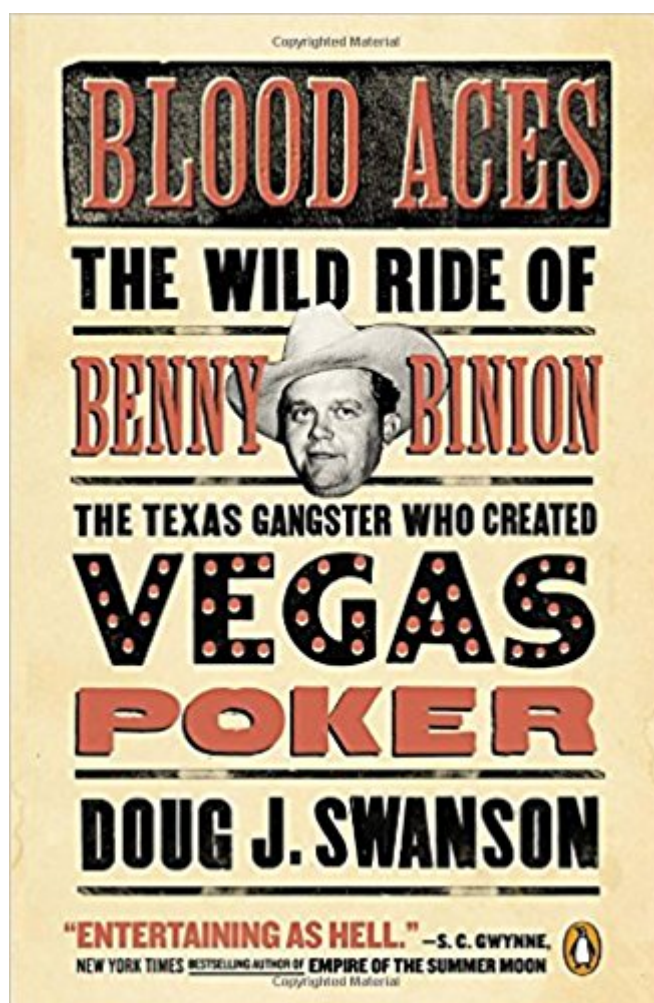


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# Blood Aces: The Wild Ride Of Benny Binion, The Texas Gangster Who Created Vegas Poker



## Synopsis

A rip-roaring saga of murder, money, and the making of Las Vegas. They say in Vegas you can't understand the town unless you understand Benny Binion—mob boss, casino owner, and creator of the World Series of Poker. Beginning as a Texas horse trader, Binion built a gambling empire in Depression-era Dallas. When the law chased him out of town, he loaded up suitcases with cash and headed for Vegas. The place would never be the same. Dramatic as any gangster movie, *Blood Aces* draws readers into the colorful world of notorious mobsters like Clyde Barrow and Bugsy Siegel. Given access to previously classified government documents, biographer Doug J. Swanson provides the definitive account of a great American antihero, a man whose rise from thugdom to prominence and power is unmatched in the history of American criminal justice.

## Book Information

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (July 28, 2015)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143127586

ISBN-13: 978-0143127581

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.8 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 161 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #256,019 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #168 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Puzzles & Games > Gambling #370 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > True Crime > Organized Crime #691 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > Crime & Criminals

## Customer Reviews

“Technically, a biography, but it reads like the best kind of crime drama—where you find yourself rooting for the bad guy.” —*The Daily Beast* “[A] slam-bang thrill ride of a biography.... Mr. Swanson, an ace investigative reporter who writes with a pulp-fiction swagger just right for his story’s cutthroat anti-hero, is above all a historian who fixes Benny Binion in the context of his times.... The World Series of Poker now takes place not at the Horseshoe but in the impersonal and cavernous convention halls of the Rio Hotel.... It is somehow reassuring to know *Blood Aces* will keep alive the story of how the great spectacle came to be, and of the violent man who dreamed it up.” —Peter Alson, *The Wall Street Journal* “If Binion had shuffled the deck himself, the

beneficent, sometimes brutal gangster with the cocky grin and country twang couldn't have been dealt a more winning hand than born storyteller Swanson as biographer.... Swanson, who got interested in Binion while covering the gambler's World Series of Poker, presents an especially well-crafted, fastidiously vetted and fun-to-read account complete with Benny-isms.... For a book with a high body count, it's full of history, humor and little-known facts. "Austin American-Statesman" "A hard-edged history lesson about a Las Vegas casino man and his family in the days before our corporate media marketing went into overdrive." "Las Vegas Review Journal" "A book that's practically crying out to become a feature film. Binion would be quite memorable in it as a cowboy-hat-wearing version of Don Vito Corleone or Tony "Scarface" Montana." "Fort Worth Star Telegram" "Laugh-out-loud funny" "odd, since it's about a semi-illiterate gangster who left a trail of dead bodies from Dallas to Las Vegas. But Benny Binion was in many ways a true visionary, even if his methods and materials were far from ethical.... [Swanson] does a bang-up job with this book.... Names of famous people who knew and liked Benny Binion pop up like weeds on the pages of this highly readable biography." He wasn't a nice guy at all, but he remains a legend." "Fort Worth Weekly" "Fascinating, not only as a biography of a Las Vegas business icon but as a look at how the city operated in its golden era of the 1950s, '60s and '70s... Blood Aces has a true-crime feel, but to describe it as such gives it short shrift. It's deeper than that.... In a way, it's like Binion himself. The small-town Texan spoke and acted like a hick, with rumpled shirts and too-short ties. But the persona hid a complex, intelligent and, yes, infamous man." "Las Vegas Sun Review" "Binion's name has floated around the edge of the history of Texas, Las Vegas and organized crime for decades, but Swanson is the first to put all the pieces together.... A cracking good biography, courtesy of a writer who writes the way Binion lived: fast and on the money." "Allan Barra, The Dallas Morning News" "Swanson captures his subject in all his antiheroical glory, uncovering sordid tales of fast living, corruption, and even murder." "Charleston City Paper" "If the late Benny Binion's life was ever to be made into a movie, now with Sam Peckinpah long gone, the rightful heir to what amounts to a biographical gold mine should fall to Quentin Tarantino." If and when that movie does get made, let's hope the masterful film director bases his first script on the new book written by Doug J. Swanson.... Where author Swanson excels is in the juicy narrative, which is not only a page-turner filled with anticipation, but an often wickedly funny guilt trip for the reader. Explosions, shotgun blasts, and cold-blooded murders become moments of belletristic beauty." "Nolan Dalla" "[A] rollicking biography... A great piece of narrative nonfiction that reads like, well, a great

crime novel. When Las Vegas gets its faux Mt. Rushmore (and can that day be far off?), Benny's mug will be there, right alongside Bugsy's.

• "Booklist, starred review

detectives and other aficionados of the history of thug culture in America will feel a warm glow of assurance at the first few paragraphs of *Blood Aces: The Wild Ride of Benny Binion, the Texas Gangster Who Created Vegas Poker*....[Swanson] brings new credibility to the subject without trying too hard to mythologize him and, wisely, without trying to make him seem likable. No one ever said you have to be likable to be interesting.

• "The Austin Chronicle

Fans of other gangster histories will likely be intrigued by Binion's arc.... The later sections of the book will be of interest to poker fans, as Binion retreats to Sin City to buy casinos and accidentally creates a legacy when he founds the World Series of Poker as a promotional stunt.... An entertaining and provocative portrait of a man whose dichotomies were largely a product of the violent times in which he thrived.

• "Kirkus

Prepare to meet one of the great unknown crime kingpins in American history: Benny Binion, a semi-literate, grammar-murderin', Stetson-and-boots-wearin' Texas hick who presided over an underworld of cowboy gangsters every bit as unique, lethal, and compelling as the Cosa Nostra. In *Blood Aces*, Doug J. Swanson has written a terrific, propulsive account of a man and a subculture I can virtually guarantee you know little or nothing about. This is dazzlingly original stuff, and it's as entertaining as hell.

• "S.C. Gwynne, author of *Empire of the Summer Moon*

What happens in Vegas... starts in Dallas? Welcome to the world of Benny Binion, the cowboy with a second-grade education who helped create Sin City and laid the groundwork for modern-day spectator poker. Steeped in lore and backed by meticulous research, Doug Swanson's *Blood Aces* gives readers an intimate and in-depth look at a key era in the history of American capitalism. You may have heard of Bugsy, Lansky and Cohen, but welcome to the Wild West of gambling populated by folks like Ice Pick, Horse Face and The Human Clay Pigeon. Prepare to be Binionized.

• "Denise Kiernan, author of *The Girls of Atomic City*

Doug Swanson is one terrific reporter and writer. In *Blood Aces*, he delivers not just the facts, ma'am, but an appalling yet wickedly humorous portrait of the Godfather of Glitter Gulch, a warm-hearted family man and cold-blooded killer who pioneered Vegas odds-making and launched the World Series of Poker.

• "James McManus, author of *Positively Fifth Street* and *Cowboys Full*

*Blood Aces* shines a rare spotlight into the American city that is singularly emblematic of unfettered political corruption. Swanson captures the hidden history of Las Vegas, whose outsize culture of greed draws unmistakable parallels with the nation at large. A compelling narrative full of outlandish characters, *Blood Aces* is a fast-paced read as enlightening as it is shocking.

• "Sally Denton, author of *The Money and the Power*

*Blood Aces* delivers the best of everything

a tale of two

cities (Dallas and Las Vegas), a primer on the history and nuances of gambling (poker and dice, especially) and, above all, the many adventures of the one and only Benny Binion, who could charm or kill with equal ease. It's a fascinating slice of colorful Americana delivered with insight and sly humor by Doug J. Swanson, one of the best historian/storytellers around. Unlike Binion's crooked cons, *Blood Aces* is a sure thing for every reader. —Jeff Guinn, author of the New York Times bestseller *Manson*

DOUG J. SWANSON is an investigative reporter for the Dallas Morning News. He has twice been named the top reporter in Texas and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in feature writing. He lives in Dallas, Texas.

Much more than a biography, *BLOOD ACES* is a tale of two cities, Dallas and Las Vegas, and how they were shaped by an semi-literate country boy named Benny Binion. The first third of the book depicts Dallas of the 1920s and 1930s, a wide open town where prostitution and gambling were tolerated if not encouraged. This is where Binion got his start, running craps games, killing anybody who got in his way. With the heat from the local authorities building, he made his escape to Vegas, then a sleepy town in the desert, freshly discovered by the mob. Benny, almost more than anyone, made Vegas the gambling mecca it is today. Swanson is a brilliant writer. Thoroughly researched, many of the passages made me laugh out loud. If you are at all interested in a different slant on organized crime and how gambling came to be in Vegas, buy this book.

Great book, written well, very interesting considering I had met Mr. Benny Benion years ago in the HorseShoe Restaurant on occasions. Also had known Mr. Jack Benion. I had an Uncle that lived in Arlington, Texas. And as a young fellow, he would tell me of the, shall we say, activities in Dallas and west of Fort Worth on the Old Jacksboro Hwy !

Engrossing read and glimpse into the recent criminal past of both the gangsters and murderers, and those who were sworn to protect us from them, all the way to the White House. Unfortunately and surprisingly, it was often hard to tell the difference between them. The corruption was, and appears to still be, a problematic issue. Even (then) Senator Harry Reid (now Senate Majority Leader) apparently wrote a passionate commendation on behalf of this notorious gangster. Scary...

If you like Poker, Vegas and gambling in general, you'll love this book. I love history in general, and

this book digs into the life of Benny Binion. Even if you don't know who he is, this is still a great book for Poker fans and history buffs I actually bought it for my brother-in-law for a Christmas gift, and ended up reading it myself. I tried to order another book, but it was on back-order. We still gave him the book, but not as a Christmas gift, we bought him something else as the official Christmas gift.

Entertaining look at an interesting man. The writing and organization is not the best but overall quite good. Main complaint I had was it was often difficult to determine (quickly) in what time frame a particular story thread occurred. I would look back at beginning of a chapter but it didn't necessarily say. It could be determined by going further back in the book but was tedious.

It was an excellent look into the early days of Las Vegas. I have been in Binion Casino many times but had no idea as to the background of Benny. I found it very interesting that Benny could have such a kind heart when someone really needed help. He was more than willing to help out people who were down on their luck either financially or by providing them with food, clothing, etc. On the other hand if someone crossed Benny he was ruthless. One more dead body in the desert meant nothing to him. I highly recommend reading this book.

OK I've lived in Texas over 70 years and been card carrying member of Binions players club since 1969. So I might be a little biased. I got the book out of the mail box an hour ago and I'm sad to say I don't think I'm going to get much sleep for the next couple of days. Never heard of Mr. Swanson but he grabbed by the short and curlies and won't let go. There's more honest Texas history in these first fifty pages than I was exposed to in all my years, meant years (spell check is smarter than I) of education Texas gave me. I can not overstate how exciting this book is regarding the birth and development of the Texan mind set. I could go on and on but I have some serious reading to do.

Excellent; amazing TRUE story of a great man. He may have been a killer, but look at his territory! That was survival in his world. He was also generous to the poor & gave donations to many civic causes besides the city attorney & local judges & police. He helped make Vegas what it is today.

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