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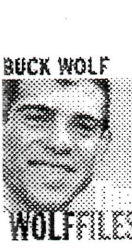
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The Yellow Submarine Hijack



New Accounts Say Cartoonists Temporarily Seized the Beatles Animated Classic

The Beatles didn't have high hopes for *Yellow Submarine*. Now, of course, it's considered a classic and is being re-released. Click on the image to see a digitally restored Pepperland. (MGM/ABCNEWS.com)



By *Buck Wolf*
ABCNEWS.com

Don't believe everything you hear the Beatles sing. In early 1968, the Fab Four wanted anything but to live in a Yellow Submarine.

Yeah, baby! Squeeze into your bellbottoms and let's groove on Austin Powers' shagadelic time machine back to the swinging '60s and find out the strokes of fate that kept *Yellow Submarine* from sinking like a led zeppelin.

Magical Misery Tour

All was not well in Pepperland. In the months leading up to the *Yellow Submarine* premiere, the Beatles had grown tired of working together. The group's *Magical Mystery Tour* TV special bombed. And their manager, Brian Epstein, had died of an accidental drug overdose amid personal fears that he was going to be sacked.

One of Epstein's last projects was *Yellow Submarine*. There had already been a Beatles cartoon series, and the group loathed it so much that they insisted it not be shown in their homeland.

Nevertheless, they owed a feature film to United Artists and figured Epstein's animation scheme to be the easiest way to fulfill their

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Nevertheless, they owed a feature film to United Artists and figured Epstein's animation scheme to be the easiest way to fulfill their commitment.

"The Beatles were afraid they were

going to look like the Flintstones," says Robert Hieronimus, publisher of Hieronimus & Co. Yellow Submarine Journal in Maryland.

"They wanted little to do with Yellow Submarine, and their initial input showed."

The Beatles dashed off four new songs — some of their least distinguished work — and had voice actors hired to play their part.

George Harrison reportedly spent less than 60 minutes writing "It's Only a Northern Song," a dig at Northern Songs, the Beatles' publishing company.

Essentially, while it was peace, love and flower power on the outside, on the inside the Fab Four were just cranking out this flick like hired hands washing the dishes. At least at first.

George Martin, the Beatles' legendary producer, essentially admits this in his introduction to Hieronimus's forthcoming book, *It Was All in the Mind: The Co-Creation of the Beatles' Yellow Submarine*.

"It was borne out of a financial and contractual need," Martin says, "not a promising beginning."

The Voice of Lennon Speaks

United Artists turned to King Features to produce the project in under a year, allotting a paltry budget of less than \$1 million. Everyone was under pressure to produce, and fast.

"Many writers were called in," says Hieronimus. "But for months there was no real script. The artists were forced in many instances to make it up as they went along, relying on the music as inspiration."

King Features quickly began squaring off with TV Cartoons Limited, the subcontractor hired to do the animation. And as the suits fought to keep costs down, the artists banded together and developed the mythical adventure of how the Beatles liberated Pepperland from the music-hating Blue Meanies.

"What I find extraordinary about Yellow Submarine is the parallel between the politicking outside of the film and the content of the film," says John Clive, the actor who provided John Lennon's voice.

Renegade Artists on the Run

Several months before the release, when King Features threatened to fire TVC and bring in new animators, two of the artists sneaked into the offices and took hostage some original prints.

"We had two of the seven reels all made up and sitting in the lab," production supervisor John Coats told Hieronimus. "And we withdrew those and the artwork to match."

But the Yellow Submarine hijacking quickly ended when King Features agreed to budget additional money to pay TVC on cost overruns. Pepperland was saved. The Beatles had another hit on their hands, their reputation only enhanced.

With the re-release of the movie this month in theaters and on home video, the surviving Beatles are standing front and center promoting this classic souvenir of the psychedelic era, another testament to their genius. What started out as a contractual commitment, now, as they say, is history.