

RAVEN TALES - THE ANIMATED FEATURE

Excerpt from Act I

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This is a WIP screenplay based on the light-hearted children's television series "Raven Tales", which illustrates many of the Pacific Northwest Native tales of the trickster Elder, Raven. It is set in pre-contact times and opens in a village watched over by Raven, his brother Eagle, and their compatriot Frog. In the series, these three generally appear in their animal forms, which are roughly human-size.

PREVIOUSLY-INTRODUCED CHARACTERS:

RAVEN - The eldest Elder, the first being made by the Creator. Raven is the original trickster who is responsible for making much of the world and what's in it through his curiosity and his special brand of magic.

EAGLE - Raven's pompous, uptight brother, also an Elder, revered by the village people.

FROG - The mysterious, mystical storyteller Elder who has deep knowledge of things that were and things that are to come. Amphibians are revered due to their ability to live both in water and in air-- they are considered conduits to the spirit world.

CHIEF - The proud and fiercely independent chief of the village. He became disenchanted with the Elders and the traditional ways of his people after his wife, the village Shaman, gave her life in the line of duty, in keeping with the customs that have governed their culture for countless years. He has been left to father two daughters alone for several years.

UNSAT - The Chief's younger teenage daughter. Following in the footsteps of her mother, Unsat honours tradition and has a strong connection to the Earth and to her people's traditions. She has begun to have visions and will take the journey into Shamanism over the course of the story... much to her father's dismay.

XAYNA - Unsat's older sister-- the gem of the family. The film opens with her homecoming from visiting a nearby village, returning with her husband-to-be (QAL). Their wedding takes place early in the film.

Up to this point in the story, Raven has lost the faith and good will of his people with all of his antics. They have forgotten that he is responsible for the creation of land, for putting the sun and the moon in the sky, for bringing fresh water and the trees into being; they see him only as an annoying, avaricious trouble-maker. The villagers are fed up, and the Chief tells Raven he is no longer welcome there. Raven retreats to the forest, where he expresses his outrage at the humans' ingratitude to Eagle and Frog. Eagle is of the mind set this will all blow over. Like the weather, humans are changeable. Frog hints that Raven is paying the consequences for his actions. Raven, a little heart-sore, goes off by himself to figure out what to do...

EXT. TREES NEAR SHORE, LATE AFTERNOON

The sky is overcast, there is no wind. The forest comes close to the shore, tall trees standing overlooking the sea. At the base of a large cedar, we see pieces of pine cone dropping down one by one. Boom up to the top of the tree to find Raven sitting on a high branch, legs dangling over. He holds a pine cone, pulling off the "petals" one by one.

RAVEN

They love me. They love me not.
They love me. They love me not--

He hears SINGING, looks down. Unsat walks along the shore from the direction of the village. She works on something in her hands; a carving she whittles with a knife. As she sings an old traditional song to herself, the sun drops below the clouds, bathing the scene in warm afternoon light against the still-stormy sky.

Frog emerges from the forest, catches up to the girl. Raven watches and listens from the top of his tree; their path takes them close past him.

FROG

Lose your appetite?

UNSAT

I don't feel much like celebrating.

She continues singing, whittling. We see that it's the form of a raven. A faulty stroke breaks the figure in two. Unsat stops her song, her walk. Closes her fist over the pieces. Frog turns back to face her.

FROG

(re: the song)
Do you remember all of it?

UNSAT

I remember everything Mother taught me... the songs, the medicine, the stories...

FROG

Which stories? Tell me...

UNSAT

You know... The Origin of Fire, The War with the Sky, How Raven Made the Earth...

FROG

Hmmm. Yes, Raven.

Unsat glances down at her closed hand, sheathes her knife.

UNSAT

Frog, could you... you know... ask him to...

FROG

Apologize? (shakes her head) He is Raven.

Frog takes Unsat's hand, opens her fingers.

FROG

He is like this, though. Inside.

UNSAT

(quietly, to herself)
I would fix it, if I could.

FROG

Perhaps you will, child. Perhaps you will...

They continue walking out of earshot. Raven looks after them, then down at his pine cone. There is one "petal" left. He plucks it.

RAVEN

They love me!

EXT VILLAGE BEACH, NIGHT

Silvery fish bodies lie one upon another. They are piled high in the bottom of a canoe. Raven paddles the fully-laden boat across moonlit water. He is heading for the village and the celebratory bonfire.

Raven paddles the canoe right up onto the beach. Hears a loud cheer from the fire, smiles. Raven heaves the full canoe farther up the sand. Selects the fattest fish, heads toward the light and laughter.

As he approaches, light and shadows from the fire and celebrants cast on the wooden planks of the houses. Laughter, as one of the shadows forms the shape of Raven. We see a snippet of the earlier scene re-enacted, when Raven [does whatever he does that resulted in the Chief kicking him out of the village].

Raven sees this, hesitates. Sneaks closer to watch from behind some driftwood.

The shadow of the Chief approaches Shadow-Raven, chastising him. There is more laughter. The Shadow-Chief points away, and Shadow-Raven walks out of the scene. Applause and cheers.

VILLAGER

Here's to the Chief!

VILLAGER CHORUS

- Yeah, we're free!
- Way to go!
- No more tricks!~, Etc.

The real Chief stands up, enjoying the adulation. Raven turns away, flops down in the sand. Looks at the fish in his lap.

RAVEN

(after a beat; re: the
fish)

All that work...

He eats the fish in one gulp, then pulls out the skeleton. Eagle alights.

EAGLE

So *that's* where my catch went!
Raven, why did you steal my fish?

Raven stands, brushes himself off. Swiftly pulls Eagle out of earshot of the celebration, back toward the canoe.

RAVEN

I didn't *steal* them, I was--

EAGLE

Borrowing? What for? A peace offering? (beat) Are you going to apolo--

RAVEN

No. I was... testing out this canoe. Checking its seaworthiness, you know. Just... trying to be helpful.

EAGLE

(suspicious)

That sounds a lot like work.

RAVEN

Well, I...

EAGLE

You hate work.

RAVEN

I...

Eagle feels his forehead, checks his pulse, pulls out his tongue for examination. Raven jerks away, irritated.

RAVEN

Alright, alright. I'm going away.

EAGLE

But we went over this, Raven. They'll come around. They're *people*. They change.

Raven starts pacing back and forth alongside the canoe. Grabs and eats a fish off the pile with each pass.

RAVEN

(trying to sound careless)

It's been a long while since I've had an adventure anyway. Getting a little restless, you know? Time to get out, see some sights...

EAGLE

What about your promise?

RAVEN

What promise?

EAGLE
 (gesturing toward the
 villagers)
 The "I'll-watch-over-them-for-the-
 duration-of-my-time-in-this-
 incarnation" promise, remember?

RAVEN
 Oh.

Raven stops pacing.

RAVEN
 I had my feathers crossed. (beat)
 Listen, thanks for the fish. You
 can have them back now. I've got
 to.. uh... Pack.

EAGLE
 Brother.

RAVEN
 (uncomfortable)
 What?

EAGLE
 I'll take care of the village.

RAVEN
 (beat)
 Good. That's good.

EAGLE
 Brother.

RAVEN
 What?!

EAGLE
 Will you come back?

RAVEN
 Uh...

More laughter from the celebration. Raven glances that way,
 then back to Eagle.

RAVEN
 Of course I will. What a stupid
 question.

Gets ready to take off.

EAGLE

Brother.

RAVEN

WHAT!

EAGLE

Where are you going?

Raven spreads his wings, springs into the sky.

RAVEN

(calling back over his
shoulder)

Now *that's* a good question,
Brother.

He flies off. Eagle watches him for a beat, then crosses over to the canoe. It's full of fish skeletons; not a single fish left. He sighs.

EXT FROG'S BOG, NIGHT

The camera booms down through drippy, mossy trees silhouetted against the cloud-shrouded moon. It comes down to water level in a bog of interconnected ponds. Large tree roots arch over the water.

Frog sits on a mossy landing in front of her cave at the water's edge. She leans out over the water. We see her reflection as she peers into the depths, considering something. The reflection shatters as she dunks a soup ladle into the pond. Pulls it out full of algae and pond goo. She plunks this into her soup pot, which is simmering over a small fire behind her.

She stirs the pot. Tastes it. Looks in. The soup settles, clears to show a vision of the endless sea. Raven drifts in a canoe-- it is the image we saw at the beginning of the film.

FROG

(O.S., re: Raven)

Hmmm, needs seasoning, I think.

The image is disrupted by dried herbs dropped on the surface. Frog stirs these in. Now the pot reflects just the sky. Raven flies overhead.

Frog continues to putter at the soup pot. Raven sneaks up, sure he has landed undetected.

Frog turns to tend to something else and Raven slips in for a taste of the soup. It's so awful, he gags and can't stop from making noise.

Frog thumps him on the head with the ladle.

RAVEN

Ow! Is that any way to say
goodbye?

Frog just looks at him.

RAVEN

This is the part where you're
supposed to act surprised that I'm
leaving, beg me to stay, you know,
tears, drama.

Frog continues to look at him.

RAVEN

You knew I was leaving. (beat)
Well, good. We can skip all the
drama and get to the good stuff.
Which is not the soup, by the way.
Here, gimme that.

He takes the ladle and starts bustling around the soup pot, throwing in ingredients, tasting, correcting.

RAVEN

(smacking his lips)
Better. So. (pours himself a bowl)
Where am I going?

FROG

It depends what you're looking for.

RAVEN

What I'm looking for?! (sloshing
soup over his wing) Ow. Oooh. How
should I know?

He blows on the bowl, then slurps down the soup.

FROG

Raven, what do you want?

Raven tosses aside the bowl, gets up, agitated.

RAVEN

DIRECTIONS! Specifics, you know.

He goes into her cave.

RAVEN

Don't you have anything useful in here? A compass? What about a map--
- got any vision-maps?

He starts rummaging through her things, throwing stuff out onto the mossy ground. [Insert funny list of items here-- Perhaps something that is a bit of a secret for her.]

Frog picks up [something].

FROG

There is a better way.

Raven pauses. Frog looks down at [the object], hesitates.

RAVEN

What? What is it?

FROG

(quietly)
Lick my back.

RAVEN

WHAT?

FROG

Lick my back.

RAVEN

(coming out of the cave)
You can't be serious.

She turns her back to him. Looks over one shoulder.

FROG

Just do it.

Reluctantly, Raven leans over and briefly touches his tongue to her back. Makes a grimace.

FROG

That is not a lick. Unless you don't want my help...

Raven steels himself, then properly gives Frog a big, wet lick on her back.

RAVEN

(talking with his tongue sticking out)
Uch, Thog. Thith ith jutht tebbibble...

FROG

Yes, well... Now spit.

Raven spits on the ground, then runs his wings over his tongue to get the taste off to no avail. He grabs some leaves and scrubs at his tongue, then turns away to gulp down the entire soup pot.

FROG

Raven.

A small pearl lies among the wet leaves.

Raven picks it up with his wingtips.

FROG

This is the pearl of your heart's desire. It will lead you to what you're seeking.

RAVEN

Wow. That's like the first time I've heard a direct answer out of you. Huh. And all it took was a little licking.

Frog grimaces, starts picking up all the stuff Raven tossed out of her cave. Raven looks back down at the pearl. We see it close up in his wingtips.

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT OPEN OCEAN, MORNING

Raven turns the pearl over in his wingtips. It is glowing subtly. He looks up: empty sky. Out: empty water. Down: empty ocean. Behind him: the distant land he came from. This galvanizes him into action. He wedges the pearl into a notch in the bow of the boat. Picks up his paddle, starts paddling.

(END SCENE)