

Tombstone: The Earp Brothers, Doc Holliday and the Vendetta Ride from Hell

By Tom Clavin

About the book: On the afternoon of October 26, 1881, eight men clashed in what would be known as the most famous shootout in American frontier history. Thirty bullets were exchanged in thirty seconds, killing three men and wounding three others. The fight sprang forth from a tense, hot summer. Cattle rustlers had been terrorizing the back country of Mexico and selling the livestock they stole to corrupt ranchers. That October, tensions boiled over with Ike and Billy Clanton, Tom and Frank McLaury, and Billy Claiborne confronting the Tombstone marshal, Virgil Earp, and the suddenly deputized Wyatt and Morgan Earp and shotgun-toting Doc Holliday.

About the Author: Tom Clavin was born in the Bronx, New York. He is a bestselling author and has worked as a newspaper and web site editor, magazine writer, TV and radio commentator, and a reporter for The New York Times.

People/Victims:

Virgil Earp-Deputy U.S. Marshal and Tombstone City Marshal, wounded during Tombstone, ambushed and wounded again later

Wyatt Earp-Assistant marshal, Reunited with Josephine Marcus, never wounded after tombstone later became U.S Marshall, hunted the cowboys who went after his brothers

Morgan Earp- Assistant marshal, wounded during Tombstone, Murdered Later

Doc Holiday- Assistant marshal, friends with Virgil, became a deputy to help Wyatt after Tombstone

Billy Claiborne-Was unarmed during shootout and ran.

Ike Clanton-Outlaw Cowboy, Worked on the ranch, survived took Earp brothers to court over death of his brother Billy

Billy Clanton- Died at Tombstone, Worked on the ranch

Tom McLaury- Died at Tombstone, Outlaw Cowboy, Ranch Owner

Frank McLaury- Died at Tombstone, Outlaw Cowboy, Ranch Owner

John Clum- Publisher of Tombstone Epitaph and the first mayor

Wells Spicer- Judge in O.K Corral Gunfight

Johnny Behan-First Sheriff against the Earp brother heavily.

Frank Stilwell-Deputy Sheriff under Behan/Killed Moran Earp due to his loyalty to the cowboy men who died at Tombstone/Later murdered by Wyatt

Discussion Questions:

1. What were your initial thoughts about the book? Did it meet your expectations of a nonfiction Western?

2. What did you already know about the Gunfight at the O.K. Corral before reading? Did this book change or deepen your perspective?
3. How does Clavin portray Wyatt Earp? Do you see him as a hero, antihero, or something in between?
4. What did you think of Doc Holliday's role in the story? How did his relationship with the Earp brothers shape the events?
5. How are the "Cowboys" (the outlaws) portrayed in contrast to the Earps? Did you find this balance fair or biased?
6. Which historical figure did you find the most compelling, and why?
7. What themes stood out most in the book? (e.g., law and order, loyalty, revenge, justice)
8. Were the actions of the Earp brothers justified, particularly during the Vendetta Ride? Why or why not?
9. How does the book explore the blurred lines between justice and vengeance?
10. How did Clavin bring the Old West to life? What details stood out to you about Tombstone and the era?
11. How important was the setting of the Arizona Territory to the unfolding of events?
12. Did Tom Clavin's writing style keep you engaged? How did he balance historical facts with storytelling?
13. How well did the author use primary sources and historical records? Did you trust his interpretation?
15. How has the myth of the O.K. Corral been shaped by media versus history? How does this book attempt to correct or support that myth?
16. What impact do you think the Earp brothers and Doc Holliday had on the legacy of the American West?
17. After reading this book, what questions or topics are you interested in learning more about?

Read Alikes

- To hell on a fast horse: Billy the Kid, Pat Garrett, and the epic chase to justice in the Old West by Mark Gardner
- 1876: the year Bat, Wyatt, Custer, Jesse, and the two Bills (Buffalo and Wild) created the Wild West, and why it's still with us by Steve Wiegand
- The notorious Reno Gang: the wild story of the West's first brotherhood of thieves, assassins, and train robbers by Rachel Dickinson