

*A visit to the houseboat ...*

“Well, since we are early, Owl Man, and not far away, perhaps I could show you some notes I made last night and this morning. Mostly they deal with the subject of Sal, but, interestingly enough, Fex and Coo began popping up as well.”

“Interesting, indeed! I’m so glad you’ve made these notes, Heron Man. If the characters we’ve barely met are “popping up” already, it sounds like they’ve already gained a degree of autonomy. We don’t want them to get too much of a head-start on us,” said the Owl, “although, if they did, I’m not sure how much of a ‘choice’ we’d have in the matter.”

“You’re undoubtedly right, Owl Man. Take, for example, the fact that Fex apparently *owns* this houseboat on Lake Union. He’s not renting it. Who would have thought? He’s only appeared in one scene and already he owns property in the City of Seattle—and waterfront real estate here doesn’t come cheap, even if it is a houseboat.”

“That’s for sure,” said Owl Man, who had considerable knowledge about such things.

Heron Man added, “Of course, we haven’t checked with City Hall to verify whether a legitimate deed has been filed, but there’s no doubt that the barge sitting just down the ramp from us in Berth #27 belongs to *someone*, and I’ll lay odds that Fex’s name is on that warranty deed or title—whatever it’s called.”

“Exactly my point,” said the Owl.

As Heron Man rummaged through his leather briefcase, his mind was still a-jumble, but he had a basic feeling for how the “notes” were shaping up.

“OK,” he said to the Owl. “We both met Sal, Fex and Coo, for the first time, two days ago at Tully’s. Already, three things are obvious: Sal plays his cards “close to the chest”; Fex also tries to play things tight, but he has trouble not broadcasting his opinions to the world-at-large; Coo prefers being a blank cipher. For the moment, at least, Sal seems more covert, convoluted and—interesting.

“So, I did some research on him last night and turned up some interesting tidbits. Safe to say there’s more to Sal than meets the eye.”

“Let me see what you came up with, Heron. The more facts we can amass on this crew of characters, the better. We don’t really know what we’ll be dealing with when we enter that

houseboat. It's all a big mystery at this point. Who knows what lurks inside?"

"Certainly not I. That's why I began to research Sal a bit."

At this point, Heron Man handed Owl Man a sheaf of printed notes. They had plenty of time before their scheduled meeting, so Owl Man eagerly reached for the papers.

Before Heron Man surrendered them, however, he warned Owl Man that what he was about to read should be held in strictest confidence, because only the principals involved knew about the facts that Heron Man had uncovered.

"Understood," said Owl Man. It was all he needed to say.