

# More in Work than Words

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Game Type: Turn-Based, Tabletop Role-Playing Game

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Players: 2-5 players [recommended]

## Game Design & Production

Iris Bull

## Inspiration

*Train* by Brenda Romero

*Dog Eat Dog* by Liam Burke

## Special Thanks

The Bracero Archive<sup>1</sup>

The Latino Roots Project<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A project of the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University, the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Brown University, and The Institute of Oral History, hosted by the University of Texas

<sup>2</sup> A project produced and maintained by the Center for Latino/a and Latin American Studies, hosted by the University of Oregon.

# Table of Contents

<b>Overview</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Game</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Creating a Character</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Family</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Heavenly Spirits and Guardians</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Goals</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Identity</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Purse</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Gameplay</b>	<b>11</b>

## Overview

*More in Work than Words* is a storytelling RPG. If you've never role-played before, that's okay; this booklet will guide you on your quest, providing you with some examples of how the mechanics of the game work. The first thing you should know about this game: *it is a lot of work*. This game was not designed to *immediately entertain you*, but that doesn't necessarily mean that you won't have any fun playing it. This game is made for a particular kind of person—you may not be that person, and that is okay.

The people you play with may assume that you are a fair and reasonable person, but that is ultimately for you to decide. Your actions may cast you as a noble creature with a caring heart, or as a selfish fiend with slippery morals, but you are necessarily neither. You are simply a human being, destined to leave a legacy, whether you care to or not.

You begin the game in Oaxaca, Mexico wherein the year is approximately 1953. There is a lot to know about this time period, and what you know definitely factors into the story you can tell. **However**, playing through this game is an **inappropriate** means through which to educate oneself about this space/time configuration. While you are encouraged to inform your experience of the gamespace with knowledge about various contexts that situate the relevance of the Bracero Program, the Catholic Church, and The Mexican Civil War (1910-1920), you technically don't need to know anything about these phenomena to play through the game mechanics/plot. To wit, you can do just about anything in this game that you can do in "real life"—you can carry items and travel with other people. You may discover tools that you need as you move with/through/against the gamespace. Since your experiences are, in part, predicated on your perception of the world, you can encounter anything and anyone. While you may not always have control of how circumstances play out, you are the master of interpreting your own fate, and of inscribing meaning therein.

## The Game

First, you must create a character.

Second, you must determine your win-condition.

Third, you and the other players determine turn order.

Fourth, players take turns until either everyone dies or until the completion of 45 turns.

Finally, players end the game by assessing the status of their player character in relationship to their goals.

## Creating a Character

Each player drafts a **Scorecard** on a sheet of paper or a notecard that belongs to them.

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### Your Scorecard

***Name:***

***Age:***

***Sex:***

***Family:***

***Your Saint:***

***Goal(s):***

***Identity:***

***Purse:***

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## Age

You can choose to be as young or old as you like; each age group comes with its advantages and disadvantages. You and your peers must decide in any given context when your age might be a factor in the outcome of an action.

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### Possible Ages

<21 years old:

+2 Luck

You begin the game with 30 hearts.

21 - 26 years old:	+1 Luck, + 1 Proficiency	You begin the game with 30 hearts.
26 - 31 years old:	+2 Proficiency, +2 Sociability	You begin the game with 25 hearts.
32 - 38 years old:	+2 Proficiency, +1 Sociability, +1 Wealth	You begin the game with 25 hearts.
39 - 45 years old:	+1 Proficiency, +2 Sociability, +1 Wealth	You begin the game with 20 hearts.
46 - 55 years old:	+1 Spiritualism, +1 Sociability, +1 Wealth	You begin the game with 15 hearts.
56 - 65 years old:	+2 Spiritualism, +2 Sociability, +2 Wealth	You begin the game with 15 hearts.

**Luck:** Any any time, this stats boost gives you the ability to re-roll [X] dice, where [X] is the amount of boost your character has.

*For example: You roll 4 dice; if you wanted to re-roll 2 dice, you would need to be younger than 21 years old.*

**Proficiency:** Any time the outcome of an event is possibly determined by your character's ability to execute an action with precision—effective communication, mechanical timing, etc—this stats boost gives you the ability to re-roll [X] dice, where [X] is the amount of boost your character has.

**Sociability:** Any time the outcome of an event is possibly determined by the actions of another character or non-player character, this stats boost gives you the ability to re-roll [X] dice for more favorable outcomes, where [X] is the amount of boost your character has.

*For example: You walk into an abandoned building and see a non-player character in the room. From your Fate Cards, you know that Death has been foreshadowed. To avoid your own untimely death, you determine that the Fate Cards must reference the non-player character. Perhaps this person is an enemy in disguise? You decide to preemptively kill this person before finding out otherwise. To do so without rousing suspicion, you smile and raise your left hand in greeting. To determine whether your feign was successful, you roll a die and declare “evens”—but, the roll reveals an odd number. You decide to exercise your +1 Sociability and re-roll the dice for a more favorable outcome. This time, the die reveals an even number. Having successfully feigned your victim, you reach for your trusty pistol with your right hand...*

**Wealth:** Any time the outcome of an event relates to the acquisition of money or resources, this stats boost gives you the ability to roll [X] 1d6 dice as a multiplier of the initial sum, where [X] is the amount of boost your character has.

*For example: You happen to acquire a temporary job harvesting a corn crop, and for your labor you anticipate earning [1d4] \* [1d20] pesos. With a Wealth boost, you would multiply the sum of that result by [X] 1d4.*

*Initial sum: [3] \* [15] = 45 pesos*

*45 pesos \* [1d4] = ...*

*45 pesos \* [4] = 180 pesos*

*Total earnings: 180 pesos*

**Spiritualism:** Anytime the circumstances of your situation require divine intervention, you may roll a die; if you successfully call the outcome as either even or odd, your request for an intervention is granted. If your Spiritualism is +2, you may re-roll under the circumstances that your first attempt at divine intervention failed.

## Sex

Mexico is dominated by a patriarchy. The only time that the sex of your character will be of some significance in this game is if/when you try to sign up for a Bracero contract; this government program only admits males.

## Family

In 1-3 sentences, describe your family (if you choose to have one).

Your family can be as big or as little as you like; big families can serve as a valuable resource, while small families or bachelorhood can serve to reduce the liabilities and responsibilities associated with raising children or caring for a spouse.

If you choose to take on a spouse, regardless of the sex/gender of your spouse, **you support them**. You decide facets of their identity; they have a scorecard nearly identical to yours—you need to decide their name, age, sex, goal, and facets. **Their goal cannot be subservience**; they must have some self-fulfilling want or desire that is distinct from your relationship with them. However, their work can support your lifestyle. You share finances and other resources.

During either your turn or their turn, you decide whether or not your spouse stays or travels with you. If you and your spouse are ever

separated, both of you would have to rendezvous in the same location in order to couple again. If they travel with you, spouses increase your stats by [+1 Luck], [+1 Wealth], [+1 Sociability]. If they stay in a location separate from you, they become a second character whose life you assume immediately following the end of your turn—play as they would play the game and make decisions that help them accomplish their goal.

## Heavenly Spirits and Guardians

Do one of two things; either choose independently or roll to determine a spiritual figure to accompany you throughout the game.

Roll [1d6] die and note the result on your **Scorecard**.

1: Santa Muerte

A personification of death, she is associated with healing, protection, and safe delivery to the afterlife by her devotees.

2: Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe

Patron Saint of Mexico; crushes serpents, heals the sick, revitalizes the fertility of living things.

3: San Ysidro Labrador

Patron Saint of farmworkers; his veneration is a reminder of the dignity embodied in hard work and value inherent to the piteous treatment of farm animals. Legends tell tale of angels plowing land to assist in the lives of spiritual agricultural laborers.

4: San Vincent de Paul

Patron Saint of the poor; renowned for his expressions of compassion, humility, and generosity.

5: Santa Catalina

Known for chastity, devotion to her virginity, patron saint for wheelwrights and mechanics; also associated with beheadings and/or acts of fatal violence towards men.

6: San Camilo de Lelis

Patron Saint of both the sick and hospital workers; his assistance is also invoked against reckless habits—gambling, in particular.

This Heavenly Guardian serves to guide you spiritually and motivationally—should you need help determining the ethical constitution of your character, or help determining what to do throughout the game. Living in

adherence to the principled living—the ethical values and practices—inscribed by the identity of your spirit will earn you **fate tokens**.

*For example: My Guardian of choice is Santa Muerte. Over the course of 3 turns I made a point to visit cemeteries or grave sites to pray for lost souls who may be trapped outside of the Afterlife. As a consequence, I now have 3 Fate Tokens ...*

**Fate Tokens** can be used to re-draw **Fate Cards**. After drawing your Fate Cards, you may use 3 Fate Tokens to re-draw 1 of the Cards.

*... On my next turn, I may use those tokens after my Fate Cards are revealed to bury and re-draw a Fate Card of my choosing.*

If I had more than 3 tokens, I could bury and re-draw as many Cards as I could afford to purchase. Given an infinite supply of Fate Tokens, there is no limit to the number of Fate Cards that can be re-drawn in a given turn.

Fate Tokens do not exist as an economy item for players; they cannot be bought, exchanged, or gifted to other players.

## Goals

Fulfill your obligations!

Pay your debts!

Care for others!

Survive!

Live meaningfully!

You have 45 turns to complete a goal that is meaningful to you; in 1-3 sentences, answer, “How do you want to win the game?” on your **Scorecard**.

*For example:*

- I want to secure a Bracero contract.*
- I want to run a small grocery business.*
- I want to support a family—a spouse and 2 young children.*
- I want to earn 1 million pesos.*
- I want to lasso 50 horses as pets.*
- I want to make 15 friends.*



# Identity

Describe up to 3 facets of your identity that distinguish you from other players.

These character attributes can be anything you like them to be, so long as other players agree that those attributes are facets that would describe a person like yourself (e.g., being able to craft most anything out of clay (reasonable) vs. being able to fly (not reasonable)).

You need to choose **2 abilities** that you consider to be **positive** attributes, and someone else playing the game needs to assign you 1 ability that they consider to be a **negative** attribute in the context of your choice abilities.

These facets might help you find temporary work, foster social relationships, acquire material resources, or support yourself independently.

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Suggested Facets:

*As a player, you excel in this area or in this way...*

Caregiver	Sprinting	Lifting Heavy Things
Basket Weaving	Being Tall/Short	Being Small/Big
Chef	Lock-picking	Hunting
Field Medic	Pottery/Ceramics	Jeweler
Shy	Sharp-shooter	Gardening
Horse Training	Gambling	Dancing
Fishing	Parenting	Romancing
Mothering	Teaching	Kleptomaniac
...	...	...

However you elect to dress yourself with talent, the significance of these skills or abilities is something that you negotiate on your journey. Any time that you think your skills or abilities can be utilized in the service of accomplishing a goal or a task, you may roll [1+] extra dice for each relevant skill/ability to increase the chance of a favorable outcome.

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Example:

*Sarah: Okay... I think this time around I want to make sure I can scavenge for edible plants, so I'll write down "knowledge of*

*botany” as a skill. Also, “horse-whisper” because that sounds awesome.... Annnnd, “sharp-shooter” because it’s pretty unrealistic to travel across the frontier without some experience with a pistol.*

*Symone: What’s your goal this time?*

*Sarah: Oh—I want to try crossing the border this time. I didn’t make very much money hanging around in Mexico by myself. I’m determined to make a living without a husband in tow.*

*Symone: Hm. I wouldn’t mind having a husband—I guess I’ll write his name down... “Fabio”—hahaha. I’m going to try supporting a family and a business, this time. I hope that I never have to shoot anyone! I’d rather settle disputes with my words, so I’ll write down “persuasive” as one of my skills. I also want to be able to work with and use children as a resource to build an artisan empire—so I’ll also put down “basket-weaving” and “parenting.”*

*Jorge: Oh, I see—taking advantage of the fact that there aren’t child labor laws, eh?*

*Symone: Don’t hate the player!*

*Jorge: Just joking! That’s not a bad strategy. Well, last time I died prematurely because I couldn’t keep myself well, so this time I’m going to write down “knowledge of field medicine” and hope that helps me in the event of an emergency. I’m also going to hope that some “knowledge of agricultural practice” helps me find some work along the way as I journey North. I’m also going to write down “persuasive” and hope that I don’t lose as much money to paying bribes, like I did last time.*

*Sarah: What’s your goal this time?*

*Jorge: Oh yeah—I’m going to try to enter into the Bracero program.*

## **Purse**

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GAME roll dice to determine how many pesos you begin with; one die will represent your luck [1d6] and one die will represent your fortune or inheritance [1d20].

Rolls of the 1d20 die represent the following fortune:

1 - 5:	50 pesos
6 - 10:	75 pesos
11 - 15:	100 pesos
16 - 18:	125 pesos

19-20: 150 pesos

Multiply your luck by your fortune for the sum total of pesos you begin the game with. Keep track of this amount with either dice or pen/paper.

*For example: you roll [1d6] and get a "4" and [1d20] and get a "7"—the total number of pesos you get is  $4 * 75 = 300$  pesos.*

## Gameplay

After filling out **Scorecards**, players decide turn order. It is recommended that the person who *knows the most* goes first.

Players also need to find a token to represent themselves and place it on the game board. All players begin the game in Oaxaca.

In this life you are asked to survive 45 turns; it is recommended that someone volunteer to keep track of time.

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### Each Turn

- Step 1: Turn up 5 Fate Cards:
- 1 Setting (If you are in a city, choose that category)
  - 1 Equipment
  - 3 Signs
- Step 2: Determine if you want to spend Fate Tokens.
- Step 3: From an interpretation of your Fate Cards, take 5 Actions.\*
- Step 4: Assess Life\*
- Step 5: Declare the End of Your Turn

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### Possible Actions:

Work  
Travel  
Explore  
Hospital

### Actions: Basic Rules

- 1) You cannot act without justification.

- 2) Taking an Action requires a short story describing what you're doing and how the context of your choices relates to your Fate Cards (e.g., explain how are your Actions justified).
- 3) When taking Action, other players listen to your account. At any time, you or another player can test whether or not something happened the way you say that it did. Test the determinacy of your story by rolling [5d6]; if 2 of the results match, your initially telling holds true. If none of the dice match, the events happen in an *opposite* manner, in a way that would appropriately disadvantage the player.

*For example:*

*[It is the beginning of Jorge's turn. Jorge draws 5 Fate Cards. For Jorge's first action, they decide to Explore.*

*Jorge: Ok, so I think what happened is: I was exploring the outskirts of Mexico City and I came across an abandoned-looking building. I peek inside and I find a dog—I've always wanted a dog—and the dog becomes my best friend. ...*

*Sarah: Wait, how do you know the dog was friendly?*

*Jorge: I guess you're right; I'll roll to see if the dog was friendly.*

*\*rolls [5d6], none of the dice match each other\**

*Jorge: Ah, okay. So, I guess the dog wasn't as friendly as I thought. Hmm. Well, good thing I was able to slowly back away from this upset puppy without getting hurt!*

*Symone: ... Are ya sure that dog didn't hurt you?*

*Jorge: \*sigh\* okay. I'll roll to see whether or not I was harmed by the dog...]*

## Work

All players begin the game **unemployed**.

In order to own a business independently, a player must have a minimum of 500 pesos. Once this condition is met, the player may spend those 500 pesos during their turn—after the Fate Cards have been dealt—to establish a business of their choosing.

When a player is an independent business owner, they are unable to leave the city in which they are located. The player collects pesos each turn; the sum of [2d6\*1d20] is immediately deposited into the player's purse following the draw of a player's Fate Cards.

Players who are independent business owners may employ their children; these players adjust their earnings: *instead* of summing [2d6\*1d20], players sum [3d6\*1d20].

Players who are independent business owners cannot also *look for work* as an Action.

Players who are independent business owners take only **3 Actions per turn**.

Players who do not own an independent business may *look for work* once per turn.

- Step 1: Player first discovers whether or not they find work; roll [5d6]. If 2 of the 5 results are identical, proceed to Step 2; otherwise, player has failed to find work and proceeds to their next action.
- Step 2: Determine whether or not the work utilized any of your special abilities; roll [1d6] and guess an even or odd result. If your guess matches the result, you get to decide what the job was how your special talents factored into the work.\*
- Step 3: Determine your earnings. First, roll [2d6]; if the work complimented your talents, be sure to *add* the appropriate number of dice to this roll.

*For example: Symone was able to determine the kind of work they did for this particular action. To take advantage of this opportunity, Symone decides that their character did lots of physical labor involving helping a wealthy family because Symone receives a stats boost when they utilize two of their facets, "abnormal strength" and "high-endurance stamina." These two facets add 2 dice to the first roll, meaning that their first roll is [4d6].*

Second, roll [1d20].

To calculate total earnings, multiply the sum of the first roll to the result of the second roll.

*Symone rolls [4d6] and gets the following: 4, 4, 5, 2. Symone sums those numbers to 15. Symone then rolls [1d20] and gets 14 as the result. Symone multiplies 15 by 14, deducing that they earned 210 pesos.*

## Travel

Players may elect to travel once per turn; they may choose to travel on foot, by bus, or by train.

### Travel on Foot

Cost: free

To travel on foot, roll [1d20] and [1d4]; multiply those numbers together and subtract the total from your miles travelled.

### **Travel by Bus**

Cost: multiply [1d6] by [1d4]; the sum is the cost in pesos. If you cannot afford the toll, you may either walk on foot or attempt to travel by train this turn.

To travel by bus, pay the toll. Then roll [1d6] and [1d20]; multiply those numbers together and deduct the total number from your miles travelled.

### **Travel by Train**

Cost: the multiplication product of [2d6] and [1d4], in pesos. If you cannot afford the toll, you may either walk on foot, attempt to travel by bus, or attempt to *smuggle aboard* the train.

**To travel by train**, pay for a ticket. Then roll [2d6] and [1d20]; multiply those numbers together and divide the product by 50. The resultant represents how many dots the player may advance on the board.

**To smuggle aboard the train**, roll a [1d6] dice. If the roll is 4 or less, the player is caught in the act of smuggling aboard and ends their turn immediately (e.g., does not take further action). If the roll is 5 or 6, the player smuggles aboard successfully and proceeds as though they paid for a ticket.

## **Explore**

After a player chooses to Explore, reveal 1 additional Fate Card of the player's choosing.

Exploration is an opportunity for players to acquire equipment items, bond with other player and non-player characters, and discover new facets of their environment. Events that happen while exploring stack, meaning that if something lasting or significant happens in or to a place, other characters can encounter this anomaly in the environment.

*If, for example, one player decides to rob a bank and ends up shooting a bank teller, another character might discover that a job has opened up at that banking branch during a turn that happens after the robbery. Another player may decide to grieve and pray for the fallen bank teller by visiting the cemetery located in the town the robbery occurred.*

## **Hospital**

If you're ever sick or suffering from poor health (e.g., your health meter is less than when you started the game), you may choose to visit the local Curandero.

The Curandero costs [1d20] pesos for every visit. You may visit the Curandero multiple times during your turn, but each visit constitutes as 1 Action. You must also roll to determine the cost of visiting the Curandero for each separate visit.

The Curandero has the ability to regenerate your health, but they must *first* diagnose an illness before they can *try* to treat it.

Step 1: Roll [1d20] 3 times, writing down each result.

Step 2: Each number corresponds to an illness you *may* have. If you roll doubles with any particular number, that number corresponds to a disease/illness you *definitely* have.

Step 3a: If the Curandero is not able to diagnose a definite disease/illness or condition, roll [5d6]—if you successfully roll 4 of the same result, the Curandero has successfully regenerated your health by [1d4]. Roll a [1d4] to determine how many hearts you may add to your health bar.

Step 3b: If the Curandero is able to diagnose a definite disease/illness or condition, roll [5d6]—if you successfully roll 2 of the same result, the Curandero has successfully regenerated your health by [1d6]. Roll a [1d6] to determine how many hearts you may add to your health bar.

If your health counter reaches 0, your character experiences death.

## **Assess Life**

Each turn, by way of accounting for the natural decay inherent to our humanity, all player and non-player characters automatically lose 1 heart.

Rogue Penalty: For each instance in which you forget to tend to your traveling companions, their life total is automatically reduced by half, rounded down (for example, if they have 7 hearts, their life total would be reduced by 3.5 → 3).

Each turn, all player and non-player characters lose 10 pesos from their purse. If they do not have 10 pesos to lose, they automatically lose 1 heart as recompense.