

# PastE The 5 Best Moments from the *Hell on Wheels* Series Finale, “Done”

By Ross Bonaime | July 25, 2016 | 10:06am



After 57 episodes, *Hell on Wheels* aired its series finale Saturday night with the fantastic conclusion “Done.” In its five seasons, the AMC period drama has gone through quite an evolution, from insane western to a surprisingly nuanced series led by the incredible Anson Mount as Cullen Bohannon and puppet master Thomas Durant, played by Colm Meaney. *Hell on Wheels* wasn’t always great, but it was always interesting, and became one of the true underdogs on

AMC's lineup. As a finale, "Done" does an excellent job of giving the series its just due, while also giving us a glimpse of this cast's future, as they head on into uncertain territory, past the railroad business.

Here are the five best moments from Hell on Wheels' series finale, "Done."

## **1. You Got Served**

The last cold open for Hell on Wheels begins with a few final moments of dumb, drunk fun and deserved comeuppance. As Bohannon wakes up on the floor of his train car, he goes to Mickey's bar for one more drink. When Mickey refuses to serve the clearly distressed Bohannon, it starts an argument that involves the entire bar. Everyone within earshot starts disagreeing about who was on what side, regarding the railroad. The bar fight was more like a rowdy goodbye, rather than an event filled with anger and animosity. When asked what the fight was about, Bohannon replies that he has no idea, and everyone picks themselves up laughing. For Bohannon and all involved, this has been a dark season without a lot of levity, so this final goodbye to one of Hell on Wheels most iconic locales is very welcome.

After the fight, Bohannon is told he must go to Washington to testify against Durant for accused bribery, fraud and corruption. Durant is also given the same information, that he is being served and must stand trial for those actions we've witnessed throughout the entire show.

What's fantastic about this opening segment is that it shows just how this period of time has changed both Bohannon and Durant. As John Campbell tells Bohannon, "Your subsequent venture will likely determine the shape of your life." The same could be said of Durant and everyone else in this show.

These past few seasons have, for most of the cast, been a period of growth, wealth and setting up their lives for the next step. With Durant, “Done” shows just how this latter period in his life has clearly defined how he will be remembered. But for Bohannon, Mickey and Eva, the period of their lives in which they will be defined and create their own identities is still to come.

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## **2. Grant’s Gala**

Much of Hell on Wheels has been about trying to escape the past, whether it’s the Civil War still looming over so many, or Bohannon moving past the death of his family at the beginning of the series. But “Done” is all about the future, as we see once Bohannon arrives in Washington and is almost immediately invited to President Grant’s gala to celebrate the conclusion of the railroad.

Bohannon always considers himself to be a railroad man, but as Grant puts it, he’s a “soldier lost without a war to fight.” This actually makes sense, considering how Bohannon always seems to be finding a skirmish to involve himself in, or problems to solve, or get invested in. Just look at the beginning of “Done,” where Bohannon starts a fight, just for the hell of it.

Bohannon at the gala shows one potential future for Bohannon, one filled with success. And success does look good on him. He’s one of four men to receive a ring as reward for finishing the railroad and when thrown into a party setting, Bohannon cleans up well and knows how to win over a crowd almost immediately. In D.C., Bohannon is utilizing all the things he’s learned from the railroad business, but with more of a toned-down output. When

Grant proposes that Bohannon is to become an Army Colonel, tasked with protecting the railroad from all threats, it seems like a logical next step for Bohannon to take.

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### **3. Bohannon's Testimony**

With both Bohannon and Durant in D.C., we see how much the railroad has transformed these two. We see one man on his way down, while another is on his way to the top. While at the gala, it's clear that Bohannon's success breaks Durant's heart. They've both done quite a bit for the railroad—which wouldn't be built without either of them—yet Durant as we have seen, will soon die cold, poor and alone. But at the gala, Durant points out to Bohannon in their final conversation that “we are all in this,” while discussing the corruption on the railroad.

Bohannon's testimony at Durant's hearing goes completely different from what one would expect, especially considering that the sneak preview of this episode last week made it seem like “Done” was going to be one gigantic face-off between these two. When asked if Bohannon ever saw any signs of corruption from Durant, he simply repeats over and over that the “Transcontinental Railroad could not have been built without Thomas Durant.” Bohannon doesn't criticize Durant's actions, in fact many of those decisions have gotten Bohannon where he is today. He just states this truth over and over, without starting a fight. As we saw in Durant's future, there is a bond that these and all railroad men seem to share, and Bohannon sticks to the information he knows, without taking down the man he could easily damn.



## 4. Confession

In the last few episodes, we've seen the weight that the future holds on Bohannon's heart. Like Campbell said, this next step is a huge deciding factor in the person he wants to become. He could continue the path he's been going down for years, and become an even darker version of himself—as he will if he remains a colonel tasked with shooting Indians for Grant, or end up as hopeless as Durant. Since working on the railroad, Bohannon has always tried to do the right thing, even when it's hard. But now that the railroad is at an end, he has to choose between doing the easy thing, continuing down the path he's on, or doing the difficult thing (and possibly the right thing), and completely switch gears.

As he stands at this crossroad, unsure where to go next, Bohannon goes to church—a place he hasn't been to since the days of Ruth. While in confession, Bohannon looks terrified and as the priest talks to him, he doesn't say a single word, just stares ahead, scared. But when the priest says, "Do you wish to be saved?" Bohannon breaks and realizes all he's wanted is for someone to save him.

This final season has been fantastic at showing the humanity and struggle within Bohannon. In past seasons, we've only gotten glimpses of this side of him, but this season has made it the primary personality trait pulling him apart. Bohannon is a man that at this point seems trapped by situations that he's caused himself, but all he needed was the mere suggestion that there was an escape from the path he's on, to

give him the wherewithal to do the right thing.

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## 5. Durant's Final Speech

1,776 miles of track. That's how much railroad was laid throughout the run of Hell on Wheels, which Durant states during the final speech that ends the series. 1776 as a number brings to mind the idea of independence, freedom and the hope of a great future on the horizon. And, despite all the deception, backhanded deals and corruption that Durant has been involved with throughout this show, it's true that he brought these ideals to those on the railroad as well. Durant says, "America needed a dream and I gave them one." In these final moments of Hell on Wheels, Durant proves this point correct.

We see this, as Mickey heads to San Francisco to continue his franchise of booze and women, while throwing away the last frames from the films him and his brother used to show to get out West in the first place. Eva, after being offered a book deal and turning it down, deciding to no longer whore herself out, tames her wild horse and rides off towards the sunset. And as I speculated a few weeks ago, Hell on Wheels ends with Bohannon on a boat towards China, finally putting his life and love before his own job and the career he's built for himself.

In Durant's final speech, he says that "history is written in pencil," which is a perfect encapsulation of Hell on Wheels' main ideals. Everyone throughout Hell on Wheels has evolved into someone completely different, right before our eyes. All of these characters have been presented with several paths that they could've gone down, drastically changing who

they are. In the end, it's the track we ultimately choose to go down that inform our final destination.

Unlike most shows, Hell on Wheels knew when to erase its history and start again, refining itself into a series that, by its end, is one of the most underrated shows on the air. Hell on Wheels created an intriguing cast, surprising stories and also offered the occasional cheese-factor amidst the darkness, making it the best Western since Deadwood.