

A Brief History of Slime

The Gooey Origins of The Green Stuff

I have never quite been able to put my finger on what it is about slime that I adore so much.

How can such a substance – unlike anything else on this earth – hold such a command over me?

Is it the colour? The texture? Perhaps an aesthetic that reminds me of the bygone, fever-dream days of my youth in the nineties?

Celebrities getting gloriously smothered and drenched in a delightfully neon-green gelatinous substance. Family viewing, and childhood memories of television shows ranging from *Funhouse* to the madness that was always present on *Nickelodeon* – hell, even its logo was a giant splat in a garish neon orange.

Even Noel Edmonds got in on the fun with his infamous sidekick Mr. Blobby and those legendary house parties.

With an upbringing such as this, is it any wonder that, as I approach my forties, I still have a deep affection for all things that drip and ooze?

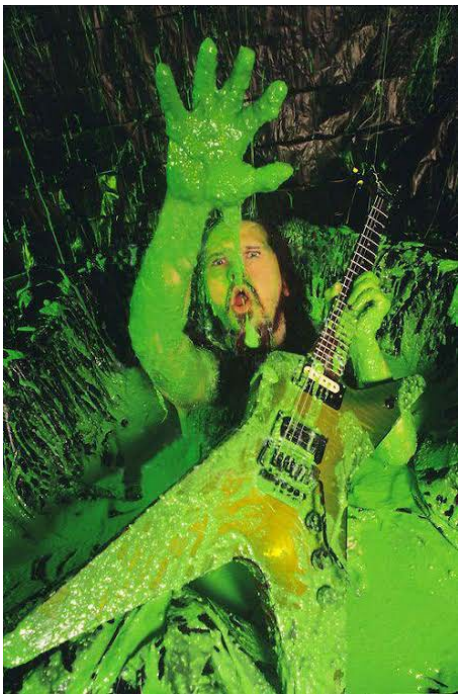
Neons are also among my favourite colours – something I attribute to slime!

Thrash metal remains my favourite genre of music – where nuclear and irradiated waste glows defiantly in the face of

potential apocalyptic annihilation, across album covers and stages.

The stuff has even left its impression on me as a guitarist, with two of my holy-grail guitars – both of which I play regularly – being the Washburn Dime 3 Slime and the Dean Razorback Slime Bumblebee.

Both were associated with Dimebag Darrell – the late, great guitarist of the heavy metal band *Pantera*.



Among the Dimebag guitar community, this earned me the rather left-field nickname of Slimebag. I, of course, couldn't be happier with such a name, leading me to joke that I am one of the many Lords of Slime.

But then again, something has been irking me. How could I possibly be a Lord of Slime, when there is something I do not truly know…

The origins of the green stuff…

I have incorporated slime so deeply into my life – from the clothing I wear to the small businesses I have run, including a dice-making business where I created polyhedral abominations emblazoned with horror font, neon contrasts and drippy pustule centres.



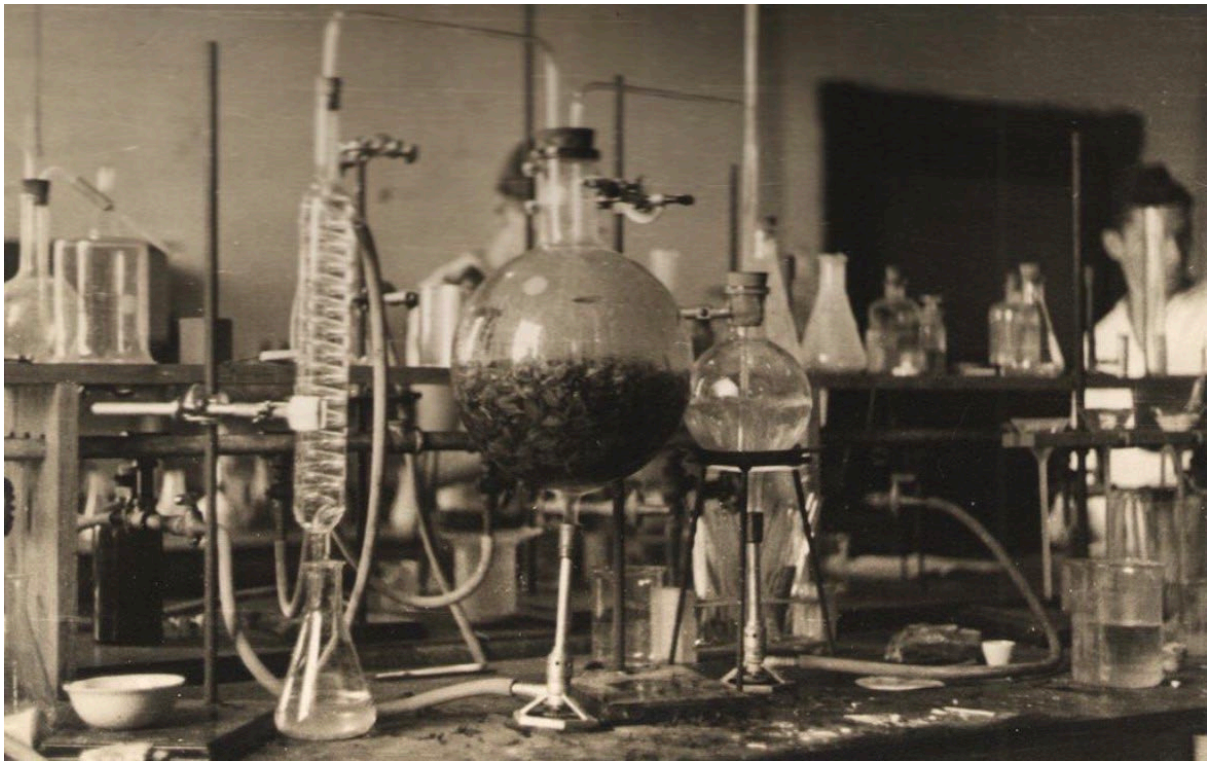
It's about time I rectified this blasphemy. For to be a Lord of something, you should at the very least know the landscape over which you profess to preside.

Don’t be shy now…

Come on a journey through culture with me…

And let’s dive on in - the slime is warm!

The Accidental Origins of Goo:



I was shocked to learn that our first stop on this journey to the origins of slime would take us Stateside, during the Second World War.

Japan’s invasion of Southeast Asia in 1942 effectively severed America’s access to around 90% of its natural rubber supply. This, of course, would prove to be a serious issue when it came to manufacturing equipment to equip troops on the frontline, as well as supplying other industries.

Wartime panic set in, and scientists did what they do best: experiment profusely in search of a solution.

Two scientists, working at separate locations, began their important work.

James Wright, working for General Electric, and Earl Warrick, working for Dow Corning, got stuck into their experiments.

They began experimenting with silicone – James with boric acid, and Earl with the assistance of Rob Roy McGregor with boric oxide - in an attempt to create a bouncy, stretchable synthetic compound that could replace their now cut-off natural rubber supply.

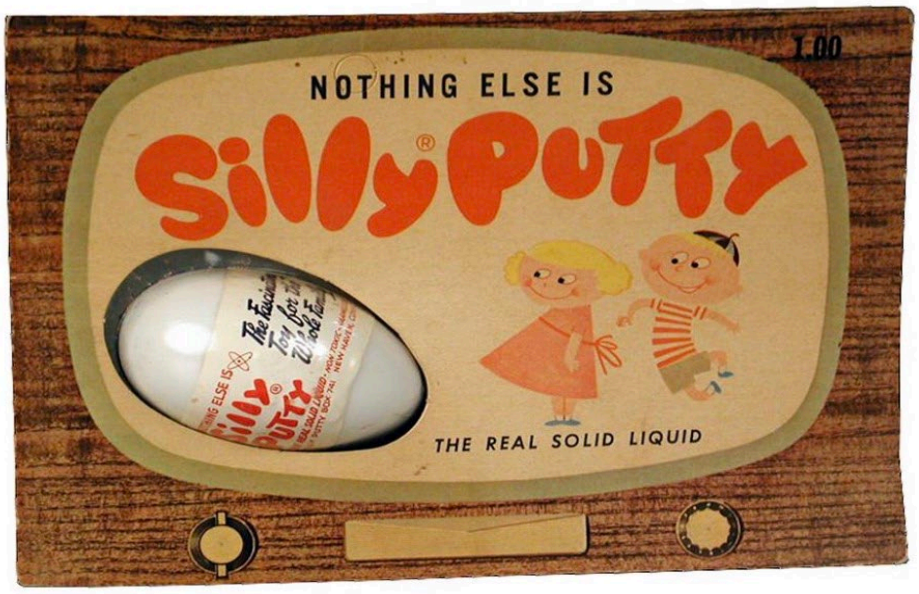
The substance that emerged was, sadly, unsuitable for its intended purpose. A disgusting oozy, messy and bouncy goop that had no chance of matching the strength and durability of natural rubber.

The poor blob was in no way fit to replace the conventional rubber boots of equipment that troops so desperately needed on the ground, let alone serve as a synthetic rubber substitute for any other equipment.

You could argue that pressing on and attempting to make any form of footwear out of this disgusting monstrosity would have left anyone wearing it looking as though they had already contracted trench foot…

The real discovery, however, was that these new synthetic materials, born from such chemical meddling, could actually be a lot of fun to play with…

Enter The Silly Putty:



The credit for this first publicly recognised slime discovery is, to this day, still hotly disputed.

Earl Warrick maintained that he and his colleague, Rob Roy McGregor, had secured the first patent for the bouncing putty – preceding James Wright's own patent application.

Crayola's own history, however, credits Wright with discovering the substance in 1943, officially making him the first Lord of Slime.

For the record, according to Carnegie Mellon University's historical research, it was established that Warrick and McGregor filed their patent application on the 30th of March 1943, which was granted in December 1947. James Wright developed a similar material independently and applied for his patent for his polymer creation in 1944. So, Warrick and McGregor's application did indeed precede Wright's.

In all seriousness, though, we've all heard of the Space Race. But how many of you are discovering, right now, that there was a race of slime?!

Not me…

Anyway, fast-forward to 1949, and enter toy store owner Ruth Fallgatter. At a social gathering - organised through New Haven's social and toy-trade circles - she was introduced to an experimental bouncing putty that was being playfully passed around. Immediately recognising the potential in something that had clearly entertained everyone in attendance, she reached out to her marketing consultant, Peter Hodgson, to discuss her discovery.

The plotting began shortly afterwards…

Their plan? To unleash this peculiar substance onto the market under the name *Silly Putty*.

Sales were initially strong, but Fallgatter eventually abandoned the venture – leaving Hodgson to seize the mantle and refuse to give up on the product.

A Lady of Slime came and went, leaving a lone Slime Lord to march onwards.

Hodgson just couldn't shake his vision for the synthetic material's potential.

Silly Putty got its big break when it featured in a New Yorker article, resulting in an astonishing 250,000 orders for eggs of the stuff within just three days.

The resilient goop even survived the Korean War, when silicone – a key ingredient in *Silly Putty* – was placed under rationing.

By 1961, *Silly Putty* had gone international, becoming a huge hit in the Soviet Union and across Europe.

But the plucky little polymer wasn't finished there… oh, no…

The sky was certainly no limit for the stuff, for in 1968 it broke free of Earth's atmosphere and entered lunar orbit in the company of the astronauts aboard Apollo 8

Not bad going for a laboratory accident…

Enter The Green Stuff:

As the 1960s drew to a close, humanity began to experience a significant cultural shift. One that grew out of the counterculture of the decade's latter years.

Humanity, it seemed, was desperate to peel away from the polished politeness of the mid-century. Rebellion was starting to take root. Post-Vietnam war cynicism stood firmly alongside hyper-commercialism as the entertainment and design industries began to adopt a powerful and cutting edge new ethos.

"Embrace the chaotic, the visceral, the tactile, and the disgusting"

Gross-out culture was the result – fuelled by the increasingly outlaw spirit of underground comix and the irreverent satire of publications such as *MAD Magazine.*

What was becoming popular and appealing to the masses had little to do with refined sensibilities. Entertainment was increasingly going for shock value, as boundaries started to be pushed further. Cinema caught up with the sweat-drenched, body-horror aesthetic, with characters such as Leatherface exploding onto the silver screen to the thunderous roar of chainsaws flecked with blood that you could almost smell.

The trend continued through the 1970s, reaching an unvarnished high point with the frat-house comedy *National Lampoon's Animal House* in 1978 – proving that gross-out comedy had found staying power alongside horror.

But just two years before John Belushi was stuffing his cheeks with mashed potato and pretending to be a giant zit, 1976 brought something entirely different…

Thanks to further weird experiments with polymers, and a desire to compete with another putty released by *Wham-O* called *Super Stuff* – a pink mouldable material with similar properties to *Silly Putty* – a company was about to provide subversive kids with the kind of toy they were desperate for.

After all, there was a desire to throw out the neat and polite toys. Porcelain dolls and plastic cars be damned! They were just too safe. Too clean…

The kids wanted something that embodied gross-out culture. Something outlandish!

After all, why should grown-ups have all the fun?

The stage was set, and unfortunately, *Silly Putty* was looking ready to exit stage left. The goo had certainly earned its status as a childhood classic, but therein lay the problem.

Being a classic doesn't always guarantee prestige. To kids, the very term can mean something dry and stale.

Enter something bolder. Weirder. Messier.

And neon green…



In February 1976, the toy giant *Mattel* launched what the kids craved.

Slime.

Gone was *Silly Putty's* subdued, flesh-coloured pink hue – replaced by something resembling radioactive toxicity. The stuff even came packaged in its own neon-green garbage can (or rubbish bin… if you're British like me).

Slime was pure gross-out culture personified.

The colour and packaging weren't just the key differences either, despite them being the first features to catch your eye. *Slime* was differently chemically too.

Silly Putty was famously known as a dry, bouncy silicone polymer. *Mattel's Slime*, however, was a non-Newtonian gel made primarily from guar gum – a plant-based thickening agent commonly used in food products, including ice cream. This was then cross-linked using sodium tetraborate.

The result?

A wet, clumsy, cold, clammy and disgustingly slippery sludge that could pour out of your hands like the overspill from a melting-down nuclear reactor.

There was no bouncing like *Silly Putty*, but who could care when you were occupied with squelching, spluttering, farting sounds escaping the suction created by pressing it between your fingers or jamming it into its container?

Mattel's Slime didn't just dwarf the competition; it completely redefined what ooze could be. Pushing the very boundaries of possibility. New releases followed to up the ante, with fake bugs, eyeballs and worms added to the mix.



They even went on to release *The Slime Monster* board game. A game that made *Monopoly* look every bit as pedestrian as property management sounds. It featured a plastic creature that oozed real slime onto the game pieces.

Brilliant!

If *Silly Putty* was a science demonstration toy, then *Slime* was Frankenstein's Monster. A version of him that allowed kids to get a feel for what his dead insides might genuinely feel like.

Slime changed the toy market, and its aesthetic began inspiring further generations of playful, gross rebellions across the entertainment world.

The next two decades were beginning to take shape, with slime playing a key part

The foundations were ready to be blown apart by the heroes of the 1980s, such as *The Garbage Pail Kids* and *Ghostbusters* – with Slimer being a case in point that this wretched stuff could even be seen as sentient.

Slime entered the supernatural pantheon as ectoplasm – the telltale sign that spooks, spectres and ghosts had once been nearby.

Monsters and mutants started finding their way to children in new ways.

And while these events unfolded, slime had already found its way into some of our homes…

Through the small screen that glowed gently in our living rooms…

The Golden Age of Goo and The Television Takeover:



Slime's dominance gave way to new ambitions for the green stuff. Ones that would see it leap from the toy shop and become a full-scale television phenomenon, ultimately defining an entire generation of children's entertainment.

Although people tend to attribute this cultural explosion to *Nickelodeon*, slime's television origins actually date back to 1979, with a show created by Roger Price called *You Can't Do That on Television*, airing on Canada's CJOH-TV in Ottawa.

The show contained a wonderfully bizarre premise. Whenever an actor uttered the phrase "I don't know", a bucket of green slime would come crashing down over their head.

This wasn't *Mattel's* patented recipe, though – far from it. This was a studio-brewed bastardisation. The original Canadian production experimented with oatmeal, green food colouring, and other ingredients, including shampoo. A far cry from the carefully engineered products that would eventually follow.

In 1981, *Nickelodeon* acquired the US broadcasting rights. By 1984, the show had become the network's highest-rated programme, with audiences tuning in throughout the week.

The key takeaway by the money hungry executives - that saw dollars replace their eyeballs - was that the audiences were being packed with kids who were desperate to see who was about to get slimed.

Thus, the *Nickelodeon* expansion began. Once the station had realised that slime was anything but a simple cheap gimmick mixed up on a television show, it became something else; an entirely new brand identity.

The only logical move the executives could think of, was to push the concept further, building an entire entertainment identity around the green stuff.

The recipe for *Nickelodeon's* slime was perfected with studio use hazards specifically in mind – such as the hot stage lighting. The prior ingredients of oatmeal, vanilla pudding, applesauce and green food colouring remained – but gelatine was added to ensure it would remain viscous enough for contestants to dive into, and crawl through, whilst also not staining their clothes beyond recognition – rather thoughtful when you think about it.

And in a rather wonderful full-circle moment, *Nickelodeon* would eventually find itself working with *Mattel* to bring its own commercially branded slime product, *GAK*, to the masses.

Unlike the earlier studio concoctions, *GAK* was an entirely different beast. *Mattel* had engineered a stretchy, colourful substance that could be squeezed, pulled, twisted and manipulated without immediately becoming a wardrobe casualty. Designed for play rather than simply being dumped over someone's head – the next evolution of slime coincided beautifully with the outpouring of programmes showcasing it.

The line up of shows and key events featuring slime as the centrepiece via *Nickelodeon* were as follows:

1986 – *Double Dare* premieres:

Physical challenges involved digging through, sliding across and generally getting covered in all manner of disgusting substances. Slime, however, would become one of the show's most recognisable features.



1988 – The Kids' Choice Awards

Celebrities in expensive clothes were no longer safe, and getting slimed became a Hollywood rite of passage.

1990 – Nickelodeon Studios Opens

The flagship studio opens at Universal Studios, Florida. The icing on the cake was its iconic Slime Geyser – an outdoor fountain that erupted with enormous quantities of glowing green water. A giant monument to *Nickelodeon's* new identity.



Damn, now that's taking your slime identity seriously.



1992 – *What Would You Do?* premieres:

Featuring the infamous Pie Coaster, Pie Pod and Wall of Stuff, audience members were now firmly in the firing line of *Nickelodeon's* increasingly outrageous approach to entertainment.

1995 – *Slime Time Live* premieres:



Nickelodeon's obsession with the green stuff enters a new millennium. Children could now compete in live games, interact with presenters and experience the full force of the slime treatment.

Alongside all of this, *Nickelodeon* continued expanding its toy empire. *GAK* was hitting the market at full force, with new variations appearing alongside entirely different products such as *Floam*. There were scented varieties to explore, and even *Solar GAK*, which brought a glow-in-the-dark twist to the increasingly bizarre world of goo.

The kids of the 90s – myself included – could well and truly consider themselves captured by a great wave of neon-green.

It was as if the movie *The Blob* had actually come to fruition – but with less deadly results.

Slime was no longer simply *Nickelodeon's* identity – it had become something that defined 90s childhood overall. A zeitgeist of vivid neon green and orange.

For kids, slime was more than a substance to get grossed out by. It represented anti-authority and empowerment. At school and at home – as with most adult-dominated spaces – any mess made by children was usually punished. But in the world of *Nickelodeon*, mess was rewarded. A glorious opportunity to stick it to the snooty, cleanliness-obsessed parents.

Watching A-listers, television hosts and other adults getting slimed was a complete inversion of the established power dynamic.

Slime also helped define the splatter-inspired visual aesthetic that became synonymous with much of the nineties. A

dripping, oozing and pulsating design language that could be seen across countless properties – from *Goosebumps* to *The Toxic Crusaders*. Clothing, toys and artwork were saturated with contrasting colours, fighting for attention in a glorious assault on the senses.

Slime was, and still is the living, breathing and physical embodiment of this high-contrast art style.

Slime helped make the world a place that kids were excited to participate in, where they could feel accepted – warts and all.

Almost every kid I knew growing up dreamed of being on a gameshow that featured the messy stuff.

Television became a bucket-list destination – with slime at home being the concession prize.

Growing up in that era, I was obsessed with all things slime. I suppose I still am…

I can remember messy fake laboratory kits where we would mix up our own polymer monstrosities. Launching batches of the stuff at each other in the garden. Experimenting by putting it into water balloons to see what would happen. Slime dripping down the fence panels, leaving a faint greasy stain.

Mothers would be devastated to see the imprint it would leave on the carpet…

Even the sweets we ate had slime as a centrepiece. Toys such as *Doctor Dreadful's Food Lab* allowed us to create horrid treats that would normally only have been welcomed at Halloween. Mixing up a storm to keep all our sisters well clear of our bedrooms.



It was a beautifully disgusting time to be a kid…

The Green Stuff Never Dies:



As our gentle, nostalgic gondola journey across the rivers of slime comes to a close, I feel it only right to examine this enduring substance and its mystifying hold over us.

Slime has endured for more than eighty years, and remains just as relevant today.

We have modern toy makers, communities and nerds all still going bonkers for the stuff.

In a world where technology is increasingly dominating childhood, neurodivergent children and those with sensory processing differences are finding comfort in its welcoming tactile properties. The goo is finding a place as a sensory play tool – which, considering its wartime origins, is almost poetic.

What is important to recognise is that slime is eternal.

An immortal polymer.

A chemical accident, born from the panic of the Second World War.

Somehow, it has morphed from there into a universal, multi-generational icon.

A creation that, deep down, emerged from humanity's ugliness. Yet, despite that, we cannot deny one simple truth: as long as slime exists, human hands will never stop touching it.

A substance that seamlessly bypasses the analytical part of our brains, unlocking something primal and instinctual – an urge to feel, have fun, rebel and, for just a moment, disconnect from thinking.

Slime is pure tactile anarchy disguised as the perfect nervous system reset.

Resisting definition – behaving neither quite like a solid nor a liquid, forever flipping off simple mechanics, mimicking biological life – yet remaining unaware, synthetic and entirely inanimate.

Slime blesses us with a chance to play with an impression of chaos – but without any of the mess… well, okay, sort of… Don't drop it on your mum's carpet… Remember!

As our lives get swallowed up by screens of flat glass, and we increasingly lose ourselves to sterile digital interfaces that hunger for our attention, we must learn to switch off and allow the raw, squishy feedback of slime to get louder.

A primal scream deep within us that yearns to squish some ooze!

We can try to fight it, but we crave the resistance, the cold and wet squelch of it…

As history trundles on, scientists will continue with their weird experiments in non-Newtonian physics, and I say that we salute the mad bastards.

Soft robotics, with materials capable of changing stiffness and adapting to their surroundings.

Dynamic impact protection.

Self-healing hydrogels.

The line between toy-store sludge and a high-tech sci-fi future is starting to blur again…

Empires are destined to crumble. Media trends rot. Viral crazes burn out.

Toys shall come and go…

But as long as humans exist, so too will their hands to squeeze that which will never live nor die.

Slime is eternal. It'll keep oozing forevermore, assuming whichever shape we choose to give it.

Signed off…

The next Lord of Slime,

Doc

EDITORS NOTE:

Following the release of this article, new items have hit The New Gonzo Journals Supply Depot over on our UK Etsy store.

Designs emblazoned with neon greens, pinks, yellows and oranges…

All dripping with oozing slime in nineties splatterpunk fashion.

But examining this playfulness with graphic design and merchandise, I now can't tell if I built it due to the article, or I wrote the article due to my obsession with creating a brand to support my work that screams defiantly; I Read **The New Gonzo Journal!**

Either way, my mind is so unrecognisably inhuman now that I am confident it is merely a polymer synthetic copy of a real human brain.

I feel a compulsion to build the nineties aesthetic clothing range I craved as a kid – whilst bolting it onto the outlaw stylings of New Age Gonzo Journalism…

Perhaps this is my version of a lab experiment going wrong… who knows?

What I do know, is this isn't just merchandise to me… it's a radioactive fashion statement. A fuck you to the regulars and their designer brands…

I would stop if I could, but the slime compels me…

Because the slime. Never. Dies.

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