

TENSION

Tension is a very crucial element of any novel, whatever the genre, because you can't have a story so bland that nothing happens or worries the reader, or you'll not be giving your readers any reason to turn the page. However, creating tension is a very complex task.

There are a few points you might like to bear in mind when trying to inject tension into your tale.

1. FIRST HINT

If you want to create tension about some plot element, don't tell everything up front. In fact, don't tell anything until you have to! Keep the reader waiting and dribble the information out with a miser's hand.

One of the most common mistakes people make when they first start writing is to tell too much too soon, because they are terrified of people not understanding the complexities of the story. Trust your readers. They'll understand. When polishing my novels, I still often move scenes in order to postpone giving information till later in the book - which improves the tension. It's so easy to do with a computer.

2. SECOND HINT

Surprise your reader, in small ways and large. Do not give them what they expect at every point. Put in twists and turns. Even a minor surprise can work wonders.

3. THIRD HINT

Sometimes you can use time to enhance tension. Have the characters waiting for something, as well as keeping the readers waiting for information. That ticking clock can be a powerful tool.

4. FOURTH HINT

Make sure your readers know or suspect more than the main characters do, then they can agonise in advance for them and pray they won't fall into traps - which the characters will sometimes do, naturally. But at other times, you can use the surprise element previously mentioned to allow the character to avoid a trap in a totally unexpected way.

5. FIFTH HINT

Interrupt the action and leave the reader in suspense by stopping at a tense moment and switching to some other part of the story, before later returning to the resolution of the particular cause for tension. To give a simplistic example, Mary may be driving along when her brakes fail and she starts to skid and everything goes black. Switch to the person who is waiting for her, wondering why she is so late. Then switch to the hospital where she is being treated. You've eked out the tension and had the reader breathlessly waiting to see if Mary survived.

6. SIXTH HINT

Variety is the spice of life - in creating tension too. Don't keep doing the same old thing.

CONCLUSION

I hope at least some of these hints will be of use to you. Keep watching this section of my web page for future articles.