



# Q.B.

by Maria Guarneri

*Here's the recipe for today's game: Two characters who haven't seen each other in a long time, garnished with an unlikely chemistry; One failure to ward off, with a good helping of assorted setbacks; One or more pieces of honest advice, to taste. All these ingredients, well-amalgamated and baked for a little over an hour, will yield a light story that makes for a wonderful afternoon break. In fact, the secret ingredient is cookies.*

## Roles

2, no gender restrictions.

## Time

About 1 hour.

## Replayability

High.

The characters' relationship is defined by the players. Some main narrative elements are written by the players as well, while others are randomly drawn.

## Leitmotiv

Amalgam, kitchen, cookies, personal relationships, failure, secrets.

*Q.B.* is a live action roleplaying game that mixes dialogue, narration, and cooking. No need for experience in the kitchen, nor with this kind of game.

What's important is being willing to chat while you bake a batch of cookies. *Probatum est.*



## Orchestrations

### Set-up

The objective of *Q.B.* is to play out a story and bake cookies together.

First of all, we'll need to procure all the *Equipment & Ingredients* listed after these rules. This means getting both alternatives when more than one is listed. In fact, we're not choosing whether to put chocolate chips or candied ginger in our recipe right now, as players: The characters will get to decide during the course of the game.

Aside from the *Equipment & Ingredients*, we should also print the *Method*, which will tell us what to do after we begin playing, step-by-step. The twelve *Fortune cookie* cards are also a must; let's cut and fold them without reading them. Finally, we need to print the two *Character recipes*. Their names are *Q.* and *B.*, of course.

Within our fiction, the cookie recipe idea comes from *Q.*, a guest in *B.*'s kitchen after a long absence. So let's decide who plays who, by preference or at random: *Q.*'s player does not need to be good with the oven, we just need to both be willing to get our hands in the batter.

Once we reach an agreement, let's take the butter out of the fridge (the first step of the *Method*) and read our respective *Character recipes* as we carefully measure the *Ingredients*. The *Tips* at the end of each sheet contain three options for the characters' relationship. We must choose together, and the first player to ask for the other's opinion must be *Q.*'s: They need to ask which of the three relationship types *B.* wishes to exclude, then choose one of the two remaining options to

put in play. Now it's *B.*'s turn to ask *Q.*; though it might look like *B.* gets nine options to pick from, they must focus on the only three variants of the chosen type, and ignore everything else. The aim is to find a specific relationship through the same mechanic as before: *Q.*'s player excludes an option and *B.*'s picks from the rest. Not all possible options are symmetrical, so if we end up with one such relationship, we should either find an agreement or leave the choice up to *Q.*'s player.

From this very first step, we should get used to blending cookery and play, since we must avoid stepping out of our characters' shoes. We should also get used to the idea that any element introduced by the other player in the story is true: Let's try to always start there and add our own twist, without ever saying "No".

Now that we know what we are to each other, *Q.*'s player can take the *Equipment & Ingredients* sheet and fill in the *Secret ingredient* section. They must write down what they think is the trick to face life's problems without being overwhelmed, that certain something that *Q.* has been relying on lately, in the turbulent times that have kept them away from home, or at least from *B.*. Once they're done, they can fold the last part of the sheet along the dotted line, so that the *Secret ingredient* is hidden, and entrust it to *B.*'s player, who will keep it until the end of the game.

*Q.*'s player writes down that the *Secret ingredient* is "A generous helping of irony". It applies to any situation and it makes it instantly clear what *Q.*'s approach to *B.*'s problem will be.

In much the same way, B.'s player needs to take the *Method* sheet and fill in the *Inevitable failure* section. They need to write down what they think B.'s current big issue is, something they have not gotten around to telling Q. yet. It might be something that has already happened, leaving them to deal with the fallout, or a failure they believe to be inevitable, but is actually anything but. What matters is that we keep things down to Earth: school, work, love and so on. There's no need to give too many details. Once they're done, they can fold the last part of the sheet along the dotted line, so that the *Inevitable failure* is hidden, and entrust it to Q.'s player, who will keep it until the end of the game.

B.'s player writes down their *Inevitable failure*: "I made an ass of myself during the first interview for my dream job. I got called back for the second interview, somehow, but I don't even know if I should bother showing up". The situation is both clear and mundane, as is B.'s approach to it.

Finally, let's put every *Fortune cookie* card on the table, along with the *Ingredients*. We'll take care of both as soon as we begin playing, as we follow the *Prep* section of the *Method*.

## Game mechanics

Once *Prep* is done, we'll bake our cookies and play the game over three distinct phases.

► The *Mixing* phase lasts about fifteen minutes and encompasses most of the kitchen work. While they prepare the cookie dough, Q. and B. try to find the amalgam that made them mix so well in the past, chatting as they work together. The conversation revolves around an unwritten rule: B. can't talk openly about their problem and Q. can't pressure them to speak. B. may apply all the trademark strategies of someone who wants to ask for advice but doesn't know how to broach the subject: alluding to it, circling around the issue, asking "for a friend" what they wish to know themselves and so on. The important thing is to keep the tone light and open to digressions. Q. will direct the operations by following the *Method* they've written themselves, but there are more than simple instructions on it. In fact, some parts are associated with one of two kinds of questions.

*Who's doing this?* Is related to four *Steps* to follow. For each of these, one of us must volunteer. By the end, we must have followed two *Steps* each.

*Which?* Is related to four choices between two *Ingredients*. For each of these, one of us must choose. By the end, we must have chosen two *Ingredients* each.

Each *Fortune cookie* card was folded to display one of the four *Steps* or eight *Ingredients* on one side, and a written prompt we shouldn't yet read on the other. We have a lot of other things to do! For now, it's enough to know that whoever follows that *Step* or chooses that *Ingredient* must take the associated *Fortune cookie* card and keep it to themselves.

► The *Wait* phase lasts exactly thirty minutes, the time it takes for the cookie dough to rest in the fridge, as detailed in the *Method*. Let's get comfortable and keep around something to drink, as well as the only leftover *Ingredient* we can snack on: the *Flavour*. The time has finally come to put B.'s problem under the microscope. Facing it won't be easy, but we'll be able to count on the characters' newfound amalgam.

Instead of waiting for B. to find the right words, Q. should be the one to take initiative. They can now read the previously restricted *Inevitable failure* section: Q. has managed to guess what B. was trying to tell them. Not in detail, perhaps, but in a general sense. There can't really be secrets between people who know each other so well. Q. may tell B. outright, or ask pointed questions; the point is to put in play the mutual understanding between our characters without Q. sounding like a psychic.

At the same time, B. can now read the previously restricted *Secret ingredient* section as well. They know Q. well enough, and they know that as soon as their problem comes out in the open, Q.'ll try to advise them to face it in a certain way.

But B. is not Q., and they may be incapable of doing it, or maybe they've tried and failed already, or they might disagree with Q.'s approach. Whatever the reason, B. will hesitate to accept Q.'s advice, as it'll inevitably be guided by what they truly think is the *Secret ingredient* to life.

Once they're done *Mixing* the dough and it's resting in the fridge, Q.'s player sits down and reads about B.'s awkward job interview. With their own *Secret ingredient* in mind, they recall that time when B. baked them a birthday cake: it was completely charred and they'd tried to hide it out of shame, but Q. had talked them into serving it, and after an awful first bite, they'd laughed it off together. Sometimes mess-ups can surprise you. B.'s player understands the allusion right away, and having just read of Q.'s trademark irony, they act annoyed and answer that some things just can't be laughed off. This is serious, this is work, and not just any work. It's a dream. Q. reacts with another joke, saying that they'd also dreamed of an edible birthday cake, and B. gets even more tense.

We need a way to get past this possible impasse and keep the conversation alive: this is where *Fortune cookies* come in. Any one of us can invite the other to play one of these cards by simply pouring them a drink or offering them a snack.

Nobody can play a card uninvited, and once our partner has invited us, we can only speak again to put the *Fortune cookie* in play, with no further digressions (of course, let's wait until our mouth isn't full).

When we play a *Fortune cookie*, we can either quote directly from the cryptic sentence on its back and then find a way to work it into our context, with our partner's help or in spite of their protests, or we can draw from its meaning and adapt it to our situation. After all, these predictions are made to work for every season. However, we must not forget that our two characters are motivated by different goals.

When Q. plays a *Fortune cookie*, they do it to show B. how their much-dreaded *Failure* will truly become inevitable or have worse consequences if they don't follow Q.'s advice or do something else about it.

When B. plays a *Fortune cookie*, they do it to show Q. that their advice can't possibly work, not this time: it would only make things worse.

Q.'s player had taken care of *Mixing* sugar into the dough: now, one of the four *Fortune cookies* they possess reads "Just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down".

When B. pours them some tea, thus inviting them to play another card, they choose that prompt and works it into the game by humming the famous song. After all, B. had just finished describing how disastrously awkward the idea of going back for a second interview after their gaffe makes them feel.

Now let's suppose that it was B.'s player *Mixing* the sugar into the dough, so they're the ones playing the card during the *Wait*. They're free to interpret it in the opposite way: instead of quoting the *Fortune cookie* directly, they might talk about how they've already made the wrong choice in the past, as they only focused on the positives instead of seriously assessing risks and benefits.

It's not vital to put every *Fortune cookie* in play before the end, what matters is for the characters' amalgam to grow during the *Wait*, even through their conflict. B. shouldn't make a choice about their next move right now.

► The *Baking* phase lasts about fifteen minutes, and it contains the conclusion of our culinary efforts, as well as our game experience. Essentially, it corresponds to the *Epilogue*.

## Epilogue

It doesn't matter who takes care of what *Step* during *Baking*, and we can count on another pause as we wait for the cookies to bake. We have no more cards to play, and the conflict born during the *Wait* might make our starting situation look something like an argument. It's okay, you need energy to mix different ingredients and we want our conversation to be somewhat animated.

Q. should take the initiative to solve the situation: whenever they deem it appropriate, they should offer B. a *Way out* of the *Failure* they dread so much, under two conditions. The *Way out* must let B. avoid their problem entirely, and it must entail Q.'s presence somehow. Since the narrative premise is that Q. has come back to B. after a long absence, we've probably explored their reason for leaving, and Q. might ask B. to go off with them or share their new life. Any other invention is welcomed, but we shouldn't be afraid of taking the simplest, apparently cliché option. That goes for the kitchen as well as every story.

After being offered a *Way out*, B. needs to decide whether to accept it or face their own *Inevitable failure*. In the first case, they can keep building on Q.'s idea; otherwise, they must refuse and explain what it is they intend to do, under one condition. Their *Resolution* must involve Q.'s presence. This doesn't mean that Q. needs to be the key to avoiding *Failure*: their role might be encouraging B. before the *Resolution* or waiting for them right afterwards. In any case, Q. will be happy to accept B.'s choice: whether finding a *Way out* or facing *Failure*, they'll still be together.

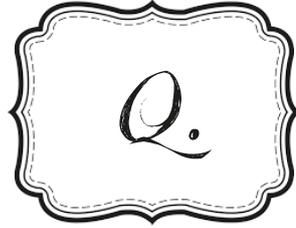
After putting the cookies in the oven, Q. tells B. that maybe they're right: if this job interview thing worries them so much, they should let it go. Q. has just come back after working at a bar for months: there was too much work and they missed home. They missed B.. They might return, if B. agrees to go with them. That would solve everything in one fell swoop, right? B. thanks them, but as contrarian as they are, they confess to Q. that they just needed some encouragement after all, the kind only Q. could provide. They'll go to the interview. But they add that there is one little thing that would help them a lot: a breakfast together, before facing destiny head on. Q. finally accepts with a smile. The choice has been made.

By this point, our cookies should be ready. Let's dig in and step out of our characters' shoes. If we'd like to, we can keep telling their story as narrating voices: every time one of us takes a cookie, they say something like "This is the bitter coffee B. gulps down before their dreaded interview" or "This is the sandwich Q. nibbles on at the café in front of the office building, as they wait" or "This is the sushi dinner we celebrate with". Our tale should always focus on something one or both of the characters eat or drink, charging it with meaning.

In any case, we don't need to get diabetes in our quest to finish every cookie: let's stop when it feels right and maybe leave some treats for our friends.

*Notes and thanks:* I selected the recipe for its simplicity... And for the cookies' deliciousness, I admit it. It's from a blog, [Anice e Cannella](#): Paoletta Sersante is a veritable goldmine of foolproof recipes. Unfortunately I don't have a vegan or gluten-free equivalent handy, tested with my own hands and tongue, but nothing stops you from introducing variants or substituting the recipe with something compatible. Aside from Paoletta, I also want to thank Oscar, because without his loving butt-kicking I would never get anything done. He's my trusted proofreader; or, more accurately, my official translator from incoherent rambling to actual game mechanics.

And last but not least, I want to thank my mom, for teaching me that cooking can be a neverending source of love and affection. Cooking for someone means caring for them.



You've always loved finding ways to spice up your life. Bold choices and strong, uncompromising flavours. It has made you happy, though not always. Of course, that's everyone. Sometimes, with the benefit of hindsight, you realise you shouldn't have insisted with the waiter to get that Indonesian dish with extra hot sauce. But you can't help it, that's just who you are. The only bitterness left on your tongue is B. and all the time you could've spent together. If only you'd been there. Nothing is lost, however, not as long as you have your special cookie recipe and every intention to make your life smell like home again. Now you're here, and B. can count on you, with all your experiences and excesses. Extra hot.

### *Tips*

What kind of relationship do you share?  
Ask B. to exclude one and choose from the rest.

- |              |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Relationship | Relationship | Relationship |
| ▼ Familiar   | ▼ Romantic   | ▼ Friendly   |



You've always tried to sugarcoat everything in your life. To make the best of bad situations, to sacrifice yourself, to focus on the little things. It has made you happy, though not always. Of course, that's everyone. Sometimes, with the benefit of hindsight, you realise you shouldn't have eaten an entire jar of Nutella just to pick yourself up after that awful day. But you can't help it, that's just who you are. The only sour bite you really didn't want to swallow was Q, and their decision to leave, far too long ago. You would've wanted to get them to stay, instead of just bottling everything up until you got heartburn, but it wouldn't have been right. Now they're back and they insist on cooking something for you, yes, right as you're trying to deal with yet another failure. Timing was never their strong suit, after all, and neither was taking things seriously. You're already feeling your stomach sour.

### *Tips*

What relationship do you share?

Ask Q, to exclude one and choose from the rest.

| Familiar   | Romantic   | Friendly   |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▀ Parent and child</li> <li>▀ Siblings</li> <li>▀ Grandparent &amp; grandchild</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▀ Partners</li> <li>▀ Former partners</li> <li>▀ Future partners</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▀ School friends</li> <li>▀ Drinking buddies</li> <li>▀ Travel mates</li> </ul> |

## Method

*Prep:* Define our relationship. Write down secrets.

- Take the butter out of the fridge half an hour before stating.
- Measure all *Ingredients* and put each into a small bowl.
- Place every *Fortune cookie* tied to an *Ingredient* in its bowl. Leave the *Fortune cookies* related to a *Step* in a corner of the table, where they're visible and handy.

*Mixing:* Around 15 minutes. Remember to take Fortune cookies.

- Put the butter in the large bowl and stir it with the spatula until its texture is soft and creamy. *Who mixes the dough?*
- Add a pinch of salt and the chosen sugar (*Which?*). Keep amalgamating to obtain a smooth, uniform cream.
- Crack one egg in the large bowl. Crack the other inside a cup and separate the white from the yolk, then add the yolk to the mix. *Who cracks the eggs?*
- Stir the egg, yolk and chosen aroma (*Which?*) into the mixture of butter and sugar.
- Sift the chosen flour (*Which?*) until all lumps are broken up. Who sifts the flour?
- Mix in the flour, dry yeast and baking soda.
- Begin mixing with the wooden spoon and fold in the chosen flavour (*Which?*), spread uniformly. Keep stirring until everything is amalgamated.

- Divide the dough in two (or three if we prefer small cookies) and shape each part by hand into a uniform long cylinder. *Who shapes the dough?*
- Cover with plastic wrap, tightly wound, tie the extremities closed and let rest in the fridge for 30 minutes.
- Heat the oven to 180°C.

*Wait:* Set the timer to 30 minutes. Read and reveal secrets.  
Play Fortune cookies.

*Baking:* Around 15 minutes.  
B. chooses between a *Way out* and a *Resolution*.

- Retrieve the cylinders and cut them into slices less than 1 cm thick. It's easier to keep the dough together if we leave the plastic wrap on, but take care to remove it all before laying the cookies on the baking tray.
- Line the baking tray with baking paper and lay the slices out a few cms apart. Put the tray into the oven.
- Bake for 12-15 minutes or until golden.
- Let cool at ambient temperature, preferably on a grid.
- Has B. chosen the *Way out* or the *Resolution*?
- Consume warm or conserve in a lidded container.

*Inevitable Failure:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Equipment & Ingredients

- A kitchen timer
- A large bowl to mix the dough
- Enough small bowls to contain all measured Ingredients
- A cup to separate the egg white from the yolk
- A spatula
- A flour sifter
- A wooden spoon, a teaspoon and a knife
- A baking tray and baking paper
- Plastic wrap
- Something to drink during the wait
  
- 185 g unsalted butter
- 5 g baking powder
- 2 g baking soda
- 1 pinch salt
- 2 eggs
- *Sugar of choice:* 185 g granulated sugar  
OR 185 g cane sugar
- *Aroma of choice:* 1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
OR 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- *Flour of choice:* 370 g soft flour  
OR 185 g soft flour + 185 g wholemeal flour
- *Flavour of choice:* 200 g dark chocolate  
OR 200 g candied ginger

*Secret ingredient:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Mixing the dough*

*Hope is a good breakfast,  
but it is a bad supper.*

*Cracking the eggs*

*Is it progress if a cannibal uses a fork?*

*Sifting the flour*

*One should never eat too much  
on an upset soul.*

*Shaping the dough*

*You've mixed it,  
now you have to eat it all.*



*Granulated sugar*

*It is better to eat food that is slightly bad for us, but pleasing, than food that is undoubtedly healthy, but unpleasant.*

///.

*Cane sugar*

*One man's meat is another man's poison.*

///.

*Vanilla extract*

*It is best to rise from life as from a banquet, neither thirsty nor drunken.*

///.

*Cinnamon*

*If something bad happens you drink in an attempt to forget; if something good happens you drink in order to celebrate; and if nothing happens you drink to make something happen.*

///./././././././.

*Soft flour*

*The best things in life are either  
immoral, illegal, or fattening.*

*Soft flour +  
Wholemeal flour*

*Too much food ruins the stomach,  
too much wisdom ruins existence.*

*Dark chocolate*

*Strength is the capacity to break a  
chocolate bar into four pieces  
with your bare hands -  
and then eat just one of the pieces.*

*Candied ginger*

*Society comprises two classes: those who  
have more food than appetite, and those  
who have more appetite than food.*