

Doc: A Novel

By Mary Doria Russell

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NATIONAL BESTSELLER

Born to the life of a Southern gentleman, Dr. John Henry Holliday arrives on the Texas frontier hoping that the dry air and sunshine of the West will restore him to health. Soon, with few job prospects, Doc Holliday is gambling professionally with his partner, Mária Katarina Harony, a high-strung, classically educated Hungarian whore. In search of high-stakes poker, the couple hits the saloons of Dodge City. And that is where the unlikely friendship of Doc Holliday and a fearless lawman named Wyatt Earp begins— before the gunfight at the O.K. Corral links their names forever in American frontier mythology—when neither man wanted fame or deserved notoriety.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A Letter from Author Mary Doria Russell

For the past three years, when people asked what my next novel is about, I've only had to say four words. “It's about Doc Holliday.” You mention Doc Holliday to guys especially and they just *light up*. “Oh, man! I love Doc!” they say, and they often mention Val Kilmer's portrayal in the movie *Tombstone*. I love that movie, too, but when I write characters, I'm really writing about whom and what *they* love. The shining silver wire that runs through *Doc* is John Henry Holliday's love for his mother. Alice Holliday was 22 when her son was born near Atlanta in the summer of 1851. She was still in mourning for her firstborn, “a sweet little girl who lived just long enough to gaze and smile and laugh, and break her parents' hearts.” I'm sure you can imagine her distress when her second child was born with a cleft palate and cleft lip. Even today, when you know clefts can be repaired, they're a shock. In 1851, such children commonly died within weeks, but Alice kept her boy alive, waking every hour to feed him with an eyedropper, day and night, for eight long weeks. Think about that exhausted young woman and the baby with the hole in his face. Locking eyes. Struggling to stay awake. Struggling to stay alive... When the infant was two months old, his uncle Dr. John Stiles Holliday performed a successful surgical repair of the cleft--an achievement kept private to protect the family's reputation. You see, in the 1850s, the Hollidays were Georgia gentry whose large extended family would become the O'Haras, Wilkeses and Hamiltons in *Gone With The Wind*. (Margaret Mitchell was Doc's cousin, twice removed.) These were people who took “good breeding” seriously, and birth defects were a source of familial shame--for everyone but Alice. Alice and her son became intensely close. She invented a form of speech therapy to correct his diction. She was a piano teacher who introduced him to the music that would become their great shared passion. She home-schooled him until she was sure his speech wouldn't be ridiculed, then sent him to a local boys academy, where he excelled in every subject. In the midst of our nation's ugliest war, she raised a shy, intelligent child to be a thoughtful, courteous gentleman and a fine young scholar who would earn the degree of Doctor of Dental Surgery before he was 21. Alice didn't live to see him graduate. She died of tuberculosis when John Henry was 15. The loss was staggering, and when he, too, developed TB, he knew exactly what kind of awful death he faced. Hoping dry air and sunshine would restore his health, he left everyone and everything he loved, and went West. He was only 22 when he left Atlanta in 1873. The Doc Holliday of legend is a gambler and gunman who appears out of nowhere in 1881, arriving in Tombstone with a bad reputation and a hooker named Big Nose Kate. But I have written the story of Alice Holliday's son: a scared, sick, lonely boy, born for the life of a minor aristocrat in a world that ceased to exist at the end of the Civil War, trying to stay alive on the rawest edge of the American frontier. John Henry Holliday didn't have a mother to love him when he was grown, so I have taken him for my own. My fondest hope for *Doc* is that it will win for him the compassion and respect I think he deserves. Read it, and weep.

Review

“If I had a six-shooter, I’d be firing it off in celebration of *Doc* . . . a deeply sympathetic, aggressively researched and wonderfully entertaining story.”—*The Washington Post*

“A magnificent read . . . filled with action and humor yet philosophically rich and deeply moving . . . more realistic yet more riveting than any movie or TV western . . . Doc Holliday is the tragic hero in this terrific bio-epic. . . . Losing their mythic, heroic sheen, figures like Wyatt Earp and Bat Masterson become more captivating for their complexity.”—Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

“Intense, individual characters, so fully realized that readers can almost physically touch them, fill the novel’s pages . . . Doc’s restrained but magnificent struggle to rise above the indignities of his disease and of life in Dodge . . . is one of the delights of this surprisingly luminous and elegant novel.”—*The Oregonian*

“Fascinating . . . Russell’s women are a match for any of the men in Dodge, and their presence at the center of *Doc* gives the novel an unforced verisimilitude.”—*The Plain Dealer*

“Intoxicating . . . *Doc* reads like a movie you can’t wait to watch.”—*The Seattle Times*

“Grabs us from the opening sentence . . . Russell makes the narrative hum and the characters come alive.”—*Chicago Tribune*

“Well-written and provocative, *Doc* is a book that will haunt you.”—Historical Novels Review

About the Author
Mary Doria Russell is the award-winning author of four previous bestsellers: *The Sparrow, Children of God, A Thread of Grace,* and *Dreamers of the Day*. Widely praised for her meticulous research, fine prose, and compelling narrative drive, Russell is uniquely suited to telling the story of the lawman Wyatt Earp and the dental surgeon John Henry Holliday. The daughter of Dick Doria, five-term sheriff of Dupage County, Illinois, Mary grew up with guns and cops but she also holds a doctorate in biological anthropology and taught gross anatomy at the Case Western Reserve University School of Dentistry before she left academe to write.

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Clementine Frazier:

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