A Ll you need to write a Nero Wolfe mystery story is seven days, a week, and a novella, or thirty-eight days, if it is to be a full-length novel. You put down a few words a day, preferably in the afternoon, for that is the more congenial to work than the morning. And, of course, it doesn't hurt the product if, when writing a Nero Wolfe mystery, you happen to be Rex Stout.

Mr. Stout puts out two shorts and a long each year, "The Golden Spider" (see Crim-inals at Large, page 221) being the most recent of the longs. Any reasonably sound statisti- cian would say that a figure like that is a writer only sixty of the 365 days. This would have the charm of a good round figure, but would not be quite exact.

For Mr. Stout suffers from hu- man frailties, and human frailties will break round figures.

"Those are working days only," he remarks, "not elapsed time. Sometimes something comes along like the World Series and those days immediately are not.

While Mr. Stout may hold time pretty much in the palm of his hand—World Se- ries excepted—his working devices otherwise sound eddily haphazard. With detective fiction depending as it does on plots and logical sequences, the proprietor of the agency might well be ex- pected to work from de- tailed and involved charts and diagrams, as well as from a cup- board filled with files of poisoned bottles. Not Mr. Stout. His interest in poi- son is less than his interest in tomatoes, and he takes his plots as they come.

If you're writing a Nero Wolfe, he said, "someone from the outside has to make the contact. I don't know how it hap- pens. In this last story, it's a boy. But there's no particular reason.

"Before starting, I do put up in front of me a handwritten list of the characters, but I've never written out a single word of any plot. "The plots come when I'm shaving, washing, writing, or putting around. Sometimes I think of them for three weeks, sometimes for three days. If you keep the main facts firmly in mind, and don't let anything confuse you, you can move around freely.

That, of course, is simple—if you're Rex Stout, then it goes on even more casually. "I suppose almost all of my Nero Wolfe stories are subcon- scious," he said. "When I sit down at the typewriter I'm pleasantly surprised, and some- times shocked, to find four- fifths of it is already there.

Each day before I start, I read what I wrote the day be- fore. Never anything from the unfortunat- est single day. I've heard that some writers claim to reread the whole thing each day. That's impossible. When you get near the end, there wouldn't be time for anything but shaving.

"I never re-read when I'm writing. Any kind of fic- tion is a sort of explosion. When the explosion has taken place, there's no use going around looking at the debris.

What about characters, the Nero Wolfe, Inspector Czernik, the Archduke and other people, everywhere in books?

"There are no kinds of characters in all fiction, the born and the synthetic," he said. "If the writer has to ask him- self questions—is he tall, is he short?—he had better quit. Take

such a character as, say, Tarzan. He was a born character. His re- sponse to some- thing in Bur- roughs. Dashiell O'Hara was a born character."

As to Nero Wolfe, himself, he was suggested by a real character. "It is the $4 ques- tion," and is un- evitable. Mr. Stout probably is sick of hearing it. "No one con- sciously," he said, "Alec Woollcott used to be the model, but not really.

Nero Wolfe and his creator have certain traits in com- mon, but also many grave dis- similarities. Both are intense gardeners, although this year, anyway, Nero's collection of orchids is better of the two. Both are pleasant talkers, using the king's rather than Spillane's English. Bluebeard is not in Nero's Wolfe, and sits, Mr. Stout is thin, wily. Nero likes gingerale of all kinds. Food, Mr. Stout eats, too, but sparingly. Nero is a New Yorker with a house near the Hudson; his creator lives on a hill along the Danbury-Brewer great di- vide.

As noted, he writes in the afternoon. This is because "it takes me two, three, four hours to wake up." The mornings go into watering plants, pruning trees, experimenting with new writers of indoor vegetable gardens. Recently he finished a novella, and was able to re- mark that he wouldn't do any writing for three or four months. This does not mean he will write tomorrow, however. He is president of the Authors' League, and there is plenty go- ing on there.

Two novelettes and a novel a year, two shorts and a long each. The novella is "Someone—Plautub, was it? —put up as his motto, 'the daily paper.' ""I could just put up, the annual detective story appears annu- ally."