

Johanna's Advice For Those Wishing to Play Malkavian Characters

This was initially written for players of the Vampire LARP, CAST – but then I realized that it really wouldn't hurt to make it available for everyone. After all, the web is *everyone's* soapbox, so I'm going to take up a little bit of bandwidth and pontificate on a favorite subject.

I've noticed that the Malkavians are a popular-but-misplayed clan. I know, I know, you could argue that for every clan in the World of Darkness, but I feel it's a particular problem with the Malkavians. There are too many fuzzy-bunny kooks, or people who think Derangements are some sort of accessory to their character - colorful ornamental and entirely optional. I protest this notion – vigorously – and offer this advice to those who are wondering why their ST goes all hesitant when reviewing their Malkavian ideas.

Concept first, derangement second.

Most of the weak Malkavian concepts I've seen tend to revolve around the derangement, like that is the only thing that defines the character.

Bad: "I want to play an egomaniac bent on world conquest".

Much better: "I'm thinking of a consummate politician who went too far. Robert grew up in a conservative home with a domineering father, whom he adored because he was strong. He wanted to grow up to be strong, too. He learned to care about power for it's own sake and he quickly learned to enjoy wielding it. Of course, over time, things went too far and Robert began abusing his position and refusing to acknowledge his responsibilities, even when he got as far as being both a Senator and a CEO of an important company. It was always 'me, first' and everyone else a very poor second. His business and political acumen were undiminished, but his enemies were accumulating and his personality was starting to fray. By the end of it, his ego was raging out of control and, during an argument with his mistress - whom had been stalwartly by his side for the past two years - he pushed her down the stairs, only to discover that a broken neck wasn't going to infringe on her day that much..."

The derangement doesn't determine the character. The character determines the derangement. That "bad" example is awful – I would toss it out the window. But that "good" example is very intriguing...

Derangements aren't "cute" or "cool" or even "fun"

One of my chief joys in being the character-arbiter in a game is shooting down "looney toons" Malkavians. No fuzzy bunny slippers and calling the Prince "Shirley" (unless that *is* their name and you're good friends). No "I'm playing a guy who has three personalities. He's convinced he is actually a trio of people who are secretly running the world". Go for Hannibal Lector, not Cookie Monster. Trust me, it's more fun that way.

There is one exception to the "Cute Malkavians are useless" rule. That would be Dru from *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*. Dru played with dolls, she had tea parties, and she would make the cutest balloon animals from her victims intestines... She was adorable, and scary as hell. But not everyone can pull that off, so think twice before attempting it. Think three times.

People *expect* fuzzy-bunny Malkavians. Why give 'em what they expect? Besides, who would Embrace those individuals, anyway? What use would they be to the clan? But more of that in a moment...

Derangements aren't easy to play - even when we tone down the "realism threshold" for this all being a game, not a recreationist exercise. Derangements are an integral part of the Malkavian character, not an afterthought. They often are (but not always) the central driving force in a Malkavian's existence. This does *not* mean that a character's derangement is visible at 20 paces. The derangement is a strong, ongoing motivator in the character's psyche - not a neon sign over their head.

Pick a derangement that suits your character - as suggested above. Keep in mind that if your character was insane before their embrace, it most likely stems from either a major trauma or a chemical imbalance. People don't just wake up and decide that they're going to be obsessive-compulsive from that

point forward... Abused children, drug addicts and people with just plain bad genes can develop mental illnesses later in life - and that's just what I can think of off the top of my head.

The caveat to this is: do some research. I'm not asking for players to go overboard in playing a derangement - as mentioned above, this *is* a game, not a recreation - but I'm *very* tired of watching players confuse schizophrenia with disassociate personality disorder and bipolarism with “Well, she's kind of moody...” If you want some online references that aren't too academic and dry, take a look at some of the URLs at the end of this document.

What's the point - of you in particular?

Actually, this is a valid question for any vampire character, but it's worth repeating here. Vampires hardly *ever* Embrace someone on the spur of the moment - particularly not in a Camarilla city. The Malkavians have a particular reputation for watching their would-be childer for a long time - even years - before their Embrace. A would-be childer must possess some *extraordinary* quality, something that simply demands it be preserved for the ages. Anything less, and the subject could just be ghoulled - or even Dominated - to whatever purpose the would-be Sire has in mind. After all, it's a lot easier to obtain a ghoul in a Camarilla town, than to receive the right to Sire childer.

And don't cop out with that “My Sire Embraced me without permission” copout – unless you're playing in an Anarch troupe. Put some thought into why you were created.

Enlightenment - or a reasonable ersatz thereof.

Now, I'm not too keen on that whole WW “The Malkavians are Enlightened” routine, but we seem to be stuck with it. I like the idea of Malkavians having a very different worldview, of being “twisted seers” and that strangeness sometimes enables surprising information to make its way into their heads. But flat-out, third-eye-wide-open “enlightened”? I find that a little too implausible – even for a roleplaying game.

My preferred take on all this is that some Malkavians consider their derangement a gift which enables them to help society - or themselves - in a highly unusual way. Of course, their idea of help might be rather...unusual. Consider that street bum who's convinced he's the Son of God. Now give him Auspex and Dominate. If he's preaching a good message, he could help thousands of innocent people lead better lives. Contraiwise is the sadist who is convinced that pain brings enlightenment to others – a radical way of teaching a person about their own priorities.

Some other Malkavians just have an interesting point of view on life, regardless of derangement. In one game of my acquaintance, there is a Malkavian who is a dedicated pacifist and student of Eastern philosophy. She dedicates herself to resolving conflict and helping other vampires find inner peace. Her derangement doesn't have much to do with all this (can't disclose what it is, she is still a PC at the time of writing) but she does have a POV that is extremely unique, for a vampire.

So think about this when creating your Malkavian. “How am I enlightened? How is my perspective radically different from my fellow vampires?”

A lot of all this might strike you as common sense, in which case I hope you're playing in my game! Otherwise, I hope I have helped you identify and excise a few bad habits and maybe come up with some ideas for new and interesting Malkavians.

URLs For Researching Mental Disorders and Illnesses

<http://www.mentalhealth.com/fr20.html>

<http://www.mentalhealth.org/cornerstone/>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/index.cfm#disinfo>

<http://www.sane.org/>