

You could say the idea that became ONE-EYED JACKS was formed as far back as 1882. That was the year Sheriff Patrick F. Garrett initially published his memoir, *The Authentic Life of Billy the Kid*. Described by its odd subtitle as “A Faithful and Interesting Narrative,” the tome is part autobiography, part biography, part fanciful history, and—to paraphrase the lyrics of Kris Kristofferson—it is also a walking contradiction, partly fact and mostly fiction. Widely debunked over the years, Garrett’s account of the “life” has become the de facto basis for everything we know, and think we know, about the goings-on in Lincoln, Fort Sumner, and other romanticized locales in the territories of New Mexico, circa 1880 and 1881.

Flashing forward to the mid-1950s, author and literary editor Charles Neider, obsessed by the Old West and the itinerant nature of the wandering gunfighter, set out to write a story that would be an intriguing blend of Billy the Kid mythology and a poetically subjective glimpse into the psyche of a young, quick-draw killer. Neider spent months with an old Colt 45 strapped to his leg, often wearing the gun to bed in order to feel its constant presence. Later, without it, he would feel lost, dread settling over him. Every day while writing and researching, he would take the gun out into the canyons, shooting, shooting, shooting. He practiced the draw, over and over, until his fingers bled from the repetition of hammer-cocking and trigger guard insertion. He complained of severe arm and shoulder aches. His novel though, took shape. Using Garrett’s memoir as a template, Neider mixed the “facts” of Billy the Kid’s existence with his own existential tale of murder and robbery; at its center stood a Kid-like figure, widely misunderstood, dangerous, feared, doomed. Originally set in New Mexico, the novel’s location was changed by Neider when he moved to Monterey, California, and realized that a western setting of sand and surf would better suit the dream-like feel of the sober world he sought to explore.

Upon publication in 1956, *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones* was well-received, although some reviews complained about its unusually graphic violence. *The New York Times* noted its “Four-letter realism.” It also seemed to dovetail with a whole zeitgeist of Billy the Kid: just months earlier, NBC broadcast a teleplay by Gore Vidal in its *Philco Playhouse* series entitled *The Death of Billy the Kid*, starring Paul Newman; in the same year, a biography by Frazier Hunt arrived, *The Tragic Days of Billy the Kid*. Amid all the Kidology, it was logical that Hollywood would come-a-calling. Upon reading a favorable review of the novel, a producer named Frank P. Rosenberg obtained the rights from Neider for the tidy sum of \$25,000.

Around the same time, Marlon Brando’s production company, Pennebaker Inc., was in a spot of trouble. Financed through Paramount Pictures, Pennebaker was essentially moribund, having been established—as many of these star-owned companies were—as, basically, a tax shelter. With Paramount footing the enormous bill of keeping the enterprise

going, and funds entering and exiting willy-nilly, the IRS decided to get involved. Pennebaker had to actually make a film to keep the government at bay; somebody suggested doing a Western. Intrigued, Brando opted for a Louis L’Amour novel, *To Tame a Land*. Niven Busch was engaged to pen a screenplay, but after weeks of meetings, it became painfully clear that Brando liked the title, but not much else. Busch disappeared, and it was back to square one.

Meanwhile, Frank Rosenberg, proud possessor of *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones*, approached a young up-and-coming writer named Sam Peckinpah to turn the book into a script. Peckinpah was thrilled; he had no experience on features at this point, except as dialog director on several Don Siegel productions, but was making a name for himself cranking out numerous teleplays for then-ubiquitous Western TV shows. He had met Rosenberg on the pilot for *Pony Express*, and they’d hit it off well. With no expectation of directing (that wasn’t in the cards), Peckinpah eagerly set to work. He was paid union scale, \$4,000, for his efforts (out of Rosenberg’s pocket), and later claimed it took six months to hammer out his draft. For Rosenberg, it was worth the money and the wait. Upon delivery he knew Sam had hit it out of the park, and why not? The myths surrounding the life and death of Billy the Kid were near and dear to Sam’s heart, and he had stayed true to Neider’s original whilst also adhering closely to the Kid’s story.

By this time, in late 1957, Rosenberg knew that Pennebaker was desperate and he quickly got the screenplay to Jay Kanter, Brando’s agent and partner. While the facts of this story are not exactly clear—Brando’s doings being especially prone to urban mythology—it would appear that Kanter, who always had a good handle on Brando’s behavior, sensed his client had to act, and act quickly. He convinced Brando to commit. (For those unfamiliar with this classic Hollywood tale, Jay Kanter had become Brando’s agent by curious default. Arriving in Los Angeles to be courted by the studios, Brando had been miffed that his agency had sent lowly gopher Kanter to the airport to pick him up. He immediately took to young Jay, and announced to the world that Jay would be his sole representative from that point forward. Thus Kanter found his own level of mythology.)

By whatever means Brando arrived at his decision, the result was that *The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones*, a screenplay by neophyte Sam Peckinpah, was now a go project for Pennebaker, to be financed and released by Paramount Pictures. The script was purchased for \$150,000, a neat profit for Rosenberg’s investment of \$25,000 for the book, and \$4,000 for the script. By April, 1958, the deal was done and shooting scheduled to commence in the latter part of the year. Peckinpah was elated; this was a dream come true. He was enamored of Brando and enjoyed sitting around spitballing with the acting legend. Excitement increased when Stanley Kubrick entered the ring as Brando’s directorial choice; after screening *The Killing* and the hot-from-the-movieola *Paths of Glory*, Brando and his

crew touted Kubrick as the new big thing and encouraged the director to spend weeks jawboning about the project and its prospects. Unfortunately, as time wore on, and despite having signed on to shoot the Peckinpah script, it became abundantly clear that Kubrick had little interest in the screenplay in front of him, and began lobbying Brando to allow extensive re-writes. By the summer of 1958, Kubrick had requested that his friend, author Calder Willingham, be brought in to add the necessary flourishes. This of course signaled the death-knell for Peckinpah, who was called into the office and summarily fired. Peckinpah’s then-wife Marie recalled that he was “devastated”; this was his introduction to Hollywood’s back-stabbing ways.

With Peckinpah gone, a malaise set in. In his biography of Brando, Peter Manso writes that, “Over the summer of 1958, script meetings shifted to Marlon’s Mulholland house, where because of the teakwood floors, no one was allowed to wear shoes. Kubrick, for some reason routinely took off his pants as well and worked in only his underwear and dress shirt. Rosenberg recalled, ‘Brando sat crosslegged on the floor within easy reach of a Chinese gong, and when the discussions became too emotional, he would hit it.’” Pre-production, meanwhile, was already in progress and casting was beginning. As summer turned to fall it was becoming obvious that things were not working out with Kubrick, whose draft with Willingham had stalled at page 52. The screenplay that Rosenberg had pronounced “perfect” had been ruined. In its place loomed an unfocused jumble of esoteric art-house happenings, existentialist wanderings, and half-baked notions predicated upon Marlon’s favorite book, *Zen and the Art of Archery*. Guy Trosper was hired to do a polish, but it, too, bogged down in the mire.

As the first day of shooting loomed in November, no script was ready and the star was at his wits’ end. Karl Malden, cast in the role of Dad Longworth, had been on salary for weeks to prevent him from accepting other films, and was enjoying his extended, lavishly paid holiday. Around this time, with the start just days away, Kubrick opined that he didn’t know what the film was about. “I’ll tell you what it’s about,” fumed a frustrated Brando, “it’s about the \$300,000 I’ve already paid Karl Malden!”

Kubrick was officially dismissed on November 21st, and Brando himself decided to helm the picture. Many thought this had been his plan all along. The film, initially budgeted at \$1.8 million, had so far incurred costs of \$1.25 million. Not a frame had been shot. The company moved to Monterey and set up shop. Sets had been built, although much would end up being redone back at Paramount. Shooting finally commenced on December 2nd, and dragged on, and on, and on.

The Authentic Death of Hendry Jones, as written by Charles Neider and adapted by Sam Peckinpah, tells the story of the Kid (Hendry) and his old friend, Dad Longworth. The Kid runs with a rough pack, and Dad, now the sheriff of Monterey, brings him in on charges of murder and lets him stew in jail, pending execution. Tormented by the obnoxious deputy

Lon Dedrick, the Kid eventually busts out, murders Lon and another deputy, and flees with his gang south to old Mex. After holing up there a while, the Kid can't help but return, nominally to see a girlfriend, Nika, before triggering a final showdown with Dad which ends with the Kid's death. Told as a flashback from the point of view of "Doc" Baker, a surviving gang member, Peckinpah's script structured the story as a framing device beginning and ending at the Kid's funeral.

And if this all sounds familiar, then look no further than Peckinpah's own *Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*, made fifteen years later, wherein it is Pat Garrett's death in 1908 that is used as the framing device with the story of the Kid's last days sandwiched in between. Much of *Hendry Jones* made it into Peckinpah's later film, whole scenes and chunks of dialogue, particularly in the Lincoln jailbreak sequences, as well as the generally weary and poetic exploration of time aimlessly passing and death waiting pointlessly around every corner. Brando's *One-Eyed Jacks*, though, is a horse of a completely different complexion. Basically all that remains from Neider's novel is the setting, Monterey, and the character of Dad Longworth. In this tale, beginning with a confusing "prologue," the Kid, known as Rio, is a badass bank robber in Mexico, and so is his pal, Dad. After a crime gone wrong, the Kid and Dad find themselves snagged in a tight spot. The Kid knows one of them has to go for fresh horses and help, and Dad wins the coin-toss. Naturally, he doesn't return, but instead hightails it to freedom. The Kid is captured and does a five-stretch in Sonora. Breaking out, he discovers that Dad is now the sheriff of Monterey and heads north to kill him. Once there, the Kid decides to de-flower Dad's step-daughter (Dad has married to reinforce his notion of a decent life), and rob the bank in Dad's town. Predictably things go awry, and the Kid is captured (again) and jailed. After more shenanigans, the Kid gets loose, and in a risible turn of events, kills Dad, and makes off with the step-daughter, who by now realizes she loves the Kid.

The film does boast some fine actors; alongside Brando and Malden are Ben Johnson, Katy Jurado, Slim Pickens, and Sam Gilman. In the role of Dad's step-daughter Luisa was newcomer Pina Pellicer, a highly-strung young woman who had attempted suicide on two previous occasions. (She would succeed with a later attempt, in 1964.) Romantically involved with Brando—although he had at least two other lovers in the cast as well as France Nuyen back in New York—Pellicer struggled through the film, her fractured nerves clearly visible on screen. By and large the actors loved Brando, and why not? He wasn't demanding, gave them plenty of time off, and would often wait hours or days to get the right shot. One memorable incident involved his sitting on a rock at his favorite beach, chewing over which was the right wave to capture on film.

Nearly five months passed. In April 1959, Brando pronounced the location shoot over, but there was still much to do back at the Paramount lot. Studio executives were unsurprisingly freaking out as the budget spiraled into the stratosphere. Part of the pic-

ture's problem was the make-it-up-as-we-go-along aspect; many of the scenes were improvised. The sheer volume of exposed film made the prospect of post-production and editorial assembly a ferocious, time-consuming, not to say hideous challenge. In the end, the budget crawled past \$6 million, a figure Paramount attempted to conceal from the press. Between June, 1959 and March, 1961, editing proceeded at the same pace as shooting, which was roughly the speed of a coelacanth crossing the ocean floor. Finally, Paramount executives snapped and removed Brando from the process. This was just after he delivered his "director's cut," which clocked in at a little under five hours.

In late 1959, Paramount had called the actors back to re-shoot the picture's climax, which resulted in the happy ending in place today. The original had been an altogether more nihilistic vision in which, as Dad lies dying, he inadvertently shoots his own step-daughter as she and the Kid flee town. Tending to her by the beach, the Kid grieves until she breathes her last; then he carries her back to face the wrath of the citizens. Similarly, after Brando's departure, Paramount editors slashed and hacked the film to a more acceptable length, but could do nothing about its awkward shape. It was what it was: a strange, ruminative, dream-like piece, dotted with moments of beauty and poetry, hanging by the thinnest of narrative threads. All comparisons to the actual life and times of Billy the Kid had been washed away, and what was left defied description.

At what point, and by whose suggestion, Hugo Friedhofer entered the scene, no one seems to know, but a solid guess is that he had scored Brando's preceding picture, *The Young Lions* (for which he had received an Academy Award nomination), and perhaps Brando, or someone at the studio, felt he'd be a good fit. The composer himself said the following, in an interview with Irene Kahn Atkins for the AFI: "There was a period in there when I was—how shall we say—unemployed. But not altogether because I had been starting to get my feet wet in television at that time. Mark Newman, my agent, came up with not one but two pilot films, one for a western series called *Outlaws*. And before the selling of *Outlaws* as a series, Mark Newman came up with *One-Eyed Jacks*. Directly upon finishing that film, I really got hooked into television."

Friedhofer, whose extensive career as composer and orchestrator dated from the 1920s, had a reputation for being one of the best in the business, delivering highly acclaimed scores for *The Woman in the Window*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *The Bishop's Wife*, *Joan of Arc*, *Between Heaven and Hell*, *An Affair to Remember*, *Boy On a Dolphin*, and dozens more. Irascible, and possessed of the driest wit, Friedhofer was a singular talent; a man who marched to no other drum but his own. *One-Eyed Jacks* was a plum vehicle for him; he liked Brando and was thrilled by the prospect. "I went in to look at it one night with my wife, and we literally both sat on the edge of our seats. We were both really gripped and moved by the film. So that was my sole obsession for the next ten weeks."

His appreciation for the film's artistry shone through in the beautiful, elegiac musical tapestry he created. Blending the urban romantic tragedy of *Best Years of Our Lives* with something akin to Alex North's *Viva Zapata!*, the score seethes and bustles, ebbs and flows, grows languid and calm, perhaps not unlike the unpredictable surf of California's Monterey peninsula. The gorgeous central theme, elegantly introduced in the "Main Title," its periodic restatements emerging as if from a fog (the lonely trumpet is played by Pete Candoli); the exquisite, disquieting moments of love and loss as delineated in "Luisa in Love," "The Seduction," and especially "Contrition"; the adventurous mischief of "Kiss of a Scoundrel" and "Pursued by Rurales"; the unbearable sadness of "Confession of Love" and "Confidence Regained"; the playful moments of mariachi and dance. Through it all you can hear Friedhofer's passion, his talent and force of will, pushing, pushing, pushing for *One-Eyed Jacks* to achieve the greatness he feels it deserves.

However, just as the film itself endured mutilations and humiliations, the music was not permitted to escape intact. Friedhofer bitterly remembers, "At the time of the first preview, everybody got their grubby little hands on it. Marty Rackin had become head of production at Paramount. D.A. Doran had been in charge to certain extent. But, at that time, Paramount was a captainless ship, shall we say. But I always think of the film in its original form. I had an album of the original score, which I had edited myself. But they had made innumerable cuts in the film, so that they had the devil's own time bridging musical sequences they had slashed into. The only way they could do it was by goosing up sound effects and lowering music levels. I saw the picture once, in the studio, after they had made these cuts and I walked away from it kind of ill."

Finally, thanks to Kritzerland, we can hear all of Friedhofer's work the way it was intended to be heard, along with his own original album: at the time of the film's release, the only way he could salvage a portion of the score as written. "So the score is best heard in the UA record album," the composer would say, "which I had the opportunity to edit. That is the real score of *One-Eyed Jacks*, minus about forty-five minutes of music!"

As for the film itself, its fate was sealed. In a *Newsweek* interview, Brando later proclaimed, "*One-Eyed Jacks* is a potboiler. I think it is quite conventional. It's like spending two years building a chicken coop. When you're finished you want to feel you've done something with your time. It is not an artistic success. I'm a businessman...a captain of industry. Any pretension I've sometimes had of being artistic is now just a long, chilly hope."

— Nick Redman