

a role-playing game for two players



a single moment

written by tobie abad

The two samurai stared at each other.

Once they were friends. Brothers. But time has
come for honor to be regained,
and vengeance to be unleashed.

Footing adjusted. Grips tightened.
Eyes narrowed.

A single moment
and it was over.

I dedicate this work to the people who have made this possible:

*To **Rocky Sunico**, who inspires me and nurtures my creative soul. I love you dearly.*

*To my parents, **Lito** and **Dulce Abad**, without whom I would not exist. Their belief and support in my love for gaming will never be forgotten.*

*To my first true game master, **Ryan Mendoza**, who allowed me to celebrate gaming and gave me the confidence to start running my own games.*

*To **Ben Woerner, John Wick, Ben Lehman, Mark Rein-Hagen, Josh Jordan, Eloy Lasanta** and **Giovanni Micolucci** who have inspired and supported me and welcomed me to the gaming industry despite the fact I'm practically a nobody.*

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*To **Urim Hernandez**, who actually challenged me to come up with a good two-player RPG system. And is always ready to play a game with me. This is the fruit to that challenge, buddy. Hope you like it.*

*To my Tag Team Supporters, most especially **Che, Giovanni, James, Justin, Karlo, Mina, Paolo**, and **Rocky** who have voiced out their support for me and have given me the push to keep creating. You are my Patrons and I thank you so much for the faith in my abilities. You are all awesome!*

*And lastly, to our dog **Yoshi**.*

Our secret Game Master when no one is looking.

A Single Moment,

A role-playing game for two players

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what is a single moment?

A Single Moment is a two-player role-playing game that tells the story of how two Samurai have come to odds and what bitter end awaits them.

Every *A Single Moment* game begins with the two Samurai upon a field, with swords drawn and tensions soaring. But how it ends, that is not revealed until all the events in the past are remembered. These events are played through as a series of Chapters that both Samurai share in flashback.

When all the Chapters have been shared, the game finally reveals the dramatic conclusion of that single moment.

To play *A Single Moment*, you need the following:

- 1) Two players who are willing to play the role of Samurai who have a duel to settle.
- 2) A sheet of paper for each players to write character and story notes you need.
- 3) A good number of six-sided dice per player. It helps to have a different color of dice for each player. Around ten each would be more than enough.
- 4) Four colors of tokens.
 - One color will represent Choice Tokens.
 - Another color will represent Hatred Tokens.
 - A third to represent Scar Tokens.
 - And the last color to represent Edge Tokens.

For groups that aren't comfy with so many tokens, you can simply track them with marks on the sheet of paper.

- 5) Print outs of the cards used in the game. The cards are the following:
 - Key Focus (3 cards)
 - Key Characters (3 cards)
 - Virtue Cards (7 cards)

role-playing or narrative game?

This is a narrative-focused role-playing game. The point is not to “win” but to craft a great narrative together with the other player.

what if i prefer using different dice?

I wrote this game with six-sided dice in mind since those dice are most common. Perhaps in a later expansion, I can write up alternate rules for other dice.



outline of a single moment

Unlike most role-playing games, in *A Single Moment*, players do not start by creating a character. Instead, they start by determining what the opening scene will be.

The Opening Scene

Each player take a turn to build the setting of the story, as well as the initial inklings of who they portray. Players will not be creating a full concept yet, but just answering key question that will help shape the initial setting of the game.

If the story of the session was viewed as a movie, it would resemble movies that begin with a glimpse of the closing battle. The “Finale” so to speak, but rather than show that fight, the movie cuts away to flashbacks to show the viewer how we got to this point. That is the feel of the Opening Scene in this game.

The Chapters

During the chapters, each Samurai has an opportunity to bring forth a flashback of some event that transpired in the past between the two. Each one is reflective of one of the Virtues of Bushido and may or may not contain the participation of other characters or Key Roles. These may be moments of passion, of revenge, of jealousy, or perhaps even of love.

These Chapters are meant to build the narrative of what happened between the two characters, as well as expand on who they are. A standard game of *A Single Moment* would feature five Chapters in total, with three of them featuring the Key Foci.

Each Chapter ends with one of the two samurai getting what they want. This is reflected as Edges that are earned and fuel his determination to win in the Finale. The loser, however, collects Hatred which can fuel as well attempts to still win in the Finale. Hatred, however, does result in the weight of Scars which can still shift the tides of fate.

longer or shorter games ?

For a short game, three chapters is good, since it allows each Key Focus to be presented.

For longer games, you are not even limited to just Chapters. You can have multiple chapters if you want, or have the scope of a Chapter run for a full game-session. This can allow your game to feel more like a television series than a single one-shot tale.

Just remember, regardless whether there are more or less chapters in your game, make each one count.

The Finale: A Single Moment

Once Hatred and Scars and Edges find their purpose, all the things of the past lead to this final moment in the present. Death smiles its bitter grin. The *A Single Moment* is played through, and the two Samurai reveal how that moment comes to what most likely will be a bitter end.

Epilogue

A final tale, perhaps to wrap up loose ends. Or perhaps a final sharing of what this tale has left us.

the opening scene

You and the other player are standing face to face, ready for that final act of violence. There is one thing certain: someone must die when that moment ends.

Starting with the player who last saw a martial arts movie/documentary, that player declares the following and fills in the missing details:

*"My name is (insert name).
I am of the (insert name) Clan.
This is my story."*

The next player then declares his version of the same declaration.

*"My name is (insert name).
I am of the (insert name) Clan.
This is my story."*

The Players then must work together to build a coherent setting. The two players will alternate making Opening Declarations, starting with the first player. The list must be completed in sequence. Established facts cannot be contradicted by later facts.

The Opening Declarations List

- **It is during a time of...**

Describe when the story occurs, perhaps what season, perhaps what year.

- **We stand upon...**

Describe the locale, which may suggest as well technology or general state of environment.

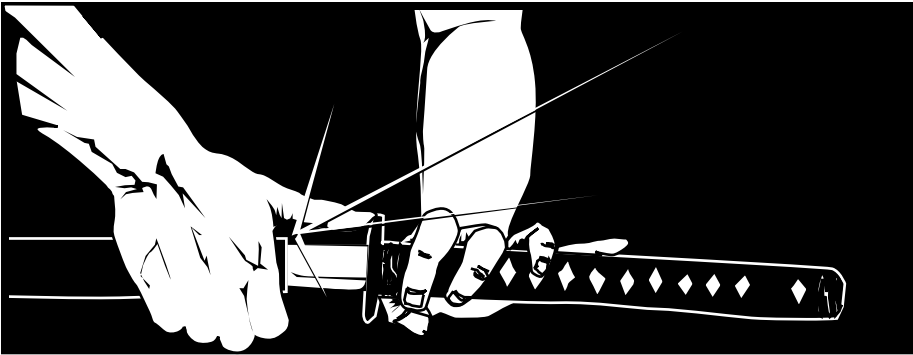
- **It has taken us... to come to this single moment.**

Describe the length of time the whole narrative will eventually take, even give the game an epic feel if the timelines are longer than typical human lifespans.

- **The story is a story about...**

Choose one Virtue among the Virtue Cards. The rest are then shuffled and stacked in one side.





the seven virtues of bushido

Bushido, the unique philosophy which ruled their martial training and day-to-day conduct, is said to have seven or eight virtues, depending on who you asked. For this game, we will stick to seven. These seven virtues serve as well as the key theme of a game of *A Single Moment*.

For the game, there are seven Virtue Cards. When a Virtue is chosen as one of the General Declarations, the remaining six are turned face down and shuffled into a single stack. These remaining cards will be used later in creating Chapters.

The General Declaration Virtue also takes precedence over any other Virtue during the succeeding Chapters.

The Seven Virtues are:

- **I. Rectitude**

A story of dying when the time to die is right. Of striking when the moment to strike is right. It is the foundation of all the other virtues. The unwavering power behind a decision of morality.

- **II. Courage**

The spirit of daring and bearing. To rise and meet even that which one cannot fathom.

- **III. Benevolence and Mercy**

Understand when to befriend even one's enemy.

- **IV. Respect**

There is a proper order in all things. A harmony brought by politeness.

- **V. Honesty and Sincerity**

There is no need for written pledges. One's word is one's bond.

- **VI. Honor**

Live and die by one's honor. Or commit haragiri (seppuku) to preserve lost honor.

- **VII. Loyalty**

One's loyalty is more precious than life itself.

The key theme should be a pervasive element in every Chapter. It should either highlight, stand as a foundation, or serve as a springboard for the events to unfold in the later chapters. Its importance (or its absence) should be felt.

example 1

Rocky and Yoshi are playing A Single Moment. Yoshi had just seen The Bride With White Hair and the Rouroni Kenshin movies and goes first. Yoshi starts the Opening Scene by declaring, "My name is Kurosawa. I am of the Yamato Clan. This is my story."

Rocky then follows by declaring, "My name is Kenshin. I am of the Ide Clan. This is my story."

Yoshi and Rocky then begin the Opening Declarations. Yoshi begins by stating, "It is during a time of war when the tale begins with Winter upon the lands."

Rocky continues the next part and states, "We stand upon the ruin of the Yamato castle. Fire still burns nearby. Our people lie dead in hundreds around us."

Yoshi smiles at the idea and decides to go for it, "My blade shines ready to drink again. Your blade glows red, with tongues of fire flickering from its edge."

Rocky choosing a Virtue card and closes the Opening Declarations by stating, "This is a story about Honor."

chapters

Following the Opening Scene, players then go through chapters.

Each Chapter is a flashback of one of the many events that lead to the final single moment. During Chapters, players build the story of friendship, trust, love, jealousy, envy, hatred, and sorrow between the two characters. This tale should reveal the personalities of the samurai and the reasons behind their duel.

At the end of each Chapter, both players roll their Choice Dice to see which among them is victorious. The winner gains Edges which are vital in the Finale. The loser collects Hatred.

Every Chapter is created in the following manner:

1. Draw a Virtue
2. Declare the Focus of the Chapter, inspired or based on the Virtue drawn.
3. Set the Scene (And, possibly, a Key Role)
4. Play through the Chapter
5. Chapter Climax
6. Resolve Chapter

Step 1: Choose Whether or Not to Draw a Virtue

Either player can start a Chapter. The player who chooses to start a Chapter is called the Active Player. Depending on the number of Chapters that you plan to play, the Active Player may choose to or not to draw a Virtue card.

If you do choose to draw a virtue, both player draw one of the remaining six Virtue cards and the Active Player must choose one of them as the Virtue of the Chapter. The unused card is then reshuffled back with the remaining cards.

While the overall story revolves around the chosen General Declaration Virtue, all the remaining Chapters are based on the other virtues of the Bushido. As the virtues are inherently part of the Samurai's life, the Active Player should find a way to create a Chapter while displaying or representing that virtue.

At the end of the Chapter, the next player must then become the Active Player.

Step 2: Declare the Focus of the Chapter

There are three Key Foci in every game of *A Single Moment*. The Active player must decide if the current Chapter is one of the Key Foci available. All three should be chosen before the game reaches the Finale.

Key Focus I. The Time When We Still Trusted Each Other

"I remember the time when we still once trusted each other..."

Key Focus II. The Moment You Crossed the Line

"I remember that which you did that began all this..."

Key Focus III. The Promises

"I remember the promise you made to (insert name here)..."

If the Chapter does not have a Key Foci, the player merely needs to give a short summary snippet of what the Chapter does focus on. *A Single Moment* games are meant to be short, focused, and eager to explore the narrative so a Chapter should not be wasted on what would normally be considered

downtime events. Each Chapter should be an important dramatic moment that contributes to the overall story of the session.



Choosing a Chapter to be a Key Focus rewards that Active Player with two Edges.

example 2

Rocky and Yoshi continue their tale of Honor. Yoshi opts to be the Active player first. The two draw Virtue cards; Yoshi draws Loyalty; Rocky draws Respect.

Yoshi chooses to use Loyalty and declares, "I recall that time when an act of disloyalty led to the destruction of a friendship that stood for generations," and reveals the Loyalty card.

Yoshi then decides that this Chapter will focus on the 3rd Key Focus. "I remember the promise you made to me."

Later, when the Chapter is done, Rocky is the Active Player. Both draw cards again and this time, Rocky choose the Virtue of the Chapter.

Step 3: Set the Scene (and a Key Role)

With the Focus defined, the Active Player then states the details of the scene. The Active Player is allowed to define one Key Role at the point and share how the events of this Chapter involved that personality. From that point onwards, any scenes that involve the defined Key Role are role-played by the player who introduced it.

There are three Key Roles featured in every *A Single Moment* game:

The Catalyst

This person is in many ways the reason the Single Moment comes to pass.

Perhaps, it is the sly tongue that spurs you to action. Or the pained mother who asks you to avenge her murdered husband. Maybe, the lord you serve who demands you follow his command.

The Victim

This person is the one who suffers the tragedy which one of the Samurai could not stop. While some might think this is similar to the Catalyst, typically this Role cements more the animosity be-

tween the two Samurai.

Perhaps it is the child that got in the way. Or the farmer who opted to tell the truth no one wanted to hear. Maybe, the old master who was poisoned.

The Coveted

This person holds the affections, respect or trust that one Samurai has which the other so desperately desires.

Maybe it is the concubine of the Daimyo who fell in love with you. Or the sister of the other samurai who wanted to be yours. Perhaps, the wife of your brother.

While it may seem that a character might serve more than one Key Role, Key Roles are best kept separate characters in a story. So while a story might have the coveted wife be the murdered body, this doesn't mean she too is the Victim. The Victim can be a second more brutal murder that pushes the story forward. Or the initial dead body found in the river that was used to "lure" the other samurai away from the village while he investigated it.

Not all introduced characters need to be a Key Role, however. Extras and other bit characters that do not serve Key Roles might not even require any names and are portrayed by the non-Active player. If the non-Active player desires it, the Active player can also take some roles.

Of course, if the other Samurai is present in the scene, its own player role-plays the Samurai.



example 3

Yoshi plans to later define the Victim, a Key Role in the story. Rocky, however may have his own idea on who the Victim should be. For now, however, they play through the first Chapter. Yoshi describes the scene, "It was a warm spring afternoon when we met on the road to the Mountain Pass."

"Kurosawa," Rocky says as Kenshin, "I have received word that your Father calls for me." Rocky has plans to have the father be the Victim.

"Your skill with the blade is equal only to mine, Kenshin. My father chose well. He requires someone to escort him through the Mountain Pass in the morrow. Sadly, I have been given other duties to perform." Yoshi says as Kurosawa.

"I am honored to be given such a duty," Rocky replies, "You can trust that I shall guard him with my life."

Wait! Wait if the Key Role is dead? Or dies in a Chapter?

Depending on how you choose to approach your game, a dead Key Role can still be portrayed through flash-back scenes, or perhaps even as a spirit that demands vengeance. Scenes, after all, can be set in the past or the future so long as they contribute to the narrative and remain consistent with what has been told.

Step 4: Play Through the Chapter

With the Focus, Scene and any characters defined, play through the scene and allow the narrative to develop. Build the relationship between the characters and relate it to the Chapter's Virtue.

The Active Player is the "GM" for the scene, and will make any necessary rulings and decisions on any actions the Samurai, Key Roles or other characters take in the Chapter.

Each Chapter has seven Choice Token to be awarded, and each time the rulings favor the Active player's own Samurai, a Choice Token must be handed to the other player. Each time a ruling favors the other player, the Active Player rewards himself with one.

Whenever conflicts arise in the scene, be it dramatic moments, or when there are disagreements between the two players on how an event or action should resolve in the Chapter, the Active Player always makes the final call. The decision must support the short summary given in "Declare the Focus of the Chapter".

example 4

Yoshi and Rocky continue the scene on the road to the Mountain Pass. Yoshi decides to use the scene to also add more details to the characters and their gear.

Yoshi asks, "Your blade, that is the Singing Hand is it not? The legendary blade that makes a distinct sound when it is swung. It is said to be the last sound any one hears before they die."

Rocky considers for a moment if he wants his character to have a legendary blade. He decides, "Yes. The same blade your great grandfather gave our Clan when the friendship was first forged. And it has remained bound to its sheath ever since, never to be drawn or used ever again." Yoshi keeps a Choice Token since Rocky has given himself such a burden. He could have claimed it was and that he had the freedom to use it whenever he wanted, which sounds more like a benefit than a burden. If it were that kind of a response, the Choice Token might have stayed with Rocky instead.

"A pity," Yoshi smirks, "I would have been honored to challenge you to a friendly duel."

"There is nothing stating we cannot," Rocky smiles, "A friendly duel does after all mean no blades are drawn."

Yoshi grins, "I nod in reply. And draw my sword and its sheath out to challenge you."

Rocky describes he does the same. The Friendly Duel is on. "To first touch," he adds.

Yoshi describes himself taking a step back, but suddenly swinging his sheathed blade on an upward strike, hoping to catch Kenshin's knee. Rocky describes blocking the strike at the last second, then spiraling as he leaps towards Kurosawa to try and strike him on the shoulder while mid-air. For the successful block, Yoshi keeps one Choice Token. There are five left.

Not wanting the fight to end quickly, Yoshi gives one Choice Token to Kurosawa (four left) and describes blocking the strike at his shoulder with the blade and using the force to propel himself backwards. The two stare at each other from thirty paces.

"Your skill is indeed equal to mine," Yoshi says, mimicking the heavy breathing Kurosawa needs to speak through.

"I am not even winded yet," Rocky says as Kenshin and describes darting forward to close the gap. Yoshi describes both blocking the next set of slashes and the two are now running through the woods near the path, waiting for an opportunity to strike at each other. Neither get a Choice Token for now.

"My father's life shall be in your hands," Yoshi mutters, "I am honored to see you be his protector." Yoshi however adds how the words sting Kenshin instead, as to him they sound like he's being treated as a mere bodyguard. Rocky agrees and this means it's a shift favorable for Kurosawa. Yoshi gets another Choice Token (three to go).

"At least he trust my skill more than your own," Rocky's words go with vile and venom. Rocky describes how they are enough for Yoshi to also get incensed. Yoshi, however says Kurosawa accepts it as a fact, and just remains blindly grateful. Once again and gives the Choice Token to Yoshi again. (two to go).

The scene continues.

Step 5: Chapter Climax

Eventually, the scene's Focus will reach a climactic point directly about the Focus of the Chapter and will require a resolution. This should come after all seven Choice Tokens have been assigned.

At this point, both players grab their Choice Tokens and replace them with an equal number of dice. Both players can choose to add extra dice in their roll. For each die they want to add, they earn a Scar. Neither player can have more than seven dice at the end of a Chapter.

Things Align...

Both players decide which samurai represented the Key Virtue best in the Chapter. That samurai also has two extra two dice to roll. There are benefits to being in tune with the ebb and flow of the world, after all. If the players cannot decide who gets it, neither do.

example 5

In a clearing in the woods, the two stand with their sheathed blades in their hands. Kurosawa feels the fight has been an honorable friendly match, both equal in skill. Yoshi describes how Kurosawa is blind to how insulted Kenshin actually feels.

The last two Choice Tokens went both to Yoshi, who continued to parry the last two attempts Rocky made to hit Kurosawa. They reach the moment of the Climax.

"Enough!" Rocky snarls as Kenshin and he describes, "As you parry my last swing, I kick off the ground and, moving faster than the eye can follow, draw the Singing Hand. It sings as it closes in on Kurosawa's face!"

Yoshi has a total of six Choice Tokens. Rocky has 1 token. Both feel Rocky should get two extra dice for breaking his promise regarding the sword, thus reflecting the Key Virtue, Loyalty. Liking the rage, Rocky decides to roll two more dice, and collect Scars Tokens for the extra dice.

"You dishonor your own line," Yoshi gasped.

"You've insulted me long enough!" Rocky growls.

Add the total of all the dice for each player.

The player with the higher total is Victorious and gains Edges equal to the number of Choice Tokens he had in the Chapter. The Victorious player also gets to narrate how the Chapter ends.

The player with the lower total is Overcome and gains Hatred equal to the number of Edges the Victorious player earned, plus one for every die he rolled that was above 3. Hatred grows when part of you feels you “could have won but didn’t.”

On a tie, the scene ends with a stalemate. Neither is Victorious nor Overcome. Both earn Edges equal to the number of Choice Tokens they had and Hatred equal to the number of Tokens the other has. The Active Player, however takes a Scar.

Players then collect the Edges, Hatred and Scars they have collected and set them aside for now. These will be used again in the Finale.

example 5, continued

Yoshi has 6 Tokens, which gives him 6 dice to roll.

Rocky has 1 Token, and 2 extra dice for Things Align. He also has 2 more dice thanks to choosing to get Scars. He has 5 dice to roll.

Both roll their dice.

Yoshi rolls 1, 3, 4, 2, 2, 6.

His total is 18.

Rocky rolls 1, 6, 6, 3, 2.

His total is also 18.

Since the rolls were tied, it is a stalemate. Neither is Victorious nor Overcome.

Yoshi gains 6 Edges and 1 Hatred. Rocky gains 1 Edges and 6 Hatred.

As Yoshi was the Active Player, he also gains a Scar Token. Rocky however does have 2 Scar Tokens. Yoshi describes his scar as the result of Rocky’s attack on his face. Rocky decides his two scars represent something psychological – a deep seated anger for Yoshi who thinks he is better than him.

Step 6: Resolve Chapter

The Victorious then narrates how the Chapter ends. If the Victorious was the Active Player, he most likely would simply confirm the Focus of the Chapter and narrate events falling into place in that manner.

If the Victorious was the other player, however, that player may narrate the Chapter ending in a way to suggest that perhaps the Focus of the Chapter was not wholly accurate. The ending must, however still seem to match the Focus at least for the Active Player's character. A Focus on when someone murdered a loved one might actually reveal the loved one committed suicide and the other merely arrived in time to think the first committed the murder, for example.

On a stalemate, the Active Player basically ends the Chapter.

The Active Player then discards the Virtue card, shuffles the remaining Virtue cards, puts aside all the Dice and hands the other player seven Choice Tokens. The other player is now the Active Player and a new Chapter begins. Once all Virtue Cards have been used, or if the decided number of Chapters has been reached, it is time to go to Dealing with Hatred.

example 6

“You could have killed me! This was supposed to be a friendly duel,” Yoshi angrily yells as Kurosawa. He brings a hand to his face, as if to staunch the flow of blood.

Rocky, as Kenshin, mimes sheathing the blade, “This duel is over. My duties to your father remain.”

Given it was a stalemate, Yoshi ends the Chapter. “Then you won this match. Relish this success.” He describes the two samurai continuing down the road on their separate ways, but just before they are beyond each other's earshot, Kurosawa mutters, “A true Samurai knows who truly won.” Kenshin hears this but chooses not to act, for now. This becomes the seed of anger that grows within Kenshin. This becomes the root of the violence to come.

The chapter is resolved.

Rocky is now the Active Player.

A new Chapter begins. More Chapters are played until it is the time for the Finale. Both total the Edges and Hatred and Scars they have.

dealing with hatred

Once all Chapters are done, both players have to choose how to deal with their accumulated Hatred. There are two ways to deal it. Consider also that the Hatred allows you to narrate scenes that help lead the story to the scene of the finale where the two have their final fight. The samurai can either **Channel their Anger** or **Let Go of their Hatred**.

Channeling their Anger

The players can roll their Hatred dice in a final bid to transform them into Edges. Note down the amount of Hatred each player has (this will be needed in the Finale). Each player describes a course of action he had taken away from the other Samurai's notice in preparation for the final fight. Each course of action must be a moment inspired by anger and hatred. Unlike Chapters, since the other Samurai is not in the scene, the Hatred dice are rolled on their own.

Evens once again become Edges for that samurai.

These are spent during the Finale to make moves that intend to defeat the opponent. Or make his life worse.



Odds, this time, become Scars which can complicate things for the Samurai. Scars may be physical injuries that the Samurai has to endure while in combat, or psychological or emotional scars that affect his focus and discipline.

example 7

Yoshi has a total of 9 Hatred. He decides to describe them as follows:

The Yamato Clan begins to close its doors to the Ide Clan, denying them passage through their own towns. Samurai of the Ide Clan that are encountered traveling alone are attacked, beaten to near death. People begin locking their doors to the Ide Clan, out of fear of being caught in the fight. Yoshi thinks some more and decides to add more painful displays of Hatred. With Winter coming, the Yamato Clan burns down the Ide farm-lands. Not content, storehouses of grain and goods owned by the Ide are also burned down. Eventually, people flee out of Ide towns in fear. (6 Hatred)

Kurosawa then hunts and kills Kenshin's wife (1 Hatred), daughter (1 Hatred) and leaves their bodies to rot while tied to a post along the road. (1 Hatred)

Yoshi rolls the 9 dice and gets 3 odds (Scars) and 6 evens (Edges).

Letting Go of Hatred

While the final Chapter has not begun, a player may opt to "let go of his Hatred" as a show of acting in a Samurai manner. Such an action is commendable and deserves a scene of its own to be narrated by the player who chose to let go of the Hatred. You can only let go, however, if your Hatred is more than ten.

The act of letting go of Hatred does have an in-game benefit: The player can get rid of Scars equal to half the number of Hatred points he had, rounded down. However, choosing to let go of anger and hatred does not give the samurai any Edges.

example 8

Rocky decides Kenshin has realized his mistakes and attempts to let go of all the Hatred. He however, knows he still has to match the narrative in the opening (which represents the Finale).

He takes the Hatred he has accumulated (11 Hatred) and symbolically drops them to the dice bag as he declared, "I let go of all Hatred." He describes however how this clan are incensed by his choice and charge at Yamato Castle while he sleeps, burning it to the ground. Kenshin tries to rush to the battle and stop it but it is too late. Too many deaths have come to pass. He sees Kurosawa and calls out his name to challenge him to one final duel.

Rocky looks at the Scars he has accumulated and discards half, rounded down.

finale: a single moment

When all the Chapters are done, the story returns to the Opening Scene. The focus of the narrative returns to the very duel that opened the tale.

Both players are back in the Opening Scene, staring at each other at the final duel.

Whoever had the most Hatred acts first as the Attacker. If Hatred is tied, whoever has the most Edges goes first. If still tied, whoever has the most Scars goes first. If still tied, then whoever declares a move first goes first. The Attacker declares a move. The Defender declares how he defends against it. Both are encouraged to be as dramatic and in-genre as possible.

Players then alternate being Attacker and Defender.

Exchanges

Each exchange requires an Edge dice from the Attacker. The Defender rolls a die for free.

Both roll their dice at the same time. The Attacker must roll higher than the Defender to score a hit.

The winner always describes how the attack resolves.

The loser gets a Scar. On ties, both players have locked blades and must blind bid more Edge than the other to win the lock or get a Scar. You may bid zero. If the bid is tied, then neither get a Scar.

Scars now must be tactical advantages or physical injuries that the Samurai has to endure while in combat. All later scenes are encouraged to represent these Scars whenever possible. Keep track of the total number of Scars as it is important once the Edges are all used up.

As the Scars mount, and the Edges dwindle, the players start to see who is winning the battle.

The fight ends once one player runs out of Edges.

example 9

Yoshi has 18 Edges and 9 Scars. Rocky has 14 Edges and 2 Scars. Yoshi is the Attacker and spends 1 Edge. Yoshi describes Kurosawa charging forward to slash at Kenshin. Kenshin attempts to parry. Yoshi rolls 5. Rocky rolls 2. Yoshi describes how Kurosawa slices Kenshin's left arm open. Rocky gets a Scar.

Rocky now is the attacker and spends 1 Edge. He then describes how Kenshin kicks Kurosawa to push him away. Yoshi describes Kurosawa dodging with a roll. Rocky rolls a 1! Yoshi rolls 3. Yoshi describes how the kick misses completely, and Kurosawa moves into a perfect position to slash a second time! Rocky takes another Scar.

Yoshi spends 1 Edge. He describes Kurosawa's blade being thrust into Kenshin's wounded arm. Rocky describes a last ditch parry. Yoshi rolls a 2 but Rocky rolls a 2. Their swords clash, and both blind bid to see who wins the locked blades. Yoshi reveals 4 Edges. Rocky reveals none. The clash ends with Kurosawa's blade digging into Kenshin's arm a second time. Rocky takes a third Scar.

*Yoshi has spent 6 Edges and 9 Scars so far.
Rocky has spent 1 Edge and now has 5 Scars so far.*

The fight continues.

Before rolling in each exchange, both players are allowed to spend Edges to increase their dice pool. Each Edge spent gives the player an extra die. They, however, cannot spend more than two Edges for extra dice in an Exchange.

example 10

Rocky isn't too happy with the growing number of Scars he has gained, and on his turn as the Attacker, Rocky decides to try to bump things in his favor. He describes going on a defensive, parrying any attacks and focusing on keeping distance. Yoshi describes pressing on. Rocky, however, opts to spend 2 extra Edges for 2 extra dice. Yoshi, decides not to spend, hoping instead to still have enough Edges left for a Killing Strike.

Rocky rolls 1, 4, and 6. Yoshi rolls a 6. Swords clash again, and neither bid Edges. Both disengage their swords from the lock. The fight continues.

Once one player is out of Edges, the other player has an opportunity to commit a Killing Strike.

This time, however, each remaining unspent Edge translates into an automatic Scar that the Defender receives if the Attacker wins the exchange.

example 11

Yoshi ran out of Edges! Rocky still has 2 Edges and declares he is going for a Killing Strike. He describes Kenshin leaping into the air, vanishing, then reemerging as he falls with the moon behind him for one final blow! Yoshi describes Kurosawa attempting in one final move to catch the bare blade with his hands to stop it!

Rocky rolls and gets a 5. Yoshi rolls.. a 6!

If the Attacker wins in the Killing Strike, the attacker is now Triumphant. All remaining Edges are added to the Defender as Scars. The players then check who has the most Scars.

example 12

Yoshi describes how Kurosawa catches the blade, and twists it to bring Kenshin to the ground. The sword clatters to the ground. Both bleeding and exhausted, Yoshi describes picking up the sword, and closing in for one final stab. Rocky describes Kenshin just closing his eyes, waiting to see it happen.

Yoshi rolls and gets a 1. Rocky rolls.. a 3!

If the Defender has more Scars than the Attacker, the Defender dies and is Defeated. The Attacker narrates how the story ends.

example 13

Rocky and Yoshi review their ratings.

Yoshi has 9 Scars and hit 9 Hatred.

Rocky has a total of 9 Scars and hit 11 Hatred.

Kenshin is still the Defeated.

Kurosawa is Triumphant in the final battle.

If the Attacker, however, still has more Scars, the Defender is merely Defeated. The Attacker narrates how the story ends.

If the Attacker fails in the killing strike, the Defender can attempt a sudden final killing strike as well (as the tables have turned), and the rolls are no longer can be modified.

If this second final killing strike also fails, then the Defeated is whoever has the most Scars. The Triumphant is whoever has the least Scars. Ties go to whoever had the least Hatred.

epilogue

With the results of the Finale, the two players then narrate the Epilogue and share how the story ends.

The Epilogue starts with the Triumphant sharing what happened directly after the end of the Finale. This may be a short summary of events that transpired or an overview of how the rest of the world reacts to the resolution of the duel. The Triumphant is free to embellish the narrative in his favor.

The Defeated then adds to the epilogue. It is prudent that the Defeated keep the narrative just as dramatic but still favoring the Triumphant.

And finally, the Triumphant shares how the story ends.

example 14

Yoshi starts the Epilogue: Kenshin feels nothing. He opens his eyes to see Kurosawa holding the katana in his hands, yet weeping. Kurosawa bows his head and tells Kenshin, "Your Pride - all this tragedy because of your pride." The sky rumbles and the winter snow falls, painting the devastation and death white. "I failed you, father. Wife. Daughter. I failed you all."

Kenshin watches in shock as Kurosawa plunges the blade into his own belly, perhaps one final act of attempting to regain lost honor. The story of Kurosawa's final actions spread and people learn of how the final battle had ended that winter.

Rocky smiles and continues the story, sharing how people learned of it because Kenshin told them of it. He shared every detail and nuance of how Kurosawa, at the end of it all, spared the other's life and regained his lost Honor. None, however, realized the one sharing the story was the very man Kurosawa fought that winter.

Yoshi finally ends the story with Kenshin seeing a young boy in the distance playing with his friends. The boy declares, "I am Kurosawa, the Honorable!" and chases after the others kids. Kenshin simply walks away, forgotten by history and time.

additional playkits

Not everyone is into tales of blood and honor. Sometimes, people want to explore a different setting or play within a different type of story. Here are a few play kits that have been created to allow you to explore other genres and their corresponding virtues for the session.

Creating your own playkits

Every one is encouraged to come up with their own playkits. All you need to do is determine what “Virtues” should apply as a guide for each Chapter played out, as well as some sample Opening Declarations to get your creativity started.

The basic guide for Virtues:

a) They should reflect key or narrative tropes appropriate to the kind of tale you wish to say. Westerns most of the time have a shoot-out. Medieval stories tend to have moments when honor is tested. Pulp stories always have a chase sequence.

b) They should celebrate the genre of the story session. Do not be limited by the direct or formal meaning of words, however, as it can be fun to go against the grain (having a Western story where no guns are ever drawn), these would perhaps be creative challenges best explored by those used to improvisation. A Western Shoot-out for example might be a duel of words, rather than bullets.

The basic guide for Declarations should be to determine:

- a) The time/period of the tale
- b) The general location of the narrative
- c) The length of time the whole narrative will encompass
- d) The Main Virtue of the over-all story

WILD, WILD WESTERN

A gun duel in the west. A shoot-out between the Sheriff and the Outlaw. *A Single Moment* is all that stands between two gun shots and one falling to his death.

Wild, Wild West Virtues

Elements present in such a story include the following:

- **I. Respect**

Showing deference to those who deserve it.

- **II. Danger**

From poisons to bullets or uncontrolled trains, life placed on the line.

- **III. Untamed**

Facing the wild frontier and interacting elements beyond the town.

- **IV. Marksmanship**

Displays of intense skill and inherited mastery.

- **V. Luck**

Moments of unexpected twists. Trusting and gambling for success.

- **VI. Fearless**

Facing incredible odds. Standing before certain death.

- **VII. Explosive**

Dynamite. Boom.

Sample of Opening Declarations

"My name is (insert name). I am a (role played in the tale). This is my gun."

"I am known as (insert title). I want to become (goal to be attained in the narrative). This is my tale."

"This is a tale set during the gold rush."

"This is a story that began with the death of the sheriff."

"The full moon last saw the two of us as friends."

The Knight's Tale

Two men in armor. Steel and tears. Banners aflutter. Lords and lieges.

Medieval Tale Virtues

Elements present in such a story include the following:

- **I. Justice**

Doing what must be done. Right above good.

- **II. Chaste**

A battle against the pangs of the heart and the call of duty.

- **III. Forgiving**

Learning to allow insult to pass unmolested.

- **IV. Mercy**

Respecting life above right.

- **V. Modesty**

For some things are meant for certain eyes.

- **VI. Temperance**

Just enough. Just sufficient.

- **VII. Pride**

To honor oneself and one's achievements.

Sample of Opening Declarations

"My name is (insert name). I serve (name of the liege you serve). This is my tale."

"Long live the king. The king is dead. These mark the events that happened next."

"Time matters not, as this is a tale that transpires four generations."

"I stand before you, one of the (role played in game), to speak of this tale of (Virtue)."



OVER-THE-TOP PULP ACTION

Jetpacks and Nazis. Daredevils and super science. Adventure, daring-do and bizarre mesmerism.

Pulp Action Virtues:

Elements present in such a story include the following:

- **I. Discovery**

New worlds. New science. New experiences.

- **II. Pride**

Social class. Expectations of culture. Positions of power.

- **III. Hospitality**

Meetings without violence. Welcome to one's home.

- **IV. Betrayal**

Expected and inevitable. Poisons. Lies.

- **V. Fearless Chase**

By train, by plane, by foot, by flight.

- **VI. Sacrifice**

Lost forever. Destroyed in the blaze. Artifact or friendship.

- **VII. Gangsters**

A rough encounter. A fight against many.

Sample of Opening Declarations:

*"My name is (insert name). I am the world's best (insert concept).
This is my tale."*

*"No one believed in the Curse. But that's getting to ahead of the tale.
My name is (insert name)."*

*"I had never thought I'd see so much of the world in (insert duration).
How? Listen well."*

*"Someone had to stop them. (Insert name) is a name that will go
down in history for having tried."*



SPACE OPERA

Starships and diplomacy. Alien civilizations and cultural discovery. Time travel and teleportation. Lasers and artificial intelligence with feelings.

Space Opera Virtues:

Elements present in such a story include the following:

- **I. Discovery**

New worlds. New science. New experiences.

- **II. Duty**

The need to follow a Prime Directive. Governing laws over personal decisions.

- **III. Gobbledygook**

Moments where science nonsense makes sense. Technology gone haywire.

- **IV. Betrayal**

Sides shift. Promises broken. Bounty hunters and diplomats cast shadows.

- **V. Black Hole**

Massive threats that can only be evaded or escaped. Moments when technology is not enough.

- **VI. Faith**

Belief in greater powers, or belief in oneself. Moments when science is trumped by personal belief. Or the presence of god-like beings to challenge science.

- **VII. Isolation**

When one is different from the rest. Being alone. Lost in space. When one is artificial amongst the normal.

Sample of Opening Declarations:

"I am (insert name), (role played in the game) of the (name of your vessel). This is our tale."

"We have (insert duration of time) left remaining in life support. This is how we got to this point."

"It is the prime directive for (name of organization) to never interfere with the internal development of civilized races. But this was a situation where we had no choice."

"Time does not exist here. And yet here, at the end, I remember how it all began. My name is (insert name), and this is how it all ends."



RomCom

Romance and comedy mixed with a dash of misadventure. Passions ignited. Hearts broken. Kisses and lies. Theme songs and quotable quotes.

RomCom Virtues:

Elements present in such a story include the following:

- **I. First Sight**

First meeting yet not really getting introduced. Opinions formed without introductions.

- **II. Friends**

When friends share their views of the other. When peer pressure makes for odd encounters.

- **III. Differences**

When Mars and Venus are clearly defined. Social class becomes an issue. Opposites repel.

- **IV. Secret Discovery**

When something desirable is witnessed in secret. When one knows more than the other. When one keeps something intentionally because of reasons.

- **V. Trust**

When an initial leap of faith is made. When happiness comes early and seems too perfect. When a taste of the happy ending is celebrated.

- **VI. Conflict**

Betrayal comes from misunderstanding. Lies are given instead of honesty. The wrong word at the worst possible time.

- **VII. Recognition**

When the realization comes too late. When the need to chase becomes apparent. When the last attempt to prove things arises.

Sample of Opening Declarations:

"No one believes in finding love online. But I did. My name is (insert name) and this is how it happened."

"I was sixteen when I first met him. It was not until fourteen years later when I'd realize we were meant to be."

"So there we were, standing in the rain. He was waiting for my answer and my mind raced over everything we had gone through for the last nine months."

"Another chance. She believed we should try it again. But it failed in Mars. It failed during the People's Power revolution. And it failed back when we were sneaking in glances while serving Cleopatra herself. Why should I trust in this time traveler one more time?"



discussions on playing

A Single Moment celebrates the narrative that you and the other player will weave, while adding a dice mechanic that helps insert a level of thrill and uncertainty into the game. The game can still function even if the dice and scar system is completely removed, with players merely taking turns deciding on who wins which Scene.

During playtesting, a common source of fun that playtesters found was in the freedom to get creative in describing the scenes and the manner of conflict two players would be engaged in. One group had a direct duel with swords flashing as the rain fell. Another group had a final scene showing a dining hall, with the two sitting across each other as guests of the Grand Emperor. Both played a subtle game of insult and implied threat, until the loser broke his patience and acted brashly. The loser was dismissed by the Emperor, who of course vowed revenge at some later date (and perhaps some future session).

Overall, the game was less about “killing” the opponent and more about finding more and more ways to either make life harder/more painful for the other, or moments where-in the other indulged in a selfish need for immediate gratification.

Game Length Variations

If you like sharing narrative control, and aren't that much a fan of dice rolls, you can limit the final dice roll of each scene to be once at the end of each game session. This way, the focus can be on creating the story, rather than leading up to the results of the dice rolls.

Another approach you can try is to make a single game session a combination of two Chapters, one for each player. The players then alternate on who is the focus of a scene, like a television show that cuts between two main story arcs in a single episode. This can be an awesome approach to challenge gamers who are used to being both players or GMs.

Finally, you can even super-extend a Chapter to last multiple game sessions, with each Choice Token being awarded at the end of a game session. This can allow for epic tales with long drawn out narrative moments. This approach can be very fulfilling for those who like a decreased presence of dice rolls and randomness in their tales.

Virtues Galore

You can also try mixing up all the Virtue cards provided into a single deck, and simply randomly draw one card from the whole stack when required to do so. This can allow you to have much more varied stories, with wider-ranging themes.

I whole-heartedly recommend you even come up with a few of your own Virtues, especially if there are certain narrative themes or twists your group really loves to explore.

Examples of Hatred

Hatred reflects acts or events that are born from the actions of the two characters. They can represent other negative setbacks and complications that might plague a character and his plans. Here is a quick list of ideas you can inject into your narrative to reflect Hatred.

Abandoned	Assassin	Bankruptcy	Betrayal
Cursed	Death	Delirium	Destruction
Disgust	Exhaustion	Hostage	Misdirection
Peripeteia	Poison	Sickness	Spy
Surrounded	Switched	Theft	Weather

Hatred can also be given points to reflect the importance or the significance of its effect.

One point	Close friend or member of the family
Two points	Significant member of the family
Three points	Unforgivable loss
Four points or more	Large number of people of significance

Continuing Stories

Games can be approached as story arcs, with each session reflecting a major story arc instead of the complete story. Other role-playing games used to embrace the concept of Chronicles, the overall flow of a game using characters made up of multiple stories or chapters. A *Single Moment* can be expanded to run for multiple Climaxes. Imagine, if you will, each movie of the Star Wars saga was made up of the Chapters leading to a Climax, but instead of the Climax representing the final duel, it represents the final scene of the movie.

For this type of game, the following changes are implemented:

- a. The players decide on the number of total Climaxes the narrative will have.
- b. At the end of each Climax, the Triumphant wins a Permanent Edge and the Defeated wins a Permanent Scar.
- c. These Permanent Scars/Edges will now always be part of future rolls to resolve succeeding Climaxes.

Multi-Generational Stories

Perhaps you would like to approach your games as having multiple characters carrying the narrative rather than a single one. Perhaps each Chapter, a descendant of the first character continues the legacy, with the final Chapter featuring the great-grand children of the initial rivals duking it out to finally conclude the long-unfinished business of their ancestors.

While the game can be run that way, with simply the active characters' replaced when necessary, you can add a secondary system to make things a bit more interesting:

- a) At the end of each Climax, the players choose one of their Edges and one of their Scars.
- b) The players then narrate how the next character inherits both.
- c) The two then begin the next narrative arc with the new characters as per the normal rules.

Coming up with your own Single Moments playkits

Players are encouraged to come up with their own playkits. Feel free to come up with your own and do let me know how they turn out! Do contact me at <http://tagsessions.blogspot.com> to let me know!

Have fun.

virtue cards

義

Rectitude

Virtue

勇

Courage

Virtue

忠義

Loyalty

Virtue

名譽

Honor

Virtue

virtue cards

仁

Benevolence
and Mercy

Virtue

礼

Respect

Virtue

真

Honesty and
Sincerity

Virtue

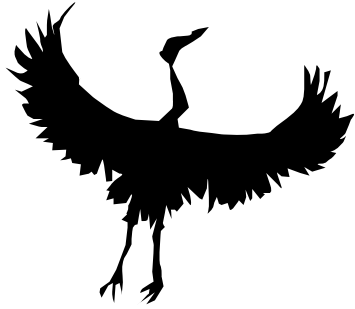
key character cards

the
catalyst



Character

the
victim



Character

the
coveted



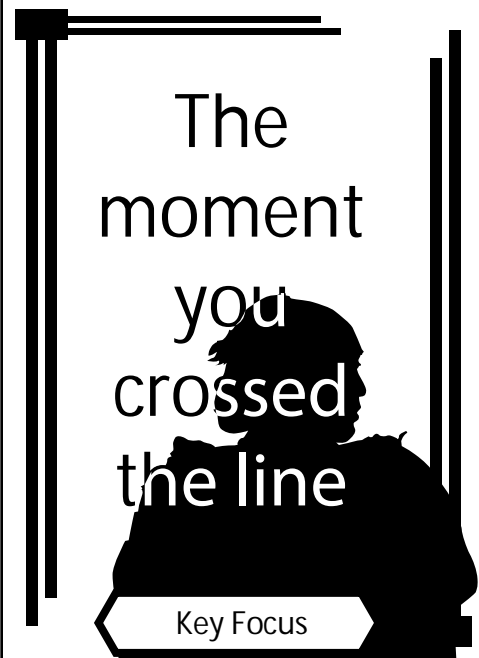
Character

key focus cards



That time
we still
trusted
each
other

Key Focus



The
moment
you
crossed
the line

Key Focus



The
Promises

Key Focus





About the Author:

Tobie Abad is a game designer and storyteller based in Manila, Philippines. He lives with his partner, Rocky, and their dog, Yoshi. He shares his thoughts on gaming at <http://tagsessions.blogspot.com> and gives talks and runs games at each Gamers & GMs Philippines mini-con. *A Single Moment* is his very first solo project and he hopes to release more with the help of his patrons at <https://www.patreon.com/tagsessions>.

bad timing



A ROMANTIC COMEDY FIASCO PLAYSET

BY **TOBIE ABAD**

LAYOUT AND ARTWORK BY **BIANCA CANOZA**

READ THE SCRIPT THAT INSPIRED IT ALL AT
<http://script-badtiming.blogspot.com>

Ben Woerner

WunderWerks

"Tobie Abad's A Single Moment cuts deeper than the blade your character points at his enemy. The experience is draw out of you from recesses that you didn't know existed via the invisible game system. In just a few hours you will have shared a deep and enduring tale with a good friend that all comes down to, a single moment."

Josh T. Jordan

Ginger Goat

"This is an interesting, well-edited two-phase story game. I would gladly play it. Heck, I would gladly publish it. In particular, I like the advice and explanations hiding inside the rules text. I also like the suggestions at the end for hacking the setting. I want to play the space opera hack with my friend the Stars Wars fan."

Ben Lehman

these are our games

"An intensely focused Samurai game with a lot of grit, intention, and drive."