

Learn, let loose with local virus card game

Bye Bye Virus, created by two Singaporean housemates, aims to educate and entertain



Prisca Ang

You are in a tough situation. Supermarket shelves are empty as people are hoarding supplies and, worse, you have lost your mask and hand sanitiser.

Inspired by real-life situations amid the pandemic, these scenarios are part of Bye Bye Virus, a card game that aims to bring some cheer to people stuck at home and teach them how they can protect themselves against viruses.

Launched on May 4, the game was created by Singaporeans Denise Lim, 33, and Yasmine Khater, 35, over 10 weeks, including the circuit breaker period.

Ms Lim is acting head at the Institute of Innovation & Entrepreneurship at Singapore Management University, where she completed a double degree in business management and social sciences. Ms Khater, who is half Egyptian, is founder and executive coach at professional train-

ing company Sales Story Method. Hunkered down indoors as they were working from home, the housemates found themselves increasingly bored and itching to start a new project.

Ms Lim says: "We are extroverts, and after one or two weeks, we were going crazy. We needed something to do with our time and we also read about how there was a lot of misinformation about the virus."

The isolation sparked their creativity and Bye Bye Virus was born. In the game, there is a virus outbreak and players have to collect a total of five protective items – disinfectant, a mask, soap, gloves and hand sanitiser – to win.

Players meet obstacles that mimic actual circumstances in a pandemic. For example, they might lose a turn because supermarket shelves are empty due to hoarders, or lose cards if they touch their



Singaporeans Denise Lim (far left) and Yasmine Khater (left) with their Bye Bye Virus card game, where players have to collect five protective items to win. It is available for preorder on Kickstarter from \$30. PHOTO: BYE BYE VIRUS

faces during the game.

They can also gain extra cards for exercising – doing jumping jacks during the game – and reading verified news. There are also panic hoarding cards, which feature things such as toilet paper, ramen and a dinosaur suit. Players may discard three of these cards to steal a card from another player.

The game can be played in real life by members of the same household, or with others over a video call if they also have a deck of cards.

Ms Lim and Ms Khater hope the game will be a source of mirth if people are feeling anxious or stressed while cooped up at home.

"Laughter often helps to reduce anxiety. When we started to laugh about hoarders and supermarkets being empty, it helped us not be so upset about the situation," says Ms Lim.

Besides providing entertainment, the game aims to help players understand how viruses infect people and to avoid infection. It also tries to encourage socially responsible behaviours such as safe distancing and reading verified news, and discourage actions such as touching one's face and breaking quarantine, says Ms Lim. "Through gameplay, we hope people subconsciously learn these things."

Bye Bye Virus has already secured some \$24,000 in funding from crowdfunding platform Kickstarter and two funds.

It is supported by philanthropic organisation The Majority Trust's Singapore Strong Fund – which

aids community efforts that help vulnerable groups, front-line workers and ordinary Singaporeans tide over the pandemic – as well as the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth's Our Singapore Fund.

Ms Lim and Ms Khater plan to produce 2,000 decks in the first print. Of these, half will be distributed for free to vulnerable communities and schools, an initiative that is supported by the two funds.

Meanwhile, 12 per cent of profits from retail sales and Kickstarter backers will be donated to causes related to Covid-19, says Ms Lim.

Creating the game in such a short time was not all smooth sailing. The duo tested 47 versions of the game, encountering minor setbacks before arriving at the final product.

For example, they realised it initially lacked an element of surprise. A police power card was therefore created, so players can prevent others from winning by requiring them to discard a protective item.

They also wanted to design the game for children at first, but realised it might be too complex for young kids.

Giving an example, Ms Lim says: "You're not supposed to hoard the ice cream card, but young kids are not going to understand that. They will just want the ice cream."

She adds that there are plans to test and develop the game for young children in the future. For now, Bye Bye Virus targets players aged eight and above.

Both creators have backgrounds in entrepreneurship and psychol-

ogy, which came in handy.

Ms Khater has used games to teach others in sales training sessions. She studied integrated marketing communications and psychology as an undergraduate at the American University in Cairo before getting her master's degree from the IE Business School in Spain.

Ms Lim is a serial entrepreneur who has founded businesses and worked with start-ups in Guatemala, Colombia and Chile.

The housemates met through mutual friends 10 years ago. They were travelling and living in various countries in recent years, but made it a point to catch up each year. Finally reunited in Singapore, they moved in together in February.

The duo say highlights of the creative process include rapping for the game's promotional video on Kickstarter, with advice from Singapore-born rapper Masia Lim, and transforming seemingly ordinary items like masks and gloves into cute characters.

The creators hope the game will have a shelf-life beyond the pandemic.

Ms Lim says: "The game can be adapted according to future situations. Teaching hygiene is always useful, even after Covid-19 dies down."

prisang@sph.com.sg

• The game is available for preorder on Kickstarter (bit.ly/2X0ifsu) from \$30. Estimated delivery is in July.

Other virus-themed games to check out



CAN YOU SAVE THE WORLD?

Avoid other pedestrians on a crowded street and collect masks in this video game.

Can You Save The World? was created by Professor Richard Wiseman from the University of Hertfordshire in Britain and French game designer Martin Jacob.

The free online game, which aims to highlight the importance of safe distancing, is targeted at families and has been played about 15,000 times since it was launched on May 8.



PLAGUE INC

Launched in 2012, the popular mobile phone game allows players to control a deadly pathogen that spreads through humanity.

Ndemic Creations, the Britain-based makers of the game, said in a statement in January: "We specifically designed the game to be realistic and informative, while not sensationalising serious real-world issues."

However, it cautions that the game is not a scientific model and that people should get their information directly from local and global health authorities.

There is also a board-game version, while another version of the game, Plague Inc: Evolved, is available on gaming platform Steam, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch and PlayStation 4.



PANDEMIC

Work together with others to treat diseases and find cures in this classic cooperative board game published by Z-Man Games in 2007.

The game can be played by up to four people, who take on various roles in a disease-fighting team and have to contain four diseases. The group win if they can develop vaccines for all the diseases.

American board game designer Matt Leacock started designing the game in 2004, during the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak.

He wrote in a New York Times opinion piece in March this year that playing the game or watching a movie like Contagion (2011) is "a natural way to cope with our new reality. It gives people a chance to confront their fears, make sense of the situation and perhaps even feel somewhat in control as they defiantly attempt to defeat the big bad themselves".

PHOTOS: MARTIN JACOB, NDEMIC CREATIONS, ZMANGAMESOFFICIAL/YOUTUBE

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