

A Book Review of Sorts Lawrence Block's "Keller's Fedora" By Stan Cronwall

It has been three years since we have had new book from Lawrence Block on the latest adventures of stamp collector and free-lance "hit man" Keller. Block continues to be a prolific writer keeping three different series all going at the same time.

A lot has happened to Keller in the interim. He left New York City moving to New Orleans, changed his name, got married, and has a young daughter. Keller has not taken a freelance contract in many years, but instead has stayed on the straight and narrow flipping houses. He and his partner buy up houses, do the clean-up and a lot of the fix-up work, and hire skilled tradesmen where needed. The houses and other properties are then sold hopefully at a profit.

However, that all came to an abrupt halt when hurricane Katrina devastated the city and surrounding area.

The days of flipping houses in New Orleans were gone at least temporarily. However, Keller had salted away enough in the way of funds from his freelancing days to continue adding to his worldwide stamp collection. Recall that his collection starts with the very first issues but like many collectors including some members of NSSS stops after 1940.

Gradually Keller and his work partner started buying post-Katrina salvageable houses, repairing the storm damage and re-selling them.

Out of the blue he gets a call from the past. The woman who called on him to take care of freelance hits has a job if he wants to get back in the game. It's always nice to have some additional cash to make additions to his collection, so he accepts.

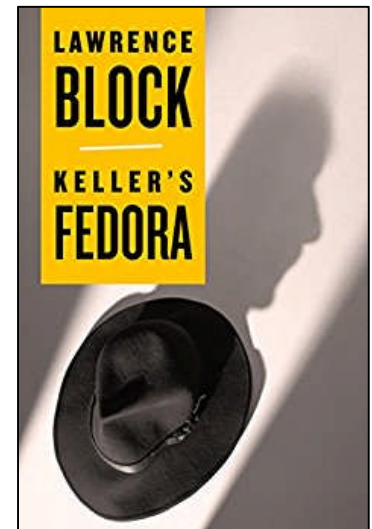
The story has a few twists. The hit is to be on someone who is having an affair with the wife of a wealthy financial guy in the Chicago area. The husband has hired the hit to be carried out on his wife's lover, but not the wife. One problem, he doesn't know who lover-boy is. Keller has no name for his target.

Our hit man suddenly has two jobs. First, figure out who the target is, and then develop and execute (pardon the pun) a plan to take him out. This where the book title comes into play. Keller needs to be a sleuth like Sam Spade, or Philip Marlowe. He decides to buy a suitable hat, a dark gray Fedora. Think Bogart in the "Maltese Falcon".

But before the sleuthing can begin, our newly minted detective must get himself to Chicago. Anytime you fly these days, your name and possibly even your likeness will be added to at least three data banks that are tracking everyone. That probably isn't true of trains . . . yet. To maintain a low profile, our man buys a ticket under another name on a train from New Orleans to Chicago – the *City of New Orleans*. As the cliché goes, "back in the day" this was a classy way to travel. All the fine trains had names like the Twentieth Century Limited, Empire Builder, the Santa Fe Chiefs, the Sunset Limited and so many others. The *City of New Orleans* has been immortalized in song by Arlo Guthrie. You know him – he's Woody's boy.

(As a child, during World War II, my mother took my younger sister and me on that train to Alabama to live for a while in some tiny back water town with dirt streets. We traveled with another Chicagoland area family, but all the principals have assumed room temperature so I'll probably never know why we were there. The fathers were too old for the services but had jobs in Washington, D.C. I don't remember much about the train but it was an adventure for a six or seven year old boy.)

I won't tell you any more about the book other than our man uses a very unusual weapon on his prime target, and delivers a bonus to the person who originally brought the assignment.



This book is a fast read. I feared that given the age of the author that he might use this story to put Keller “on ice” permanently. Apparently not. Sooo, if author Lawrence Block is still alive and taking nourishment, we can expect another “hit man” yarn in about two or three years. Personally, I can’t wait.

Anyone who wants to borrow “Keller’s Fedora” please see me.

Stan Cronwall's collecting interests include Germany: Third Reich 1933-45 and the areas it occupied (stamps covers & cards). He also collects U.S. World War II Patriotic Covers and Cards; Civil War Patriotic Covers (both U.S. and CSA); U.S Naval Covers; DDR stamps; and, Post WW II Soviet Zone Hitler Head Obliteration stamps, covers & cards.