



GUNS

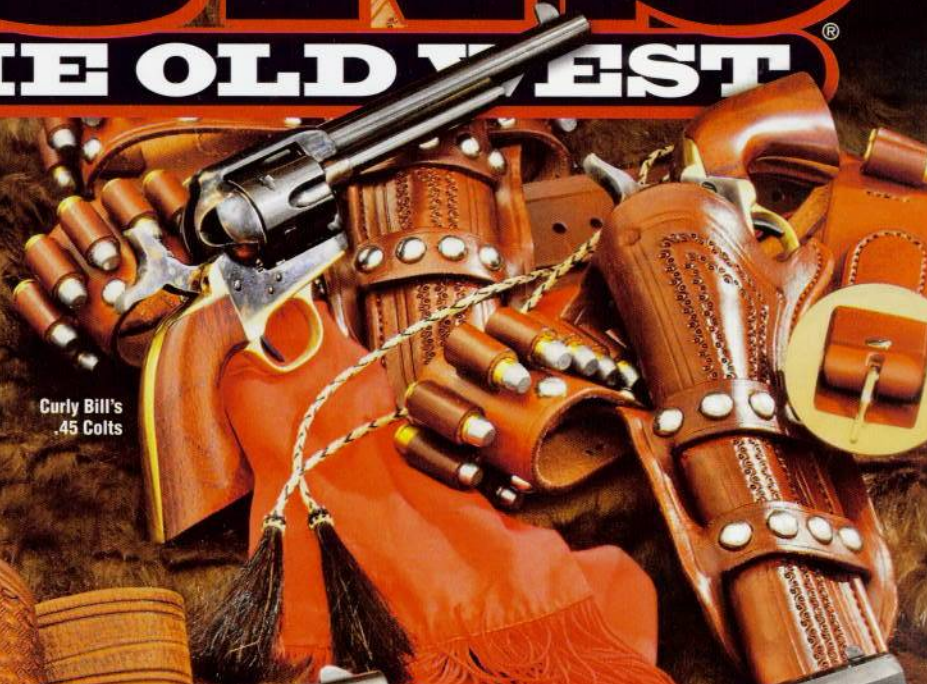
OF THE OLD WEST

BAD MEN OF TOMBSTONE

★ Curly Bill's .45 Colts

HELL ON WHEELS

★ Elam's .44 Open Top
★ Bohannon's .44 Army



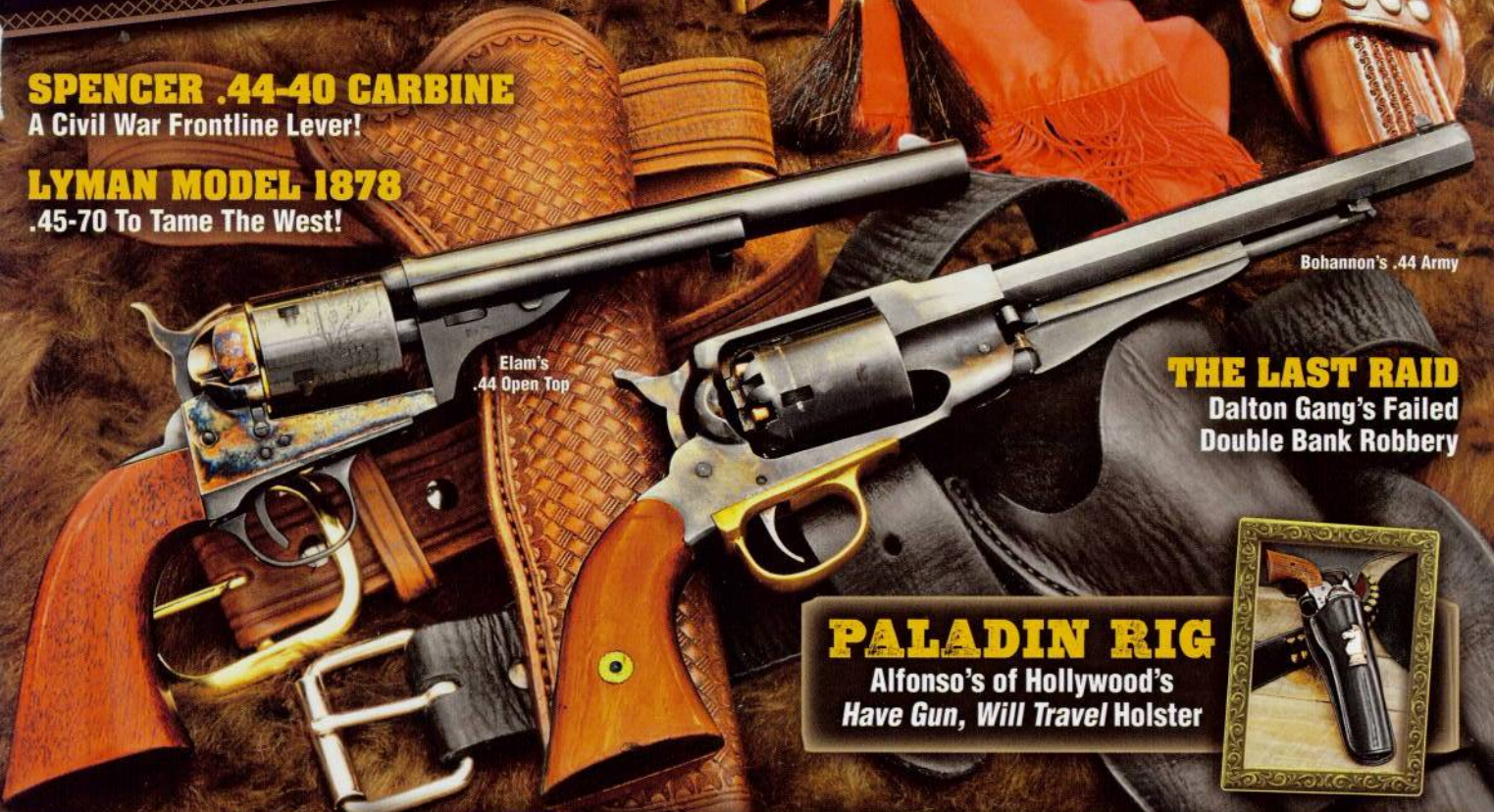
Curly Bill's .45 Colts

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Elam's .44 Open Top

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- Taylor's Spencer .44-40 Carbine ★ Lyman Model 1878 .45-70
- ★ Colt 1865 Pocket Navy .36 ★ Open Top .44 ★

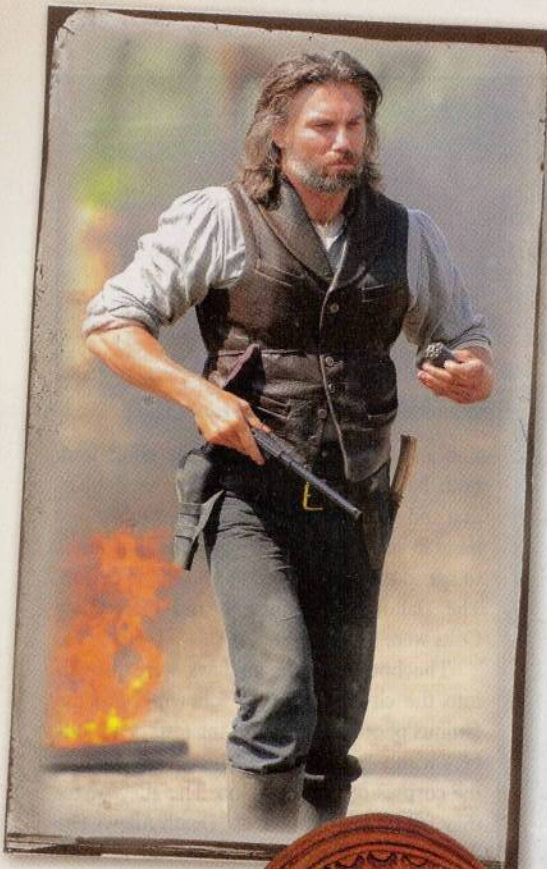
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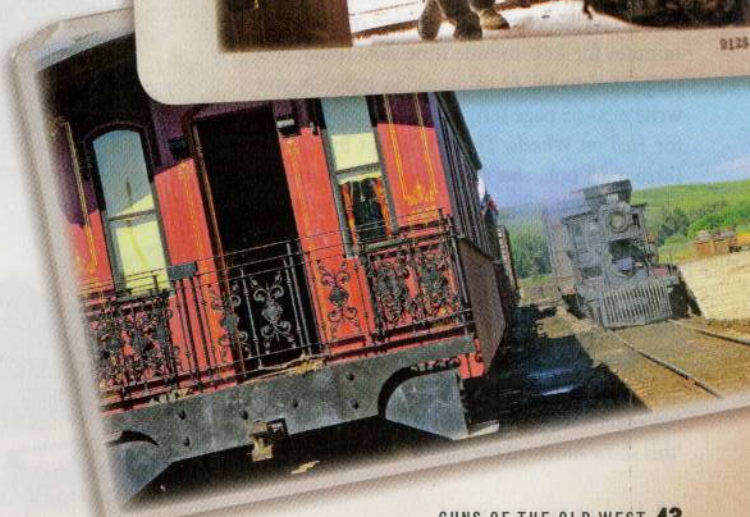
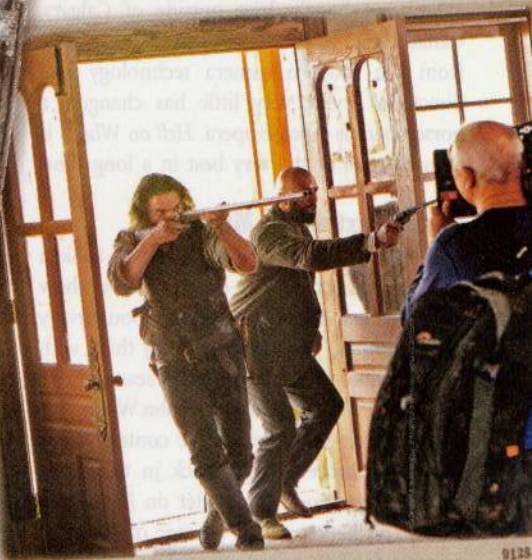
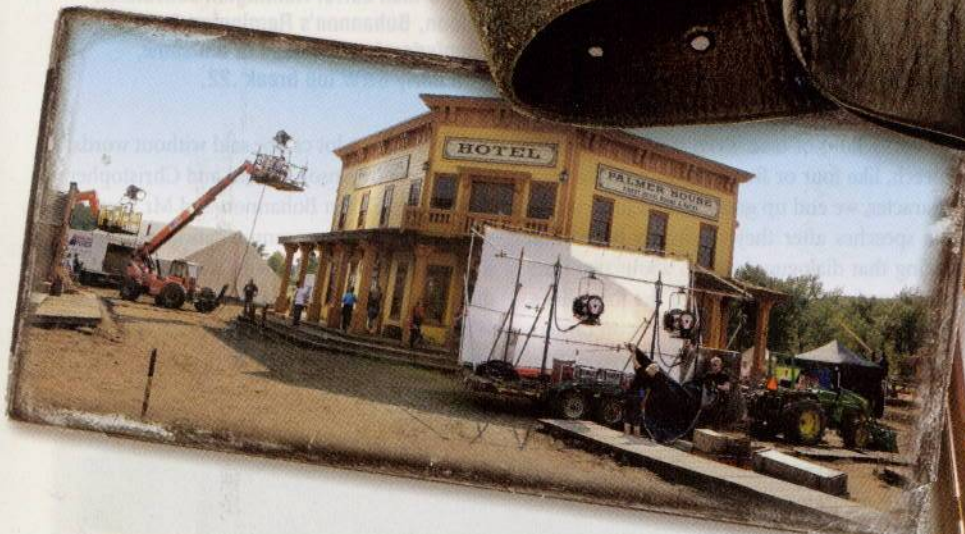
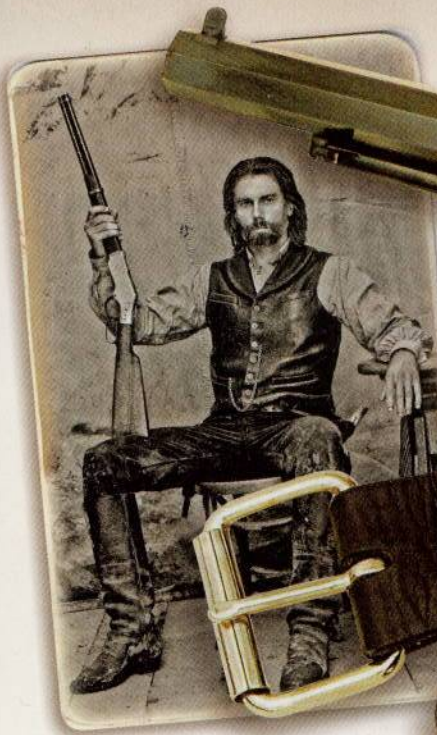
To HELL (ON WHEELS) And BACK



Guns of the Old West goes on location for season three!



In *Hell on Wheels*, Bohannon (upper right) and Elam (above) both have distinctive holsters. Regarding the Remington, Mount says, "I wish we had established the loss of the Griswold a little bit more. The fact that the gun I am carrying now was a Union issue sidearm is just salt in the wound, but the begrudging truth is, I think Cullen finds the Remington to be a better sidearm!" (Holster reproductions by Chisholm's Trail/Guns courtesy Taylor's & Co.)



BY DENNIS ADLER

LOCATION PHOTOS BY CHRIS LARGE/AMC
PORTRAITS BY FRANK OCKENFELS/AMC

IMAGINE BEING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS, SO FAR FROM CITY LIGHTS THAT IT TAKES A LONG DRIVE OVER ROUGH TERRAIN just to find any semblance of civilization; somewhere where a fast moving river that can and has overflowed its banks is just a short walk from a makeshift tent city right out of the post Civil War era, and you have arrived at *Hell on Wheels*.

The first time I set foot on the soundstage of a television western I was 18 years old and had been hired as a part-time set photographer for *Gunslinger*, which was filmed at



After three seasons the show has amassed quite an arsenal of actual working firearms that are used by the main characters. At top Elam's shotgun, center one of the Yellowboys used by Elam and Bohannon, below, the new 8-inch barrel Remington conversion being carried by Doc Durant, a Sharps four-barrel kept in the cash drawer at the Phoenix saloon, Bohannon's Remington Army percussion revolver and Elam's Open Top .44. At far left one of the various brass-framed Confederate guns used in the show, far right, the Ethan Allen double barrel pistol used by both Durant and Lily Bell and an early S&W top break .22.

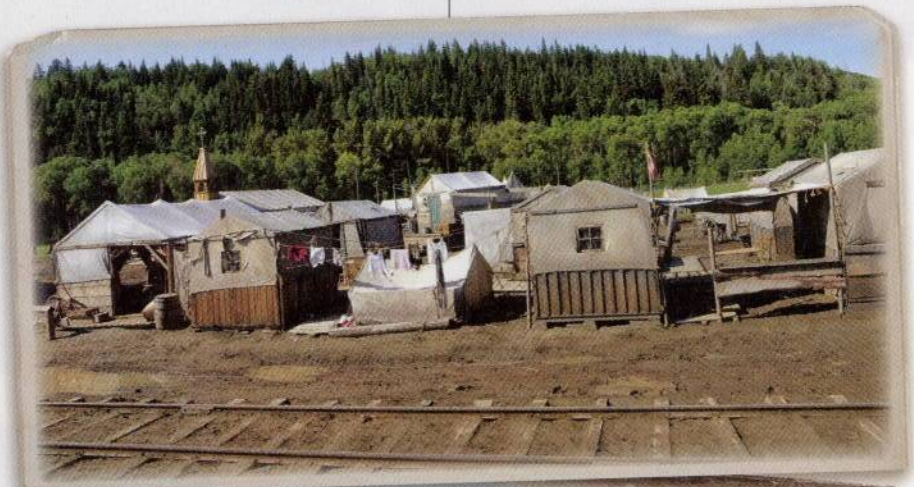
CBS Studios in Studio City, California. Almost half a century later I am on the set of *Hell on Wheels*, an hour's drive outside of Calgary, Canada, and what occurs to me is, that aside from the modern camera technology and directorial styles, very little has changed; a horse opera is a horse opera. *Hell on Wheels* is arguably one of the very best in a long time.

Better Part Of 60 Minutes

Each episode of *Hell on Wheels* is broken up into six acts, so in 60 minutes a show has to break for commercials about every eight minutes, "but, there's a funny thing with the dialogue on this show," says season three Executive Producer and writer John Wirth, "for a typical one-hour drama the content keeps getting scrunched down. Back in the 1980s when I started out as a writer on *Remington Steele*, you had to fill an average of 49 or 50 minutes for a 60-minute time slot. Today, you only need to fill 42 minutes. So typically you write a 50-55 page script but this doesn't work for *Hell on Wheels*. The first script for season three, part one, was 49 pages and we came in 15 minutes too long! Part two (which Wirth wrote) was only 42 pages and it was 14 minutes too long! So a lot of good material is left on the cutting room floor. We have been cutting the scripts down as we go into the season and the script we are shooting now (episode 9) is only 37 pages long, but as Mark Richard (co-executive producer and senior writer) says, 'this show moves at the pace a horse walks' and

it's really kind of true. Even if we will write a speech, like four or five lines of dialogue for a character, we end up going in and line cutting the speeches after they've already been shot, taking that dialogue down to about two lines and somehow the intention of the three lines, which are no longer there, remains on camera in the actor's expressions." As it turns out, in

Hell on Wheels a lot can be said without words, particularly by Anson Mount and Christopher Heyerdahl (Cullen Bohannon and Mr. Swede) who are brilliant in communicating more with a look or a gesture than with an entire page of dialogue. "We create a lot of mood on *Hell on Wheels*" says Wirth, "because there is a stillness to these actors which is



unusual. There isn't this hectic pace of a drama set in contemporary times, they're very still, so you get a lot of great drama without words."

Today's scriptwriters build each story so there is always a dramatic exit point before a commercial break, but Wirth points out that even this is not a rule for writing *Hell on Wheels*. "What we try to do is make every scene end like that, so you are constantly driving forward through a series of dramatic tensions that push you into the next scene, even if there isn't a commercial break coming up." After spending time on the set one quickly understands that there is a general efficiency with this show, in how it is written and shot.

Hell on Wheels is a predominantly two camera show, one usually fixed in position and the second hand-held and moving with the actors, which accounts for many of the long, uninterrupted scenes in season three where Bohannon and Elam walk along a street, work their way through a room or into an action scene involving a shootout. The hand-held is a gyroscope-balanced steadicam, and the operator can move in step with the actors without the camera sensing (recording) any vibra-



tion, so a long action scene, running down the street for example (as in the shootouts in episode 9) is seamless and captured in one continuous shot. The second camera is used for opposing angles or tight shots that can be interspersed. In editing, a lot of separate shots come together from multiple takes; but

those dramatic action scenes are usually one uninterrupted shot to create a sense of being right in the middle of everything, and in many instances that's exactly where the camera is.

All of the *Hell on Wheels* sets, both the tent city and the new Cheyenne, Dakota Territory set, are actual structures with full interiors, not just facades, so scenes can be shot inside and out without having to leave the location. And with few exceptions, all exteriors are shot with natural light, whatever Calgary gives them, rain or shine, while interiors are minimally lighted, except in the tent city where natural light coming through the canvas roofs does the job! That is about as real as it gets.

Bohannon's Journey

Everyone who has been watching the continuing journey of Cullen Bohannon over the last three seasons has seen the story unfold in some unexpected ways and take a few twists and turns that have made viewers not only question Cullen's motivations but the reasoning of the writers and producers. After a visit to the set and a lengthy discussion with producer and writer John Wirth and stars Anson

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Mount and Common, many questions are answered and the direction *Hell on Wheels* is taking in the seasons to come brought to light.

When you are doing a show based on history certain events with building the Transcontinental Railroad often fall nicely into place for story telling. "Burning down the tent city, for example, at the end of season two, was actually based on a real incident," explains

Bohannon having stayed behind at the burned out camp throughout the winter of 1867. There was a lot of darkness to those first two episodes because Cullen had really had lost his will to live and one of the reasons he stayed behind was that he didn't care if he died. But he survived (unfortunately his hat didn't!) and Cullen finally found a reason to go on, and that was to build the railroad in spite of Durant."

stitute for the war, and he still gravitates to whatever is most like war. By equating the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad to fighting a war, and he even described it that way to Durant in season one, he eventually brought on a battle at the end of the second season that was not necessary, and it cost him everything."

As a result, season three begins with a very different Cullen Bohannon, a man who now equates building the railroad to rebuilding his life. But there is more to it than that, explains Mount. "You can only stick your stuff in your blind spot until the blind spot fills up, and then it spills over and you have to look at it. He is starting to recognize he can't handle it alone. So he is, without being willing to admit it to himself, interested in the light, for lack of a better word, and Ruth and her church represent that. It's safe for him to see it as a friendship, someone to confide in. But she does represent a kind of consciousness that he's never exercised before. The first part of maturation is an ability to be present with yourself and to have consciousness."



6128—Troop E. 10th U. S. Cavalry on the March, Chickamauga Park, Ga., U. S. A.

Wirth. "The Cheyenne did attack and burn a railroad encampment, but what most people do not know is that the raids were mostly carried out by young braves, boys 16 and 17 years old who were in conflict with their elders and chiefs over the railroad. Incorporating that story was a dramatic way to end the second season and set the table for season three."

"John Wirth's first objective for me this year..." says Anson Mount (laughing), "... was actually to have Cullen drink less and talk more! But my objective with the character is to go through a kind of maturation process, because at the end of the second season we saw a person with an addiction hit rock bottom, the addiction was violence and the rock bottom was the loss of a battle and the death of Lily. When you hit rock bottom with any addiction you only have two ways to go, death or you begin to climb your way out of it." This season has been that climb and Bohannon has stumbled more than once in his search for ways to build the railroad and rebuild his life.

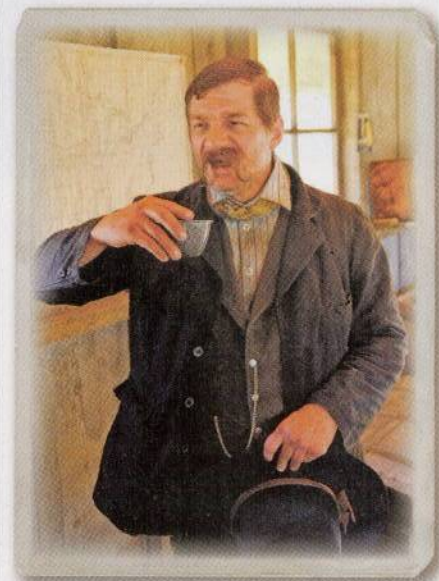
Short Life Of Dick Barlow

Introducing a new character in season three, railroad Chief of Police Dick Barlow (played by Matthew Glave) was a turn no one expected




Snowbound & Cullen's Resurrection

"It was decided that the third season would start in a much unexpected way," says Wirth, "with an almost crazed Cullen

Toward the end of season two Lily had said that Cullen was a better man with her than without, and it was true, "but unfortunately," says Mount, "this season has not been about Cullen being a better man, it has been about ambition, and that has both its good and bad sides for Bohannon. Cullen's ambition is not about money, he doesn't care about money, it's not about power, or love; it isn't anything like that. His ambition is simply to win whatever is directly in front of him, and that has been manifesting itself, most acutely since the first season though his addiction to battle. He needs confrontation in order to feel normal and at this point (the beginning of season three) Cullen doesn't have enough self-awareness to realize that the railroad is nothing but a sub-



after Elam was made *Hell on Wheels* Police Chief. "From the first season," says Common, "Elam has been someone who continuously wanted to rise, somebody who is ambitious and feels like the sky is the limit. As much as we are living in a world that limits so many people with so many boundaries and walls, Elam is the person who says, 'I need to break down the



**BURNING DOWN
THE TENT CITY,**
 for example, at the end of
 season two, was actually
 based on a **REAL**
INCIDENT...


walls.' That's been his motivation from the time he worked the cut line until Bohannon made him Chief of Police, so nobody knew what to make of Barlow's arrival, but we did have a great chemistry from the start, and I think everyone liked this unlikely pairing up."

Almost from the second pot of "sock" coffee Barlow brewed up we immediately learned to like him and wonder how he was going to change things in Elam's life, and then just as quickly he was taken away. "You never saw it coming that he was going to get taken out right away," says Common. "Here was the Chief of Railroad Police and though we were at odds, we also had a bond, there was just something about him you had to like, and I liked him."

"By killing Barlow so suddenly and senselessly you generate a different feeling of empathy in viewers," says Wirth, "because there have been a lot of people killed in *Hell on Wheels*, and in my view Barlow was, if not the first, then one of the first persons killed who we cared about. In the past, when most characters were killed, it was Cullen doing the killing as he sought vengeance for the death of his wife and son, and you never really got

to know the people he killed, but we knew that they were bad because they had murdered his family. Its Cullen's just revenge, so it doesn't really have much impact, its retribution. What I wanted to do was tell a story where someone on the railroad got killed that we really liked, so that you would feel the impact of what that is.

"Then there is the secondary story of Cullen hanging the Mormon boy for Barlow's murder. This really opened up the series emotionally for Bohannon's character. He's been so closed and he'd built so much around him in the first two seasons so he can go and just systematically kill these people who murdered his family. I wanted to find what else was in there, and so the idea behind episode two was to take Bohannon and turn him into, sort of metaphorically, the same sort of force that slaughtered his family and destroyed his country during the Civil War.



By becoming the chief engineer for the railroad he also became the representative of the United States government with the same powers as those who had swept in and wiped out his family. That's what he had been railing against for the last two years, and now he realizes he's doing the very same thing to the Mormons. At that moment we see the pain in Bohannon, there is no dialogue for what he's experiencing, only the look in his eyes just before the hanging, where

he just wanted somebody to stop him from what he was about to do. And nobody does."

Eastern Newspapers

When Horace Greeley's reporter, Louise Ellison (played by Jennifer Ferrin) comes to *Hell on Wheels* to write about the building of the railroad, she finds nobility in Bohannon's character and rather than vilifying him as she watches the young (Please turn to page 72)

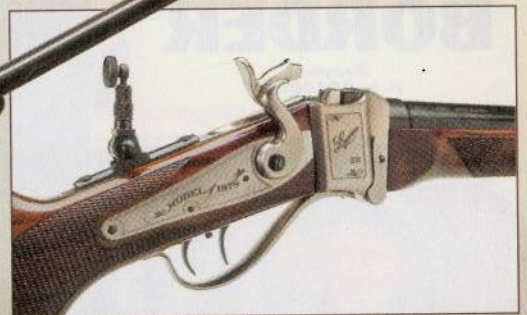
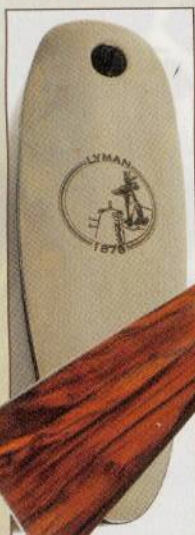
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To Hell (On Wheels) And Back

(continued from page 47)



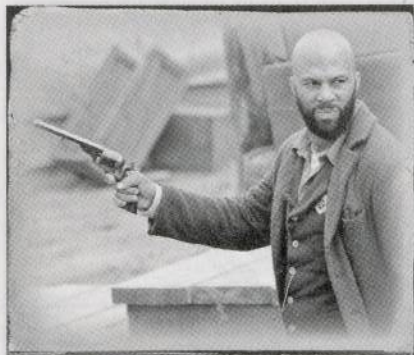
The hand-held steadicam (at far right) is used to follow the actors and stay right on top of them in action scenes to put viewers right in the middle of everything.

Mormon boy hang, she writes an article that puts the railroad itself in a more dubious light. She isn't Bohannon's champion, but she isn't Durant's or the railroad's either.

Bringing a woman reporter into the story may seem a little gratuitous, considering the murder of Lily Bell in season two but Wirth quickly notes that this is also an historical fact that has played into the hands of the show's writers. "There was a very famous female reporter who used the pseudonym Nellie Bly (in the 1880s). She was one of the first investigative journalists and Louise Ellison is based on her exploits in the late 19th century as well as other early female journalists writing for Eastern newspapers in the post Civil War era." Ellison brings a new perspective to building the railroad and through her words we begin to see things in a different light.

Decisions & Consequences

"Every episode this season is kind of set off by a decision that Cullen has to make. He makes the decision to enlist Elam to go with him to New York and try and get his job back as chief engineer when most everyone back East thinks Bohannon is probably dead. He makes the decision to hang the boy for killing Barlow, even though he knows he's probably innocent and his father is responsible. His decisions all have consequences, both good and bad. That has been the way season three has gone," says Wirth, "putting Bohannon in



"For my character," says Common, "it was obvious I had never dealt with guns coming from being a slave, but since Cullen taught Elam to shoot, to protect himself in season one, he has become more proficient. As Chief of Railroad Police in season three I carry the Colt revolver, 1886 rifle and a shotgun."

positions where he has to make decisions that affect others, and from those decisions come further consequences and, he makes some bad decisions. That's the brilliance, in my view, of *Breaking Bad* where every decision Walter White made brought about serious consequences and a need to make more decisions. Cullen Bohannon is in that same spot with the railroad. It's not as bleak as *Breaking Bad* but every decision he makes in season three brings consequences, and as we move toward the end of the season things that were set in motion in the first two episodes, including his entanglement with one of the

daughters of the Mormon farmer whose son Bohannon hung, all come back to haunt him."

The railroad's encounters with Native American tribes along the route to the Pacific Coast were unavoidable, as are events in season three regarding the Mormons, who were actually trying to build a spur line from their encampment to the Transcontinental Railroad, so once again history played into the hands of screenwriters, but as Wirth notes, "The thing about doing a serialized drama in short form, only 10 episodes per season, is that you have to do the show within the confines of a limited timeframe, so the story has to move along quickly. The building of the bridge over the gorge had been the biggest achievement by the end of season two. We decided to take the series from that point and move it forward as the railroad approaches Cheyenne, Dakota Territory (later to become Cheyenne, Wyoming), which is a pivotal event in the road's construction. Along the way they run afoul of the Mormons, who have already had bad dealings with Durant in the past. This is compounded by the father of the boy Cullen hanged being among them and he decides to form a posse, capture Bohannon in Cheyenne and bring him to trial at the Mormon fort. And then there is Mr. Gunderson, who has transformed himself from 'the Swede' into a Mormon Bishop Joseph Dutton! We had to build a separate storyline for him that ran parallel to Bohannon's and the railroad's in order to keep them apart from each other until the final episode of the season when they finally meet face to face and Bohannon finds his fate in Mr. Swedes' hands!"

"Ah yes," as Thor Gunderson would say gazing upward to the heavens, "consequences." ★

