

= The Land of Gorch =

The Land of Gorch is a recurring skit that appears in season one of the American comedy television program Saturday Night Live . It features Jim Henson 's Muppets . Prior to his work on Sesame Street , Henson had created puppetry work , including his show Sam and Friends , for adult audiences . His characters appeared regularly on the late @-@ night comedy television programs , and The Ed Sullivan Show . After Sesame Street , Henson feared he would become typecast into working on children 's television series . His talent agent Bernie Brillstein , who represented Gilda Radner , Dan Aykroyd , and John Belushi , helped him transition to Saturday Night Live .

The premise of The Land of Gorch featured Muppet characters , who were members of a royal family , in a faraway locale . They behaved boorishly and made frequent references to drug abuse , sexual innuendo , and consumption of alcohol . Characters included King Ploobis , Queen Peutra , their son , and servants Scred and Vazh . These characters often consulted their oracle Mighty Favog for advice .

The writers of Saturday Night Live clashed with Henson 's vision for the program . Michael O 'Donoghue , Alan Zweibel , and Al Franken often tried to avoid writing the weekly sketches . Henson felt they were trying to write for situational comedy rather than staying within his intended story . Frank Oz eventually agreed the partnership between Henson 's team and the show 's writers was imperfect , and was thankful they moved on to The Muppet Show .

The Land of Gorch had a significant impact on later Muppet works , including the feature film The Dark Crystal and the television show Dinosaurs . Commentators agreed the reception for The Land of Gorch was universally negative ; The A.V. Club said it was an in @-@ joke that nobody wanted to keep the sketches on Saturday Night Live . San Francisco Chronicle called the characters the opposite of Kermit the Frog and compared them to trolls . DVD Talk called the feature the worst mistake in the first season of Saturday Night Live . Academic Michael J. Bernstein wrote in his essay " The Puppetry of Nightmares " that the idea failed because the characters were irredeemable and unfunny .

= = Premise = =

The Land of Gorch takes place in a world far away from contemporaneous society . The characters live on a fictional , swamp @-@ like planet in a fantasy genre . The set includes volcanoes and prehistoric themes . The environment is dismal and the puppets have grotesque physical appearances .

The creatures each have unique cultural identities and a sense of loyalty towards their inherent , traditional practices . The main characters comprise a royal family that includes King Ploobis , Queen Peutra , and a male child named Wiss . There are also a male servant named Scred , a female servant named Vazh , and a rock prophet named the Mighty Favog . Scred acts like a fervent supporter of dim @-@ witted King Ploobis , while Vazh displays flirtatious qualities .

The Land of Gorch segments deal with adult themes ; characters use euphemisms to refer to their sex drives and often consume alcohol . They often contradict each other and act obnoxiously and lasciviously . They grapple with adult issues including death , sexual intercourse , and alcoholism .

= = Production = =

= = = Influences = = =

Early in his career , Jim Henson 's work was aimed at mature audiences . His television program Sam and Friends was designed for young adults . During this period , his characters often appeared on late @-@ night , comedy television programs The Jimmy Dean Show and The Ed Sullivan Show . Throughout the 1960s , Jim Henson used his puppets for profane , irreverent comedy . These early Henson creations made references to substance abuse and sexual intercourse ; The A.V. Club said

Henson was probably influenced by the work of Ralph Bakshi , who was also active during the 1960s .

== = Conception == =

Jim Henson originally conceived of his Muppets as characters aimed at an adult audience . He was disappointed the popularity of characters that appeared in Sesame Street , including Big Bird and Bert and Ernie , had solidified a public perception his Muppets were solely intended for educating children . Henson worried he would be stuck forever working on children 's television series . He felt his Muppet characters should be able to be appreciated by individuals of any maturity level . Henson told The Saturday Evening Post he had constantly dealt with others looking down upon the idea of puppet performers . He envied performer Edgar Bergen for his ability to appeal to a mature audience . Henson said he wanted to work on program that was broadcast during the peak adult @-@ viewing time and said he had prior difficulty persuading the major television networks to create a puppet program for mature audiences .

Bernie Brillstein , Henson 's talent agent , helped him move away from working solely on productions for children . When Henson decided to engage Brillstein as his talent agent , Henson was not well known within the industry . Brillstein was an asset to Henson ; his clients included Gilda Radner , Dan Aykroyd , and John Belushi . Henson wanted Muppets incorporated into Saturday Night Live as a way to expunge the popular view his characters were only for young audiences . With help from Frank Oz , Henson generated The Land of Gorch characters for use on Saturday Night Live . His new characters were featured in the television program 's first season . Henson designed the conceptual framework of The Land of Gorch characters to be eccentric .

== = Design == =

The designs for the characters and associated puppets in The Land of Gorch were created by Michael K. Frith and Jim Henson . The characters were specifically created for Saturday Night Live and were not previously used in the Henson puppet universe . Their appearance was built to be more realistic than Henson 's previous puppet creations . It was the first instance Henson used glass eyes in his models . " The Mighty Favog " character was co @-@ designed by Frith and Henson . King Ploobis and Scred were designed by Frith . Jerry Juhl and Jerry Nelson assisted with the production of the Muppets during the program .

== = NBC contract and marketing == =

NBC asked Saturday Night Live 's producer Lorne Michaels to add The Land of Gorch to the program to lighten its overall tone . In its initial contract for Saturday Night Live , NBC required producer Lorne Michaels , short films by comedian Albert Brooks , and Jim Henson and the Muppets . Michaels said he was pleased to be working Henson on his new show : " I 'd always liked and been a fan of [the Muppets] and Jim 's work " . He said he thought Henson 's idea could support a weekly routine on the program . Henson initially called the segment " Muppet Night Creatures " before settling on its final name . " Jim Henson and the Muppets " were marketed as a regular feature of Saturday Night Live before its first episode was hosted by George Carlin .

== = Writing conflicts == =

Because of regulations imposed by the Writers Guild of America , only those employed as writers for Saturday Night Live were allowed to write sketches for the program . Henson and his puppeteers merely performed the scripts for the segments ? they were not involved in the writing process . Saturday Night Live cast members did not enjoy working with The Land of Gorch segments . Writing assignments for The Land of Gorch sketches was given to Saturday Night Live staff as a penalty for being least liked among the production team . Writers generally regarded the routines as childish .

The writing staff of Saturday Night Live and Henson 's team did share some qualities ; each group formed a separate social clique and were independently opinionated and creative . They differed in age @-@ range and background ? producer Lorne Michaels was 32 @-@ years @-@ old in 1975 and Henson was 40 . Most of the writers were single and Henson was married with five children at the time .

Writer Michael O 'Donoghue said , " I don 't write for felt " . In a 1977 interview for Playboy , O 'Donoghue called The Land of Gorch characters " fucking Muppets " and " little hairy facecloths " . Saturday Night Live writer Alan Zweibel said the writers drew straws to decide who would draft that week 's Muppet routine . Zweibel said that in addition to himself , other writers who disliked working on scripts for The Land of Gorch included Michael O 'Donoghue , Al Franken , and Tom Davis . Zweibel had personal disagreements with Jim Henson , who disapproved a few storylines . Henson 's associate Jerry Juhl said John Belushi hated having the Muppets on the show . Juhl said they had gone through virtually every writer on the program trying to find one who would write sketches both parties could agree with .

Lorne Michaels said The Land of Gorch characters had been created without a set of rules or boundaries to govern the storylines . He said he felt his writing staff would have been able to work more effectively if there had been more guidelines on the characters ' behavior and function . Henson said he felt the type of humor being written for the show was tedious and unimaginative .

= = = Cancellation = = =

Jim Henson said his ideas did not mesh well with those of the writers . He said his creative team did not form a bond with the writing staff , which he said embraced a darkly irritating form of comedy .

Frank Oz said The Land of Gorch had its positives and drawbacks . Oz said he thought the routine was not a good fit for Saturday Night Live , and that the cartoon @-@ style humor of their characters did not work well with the comedy of Saturday Night Live , much of which was initially derived from the Second City environment . Oz said he generally enjoyed working on Saturday Night Live and watching in @-@ person the skills of performers including Andy Kaufman , Albert Brooks , John Belushi , Chevy Chase , and Dan Aykroyd .

The conflicts between Henson and the Saturday Night Live writers , The Land of Gorch segments were discontinued from production with the agreement of all parties . By the time Lorne Michaels asked one of his producers , " How do you fire the Muppets ? " , Henson 's staff had already begun focusing on producing The Muppet Show in London ; Oz was thankful for the move . The Muppet Show , which was launched in 1976 , featured new characters that were not previously seen on Saturday Night Live . Henson later said part of the reason he decided to stop producing the segments was to focus on traveling to England to work on The Muppet Show .

= = Characters = =

King Ploobis (performed by Jim Henson) ? the greedy and decorative King of the Land of Gorch . He is married to Queen Peuta but has been having an affair with his servant Vazh . King Ploobis is always seeking advice from The Mighty Favog .

Queen Peuta (performed by Alice Tweedie) ? the Queen of the Land of Gorch . She is married to King Ploobis . Due to King Ploobis having an affair with Vazh , Queen Peuta secretly has an affair with Scred . She has three feet and wears shoes that were made from the skins of the Gligs .

Wiss (performed by Richard Hunt) ? The son of King Ploobis and Queen Peuta making him the prince . He is shown to have an addiction to smoking .

Scred (performed by Jerry Nelson) ? King Ploobis ' right @-@ hand man and servant who is having an affair with Queen Peuta . Scred is always mistreated by King Ploobis .

Vazh (performed by Rhonda Hansome in the first appearance , Fran Brill in later appearances) ? King Ploobis ' lovely servant and mistress .

The Mighty Favog (performed by Frank Oz) ? A living statue who serves as the deity of the Land of Gorch . He would offer his advice to King Ploobis and the planet 's other inhabitants in exchange

for sacrifices .

= = List of episodes = =

= = Home media = =

The Land of Gorch was released on the Saturday Night Live season one DVD release in December 2006 .

= = Themes = =

In his essay " The Muppetry of Nightmares " , academic Michael J. Bernstein wrote that The Land of Gorch routines exemplified how disgustingly puppets could act , and illustrated the connection between the uncanny and odd behavior . He commented on the value of Henson 's contributions to Saturday Night Live within the artist 's larger corpus of work , and said none of Henson 's other creations were as profane or grotesque . Bernstein said these qualities made the characters a crucial part of the Muppet timeline .

Bernstein said audiences contemporaneous with the first season of Saturday Night Live were not ready for such characters . He said The Land of Gorch characters behaved so uncannily that audiences did not relate to them because they did not foresee hideous puppets behaving in such a mature manner . Bernstein said this was the reason the characters ' pithy one @-@ liner jokes succeeded .

According to Ben Underwood , the characters that appeared in The Land of Gorch were called " Muppets " by Henson and his crew , but diverged significantly from his other creations within the Muppet universe . Underwood said they exhibit a dichotomy of sweet and affectionate behavior while at the same time being disgusting .

Jason Segel , writer and star of the 2011 film The Muppets , likened Henson 's efforts with The Land of Gorch to the early struggles by Apple Inc. founder Steve Jobs with his burgeoning new company in its early years . Segel said the format did not work with Saturday Night Live because of its edgier tone ; " they had created a new world of sort of adult , darker Muppets to fit in with SNL and it didn 't quite work " .

= = Legacy = =

After the conclusion of The Land of Gorch , Henson and his team had learned a great deal from being involved with the production . They gained institutional knowledge about adapting and quickly creating a television program within a seven @-@ day period . He also gained valuable friendships with multiple celebrities through his work on Saturday Night Live . They were later able to use these skills and relationships on Henson 's next television venture , The Muppet Show .

In a 1982 interview with Knight @-@ Ridder Newspapers , Henson said ideas for his feature film The Dark Crystal originated from his efforts at character creation on Saturday Night Live . Henson told the Associated Press in 1982 that The Dark Crystal characters evolved directly from his Saturday Night Live creations . Henson described the evolutionary process from The Land of Gorch to Dark Crystal , saying that because The Land of Gorch was featured on late @-@ night television , it helped expand the scope of his puppets , including risqué behavior . He described the challenge that motivated him to further develop concepts from The Land of Gorch on Dark Crystal , saying his next motivation was to draft a universe of puppets for a feature film without humans .

During his work on Saturday Night Live , Henson began to see a vision for " a feature @-@ length , self @-@ sustaining puppetry world devoid of human presence " . According to Catriona McAra , " " evolutionary precursors " to The Dark Crystal were found within The Land of Gorch , including the idea of a royal family reliant upon spirituality . In their book Saturday Night : A Backstage History of Saturday Night Live , Doug Hill and Jeff Weingrad said The Land of Gorch produced the prototypes

for characters that would appear in *The Dark Crystal*. The Land of Gorch sketches were the first time Henson had used taxidermy eyeballs in one of his characters. He used this technique in *The Dark Crystal*. Henson said his experience on *Saturday Night Live* prompted him to investigate ways to make his creations more lifelike in appearance.

The Land of Gorch influenced later works within the Jim Henson universe as well, including the television show *Dinosaurs* produced by The Jim Henson Company. The first episode's story of *Dinosaurs* to feature a plot line supporting environmentalism had previously appeared in a similar version within The Land of Gorch. The Land of Gorch segment from the November 8, 1975 episode of *Saturday Night Live* hosted by Candice Bergen included such themes which were reused in *Dinosaurs*.

The puppets used in The Land of Gorch were archived by the Jim Henson Company in their historical collection. The Company held its first exhibition of characters in 1979 to coincide with the release of *The Muppet Movie*. Characters from The Land of Gorch were featured in this exhibition, which was held in the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. In 2006, Henson's Muppet character model "Scrod" was featured as a highlight of his body of work in the exhibit "Jim Henson: Performing Artist" at the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

In a 2011 appearance as host of *Saturday Night Live* while promoting his film *The Muppets*, Jason Segel mentioned The Land of Gorch in his opening monologue. In a follow-up interview, he was asked about the possibility of re-introducing The Land of Gorch to popular culture, and said, "I think that that is a reference that is probably lost to time ... They weren't even famous then". In 2013, writer Jay Fosgitt marketed to publishing company Archaia Entertainment the idea of reviving The Land of Gorch characters in comic book format with a new storyline.

= = Critical reception = =

Writing for *The A.V. Club*, Phil Dyess Nugent said "nobody wanted this shit on the show" became an in-joke among the *Saturday Night Live* staff. He said although he was confused about the reason the concept did not work for *Saturday Night Live*, he remembered skipping through the sketch to watch other parts of the episode. Writing for the same publication, Erik Adams called the sketches uninspired and one of the low points of Henson's working relationship with NBC. The *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote that The Land of Gorch characters appeared antithetical to Kermit the Frog and compared them to trolls.

USA Today television critic Robert Bianco mused as to why the characters were not successful, saying they did not land with the audience because of an imbalance between the initial appeal of the Muppets to youth over against the mature comedy used in Henson's other endeavors. Author Jake Austen said Henson's characters were "unappreciated Muppets". *Vogue* said the sketches feature "proto-Muppets" behaving oddly in a dystopian future world. Associated Press called the characters Muppets in a disturbing and horrifying context.

The *Economist* described Henson's *Saturday Night Live* characters as his odd children who were known to muse about aspects of philosophy. DVD Talk said The Land of Gorch was the most serious mistake from the first season of *Saturday Night Live*. The review also said the characters repeatedly lack humor and brought each episode to a dead stop because of the length of the sketches. Author Wesley Hyatt said the only redeeming scene from the sketches was a duet between Lily Tomlin and one of the characters, singing "I Got You Babe".

Michael J. Bernstein wondered why The Land of Gorch characters were not appreciated, saying they were unfunny, unintelligent, and devoid of redeeming characteristics. He said, "They are probably the most unlikable Muppets ever created". Bernstein attributed this notoriety to the *Saturday Night Live* writing staff rather than Jim Henson or Frank Oz. He said the staff's lack of motivation to produce imaginative writing contributed to bland dialogue between the characters.

In her essay "Emmet Otter's Jug-Band Christmas: The Gift of the Muppets", Catherine Edwards said The Land of Gorch sketches were a critical flop. Edwards interpreted this as a net benefit for fans of the Muppets because the failure of the skits resulted in Henson's next

successful venture , The Muppet Show .