

Hardwired: Marlowe 3.0 analysis

Following is the Marlowe analysis of Hardwired by Meredith Wild. We've combined all the sections of the report into a single PDF for demo purposes only — the analysis for each manuscript is located in the Author Dashboard by Authors A.I. at <https://authors.ai/author-dashboard>. You'll find the dashboard much more useful in refining your manuscript than a static report.

Premise

A recent Harvard graduate building a fashion social network gets caught in a dangerous love affair with a billionaire hacker whose dark past threatens to destroy everything she's worked for.

Genre & story type

Erotic Romance with elements of Contemporary Romance, Romantic Suspense, New Adult Romance, and Billionaire Romance. The story also contains elements of the following:

- Contemporary Fiction
- Tech/Startup Fiction
- Psychological Drama
- Family Drama
- Sexual/BDSM Elements
- Revenge/Vendetta Plot
- Political Intrigue
- Coming-of-Age Elements
- Business/Corporate Drama
- Hacker/Cyberthriller Elements

Overall assessment

This is a sexually explicit contemporary romance featuring a complex power dynamic between a driven entrepreneur and a wealthy, controlling tech mogul. The story targets adult readers who enjoy steamy romance with high-stakes business drama and psychological complexity.

The novel succeeds in creating compelling sexual tension and features well-developed protagonists with clear motivations and believable chemistry. The business world backdrop adds authenticity and stakes beyond the romantic plot. However, the story can become even stronger by incorporating the suggested refinements set out in this report, particularly regarding pacing, character development consistency, and thematic depth.

Story strengths

Here are some of the most noteworthy strengths that contribute to your story's overall effectiveness and reader appeal.

1. **Strong protagonist voice:** Erica's first-person narration creates an intimate connection with readers while maintaining her intelligence and agency despite vulnerable situations.
2. **Authentic business world:** The tech startup environment feels realistic and provides meaningful stakes beyond the romance, grounding the story in a contemporary setting readers can relate to.
3. **Sexual tension and chemistry:** The erotic scenes between Blake and Erica are well-crafted, building naturally from their emotional connection and maintaining heat throughout.
4. **Complex male lead:** Blake's character avoids simple billionaire stereotypes through his hacker background, family issues, and genuine emotional vulnerability beneath his controlling exterior.
5. **High stakes conflict:** The combination of business pressures, family drama, and past trauma creates multiple layers of tension that drive the plot forward effectively.
6. **Emotional depth:** The story tackles serious issues like sexual assault and addiction with sensitivity while maintaining the romance genre's escapist appeal.

Chief opportunities

Following are areas that could stand to be improved and strengthened during the rewrite process:

- **Pacing inconsistencies:** Some scenes rush through major emotional beats while others linger too long on minor details, creating an uneven reading experience that could benefit from smoother transitions. The story would flow better with more consistent pacing throughout.
- **Secondary character development:** Supporting characters like Alli, Heath, and Max need more dimensional personalities and clearer motivations to feel like real people rather than plot devices. Their actions sometimes feel convenient rather than organic to their established characters.

- Repetitive conflict patterns: The story relies heavily on misunderstandings and Blake's controlling behavior to create tension, which becomes predictable and could be varied with other types of conflict. More diverse sources of tension would strengthen the narrative arc.
- Thematic integration: While individual themes are present, they don't weave together cohesively throughout the narrative, missing opportunities for deeper resonance. The themes need stronger connection to character actions and plot developments.

The Dissonance section below in the Report will provide specific suggestions on how to tighten the plotting, writing, and otherwise enhance the storytelling.

Word count

Hardwired contains about **69,071** words.

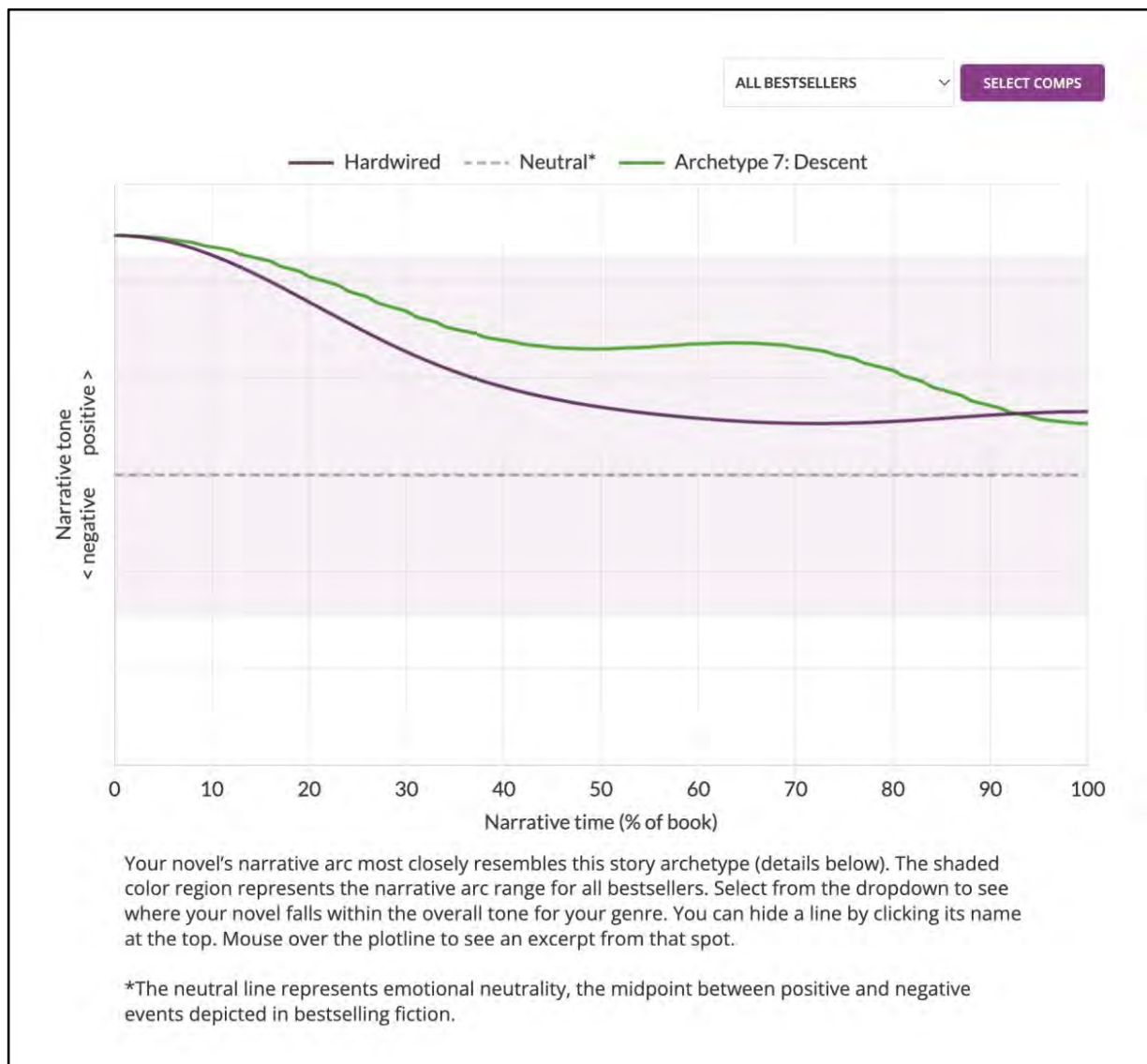
While there are no hard-and-fast rules about minimum and maximum story lengths, there are industry traditions and reader expectations. If you want to give yourself your best chance without having to fight any additional uphill battles, then writing with the word count guidelines for your genre in mind is often the wisest course. (Getting your word count right will also cut down on editing costs.)

Here's a quick reference for typical word counts by genre:

- Adult contemporary fiction: 70,000-90,000 words
- Literary fiction: 80,000-120,000 words
- Romance: 50,000-90,000 words (mostly 70,000-90,000)
- Science fiction/Fantasy: 80,000-120,000 words (longer for epic fantasy)
- Historical fiction: 80,000-120,000 words
- Mystery/Crime: 60,000-90,000 words (cozy mysteries are shorter)
- Horror: 80,000-100,000 words
- Thriller: 70,000-100,000 words
- Westerns: 50,000-80,000 words
- Young adult: 50,000-90,000 words

Are you on track with your story's word count given the genre you've chosen?

Narrative arc analysis



Marlowe has analyzed the narrative arc of *Hardwired* and produced the graphic in the Author Dashboard. The graph depicts two key elements of your book:

1. Its major plot arc. The curved line shows the high-level “shape” of your narrative at a glance. Marlowe also compared it to a story archetype with a similar narrative arc.
2. Its overall tone. The graph includes a color tint block that shows whether your story falls within the same range of emotional tone that most bestsellers do.

A narrative arc refers to the structured progression of a story, outlining how it unfolds from beginning to end. It typically consists of several key elements, including exposition, rising action,

climax, falling action, and resolution. This arc maps the emotional and dramatic journey of the characters and the plot, guiding readers through the narrative's development. It doesn't capture plot turns or story beats, which are more detailed, but instead looks at the narrative's positive and negative sentiment as the plot unfolds from a high-level view.

Key components of a narrative arc

1. Exposition: Introduces characters, setting, and background information (Act 1).
2. Rising action: Builds tension through conflicts and complications (Act 2). Don't confuse rising action with the curve's rise or fall in the graph above – rising action consists of both positive and negative events and the characters' reactions to those events.
3. Climax: The turning point where the main conflict reaches its peak (Act 3). The [Story elements](#) section will likely show a positive or negative beat for your climax and it's often not depicted in the narrative arc.
4. Falling action: Events following the climax that lead toward resolution.
5. Resolution: Concludes the story, resolving conflicts and tying up loose ends.

See the [Story elements](#) section for a detailed look at where certain plot elements should fall.

Your novel's story archetype

Marlowe has determined that your story is most similar to the Descent story archetype.

A *story archetype* is a universal pattern or model that serves as a framework for storytelling. These archetypes manifest through recurring themes, character types, and plot structures across various cultures and genres through the ages. They provide a foundational structure that writers can use to develop their narratives.

Using archetypes allows writers to tap into shared human experiences, making their stories resonate more deeply with audiences. By understanding these patterns, authors can craft compelling narratives that feel both familiar and fresh.

The emotional tone of your story

The graph shows not just the story arc but also the overall emotional tone and major trends in tone within your story — the “emotional arc” of your book. The colored tint block shows the range in emotional tone, from positive to negative, that represents 90% of all bestsellers. In short, it tells you how light or dark your story is and how it fits within your genre. If you choose a genre or subgenre from the “All Bestsellers” dropdown, the tint block will adjust to show the range encompassing 90% of books in that specific genre.

Using the dropdown, notice that some genres and subgenres have a lighter or darker tone and a broader or narrower range than others. If the narrative arc of your story doesn't fit comfortably within the range for your novel's genre, consider whether your story might be

improved by adjusting the tone of your story arc.

How to use the data

The narrative arc graph provides a high-level overview of your story and the journey of your characters, along with the closest story archetype. You can use this information in two chief ways:

To understand your story type. It's valuable to identify the type of story you've told — say, whether it's a Rags to Riches tale or a Quest narrative. By exploring your specific archetype, you can read similar stories to see how other authors have approached the same structure. Refer to the examples provided below for books that fit your chosen archetype.

To refine your narrative. You may want to adjust your story to align more closely with archetypal conventions. Review the guidelines for the archetype identified below and consider how well your story follows these frameworks. For more detailed frameworks, see [Story structure](#).

What a narrative arc represents

A story shape represents the overall emotional journey that your characters embark on throughout your story, from positive vibes to negative vibes — or the opposite. The peaks and high points on the graph represent a section of your story when your characters' experiences are generally positive (even if there are moments of conflict mixed in.) The valleys or troughs represent an overall stretch of low points in the story in which your characters' experiences are negative (even if there are happier moments mixed in).

Based on these archetypes, Marlowe has drawn a visual representation of your book's plot shape alongside the most similar narrative archetype, Descent.

Story archetypes consist of broad generalizations. While some are more often associated with a particular genre, there are examples of each archetype in all genres. Rather than getting hung up on narrative arcs, most authors instead turn to story frameworks as a way to add structure to their novels. See the [Story structure](#) section.

Because Marlowe is tracking the sentiment or mood of the language in your novel, that sentiment usually aligns with the major positive or negative events in the story — but not always. Sometimes the language might be dark in sentiment (war) but the character's experience (saving a loved one) might be positive or brighter. But the general atmosphere of the novel in that moment will still feel darker and so the graph will likely bend that way.

Descent

Descent stories focus on a character's downward spiral, usually as they succumb to inner darkness, external pressures, or moral corruption. These stories often explore the gradual deterioration of the protagonist's mental state, morality, or circumstances. The journey is typically marked by a series of choices or events that lead to a tragic or irreversible outcome.

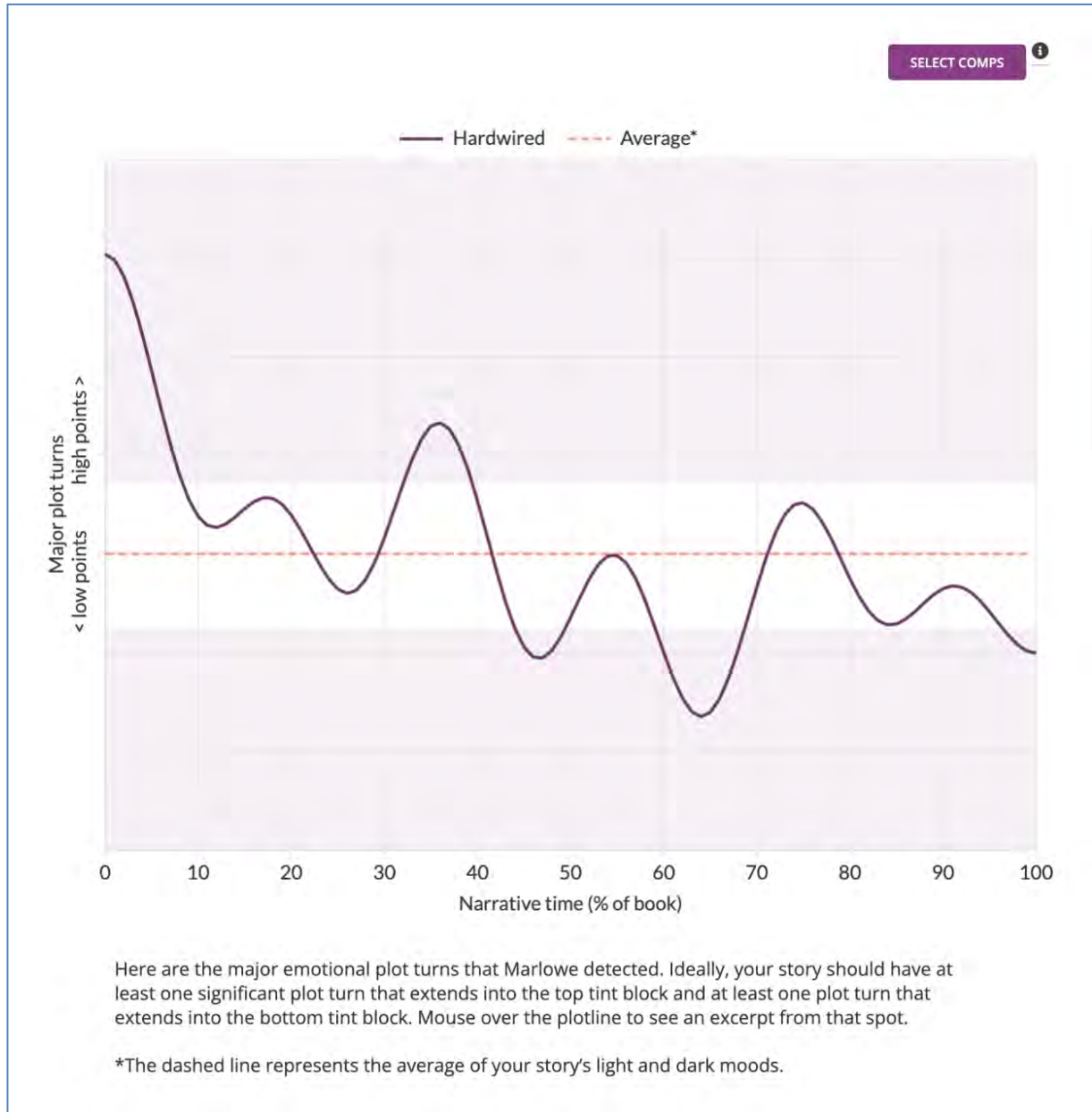
Key elements of the Descent archetype include:

- The initial state: The protagonist starts in a relatively stable or normal situation.
- The downward path: Through a series of choices, actions, or events, the character's situation deteriorates.
- The breaking point: A moment of significant loss, realization, or despair.
- The aftermath: The protagonist is left to face the consequences of her descent.
- The resolution: The story may end in tragedy, redemption, or resignation.

Descent stories often explore themes of fate, morality, and the human capacity for darkness. Examples include *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, which deals with guilt and the psychological consequences of crime, and Hubert Selby Jr.'s *Requiem for a Dream*, where addiction leads to despair. In modern storytelling, the film *Black Swan* captures a dancer's psychological descent into obsession. Other examples of Descent include:

- *You* by Caroline Kepnes - This dark thriller novel follows Joe Goldberg, a seemingly charming bookstore clerk whose obsession with a woman named Beck devolves into moral corruption and madness.
- *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn - This psychological thriller follows the descent of a marriage as secrets, lies, and manipulations unravel between Nick and Amy Dunne.
- *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy - This post-apocalyptic novel chronicles the journey of a father and son as they struggle for survival amid bleak and deteriorating conditions.

Plot analysis



Plot overview

Erica Hathaway, a recent Harvard graduate, seeks funding for her fashion social network while navigating a tumultuous relationship with Blake Landon, a billionaire hacker who becomes obsessed with controlling both her business and personal life. As Erica fights to maintain her independence, she discovers dangerous connections between Blake's past, her potential

investors, and her own family history. The story culminates when Erica learns that her rapist from college is actually her newly discovered father's stepson, forcing her to confront both her traumatic past and her complicated feelings for Blake.

Major plot turns in your story

- Blake deliberately sabotages Erica's pitch to test her while secretly wanting her
- Erica and Blake have explosive sexual encounter in Las Vegas after professional conference
- Blake manipulates Erica into living in his apartment building
- Heath's drug problems are revealed, threatening Alli's relationship and forcing Blake to intervene
- Blake hijacks Erica's investment deal with Max by transferring money directly to her account
- Erica discovers Daniel Fitzgerald is her biological father through photo research
- Erica meets her father but discovers his stepson Mark is the man who raped her in college
- Blake's hacker past catches up to him when M89 targets Erica's website
- The revelation that Blake knew Mark's identity and connection to Daniel before Erica met her father

How to interpret the plot turns graph

Marlowe has identified the major emotional plot turns in your manuscript and has represented them in the plot turns graph above. Upward slopes in your line show your novel's moments of conflict resolution, where the story takes a hopeful or positive turn, signified by joy, excitement, love, relief. Downward dips illustrate where the story takes a darker turn or where there is a progressive complication presenting obstacles and challenges for your protagonists. The middle of the graph represents emotional neutrality. Higher peaks and deeper valleys increase the emotional intensity, and the more frequent the peaks and valleys, the more the story becomes an emotional rollercoaster for the characters — and for readers.

Think of the graph above as capturing the “emotional arc” of your story — a snapshot of your characters' emotional journey throughout your book. While the narrative arc graph depicts the high-level overall tone of your book, this graph illustrates what Marlowe detected as the major emotional shifts in the story.

It's important to think about plot turns not just in terms of *where* and *how often* they occur, but also in terms of their *intensity*. It's fine if most of the twists and turns in your story fall within the white band, but 90% of bestsellers have at least one emotional peak that extends into the top tint block and at least one emotional valley that extends into the bottom tint block.

Note that emotional plot turns may or may not always correspond with the major plot points in your story. But chances are *that they will often align* — if something tragic happens or your characters suffer a major setback, it's likely that the emotional temperature of the scene will follow suit.

Major subplots in your story

1. **Alli and Heath's relationship:** Erica's best friend and business partner falls in love with Blake's troubled brother, who struggles with cocaine addiction and repeatedly relapses. This subplot explores themes of loyalty, enabling, and the impact of addiction on relationships.
2. **Erica's search for her father:** After finding a photograph, Erica investigates her parentage and discovers her father is a prominent lawyer running for governor. This subplot examines family, identity, and the consequences of long-buried secrets.
3. **The M89 hacker group threat:** Blake's past involvement with a hacker collective returns to haunt both him and Erica when they target her business. This subplot adds cyberthriller elements and explores the consequences of past actions.
4. **Max versus Blake rivalry:** The competitive relationship between the two investors creates business tension and reveals character motivations. This subplot examines power dynamics in professional relationships.
5. **Erica's college trauma backstory:** The revelation of Erica's sexual assault and its connection to her father's family creates psychological depth and examines themes of survival and healing.

Foreshadowing in your story

The story employs several effective foreshadowing techniques, particularly around Blake's mysterious past and controlling nature. Early hints about his hacker background prepare readers for the later M89 threat, while his immediate knowledge of high-tech solutions signals his technical expertise. The story also foreshadows the connection between Erica's father and her past trauma through Blake's research capabilities and his protective behavior.

However, some major revelations feel insufficiently prepared. Blake's knowledge of Mark's identity before Erica meets her father needs stronger foreshadowing to avoid feeling like a convenient plot twist. The story would benefit from earlier hints about Blake's extensive background investigations and his awareness of dangerous connections in Erica's life.

Several plot threads receive adequate setup but weak payoff. Marie's evasiveness about Erica's father is well-established but her motivations remain unclear. The M89 hacker group is introduced late without sufficient context about why they would target Erica specifically. The foreshadowing of Max's romantic interest in Erica could be strengthened with more concrete examples of his behavior rather than relying primarily on Blake's assertions.

The story needs better foreshadowing of the traumatic connection between Mark and Erica's family situation. While individual elements are present, the convergence feels coincidental rather than inevitable, weakening the emotional impact of this crucial revelation.

Unresolved plot threads

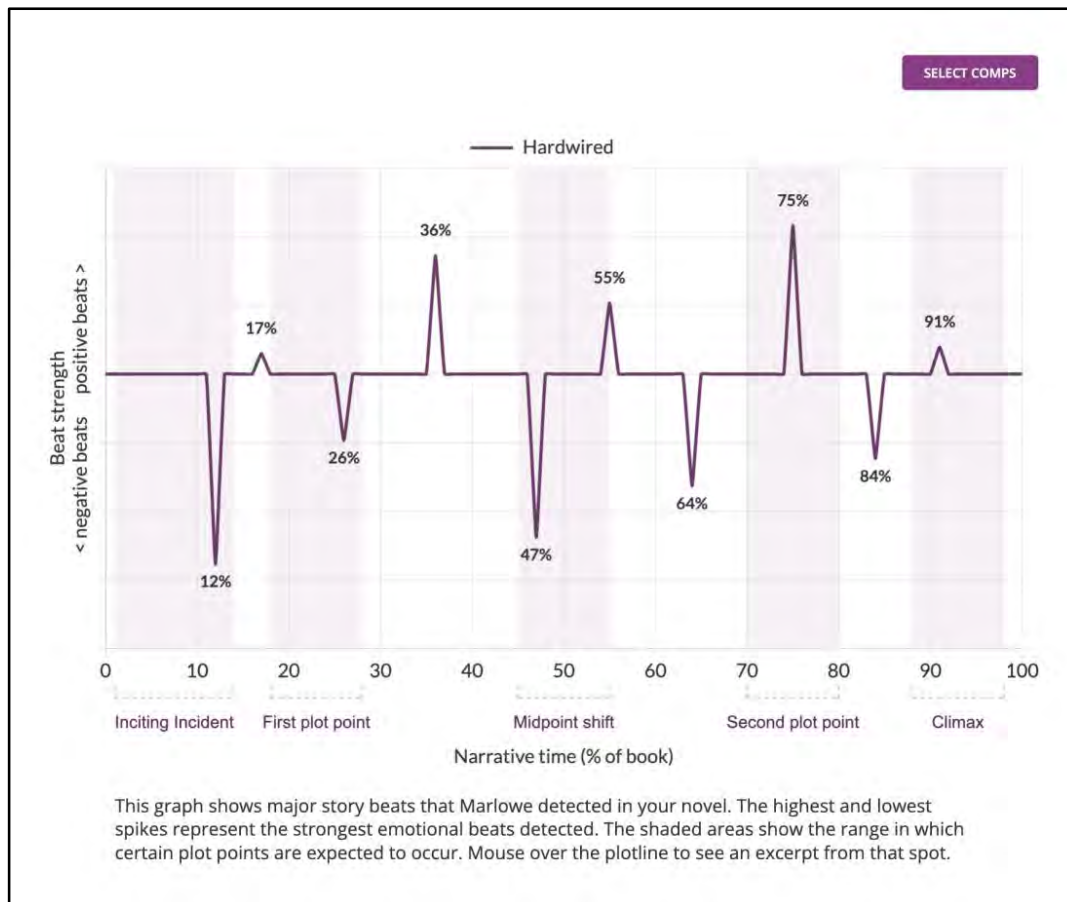
Unresolved plot threads are story elements or questions introduced during the narrative that remain unanswered by the end of the book.

1. **M89 hacker group resolution:** The story ends with the hackers targeting Erica's site but doesn't resolve how Blake will handle this threat or what consequences it might have.
2. **Daniel Fitzgerald relationship:** Erica's future relationship with her biological father remains unclear, especially given the Mark revelation and Daniel's political ambitions.
3. **Blake's legal vulnerabilities:** The story hints at Blake's narrow escape from jail time but doesn't clarify if he still faces legal risks from his hacking past.
4. **Heath's recovery outcome:** While Heath enters treatment, his long-term sobriety prospects and relationship with Alli remain unresolved.
5. **Sophia's ongoing role:** Blake's ex-girlfriend's business relationship and potential for future interference isn't clearly established.

Revisions to consider

1. **Strengthen the M89 connection:** Establish earlier why the hacker group would target Erica specifically, perhaps through a previous connection to Blake's banking software or a vendetta against his current success.
2. **Develop Max's motivations:** Provide more concrete examples of Max's inappropriate interest in Erica and his rivalry with Blake to make his character feel less one-dimensional and more threatening.
3. **Enhance the father-daughter discovery:** Add more emotional complexity to Erica's meeting with Daniel, including his reaction to learning about her mother's death and their shared history.
4. **Create consequences for Blake's manipulation:** The story could benefit from Erica discovering Blake's interference earlier and having to work through the trust issues this creates more thoroughly.
5. **Establish Mark's ongoing threat level:** Clarify whether Mark recognizes Erica and what danger he might pose to both her and her relationship with Daniel going forward.

Story elements



Overview

Marlowe has identified major story elements and story beats in your novel by marking the points where the tone shifts from positive to negative or vice versa. The greater the shift, indicated by peaks or valleys on the graph, the more impactful the moment in your story.

In its review of *Hardwired*, Marlowe examined the places in your narrative where your story shifts from a generally positive tone to a more negative tone — and vice versa. These turns or emotional shifts in tone often align with key structural beats in a novel, including plot turns in the previous section, though they may not match up perfectly.

Analysis of your story's major elements

Readers of modern fiction expect stories to hit certain notes, particularly in genre fiction, that build on perennial story elements that harken back to ancient times.

Hook: The opening scene features Erica celebrating her Harvard graduation with Marie, establishing her achievement and the absence of family, but lacks immediate dramatic tension. A stronger hook might begin with the high-stakes pitch meeting or Blake's interference in her life.

The opening: The first chapters effectively establish Erica's character, goals, and world, but move slowly before introducing Blake. The momentum builds significantly once Blake appears, suggesting the story might benefit from an earlier introduction of the central conflict and sexual tension.

Relatable protagonist: Erica successfully comes across as smart, driven, and sympathetic despite her privileged education. Her struggles with independence, trauma recovery, and professional challenges make her relatable to contemporary readers.

Inciting incident: The inciting incident that disrupts Erica's normal world is Blake's sabotage of her investor pitch, which propels her into his orbit and begins their complex relationship. This occurs at an appropriate point early in the story and effectively launches the central conflict.

Call to adventure: Erica initially resists Blake's advances and manipulations, wanting to maintain her independence and professional integrity. Her reluctance creates natural tension, though she doesn't require much convincing to engage with him romantically.

First plot point: The first major plot point occurs when Erica and Blake sleep together in Las Vegas, fundamentally changing their relationship from professional antagonism to personal intimacy and raising the stakes for future interactions.

Midpoint shift: The midpoint shift occurs when Blake hijacks Erica's investment deal with Max, forcing her to accept his financial support whether she wants it or not. This happens at approximately 60% through the story and fundamentally alters the power dynamic between them.

Second plot point: The second plot point involves Erica discovering that Mark, her college rapist, is her father's stepson, creating an impossible situation that forces her to rely on Blake's protection while dealing with family trauma.

Climax: The story's climax centers on Erica's confrontation with her past trauma while accepting Blake's love and protection. This emotional peak satisfies readers by resolving both the romantic and psychological tension.

Resolution: The story resolves with Erica and Blake declaring their love and working together, though several practical matters remain unaddressed, creating setup for potential sequels.

These story elements work together to create a cohesive narrative arc within the Three Act Structure, though the pacing could be refined to create more consistent momentum throughout.

Character analysis

Overview

Our AI has analyzed the characters in *Hardwired* based on their agency — what they seem to be doing in your story rather than based on their descriptions or backstory. Regardless of which type of novel you're writing, the characters you create will play a crucial role in engaging the reader. Broadly speaking, there are two types of stories:

- Plot driven, in which the story is driven mainly by action — the characters serve to advance the plot. E.g., *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn, *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien.
- Character driven, in which the story focuses more on character than plot — the plot is a mechanism through which to develop character. Examples: *Breakfast at Tiffany's* by Truman Capote, *Normal People* by Sally Rooney.

After you're finished with your draft, see what Marlowe says about the major characters and see if they need to be tweaked or some of their actions need to be reconsidered.

Analysis of your story's characters

Well-developed characters drive reader engagement through their authentic motivations, realistic flaws, and believable growth arcs, avoiding tired stereotypes through specific, unexpected details and behaviors.

Protagonist analysis

Erica Hathaway is a compelling protagonist whose intelligence, ambition, and vulnerability create a multi-dimensional character. Her determination to succeed professionally while maintaining independence drives much of the story's conflict. She demonstrates strength in building her business and surviving trauma, yet shows realistic insecurity about relationships and trust. Her background as an orphan who put herself through Harvard creates believable motivation for her fierce independence, while her inexperience with intense relationships makes her reactions to Blake's controlling behavior authentic.

Antagonist analysis

Blake Landon functions as both love interest and antagonist through his controlling behavior and manipulation of Erica's circumstances. His wealth and power create genuine obstacles for Erica's independence, while his hacker background and family issues provide depth beyond typical billionaire characters. His protective instincts war with his need for control, creating internal conflict that makes him more than a simple romantic hero or villain.

Supporting characters analysis

Marie Martelly serves as Erica's surrogate mother figure and confidante, though her knowledge of family secrets creates tension. **Alli Malloy** represents Erica's closest friendship while demonstrating how love can compromise judgment through her relationship with Heath. **Heath Landon** embodies addiction and charm, creating sympathy despite his destructive behavior. **Max Pope** functions as professional rival and potential threat, though his motivations need stronger development. **Daniel Fitzgerald** represents Erica's longing for family connection while highlighting the complexity of delayed relationships.

Character dynamics & character arcs

Character dynamics: The central dynamic between Erica and Blake creates compelling tension through their power struggle over control versus independence. Their sexual chemistry masks deeper issues about trust and vulnerability that could be explored more thoroughly. Blake's protective instincts clash with Erica's need for autonomy, creating natural conflict that drives the relationship forward. The supporting characters tend to serve the central romance rather than having fully developed relationships with each other, which limits the story's emotional scope.

Character arcs: Erica's character arc moves from determined independence toward accepting help and love without losing her core identity. She learns to trust Blake while maintaining her professional boundaries, though this development could be more gradual and hard-won. Blake's arc involves learning to express love without control, though his growth feels less complete than Erica's. His final gesture of funding her business represents both love and continued manipulation, suggesting his character development needs more work. The supporting characters lack significant growth arcs, with Alli and Heath remaining relatively static despite their dramatic circumstances. To strengthen character development, consider showing Blake learning to ask rather than assume, and give Alli more agency in her relationship with Heath rather than passive acceptance of his problems.

Character development ideas

1. **Develop Blake's vulnerability more gradually:** Show Blake struggling with his need to control through smaller, more relatable examples before the major business manipulation. This could include difficulty delegating to employees or compulsive behavior around planning dates, making his later actions feel more like character flaws than plot devices.
2. **Give Alli stronger agency in her relationship crisis:** Rather than having Alli passively accept Heath's addiction problems, show her actively researching addiction, setting boundaries, or making difficult choices. This would make her feel more like Erica's equal and less like a cautionary tale.
3. **Enhance Max's characterization beyond rivalry:** Provide specific examples of Max's entitled behavior toward women or his competitive nature that don't rely solely on Blake's warnings. Show him making inappropriate comments or using his wealth to pressure situations in ways that feel organic to scenes.
4. **Deepen Daniel Fitzgerald's emotional complexity:** Explore his genuine surprise and possible regret about losing touch with Erica's mother, showing internal conflict between his political ambitions and personal relationships. This would make him more sympathetic while maintaining story tension.
5. **Strengthen Heath's appeal beyond charm:** Show specific examples of why Alli fell for Heath despite his problems, perhaps through creative talents, genuine kindness, or shared interests that make their connection feel deeper than physical attraction and party lifestyle.

POV analysis

Handling shifting points of view can be tricky. Many beginning authors engage in head hopping within a single chapter without inserting scene breaks. The story maintains consistent first-person point of view from Erica's perspective throughout, which creates intimacy and allows readers to experience her emotional journey directly. This choice works well for the romance genre and keeps readers firmly grounded in the protagonist's experience.

The consistent POV choice effectively limits readers to Erica's knowledge and emotions, creating suspense about Blake's motivations and past. However, this limitation sometimes requires awkward exposition or dialogue to convey information that other characters know but Erica doesn't. The single POV perspective works particularly well for the erotic scenes, maintaining intimacy and emotional connection.

Some scenes would benefit from Erica's internal reactions being more clearly distinguished from her dialogue and actions. Occasionally, her thoughts blend too seamlessly with narrative description, making it unclear whether she's thinking something or observing it objectively.

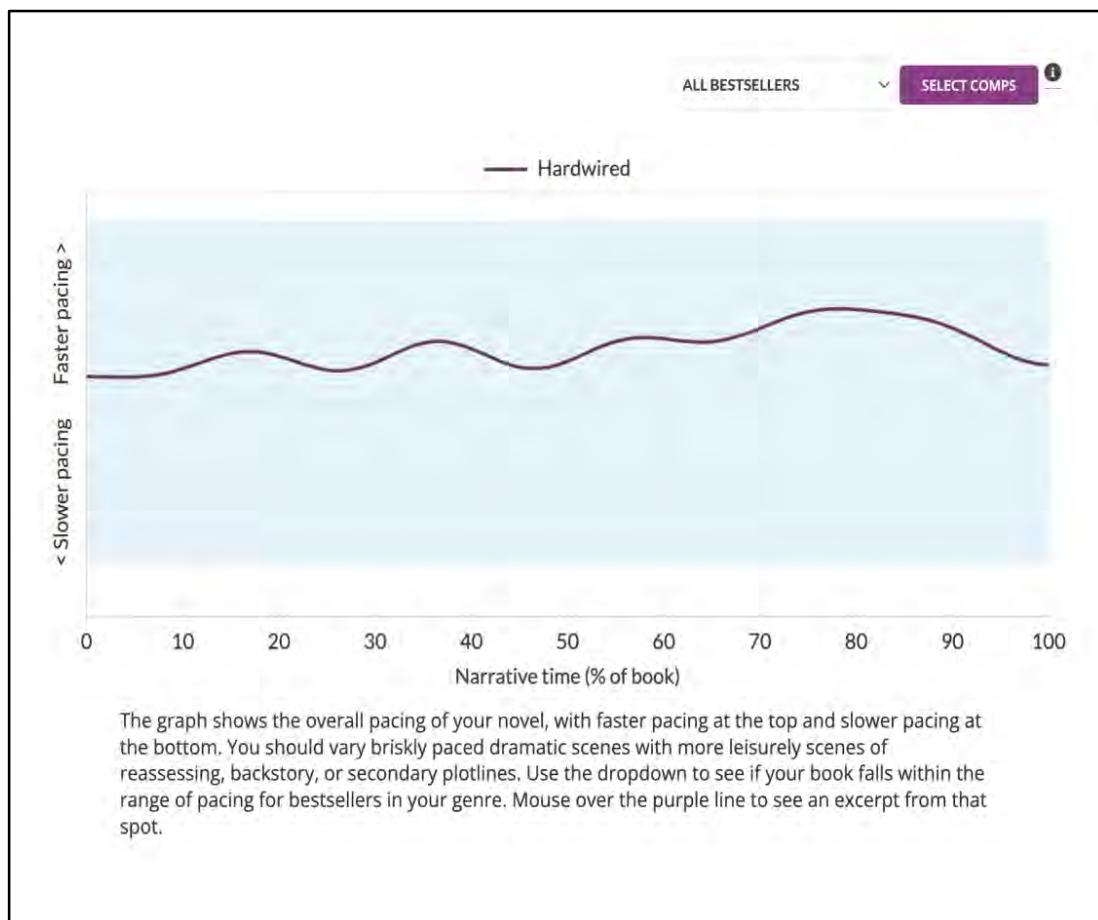
Revisions to consider

Consider adding more distinct internal voice patterns that differentiate Erica's immediate thoughts from her analytical observations. The narrative could benefit from stronger transitions between her emotional states, particularly when moving from anger to desire or from professional concerns to personal vulnerability.

Strengthen the POV by ensuring Erica's observations always feel filtered through her specific personality and experiences rather than generic narrative description. Her background in business and technology should color how she processes information and makes decisions throughout the story.

The POV handling is generally strong but could be refined to create even more consistent characterization through Erica's unique perspective on events and relationships.

Pacing analysis



Overview

In the graph above, Marlowe has charted the high-level pacing of *Hardwired*. This pacing model simulates the experience readers have as they move through your narrative. While it doesn't show every fast-paced and slow-paced passage, the graph gives a snapshot of the parts of your story where your readers will be turning pages most quickly (peaks) as well as the slower moments (valleys) of foregrounding, scene setting, and the "sequels" that occur between action scenes. (See the [Story elements](#) section for more on sequels.)

Marlowe determines pacing by considering language used, sentence length, paragraph length, and scene length. Key changes in pace are marked by dotted vertical lines and a percentage showing where in your story the change takes place. The graph is interactive so you should be able to click on any point to see a text excerpt.

A graph that depicts narrative speed

If you see several valleys, that's not a bad thing. Readers need a break between major action scenes to assess and prepare for the next peak. A warning flag should go up if your graph shows relatively flat pacing – most bestsellers offer a joy ride of highs and lows throughout a story. However, keep in mind that while the plot turns graph shows the emotional rollercoaster ride your story takes readers on, the pacing graph above doesn't measure emotion, mood, or tone at all — it depicts the speed at which the story is moving. Note that different authors handle different scenes with their own style and voice, so you could write a slow-paced gun battle or a fast-paced romantic scene. Marlowe determines pacing by looking at the complexity of your sentences from scene to scene.

You'll notice a blue tint block. This represents the full range in pacing (from fastest to slowest) in 90% of bestsellers — and when you choose a genre from the ALL BESTSELLERS dropdown filter, it shows the range for that genre or subgenre. Whereas the narrative arc and plot turns graphs show a lavender tint block to indicate the range of tone and mood, this tint block shows how quickly readers are likely turning the pages based on what's happening in the story.

It's important to point out what Marlowe is *not* looking at: time frames. A romance, mystery, or science fiction novel might unfold over a number of weeks, months, even years. But some genres, such as thrillers, often demand a compressed time frame (you know, the ticking clock thing). Marlowe is thinking about your pacing not based on the calendar but rather on your writing. Faster-paced scenes usually contain shorter sentences, more action verbs, crisper dialogue. Slower scenes contain more description, texture, background. A mix of both is good.

Even a veteran author who has published multiple titles can benefit from a deep dive into pacing. Just keep in mind there is no ideal shape of a pacing graph, though you may want to compare yours to titles by bestselling authors you admire.

Pacing analysis of your story

Pacing determines how quickly story events unfold and how much time readers spend in

different emotional or dramatic states. Effective pacing balances action with reflection, tension with relief, and moves readers through the story at a speed that maintains engagement without overwhelming or boring them.

The story's overall pacing works well for the romance genre, moving quickly through initial attraction to sexual encounters while building emotional stakes. However, some sections drag while others rush important emotional beats. Business scenes sometimes slow momentum when they don't directly tie to relationship development, while family revelations happen so quickly they don't have full emotional impact.

The erotic scenes are well-paced with good buildup and satisfying resolution, but the pattern becomes predictable. Professional scenes work best when they intersect with personal stakes, such as during investor pitches or Blake's business interference.

Suggestions for faster pacing

- **Business meeting exposition:** Streamline explanations of investment processes and startup logistics that don't directly impact character relationships or emotional stakes.
- **Daily routine descriptions:** Cut mundane details about apartment hunting, furniture shopping, and meal preparation that don't advance plot or character development.
- **Repetitive conflict cycles:** Condense the recurring pattern of Blake acting controlling, Erica getting angry, then resolving through sex to avoid reader fatigue with similar emotional beats.

Suggestions for slower pacing

- **Father-daughter introduction:** Spend more time on Erica's initial meeting with Daniel to fully explore the emotional complexity of this life-changing encounter and her conflicted feelings.
- **Trauma revelation impact:** Allow more space for Erica to process discovering Mark's connection to her father rather than immediately moving to Blake's rescue and resolution.
- **Blake's character development:** Slow down moments where Blake shows vulnerability or growth to make his emotional evolution feel more earned and believable.

Conflict analysis

Overview

Conflict — both external and internal — is central to effective storytelling. Used properly, conflict (when combined with character and other key elements) can propel a novel onto the bestseller list. But you can't just pile on the conflict with no let-up, even if you're writing a high-stakes thriller.

As James Scott Bell notes in *Conflict & Suspense*, our goal as authors is to keep readers engaged through tension and resolution. Bestselling plots alternate between intense conflict and quieter moments where characters regroup and move closer to their goals.

In his seminal book *Scene and Sequel*, Dwight Swain laid out the general rule that action-packed scenes should be followed by reflective moments that allow characters to process events and plan their next steps. These “sequels” could be as short as a couple of paragraphs or as long as a scene. It’s a way to let the story breathe.

Fiction University founder Janice Hardy emphasizes this structure: Each scene should follow a pattern of Goal > Conflict > Result, followed by Reaction > Reflection > Decision. Have you done so in your story?

Our AI has analyzed the main sources of conflict in *Hardwired* and has identified the main sources of conflict in the storyline and the major shifts in emotional polarity. We end with a short “brainstorming” session focusing on opportunities to enhance the narrative drive.

Conflict in your story

Conflict drives narrative tension by forcing characters to make difficult choices that reveal their true nature and values, creating stakes that matter to readers through both external obstacles and internal struggles.

1. **Professional versus personal boundaries:** Erica's struggle to maintain business independence while accepting Blake's love creates sustained tension throughout the story.
2. **Control versus trust:** Blake's need to control situations conflicts with Erica's need for autonomy, generating relationship conflict that drives character development.
3. **Past trauma versus present healing:** Erica's sexual assault history creates internal conflict about vulnerability and trust that affects her relationship choices.
4. **Family loyalty versus self-protection:** Alli's choice between supporting Heath and protecting herself creates secondary conflict that mirrors the main relationship.
5. **Public image versus private truth:** Daniel's political ambitions conflict with acknowledging his daughter, creating external pressure on their developing relationship.

The story successfully employs multiple layers of conflict that intersect and reinforce each other. The external business pressures amplify the internal relationship tensions, while past trauma complicates present choices. However, the conflicts sometimes feel repetitive, with similar patterns of Blake acting possessively and Erica resisting, then eventually giving in. The story would benefit from varying the types of conflicts and showing more growth in how the characters handle disagreements over time.

Narrative drive

Narrative drive is crucial for maintaining reader engagement throughout a novel's length. In his masterclass, James Patterson says that narrative drive is about parceling out information in such a way as to keep the reader asking questions and engaging emotionally with the protagonist. This is precisely why long passages of exposition (also known as information dumps) do not work. They reveal too much information and they do it in a way that distances readers rather than intriguing us. Character motivation must remain urgent and emotionally gripping, so that every action and decision feels inevitable yet unpredictable. Finally, questions should constantly be raised—whether through mystery, conflict, or suspense—ensuring that readers are always curious about what happens next.

The story demonstrates strong narrative drive through sexual tension and business stakes that keep readers engaged. The mystery of Blake's past and the revelation of family connections create questions that propel the narrative forward effectively. However, some sections lose momentum when focusing too heavily on internal angst without advancing plot or character development.

The pacing occasionally stalls during business meetings or family dinner scenes that don't maintain the emotional intensity established in romantic scenes. The story works best when personal and professional stakes intersect, such as during the investor pitch or when Blake interferes with business deals.

Information revelation generally works well, particularly around Blake's hacker background and Erica's family history. However, some exposition feels forced, especially when characters explain things they would already know for the reader's benefit.

The story could improve narrative drive by ensuring every scene either advances the central relationship or reveals crucial information about character backgrounds. Cutting scenes that only serve to show daily life without advancing emotional or plot stakes would strengthen overall momentum.

Ideas to intensify the conflict

1. **Introduce a female rival for Blake's attention:** Create a sophisticated business partner or investor who genuinely interests Blake professionally and personally, forcing Erica to compete on equal footing rather than just deflecting unwanted male attention.
2. **Develop competing business opportunity:** Present Erica with a legitimate alternative to Blake's funding that comes with different but equally significant trade-offs, making her choice about more than just Blake versus independence.
3. **Create family loyalty test:** Force Erica to choose between protecting Daniel's political career and exposing Mark's criminal behavior, adding moral complexity to her personal relationships.

4. **Escalate the M89 threat personally:** Have the hacker group target Erica individually rather than just her business, making Blake's protection more necessary while forcing her to rely on skills that demonstrate her own competence rather than just his resources.

The importance of narrative tension

Emotional valence shifts are crucial for maintaining dynamic storytelling, as scenes should develop narrative tension rather than simply describe a series of events. In *How to Write a Damn Good Novel*, James Frey writes, 'Many books have scenes that don't shift valences. They never turn. When a scene doesn't turn, it's not a scene.' Every scene should advance either plot or emotional engagement, avoiding static filler content.

The story maintains a generally intense emotional temperature with frequent shifts between anger, desire, vulnerability, and determination. The combination of high-stakes business pressure and sexual tension creates sustained emotional engagement, though some scenes linger too long in single emotional states without building to meaningful change.

Notable shifts in tone or emotion

Vegas seduction to vulnerability: Erica's shift from sexual aggression to emotional openness when she reveals her assault history creates powerful intimacy and character development.

Professional confidence to personal panic: The transition from Erica's successful investor pitch to discovering Mark's presence at her father's house demonstrates effective emotional whiplash that serves the plot.

Anger to desperate need: Erica's pattern of fighting Blake's control then surrendering to sexual desire creates recurring emotional peaks that drive the romantic tension.

Business triumph to betrayal: The reversal from celebration over Max's investment to discovering Blake's manipulation creates effective dramatic irony and character conflict.

Family hope to traumatic recognition: Erica's excitement about meeting her father transforming into horror at encountering her rapist provides the story's most dramatic emotional shift.

Revisions to consider

1. **Vary the anger-to-desire pattern:** Instead of always resolving conflict through sexual submission, show Erica and Blake working through disagreements with conversation, compromise, or temporary separation to create more emotional variety.
2. **Develop quieter emotional moments:** Add scenes where characters experience contentment, friendship, or simple joy to provide contrast with the intense dramatic conflicts and create more emotional range.
3. **Strengthen business confidence shifts:** Show Erica experiencing more professional victories that don't get overshadowed by relationship drama, creating emotional highs that aren't dependent on Blake's approval or interference.
4. **Create anticipation without panic:** Build tension through hope and excitement rather than always using anxiety and fear as emotional drivers, particularly around family relationships and business opportunities.
5. **Enhance friend dynamics:** Develop more complex emotional shifts in Erica's relationship with Alli that don't revolve around Heath's problems, showing the friendship's independent emotional landscape.

Theme analysis

Primary and secondary themes

The primary theme explores the tension between independence and love, examining whether strong individuals can maintain their autonomy while building intimate relationships. This theme manifests through Erica's struggle to accept Blake's support without losing her identity and professional independence.

Secondary themes include:

1. **Power and control in relationships** - demonstrated through Blake's manipulation of Erica's business circumstances and their sexual dynamic
2. **Healing from trauma** - shown through Erica's journey from sexual assault survivor to someone capable of intimate trust
3. **Family and chosen family** - explored through Erica's search for her father and her relationships with Marie and Blake

Theme development

The independence versus love theme develops gradually as Erica moves from fierce self-reliance to accepting help and emotional support. Early scenes establish her determination to

succeed alone, while later chapters show her learning to trust without sacrificing her core identity. Blake's evolution from controlling manipulation to supportive partnership mirrors this development, though his growth feels less complete.

The power and control theme interweaves with the romantic plot through Blake's business interference and their sexual relationship. The story explores how control can stem from love and protection rather than mere dominance, though it doesn't fully resolve the problematic aspects of Blake's behavior. The trauma healing theme connects to both love and control themes, as Erica's past affects her ability to trust and Blake's knowledge of her history influences his protective instincts.

Revisions to consider

How to strengthen the theme

1. **Show Blake learning to ask rather than assume** - Create scenes where Blake requests permission or input before taking action, demonstrating growth in respecting Erica's autonomy while maintaining his protective nature.
2. **Develop consequences for control** - Show negative results from Blake's manipulation that force him to confront how his behavior damages rather than protects their relationship.
3. **Enhance Erica's professional independence** - Create situations where Erica succeeds professionally without Blake's help or interference, reinforcing her capability and the theme of balanced partnership.
4. **Explore chosen family dynamics** - Develop how Erica creates family bonds with Blake, Marie, and others to contrast with her biological family disappointments and strengthen themes about love and belonging.
5. **Address trauma recovery more thoroughly** - Show Erica actively working on healing rather than just being rescued, emphasizing personal agency in recovery and growth.

Author voice

The author demonstrates strong command of first-person narrative voice, creating an authentic and engaging perspective through Erica's intelligent, determined personality. The writing effectively balances vulnerability with strength, allowing readers to connect with the protagonist while respecting her agency and competence. The voice remains consistent throughout, maintaining Erica's analytical nature and business acumen while allowing for emotional growth and romantic development.

The storytelling successfully transports readers into the high-stakes world of tech startups and investment negotiations while maintaining the intimate emotional focus that romance readers expect. The author's handling of both professional and personal scenes shows versatility and keeps the narrative grounded in believable contemporary settings.

Prose style

The story's prose style effectively serves the romance genre while maintaining literary quality and character authenticity. The writing flows smoothly between action, dialogue, and internal reflection, creating good rhythm and pacing throughout most sections. The author demonstrates skill in crafting erotic scenes that feel both emotionally meaningful and physically explicit without becoming gratuitous.

The business and technical elements are handled well, providing enough detail for authenticity without overwhelming readers who might not be familiar with startup culture or investment processes. The author successfully balances contemporary slang and professional language to create believable character voices.

However, some passages could benefit from tighter prose and more varied sentence structure. Occasionally, sentences begin with gerunds or rely too heavily on similar constructions, creating repetitive rhythm that could be smoothed with revision.

The emotional beats are generally well-crafted, though some transitions between anger and desire happen too quickly to feel fully earned. The prose would benefit from more gradual emotional shifts that allow readers to follow the character's psychological journey more clearly.

Dialogue generally feels natural and character-appropriate, though some business exposition could be streamlined to avoid feeling forced or artificial. The romantic dialogue is particularly strong, effectively conveying both vulnerability and desire.

The descriptive passages work well to establish setting and mood without overwhelming the narrative pace. The author shows good restraint in not over-describing locations or appearances, allowing readers to fill in details while providing enough specificity for clear visualization.

Some recurring phrases and descriptions could be varied to avoid repetition, particularly around Blake's physical appearance and Erica's emotional reactions. While these descriptions effectively convey attraction and response, fresh language would strengthen the overall prose quality.

The writing successfully maintains the story's contemporary feel while avoiding overly trendy language that might date the work. The balance between modern technology references and timeless relationship dynamics serves the story well.

Other sections

In addition to the sections above, the Author Dashboard also contains Marlowe's analysis in these sections:

- Dialogue vs. narrative (including dialogue tags)
- Readability score and complexity score
- Setting analysis
- Novelty and variations in chapter openings & closings
- Active vs. passive voice examples & suggested alternatives
- Cliches finder and Select Comps option
- Explicit language and content and Select Comps option
- Repetitive phrases finder and Select Comps option
- Repetitive adverbs
- Repetitive adjectives
- Misspellings finder
- Dissonance: Revisions to consider, inconsistent plot threads, unlikely character actions, etc.
- Story structure: Frameworks, templates, and tropes by genre
- Final review checklist

Head to <https://authors.ai/author-dashboard> for Marlowe's full analysis of your work.