

Sludge Rock

written by

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INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

The camera opens on Batson Sludge, reclining on a gaudy yellow couch in his recording studio. The room is a mix of industrial and opulent: gun-metal aluminum wall panels, dark blue painted walls, gold chandeliers, and a massive wall of Orange speakers. Batson's bald head has a spout of reddish gold hair. He is bobbing to the beat of the speakers.

BATSON

(adjusting microphone, gravelly, voice)
One, two, boo, testing. Good. Hi,
I'm the reclusive, insane music...
(beat) ...I'm The Batson Sludge. I'm
sitting on my gaudy yellow couch in
my gun-metal and navy-blue
recording studio.

UP ANGLE

We see a wall of speakers.

A Batson Sludge song is playing loudly.

BATSON

One wall is covered by giant
speakers made by Orange.

WALL OF SPEAKERS POV - BATSON SLUDGE

BATSON

My scratchy voice coming out of the
speakers like a man walking away
from death row, envelops me.

He walks to an audio control board, turns the volume down,
then returns to the couch.

BATSON (CONT'D)

I'm going to tell my story. Warning
— I tend to ramble. The purpose of
this film is to set the record
straight. I never imagined I would
own my own recording studio. I
worked hard to get to achieve this
lifestyle.

An interviewer (off-camera) asks:

INTERVIEWER
Batson, may I call you Batson?

BATSON
(nods)

INTERVIEWER
What was the most important day of your life?

BATSON
(Earnestly)
The marriage of my parents. Without them I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be anywhere.

Smiles.

BATSON (CONT'D)
The marriage of my parents was so doomed to fail, the church exploded.

CLOSE - BATSON

Funnels his hands together at his mouth.

BATSON (CONT'D)
Boom!

Laughs.

INTERVIEWER
What do you need to tell us today about yourself?

BATSON
There are tons of rumors about me. Some people think I live in a mental hospital and travel with an army of psychiatrists.

INTERVIEWER
Do you?

BATSON
(Serious)
I did live in a mental hospital. I don't travel with an army of psychiatrists.

(MORE)

BATSON (CONT'D)
Others claim I think I'm one of The Beatles. I am not.

INTERVIEWER
Tell us something traumatic that happened when you were a kid?

EXT. NORTH CAROLINA KUDZU FIELD - DAY

AIRIAL VIEW

Three-year-old Batson is surrounded by fire.

NARRATOR/BATSON
Our moving van pulled into a driveway. I got out of the truck and tried to keep out of the way. My mother said I was three years old and that I couldn't be left alone. My stepfather told her she could unload the truck by herself if she couldn't stop talking. I got out of the van and went to the back yard to play. Behind the yard there's nothing but kudzu. I walked into the kudzu. After the van was empty, my mother looked for me. Where are you, Batson? Come here. She yelled loudly. My stepfather said I was stupid and was hiding in the kudzu. He decided to set the kudzu on fire.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

INTERVIEWER
(With sympathy.)
That's awful. Anything else?

DOWN ANGLE

BATSON
I wasn't allowed to listen to rock music as a child. Now that I'm an adult....

INTERVIEWER
What was your childhood like?
Apparently, it wasn't all good.

BATSON
(Hauntingly)
A powder keg.

INTERVIEWER
Care to explain?

BATSON
The house could go from calm to
explosive in a second.

INTERVIEWER
What type of a child were you?

BATSON
(Seriously)
I was a human child.

INTERVIEWER
How would you describe your mental
state as a kid and then as a young
adult?

BATSON
I felt incomplete. I questioned
reality. Was my life someone else's
dream? Was I the one dreaming? Did
the universe exist only for me?

CLOSE - BATSON'S FOOT

He is tapping his foot nervously. He realizes what he's doing
and smiles. He stops tapping.

INTERVIEWER
(OFF CAMERA)
You asked some deep questions.
Would you like to talk about those
questions?

UP ANGLE

Batson inhales. Remembers.

EXT. LION CAGE - NIGHT

AIRIAL VIEW

Batson is a lion tamer holding a whip as hungry lions advance
toward him.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

CLOSE - BATSON

BATSON

Living in a powder keg is no fun. I
began to retreat into a safer
world. I wrote these lyrics.
*I considered if I could be a dream
someone else was dreaming. When
they awoke, oh no, the world I
would be leaving. Sometimes I would
switch, you see, I'm the dreamer,
and the world only existed for me.*

Batson strokes his funny hair spout.

CREDITS BEGIN.

CREDITS PLAY

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Down angle

Danny Sludge and Marie Fincher are getting married. Danny is in a cheap blue suit, and the bride is in a borrowed white gown. The pastor is reading the vows. Suddenly lightning strikes, the church and the steeple is on fire. The fire quickly spreads and the fire advances toward the wedding participants.

DANNY SLUDGE

I do.

He yells as the flames get closer.

MARIE FINCHER

I do.

UP ANGLE

The pastor, the bride, and the groom outrun the flames and exit through the church doors.

The church burns to the ground.

INT. HOUSE - DAY

THREE - YEAR - OLD BATSON POV - STEPFATHER

NARRATOR/BATSON

By the time I was three, my mother
had remarried. My stepfather played
games with me that were abusive.

Three-year-old Batson is standing in front of his stepfather.
The stepfather is on his knees.

STEPFATHER

Hit me in the nose.

BATSON

I can't.

STEPFATHER

Do it now.

STEPFATHER POV - THREE - YEAR - OLD BATSON

Batson runs toward his stepfather and swings for his nose.
The stepfather hits Batson in the face with the palm of his
hand. Batson falls backwards and cries.

STEPFATHER (CONT'D)

Again.

Batson gets up off the floor. He charges in swinging both
arms wildly. Stepfather picks him up and tosses him over his
shoulder.

EXT. NORTH CAROLINA RURAL NEIGHBORHOOD - EVENING

AIRIAL VIEW

We see small houses with small yards. We see men yelling at
their wives and kids.

NARRATOR/BATSON

I was raised in a few small towns
in North Carolina. I wish I could
say like a John Mellencamp song,
but it wasn't. I wasn't encouraged
to be anything. I couldn't be the
president. We never had a pink
house.

INT. ROLLS ROYCE FACTORY - NIGHT

SHADOW - POV - ASSEMBLY LINE

Rolls Royce Shadows roll off an assembly line. A shadow with no body watches.

NARRATOR/BATSON

The Rolls Royce Shadow was produced the year I was born. Nineteen Sixty-Five. I identified with the Shadow. I felt like the shadow in the car's name. Even as a small child, I never felt like a whole person. I thought of myself as a mere shadow of a person. I wondered if I was real. Was I a complete person?

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - DAY

AIRIAL VIEW

Seven - year - old Batson is in a fight and winning.

NARRATOR/BATSON

I stuttered as a child. Kids made fun of me. That caused me to become a fighter.

Batson is in a fight.

Batson wins the fight.

NARRATOR/BATSON (CONT'D)

When I entered jr. high, I realized my fighting day were over. The other boys had grown. I had not.

Batson gets beat up but gains respect.

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

AIRIAL VIEW

Batson is in a wrestling match.

NARRATOR/BATSON

I joined the wrestling team in high school. I was a good wrestler.

Batson pins his opponent.

EXT. RIDING TRAIL - DAY

MOVING WITH AND TRACKING

Sixteen - year - old Batson is riding a motorcycle on trails.

NARRATOR/BATSON

My father bought me a motorcycle
and changed my life.

MOVING WITH AND TRACKING

Twenty - year - old Batson jumps off a hill on his
motorcycle. He jumps twenty-five and crashes.

NARRATOR/BATSON (CONT'D)

I felt alive when I was riding too
fast. I was happy jumping twenty
feet off hills. Crashlanding made
me feel alive. My life away from
the motorcycle was hard.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

UP ANGLE

Batson drinks some water.

INTERVIEWER

(Offscreen)

Take your time.

Without warning

Batson gets up and walks off camera.

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)

Is something wrong? Should I tell
them to stop filming?

DOWN ANGLE

Batson walks back and sits down on the couch. He strokes his
beard.

INTERVIEWER (CONT'D)
It appears that we are stopping
here and will continue later.

Batson closes his eyes and appears to drift into a sound
sleep. The interviewer is going to signal the crew to shut it
down. Batson makes a keep it rolling gesture with his hand.

BATSON
(Eyes closed)
I'm good now. Just making a
decision.

UP ANGLE

Batson opens his eyes.

BATSON (CONT'D)
You can ask me about my decision.

INTERVIEWER
Okay, what did you make a decision
about?

BATSON
About everything.

Laughs.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

UP ANGLE

A motorcycle and its rider go off the edge of a mountain. It
is plummeting toward the rocks below.

NARRATOR/BATSON
When I was twenty I took my
motorcycle to a mountain to ride
the trails. I was going too fast
and I missed a turn. Well, I went
off the edge of the mountain. I was
plummeting to my death. That is
when something unexpected happened.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

UP ANGLE

The interviewer's chair turns. We only see the chair.

Batson laughs.

BATSON

That was like when people turn the radio down while driving through fog. Like they can see clearer if the radio volume is lower. Anyway, the motorcycle and I were now on the mountain trail. I crashed into a bush.

Batson throws his hands up.

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

AIRIAL VIEW

Motorcycle and rider slowly rise through the air and are placed back on the mountain trail. Batson crashes into a bush.

NARRATOR/BATSON

I don't know how that happened. At the time, I thought an alien from another dimension had saved me from death. I spent the next twenty years in therapy discussing the mountain incident. The MI, or mountain incident, made me lose my ability to cope with everyday life.

A brief flash of light.

BATSON (CONT'D)

(Quietly)

Yes, I saw something and no I didn't see an alien. I saw brightness right before I realized I was back on the trail. A thought was implanted into my brain. I knew he was from another dimension. I knew he used levitation and time manipulation. I knew he was called Angel. I knew he wasn't an angel and I knew he was my guardian.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

UP ANGLE

We see the interviewer in shadow.

INTERVIEWER
(Gleefully)
What happened next?

EXT. MOUNTAIN - DAY

AIRIAL VIEW

Twenty-year-old Batson is falling down a deep hole. The hole is spinning.

NARRATOR/BATSON
The wheels came off. I had another incident. I thought I was falling down a spinning hole.

He hits the bottom. And there are devils and angels fighting. The angels have light swords.

NARRATOR/BATSON (CONT'D)

I landed at the bottom. There were devils there that were attempting to escape into the atmosphere. There were angels there with light swords driving the devils back into the ground.

Vultures arrive and attempt to drag Batson away.

NARRATOR/BATSON (CONT'D)
Vultures attempted to drag me away.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

DOWN ANGLE

BATSON
Before this incident, my brain was like an old radio constantly scanning for a station. I was unable to resist running unlikely scenarios through my brain.

INTERVIEWER
Did you think you were mentally impaired?

BATSON

Yes. The abuse I saw and lived through, the knowledge of an alien guardian, and the questions about reality became too much to handle.

The interviewer motions to the camera crew.

INTERVIEWER

I feel we should stop here.

Batson laughs and makes a crazy face.

BATSON

Works for me. That wasn't the decision. Knock knock.

The interviewer is caught off guard and doesn't respond.

BATSON (CONT'D)

Knock knock.

INTERVIEWER

Who's there?

BATSON

Cow says.

INTERVIEWER

Cow says who?

BATSON

No silly, cow says moo.

The interviewer starts laughing and can't stop. Batson signals the crew to stop filming and recording.

The crew is uncertain what to do. The laughing continues.

The interviewer recovers.

INTERVIEWER

Big shift, from near death experience and devils to knock knock jokes. One minute a deep humble man, the next a six-year-old.

Batson appears to be calm and peaceful.

The crew go into action.

Batson moves one finger.

They stop.

BATSON

Stay. I did want to end on a high note of laughter. But now I don't.

The interviewer waits. Holding his breath.

INTERVIEWER

Film? Record?

Batson shrugs.

BATSON

Afraid so. The joke was the decision.

INTERVIEWER

(In shock)

The knock knock thing? The decision?

Batson smiles.

BATSON

Of course. It was getting dark in here.

INTERVIEWER

The studio? Inside your head?

BATSON

Probably.

INTERVIEWER

We done?

Batson stands and begins to box and imaginary opponent.

BATSON

Could be.

Batson walks off camera and doesn't come back.

The crew shuts everything down.

INTERVIEWER

(Puzzled)

That is some kind of a man. What kind?

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL DR. WINGDING'S OFFICE - DAY

POV OF WINDOW - BATSON AND DR. WINGDING

Batson is sitting in an upholstered chair talking to his psychiatrist.

DR. WINGDING

How are you today, Batson?

Batson is still in shock from being placed in the hospital. Fear shows on his face.

BATSON

The hospital is big and full of scary people just like the world.

DR. WINGDING

I'm your friend and I'll keep you safe. We all need friends and people to look after us. Is that why you think you saw a guardian angel?

BATSON

I did see something and something or someone did help me. If not a guardian angel, then who?

The doctor writes something down on his pad.

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL BATSON'S ROOM - NIGHT

POV OF KEYHOLE - BED

Batson is in bed.

BATSON

Angel, this is Batson, come in
Angel. I'll assume you are here.

A new thought comes to him. He sits up in bed.

BATSON (CONT'D)

Wow, what if I have a phantom brother? I must have had a twin with me in the womb. The twin was never born but was a part of me and helped me. Wow! If I have a guardian angel, which I do, then why can't I have a phantom brother?

(MORE)

BATSON (CONT'D)
 It would be silly and mentally
 imbalanced to say I have a guardian
 angel and deny I have a phantom
 brother. It would be the same to
 say I have a phantom brother and
 not a guardian angel. I have both.

He laughs and relaxes.

BATSON (CONT'D)
 I can't wait to tell Dr. Wingding.

That night, while Batson slept, the phantom brother appeared.
 Batson wakes up and sees him sitting on the bed. Batson
 doesn't jump or become afraid.

BATSON (CONT'D)
 Are you my phantom brother?

Phantom Brother has long hair and a beard. Both are purple.
 His face is long and angular.

BATSON (CONT'D)
 Can you not talk? I hope you can't
 talk, people here talk too much.

PHANTOM BROTHER/Z
 Z.

BATSON
 Hello Z, glad to meet you. I think
 I'm going to like you.

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL DR. WINGDING'S OFFICE - DAY
 UP ANGLE

DR. WINGDING
 Good morning, Batson. Having a good
 day?

Batson is cheerful and hyper.

BATSON
 I'm doing great. I'm not alone here
 anymore.

DR. WINGDING
 Puzzled.
 What changed?

BATSON

My brother is with me now. Here
arrived last night.

Very puzzled.

DR. WINGDING

You have a brother? I need to go
through your records again. I don't
recall a brother.

Batson stands.

BATSON

I met him last night for the first
time. He died in nineteen sixty-
five. But he is here with me now. I
don't mean right now. He's here in
the hospital somewhere. I saw him
in my room last night.

Concerned.

DR. WINGDING

I understand. He's here with you in
spirit. He's looking down at you
from heaven. Have you ever been
diagnosed as schizophrenic?

BATSON

(Sincere)

No, I've always been Baptist. They
immerse your body in water. The
Lutherans diagnose with sprinkling.
Not sure what the Schizophrenics
do.

A tornado hits the room. The doctor and Batson and everything
in the room spins with it except the desk. The twister gets
smaller and smaller. It lands on the desk. The room pops out
of it and returns to normal.

DR. WINGDING

You had a panic attack. Do you hear
voices?

BATSON

Yes.

DR. WINGDING

He leans forward.

What do they say?

Batson is now reclined on the couch.

BATSON

One voice said, do you hear voices?
Another voice said, yes. Then the
first voice said, what do they say?

DR. WINGDING

Those were our voices?

BATSON

Yes.

DR. WINGDING

Do you hear voices when you are
alone?

BATSON

Yes, when I talk on the phone.

The doctor pulls a wine bottle out of a dresser drawer. He
drinks out of the bottle.

DR. WINGDING

Tell me about your childhood.

BATSON

I lived in small towns in little
houses. It was me, my mother, my
half-sister, and my stepfather. My
real father and my mother had
divorced when I was little. The
stepfather was abusive. My mother
was abused. The stepfather would
lurk outside my bedroom door and
spy on me. When can I leave here?

The doctor puts the bottle away.

DR. WINGDING

When you prove to me you can cope
with everyday stresses and live in
reality. You're seeing phantom
brothers and alien guardians. How
can I release you the way you are
now?

Defiantly.

BATSON

I can't tell you something that
isn't true. I have a phantom
brother named Z.

(MORE)

BATSON (CONT'D)
 I have an alien guardian angel. I
 will prove it to you.

DR. WINGDING
 You could be here a long time.

INT. RECORDING STUDIO - DAY

RECORDING EQUIPMENT POV - BATSON

Batson is standing over the recording board.

BATSON
 While I was talking to my
 psychiatrist, Angel was hovering
 over the hospital. His real name
 was
 Astronomicalgalexystarburstbromidec
 ream. Angel didn't have a physical
 body. He was a steam-like material.
 He was made of smoke. He formed
 this smoke to resemble a body. He
 could levitate large objects and
 manipulate time. Looking back, I
 realize I invented Z. I was afraid
 to be alone. I needed Z. Z or
 Zenithbubblenightmoonholesodiumseas
 altzoinks, lived on a mountain with
 Angel. He liked to hang in a tree
 by his ankles.

Batson picks up an album.

CLOSE - ALBUM

I did an album named Z in a Tree.
 It's a great album.
Z in a tree, as happy as can be.
I'm in the psych ward; he's doing
better than me. He's on a mountain
top, I'm here until I rot. Z in a
tree. He's doing better than me.

UP ANGLE

BATSON (CONT'D)
 Angel liked to hover over fuel
 tanks. He mixed with the fumes. His
 favorite was Sunoco fumes. They
 were his version of magic markers.
 I never did street magic markers.
 (MORE)

BATSON (CONT'D)
I was addicted to prescription
magic markers.

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL BATSON'S ROOM - NIGHT

AIRIAL VIEW

Batson is watching tv. Z is there.

BATSON
I love watching The Flintstones.
The Great Gazoo helps Fred and
Barney. I also like Casper the
Friendly Ghost. He never meant to
scare anyone. Z you are my Great
Gazoo and My Casper.

Z
Thank you.

BATSON
I have to go see the doctor. Will
you come with me?

Z disappears.

INT. MENTAL HOSPITAL DR. WINGDING'S OFFICE - NIGHT

DR. WINGDING
How are you? Can tell me about your
childhood?

BATSON
I'm okay. When I was twelve, a
ghost lived in my house.