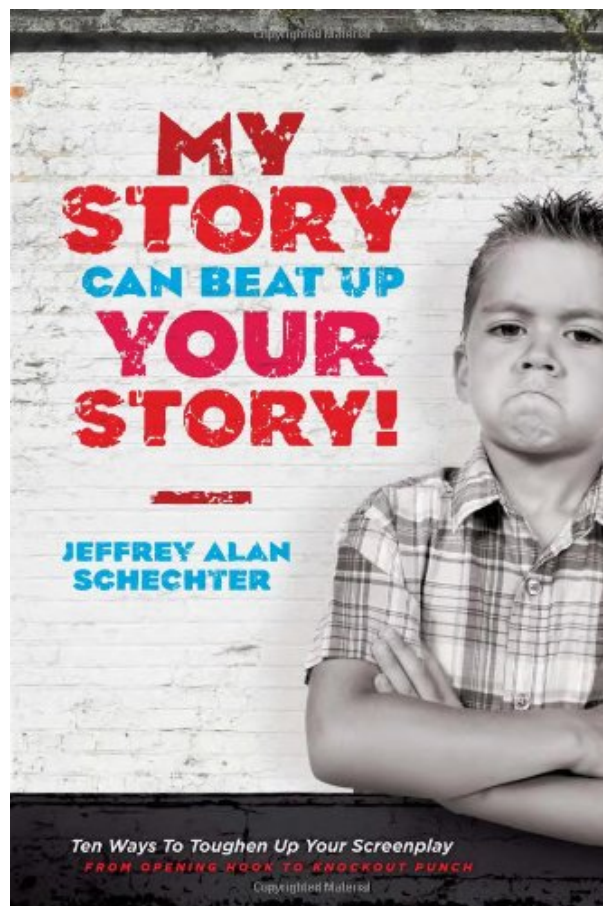
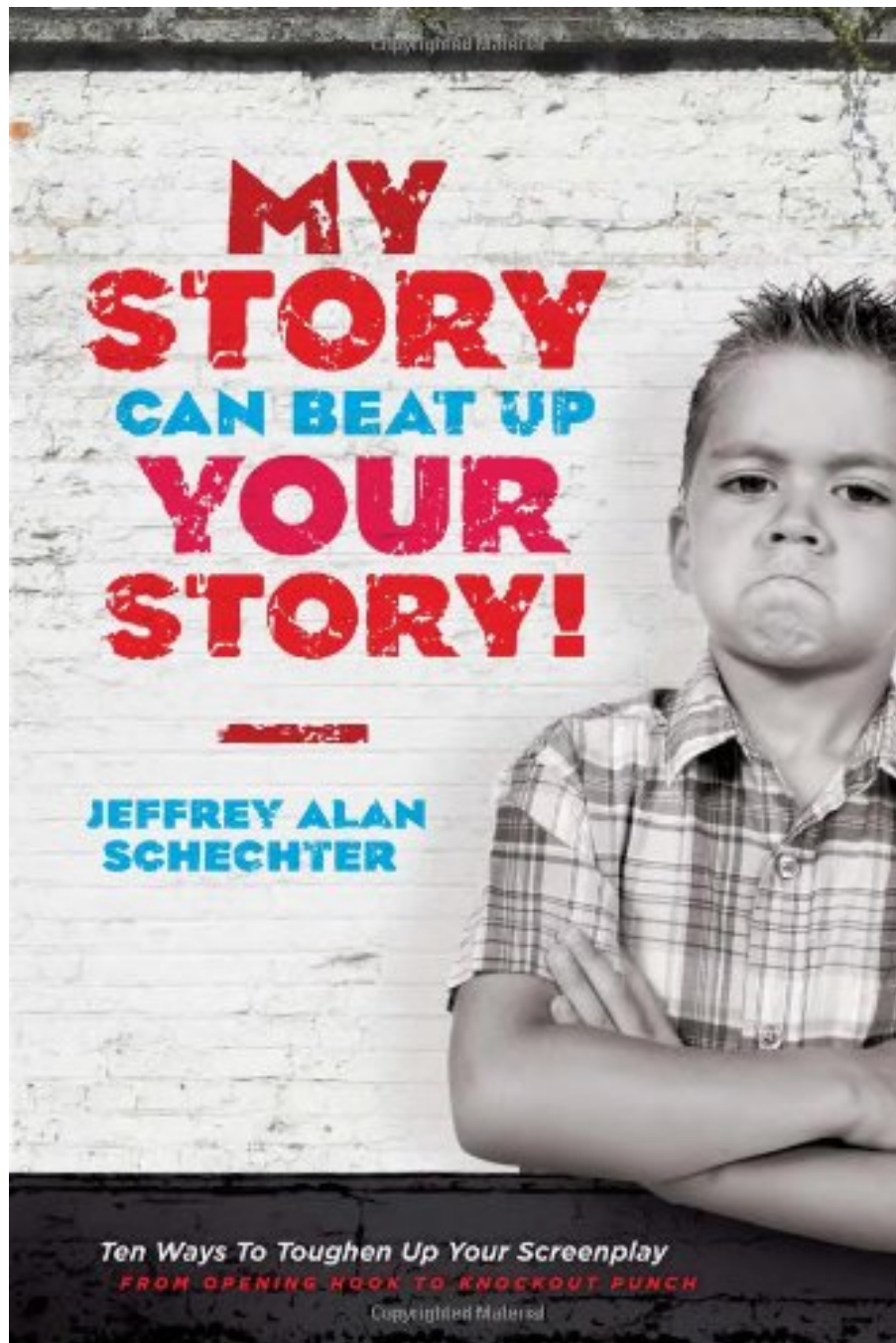


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About the Author

Jeffrey Alan Schechter was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, which explains his endearing personality. After moving to Los Angeles and not wanting to starve, he quickly established himself as a versatile writer, able to work in all genres from action films to family comedies, from pre-school to adult drama, from live action to animation. His writing has earned him nominations for two Emmy awards, a Writers Guild of America award, a Writer's Guild of Canada award, and a BAFTA award. Over the years Jeff has worked with dozens of studios and networks including Warner Bros, Universal Pictures, ABC, NBC, The Discovery Channel, Nickelodeon, The Hallmark Channel, the BBC, VH1 Films, RHI, and The Walt Disney Company.

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My Story Can Beat Up Your Story! is the same powerful, easy-to-learn system that industry insiders have used to generate millions of dollars in script sales and assignments. In a clear, step-by-step fashion, this book is a fun, eye-opening, brain-expanding, and often irreverent guide to writing stories that sell. Covering everything from Heroes to Villains, from Theme to Plot Points, from cooking up good ideas to a business plan for smart writers, this book forever eliminates that horrible feeling every writer goes through — staring at the blank page and wondering “what comes next?”

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Most helpful customer reviews

18 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Great book on punching up your script!

By Matthew Terry

I've been writing screenplays for over twenty years and I've heard the term "punch it up" and I never really understood what that meant. Punch it what? Punch it where? Punch it how?

Though Mr. Schechter's book really doesn't use the term "punch it up" - it was in the back of my mind as I read. Simply put, punching up your screenplay - or toughening it up is the task of looking at the elements of your screenplay and making sure they're the best they can possibly be. Is your hero heroic? Why? Is your villain really a villain? How? What does the villain have in common with the hero and vice versa? Is your format correct? Are the elements in place? What of the plot points? Are you missing some? And sub-characters...what about them?

Mr. Schechter's book helps you strip your screenplay and story down to the core elements and then forces you to focus on them (as much as you may not want to) until you've worked through them and made your script better than it was and possibly better than many scripts out there.

How does he do this? By taking the basics of your story and parsing it out. Hero, villain, acts 1, 2a, 2b, 3, formatting, structure, characters, etc. By using graphs, photos and wonderful examples (recent films such as, but not limited to: "Avatar," "The Sixth Sense," "The Dark Knight" and, especially, "Star Wars - Episode IV - A New Hope"), to get his points across. And if the book isn't enough - he gives you links to free downloads to help you even further.

The only area where I feel the book stumbles a bit - is when Mr. Schechter creates the absolute of 44 plot points throughout your script. I'm not a fan of absolutes as I kind of figure that everyone's script is different and may not follow formulas to an absolute degree but, BUT, he makes a valid point. I've read many a script where the main characters hate each other on page 25 and love each other on page 30 and there were no plot points in between to show the transition. Do you need the 44 for a 108 page script? I don't know - but you certainly need more than what you probably have already. And this book will help you with that.

Personal note: As I read this book I couldn't help but think about how we (my co-writer and I) needed to punch up our hero in our current script and I used the tools and examples that Mr. Schechter provided to do just that. I also was able to re-think a previous script that I had written and saw how - without thinking - I had already had many of the elements discussed. You might find the same thing, too

Bottom line is that not only does Mr. Schechter's book give you the tools to strengthen your story so it can beat up other stories; it holds them down and gives them wedgies, too. One of the best books on punching up your script you will ever read.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful.

Best writing help book since Save The Cat!

By Baron Von Cool

Hands down, this is the best writing help book since Blake Snyder's Save the Cat! It's written in the same fun, laid-back style that makes you feel like the author is hanging out in your living room talking to you over a few beers. It's really easy to learn from and a pleasure to read. It's also useful for novelists AND screenwriters.

One of this book's big revelations for me is the Unity of Opposites, a chart where the protagonist has his own "family tree" of sidekicks, mentors, and helpers, but so does the villain. They have all the same roles fulfilled in their trees regardless of which side of the conflict they are on. And a new type of role is introduced for

both, the Deflector (or contagonist), who tries to pull the hero or villain off his path and onto his or her own. The Deflector is the flip side of the same coin as the hero, whereas the Villain is the polar opposite.

For example, in *Star Wars* (1977), Darth Vader is not the villain but the Deflector. Grand Moff Tarkin (Peter Cushing) is the villain. Vader works for him (on loan from the Emperor). The Death Star is Tarkin's pet project and it's his butt on the line with the Emperor if it fails. Vader would just get a slap on his cybernetic wrist and reassigned. But Tarkin would get zapped with lightning or force-choked to death (probably one of the Grand Moff's overriding reasons not to abandon ship).

Lord Vader tries to warn Tarkin not to be too proud of this technological terror he's constructed, and that its power is insignificant compared to the Force. Tarkin fails to heed Vader's advice and it is the Force (via Luke) who defeats Tarkin and the Death Star. Vader later tries to turn Luke to the Dark Side rather than kill him, thus deflecting him from his heroic goals onto Vader's dark path.

You'll see this same kind of seduction/deflection going on with femme fatales and other cynical, selfish types regardless of genre, as they try to con the hero into double-crossing his or her partners for personal gain (love/lust/greed/ambition/revenge) that also serves the Deflector's agenda.

The book goes on to talk about thematic arguments being embodied by both hero/deflector and villain. Again, using *Star Wars* (1977) as an example, the thematic argument is: Which is more powerful? Faith or technology? Tarkin answers technology. Vader answers faith. Because the hero must grow and have an arc, Luke begins the story trusting in technology, then embraces faith through Obi-Wan's teachings about the Force, but he is still confused. Only by combining faith (the Force) and technology (a proton torpedo aimed by the Force instead of his targeting computer) can Luke triumph over the villain and his planet-destroying Death Star. And thus, the thematic argument is finally answered. Because Tarkin chose wrongly, he dies. Because Vader also chose wrongly, he also loses but lives to fight another day.

And these are just TWO of the ten ways to toughen up your screenplay (or novel) in this book! You'll learn a lot from it. I know I did. There are a bunch of free online story worksheets on the author's website, too.

UPDATE: The Unity of Opposites concept was originally in *Dramatica: A New Theory of Story* but with clunky names like Contagonist instead of Deflector. The author mentions that in a footnote. Having just read *Dramatica*, I can say that *My Story Can Beat Up Your Story* presents a much more enjoyable, easy to read, and streamlined version of the *Dramatica* theory. *Dramatica* is clunky, pretentious and a pain to read (it also gets way too complicated and is riddled with typos and formatting errors), but I would recommend reading it because it does go into way more detail than this book does.

The eight archetypes are further divided in two "quads" of opposing Driver and Passenger characters and each assigned a complimentary set of action and decision characteristic that defines and explains their attitude and approach to problem-solving. It's eye-opening stuff with the usual examples (*Star Wars*, *Jaws*, *The Wizard of Oz*, and *Gone with the Wind*). *Dramatica* further explains that by replacing one of the two characteristics with an uncomplimentary one from another archetype, you can create flawed, possibly more interesting characters than pure archetypes.

There's no way I recommend *Dramatica* over *My Story Can Beat Up Your Story*, but as a complementary resource to be read in conjunction with this book, it's good. Just be prepared for clunky, egghead "I've been to college!" writing which is an annoying shock after reading Jeffrey Schechter's casual, friendly "insider" tone in *My Story Can Beat Up Your Story*.

13 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

My Story Can Beat Up Your Story

By Heather Hale

In *My Story Can Beat Up Your Story*, Jeffrey Alan Schechter promises "Ten Ways to Toughen Up Your Screenplay From Opening Hook to Knockout Punch."

Like the old Arthur Murray dance classes where students would learn by stepping on the cut out footprints on the floor, Schechter simplistically breaks down basic screenplay elements into bite-sized pieces, ending each chapter with an exercise to put what you've just learned into practice. He's smart to drive Readers to the book's website (MSCBUYS.com) by offering them the chapter exercises as free downloadable worksheets.

As the pieces begin to form the big picture, you, as the Reader-Writer, are taken on a journey unveiling the thought process behind the story structure software, *Contour*, that Schechter helped develop.

You're encouraged to consider Schechter's four key questions and then apply four classic literary archetypes to your own contemplated project. And as you build (or renovate) your three-act structure, he encourages you to populate it with your own unique interpretation and execution of the six supporting characters that will help illustrate the different viewpoints of the thematic argument in play - especially through character-specific dialogue.

With such a rich cannon of screenplay literature, it's difficult not to step on familiar terminology or territory and come across as derivative, so Schechter saves time by just crediting and starting with Michael Hauge's great definition of what a story must do: "enable a sympathetic character who overcomes a series of increasingly difficult, seemingly insurmountable obstacles to achieve a compelling desire," Schechter traces these elements through the most successful, non-sequel movies of all time as examples. This is a great filter to the vast inventory as it focuses on box office successes that were contingent on original story execution.

The playful "bully" motif and terminology for plot point sequences and page goals were (to me) reminiscent of Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat*. The distinction being here, perhaps, that where Snyder focused on commercial genre delineation and overall story beats, Schechter goes into the minute detail of structure to the point where he codifies a series of paired reversals to raise the stakes in the Second Act, which to me, harkened back to Robert McKee's (positive/negative) unity of opposites.

By interactively reading *My Story Can Beat Up Your Story* and seriously analyzing your own story idea, you'll learn Schechter's reproducible forty-four plot point system and put it in action as you strategize how to most-effectively populate your own story and build each beat, scene and act into an ultimately satisfying story and ideally, a marketable and producible script.

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About the Author

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