

Game time



Reviewer **Angela Jacobsen** takes her chances and tries to play her cards right while testing out two locally designed board games



With summer approaching, and the impending mass exodus off to the Kiwi bach, there is no better time to start thinking about those cool summer evenings playing games on the deck, glass of wine in hand, with your friends and family.

Being of a competitive nature, I absolutely love games. Board games, cards, basically anything that affords me the opportunity to compete. It's not just about winning, it's also the social interaction that takes me back to childhood hours spent battling my big brother across a chessboard. Yes, I'm a geek.

So it was with much excitement that the NZLawyer team hurried off to my house recently, laden with wine and food, for a games night to sample two new home-grown games that are the brainchild of Aucklanders Julia Schiller and Amanda Milne of Schmil Games.

It's fair to say that, at the best of times, the NZLawyer team has a short attention span and this night was no different. Feeling like I was in a room full of Mexican jumping beans, I attempted to read through the instructions of our first game of the evening, *Komodo*. It was no easy feat.

Winner of the New Zealand Game Association's '2012 New Game of the Year' and 'Children's Choice Award', *Komodo* is a strategy game in which players lay tiles to build a shared habitat that houses animals that are threatened with extinction due to an asteroid plunging towards the South Pacific. It's similar to those European-type strategy games like *Carcassonne*, but, in my opinion, a lot more fun and interactive, with definitely less arguments.

After a chorus of "I want to be the tarsier" and such like, we began work on building our terrain of forest, grassland, desert, and water for 24 species of animal that are picked via playing cards. But, thanks to some sneaky wild cards, *Komodo* soon stirs up deviance in the mind of even the most

good-natured player. We were soon bartering tiles, forcing tile swaps, and plotting the demise of our opponents' animals that had been placed but were not secured, so 'on the loose', in their habitats, much to protests from Darise who had been silently building a desert only to have her plan thwarted. She was not a happy lady.

We played *Komodo* in basic mode, but there is also a strategic mode for the more competitive gamer. And for those who prefer a more harmonious life, there is also an option to play a collaborative game which draws upon players' good communication skills and consideration in order to save all of the animals. Clearly not a suitable option for the anarchical NZLawyer team.

The game exceeded the one-hour playing time that was indicated in the instructions, but this had everything to do with the short intervals of playing with the animals that seemed to sporadically occur. At one point, Osmyn built a very fine animal tower. This was not going to be an early night.

We finally reached the end of the game only to discover that the values of the remaining homeless, and doomed, animals in our hands were to be deducted from our final scores. Osmyn had shown promise throughout the game with his Donald Trump-like play, but Aaron was the winner and I, unfortunately, came last. That said, it was a great game and one that I'm keen to play again.

It was then on to our second, and final, game of the evening: *Raid the Pantry*. This was my opportunity to snatch victory and put a stop to a potential losing streak.

Raid the Pantry is a card game for two to four players where you're given ingredients cards and recipe cards. The aim of the game is to create selected meals with the ingredients that you accumulate; some require more ingredients than others making them worth more points.

Action cards determine what will happen on your turn, which could be: picking up ingredients cards (that also include interesting facts and tips on the ingredient); forcing your opponents to surrender ingredients; instant dishes; bartering; and dumpster diving – an action I might add that Darise was, at first, appalled by but one that soon saw her rolling up her sleeves and getting dirty.

This certainly was a game that roused the most excitement in the team. We were soon giggling as Osmyn tried in vain to be rid of his oranges, and when the clam chowder became the 'Old Maid' of the game doing it's rounds among each of us before ending back up in Aaron's reluctant hands.

There was a great feeling of victory when completing a meal and proudly displaying it in front of you for the other players to verify. We take game playing most seriously, you know. And as we neared the end of the game, we longed to dumpster dive in order to snatch that key ingredient that we'd all been eyeing for our dishes, with Osmyn gleefully proclaiming, "I never knew that I was such a scab, this is my dream card!".

Raid the Pantry was easier to play than *Komodo* because the level of concentration required is lower. We were also laughing at each other far more, though this may have had something to do with the wine! Though they are very different games, both require a degree of cunning and an ability to think beyond your next move.

There is a lot to be said for sitting and playing games together, talking, laughing, and focusing on one another for an evening without the distraction of the TV or games console. I went to bed contented at the fun we'd had (and my eventual win) and inspired to dedicate more time in life to enjoying evenings like this. ☺

Komodo and *Raid the Pantry* are available in stores throughout New Zealand and online at www.schmilgames.com.