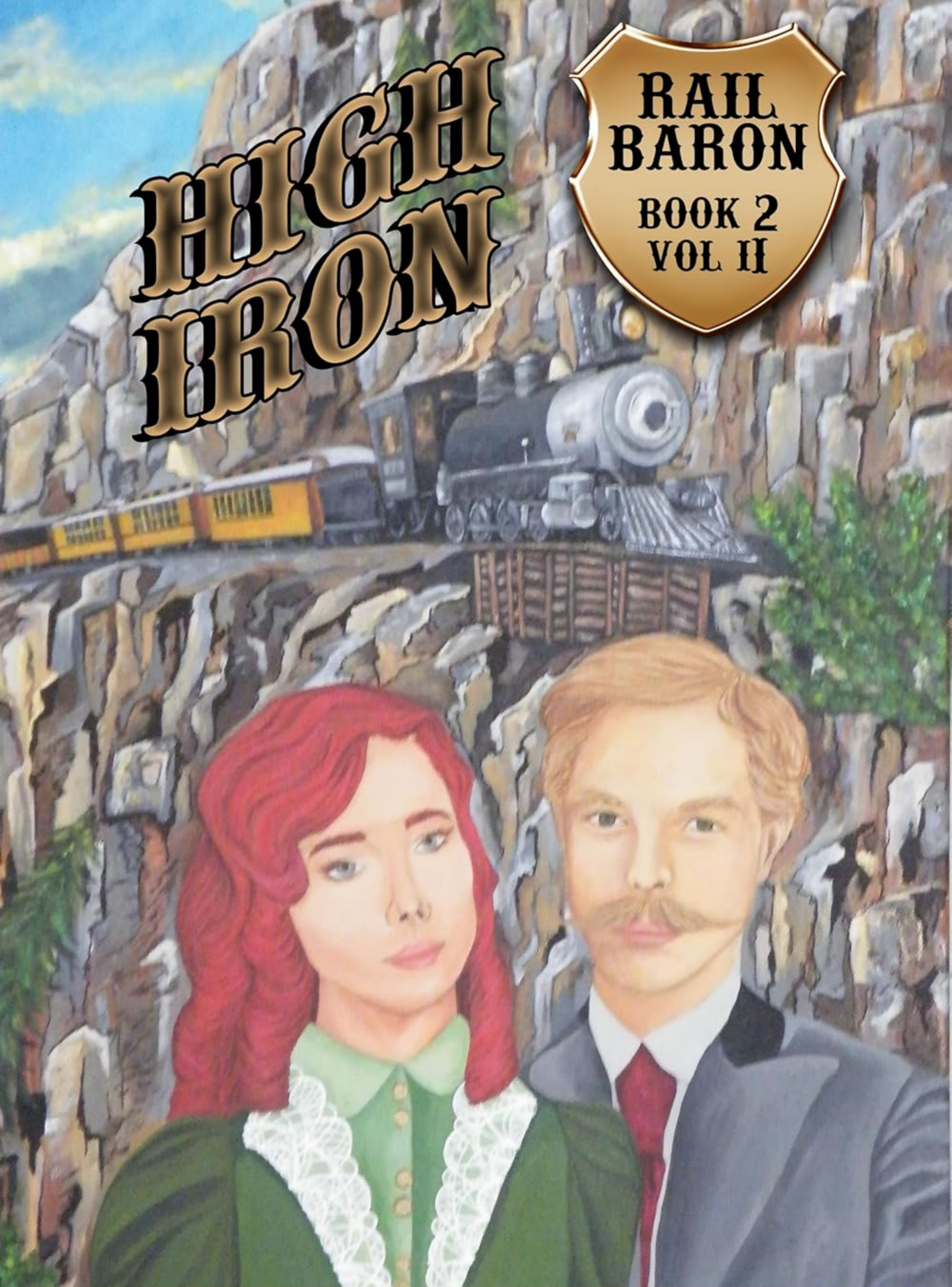


# RAIL BARON

RAIL  
BARON

BOOK 2  
VOL II



MARK MALMKAR

# HIGH IRON

Vol. II

Mark Malmkar

Cover art by Tiffany Malmkar

*This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, brands, media, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to similarly named places or to persons living or deceased is unintentional.*

Print ISBN: 978-1-94415-52-1

First Edition

Copyright © 2025 Mark Malmkar

Whidbey Writers Group Press is a d/b/a of Whidbey  
Writers Group

First draft completed 2 December 2022

*High Iron* is a historical novel about building a railroad in Colorado in the 1880's. It is book two, following the previous novel entitled *Rail Baron* which was about building railroads in Colorado during the 1870's. In the entire Rail Baron Series the actions and activities of the various railroads in Colorado are true to history. The fictitious *Rocky Mountain Central Railroad* is weaved through the plot to tell my story.

Characters such as William Palmer, David Moffat, Governor Evans, Jerome Wheeler, J.J. Hagerman, Thomas Wigglesworth, and others, are real people from Colorado railroad history. I hope my 'poetic license' does not distract from the contribution these men made to develop and improve Colorado.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Part I: 1889.....	7
Chapter One.....	9
Chapter Two.....	14
Chapter Three.....	22
Chapter Four.....	28
Chapter Five.....	37
Chapter Six.....	42
Chapter Seven.....	53
Chapter Eight.....	59
Chapter Nine.....	66
Chapter Ten.....	76
Chapter Eleven.....	84
Chapter Twelve.....	95
Chapter Thirteen.....	103
Part II: 1890.....	113
Chapter Fourteen.....	115
Chapter Fifteen.....	122
Chapter Sixteen.....	129
Chapter Seventeen.....	134
Chapter Eighteen.....	139
Chapter Nineteen.....	149
Chapter Twenty.....	154
Chapter Twenty-One.....	162
Chapter Twenty-Two.....	168
Chapter Twenty-Three.....	177
Chapter Twenty-Four.....	184
Chapter Twenty-Five.....	191
Chapter Twenty-Six.....	201
Chapter Twenty-Seven.....	208
Chapter Twenty-Eight.....	215
Chapter Twenty-Nine.....	218
Chapter Thirty.....	224
Chapter Thirty-One.....	230
Chapter Thirty-Two.....	237
Chapter Thirty-Three.....	245

## CHAPTER ONE

Sean stood outside of the Midland office building in the middle of the Colorado City railroad yards. It was cold that February day in the new year of 1889. He could see his breath as he watched locomotive No. 12 back away down the roundhouse lead track towards the two coaches parked on the mainline several yards to the west. It replaced locomotive No. 19 which had brought the train load of snowbirds down from the mountains. As the locomotive backed away, Sean could see the car shop and planning mill building directly across the mainline and parallel sidings. It was the largest structure in the yards, wooden frame and siding, painted white. As soon as the two-car train returned from its short trip to the depot in Colorado Springs, the two coaches would be spotted inside for needed repairs.

The two cars and locomotive No. 19 had returned from a week west of Leadville where the two carloads of snowbirds cleared snow from tunnel portals and stuck snowplows. Snowbirds were men like Sean who were rounded up from whatever job they were doing, handed a shovel when they reached the drifts, and told where to scoop. He left his warm engineering office upstairs and climbed aboard the coaches a week ago.

After a week of travel with nearly fifty men, and the cars used as a hotel at night, the coaches needed a thorough cleaning. Some of the upholstery needed repairs. Brake lines were frozen, or worse, broken. One of the car's brakes was inoperative. The cars stunk from sweat. No one had a bath in the week. Yes, the shop crew had a couple days work ahead of them to make them presentable to the public again.

"I wish they would hurry," said a man near him, one of thirty or so who'd climbed down from the coaches while the locomotives were

Mark Malmkar

changed. Most of those men lived nearby in Colorado City. Sean had returned to the engineering office to retrieve his belongings. He was waiting to get back on the cars and continue his journey to the Springs where he could board a train back to Denver. Any train.

"You live in the Springs?" Sean asked. He lifted the carpetbag and hitched the canvas he built a week ago for Ariana under his armpit.

"Yeah. You?"

"Denver." Sean shivered as he spoke. His clothes were still wet and had not dried from the stove in the car. Sitting more than ten feet away, one couldn't feel much heat coming from the coal fired heater in the end of the car.

"You have a way to go."

"I figure I'll be home by six, or seven." It was just after three P.M. on February 20th.

Sean didn't know the man, and may never see him again, so he wasn't interested in any more conversation. He was only thinking of seeing his family again. Seeing Emma. He thought of her as the second locomotive backed into the two coaches and coupled up. Emma's belly was growing more noticeable later in January. He still had to plan when to go back to the Central and survey the Hogback. He hated to leave her in her condition, but he'd done it before with her pregnancies with Samuel and Ariana. He was around for the other children's births. Emma had no major problems.

Sean stood, holding the collar of his heavy wool coat closed with his left gloved hand, and holding his carpetbag with his right. He was stomping his feet to keep warm. The wood frame canvas under his right arm wasn't very comfortable, but he'd be in the coach soon. There were only a dozen men waiting for the transfer train.

Finally, the first locomotive moved past the roundhouse lead tracks and slowly stopped fifty feet away from the north side of the office building. They'd have to walk across two tracks to reach the coaches.

Strange. Sean noticed smoke emanating from the cracks around the coach's windowsills. He could see yellow flickers of flame through the glass in the end windows of the second car.

Suddenly men emerged from the doors on both ends of the coach.

"Fire!" one of them shouted.

Sean could hear curses from the men around him. A half dozen men were abandoning the car.

"Get the fire brigade going," someone yelled.

Men poured from the front coach, fearful it would catch fire, too.

Glass shattered and smoke and flames burst through the opening.

"The coal stove cracked open and spilled hot coals on the floor."

This was from one of the men from the car. "A big chunk of cast iron just broke off."

"We got it too damn hot!" cursed another.

Sean went closer to the car. It was coach No. 114, a first-class car. The coach ahead was No. 252, one of the second-class coaches. Smoke could be seen seeping through the seams in the tar paper covered roof. Two more windows burst, sending glass shards out into the snow.

One man ran forward with a fire bucket of water he got from somewhere. He threw it at the side of the car, barely hitting the window, water splashing down the wood siding.

The men around Sean stood watching. He could see the hogger looking backwards from his window in the locomotive. Were they going to let the car burn? Nobody else was moving to do anything. If the fire wasn't put out, it would catch coach No. 252 on fire also. Backing it up or pulling it ahead would do no good. It had to be uncoupled.

Sean dropped the carpetbag and canvas in the snow and ran toward the space between the two cars. He grabbed the cut lever at the side of the coach and yanked on it. Mercifully it clanked, not frozen, and the knuckles released their grip.

Sean waved frantically to the hogger, "Move it! Move it!"

The hogger ducked back into the cab and moved levers, pulling the throttle. The locomotive wheels began turning, and the two cars broke apart, the air hoses splitting with a hiss. Sean heard the brake rigging on coach No. 114 engage. As the other car rolled away, the brakes would hold the burning car. It must have been coach No. 252 that had the damaged brake system.

As the men watched the smoke and flames spread throughout the coach, more people crowded around. Workers from the coach shop could be seen observing from across the tracks. Most likely the entire office building emptied out behind Sean. He picked up his carpet bag

Mark Malmkar

from the snow and stepped away. Two men emptied more buckets of water at the flames, but it soon became apparent there was no saving the car. Most of the windows had broken from the heat, but few hung in their blackened frames, defying the inferno.

"I saw a boxcar catch on fire once," a nearby man said.

Not to be outdone, another spoke, "I saw a way car catch fire and burn on the Rio Grande. Same cause—the cook stove in the way car."

"I watched a gondola burn on the Denver and New Orleans," a third man offered his tale. "It was in the ash pit. The roundhouse crew dumped hot clinkers into it. Smoldered for a day before the wood caught. Total loss."

Sean silently watched the car being totally consumed until all that was left was the heavier framing wood, turning black. The horsehair seat backs, and cushions all sent off heavy smoke. Before the thick smoke subsided, the conductor called all who wanted to ride to the Springs to the remaining car. Sean picked up his belongings and took his turn climbing the steps. Inside it was close to being crowded. Most seats had one person seated—no doubles.

As the one car train rolled east, Sean shivered in his damp clothes and thought that the shop crew would most likely be tasked with dismantling and removing the remains of the burnt coach. Such a shame, it was a right attractive car inside.

He leaned back, feeling some heat from the coal fired stove three seats ahead of him. He could return to his dilemma. What to do about Rachel. Should he tell Emma? He couldn't tell Emma—it would crush her. Should he simply end the relationship with Rachel?

\*\*\*

Sean thought it took two days sitting close to the fireplace to warm up. He kept John, Sam and even Kevin busy hauling wood and coal, keeping the house warm. Emma sat with him a lot. She still cooked but had Ariana helping this winter season. The girl turned seven in December and was becoming a good assistant.

"This babe is different than any of the others," Emma commented one evening as they sat by the parlor fireplace. Kevin was nearby,

quietly building structures with wooden blocks. That he was quietly kneeling on the floor was unique. The other children were in the house, occupied with their own things.

"In what way?"

"It moves a lot one day, then I don't feel it move hardly at all for several days." She was quiet for several moments, both hands on her stomach. "For the most part, my morning sickness is gone, but I just feel miserable anyway. I don't want to do anything but sit."

"You shouldn't have to. Just sit if you want."

"I won't get my work done. Sewing isn't being finished."

"I told you; you don't have to sew dresses. I can support us."

Emma looked over at him, just for an instant. "You've been off, without pay, three different times since October. Money is tight." She moved her hands to the arms of the rocking chair.

Sean didn't argue with her. She was right about the money. That's why he volunteered to be a snowbird for a week up Hagerman Pass. It's no longer easy. And the RMMR dividends at the end of 1888 were slim for the year.

"I almost don't care about sewing," Emma sighed, looking blankly into the fire. "I almost don't care that I'm behind on Ester Van Boening's dress."

Sean leaned over and took her right hand in his. She gripped it back but didn't look at him. I can't tell her. Not in this mental state.

## CHAPTER TWO

Sean was sitting on a straight chair beside the fireplace in the bedchamber. He'd just finished banking the fire with three large logs, each about five inches in diameter. He looked across the room at Emma who was seated at her dressing cabinet in the alcove over the front entry. It was March fifth, and he hadn't been back to the Midland Railroad since the coach caught on fire. In his mind and heart, he was still miserable.

He watched Emma comb her hair. She was still wearing her heavy night gown and green robe. The 'old faithful' green robe. She was still uncomfortable in her pregnancy. Not wanting to jinx a girl by referring to it with a boy's name, they also didn't want to jinx a boy by referring to it with a girl's name. So, early on, they simply referred to the child as Little Dunigan. But soon the longer two-word name got shortened to D.

There was a racket down the hall. Sean heard words yelled at the top of one boy's lungs. Yup. There was soon an equally loud response in the voice of the other boy. Then a crash sounded in one of the rooms, making it necessary for fatherly intervention.

Sean opened the door of the bedchamber to see Sam running towards him. Wooden blocks flew down the hallway, one narrowly missing Sean's forehead. Sam speedily ducked around the corner of the stairs. Panic was in his eyes.

Kevin kept throwing blocks—until he saw that his father was now the most likely target. His eyes got three times larger.

"What's going on!" Sean raised his voice.

Kevin pivoted and retreated to his room.

Sam stood fixed, one foot on the landing and the other on the top stair. He meekly looked around the corner. Was the coast clear?

Sean Dunigan, a railroad track worker, a spiker, known out on the right-of-way as a 'track monkey', wants more out of life. He graduates from the Colorado School of Mines in Golden, Colorado in 1887. It had been a tough four years with persecution for his being Irish. Now he seeks a job as a civil engineer. His goal is to build his own railroad someday. Can he get past his heritage and position in society? Can he manage being in love with two women: Emma and Rachel?

ISBN 9781944215521

