

SALOME

A 24 Hour RPG

By Ivan Ewert



Everybody wants something that someone else controls.

Salome wants to kiss the lips of John the Baptist, locked away by her stepfather Herod. Herod wants to watch his stepdaughter dance, but her mother forbids it. And John wants the world to submit to his messiah, or kneel in damnation.

In the end, everybody gets what they want - and everybody pays the price. Salome dances and is rewarded with the head of John the Baptist, whose dead lips she kisses, whose death brings the judgment of an angry god upon the house of Herod.

Everybody wants something. How far would you go to get it? And how far will the world change to make your wishes come true?

Salome was designed, written and laid out in a 24 hour period from Tuesday, Oct. 12 to Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2004 as part of the 24 hour RPG contest run by the good people at the Forge. It's my first attempt at designing a game since learning that a list of skills and powers doesn't create any kind of tension, drama or excitement: those things must be provided by the people at the table, and the fewer shopping lists there are the faster one can get into the game.

It's apparently something of a tradition to include some lists in the book regarding what was done while writing. The music played includes, very specifically: U2's *Shake It Salome*, Boss Hog's *Come And Get It*, and Warren Zevon's *Sacrificial Lambs*. Whole albums include those by Boss Hog, the Black Crowes, the White Stripes, Drive By Truckers and John Lee Hooker. I took a break for a bike ride through the forest to clear my head and ate off a pot roast which we made the night before specifically so I'd have something to grab quickly throughout the day. It was finished around 7 AM on Wednesday after a reasonable night's sleep.

Cover is by Gustave Moreau, interior art by the indomitable Aubrey Beardsley, collected from the royalty-free clipart.com.

I'm happy with the way it turned out, though I'm sure there is room for improvement. I'd like to thank everyone involved in the creation of this contest - it's been a lot of fun.



CHARACTERS

Stats

All characters in Salome have two Stats in common: Passion and Will.

Your Passion is what you roll in order to affect someone who does not wish to be affected, though what method you use will vary from time to time - whispering words of sweet corruption, stabbing someone through the heart, and breaking down in crocodile tears all use the same basic mechanic, a roll of the Passion die.

Your Will is what you use to resist the Passions of others. It is reactive rather than active, never used until someone else is attempting to affect you directly. Can you resist the sweet words, parry the deadly blade, remain strong against those welling tears? Anytime you wish to avoid being affected by someone else's Passion, you may choose to roll your Will die.

You start with one 12-sided and one 10-sided die. Put one of those dice into each Stat.

Drive

All characters in Salome have a player-created Drive, which does not involve dice at all. Your character's Drive is the thing you most want in the world, the thing you would rather die than live without, the thing you would give your life to see, possess or experience.

More than anything else, it is your character's Drive which separates him from the rest of the world and makes him an individual. It's the most important decision you'll make in character creation.

It's important to note that Salome is not a game for playing chartered accountants. Everyone in the world of Salome is driven to extremes in the pursuit of their desires, and those desires are all directed at something specific. "I want to be happy" is not a Drive, "It would make me happy to possess my stepdaughter Salome" is a Drive. "I want to be comfortable" is not, "I could be comfortable if the Crown Jewels were mine" is.

The difference is not subtle. But then, neither are the people who inhabit the world of Salome.



The One

The One refers to the thing which is controlling your access to the object of your Drive. They will be your most common target in trying to affect the world around you.

The One does not have to be a person, it could be a circumstance or a character trait within a person. For instance, Salome wants to kiss the lips of John the Baptist. He is the one stopping her from doing so, but more to the point, it is his faith which stops her. If Salome could wear down his faith, she could tempt him into her desires, and thereby get exactly what she wants.

The Three

As mentioned above, every attempt to affect the world depends on your Passion die. However, not everybody uses the same tactics to get what they want. John the Baptist isn't a mass murderer preparing to send everyone to Hell with his own two hands, he's a born orator with second sight and a strong faith in his religion. King Herod isn't really a violent rapist, he's a spoiled hedonist with a lot of clout.

These two men get what they want based on what we call The Three. Choose three tactics that your character is most comfortable and/or capable with in terms of getting what they want. Again, this is done in terms of a simple sentence, or even a few words.

In game terms, using these tactics allow a character to use his Passion die to its full potential, as described in Conflict (below).

The Description

Finally, it's a good idea to write up a capsule description of what your character looks like. Feel free to fold the Three into this description - a wealthy man is probably well-dressed, a born liar might have a shifty cast to his eyes.

This description will be available to all other characters at the table, so try to think of how other people see him rather than how he sees himself. A common trick is to 'cast' a well-known actor in your role, or to find a lesser-known actor's picture using an internet search engine.



EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION

Craig's setting up a character for a short game of Salome, set in medieval France. He wants his character to be more active than passive, an instigator rather than a stalwart; so he puts his 12-sided die into Passion and his 10-sided die into Will.

For his Drive, Craig wants to play with the idea of a disinherited son, angry at the world and ready to prove that he was the better choice to gain his father's land. His Drive is listed as "I want to control the lands my father once controlled."

There are many choices Craig could make regarding The One. The most obvious would be an older brother, but Craig actually *has* an older brother and isn't playing the game out of some weird family trauma. He thinks it would be more interesting if the lands went to the Church on his father's death, which permits him a wider playing field and the setup for some nice Church vs. State roleplaying.

However, making "The Catholic Church" the One is a pretty tall order. We decide to settle on "The Bishop who controls these lands" as a more focused option.

Craig now gets to choose the Three, those tactics he will use to wrest control of his father's lands back from the Bishop. Since he decided not to go the family route, it makes sense that his younger brothers might actually support him in his Drive, so his first choice is: "Strongly supported by his brothers." He's always enjoyed movies of epic battles and military history, so his second choice is: "Skilled commander of men." For number three, Craig wants to get away from the use of non-player characters and create something for more personal scenes. As a result, he takes "Impassioned orator," which may prove the turning point in his battles against the Bishop.

For the Description, Craig simply writes, "Clement d'Arcy is a tall and powerful knight in the prime of his life, dressed in the ancient livery of his once-great family. His eyes seem to crackle with energy when he speaks, and his voice is that of Brian Blessed."

That's it - Craig's got his character.



SALOME CHARACTER SHEET

Name:

Drive:

Passion: d12 d10

Will: d12 d10 d8 d6 d4

Inverted: d12 d10 d8 d6 d4

The One:

The Three:

Description:



CONFLICT RESOLUTION

As mentioned above, all characters affect the world through the use of their Passion die and resist being affected through the use of their Will die. This is the most common and meaningful form of conflict resolution in Salome, which is why we start there.

Any time a character tries to affect his One, any minions or tactics of the One, or anything which directly stands between him and his Drive, he may choose to either play the averages or roll the dice.

Playing the Averages

To play the averages, the character simply halves his Passion die and hopes that the target is using a weaker die than he is. In short, playing the averages guarantees success against a weaker opponent, and guarantees failure against a stronger or equal opponent.

However, playing the averages is far less effective in terms of long-term reward than rolling the dice is. The minor success granted by playing the averages never truly moves the character any closer to his Drive, because it does not erode the opponent's Will in any way.

What it *does* provide is a means of short-circuiting scenes which you do not find interesting. For example, when the referee describes Juliet's bedroom as placed out of Romeo's reach, he may have intended the young lover to make a scene out of climbing the wall, physically assailing this object which stands between himself and his Drive. Instead, Romeo wants to get right to the heart of the matter and talk with his inamorata, so he plays the averages and takes a 6 against the wall's average of 5. That cuts the wall-scene short and gets them right to the balcony scene, which is - let's be honest - a lot more interesting.

Playing the averages may also be used as a feint - it shows you how powerful your opponent's Will is, knowledge which may change your choice of tactics later in the game.

There are two caveats to the rule of playing the averages. First, if your character is using a tactic that is not listed among the Three, he must play the averages - he cannot choose to roll the dice. This ensures that all characters on every side keep to their core concepts. Secondly, the One may always insist that the dice be rolled in any



scene which directly affects them. To continue the example of M. Shakespeare begun above, Romeo's "the One" is Juliet's family. When Juliet comes out on the balcony, the player of the family (knowing now that Romeo's Passion is stronger than their Will) may insist that Romeo roll the dice rather than play the averages. That puts the fickle element of chance into the scene, and might impact Romeo's ability to achieve his Drive in the end-game.

Rolling the Dice

Rolling dice is theoretically simple. The player who is trying to affect the world rolls his Passion die, and the player who is being affected rolls his Will die. Whichever player rolls the highest number wins the roll-off, and the scene ends.

When the dice come out, however, characters begin to be truly affected by the actions of others. That's because the Will score of the loser of a roll-off drops by a die type every time a scene is concluded.

The die types are, in order: d12, d10, d8, d6, and d4. So if you begin the scene with a d10 in Will, and lose the roll-off, your Will drops to a d8. This happens regardless of whether or not you were the instigator or the victim of the roll-off: Being thwarted in your efforts to affect the world makes you more liable to missteps and being affected in turn by those you thought you could dominate.

Playing It Out

Now, there's a lot more to a good story than two people rolling a few dice and walking away. There's no passion and drama in that! You want to make sure all the other players at the table understand just what's happening between the people involved in the scene.

For most of us, that means describing the scene and putting forth our arguments. Make your friends want you to win the roll. Make even the players portraying the One want to lose to you, and you've won the scene emotionally even if you lose the roll. It's the kind of thing we all play these games for, after all!



Defining the Scene

It's up to the players as a group to decide how long these scenes are going to go, which is why we've subtitled the game "in one to five acts." A single roll-off could be used for every verbal thrust, every slice of the switchblade, every little action the characters undertake. That'll give you some very quick resolution, and someone will very likely run their Will die down to nothing within an hour or so of play.

If that grabs you, great! Salome is designed to play quickly if that's what your group wants and/or needs. However, if you'd like to tell a wider and more sweeping tale, we can accommodate you there as well. Just define the Scene as "everything happening in this space, at this time," and you've got an awful lot of drama packed into a single roll of the dice. This is the five-act drama, which can take a whole session or longer to fully play out.

Think of it as action vs. setting. If you want quick resolution of the game, roll once for every action taken. If you want a longer and more involved game, roll once for every change of scene which requires a resolution of conflict.

Incidental Resolution

In a one-act game, there's not going to be much incidental resolution. Everything that's happening should be happening for a reason, and it needs to impact the Drive, One, and Will of every character around. In longer games, however, some minor characters and obstacles may easily arise during the course of play. Through incidental resolution, a character can regain Will die types by rolling the dice and successfully overcoming these tangential obstacles to the achieving of one's Drive.

Additionally, since these are side-quests at best, they're nowhere near as difficult to achieve as actual dramatically important resolutions. Incidental Resolutions are always considered to have a Will of d6, making them reasonably simple to beat in the early part of the game.

Of course, if you fail to win an incidental resolution, your Will die type drops as usual. It's a gamble, but it's also the only way you can refresh your Will in the course of a game.

You're allowed to call for a single incidental resolution for every two die types you lose in a standard resolution - you'll never make it all the way back, but you can stave off the inevitable a little longer.



Once a player calls for an incidental resolution, the stage is set for a quick face-off between the character and something which could keep him from achieving his Drive, but which does not actually have to be resolved in order to achieve that Drive. To return to Romeo and Juliet for a moment, the character of Tybalt is an example of an incidental resolution. He doesn't actually have to die or step aside in order for Romeo to reach his Drive of Juliet, but it wouldn't hurt if he did, either.

Other possible examples of incidental resolution might include moving one's primary location, convincing a third party to intercede on your behalf, gambling to win enough money to impress the object of your Drive, etc. Anything that might impact the Drive, the One, or your own situation can be considered an incidental resolution.

d4 Will ... and Beyond

So, why should you care about refreshing your Will through incidental resolution? Because when your Will is gone, your Drive is inverted. You've lost, and if you recall, you'd rather die than lose. Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven and all that.

When John the Baptist rejects Salome for the final time, she still wants to kiss his lips ... but she knows she's never going to be able to do so while he lives. When Romeo manages to get Juliet away from her family, they'd rather see her dead than married to a Montague.

Your Will returns to its original standing, only now, you've gone around a very specific bend. You hate the thing you loved, despise the thing you wanted. You'll do whatever you can to see Juliet stabbed, Desdemona strangled, John beheaded.

Essentially, you begin the game again, and this time you've got the upper hand. Your One has likely been beaten down already by your protracted struggle, and is only going to be able to resist you for a short while. Once you've broken them, you can get the shadow of the thing you always wanted - the reflection of your heart's desire.



A Note For Combat Fans

I'm going to be polite here, since let's be honest, I'm doing you people no real favors here. The least I can do is be civil.

Yes, in all honesty, a knife-edge hurts a lot more than a few nasty names and black-bordered letters. A bullet from a Thompson gun is going to do real, serious, lasting damage to anyone who happens to catch it, while a shoulder to cry on is generally treatment for any real-world insults our heroes may endure.

Salome knows, and Salome doesn't care.

It's not a tactical game, and it's not intended to be. The central idea in Salome is the creation of drama and the re-creation of the feeling you get when you're watching a great story unfold before your eyes.

Not good enough for you, huh? Still itching to unload a world of physical hurt on your imaginary enemies? All right then, consider this:

You can still use your guns, your swords, your Argonian death-rays. Nobody's stopping you from doing that, but your choice of targets is so *much wider* than in other games.

You're not going after your enemy directly, you're going after the very foundations upon which he stands. You're trying to destroy him before you kill him, because death's just too good for the bastard. When your character unloads his Uzi into the massed fanatics supporting your enemy, he can kill an awful lot of people, and that will erode his support base. When your character besieges his enemy's castle with trebuchets and catapults, he can bring the walls of a mighty fortress crashing to the earth, and everybody wants to be on the winning side.

That's why Salome works by reducing Will rather than Hit Points, Damage Allotment, or whatever the kids are calling them these days. You don't go after your foe directly and physically until the end of Act Five, when he's already been put through the wringer and is ready to be killed rather than see you live a second longer.

Try it. Trust me, it's a lot more rewarding at the end of the evening.



EXAMPLE OF CONFLICT AND RESOLUTION

Craig and I decide to run the first conflict between his character, Clement d'Arcy, and the Bishop Trudeau.

Craig: I want to start off playing the averages - see what kind of man this Trudeau really is. I'm going to send my sister in to meet with him, see if he behaves improperly or if she can discern any hidden weaknesses in the man's armor.

Ivan: Okay, that doesn't use any of the Three but since you're playing the averages it doesn't matter. I'll allow you to play the averages, since this is an example.

Craig: Fair enough. My Passion is d12, so the Average is 6.

Ivan: During the meeting with your sister, Bishop Trudeau hems and haws a bit. He has trouble meeting the young lady's eyes and the few times he does, he blushes a fiery crimson. In other words, you win - his Will is at d10 currently, so the Average is a 5, but since you played the averages ...

Craig: ... he doesn't lose any will. And of course, none of my Three can directly impact his lustful thoughts and nature, so I can't ever roll against that.

Ivan: Not directly, no.

Craig: What are you ... oh, I see. But it's your turn to respond to my attempts, so I'll have to save that for the next time.

Ivan: Yep. Let me think for a second ... okay. The Bishop Trudeau is going to use one of his Three, the fact that he is a very wealthy man, to send a gift back with your sister which is clearly intended to appease your angry blood. It's a fabulously wrought box from the Holy Land, and enclosed within it is a marvelous incense to be burned in your chapels.

Craig: It is poison to me! The scent of scales in the Garden of Eden, the reek of an inseamed Bishop's bedclothes!

Ivan: Be that as it may, you still have to roll to see if it has any actual



effect on your Drive and Will. Remember, you've got a d10 for Will ...

Craig: And he must have a d12, since his own Will was a d10 as well.

Ivan: Yep. And I get a six.

Craig: Eight! I win! Again with the inseamed bedclothes, the Garden, and yet more!

Ivan: Want to give me more of your masterful oration?

Craig: Nah, it'd just be a cheap way of padding the example out so you can reach the required page count.

Ivan: ::sigh:: Fine, fine. Your rejection of the gift means your Will stays strong at d10, and Bishop Trudeau's is reduced to a d8. The scene goes to you.

Craig: Well, knowing what I do about his rakish behavior toward my sister, I'm going to take the box of incense to the next party I attend. I'll be using one of the Three - Masterful Orator - to compare the incense to the perfumes of Italian whores, whose company this false priest has enjoyed so oft.

Ivan: Okay - that'll go over well, and you can roll your Passion of d12. Go nuts.

Craig: Ten!

Ivan: Ouch. And with his Will reduced to a d8, he can't possibly beat that. His Will drops again to a d6, and I'm going to call for an Incidental Resolution to try to raise back to a d8.

Craig: Okay, what's the story there?

Ivan: Bishop Trudeau goes to his confessor, seeking absolution and strength in the eyes of God. "I have lusted in my heart, O God, and have seen the gates of Heaven in the very lap of this maiden ..."

Craig: Ew. Okay, since it's just us I'll roll for your Incidental. Incidentals are always d6, and I get ... a six. Man, I'm almost sorry about that.



Ivan: I've still got a chance. If I roll a six myself, then I've matched you and my Will goes back to a d8. Of course, in reality, I roll a three, and my Will goes down again to d4!

Craig: Okay, let's see ... in story terms, the Confessor decides that the best thing for Bishop Trudeau to do is to go into a solitary cell and pray. But the whole time he is within, trying to concentrate upon God, his thoughts keep turning to d'Arcy's sister. You know, it's weird how I'd planned this story to be one about military strategy and it's turned into this whole pandering thing.

Ivan: I know. The first tactic you choose can set the stage for the entire game, really. All right, let me see ... I'm down to a d4 but I can still take you down a peg before I invert my Drive. Ah, got it! Your Three says your *brothers* support you ...

Craig: Ouch. I see where this is going.

Ivan: Yep. Trudeau will use one of his Three, "Handsome foreign devil," to sway your sister into entering the nunnery near his own luxurious home, the home that was once your family's, now steeped in vile sin with your father's daughter as an accomplice!

Craig: If you win.

Ivan: If I win. And I roll a nine. Your Will is d10, beat that!

Craig: Seven! Damn it! My Will drops to d8 ... and I've had enough of subtlety. I begin massing my men along the border to show him the mailed fist of the d'Arcy's - I roll a six.

Ivan: Still higher than I can get. Trudeau's lost his Will and his Drive is now inverted. Rather than wishing to possess the lands of the d'Arcy's, he now wants to destroy everything that they once loved. And h'es going to start by strangling your sister in their ... what did you call them? Inseamed bedclothes.

Craig: God in Heaven! You're willing to commit murder just for an example of play? You're a monster!

Ivan: Fate is cruel, my friend. Fate is cruel.



TELLING THE TALE

Naturally, you're going to need more than a single player to get the most out of Salome. It plays very well with two - one taking the part of the instigator and the other taking the part of the One - and it was with this mode in mind that the game was actually designed.

In this mode, telling the tale is relatively simple. The instigator describes his first move toward his Drive, the One reacts, and the tale unfolds more or less as a duel or a chess game might, with each reacting to the other's latest moves.

When more than two players are involved, a number of options become available. The first and simplest is to hand control of all the incidental resolutions to the third player, thus creating a more or less impartial judge for these elements of play. In this case, the third player takes on a role similar to the standard GM of most roleplaying games, controlling everything in world except the primary designated antagonist.

Of course, that's not the only way it can be done. If you recall, in our character creation example we created Craig's character as a noble son disinherited by the church and arrayed against the Bishop. If a third player wishes to be brought into the game, all said player must do is tie himself into the central conflict.

Perhaps the third player becomes an uncle of the lordling, whose Drive is to protect his nephew. In this case the One is represented by Craig's Drive: as long as Craig does not hold his lands, his uncle may be able to better protect him. Alternately, the third player may become an ambitious young monk, desirous of the office of the Bishop. Now his One is the same as Craig's (the current bishop), but his Drive is opposed to Craig's (To become the Bishop and hold his lands intact).

By defining a central conflict and tying all players into that conflict, any number of players could theoretically sit to a game of Salome. Simply agree to the two players who will define the central conflict (high roller, short straw, host of the game) and work from there.

The rhythm is different with multiple players, however. There are a number of ways in which this can be worked out. The simplest is to work with a single conflict until one character has seen their Drive



inverted, bringing their Will back to full power and introducing the additional players as part of this new and defining conflict. The play Salome uses this method - when John the Baptist has successfully resisted Salome and inverted her Drive, he vanishes from the tale and King Herod arrives.

(As a side note, this could also have been played out by two players, with one taking on the roles of John and Herod and the second playing Salome for the entirety of the game.)

However, it's undeniably true that many of us game in order to play with a number of our friends at once. In this case, the game will almost certainly become an extended, five-act version. Allow a single conflict to be played out, then move to a new scene. Traditionally play would rotate clockwise around the table, permitting each player to participate in two scenes in a row with two separate opponents; but this technique can be easily altered to suit your style and needs.

One warning: It might not be a bad idea, in this case, to use the idea of one player taking on all incidental conflicts as well as moderating the pace of the game. This player should try to make sure no single character gets more than two scenes in a row - otherwise, you run the very real risk of having one character invert their Drive before everyone has had a chance to run a scene with his original intent.

ENDGAME

A standard two-player game ends when one character has driven his opponent to invert his Drive, and either triumphs against or succumbs to the inverted Drive. Either way, the tale has been told, and it's likely that only one character remains standing.

In a game with multiple players, the endgame is likely to be the same. However, if two strong contenders with opposing Drives remain in the game, there's no reason the story could not continue on, focussing now on this alternate conflict. It's naturally best if all players agree to either end or continue, unless the host of the game has another game or activity prepared that can occupy those who are disinterested in watching the story end.



STYLE, MOOD AND FEEL

Salome's a game of tragedy, not triumph. Your victories are ultimately either temporary or hollow, no matter how hard you fight. However, that doesn't make them pointless.

If you look at each of the two stories we've used for our examples so far, you'll see that something important happens to the world even when the protagonists fail in their individual aims. John's messiah judges the corrupted courts of Herod, the houses of Montegue and Capulet are reconciled.

The world has been changed, and it was ultimately you who brought the change about. Your responsibilities are awesome, and your deeds reverberate beyond the limitations of your petty needs. By being human, you alter the universe.

Think about that. That's the essence of Salome - the idea that victory and failure are equally meaningless when applied to the grand picture of the story you're telling. What matters, what's truly important, is the fact that your actions have been remembered, and have impacted everything that you once knew and valued.

With that in mind, Salome lends itself to any era, and any place. Passionate and driven individuals feature prominently in stories taken from all around the world, from all ages of man. All you have to do is make sure that the Drives are appropriate to your period, and the other pieces will generally fall into place.

Interested in the bootlegging gangsters of Chicago? Or are the Crusades more to your liking? Berkeley, Baghdad, and Boston all have stories to be told about the people involved in momentous occasions, and the tragedy that befell at least one among their numbers.

It's not designed to be a campaign game, of course. There's a very definite end to every tale told in Salome, and without that endpoint the whole focus of the game is lost. But if you're looking for a way to extend the simple mechanic into something that can be used on a semi-regular basis, then read on ...



DIFFERENT METHODS OF PLAY

Salome's been designed as a fairly standard, if stripped-down, role-playing game. However, anything inspired by Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley has got to allow for a certain desire to shift the boundaries even further.

Performance

A performance-based game tries to take into account the various forms of artistic expression which people bring to the gaming table. We've all seen someone - probably more than one - who enjoys games and gaming but simply isn't a born talker.

If you're good with words, do it the way you're used to in other role-playing games and describe everything you're trying to do. Actually persuade the other people at the table to want you to win, and you've done well and brought fun to the table regardless of whether your character wins or loses the scene.

But not all of us are great with words. So Salome urges you to bring more to the table than that. If you're an artist, sketch it out! Show the table what Salome looks like. Make them want to see her dancing. Draw a dark sky and silver stars and seven veils drifting to the floor, and use that as your scene rather than stumbling over a bunch of melodramatic language.

If you're a musician, bring your instrument and improvise. Play the song Salome will dance to, let people hear the rhythms of her dancing feet. Play them ahead of time and record them, if you have to; and bring those compositions to your group. If that's your strength, then it belongs at the gaming table.

Once you've finished your composition, and your opponent has responded - either through language or art, music or movement - then you each roll the dice as you would with any standard scene in any other game, and determine victory based on the throw of the die.

Salome was developed around art and language, with a dancer as its central figure of importance. It would be ridiculous for me to suggest that only language has a part in the playing of this game.



LARP

Thanks to the limited mechanic, Salome could easily be translated into a LARP mechanism. Everyone carries a single set of dice and sets about the room, ready to stand or fall as the dice insist. While the majority ofLARPs seem to disdain the use of dice, I think that a single roll-off is not too much to ask of the great gods of gaming, even in a public location or at odd times of the day.

This is really one way in which I could see a much larger group getting together to enjoy the game, providing a few sides along which to align oneself and dozens of Drives conflicting with one another.

Of course, it could also wind up an absolute madhouse; but that has its own defined (if limited) appeal, doesn't it?

Play By Post / Play By eMail

Due largely to its limited scope, Salome's also well-suited to a more leisurely style of storytelling in terms of electronic play. If you want more Byzantine plots, more well-written language, more cunning ploys and a much slower pace, play by post is the right technique for you.

You could run this system under standard email or bulletin board, allowing someone to cut and paste the information into a reasonable facsimile of a screenplay. You could run it under a Blog, in which each instigator's move takes the form of a post, with the dialogue that makes up the scene taking place in the comments.

You could even run it under a Wiki, I would imagine, with instigators creating entries as historical events which are then edited and altered by those being affected, but I honestly don't know enough about Wiki management to say whether that would be a good idea or not.



SETTING IDEAS

I see that according to the rules of the 24-hour game you must provide a complete setting as well as everything else. However, since I'm about six pages short at this point and can't think of much else that's missing, I'm going to provide three settings for the price of one. Yes, I'm reaching the loopy stage of the design game (8 hours in) during which the fourth wall is broken and I begin speaking to you more directly. Also, in which I have a beer.

Shake Your Money Maker

Nobody ever said Vegas was pretty. Nobody ever said Vegas was nice. But ask anyone, anywhere, and they'll tell you for sure that Vegas swings, and that everybody in town has a story of their own.

It's nothing but desert for miles around, and yet the people keep on pouring in, begging for someone to take their money, take their dignity and their pride, take everything they have and leave them begging for more. They want showgirls to shake it and waitresses to serve them what's never been on the menu. They want high rollers and low morals and they don't want anything in between.

Nobody goes far in Vegas unless they're willing to shake the strongest pillars of the temple. And nobody shakes the pillars like Salome.

This setting could easily be a direct port of the story itself, and I'd frankly be surprised if some amateur theatre company hasn't already done it. But you don't have to stop there, not for a heartbeat. Think of gangsters and roadsters, convertibles and easy cash. Think of every temptation you've ever felt in your life and multiply it by any number you like, and you've got the city in the sands.

Think mayor and governor, think ways and means. Remember that what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas, and think of what that means carried to its ultimate and frightening conclusion. There are few places in America with a strong a grip on the popular imagination with regard to temptation, passion and ambition. Make the most of it and see where your imagination takes you.



Wilde High

Remember high school? Remember how everything seemed bigger, more important, more necessary to you? Remember how crucial cool was, and how easy it was to provoke some kids into a blind rage? Remember the games, the taunts, the physical abuse? It's all there, and it's all chicken soup for Salome's soul.

In many ways, high school is about as close as most moderns as likely to get to the real spirit of Salome. Adolescence casts a heavy shadow over most people, gamers in particular, and there's no doubt that everyone feels things more deeply in that wicked brew of hormones and self-doubt. You can see it in their eyes and if you try hard enough, you can remember seeing it in the mirror.

This isn't a celebration of childhood, it's a retelling of the way things used to be - it's historical tragedy, possibly on a smaller scale than that of King John but part and parcel of the new national attention nonetheless. There's a reason youth is simultaneously celebrated and condemned by American culture, so make the most of it.

Sharpen your tongues and gun your engines. Get ready for a wild time.

One For the Chorus

Ancient Greece was the birthplace of tragedy, the nation and culture that gave us the very idea of the hubris which drives Salome. There are more stories per square inch in the fertile lands of the Mediterranean than there are in the miles and miles of uncharted space, so dig them classics out and shake them down.

Give us your blind, your mad, your incestuous monarchs unwilling to be free. Give us great temples to be built and gods to be defied, give us capability and culpability in a single evening's entertainment. Bring on the Bacchae, those proud forerunners of our own salacious dancer, and set the women upon their men like hounds at an endless feast.

Ancient Greek storytelling was fueled by tragos. Go back to the well and drink deeply of your forebears, go back to the well and make it your own.



ENDNOTES

Salome is an experiment in a lot of ways. While I'm sure someone has done the two-die mechanic before, and very likely done it better, I don't know about it. What I wanted to do was create a game that was simple and straightforward, that could be played as a one-hour one-shot or over the space of a few nights of scenery-chewing, dialogue-writing madness. I like to think I've succeeded; but of course, I can't tell until I actually play the bloody thing.

I'm new to game design, game theory, indie gaming and everything else; but I'd like to make a few acknowledgements up front. Bryant Durrell is the man most responsible for indirectly introducing me to this keen new hobby, and his *Above the Earth* system was the kick in the pants it took to get me making time for this game. The blame for any error is mine, the thanks for any victory belongs to him.

Phillip Reed's *Vs. Monsters* was a serious kick to the head. I'm trying to make a living out of graphic design here, and along comes this guy with a brilliant layout and design in the space of 24 hours with a fun game to boot. I know that *Salome* is nowhere near his production quality, and I can only vow that next year will be different.

I'm ashamed to admit that I've never played *My Life With Master*, but the Actual Play threads I've looked into assure me that simpler mechanics can actually work and enhance the roleplaying experience.

Finally, I want to tip my hat to Messieurs Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. Without them, I would never have become interested in the story of *Salome*; and while their lives were too brief their influence lives on in every artistic sphere.



IMPORTANT LINKS

Artistic Inspiration and Clipart

<http://www.clipart.com> is a great resource for decent clipart and fonts. Their photos section leaves something to be desired, but for the price that's really to be expected.

<http://www.artchive.com> is one of the best art history and example sites one can find. It's got good examples from nearly every era of art history and dozens of influential artists.

<http://etext.virginia.edu/subjects/salome/salome.html> is the direct link to the University of Virginia's e-text version of Oscar Wilde's one-act play, *Salome*. The language might seem a little odd to modern audiences, but it's the very bedrock upon which this game was built.

<http://www.1890s.org/sub/beardsley.htm> provides a decent overview of Aubrey Beardsley, his life and works. I'm listing it instead of the many other sites out there since, well, Beardsley did a lot of what could be termed "not work-safe" art. Something to keep in mind, is all I'm saying.

Gaming and Personal

<http://www.24hourrpg.com> is the official website for the 24 Hour RPG contest and events. You're probably there right now, unless you got this file from a weird friend.

<http://www.indie-rpgs.com>, AKA The Forge, is an amazing place. Game theory, forums, announcements, examples of play; anything related to good indie gaming either winds up or begins right here.

<http://www.gamesgroove.com/ivan/> is my personal site, and while there's not a whole heck of a lot there right at the moment I'll very likely be updating more regularly soon.

Contact Information

If you liked *Salome*, or want to discuss ways and means of improving it (which I'm sure could be easily done), feel free to write me at ivan_gaming@yahoo.com. Note, however, that I delete all non-titled email automatically; so be sure to include a subject line like "*Salome*" or "Your Games" or "M:AK:E M:ONE:Y FA:ST."



