main characters, this one is written as the memoir of Harry Ransom, an inventor who appeared only briefly in the prior novel. It's still a decent book, and the second half is much better than the first, but it didn't grab me and excite me the way the first one did.

The first 185 pages of this book relate Harry's childhood and his travels around the West, and I honestly found it a slog and thought of giving up more than once. Like too many fantasy sequels, it lapses into a tedious travelogue, its protagonist hiking about with no particular end in mind. Meanwhile, readers have no prior investment in Harry, whose role in world events during the first half of the book is at best peripheral. While he's rather amusing, he's not quite interesting enough to make up for having lost our previous main

characters and storyline. Liv and Creedmoor do play a small role here, as seen through Harry's eyes, but they're understandably reticent with him and so we see almost nothing of their adventures.

Fortunately, the book does pick up in the second half: Harry stops traveling and becomes involved in world events, and I was engaged and interested again. Even the world seems more alive in the latter part of the book, and some interesting secondary characters step up to play important roles. Gilman displays his writing talent quite effectively, for instance, in a chapter that consists entirely of unattributed dialogue with 5 or 6 people present--and yet the reader can understand who is speaking and what's going on without trouble. And, to give credit where credit is due: I criticized the first book for only having one female character of any importance, but in this installment there are several and they're quite interesting.

Looking back on the whole work, then, it's more than competently written and the world is still interesting, but the choice of Harry as narrator is questionable. Not only is it difficult to switch from the movers and shakers to a relatively minor character partway through a story, but Harry's voice never quite seems to match his personality. He is supposed to be fast-talking and pompous, but comes across as rather too self-aware and regretful, almost ingenuous, as if Gilman had not entirely adopted his voice.

Overall, this one is worth reading if you liked the first book and are willing to push through the first half of this one (or actually enjoy fantasy travelogues). For me, though, while it has its moments, it does not live up to the promise of *The Half-Made World*.

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### **Peter says**

Felix Gilman revisits his Half-Made world. This book is as great as I hoped the first book was.

New Weird meets the Weird West. Where the first book felt a bit too metaphorical and post-modern (Chaos versus Order! The West as an empty space, formed because it is discovered), this book fleshes out the setting a bit more, but, most importantly, fleshes out its characters. The setting is as weird as in the first book, but feels more real.

Harry Ransom is a great, flawed hero, and the alluded Ransom City is something you want to be real, but know it will never be.

People who loved new weird classics like *The Etched City*, *City of Saints and Madmen* or the Bas-Lag books by China Miéville should add this book to their to-read list.

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### **Carl Nelson says**

Engaging, imaginative, and thrilling read. If you're expecting a sequel to "The Half-Made World," you may be disappointed. "The Rise of Ransom City" is a tangential story, perhaps with less beauty and much slyer wit. This book works on its own or in tandem with "The Half-Made World."

"The Rise of Ransom City" works for two main reasons: Gilman's world is so inventive and Harry Ransom is roguishly likeable, Ransom is equal parts inventor and charlatan, making for an imaginative narrator that the reader knows he can't quite believe but he really wants to anyway. Ransom's voice is self-deprecating and optimistic.

Great authors often create in me a sense of glorious disappointment, because their writing is so richly

detailed that I would love to hear all their asides brought to life. Such is the case with Gilman; I hope to see more of his *Half-Made World* very soon.

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### **Rob says**

The follow-up to *The Half-Made World*, set in the same reality but not about the same characters, though a few do return in bit parts.

Enjoyed it a lot at the beginning, less so for a stretch in the middle, and quite a lot again after that. The best things about it are the world and the characters, both of which feel alive. Most obviously, the principal conceit of the book is that it purports to be the memoir of Harry Ransom, inventor, visionary, and salesman and sometimes-genius, and is therefore presented in first-person. Moreover, it is written in segments, mailed to fictional newsman Elmer Merrial Carson, who does not entirely credit Ransom's writings. Both Ransom and Carson feel like real people with real personalities, though Carson appears only occasionally. Gilman's world is also alive, at least in the enclaves where the plot brings us. Jasper City feels most real of all.

I loved HMW, but I felt it petered out toward the end, in need of editing and direction. RRC's aimless period is in the middle and is thankfully brief; the end, if anything, wraps up awfully fast.

Worth reading if you enjoyed the world of HMW.

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### **Fantasy Literature says**

If Horatio Alger, rather than Mark Twain, wrote the sequel to *Huck Finn* (though keeping Twain's wry humor) after he lights out for the territories, and if Huck were possessed by the spirit of Nikola Tesla, and if the Wild West were the Wild West except that the trains and guns were all hosts for demons battling for supremacy while haunting both sides is the possibility of a sort of doomsday device, well, then you just might be close to approximating Felix Gilman's *The Rise of Ransom City*, a kinda-sorta sequel to his *The Half-Made World*, which I had on my top ten list the year it came out. *The Rise of Ransom City* might not be quite that good, but it doesn't fall far short.

In *The Half-Made World*, we were introduced to a West being ravaged by a war between The... Read More: <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/revi...>

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### **Porkpie says**

This is a fantastic story, with excellent characters, believable dialogue, and a plot that's firm enough to allow the setting of the entire story become a character as well.

It's hard to write a review without spoiling that last part, as the first thing you'll notice is the setting itself. It's arguably the most clever part of the entire novel. I won't ruin it for you, except to say that there's just enough familiarity in where you're dropped at the start of this novel to make you realize just how delightfully foreign it is.

I can't recommend this book highly enough. It's definitely in the Steampunk genre, but the writing is so solid

and evocative, and the premise is so strong, that anyone with a taste for an artful tale cleverly told will enjoy it immensely.

The Rise of Ransom City is easily one of the best novels I read in 2012, and I cannot wait to see what the author comes out with next. Instant fan.

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### **Andrea McDowell says**

Wonderful. Felix Gilman's part fantasy, part western, part steampunk, part meta-fictional commentary on the european conquest of North America and our twin obsessions of industrialism and rabid individualism is also a fabulously written and well-characterized trip. Start with Half-Made World. Gilman proves that there is still something brilliantly original to be done in fantasy literature that is worth doing, a lovely escapist treat and intelligent at the same time. I can't ask for a single improvement. Can't wait for #3.

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### **Liviu says**

another huge asap that came; should get to it very soon

very slow and conventional western beginning; will try later

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