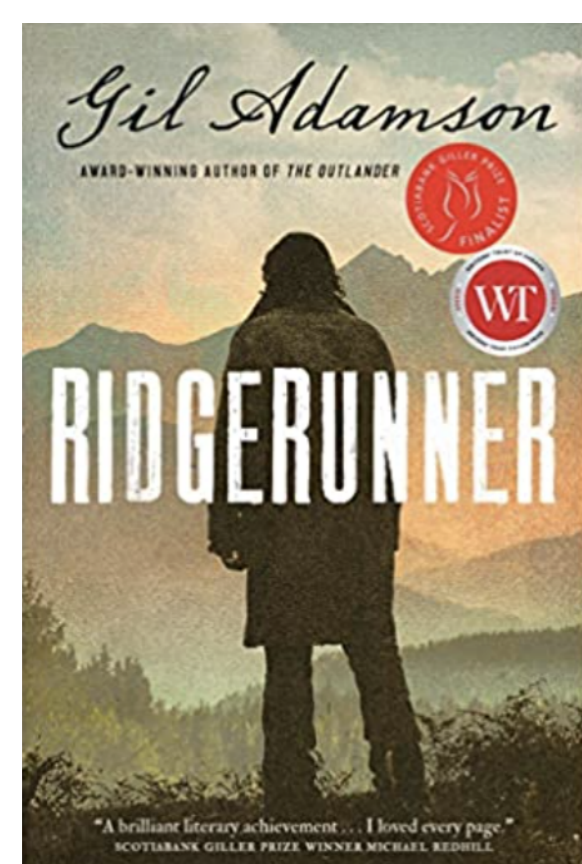


## 'Ridgerunner' Takes a Wrong Turn at the Pass

*A Sophomore Slump Western from a talented Canadian author*

March 25, 2021 Michael Giltz

Well, she certainly didn't rush it out. Author Gil Adamson took 14 years to follow up her debut novel. If the new book, *Ridgerunner*, falters, it's because of a choice she made, not a rush to print. Her talents remain intact.



Adamson is a Canadian author with books of poetry, a short story collection and a "fan-commissioned biography" of actor Gillian Anderson to her credit. You have to love anyone who pens a biography of the abundantly talented Anderson, especially when they title it "Mulder, It's Me." If you're waving the flag of fandom, wave it high!

She really broke through with her first novel, a 2007 western called *The Outlander*. It features a "self-made widow" on the run from her dead husband's two vengeful brothers. It's pure adventure from start to finish, bursting with excitement and wary romance amidst the backdrop of the 1905 Canadian wilderness.

Our hero is constantly on the move, yet Adamson is gifted enough to upend expectations. Every time she catches her breath and meets up with someone new, we think, OK, this is where she'll stay. She crosses paths with a sad widow and her two amusingly protective servants, a hermit-like mountain man, a preacher who wallops the hell out of his mine worker parishioners to knock some sense into them and on and on. Each character is so vivid we hate to leave them behind...until the next eccentric looms into view and holds our attention.

That gift for character is on full display in *Ridgerunner*, a book that begins some 10 years later and overlaps in certain characters. Instead of a gritty widow, our hero is a boy just about 13 years old whose mother dies. In a fit of nerves, the boy's ornery father decides an isolated life in the mountains miles away from the fringes of civilization is no life for the kid. Determined to give his son Jack every advantage, the dad places him in the care of a wayward nun and bolts down south toward the United States, the better to rob hotels, mining outfits and any other large company with cash lying around.

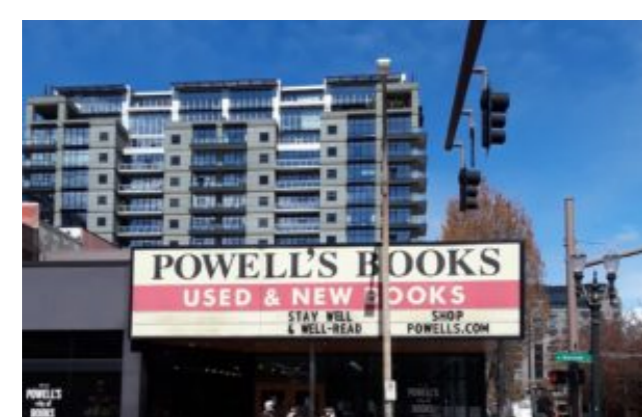
For much of the book, you'll be just as pleased as any reader of *The Outlander*. The boy Jack is furious at being abandoned, especially since the one-time nun lies and tells him the father is never coming back. After chafing under her strict care, Jack hightails it back to the lonesome cabin where he grew up in bliss with his nutty but loving parents. The dad shuttles in and out of danger piling up cash, the not-a-nun feels abandoned herself and slips back into a laudanum habit, bears attack, wolves sniff around, bounty hunters close in and it's all good fun.

Adamson's ability to entertain remains. Then, one stray but momentous detail about a character just didn't convince. It doesn't seem that important but is oddly discordant with everything else we knew. So what? Ignore it. Yet that one detail is elaborated on and looms larger and larger until we realize it's the engine driving the entire novel. Right off a cliff, I'd say.

Worse, the author's madness here seeps into our hero Jack and his dad right towards the end. Both of them behave uncharacteristically during a tense, violent finale just when we need them to behave as they should. You can't really enjoy a shootout when a character you've grown to love acts like a lunkhead and says, "Hey, what's going on around here?"

On the bright side, Adamson ends both novels very well indeed. *Ridgerunner* outlasts its climax to offer a sweet, double-barreled denouement. That takes the sting out of some bungled plotting. *The Outlander* also has a grace note, literally. So, its only flaw is the title. You must repeatedly tell people, No, no, *Outlander* is a time travel romance by Diana Gabaldon, while *THE Outlander* is a Western by Gil Adamson and it's really good. Those who enjoyed it will probably enjoy *Ridgerunner* as well. They just won't recommend it the way they can the first. Or hopefully, the third.

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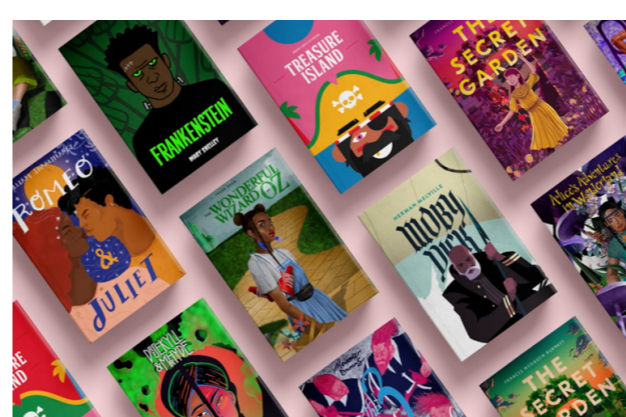
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### Michael Giltz

Michael Giltz is a freelance writer based in New York City covering all areas of entertainment, politics, sports and more. He has written extensively for the New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Magazine, The Advocate, Out, Huffington Post, Premiere Magazine, Entertainment Weekly, BookFilter, USA Today and the Los Angeles Times. He co-hosts the long-running podcast *Showbiz Sandbox*.

## One thought on "'Ridgerunner' Takes a Wrong Turn at the Pass"

Jinder Johal  
 July 21, 2021 at 12:43 am  
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Michael: I have a book club tomorrow and would love to know what detail about a character in *Ridgerunner* you found did not convince. Th only character I can think of is the nun. Do you remember this detail?

Thank-you

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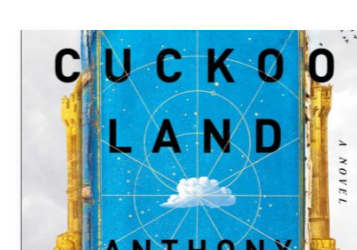
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