

## TV Review: Strong Cast Drives AMC's Inconsistent 'Hell on Wheels'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 12, 2012 - 10:32am

- [AMC](#) [2]
- [Anson Mount](#) [3]
- [Breaking Bad](#) [4]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [5]
- [Colm Meaney](#) [6]
- [Common](#) [7]
- [Deadwood](#) [8]
- [Dominique McElligott](#) [9]
- [Hell on Wheels](#) [10]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [11]
- [Mad Men](#) [12]
- [Television](#) [13]
- [Tom Noonan](#) [14]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [15]

CHICAGO – Do you know what separates AMC from a majority of networks? The art of the ensemble. The multi-E Emmy-winning casts of “Mad Men” and “Breaking Bad” are the bars against which most current dramas are measured. There were issues with some of the writing behind “The Killing” but no one ever complained about the performances. And it’s the people of “The Walking Dead” that keep it interesting.



Television Rating: **3.0/5.0**

And then there’s “Hell on Wheels,” which returns for its second season tonight, August 12, 2012. It’s a show that proves that even a strong ensemble can only get you so far. I increasingly like the cast of this show, particularly the charismatic actor (and incredibly talented rapper) Common, but the writing still leaves something to be desired.



Hell on Wheels  
*Photo credit: AMC*

When we return to the world of the Union Pacific railroad, Cullen Bohannon (Anson Mount) has joined forces with a group of train robbers who cross paths with Elam (Common), now charged with protecting things like the payroll for the railroad workers. Lily (Dominique McElligott) is

closer to the nefarious Doc (Colm Meaney) while the world around the construction seems increasingly full of death and pain.



Hell on Wheels  
Photo credit: AMC

"Hell on Wheels" is a dirty, grim, dark show. People at the bottom of the economic and social ladder fall off and die. There's rarely anyone there to protect them. On a writing level, the parallels between a growing society around a railroad and our modern recession that leaves so many workers hoping for more but not finding it is the strongest element of the show. Thematically, "Hell on Wheels" is interesting stuff (not just in the economic issues but the civil rights ones that still have echoes in 2012).

It's in plot and character where the show falters. The plotting is often too deliberately slow and remarkably self-serious — something that only works on a show like "Deadwood" where the characters are strong enough to carry the lack of action. Such is not the case here. Common steals every scene he's in and Dominique McElligott is engaging but I find the villainous Colm Meaney two-dimensional and too much of the rest of the supporting cast forgettable. Lead Anson Mount does his best to find the charisma needed for his character but he's not given enough chances to display it, especially in the slow premiere.

"Hell on Wheels" doesn't have enough of a tonal identity. The producers seem to adore shots of hooded train robbers holding their guns in the air but the show isn't stylish enough overall to make the image resonate. Dialogue scenes often go on too long and feel repetitive while other character actions might come across as underdeveloped. It's just inconsistent.

Having said that, the cast is strong enough that "Hell on Wheels" could find the track again. Common should be a TV, movie, and (even bigger) music star. Mount needs to be able to play the hero that it feels like he easily could. And the writing staff needs to decide what they're making — an old-fashioned Western, a gritty drama, a poetic ode to a lost time, or none of the above. Figure out the tempo of "Hell on Wheels" and let the talented ensemble play to it.

*"Hell on Wheels" stars Anson Mount, Common, Tom Noonan, Dominique McElligott, Christopher Heyerdahl, and Colm Meaney. It returns to AMC on Sunday, August 12, 2012 at 8pm CST.*



[16]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [17]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

[brian@hollywoodchicago.com](mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com) [16]

**Source URL (retrieved on Mar 28 2024 - 4:40pm):**

<http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/19513/tv-review-strong-cast-drives-amc-s-inconsistent-hell-on-wheels>

#### Links:

[1] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/users/briantt>

[2] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/amc>

[3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/anson-mount>

[4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/breaking-bad>

[5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/brian-tallerico>

[6] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/colm-meaney>

[7] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/common>

[8] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/deadwood>

[9] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/dominique-mcelligott>

- [10] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hell-on-wheels>
- [11] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/hollywoodchicagodotcom-content>
- [12] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/mad-men>
- [13] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/television>
- [14] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/tom-noonan>
- [15] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/dvd-theater-tv-news>
- [16] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>
- [17] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/about#BRIAN>