



THE LIFE OF THIS s-f writer is made difficult by trying to work at home, with children on all sides. Why not rent a studio or office? This brings us to the central problem of the writer. Loneliness. That, all writers will admit, is what gets you down; in my case, it hit in about by my 8th year of selling, when it was already too late to turn back. No occupation that I know is so lonely; imagine locking yourself in a room at 9 in the morning, seeing no one, actually avoiding people wherever possible - and yet all the time being consumed by a genuine passion to know all there is to know about people, thinking constantly about people: what makes them tick, how such-and-such a person would say a certain phrase, if he'd say that phrase at all. It's a condition in which you're forced to occupy yourself with imaginary people instead of real ones...which is okay for very young children and schizophrenics, but hard on a person with a wife and 4 kids trying to earn a living. It's a sort of grim, deliberate regression of the psyche which takes place each day; you must break with the reality principle, go into your own mind, become engrossed there. And then all at once the phone's ringing, and you have to abandon your struggle - which you do not want to do anyhow, but know you must. So reality, in all its tiny details, conspires with your unconscious to bring about what you dread the most: writer's block. I've had it hit me for six months, been unable to write, even a letter to a Friend from January to June or even to August. No one knows what causes it, but every solution from adultery [sic] to drink to suicide has been attempted (not to mention psychoanalysis or psychosis). I have no solution, but frankly, having suffered several prolonged blocks, I would - if I could go back in time - try another profession. I can't stand the dry periods...although it is wonderful when once, after months, you suddenly get hot once more and can produce.

Don't take this too seriously, because I've talked to other writers and none of them seem to be as afflicted with this as I am. I am much less disciplined than most writers - I depend on inspiration, on my unconscious; I am not rational or deliberate about how I work. Like Van Vogt, my stuff either comes off or it doesn't - as compared to Heinlein or Poul Anderson who are deliberate, conscious, controlled. You might fall somewhere in the middle or at my end or Poul's end. You'd just have to try and find out - but in any case, let me wind up by saying: write all you can, every minute you can, about every kind of thing. Write and write. And don't read books on it, don't take writing courses. DO read great writers like James Joyce and Pascal and Styron and Herb Gold and Philip Roth. When you know you've done a good piece - that's it. Not getting into print but knowing you've been successful; you've written something new and good, - Philip K. Dick.