

## On TV it's 1865 again: Hell on Wheels and Copper Return

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The Civil War is not over – at least not on television this summer. Two signature dramas set during and immediately after the War Between the States return to the small screen just in time to take up the slack as this spring's big shows end their seasons.

At a time when the increasingly dubiously named “major” networks are offering trashy dreck like *Mistresses*, *Devious Maids* and a show with Anne Heche as an angel that is so bad *Entertainment Weekly* calls it a “train wreck,” BBC America and AMC are quite literally riding to the rescue.

The first brings back *Copper*, last year's big hit about an Irish policemen in New York during the last days of the Civil War, and the second will air a new season of *Hell on Wheels*, a rip-roaring Western whose story is based on the building of the railroad that in the 1860s would finally link the country from sea to shining sea.

*Copper* begins its second season on Sunday, June 23. Tom Weston-Jones returns in the title role of a Union veteran who along with a band of fellow Irish immigrants joins the New York City police force. Last season while tracking down killers and other common criminals they also foiled a Rebel plot to burn down the city. That story line, like many other events in this series written and directed by Academy Award winners Barry Levinson (*Diner*, *The Natural*, *Good Morning Vietnam*) and Tom Fontana (*St. Elsewhere*, *Oz*, *American Tragedy*), is based on real events and people.

Hell on Wheels is similarly well-grounded in history. Like Tom Weston-Jones' character Kevin Corcoran on the BBC show, actor Anson Mount's rebel veteran Cullen Bohannon is also fighting the same war. The principal differences are not only that Bohannon was on the losing side, but that his story is set a few months to a year later than the BBC drama. Bohannon's war is a personal one, fueled by anger and sadness at the loss of his family to Yankee marauders, and the need to build a new life out West.

Hell on Wheels returns to AMC on Saturday night, August 3.

With HBO's Game of Thrones and Starz's DaVinci's Demons having just come to their season ends this past weekend, and AMC's Mad Men about to close season five in two weeks, those who long for good, solid, smart drama – and especially drama that is at least rooted in history and real events – can take more than just a little solace that Copper and Hell on Wheels are on the horizon. At a time when the tube is awash in bad reality shows, embarrassing “look at me” song, dance and cooking competitions, and silly trash, it is programs like these that help restore the faith of those viewers who still believe that this medium can still deliver a message, and a worthwhile and entertaining one at that.