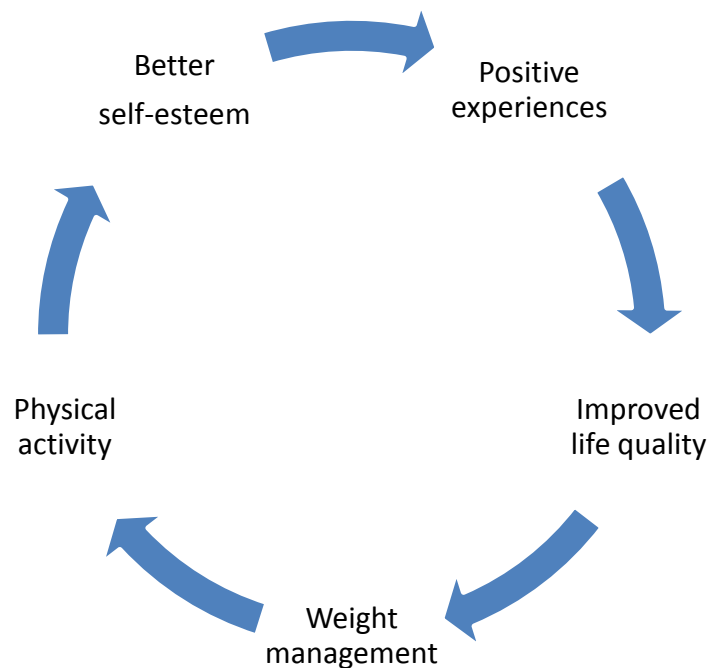


# Mikodine XA

*a Live Action Role-Playing Game  
about a Revolutionary Drug*

*for Five to Seventeen players  
and a Game Master*

**by Lauri Lukka**



This larp has it all – morals, politics, boardroom drama, voices in your head, ethical conondrums, slapping and clapping. The concept is polished, the presentation clear and detailed. The kinds of questions that occupy ethical philosophers and critics or employees of big pharma – but pretty much nobody else – are turned into drama and entertainment and then back into questions. “Mikodine XA” is for larp what “The West Wing” was for television. We have only one question for the author(s): Where do we sign up?

*Statement of the Jury of the Knutepunkt Larp-Writer Challenge 2013*

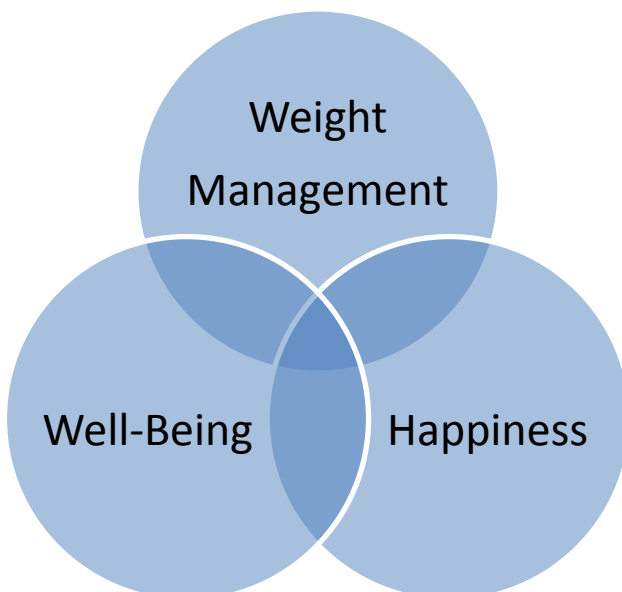
## Introduction

*Many of us have struggled with weight problems. There are many diets out there promising quick results – yet hardly any of them live up to the advertisers' claims. New ground-breaking technology has finally made it possible to design a product that really works, Mikodine XA!<sup>1</sup>*

*“Eat your weight away  
With Mikodine XA!”*

*Reyes & Shaw has brought you effective and innovative, but most importantly safe, medicine since 1926. Now it brings you a clinically tested, scientifically effective product to help you achieve your weight goals. Mikodine XA reduces the amount of energy absorbed from food to our system enabling only the important nutrients to be digested. With Mikodine XA there is no need to starve yourself thin. Just one, easy and safe pill a day and you are on your way to the figure of your dreams. And for those concerned about gaining weight in the future, there is also good news – Mikodine XA can also be taken preventatively!*

<sup>1</sup> Effective ingredient *mikohydrocycline*. Available over-the-counter in drug stores around the world.



Set in the modern-day office of *Reyes & Shaw* pharmaceutical company located at the heart of London, *Mikodine XA* is a game about the conflict between conscience and selfishness; suppression and expression of emotions. Its innovative game mechanic draws inspiration from both musicals and improvisation theatre. *Mikodine XA* is also a political game promoting critical thinking about pharmaceuticals.

*Mikodine XA* is designed for one game master and 5–17 players. Any location is suitable, but an authentic office space would support immersion to the characters and the game. The total game-time, including an two-hour-long pre-larp workshop, is about 5 hours. Except for the players and location, this paper includes everything you need to play.

## Disclaimer

This game is a work of fiction. All characters, companies and brand names in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, companies or brands is purely coincidental. The game does not reflect the view of the author toward prescribed medicine.

This game does not advice or imply, in any way, you to quit the use of prescribed medicine and you should always consult your physician before making any changes to your medication.

### Improvements in version 1.10

- My fondests thanks to the Dutch play-testers!
- The warm-up exercises have been greatly elaborated and expanded.
- The character creation has been improved considerably.
- The role of the game master has been made more active.
- The role of Voices has been clarified.
- The handouts have been changed.
- The flow of the text has been improved and grammatical errors corrected. Clarified the game terms.
- A book recommendation has been added.

### Improvements in version 1.15

- My humblest thanks to the Norwegian play-testers!
- Changed the fourth scene
- Lengthened the suggested game length and added time management guidelines
- Changed the name of the main game mechanic from Slap 'n' Clap to Ripples.
- Shortened the warm-up exercises.

## The Premise

The following text explains the premise of the game. It contains no secrets for the players, so they should also feel free to read it.

### A Miracle Drug

Before its release seven years ago, Mikodine XA was in development for nearly a decade. Chemically it is based on a brand new Mi550-technology discovered and patented in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Quickly after the potential of the technology was realized, it was sold the highest bidder, *Reyes & Shaw* pharmaceutical company. Fascinated by the potential of Mi550-technology and the substances it could produce, a top-team was set up to research it. The team found the technology could produce a substance affecting the way organisms treat nutrients. Basically, it acted as an independent agent making it much harder to absorb more energy from food than our bodies optimally need.

The substance, mikohydrocyclyne, was clinically researched according to the standard four-phase procedure. Its pharmacodynamics and -kinetics were tested in laboratory first with animals and then in humans with growing samples. After six years of comprehensive testing, the substance was branded Mikodine XA and made available as a prescription drug. More studies were published after its release, finding it very effective, safe and its side effects minimal.

Four years after its initial release, the product was made available to the general public – where it gained much attention as “a miracle drug”. There were numerous critical physicians, but the overwhelming evidence silenced them. On top of the positive attitude of the general public, a huge marketing campaign made Mikodine XA one of the most profitable drugs in the market. The affordable consumer price made it available to most families. In the last few years, the population using Mikodine XA has grown increasingly. Today, an average of 7% of the adult population in many western countries uses

Mikodine XA. This year, Mikodine XA junior is to be released for the treatment and prevention of obesity in children and it is enthusiastically awaited.

### Behind Closed Doors

The development of Mikodine XA did not exactly go as the advertisers present it. The purchase of the Mi550-technology was secretly funded by the government as an act to reduce obesity that had become more and more a burden on public health-care. Knowing the public would protest a drug developed by the government in order to reduce health care costs, the government proceeded to act in secrecy outsourcing the development to a prominent pharmaceutical corporation while backing it up bountifully.

The production of Mikodine XA requires special technology and its the rather low price point has raised some justifiable suspicions. Besides the government, also the fast food industry has made extremely generous donations to Reyes & Shaw helping them keep the price as low as possible making the drug available to those most in need: the overweight low and middle class. Now, the stocks of the fast food industry are on the rise again – in correlation with Mikodine XA sales.

The clinical tests were made using all state of art equipment by a professional team. There was but one bump in the road, one test that did not fit. It was counted off as a statistical error. It was never made public, but was hushed up and burned. Why bother with minor details if you have a perfect product?

### The Key Points

- Mikodine XA has been sold for seven years, three years over the counter
- Reyes & Shaw has been secretly backed by the government and the fast food industry
- Mikodine XA is growing in popularity
- Mikodine XA junior is soon to be released

## The Theme

The game has two main themes represented as conflicts. The two themes should resonate and reinforce each other.

### Conscience vs. selfishness

During the game each character has to decide their motivation in respect to developing, marketing and selling Mikodine XA – are they in it for the money, fame and success or do they want the good of the general public. The conscience reminds the character about their responsibility to minimize the harm to the users. On the other hand, the selfishness is the wish to put the blame on others, twist the truth and escape responsibility. There is also the question of loyalty: are they loyal to their employer or to the public.

### Suppression vs. expression of emotions

The second theme contrasts the tediousness of meetings, rational thinking, code of conduct and the world of adults to the inner conflicts, sincerity, openness and liveliness. In the game, this conflict is explored with the game mechanic ripples (before: slap'n'clap), which will be explained in detail below.

## The Game Principles

### Improvisation

Improvisation is an important part of the game. The players are encouraged to come up with new ideas during the game. Improvisation should be understood as a state of mind: being open to suggestions from others but also one's own ideas. This mindset is reinforced with exercises before the game.

### Atmosphere

The players participate in a meeting supposed to be serious, tedious, matter-of-factly and adult. In the meeting, there is no room for emotions. All personal comments should be avoided. This does not mean that there are no emotions – on the contrary! There should be a lot of emotions, but they are not expressed during the meeting. The characters unable to

suppress their emotions use the ripples mechanic to vent them out.

### The Tension

The players should strive to build tension by creating conflicts and difficult situations. These unresolved conflicts will build tensions, drama and emotions within the characters. They will also keep the game rolling and interesting.

The tension built can be intrapersonal, reflecting the inner conflict between the conscience and the selfishness of the character. On the other hand, it can be interpersonal, reflecting the conflicting opinions and values between characters. *Remember, the game is set in a business meeting – the interaction is strictly correct, businesslike and adult.* All the emotions are toned down – this tension represents the conflict between the suppression and expression of emotions.

### The Role of the Game Master

It is up to the game master that every player understands the game themes, principles and mechanics before the game starts. It is very important that the game mechanics are explained, rehearsed and discussed thoroughly before the game begins so all the players have the same idea about the game. There are several exercises below to facilitate this.

During the game, the game master sits in the board table with the players acting as a **secretary**. This way he can affect the flow of the game directly. This role and the scene cards help pace the story and guide the flow of the game. The game master should use the scenes and cues to guide and activate players: “First, we should discuss ... How should we respond to this enquiry... Does product development team have a comment on this... Madam, this memo just came in, it says that... Sir, you asked me to remind you that the professor is awaiting your reply on the matter... It is urgent we make a decision on this topic as soon as possible... ”. The scene

cards can be showed to the players, but this is not necessary.

During the first part of the game the characters should have enough time to get to know the other characters, test the game mechanics and get a feel of the game. The second part of the game, however, should be more active, aggressive and tense. It is encouraged the game master use techniques he or she feels comfortable to complement those presented in this text.

### **Equality**

The characters can be of either sex. To keep things simple, it is suggested the players play characters of their own sex. The meeting should not be dominated by a handful of characters others remaining in the shadow. Therefore, the characters are the members of the executive board of Reyes & Shaw, who is collectively responsible for the whole company. During a board meeting, each board member is equal, even if outside of it they wouldn't be. Think of the meeting as the round table of Camelot – and actually having the members sit in a circle is a good idea, too. Everyone's opinion is important as each person has their own area of expertise – but also conflicting interests, agenda and the potential of “running the show”.

### **About the characters**

The players should be encouraged to play such characters as they enjoy. At the same time, the players should try to come a bit out of their comfort zone in order to make the character more engaging. The players can freely add elements to the characters as they see best. It is important that every character knows their stance in both conflicts before the game. What is their motivation in the board; what do they wish to accomplish; where do their loyalties lie? What thoughts and feelings they may suppress? Optimally, the players have mixed feelings about both conflicts creating a problem for them to resolve during the game.

## **The Game Mechanics**

### **Ripples (ex-Slap'n'clap)**

To ripple the player starts to repeat a simple, spontaneous movement, sound or thought. Ripples start subtly, but once other players notice it, they join in on the movement or sound. Then the group collectively alters it. Finally, everyone stops the activity at the same time and act as if nothing has happened. You may recognise this from musicals: the musical event is actually not a part of the film reality.

This is the main mechanic in the game. It reflects the second theme and conflict of the game: expression of emotions that can no longer be suppressed. During a business meeting, the code of conduct prevents you from expressing your emotions openly, rather you are supposed to suppress them and discuss politely. The emotions that bleed from the characters are represented by ripples.

Ripples can be used to express the collective atmosphere of the group and to bring out suppressed emotions. Everyone should participate in ripples if it fits the characters emotional state at all. This requires the players to pay constant awareness to other players – which can partly be a source of emotional burden. Below, you will find some examples on how to use the mechanic.

#### *Bringing out the atmosphere:*

One person has a lengthy monologue about a boring detail. One of the listeners becomes bored and yawns. Everyone joins the yawning and start to flex their muscles.

#### *Expressing selfishness:*

One person explains how their key value is the health of children. A more selfish board member can no longer control himself and starts to laugh aloud, others join in the maniacal laughter. This is ended abruptly and everyone continues to talk about the company values.

*Expressing conscience and peer pressure:*

A board member refuses an altruistic idea and begins talking about selfish motives. Another board member whispers “asshole” and others join the whispers, except the player being mocked who may continue pressing his selfish values as if the others would remain silent.

*Filling the gap:*

Everyone is silently pondering an improvement idea. One person drums the table with his fingers. Others join this by clapping their hands, drumming the table, stomping their feet.

Be creative with the mechanic and remember that the movement or sound can evolve during ripples as everyone brings their own flavor to it. There can be “battles” between groups in finger snapping, choruses of handclaps, humming, dance moves or short prayers.

This mechanic may seem rather odd and funny. It is supposed to. It is meant to vent the feelings for which there is no space in the business world. In order to avoid confusion, the mechanic is practised before the game and its components (awareness, improvisation) are trained during the warm-up exercises. Play testing has proved that the mechanic actually works, so do not worry. Just go with the flow.

The key points about ripples:

- Requires awareness of other players
- Expresses hidden emotions and motives of the characters or the atmosphere in the group
- Starts with **repetition**, is joined by **imitation**, is continued with **alteration** and is stopped **abruptly**
- Everyone participates in slap’n’clap, except possibly the player being mocked or commented on.

**Scenes**

The plot of the game advances in scenes introduced by the game master. The events are designed to guide the game to a progressively tenser situation forcing the characters to face the two themes of the game. The game starts with the board planning the release of Mikodine XA junior. This first part includes four scenes. Then the game jumps eight months to a meeting just before the launch of the drug for another four scenes.

Each scene is introduced by the game master with the help of a handout found at the very end. Change from scene to scene should feel as natural as possible. The game master should use their guile and creativity to bring the scenes to the life in the most interesting way.

**Voices**

The voices are not physical characters, but the inner states, emotions and conflicts the characters experience. They work to increase the tension in the game and force the players to think about the themes of the game. *Importantly, the characters do not hear the voices – the players do.* The player acts as a buffer and decides how the voice affects the character.

The voices can affect the players in many ways. They can whisper in the characters ear, affect them by touch, making faces, using mimicry and so on. Their acts should remain somewhat subtle, however, in order not to disturb other players. The voices are encouraged to interact with each other in the game. They also participate in ripples.

The Voices of Ethics and Greed are designed to contrast and support each other. Use them both if you have ten players or more. If you have less than ten players, strongly consider leaving them both out.

## **The Plot**

The following text includes spoilers about the game and should not be read by the players!

The game is divided into two parts. The first part of the game sets up the baseline. In it the players discuss the details about the release of Mikodine XA junior, which is scheduled to happen in eight months. In the second part of the game, Mikodine XA junior is just three days from its release and there is an emergency meeting called in.

### **Scene 1: Mikodine XA Junior**

First, the details of the marketing campaign is discussed. For details, see handout #1.

### **Scene 2: M-Club**

Next, there is an invitation to a special M-Club event. M-Clubs are a social platform helping Mikodine XA users change their lifestyle. One hundredth branch is to be opened in a month and one of the board members is invited to speak in the opening ceremony. For details, see handout #2.

### **Scene 3: A Counter Argument**

One more anti-Mikodine XA junior papers has come up. A prominent child psychologist claims that children eating a drug to stay thin do not actually learn to eat healthy, become psychologically dependent on the drug and do not learn healthy eating habits. The board should discuss about how to tackle the situation. For details, see handout #3.

### **Scene 4: Sponsors**

Finally, the board should discuss about Mikodine partnership deals and choose between two lucrative offers. Each deal has a subtle anti-overweight message in their campaigns. Additionally, the board members discuss future partnership programs and sponsors. For details, see handout #4.

## **Cut to Pre-Launch**

The game skips eight months to an emergency board meeting to discuss an unnerving event. The huge international launch of Mikodine XA junior is three days away.

### **Scene 5: The Secret Study Revealed**

The secret study done internally at Reyes & Shaw has leaked to public. This is a considerable problem and can effect the whole company. The study showed that the use of Mikodine XA before and during pregnancy may have effects on the foetus and on the development of the child. It is up to debate who sent the study – only the board members have had access to it. For details, see handout #5.

### **Scene 6: Hard Evidence**

An independent study supporting the findings of the secret study suddenly comes up. Combined, they propose even a bigger threat to the company, Mikodine XA and to the launch of Mikodine XA junior – and to the stocks! The board must discuss the effect of the studies and come up with some sort of action plan. For details, see handout #6.

### **Scene 7: The Shipment**

The board is notified about the current worldwide shipment status of Mikodine XA junior. Confirmation about shipment to Spain is needed. For details, see handout #7.

### **Scene 8: The Finale**

In the final scene, the board members are faced with a decision. Do half of the members sign a paper in which they officially confirm they know the drug to be safe and effective and that they are legally responsible for it. How does the board react? Do they cover their tracks? Do they need a recess to discuss in private? Do they sign the paper regardless of the information they just received or do they dismiss the results perhaps as fraud or mistake? The decision ends the game. For details, see handout #8.

## How to run the Game

There is a lot more than the actual in-game board meeting to this game. The customized warm up exercises are designed to teach the game mechanics and prepare the players mentally for the game. Improvisation exercises are used to achieve this. Some people, or even the game master, may have no previous experience with improvisation. The exercises are designed with this in mind. Remember, there is no right or wrong in improvisation – not for the game master or for the players! Below you will find a step-by-step guide for the seven part warm up.

### Time management

- ½ hour: Welcome the players, explain the game themes
- 1 hour: The warm-up exercises
- 1 hour: Character development and training of game mechanics
- ½ hour: Answers to player questions and breaks
- 2 – 3 hours: Playing the game
- Total: 5 – 6 hours

### The Game Master Makes the Necessary Arrangements before the Game

- Read the game materials.
- Reflect on the experience you want the players to have.
- Copy the character sheets.
- Invite the players. Make sure you give them sufficient information before participation.
- Set up the game location. If you want, set up props as you see fit.

### Prepare the Players

- Welcome the players and give them an overview of the schedule.
- Explain the history of Mikodine XA and the premise of the game.
- Explain and stress the significance of the game mechanics, principles and theme.
- Answer any questions players have.

### Hold the Warm up Exercises

The goals of the exercises are threefold:

- Help players feel comfortable with each other.
- Invoke a creative and non-judgmental state of mind.
- Prepare the players to use the provided game mechanics.

### Part 1: The First Walkabout

Guide the players to walk randomly in the game space. Have the players turn their attention toward themselves and to reflect on what they are thinking, feeling and experiencing. Guide the players to relax their muscles: jump lightly, flex their arms and feet. Encourage the players to let go of unnecessary thoughts, just letting the thoughts flow by as if they were watching scenery from a moving train. Guide the players to focus their attention to here-and-now: they should focus their attention completely on their breathing as they walk. They should breathe deep so that their stomach moves, too.

After a while, guide the players to turn their attention toward other players. They should try to sense the whole space with other players in it. They should try to use the whole space so that there is an equal amount of people in every part of the space (so that everyone is not in one corner at the same time). You can invoke a mental image that if the players cluster in one corner, the floor would become unbalanced and slope that way. Then, they should start to try to make eye contact with other players as they walk.

Then advice the players to verbally interact with the other. They should talk to each other shortly in a mood of their choice but only using numbers when talking. For instance, walking up to someone and greeting them by saying “five thirty-two”, or saying “four seven seventy-nine” in an inquisitive voice and the other answers fearfully ”two thousand and three”. Then have the players walk in a silence for a while.

Finally, advice the players to try to stop walking all at the same time, without any verbal communication, only using their sense of the space and others in it. After the



stop, tell them to resume walking again and then to stop again. Repeat the stop-exercises half a dozen times.

Explain that the awareness of others and the “stop”-mechanic are actually a key part of the game, but you come back to that.

### **Part 2: More Advanced Improvisation**

The players gather in a circle. The game master looks at the player on his left side in the eyes and says the first word that comes to their mind. The player receiving the word looks at the next player and says the very word that first comes to their mind. Repeat a couple rounds. Then do the same, but have the players make up complete sentences. The players can say “full stop”; “comma”; “exclamation mark” etc. to build sentences.

Still in a circle, the game master leads an exercise of the imaginary gift. You can divide the group in half you have more than a dozen players. The game master pantomimes holding an imaginary object or substance that can be anything (think about holding sand, a guitar, something smelly etc.). They then act out giving the gift: walking toward another player, pantomiming giving them the gift and returning to their own place. The receiver pantomimes taking the gift that has turned to something completely different and walks with it to another player. Repeat.

Then have the players pair up. One of them acts as a guide first, the other is the follower. The guide holds out their hand and the follower focuses their attention on the palm. The goal of the follower is to keep their face at equal distance from the palm of the guide as the guide moves about the space and moves their hand at the same time. After a while, have them change roles.

### **Optional: Improvisation in Groups of Four**

Use this exercise if you have plenty of time and the players are into improvisation. Have the players divide in groups of four. The people who know each other should go to different groups.

Ask for suggestions for an environment everybody is familiar with (for

example hospital, shop, church). In this exercise, the players are in the chosen environment but one of them must always be lying on the ground, one must be sitting, one must be leaning on something and one must stand straight. If someone who is sitting down stands up, someone else must immediately sit down, so that the balance is kept. The players improvise a scene in this environment constantly changing their posture. They are allowed to talk in this exercise.

Ask for suggestions for another environment. In this exercise, the four divide into pairs. Two of them act out a scene together, but they can only talk, not move themselves. Instead, the other move them. They stand behind the two acting in the scene physically moving their hands, fingers, feet and head into different positions. The one being moved reacts in their speech to the postures and gestures they are being made to make. Have the pairs play out a scene in the chosen environment. Afterwards, have the pairs change roles.

### **Part 3: Whispers**

This part familiarizes the players with the Voices. Choose two players to act as the Voices. They do not have to be same people that play them in the game that follows. Explain the players what Voices are, how they are used in the game and what is their purpose.

Have the players sit in a circle and choose a contemporary topic to debate on such as world economy, up-coming elections or modern art. Then have the players discuss it. The Voices circle behind the players “invisibly” and influence them with whispers, slight touches and movements behind their backs. The players should change their view in the topic in accordance with the guidance from the Voices. If needed, change the Voice players and practise with another topic. Ask the players if they understood the method.

### **Part 4: Suppression of Emotions**

Be careful with this exercise, it may arouse strong feelings.

Have the players stand up. Explain what suppression of emotions mean: burying a surge of feelings deep inside you and not showing it. Have the players practise suppression with four basic emotions: fear, anger, sadness and joy – in this order preferably. Instruct the players they are free to use all the space in the room for this exercise. As always, the players have an option not to participate in the exercise.

Have the players suggest themselves to the first mood: Think about the thing you fear somewhat (not something you fear a lot!), yet something they can control. Think about all aspects of it and how it crawls nearer and nearer. Have the players act in accordance with the emotion. Keep talking to the players arousing their fear. Then, suddenly, ask the players to cover the feeling deep inside, hold onto it and gather in a circle. Instruct the players to hold the emotion, feed on to it with their thoughts and stand still, emotionless and with no expression in a circle. Hold that moment for 30 seconds or a minute, then have the players jump and relax. Ask how they felt about the exercise. Then repeat this with anger, sadness and joy. Next, we practise venting that feeling. Remember, emotions are not dangerous. They are just emotions.

### Part 5: Ripples

At this point the players should be somewhat tuned to the game. It is important that you explain elaborately ripples as a technique, its meaning and how it is used in the game. You should stress that this is a key game-mechanic.

After explaining the mechanic, you should practise it thoroughly and with different methods. Sit in a circle. First, guide the players attention to each other. Ripples work only if the players are aware of other players.

First practise ripples with a **simple sound** such as a yawn, a sigh or a cough. Everyone sits in a circle and look at each other. One player starts the sound and **all other players** repeat, imitate, alter and finally stop it abruptly. Do this exercise several times

with various sounds until the players get a hang of it.

Then practise it with a **simple movement** such as running your fingers through your hair, tapping the table or pointing your finger. Repeat this exercise several times.

Then practise it with a **mood**. One player takes up a clear mood such as sadness, rage, desperation or elation. Others imitate this, alter it and finally stop it abruptly. Practise several times with different moods.

Then practise it with a **simple inner thought**. One player says what is on their mind, such as “yes”, “no!”, “this is stupid”, “I want to go home”, “someone has to make these decisions!”. Others join (repeat), imitate, alter and finally stop it abruptly.

In the last exercise, go over the top. This methods should only be used in the second part of the game. Have a player come forth with an **elaborate content in their mind**: player starts to sing the tune of Rocky (the Eye of the Tiger), imitate a wild west shoot out against people they disagree with, roll over in cash like Scrooge McDuck or die like soldier in World War One in machine gun fire. Go wild. Jump on the table and chairs. Roll on the ground. Scream and shout! Others imitate, alter and finally stop it abruptly. Repeat a couple times until all players have lost their inhibitions.

If the players need more practise, explain more about the mechanic and its uses using the examples above.

Finally, ask the players if they have any questions. Remember, in the game everyone has to participate in ripples regardless of their stance in the issue or their mood. Game testing has proven that this is the best method for the game, even if some players disagree with it. Just encourage them to try out the method and use it as instructed.

**Hold a short break.**

### **Building the Characters**

- Deal out the characters randomly. Give the players a possibility to change characters.
- Remind the players that their input in character creation is essential. The players should be encouraged to elaborate their character greatly.
- Have the players focus on their character. What is their motive? What kind of a person are they? How do they talk and act? Do they have a dialect? Strange manners?
- Remind the players that each character should have a conscientious side and a selfish side. The inner battle between these sides is the core of the game.
- Examples of conscientious motives are: I do this to expand human knowledge, I want to help those who cannot help themselves, I want more equality in the world or I want my children to have better lives.
- Examples of selfish motives are: I do this to gain more power and status, I want money, I want to be remembered once I die or I want respect.

### **Building Three Relationships**

- Next we build three relationships for each character: a positive, a negative and an ambivalent one. These backgrounds give the players feelings to suppress during the game, even if they are not mentioned aloud.
- Have the players pair up randomly. The characters have a mainly positive relationship to each other. Ask the players to discuss their characters' personalities, common interests, motives and background together for five minutes. How do the two back each other up? Do they have a common goal?
- Have the players change pairs. These two characters have mainly a negative relationship to each other. Perhaps they are rivals or have had a breakup?

Ask the players to discuss their background, crisis and motives for five minutes. The goal is to build more drama for the game. Are the players rivals, do they have a secret agenda, how do they oppose each other?

- Ask the players again to change pairs. Next we an ambivalent, unilateral or conflicted relationship is built: is one in love with the other, secretly has bought their opinion or have a secret in the past? This relationship should build more drama in the the game.
- The game is supposed to be rather dramatism than realism or simulationism.
- Finally, answer the player's questions. Stress the two key conflicts of the game. Remind them about the ripples mechanic.

### **Hold a short break.**

### **Hold the Game (see The Plot)**

- The game starts with everyone sitting around the board table.
- Start scene 1.

### **Hold the Debriefing**

- Short version: Have the players gather in a circle. Everyone describes in two to four sentences their game experience.
- Long version: A longer debriefing is needed if the game aroused emotions that the players are uncomfortable with. First, everyone comes out of their roles by stating their real name, what they do and the most important things about their lives. Then the players divide into small groups and discuss their feelings and thoughts about their experience.

## About the Game Design

*“The majority of pharmaceutical research is supported financially by the pharmacy industry, which have no interest in reporting zero results.”*

Bringing a new drug to the market is a long and expensive project – on average 500 million dollars. Clinical trials are strictly controlled and thorough. However, the publication of the results always is not. Some pharmaceutical companies have conducted research they have had the right to publish or withhold publishing. From the point-of-view of the pharmaceutical company, unfavourable (and unprofitable) results may be left unpublished. This is scientifically and ethically questionable.

There are also other issues in the field: Access to academic journals is often restricted which makes it harder for the patients to make informed decisions about their treatment and medication. Even if the patient could access the journals, they usually would not understand their complicated language. The physician prescribing the drug may have received promotion from the pharmaceutical companies which may both consciously and unconsciously affect their decision making, at times, to the (financial) disadvantage of the patient. The marketing campaigns can mislead the patient. Most of the medicine in the world is used by and developed for the high income countries.

The rapid development of modern medicine during the last centuries has made it possible to treat and cure diseases that previously were untreatable, life threatening or mortal. At the same time, it should be acknowledged the pharmaceutical companies are just that – companies. They provide people with drugs to treat diseases but also make money doing so. Therein lies potential for ethical conflict.

If you wish to read a critical review of contemporary use of pharmaceuticals in psychiatry, turn to book *Pharmageddon* (2012) by professor David Healy.

## Acknowledgements

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I would love to hear your thoughts and experiences on the game:

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## Characters

### **Ben / Maya Blackwell**

The Head of Product Development

- Has not used Mikodine, although they are overweight
- Eats to comfort themselves
- Doesn't want to dependent on anyone
- Believes in technology

### **Liam / Olivia Sullivan**

The Marketing Manager of Mikodine XA

- Has created the advertisement campaign helping Mikodine gain its popularity
- Has used Mikodine preventively for six years
- Has a three-year-old boy and a five-year-old girl
- Believes most rules can be bent

### **Tyler / Hannah Nash**

The Head of the Ministry of Health

- The nation's representative on health issues
- Was bullied at school
- Blames other for their own mistakes
- Does not believe in emotions

### **David / Anna Berger**

A Representative of Food Industry

- Represents, promotes and lobbies for the food industry
- Has been cured of cancer
- Would like to make a difference
- Wants to appear strong to others

### **Arthur / Martha Preston**

Professor of Health Sciences

- Internationally acclaimed expert on Health Sciences
- Would like to change their lifestyle
- Almost bankrupt personally
- Tries not to think about bad things

### **Elliot / Sofie Carpenter**

The designer of Mi550-technology

- Has developed the technology that made the development of Mikodine possible
- Cannot have children
- Would like to change their way of life
- Appreciates freedom, but has a mortgage

### **Ethan / Jessica Shaw**

A Head of Board in Reyes & Shaw

- Economist
- Workaholic
- Would like to learn to lie
- Gets frustrated easily

### **Kyle / Julia Reyes**

A Head of Board in Reyes & Shaw

- Humanist
- Spends more than they earn, and that is a lot
- Would like to take responsibility but cannot
- A chronic binge eater

### **Sebastian / Grace Barnes**

The Head Chemist of the Quality Control Unit at Reyes & Shaw

- Responsible for quality management of the final product
- Cheats on their spouse
- At times, makes mistakes on purpose
- Has hard time making decisions

### **Jayden / Chloe Hughes**

The Media Contact at Reyes & Shaw

- Makes direct contact with the media
- Hates underachievers
- Cries themselves to sleep
- Becomes defensive easily

**Henry / Ella Quinn**

Attorney at Reyes & Shaw

- Responsible for contracts and legal details
- Pretends being better than they are
- Trusts no one
- Thirsts for appreciation

**Connor / Alice Roy**

The attorney of Mr./Mrs. Carpenter

- Has represented Elliott/Sofie Carpenter for two decades, making them both rich
- Ashamed of their disabled brother
- Has fallen in love their client
- Has got a good job proposal from elsewhere but has not decided anything yet

**James / Eva Schultz**

The Head of Human Resources at Reyes & Shaw

- Has recruited all the key people in the company
- Gave all their wealth away after a life change, and regretted it shortly after
- Never wanted to be in this business
- Cannot take any criticism

**Leon / Skye Winters**

A Manager of Mikodine partnership Program

- Cooperates with many sponsors (sports equipment, candy corporations, clothing, accessories) and partners. The money flows both ways.
- Has never revealed their true self
- Overachieves physically
- Cannot remember much about their past
- Uses steroids, believes in singularity and modification of humans

**Edward / Gracie Sawyer**

An Expert Statistician at Reyes & Shaw

- Knows everything about numbers
- Succeeded in losing weight with Mikodine, now respects themselves
- Unpredictable
- Obsessive about food, orthorexic

**Ethic / Ethica**

The Voice of Ethics

- You are the positive voice: the small angel on the shoulder.
- You can influence the characters, but they do not actually see you.
- Responsibility
- Ethics
- Greater good
- Altruism

**Cha-ching**

The Voice of Greed

- You are the negative voice: the little demon on the shoulder.
- You can influence the characters, but they do not actually see you.
- Individuality
- Personal gain
- Refusing to take responsibility
- Neglect

### **Handout #1**

The Secretary (game master) uses this to introduce the first scene.

The marketing team has an excellent campaign coming along. There are still some issues that should be discussed in the board meeting:

- 1) Is Mikodine XA junior marketed primarily to children, adults or both? This affects many things, such as how and where the product is advertised.
  - 2) Is the product marketed as preventative or proactive?
  - 3) What are the key values the campaign wants to convey about Mikodine XA junior?
  - 4) Who should be face of the campaign? A fat child? A child having lost weight? A cartoon character?
- 

### **Handout #2**

The Secretary uses this to introduce the second scene.

Sender: Mr. Kerr ([kerr@mikodine-club.com](mailto:kerr@mikodine-club.com))  
Subject: The launch of 100<sup>th</sup> M-Club to Halifax

Dear Jayden / Chloe, [the media contact]

I greatly appreciated our last conversation. The sponsorship program with the local chocolate factory has proven very successful, thank you for the idea! M-Web has grown ever more popular and our mobile apps have now very active users.

You asked about the goals of the M-Club. Here are our three key objectives:

- Provide social interaction and support for those using Mikodine XA
- Help those who have lost weight to lead a more healthy life
- Promote awareness of weight problems

We are opening our 100<sup>th</sup> branch in the UK to Halifax in a month. I am planning on having a great opening ceremony. If any of the board members has the time, they are most welcome to give a short speech and talk with the fans of Mikodine XA. Let me know if one of you has the time.

Also, I am always open to your ideas on improving our activities!

Best wishes,  
Mr. Kerr  
Head of the M-Club UK

### Handout #3

The Secretary uses this to introduce the third scene.

An essay published three days ago in a popular magazine by a prominent child psychologist

*The Art of Passiveness*

– *Why the Upcoming Mikodine XA junior is bad for your child*

Abstract

*Mikodine XA junior teaches children they can eat whatever they want whenever they want. As a result, they do not learn healthy eating habits, proper meal times and hunger control. In the future, we will have adults who have no idea about healthy eating and who are indirectly dependent on the drug – if they would stop taking it, they would most certainly gain a lot of weight. The whole marketing system of Reyes & Shaw actually promotes this dependency and wants to control the life of your child.*

How should the board tackle the situation? Is there a counterargument? What does the professor of health sciences have to say to this?

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### Handout #4

The Secretary uses this to introduce the fourth scene.

A major sponsorship deal between Mikodine XA junior and a major sport brand

After months of careful negotiation, you have received the offers from two major sports brands willing to partner with Mikodine XA junior. The sports brands benefit from cooperation with Mikodine XA because more and more people become physically active.

Brand A:

Slogan: *Find your inner strength*

What: A big arena is named Mikodine Stadium  
Famous athletes become Mikodine XA models  
Brand helps lobby pro Mikodine XA laws in the government  
Social media is used to promote Mikodine XA

Brand B:

Slogan: *Enjoy sports together*

What: Special Mikodine trainers and free sports equipment are given to children  
Heavy Mikodine XA product placement is implemented in television  
Brand creates special high quality Mikodine sport equipment  
Each board member receives 1 million pound compensation

Additionally, you have negotiated for some additional sponsorships: Which firms are potential future partners? Which companies benefit from Mikodine XA? Which links should be reinforced?



**Handout #5**

The Secretary uses this to introduce the fifth scene.

Sender: Mr. Miles ([miles@scientificc.com](mailto:miles@scientificc.com)) [a popular international science magazine]  
Subject: Request for comments

Dear board,

An anonymous source provided me with a study about the effects of Mikodine XA on the fetuses of Mikodine XA users. Apparently, the study is done within your company and it seems rather preliminary, but I would like to know if you have other studies done on the subject? How do you comment on the results that there were changes in the neurology of the foetus perhaps affecting their development? The sample of the study is rather small. Have you done studies with bigger samples and have they confirmed or dismissed the results? To this day, I have found no other studies like this and I would greatly appreciate your input on our article about the subject to the magazine next month.

Yours truly,  
Mr. Miles  
Editor of Scientific

[The head of the product development organized this study at Reyes & Shaw, but the study was never published as its results were unfavorable. The results of the study were only available to the board members.]

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**Handout #6**

The Secretary uses this to introduce the sixth scene.

**Mikodine XA: A comparative, six-year follow-up study on the psychiatric effects of Mikodine XA including children of Mikodine XA users**

N. N. Cole (MD)<sup>1</sup>; E. F. Patterson (PhD)<sup>2</sup>; A. Russel (MD)<sup>3</sup>; & O. Woods (PhD)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Boroughs, UK

<sup>2</sup>University of London, UK

<sup>3</sup>University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

*Abstract:* In a double-blind setting 1248 Mikodine XA users were followed along with matched group of 3102 non Mikodine users. There were no statistically significant differences in occurrences of psychiatric disorders between the two groups. However, a statistically significant difference between the children of the two groups was found: the occurrence of many neuropsychological disorders. The children of Mikodine XA users were 12 times more likely to have a ADHD; 9 times more likely to have a mood disorder and 4 times as likely to have an autism spectrum disorder. This is the first study in which second generation psychiatric effects of Mikodine XA junior have been studied. The authors report no conflicting interest.

[ The study is overall thorough and to the point; the statistics are precise and convincing. There is only a very narrow margin of error. The study is to be published in two months in a major journal. ]

**Handout #7**

The Secretary uses this to introduce the seventh scene.

Sender: Mr. Jensen ([b.jensen@reyesandshaw.com](mailto:b.jensen@reyesandshaw.com))  
Subject: Shipment to Spain and shipment status

Dear Reyes / Shaw,

I have the shipment ready for Spain. Have you received the permission from the health ministry of Spain that we are allowed to send this shipment? Currently, 37% of the UK products have been delivered and the rest are on the way. If the sky doesn't fall, nearly all of the products will be at the pharmacies at the time of launch. International shipments have been quite on time. The products just arrived to the central distribution hubs in Germany; shipments to France are being loaded as air cargo as we speak; the products to Nordic countries are on the way. At this time, we predict that internationally 92% of the products will be at the pharmaceuticals at the time of launch and 98% of the products within a week from launch. We work triple shift to make the schedule.

Yours truly,  
Mr. Jensen  
Head of Shipments at Reyes & Shaw Pharmaceuticals

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**Handout #8**

The Secretary uses this to introduce the final scene.

**International Organization of Pharmaceutical Safety (IOPS)  
Paris, France**

**Authorization for Release**

**Product:** Mikodine XA junior (mikohydrocycline)  
**Company:** Reyes & Shaw Pharmaceuticals  
**Licence:** Two years as of the signing whereupon re-evaluated

The board members of Reyes and Shaw pharmaceutical company assert they know the drug to be effective (according to the Copenhagen principles 3a-9, 1989) and safe (according the international regulation on pharmaceutical safety, 2008) and take full legal and moral responsibility for its release. Once signed Reyes & Shaw has the permission to sell and market the product to treat and prevent obesity in the European Union countries. A majority of the board members is needed to sign the paper in order for it to take effect.

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