

A WORD BEFORE WE START

I would rather jump right to the point—it is the reason you picked up this book in the first place—but I feel it necessary to explain a bit about myself and the purpose of this guide, so bear with me. My name is Geoffrey P. Ward. While most authors would give a long-winded introduction explaining the intricate details of their life leading them to publish their book, including shining an inordinately bright light on how qualified they are to expound on the subject, I will keep it brief.

As to my non-professional history, you don't care where I came from or who my family is. While they played a role in how I fell into this profession, it doesn't matter in the context

of this guide. Professionally speaking, I started at the age of eighteen and have roughly twelve years of experience working as a villainy consultant. After being offered my first consulting job, I worked mainly with faeries, stepmothers, fiefdoms, and the odd minor kingdom. Since then, I've grown into the most sought after villainy consultant in all the land. Granted, I am the only villainy consultant in all the land, but I provide a valuable service nonetheless.

There is an extreme lack of resources for villains. Princes have wizards, mages, or captains of the guard training them from birth. Farm boys have their grizzled hermits to guide them. Princesses and exceptionally comely peasant girls have fairy godmothers and a myriad of magical creatures popping into their lives at prime dramatic intervals. Villains have no one. The odds are stacked against us.

And in case you missed that, yes, I count myself a villain. No, I haven't conquered a kingdom or destroyed the lives of others. At least, none that didn't deserve it. But as I've been told by countless non-villains, the nature of my job plants me firmly in the villain camp.

My services provide crucial guidance and information to the aspiring villain, which help mold them into the success they wish to be. However, I've reached the point where my schedule is far more limited than the number of applicants petitioning for my services, so I thought it best to write down the most common advice I give my clients to help those unable to have me personally in their corner.

Regardless of the reasons why you are starting this path, your success relies on help and knowledge. While my help is limited (this is a guide book, not a spell book, after all), I have the knowledge in spades. This guide will outline valuable

principles to help you achieve success and survive long enough to enjoy it.

The Black, the White, and Everything Between

Before delving into how to succeed as a villain, it is important that we spend a moment on what it means to be one. No doubt, you have an idea in your head, but that image is the product of stories that paint heroes as the strong arm of the righteous, damsels in distress as angels, and villains as demon spawn. The truth of it is much more complex than the non-villains' stark categorization.

Let me tell you a little story:

Once upon a time, there was a man who wanted to make more of his life than he had been given at birth. He worked hard to climb the ladder of success only to be kicked down and stepped on by anyone higher than him. No matter what he did, he couldn't improve his situation because a small minority held the power and only allowed those of their choosing to succeed. Anyone else was put in their place. So, the man did what any ambitious self-starter should do. He wrestled the power away from those setting the status quo and through his own labors, grabbed what he wanted from life. And he lived happily ever after.

This is a story I've heard repeatedly. Most villains are simply building a life beyond what destiny or magic doles out. Non-villains expect you to accept your lot for what it is and

never step higher.

"You're born this way, and you'll die this way," they say, never giving a single thought as to why that is. If you're born a peddler's child, you'll either become a peddler or marry a peddler. To desire more leaves you with only two options: disappointment or villainy.

Our fellow in the story didn't lack drive, ambition, or ability, all of which should lead to better things. But to non-villains, the world is written in stone and cannot be changed; there are roles each of us plays and stepping outside of that is wicked. There are the royals and the peasants, and never the twain shall meet. Except when it comes to taxes.

At this point, you may be thinking of stories refuting that statement—some peasant girl who married a prince or the farm boy that went off on a grand adventure, receiving boatloads of glory and a princess to marry—but those are only the exceptions. Magic allows variations to the rigid order, but fairy godmothers are selective in who they deem worthy of magical intervention, giving it only to those who have the right combination of poverty and attractiveness. If you're poor and gorgeous, good things may be coming your way. All others need not apply.

Being a hero is an exclusive club. They have strict rules about who is and isn't allowed in, and those operating outside those dictates are labeled a villain. But villains are those who would rather rely on skill and hard work than nature or fairy godmothers. It is not our deeds that earn us that label, but the arbitrary dictates of the heroes.

The line between hero and villain is clearly defined by heroes, but the moral implications of heroism versus villainy is hazy. There are villains who never do anything objectively

evil, but by choosing their own path, they're vilified. In fact, the most successful villains are those who would be considered heroic if their father had been a woodsman or a king instead of an accountant, or if a wizard or fairy godmother had helped them instead of me.

Wanting to be in charge is not inherently villainous. Kings and the rest of the royal foppery are nothing more than beneficiaries of an accident of birth. Their character and ability to lead never factor into whether they deserve their status and power, yet they are called noble. However, when a person proves they are capable of leading despite not having the right social standing, they're called villains. They're considered evil, malicious, and conniving. But having brains and drive is not a malevolent thing, and upsetting the status quo is not vile.

If you choose villainy, people will try to stop you. Using every ounce of wit and logic, they will try to convince you to give up. If that doesn't work, they'll enlist any prince or predestined peasant they can wrangle up to use brute force in maintain the ever-worshipped status quo. They will destroy everything you build, and they are the "heroes".

The general bias against rule breakers isn't helped by the unreliability of the stories we hear. When a hero and villain square off, the only one who knows the truth is the one who walks away victorious. In turn, that truth is skewed by the victor to fit whatever reality they wish to portray to the public. The heroes get painted more heroic and the villains more villainous, regardless of what actually happened.

A stepmother is dubbed "wicked" by her stepdaughter simply because the woman cares more about her natural born daughters. When that stepdaughter swoops in and

steals that life of luxury her stepmother has built, she not only gets the prize but the ability to tell the tale of her stepfamily's tortures, thus cementing the stepmother's "wicked" label. Never mind that the woman generally isn't around to defend herself against the slander.

To the victor go the spoils, and one of the greatest is the ability to paint the past in whatever colors you choose. In some cases, even villains can claim hero-hood if they are successful in defeating their foe.

Villain and evil are not synonymous, nor are they mutually exclusive. Rather, they are too often mistaken for each other. Evil is malicious and violent, but villainy is ending up on the wrong side of an argument. If you wish for any level of success in your villainous endeavors, you must accept that the tales you heard while bouncing on your mother's knee may not be accurate.

Disclaimers

1. The majority of my clients fall into the large-scale villain category, meaning that they have their sights set on dominating a kingdom or the entire land, so the bulk of this guide will be centered on them. But these principles apply to anyone with villainous intent—from the High Lord of the Realm to the lowly stepmother. This guide is here to help all those taking the difficult path of villainy.
2. I hope you find this guide useful, but if you don't,

you've already bought the book so it no longer matters to me. Don't bother contacting me to argue about my advice. I stand by what is written here, and if you disagree, I don't care. And if you're one of those busy-bodies looking for evidence with which to tear me and my company apart, don't bother. I don't care if you agree with me or not. I've been called worse names than you can possibly imagine by people I care about far more than you.

3. Except my own name, all others have been changed to protect the confidentiality of my clients and to protect myself from the spiteful retaliation of the "innocent" who may not be portrayed here as heroically as they have hitherto claimed. I've been in this business long enough to know how to mitigate trouble with such people, but avoiding it is always the better option.