

# Coming of Age

## A RPG of Realizing Your Potential

by Mendel Schmiedekamp

March 7, 2007

### Introduction

Coming of Age is a roleplaying game (RPG), where each player takes on the role of someone who is more than he or she appears. As you play Coming of Age you will build the story of these characters discovering their potential. Unlike many RPGs, Coming of Age does not come with a specific setting. Whether you are unemployed actors looking for your big break or schoolgirls who must stand against a dark conspiracy, a game of Coming of Age focuses on confronting adversity, and discovering that you are more capable than you first thought appears.

The first step in starting a Coming of Age game is for all the players to decide roughly what setting to use. Do you want sword and sorcery? Perhaps you want modern crime drama? Or maybe school children fighting zombies? There are many options, but several factors are essential. First, the protagonists need room to grow. So teenagers fighting crime works well, but special ops teams don't work well unless they are completely out of their element. Second, the characters should all have reasons to know each other, even if its because they all live in the same town, go to the same school, or work in the same bar.

Once you've chosen the setting, choose roughly how long a game you want to play, called the pace. A short game has a pace of 1, while longer games might have pace of 3 or 5. Especially long games might run to longer paces, but 5 is usually the upper limit. This describes how easily adversity is overcome, and how quickly the characters grow. Once you've done this, its time to build your characters.

*Jan, Peter, Anna, and Dave have gotten together to play a few sessions of Coming of Age. They've*

*decided to take a few sessions off from a long running RPG, and so as a group agree to a pace of 3, giving them 2-3 sessions of Coming of Age. When it comes to choosing the setting, things are less unified.*

*They pass around a sheet of paper, each writing down an idea for the setting. Jan has just watched the Goonies and writes, "Geeky kids in modern day, searching for treasure." Peter writes, "Assassins in training." Anna writes, "Med school grads doing their first internship." Dave writes, "Academy of Magic."*

*They pass the paper around, each voting for a setting other than their own. Jan votes for Med school grads. Peter votes for Academy of Magic. Anna votes for the Goonies. Stuck with breaking or making a tie, Dave asks if the med school grads could be in a hospital in the future, perhaps with alien patients and doctors. No one has a problem with this, so the setting becomes "Med school grads doing their first internship, in space!"*

### Titles and Opposition

Characters can be described in many ways. Names and basic descriptions are part of this, but since Coming of Age is a game about potential, player's characters are described in two other ways. First, the titles by which they might one day be called. Mafia Don, Archmagus, or Protector of the People all suggest at accomplishment. They also can imply many things, who you know and what you can do. These represent your character's destiny. Each character has five titles, rated by dice<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Dice are described in this game by the "d" notation. Specifically a 6-sided die is a d6, a 20-sided die is a d20, and so on.

The highest is a d20, indicating the most important title describing what your character will become. The d12s are meant to flesh out the core of that future career. Destiny as a great general is one thing, but it has a different connotation if you will also be destined as a fair judge, a skilled swordsman, or a famous lover. Finally, the d8s add the last dimension, leaving room for final details, such as the general's musical talent or knowledge of engineering.

Avoid doubling up the titles, each should be distinct. Also, consider referring to specific places, people, and things. Protector of the Southside, suggests that Southside will play a role in the game to come, likewise Husband of Lady Margaret, indicates that Lady will feature in the course of the game. These sorts of titles can be more flexible, as exactly what happens in Southside, or what being a husband to Lady Margaret might entail can be developed during play.

Once you've considered who your character will become, now consider what personal failings stand in their way. Choose three faults or problems which become your character's opposition. Opposition in this case, unlike adversity, is an internal difficulty for your character. Cowardice, ignorance, shyness, depression, inexperience, or an unhealthy obsession are all examples of opposition. Opposition can be more physical, such as bad vision or frail. They might be more social as well, such as distrusted or second class citizen.

You will overcome opposition over the course of the game, but at first they will dominate your character's actions, leading to failures and complications. But these complications will enable your character to grow, as the adversity they encounter forces them face their own problems and grow out of them.

*Jan, Peter, Anna, and Dave are ready to start choosing their titles. Anna quickly picks her d20 as "Gifted Surgeon", her two d12s as "Well Respected" and "Exceptional Teacher", and her two d8s as "Always Cheerful" and "Wiz at Space Golf". Dave picks his d20 as "Prestigious Alien Researcher". Peter inquires whether Dave's character is an alien or researches them. "Both" he replies. Building on that Dave picks his d8s as "Space Traveler" and "Black belt in Centauri Judo" and his d12s as "Savior of the Kroneck" and "Diagnostic Expert". He doesn't know who or what the Kroneck are, but that doesn't matter, he'll figure that out as the game goes on.*

*Jan and Peter are having a little more trouble. Jan wants to be a cold and somewhat abrasive doctor-in-trag. She's just not sure how to put that as titles. Anna offers "Makes the Hard Decisions", and Peter suggests just taking "Abrasive Personality". Jan takes both, the first at d12 and the second at d8. From there, she decides to take "Director of Medicine" as her d20, and then a d12 as "Politically Savvy" and her last d8 as "Harsh, but Fair".*

*That leaves Peter who has been focusing more on the other players' characters than his own. Not sure of what he wants to play, he asks the others. Jan suggests a womanizing troublemaker, Dave suggests a pediatrician, and Anna suggests a veteran medic working to become a doctor. Peter shuffles those ideas around and decides on his d20 as "Brilliant Pediatrician", his two d12s as "Faced Fire" and "Irresistibly Attractive", and his two d8s as "Loved by the Nurses" and "Respected by the Paramedics".*

*With the titles finished, the four players are ready to figure out their opposition. Anna takes "Lack of Confidence", "Easily Distracted", and "Clumsy". Dave takes "Can't Related to People", "Self Serving", and "Uneducated". Jan takes "Desire to be liked", "Shy", and "Cheated in Med School". The others point out that "Cheated at Med School" isn't really an internal opposition, it might be an antagonist if it comes up, but Jan's character won't just learn to get over it. Dave suggests, "Loose Ethics" as the opposition underneath and Jan puts it down.*

*Peter looks over his selection, "Foul Temper" but he really wants to have "Shy" and "Lack of Confidence" as well. He asks the other players if there's any problem with doubling up on oppositions, and no one seems to mind, so he selects those as well. With this done, each of them has developed a character and they're ready to buy some antagonists and start playing.*

## Antagonists and Actions

Once you've built your character each player gets 10 story points to use in collaboratively building the antagonists for the story, and in helping each other overcome those antagonists. Antagonists are also describes as dice, and are purchased by one or more players using their story points. You should place an antagonist sheet in the middle of the table to record these dice, and the steps taken to overcome them.

There are two types of antagonist dice. First,

Fixed dice represent persistent aspects of the setting, a treacherous forest or difficult school work. The important thing about these dice is they cannot be won, only avoided. This means they act as backdrops for the other dice, Goal dice. Goal dice represent specific people and situations that present trouble for a character, and can be overcome.

Fixed dice cost their highest value in story points, up to a d12. Goal dice cost half that value, up to a d20. You can purchase new dice or raise an existing die at any time, and can even bring a goal die back from being overcome by raising its size. However, you should discuss and purchase a few antagonist dice to begin with, to get things flowing.

*Jan, Peter, Anna, and Dave all have ten points to spend on antagonist dice. And as they are doing that, Jan and Peter start to lay out dice for the game. Jan puts out a set of red dice from d4 to d20, and another orange set next to it. Those will be the antagonist dice, since they can range across a wide range of sizes, so she puts them next to the antagonist sheet. Meanwhile, Peter hands out different colored trios of dice, a d20, a d12, and a d8 to each player, those will be the title dice, since each player only ever rolls one title die at a time. Lastly, Jan puts a white, a gray, and a black trio of d4, d8, and d12 near the middle of the table, those will be the opposition dice as they go down in size. Each player assigns one of those colors to each of their oppositions, writing it down on the side to keep track.*

*At the same time, Anna has decided on an antagonist die, a "Sadistic Supervisor" which she decides to make fixed (since the supervisor can't be removed by defeating it). She spends six of her story points to set it at a d6, hoping that the others will add to it. Jan and Dave both agree to add one point to the supervisor, making it finally a fixed d8. Dave has decided on a goal die instead, specifically a "Transport Accident" filling the ER on the character's first day. He spends five points on this, making it a d10 goal die.*

*Peter then buys a "Cheating Scandal" based on his troubles in Med School. He plans to build things up, so he only spends four on it, making it a d8 goal die. That leaves Peter with six left, and both Anna and Dave with four. Jan decides there's enough antagonists for her at the moment, and keeps her remaining nine story points in reserve. That's fine, since she can spend them any time during the game.*

Once that is done you are ready to play. You take turns, going around in a circle, each time letting one player's character make a significant action. Usually this involves trying to confront one or more antagonist dice using an appropriate title. Take the title die, the antagonist dice, and any opposition dice that aren't explicitly irrelevant (which usually means all of them), and then roll them all at once.

If the title die beats all the antagonist dice, you gain a story point. If at least one antagonist die equals or exceeds the title die, then add a step to the highest (or one of the highest rolling) opposition dice. Once you've done this you can describe the outcome of your action:

- If your title die is above all other dice you are successful. Describe how your attempt succeeded. Add a step to any antagonist die in your roll. You may describe the achievement or overcoming of the goal only if you have added the last step to the goal die.
- If the title die is equal or less than an antagonist die, you failed to beat the external adversity. Describe how you failed, but learned something in the process.
- Otherwise, you beat your antagonist, but were beaten by your opposition, so describe how you failed in your attempt, due to your inner failings. Specifically the highest (or one of your highest) opposition dice. Usually in this case you, make the situation more complicated.

When a roll is completed, any other player may choose to spend a story point to give you another chance to roll. Both outcomes apply, treat this as a refocusing of your efforts, a sort of extended screen time. You should do this for other players as a reward for and interesting action, after all you are paying to see more.

At times players find their characters at odds. In this case, if both players agree, you may roll another character's title dice as antagonist dice. These dice are treated as fixed, and still provide a story point award if defeated. In any case, the outcome involves description from all the involved players, working together to say what happened among the characters.

*Jan, Peter, Anna, and Dave have played a few turns already, and now it's Jan's turn again. Jan's character Beka is trying to work on two patients at once, due to the Transport accident, while her*

*Sadistic Supervisor is watching keeping an eye on her looking for any mistakes. So Jan takes a red d8 and a red d10 as her antagonist dice. She decides to use Beka's Makes Hard Decisions, a blue d12, and also takes her three antagonist dice, all at d12 as well (black, gray, and white).*

*She then rolls all six of these dice. She rolls a 3 on her title die, which is the lowest of her dice. So, even though her opposition dice rolled highest, 11, 8, and 11, respectively, what matters is that her title die was beaten by her antagonist dice, particularly the accident, which rolled a 9. Because antagonist dominated Jan can choose to add a step to her highest opposition die, which because of the tie is either Desire to be Liked or Loose Ethics, she decides to add a step to the former as she's learning that being likable just doesn't cut it. Jan decides that Beka runs from one patient to another, rapidly losing her calm, until as she's working on stabilizing a woman with a leg full of splinters, her other patient starts to code.*

*Since its Peter's turn next, he responds, "Great, I run to the code." He decides his character, Geoff, will roll much the same dice (no one has had a chance to lower their opposition dice yet), except he will use his title die of Brilliant Pediatrician, deciding on the fly that the coding patient is the woman's young daughter. He rolls a yellow d20 as his title die, and rolls a 12 on it, easily beating all the other dice. So Peter gains a story point and adds a step to the accident antagonist die, since the Sadistic Supervisor is a fixed die and cannot gain steps. Just one more step (Anna added the first step on it), and the accident will have three, and will be overcome. Peter decides that he reaches the girl side by side Beka, as another doctor is about to give up on her. He cries out, "We're not letting her die!" and starts to resuscitate again, succeeding through sheer willpower. But there is not time to rest, there are still more patients.*

*Anna calls out, "Let's hear some more" and spends a story point to give Peter another turn. He goes to another child hurt in the accident and attempts to work a miracle. Unfortunately he rills an 8 on his title die, above the two antagonist dice, but not*

*his opposition dice 10, 5, 9, respectively. Geoff would succeed, except for his Foul Temper. As he is working he takes out his aggression on a nurse, and while distracted his patient gets worse. Peter at least gets a story point since he would have succeeded. Now its Anna's turn to come to the rescue.*

## Steps and Pace

Pace describes how long the story lasts. Pace roughly translates into the number of short (2-3 hour) sessions required to play through the game. Pace defines how many steps are needed to win goals or overcome obstacles, during your actions.

On a goal die, you can add steps up to the pace. Once you reach that last step, the goal die is won, and the player adding that last step gain an additional story point. If the goal die is won and then repurchased then it returns with no steps. However, if it is only raised without being won, then the steps remain.

On an opposition die, you add steps up to the pace as well. Once you reach that last step, the opposition is reduced from d12 to d8, from d8 to d4, or finally from d4 to 0. Each time it is reduced start the die over again with no steps. In this way, over the course of the game, you will remove the opposition and your character will discover his or her true potential. When this happens you should resolve the remaining goals, and conclude the story.

*After her next turn Anna adds the third step to the Transport Accident. That means the goal has been overcome, and she describes how the patients are handled and things come back to a relative calm. She also gains an additional story point for overcoming a goal die. She spends that point right back to increase the die to a d12 (and returning it to the antagonist sheet like new), describing how another wave of trauma patients come into the space dock after only a few more minutes.*

*A few more turns later, Jan finally gets her third step on her Desire to be Liked, she crosses out the d12, and now rolls a black d8 instead, as she overcomes her opposition.*

## Coming of Age by Mendel Schmiedekamp, 2007

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Concept: \_\_\_\_\_ Pace: \_\_\_\_\_

Titles:

\_\_\_\_\_ d20

\_\_\_\_\_ d12

\_\_\_\_\_ d12

\_\_\_\_\_ d8

\_\_\_\_\_ d8

Opposition Dice:

\_\_\_\_\_ Steps: \_\_\_\_\_ d12 → d8 → d4 → 0

\_\_\_\_\_ Steps: \_\_\_\_\_ d12 → d8 → d4 → 0

\_\_\_\_\_ Steps: \_\_\_\_\_ d12 → d8 → d4 → 0

Rules Summary:

*Titles* - Title dice represent your character's destiny. They are the titles by which he or she will someday be known. Titles tell you what you are capable of, even if you haven't gotten to that point yet.

*Opposition* - While titles are your potential, opposition dice are what holds you back. These are the parts of your character that stand in the way of realizing your potential.

*Antagonist* - Titles and oppositions are part of your character, but antagonist dice represent the outside forces of the world that cause you trouble, but also teach valuable lessons.

*Significant Actions* - Decide what your character is going to attempt. Take a title die based on the attempt. Take your opposition dice and any antagonist dice as chosen by you and the other players, and roll them.

- If the title die is above all your antagonist dice gain a story point, this happens regardless of whether you won the roll.
- If your title die is above all other dice you are successful. Describe how your attempt succeeded. Add a step to any antagonist die in your roll. You may describe the achievement or overcoming of the goal only if you have added the last step to the goal die.
- If the title die is equal or less than an antagonist die, add a step to the highest opposition die, if there is a tie for highest opposition die, you may choose which gets a step. Describe how you failed, but learned something in the process.
- Otherwise (meaning you beat your antagonist, but were beaten by your opposition) describe how you failed in your attempt, due to your highest (or one of your highest) opposition dice. Feel free to make things more complicated.

*Pace* - Pace determines the speed of the game. Whenever you accumulate steps on a die equal the pace, do the following:

- Opposition Die - Reduce the die size by one.
- Goal Die - Cross out the die and gain an additional story point.

**Coming of Age** by Mendel Schmiedekamp, 2007

**Antagonist Dice**

**Group Concept:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Pace:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Story Points:** Every player starts with ten story points to buy antagonist dice. Before the game and between any attempt, any player can add, by paying the cost, or raise, by paying the difference in costs, any antagonist die. When a goal die is crossed out, players may add the same goal die back at a higher value to the antagonist dice by paying the cost to raise it. You may also spend a story point to give another player a chance to roll again on their turn. This doesn't replace previous rolls, instead it means you want to hear more about what she or he is doing.

**Fixed Dice:** *cost = size* d4 = 4, d6 = 6, d8 = 8, d10 = 10, d12 = 12

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_

**Goal Dice:** *cost = half size* d4 = 2, d6 = 3, d8 = 4, d10 = 5, d12 = 6, d20 = 10

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Value** \_\_\_\_\_ *Steps:* \_\_\_\_\_