

Rolemaster – Thoughts on Character Development

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Introduction

This document is a collection of ideas on alternative ways for the character creation in the Rolemaster¹ system. In ICE's [Rolemaster forums](#)² there have been a lot of discussions about a future version of Rolemaster and how such a version should/ could look like.

There have also been some discussions about ways in Rolemaster to switch professions, especially after the introduction of HARP which offers such an option. In this document I have also collected some ideas on this topic and how a profession switch could be incorporated for the Rolemaster system.

The ideas presented should not be seen as a rule proposal. Instead it is more an extended abstract on how one could unify the character development rules (including professional aspects, training packages, and special skills).

I have to admit that the changes outlined below have not been play-tested by me or the group I play in. But I would be glad to get some feedback from other people and hear what they think about these changes. If you would like to tell me your thoughts about these rule changes, please write to epost@joergjahnke.de.

Using standardized skill costs

In the existing Rolemaster rules there is a wide variety of skill costs, starting from 1/2 over 1/3, 1/4, 1/5, 2/4 to costs like 30 and 40. Furthermore for some areas like armor and spell development there are additional skill costs like 1/1/1, 3/3/3 which allow up to three ranks per level to be developed. This is no problem in itself, but it could be done differently³. Let me show what I mean and I will come to pros and cons later:

I have tried to find a DP set with canonical costs and at the same time appear relatively often among

1 Rolemaster and HARP © 2002-2004 by Aurigas Aldbaron LLC... All rights reserved. No reproductions without permission.

2 http://www.ironcrown.com/forums/forum.asp?FORUM_ID=14

3 The idea is based on a posting by Tim Dugger in the ICE Rolemaster forums.

the current professions' skill costs so that the number of adjustments is reduced to a minimum. As I have not really done a scientific analysis there is certainly room for improvement.

For all of the skills except armor, languages and spells I have selected the following skill costs to remain:

1/2, 1/3, 1/5, 2/5, 2/7, 3/8, 4/10, 5/12, 6/14, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 20, 25, 30, 40

For armor, languages and spells a character may develop up to three ranks per level and the possible costs are as follows (I have not checked this but I guess this even covers all of the existing costs for these categories):

1/1/1, 2/2/2, 3/3/3, 4/4/4, 5/5/5, 6/6/6, 7/7/7, 8/8, 10/10, 12, 15, 20, 25, 30, 40

Now all DP costs of a given profession that are not in the above list are „rounded“ to the nearest of the above costs. In the following table this is done for the Layman profession:

Category	Layman (RMSS)	Layman (new)
Armor - Heavy	4/4/4	4/4/4
Armor - Light	2/2/2	2/2/2
Armor - Medium	3/3/3	3/3/3
Artistic - Active	2/5	2/5
Artistic - Passive	2/5	2/5
Athletic - Brawn	3/6	3/8
Athletic - Endurance	2/7	2/7
Athletic - Gymnastics	2/6	2/7
Awareness - Percept.	3/10	3/8
Awareness - Search.	2/6	2/7
Awareness - Senses	2/6	2/7
Body Development	4/12	4/10
Combat Maneuvers	4/12	4/10
Communication	2/2/2	2/2/2
Crafts	4/10	4/10
Directed Spells	3/6	3/8
Influence	2/5	2/5
Lore - General	1/3	1/3
Lore - Magical	3	3/8
Lore - Obscure	3/7	3/8
Lore - Technical	2/6	2/5
Martial Arts - Striking	3	3/8
Martial Arts - Sweeps	3	3/8
Outdoor - Animal	2/5	2/5
Outdoor - Enviromen.	2/5	2/5
Power Awareness	4/7	4/10
Power Manipulation	8	8
Power Point Devel.	10	10
Science - Basic	2/5	2/5
Science - Specialized	8	8
Self Control	2/7	2/7
Special Attacks	5/11	5/12
Special Defenses	20	20
Spells Own Base Lists	-	-
Spells Own Closed	15	15
Spells Own Open	10	10/10
Subterf. - Mechanics	3/6	3/8
Subterfuge - Attack	6/12	6/14
Subterfuge - Stealth	2/6	2/5
Tech./Trade - General	3/7	3/8
Tech./Trade - Profes.	8	8
Tech./Trade - Vocati.	5/12	5/12
Urban	2/5	2/5
Weapon - first	3/6	3/8
Weapon - second	3/6	3/8
Weapon - third	4	4/10
Weapon - forth	5	5/12
Weapon - fifth	6	6/14
Weapon - sixth	7	7
Weapon - seventh	7	7
MA Combat Maneuvers	6	6/14

As you can see many of the skill costs are still the same any many others only have small differences, mostly for the second rank to develop. But there is one point which I think is important to mention: There are some skills which suddenly can be developed with two ranks per level where before the change it was only one rank. In the example of the Layman these are e.g. „Spells Own Open“, some weapon skills or the martial arts skills. The question is whether we want to allow this to happen and how much would be the impact. From this we come to the one downside which I see with this change:

- If we assume that the current set of skill costs is kind of an „ideal“ or at least balanced set of skills then with the above simplification we move from an optimal set of skill costs to a sub-optimal set.

But this reduction in the range of skill costs to a defined small set can also offer some advantages and new possibilities:

- Simplification of the existing system by reducing the possible skill cost. Probably more a marginal improvement.
- The current ruling for Occupational, Everyman and Restricted skills could be replaced by shifting up and down in the list of skill costs. E.g. an Everyman skill could, instead of providing double the number of ranks, lead to a DP cost shift on the above scale by, lets say, 2 cost decrements. So a skill cost of 3/9 would be reduced to 2/5. Likewise an Occupational skill could shift the costs by 3 units to the left and a Restricted skill could shift the cost by 2 units to the right.

Especially for Occupational and Everyman skills this would help to avoid unusually high and possibly unbalancing skill bonuses for some „primary“ skills. E.g. the Directed Weapon Master talent would enable a Fighter to develop up to 6 ranks per level with a corresponding high OB.

More as a sidenote: In the first edition of the RMSS rules Occupational, Everyman and Restricted skills were handled in a different way: Skills marked as such had their normal skill costs replaced by other costs, e.g. an Everyman skill always had a fixed DP cost of 2/4. This could lead to some profession and race combinations were suddenly the Everyman skill cost of 2/4 replaced a cheaper cost of 1/4 when normally you would expect that the PC should learn the skill easier than before. It was therefore (?) replaced by the current ruling which is to multiply the number of ranks gained by a fixed amount. But it might indicate that the authors originally did not plan to have skills be developed at a faster rate but wanted to modify their DP costs instead with these classifications.

- Easier implementation for those of us who care about creating a spreadsheet or some kind of computer-based character development tool. Also only a marginal improvement.

One step further: Deriving all professions from the Layman profession

Just like in the above example where Everyman / Occupational / Restricted skills were handled by shifting the DP costs of the affected skills on the DP cost scale, one could derive all professions from the Layman's skill costs by specifying the units each skill category has to be shifted on the DP cost scale.

Let me give an example. In the table below three new columns have been added. The first one, „Animist“, gives the normal DP cost for the Rolemaster Animist profession. The next one, „Animist (diff)“ contains the number of units that the Layman's DP costs have to be shifted on the above DP

scale to reach the Animist's skill costs. E.g. for the Armor-Heavy category the Animist's skill costs are 6 units higher than those of the Layman, resulting in a cost of 12 instead of 4/4/4. It does not mean to specify the difference in cost between the original DP costs and the new ones.

Armor - Light	2/2/2	2/2/2	2/2/2	0	2/2/2
Armor - Medium	3/3/3	3/3/3	10	6	10/10
Artistic - Active	2/5	2/5	2/5	0	2/5
Artistic - Passive	2/5	2/5	2/5	0	2/5
Athletic - Brawn	3/6	3/8	4	1	4/10
Athletic - Endurance	2/7	2/7	3	1	3/8
Athletic - Gymnastics	2/6	2/7	3	1	3/8
Awareness - Percept.	3/10	3/8	6	3	6/14
Awareness - Search.	2/6	2/7	1/5	-2	1/5
Awareness - Senses	2/6	2/7	3/7	1	3/8
Body Development	4/12	4/10	8	4	8
Combat Maneuvers	4/12	4/10	10	6	10
Communication	2/2/2	2/2/2	2/2/2	0	2/2/2
Crafts	4/10	4/10	4/10	0	4/10
Directed Spells	3/6	3/8	3	0	3/8
Influence	2/5	2/5	2/6	1	2/7
Lore - General	1/3	1/3	1/3	0	1/3
Lore - Magical	3	3/8	2/5	-2	2/5

In effect an Animist is then – from the DP point of view – just a Layman with severe disadvantages in the Armor Group (except for Armor-Light), represented by the DP cost shift of +6, slightly higher costs in the Athletic Group, represented by a DP cost shift of +1, lower costs in the Lore-Magical Category, represented by the -2 DP cost shift etc.

To stay close to the current Rolemaster DP costs one needs to specify a cost unit shift for each and every category of each and every profession. Only if we would accept to move away further from these costs then this model would offer some simplification. In that case e.g. a Thief could be seen as a Laymen with -2 costs in the Awareness category, +3 costs for all magical skills and -4 costs in the Subterfuge category.

So what do we gain from this up to now. Until here I can only see that it would be easier to create some profession variants as in the same way as all professions can be derived from the Layman a variant profession can be derived from one of the other professions.

But with some further changes it could be used for more...

Using profession templates

In an older article on The Guild Companion about „[Irregular Realms](#)“⁴ Tim Dugger had some interesting ideas about how to use some basic profession templates to create new professions. He used the „realms“ of Arms, Subterfuge, Discipline, Mundane, Essence, Channeling, Mentalism, Arcane and combinations of these and created DP cost templates for the resulting combinations. These could be used to create new professions. In the sense of this model a Magician can be seen as

4 <http://www.guildcompanion.com/scrolls/1999/mar/realms.html>

a profession derived from the (pure) Essence template, a Rogue could be seen as a profession derived from the Arms + Subterfuge template etc.

Tim Dugger's list of „realms“ could perhaps be extended by an „Outdoor“ realm as there are some professions like the Ranger, Outrider or Barbarian which are focused very much on Outdoor skills and would not really fit into the other „realms“.

The Rolemaster Channeling Companion also made an approach to add such templates as it listed a general Priest template (as well as two more templates) and had a large list of Priest variants with their special abilities.

In my opinion such a change could be used to

- ease the classification of a profession for players new to Rolemaster,
- allow variant professions to be created from an existing template which have the same skill costs but perhaps slightly different professional bonuses, special (Everyman/ Occupational/ Restricted) skills and spell lists. With some guidelines on profession creation every GM could modify an existing template and easily create a new profession he/her is missing in his/her campaign.

On the other hand one should perhaps not include all possible combinations with their skill costs in a beginner's edition of Rolemaster as the sheer number of combinations and their skill costs would be quite overwhelming. But a companion book which specializes on a specific „realm“ (in the above sense) could offer dozens of new „professions“ (in the old sense) but listing variants of the templates of its realm. Channeling Companion did just that and thereby offered a myriad of new possible character concepts.

Training Packages could substitute the current „professions“

If we go one step further from this template idea we could use Training Packages to substitute the current professions. A profession in this sense is nothing more than a given template plus a TP. E.g. a Fighter could then be a (pure) Arms „realm“ template used with the Weapon Master TP⁵. There could and probably should still be TPs which are not used to define a profession. Even in the existing Rolemaster rules there is a similar distinction and one type of TPs, Lifestyle TPs, are used to define a certain attitude of a character – and match those which I would use to combine with a template to create a profession – whereas others, the Vocational TPs, represent skills the character simply has learned during a certain phase of his life – and these I would say do not define a profession.

But what's the gain? For now I would say there is no real advantage but this system can be extended as you will see below...

Combining standardized skill-costs with profession TPs

I will now try to combine some of the above ideas. This will finally result in an optional system to switch professions also within Rolemaster and to mix existing professions and thereby generate new ones.

Let's start with the above Layman profession based on standardized skill-costs. To become a Fighter the character selects a Fighter „Professional“ TP. This TP shifts some of the DP costs of the Layman (e.g. -2 DP units shift for combat skills, +4 DP cost units for magical skills⁶), sets

5 I have used the Weapon Master TP only as an example for an existing template which fits to a Fighter and is a Lifestyle TP. One could imagine also other TPs or create new ones specifically for each profession.

6 There is no need to shift only large groups of skills. This can also be broken down to single skill categories.

professional bonuses, special skills and spell lists. Additionally the character may select other non-Professional TPs, but these have no influence on DP costs etc. but only give the character a given set of skills he has learned through some kind of training during his life.

Let's say a few levels later this character wants to change his profession and move from a Fighter profession towards a Thief. If the GM allows this character would at the next level advancement select the Thief Professional TP. But this would not mean that now his DP costs become those of a normal Thief. Instead this time his DP costs slowly shift towards those of a Thief, beginning with the level where he selected the Thief TP. As the Thief TP normally shifts DP costs for e.g. awareness skills (-2 units), magical skills (+3 units) and subterfuge skills (-4) for this level the costs will move -1 unit for awareness skills, -1 unit for magical skills, -1 unit for subterfuge skills and +1 unit for combat skills.

The same is true for the professional bonuses of the character: By increments or decrements of 5 these would also move towards those of a Thief. These changes would continue for the next levels until all DP costs and professional bonuses are those of a Thief. In effect during this transition period the character is more a Rogue than a Fighter or Thief. I would also suggest that during this transition period no new profession change is allowed.

Immediately when changing the profession the character's special skills would also drift towards those of the new profession. In the above example the Fighter would e.g. have one Combat Maneuver that had been rated as Everyman for him. This Combat Maneuver would by 1 unit per level fall back to a normal skill. On the other hand the Lock Lore skill would slowly become easier to learn for the character as this skill is an Occupational skill for a Thief.

Base Spell Lists are a bit more difficult. My current view is that the old spell lists slowly drift from the costs of Own Realm Own Base List to Own Realm Other Base List and that at the same time the costs of the new Base Lists move from Own Realm Other Base List to Own Realm Own Base List. This would prevent that a pure spell user of a given realm can simply switch his profession from time to time to get access to all Base Spell Lists of his realm. But perhaps this takes too long and might also discourage players too much from having a non-spell user switch to a spell-using profession.

What would also be possible is to mix existing professions and thereby create new professions. In the above example I wrote that during the transition period from the Fighter to Thief the character would in effect be kind of a Rogue character. This is because his DP costs and costs for special skills are somewhere between those of a Fighter and a Thief during this period, just like it is the case for the current Rogue profession. What is more obvious then than to allow mixing professions from the general profession templates and thereby create new professions. If a profession which mixes the Arms template and the Subterfuge template does not yet exist it could be created by averaging the DP unit shifts of the base templates and also average the professional bonuses of the base template to get the costs and profession bonuses for a new Arms+Subterfuge profession i.e. A Rogue.

Certainly it is not that easy. In the example of mixing Fighter (pure Arms template) and Thief (pure Subterfuge template) to get a Rogue (Arms+Subterfuge template) profession the DP unit shifts would be averaged to -1 unit for awareness skills, -1 unit for combat skills, -2 units for subterfuge skills and +3.5 for magical skills. For the latter cost shift one would have to decide whether to round this up to +4 or down to +3. The same problem appears when averaging the professional bonuses. The +0 in subterfuge skills for the Fighter and the +15 in subterfuge skills for the Thief could be averaged to +5 or +10 and at the same time one would have to guarantee that the sum of the professional bonuses is still +50 as it is for all existing professions⁷.

⁷ Fire & Ice: The Elemental Companion contains the Elementalist profession which has only a sum of +40, but this is the only example which comes to my mind that departs from this general schema of +50 for the professional

Up to now you have a profession template. What needs to be done to make it a new profession is to assign special skills for the desired profession. Based on the general idea the GM has for the profession these need not even have to have anything in common with the base professions that the new profession is derived from. Small variations in the professional bonuses might also be made to match this general idea. Finally for spell-using professions a set of new Base Spell Lists needs to be assigned.

For a beginner this whole process of creating a profession from the Layman profession (or also a profession template) should be hidden from him. Instead he would still have a Fighter profession in the current way presented in his Rolemaster rule book. The only difference could be that this Fighter profession has some slightly different DP costs and contains a remark that this profession has to select the Fighter Professional TP⁸. For an expert the system behind the professions could be explained (perhaps in a separate Companion book) so that he can make use of the rules if he likes to and perhaps allow profession switches or create new professions/ templates that combine existing ones.

Conclusion

What we get with the last step is in my opinion a character development system which is not more complex than the existing system and at the same time offers interesting options to create new professions and also to modify the profession during the lifetime of a character. I believe that the rules for creating new professions or moving to a new profession should be only optional rules. Though I don't think they are overly complicated I do think that they would alienate the beginner who is new to Rolemaster. But some players or GMs might after some time search for new possibilities in the system and might be glad to have such options.

Acknowledgements

Certainly not all of the ideas are from me alone. This document also lists some ideas others have expressed inside the Rolemaster forums or in articles on [The Guild Companion](#)⁹. I am just extending these ideas and add a few new ones but this in my opinion offers a lot of new possibilities.

Abbreviations

DP Development Point

GM Gamemaster

OB Offensive Bonus

TP Training Packages

RMSS Rolemaster Standard System

bonuses.

8 Fire & Ice: The Elemental Companion already uses this system of selecting a profession TP for the Elementalist profession which must specialize by using a Lifestyle TP defining the element the character wants to concentrate on.

9 <http://www.guildcompanion.com/>