

Whipping Your M.U.L.E. Into Shape

by Carl M. Evans

If you haven't gone out and bought M.U.L.E. yet, don't waste any time. Stop reading this and run on out and buy your own personal copy before they are all sucked up. If you already have your own copy, then you know what I am talking about. But have you been able to beat the computer players consistently in the tournament mode when you are playing the Human character? If not, then read on and I will disclose some playing strategies to you that will come in very useful.

The first thing you have to realize is that there is only one product worth producing in any quantity . . . CRYSTITE. All of the other products in the game are subject to the usual laws of supply and demand. In other words, as the supply increases, the price of the product decreases. Crystite, on the other hand, sells for some random price between 48 and 148 dollars per unit regardless of the supply.

I am amused by the antics of other human players who try to corner the market on smithore, food, or energy. I've seen smithore sell for over 300 dollars per unit and the player who drove the price up gloated at his success until the last couple of turns in the game when I came from out of what appeared to be nowhere to pass him up and beat him by several thousand dollars. The secret is simple. Produce only as much food and energy as you can use and dedicate everything else to the production of crystite.

The logic of this seems to be clear cut, but the implementation of this strategy needs a little bit of thought. Let's go through a game and highlight some of the important milestones. First, on turn one of the game try to get one of the river plots. They can not be beat for producing food. You will find that the production of a river plot will keep you supplied with as much food as you will need through most of the game. You may want to temporarily set up one other food plot early in the game with the intention of converting it to crystite at the earliest opportunity. If you do set up a second food plot hoard all of its output and convert the plot to crystite around turn five or six.

The second thing is to try to buy up the entire supply of energy at the store. If you can do this, it will give you some additional leeway in the first four turns and hinder the development of your opponents. Whether you can suck up all of the store's energy or not, you should establish two energy plots by no later than the end of the fourth turn. An ancillary note to the energy policy is to

NEVER sell energy. The first reason is that you may very well suffer three turns later during an energy shortage and wish you had never sold any. The second reason is more immediate. You might get a hundred or so dollars for a unit of energy from an energy-starved player, but he will get at least two to eight hundred dollars worth of production from it depending upon where he is on the learning curve.

The pirate will usually show up for the first time around the fourth or fifth turn of the game. You should, therefore develop two energy plots and two food plots during the first four turns. Starting on the fifth turn, set up any new plots for crystite production and ignore the possible appearance of the pirate.

Note: be very wary of getting stuck with a piece of high priced land in an auction during the early turns of the game or you will find yourself in a real cashflow squeeze. There will always be time to buy up additional land in the second half of the game. The additional production capability of the extra plot of land does you little good if you later have to let land go undeveloped due to lack of money.

Now that you have your energy and food supply established, you can concentrate on finding those high yield crystite deposits. If you are playing against three computer opponents, this is where you beat the socks off of them. You can find crystite in one of three ways. The first way is to stumble across it on a plot of land that you already own. You can try this by simply putting a crystite M.U.L.E. on that plot of land and hope for a bonanza.

The second way is the traditional way where you go out and get a sample from a plot of land and take it to the assay office in town. This is what you will have to do if you are playing against human players. If you are playing against computer players, however, life is made easy for you. If a human player locates a high grade crystite deposit, he will assuredly grab that plot of land and put it into crystite production at the earliest opportunity. Not so, the computer player. Those poor computer players will assay one or two plots every turn without taking advantage of any assay information they get. This makes the poor computer a very easy opponent to beat. While he goes off into whatever electronic dream that androids have (electronic sheep of course — Ed.), you walk away with the game by grabbing all three of the high yield crystite deposits.

Now lets talk about some very important things to keep in mind. The first of

these things is attrition. You will find that 50 per cent of any excess food and 25 per cent of any excess energy will be lost each turn to something called 'spoilage'. Ignore the loss of any energy units, but try to minimize the losses in food by keeping no more than two or three over your needs. Your actual production on the next turn will depend upon whether or not you have an adequate supply of energy, but a lack of food simply reduces the amount of time you have to make any changes to your production plots.

You can hold up to fifty units of smithore and crystite without penalty (if you ignore any losses to the pirate). Any units over fifty are simply lost at the end of the round. This brings us to the last two things you should do in your pursuit of a clear win. Always sell any smithore that you have. This tends to keep the price down for the guy who is heavily into smithore production and consequently keeps your cost for new M.U.L.E.s down.

Never let yourself run short of energy! Being short by one energy unit can cost you as much as \$1000 on a single turn. Also note that the 'need level' that the game shows you during the auction phase is based upon your current production level. It does not take into account any new plot developing you may do on the next turn.

The next thing is something you should start doing around turn 10, if you haven't already done so. You should get rid of all of your food producers and move your energy M.U.L.E.s into the river bed. By that time you should have a large stockpile of energy and precious little undeveloped plots. As soon as all of your non-river plots are producing crystite you have no real need for food anymore since you don't have any plot changes to make. By turn 12 you should end up with at least nine crystite plots and a single energy plot on the river bed.

The last thing is to hold onto your crystite until you can get a price over 110 dollars per unit. You have to take the usual precautions about the maximum holdings of fifty rule. Also, if a pirate hasn't turned up by turn 9 you might be in for a large hole in your pocket on turn 10.

These strategies are always good against the computer players, but you will find them only adequate against experienced human opponents who are using the same tactics. When you are playing in that kind of game, try to maximize your use of the economies of scale and grab as many good crystite plots as you can. Happy gaming! ■