

Copper proves its mettle; Hell on Wheels a good yarn

By Alex Strachan, Postmedia News | August 31, 2013

It's February 1865 when the period detective-noir *Copper* returns for its second season Sunday, but Five Points, N.Y., looks much the same as when viewers last saw it: The alleys are grimy and seedy, the street lights barely piercing the dark, and there's an unmistakable desperation in the air.

When viewers last saw *Copper*, Det. Kevin (Corky) Corcoran played by Tom Weston-Jones, and his crew had foiled a Confederate gunpowder plot to burn Manhattan to the ground. Corky doesn't know it yet, but high-minded debutante Elizabeth Haverford (Anastasia Griffith) was in on the gunpowder plot. When *Copper* returns Sunday with the episode *Home, Sweet Home*, three months have passed. The Civil War continues to rage, and Abraham Lincoln and John Wilkes Booth are now weeks away from their appointment with destiny. In *Copper*'s first-season finale, Haverford was revealed to know Booth well. Haverford has a lot on her mind. When the



Canadian actor Donal Logue is shown in a handout photo from the TV series "*Copper*." THE CANADIAN PRESS/HO-Shaw Media

story picks up, she's engaged to handsome bon vivant Robert Morehouse, a dashing dandy. Corcoran's borough, the Sixth Ward, is newly under the jurisdiction of Gen. Brendan Donovan (Donal Logue, now a series regular), and it's evident from the start that the two are going to clash. Corcoran is juggling a pair of cases, one involving a dastardly cad named Buzzie Burke, a mad slasher with a history of violence against women, and the other involving a series of disappearances of teenage boys.

Copper is not family viewing. It's deliberately dark, morally ambiguous and demands a lot of it audience. Filmed on a studio lot in Toronto, *Copper* has a keen sense of time and place, but the story feels stretched and laboured at times. It's worth a look, but only the most diehard *Copperhead* will watch to the exclusion of everything else on TV on a Sunday night. (Sunday, Showcase, 10 p.m.) *Hell on Wheels*' ambitions are lower than those of *Copper*.

It's a traditional western, about forging a new life in a new land, and how truth, justice and reason don't always follow a predictable path.

Several weeks into *Hell on Wheels*' third season, with new writers and new producers, it's lost a little of its edge, but it's still capable of moments of grace and meaning. The nominal hero, Cullen Bohannon, played with a steely, southern reserve by Anson Mount, is no longer singularly bent of revenge and avenging his family's murder at the hands of marauding Union soldiers. In its third season, the story has become less serialized and more about week-by-week misadventures. In Saturday's outing, titled *Searchers*, Cullen and an emotionally distraught Elam Ferguson (Common) scour the surrounding woods for Eva's (Robin McLeavy) missing baby, presumably snatched by her former husband's brother.

Jennifer Ferrin has joined the cast this season as Louise Ellison, a travelling newspaper reporter with the (now-defunct) *New York Herald* whose primary purpose is to record the day-to-day westward expansion of the Union Pacific Railroad, while trying not to get on the nerves of Bohannon and disgraced railroad tycoon Thomas (Doc) Durant, played by Colm Meaney.

Hell on Wheels is not family viewing. It is a cracking good yarn, still firing along on all cylinders, three years in. (Saturday, AMC, 9 p.m.)