EXPERIMENT / 01

DRUGS

A live-action scenario for 6–20 participants



GAME MASTER EDITION

THE PROTOCOL

Drugs is a scenario for 6–20 participants. It consists of a workshop, a character-creation process, the game itself, and an optional debriefing. Altogether, this should take approximately 3.5 hours.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

The players portray volunteers taking part in a research experiment involving mind-altering drugs. The research is at an exploratory stage, gathering impressions in preparation for more systematic studies. The test subjects are therefore allowed to interact with the drugs and with each other quite freely. Before the drugs are brought out, the test subjects take part in a few simple getting-to-know-you exercises. The drugs are expected to be very powerful, but just how powerful they are is one of the things the researchers want to investigate.

The scenario is intended to encourage strong immersion and expressive play. The drugs act as an on-switch for intense role-playing. At the same time, players can choose different attitudes and reactions.

If there are two GMs, one will play the Lead Researcher and the other the Assistant during the game itself. You can divide up the tasks involved in the workshop, character creation, the game itself (the experiment), and the debriefing as you see fit. With up to around eight players, it should be fine to have just one Lead Researcher during the game itself.

GM's preparations before the scenario

Read through the entire scenario.

Memorize the drugs and their various effects.

Memorize, or make a cheat sheet of, the important points in the introduction to the experiment that you will give the players as the Lead Researcher (see below).

Preferably bring a Bluetooth speaker and a phone to play music from. Download and bring the songs ‘World in My Eyes’ and ‘Never Let Me Down Again’ by Depeche Mode, or other songs of your choosing.

At the venue: Make sure there is one chair for each player and a small table or similar surface (for the drugs).

Introduction and preparations (75–80 minutes)

Introduction (5–10 minutes)

Inform the players that:

- The preparations and the game are expected to take about three hours, perhaps a little longer. There will then be time for an optional debriefing.
- The scenario revolves around a research experiment in which volunteers try different mind-altering drugs while researchers observe their reactions and behavior. Within the game, the drugs are expected to be very powerful, but the researchers do not know whether everyone will be affected equally. The duration of the effects may also vary from person to person. As a player, this gives you the freedom to play as though a drug is not affecting you very strongly, or as though its effect suddenly wears off if you no longer want to play out the effect of a particular drug. In this way you can regulate your own play and withdraw from situations without breaking character.
- If you nevertheless need to break character, use the familiar and simple technique of saying ‘off-game’ and then saying whatever needs to be said. For example: ‘Off-game, I don't want you to follow me.’ You do not need to check with other players whether it is OK to play in a big, close, or intense way. This is intended to be an intense and challenging scenario involving a lot of contact.
- You may not kiss other players on the mouth, remove your underwear, or do anything that could physically harm yourself or other players. All other play is permitted. If you touch other players, first show what you are about to do, and do it slowly. Escalate physical play gradually. To simulate a kiss, use the technique of placing your hand on the other person's cheek so that your thumb is in front of their mouth, allowing you to kiss your own thumb (demonstrate this!). You can both do this at the same time so that your mouths are close together without actually kissing each other (demonstrate with your Assistant or a volunteer player!). We will practice this in the workshop.
- The details of the drug experiment itself will be explained thoroughly in-game, and you will have the opportunity, as your characters, to ask any questions you like about the experiment.
- Before we begin the game, we will first do a workshop and then create characters. After that, we will have a short break before the game itself begins. Are you ready for the workshop?

Invite questions, but try to steer away from detailed questions about the experiment and the drugs. Explain that this information will be provided in-game and will be easier to absorb and remember then.

If a player wants to set boundaries on how other players act towards them, assess on a case-by-case basis whether this is reasonable—that is, whether the others can reasonably be expected to remember the boundary and adapt their play accordingly. If you consider the request reasonable, ask the other players to respect it. If they do not want to, or if someone wants to set boundaries that would be difficult to remember or accommodate in play, ask the player who set the boundaries to adjust them or, alternatively, refrain from participating.

Workshop (30 minutes)

If there is an odd number of participants, it is helpful if your Assistant joins in (if you have one—otherwise perhaps you can do so yourself, if you can manage it), so that everyone can pair up. The following exercises may be varied, but the idea is that participants should (i) try slow physical interaction, (ii) practice the kissing technique, and (iii) do an exercise in which they are affirmative and spontaneous.

- Walk around the room, relax, be with yourself. (A couple of minutes)
- Find a partner. The person with lighter hair gently pulls and pushes the other person. Move slowly. The other person is yielding, like syrap. (A few minutes)
- Thank each other and move on.
- Find a partner. Speak only if necessary. The person with longer hair slowly leans forward, places a hand on the other person's cheek, and gives them a kiss using the thumb technique. (Remind them how it works if necessary.) (Two minutes)
- Find a new partner. Speak only if necessary. Slowly move into a mutual kiss using the thumb technique. (Two minutes)
- Find another new partner. The person with shorter hair slowly leans forward to kiss the other person using the thumb technique. But the person being kissed avoids the kiss and gently pushes the other person away.
- Do the same thing in the same pair, but switch roles.
- Walk around the room, relax, be with yourself. (One minute)
- Find a partner. The person with darker hair suggests an activity you could do here in the room. Say ‘Shall we ...’ followed by the activity (for example, ‘Shall we do handstands?’). The other person thinks for a second and then says ‘Yes!’ enthusiastically, and you do the activity for a while. If the other person really does not want to do it, they say, ‘No, but we can do something else!’ and the first person suggests something else. Once you have done the activity for a while, the same person suggests another activity. Thus, the same person makes all the suggestions. (A few minutes, so that most pairs have done more than one activity)
- Do the same thing in the same pair, but switch roles.
- Thank each other.

The characters (30 minutes)

- Walk around the room, relax. (One minute)
- Try out a few different ways of walking. Notice how they feel. (Two minutes)
- Find your character's way of walking and moving. (Two minutes)
- Give your character a name. Let it come spontaneously. (30 seconds)
- Stop, sit down, and feel free to close your eyes.
- The scenario takes place in this city and at this time, where we are right now, but in an alternative reality in which the drugs in the scenario have been developed and it is legal to test them in the way depicted here. You all live in this city, and you have all volunteered to participate in the experiment. You are all adults and you all speak the language.
- Listen to these questions and answer them spontaneously in your mind. Let your character take shape:

    - Was your character born and raised here, or did they move here? When? (20 seconds)
    - Does your character have a job? What job? If not, why not? (30 seconds)
    - Is your character self-confident? (10 seconds)
    - Is your character extroverted or introverted? (10 seconds)
    - Is your character secure or anxious? (10 seconds)
    - Is your character dominant or submissive? (10 seconds)
    - Is your character spontaneous or a planner? (10 seconds)
    - Is your character younger than you, older than you, or the same age? (10 seconds)
    - What is your character's gender identity? (10 seconds)
    - What is your character's sexuality? Are they heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual, or something else? (20 seconds)
    - What is a hobby your character has? (30 seconds)
    - Is there anything else that is important in your character's life? (30 seconds)
    - Why has your character chosen to take part in the drug experiment? For the financial compensation? For the excitement? To meet people? To contribute to research? (One minute)
- Stand up and walk around the room as your character. (One minute)
- You now have your character. You do not need to remember everything. You can improvise based on what you remember.
- Meet one or two other players, introduce yourselves to each other, and ask some polite question. (A few minutes)
- Excuse yourself and seek out one or two other players, introduce yourselves, and ask some polite question. (A few minutes)

As an alternative to the above, you as GM may use another method of creating and trying out characters, provided it takes roughly the same amount of time. (You can also write pre-generated characters and hand them out, if you prefer.)

Tell the players that:

- There will shortly be a short break.
- When they return and the door is open, you will have assumed the role of Lead Researcher and Assistant. You will no longer be the GM(s), but if they want to speak to you as GM(s), they can use ‘off-game’.
- As soon as they step across the threshold into the room after the break, they are in character.
- Music will be played at the beginning of the scenario. After approximately 70–80 minutes, music will start playing again; this marks the end of the scenario. At that point, stop playing your character, close your eyes, and remain still until the music stops.

Take any questions, but try to steer away from questions that will be answered in-game (such as questions about the drugs or the experiment).

Break (10 minutes)

Give the players a short break for bathroom visits and other needs before the game begins.

Game (approximately 75 minutes)

Here you, as GM(s), take on the roles of Lead Researcher and Assistant. Put on white lab coats (provided on location). You may choose how to portray these roles, as long as they can fulfill their function and serve the game.

Welcome — introduction to the experiment

Play some suitable music as the players enter the room. For example, ‘World in My Eyes’ by Depeche Mode (and later perhaps a second song if someone is delayed). Open the door. You may welcome participants with your eyes or body language, but do not yet speak to them.

Once everyone has arrived, turn off the music and welcome everyone. Improvise an introduction to the experiment (perhaps say something about how you got to this point and thank a few colleagues?) and make sure to include:

- Thank the participants for volunteering as test subjects in this important experiment, which has the potential to save lives.
- The financial compensation can be collected after the experiment has ended.
- The drugs take effect immediately after being taken.
- The effects of the drugs are expected to last about five minutes, but the duration seems to vary from person to person, which is something we want to study.
- The drugs are expected to be so powerful that their effects cannot be resisted, but there may be individual variations, which we want to study.
- Taking the drugs is voluntary, but anyone who does not try at least three different drugs will receive no financial compensation.
- Participants may not leave the room without informing the Lead Researcher.
- The drugs will be administered in three stages. First, half the participants will each receive one drug. Then, everyone will be free to take whichever drugs they want. Later, after about half the time, participants will be allowed to combine more than one drug at a time. You will announce when each stage begins.
- You, as Lead Researcher, and your Assistant (if there is one) may suggest drugs to try and ways of trying them. It is good for the experiment if participants are receptive to such suggestions.
- Go through the drugs that will be offered, as listed below.

Invite questions and answer them thoroughly. If questions arise about things that are not defined in the scenario, improvise whatever answers you wish. Be relatively calm and reassuring at this stage (so that the players feel, off-game, that they are getting answers to what they want to know).

Playing and getting to know one another

Tell the participants that before the drugs are brought out, they will play two getting-to-know-you games, so that they can interact more spontaneously with one another later, which is important for the experiment. Then explain the games below and make sure they are played. At this stage it is good if you act things out a little, in whatever direction—embarrassed by the awkwardness of the games, excessively warm and welcoming, etc. (to inspire the players to be expressive).

The first game: Stand in a circle. One person at a time says their name, another word beginning with the same letter as their name, and makes a movement that suits that word. The next person clockwise repeats what the first person said and did, and then says their own name, another word beginning with the same letter, and makes a fitting movement. The third person repeats what the first and second people did, then adds their own name, word, and movement, and so on all the way around the circle.

The second game: Sit on chairs in a circle. One person starts in the middle and says, ‘Everyone who ... change seats!’ with some characteristic, and everyone to whom this applies must leave their chair and find another (for example "everyone who has eaten snails change seats!"). The person in the middle then has the opportunity to take a chair. Whoever is left standing in the middle gets to call out a new ‘Everyone who ... change seats!’, and so on.

The drugs

Here, the Assistant can be active while the Lead Researcher stands back, observes, and takes notes, or vice versa.

Have the participants remain seated in a circle. Bring out the drugs on a tray (the drugs and tray are provided on location). Remind everyone of the different drugs and their effects. Then let every other person choose a drug, but one that has not already been chosen (‘so that we have a variety of reactions to study’). When someone takes a drug, remind them of its effect (‘Ah, so you will probably experience ...’). Instruct those taking interactive drugs to interact with the person beside them who has not received a drug. Encourage that person to help by being the object of the effect. Have the person taking the drug do so immediately, before you move on to the next person.

When the effects of the first round of drugs appear to be wearing off, get the group's attention and announce that all drugs are now available. Place the drugs somewhere suitable in the room. At least initially, one of you should stand by the drugs and remind people of the effects when they take one. Answer any questions about the effects. If you forget something, you can improvise!

When the game has been going on for a while and you feel it would benefit from some extra energy, get the group's attention and announce that they may now combine two or more drugs at the same time, if they wish.

Throughout this part of the game, you can interact spontaneously with the players to intensify their play. You can encourage people to take certain drugs or combinations, or encourage particular people to take particular drugs together, etc. (For example: ‘We would really like to see what happens if the two of you sit here together and you take this drug and you take that one.’) If at any point you want to stop the effect of a drug, you can pretend to inject an ‘antidote’ or something similar.

The drugs are as follows:

PARALYSIS / You slow down, your mind empties, and you cannot move. You are aware of your sensory impressions, your body, and your breathing, but you have no desire to do anything, no drive, no will.

COMPLIANCE / Your mind is emptied of drive and will and instead opens itself to the will of the person or people in front of you when the drug takes effect. Your only desire is to do what that person asks you to do, or what they seem to want you to do. Your emotions are not affected by the drug, so you react emotionally to whatever happens.

ENERGY / You are filled with a need to be active and in motion. You want to act quickly and intensely, whatever you are doing, and you constantly want to be doing something, preferably several things at once.

EMPATHY / You are filled with goodwill and caring. You perceive other people's feelings and needs as though they were your own, only stronger. You react immediately to other people's feelings and needs by feeling them yourself and trying to meet them.

EUPHORIA / You are filled with a deep, tingling joy. Everything feels good. You may want to move or be still, be with others or by yourself. Whatever you do, everything feels wonderful.

DESIRE / You feel intense desire for the person or people in front of you when the drug takes effect. You try to get close to that person and may act out sexually if the opportunity arises. If you close your eyes when taking the drug, you experience the desire without any external direction, instead focused on your own body, your sensations, and your own consciousness.

REVULSION / You feel intense revulsion towards the person or people in front of you when the drug takes effect. You try to get away from the person and avoid seeing or hearing them, but you are still filled with an awareness of their presence and feel disgusted by them. If you close your eyes when taking the drug, you experience revulsion towards yourself and your own body.

You can, in principle, invent your own drugs, but if you are leading the scenario for the first time, it is probably best to start with these.

Ending

Play music fairly loudly, for example ‘Never Let Me Down Again’ by Depeche Mode. Have the players remain still throughout the song.

Debriefing (approximately 20 minutes)

When the song ends, the game is over. Gather the participants in a circle. Thank them for taking part. Say that the debriefing is optional, but that you would appreciate it if they stayed. Invite each person to share something about their experience, in whichever order they wish. Listen.

Materials (provided on location)

- White lab coats for the Lead Researcher and Assistant.
- Drug pills in clearly labeled containers.
- A tray for the drugs.