Saturday, September 24, 4:25-5:25 pm

**Pacing and Narrative Arc: Key Points**

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**Visual Approach:** Narrative arc follows the progression of plot line from opening to close, a climbing curve that reaches its zenith near the end of the novel or story.

 — A closer look at the curve reveals peaks and valleys, representing scenes of deep tension and conflict mixed in with others that move at a slower pace.

 — For multi-book projects, each installment should start at a slightly higher tension level and reach a higher peak than the last, so that the series arc mirrors what we would expect from the arc of a single volume.

**Conceptual Approach:** Think of a novel as a piece of music, one with ups and downs, *Adagios* and *Allegros*. We don’t want every passage to sound the same. We want to vary the dynamics.

 — Musical thinking also helps with scene transitions. Sometimes a scene or chapter ends with something resolved, like a musical phrase that hits the expected ending note, giving a sense of closure. Other scenes and chapters, end without that resolution, on a note that leaves readers wanting more. These endings ramp up tension and impel readers to turn the page and keep reading. Obviously, we want lots of the latter, but we also want some balance.

 — Musical thinking helps with action scenes versus slower ones. Just as the music in a movie turns staccato and quick in action scenes, so should our prose be more succinct, more direct, relying on shorter, sharper sentences when we write action. Think of prose as the soundtrack of our stories.

**Pragmatic Approach:** Remember that narrative arc doesn’t happen in a vacuum. We want our narrative and character arcs to overlap, to reach their zeniths at the same time. Our protagonists should overcome their obstacles and come into their power — whatever that might mean — as the plot reaches its climax.

 — All scenes should have more than one purpose. **Vernor’s (Vinge) Law**: As writers we do three things. 1) Develop character; 2) advance our plot; 3) convey background information. Every scene should do AT LEAST two of these, preferably all three.

 — Remember that while narrative arc climbs, it should climb gradually. We don’t want to rush our narratives (a common mistake). Be patient and build a foundation for all that will come.