



Skin Your Friends At M.U.L.E.

**Become Your
Colony's Richest Citizen!**

By TRACIE FORMAN and FRANK TETRO JR.

MU.L.E. (Electronic Arts/Atari, C-64 computers/48K disk) is fast becoming a major craze among computer gamers. Winner of the 1984 Arcade Award as "Best Multi-Player Game", M.U.L.E. is a one- to four-player contest in which the participants strive to explore and exploit a habitable but deserted planet.

Each colonist must develop a strategy involving the supply and demand for materials which are vital to the settlement's survival. By buying and selling food, energy, smithore, and (in the tournament version) crystite, the players attempt to gain the economic edge over their human and/or computer-driven opponents. The player with the most assets at the end of the game is dubbed First Founder of the colony — assuming, that is, that all the cutthroat competition hasn't doomed the outpost.

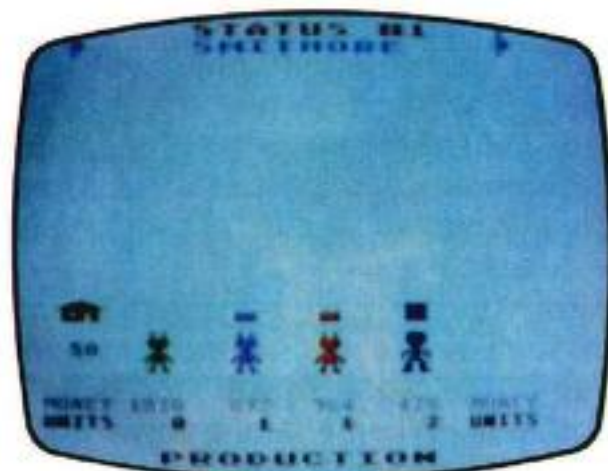
In a sense, M.U.L.E. is a space-age cousin of such boardgames as Monopoly and Easy Money. Because it's the interaction between the players that causes the largest changes in the game situation, it's virtually impossible to take a "perfect plan" approach to this electronic strategy classic. Instead, this article will concentrate on providing some guidelines for developing your own individual strategies.

THE LAND GRANT

The first humble plot you choose is the basis for your future empire. Choose the location well. The first plot

should be able to produce either food or energy, so go for flatland or river valley space. This guarantees that you'll be at least partially self-sufficient. Keep that first acre within easy striking distance of other flatland or mountain areas, and choose all subsequent plots adjacent to your first one.

Expertise bonuses are awarded to players who keep their lands tightly-knit. The more adjacent plots you have, the more you'll produce on each



Prices go up when the store runs out!

one. Likewise, producing the same commodity on three different plots rewards the colonist with more goods.

If land goes up for auction, always try to buy it, especially during the earliest phases. Each plot has an estimated value of \$500, but it's advisable to buy higher — if you have enough rounds left to produce plenty of goods. After the ninth round or so, if you pay too much for land, you probably won't be able to recover the cost from the goods produced on it. If

someone else is bidding higher than you and you *don't* intend to buy, push the line up anyway and pretend you want it. Then pull out at the last second and leave your opponent holding the bag. It's also advisable to leave yourself money to develop your brand-new plot, so never put all your cash on the line.

LAND DEVELOPMENT & PRODUCTION

Now that you've got your land, you have to decide what to do with it. Produce food? A good idea if you have river or flat land. Energy? The same. Smithore can't be mined in the wet river valley, and though it *can* be mined on flatlands, mountains are the ideal spot — the more mountains, the better!

Make enough food and energy to fulfill your needs. This will keep you from being at the mercy of your best friend, who's likely to announce cheerfully, "Food? Gee, I think I have an extra unit or two. But you'll have to pay for it!" Players who have a food shortage will find their next development turn cut short proportionately, and lack of energy means low production.

The real key to the standard game is to produce smithore. Lots of it. It has a high base price and the store will always buy it. If you produce smithore towards the beginning of the game and then don't sell, prices rise accordingly — and the colony experiences a shortage of M.U.L.E.s.

The development phase always seems too short. A few time-saving tips: When walking outside of town, avoid mountains and river land. They slow you down. The fastest walking is accomplished by moving diagonally. Also, you don't have to enter town through its side roads. Touch any portion of the center square, and bingo! You're in. When entering town from the north or south, the character always appears directly in front of the inn.

It's possible to switch M.U.L.E.s without having to remove the installed one. Just go into town, get the type of M.U.L.E. you want, then position your character directly over the installed M.U.L.E. Press the red button. If you've done it right, the production symbol changes and you now have the old M.U.L.E. in hand. If you do it wrong, the M.U.L.E. you just bought runs away.

During the tournament game, two

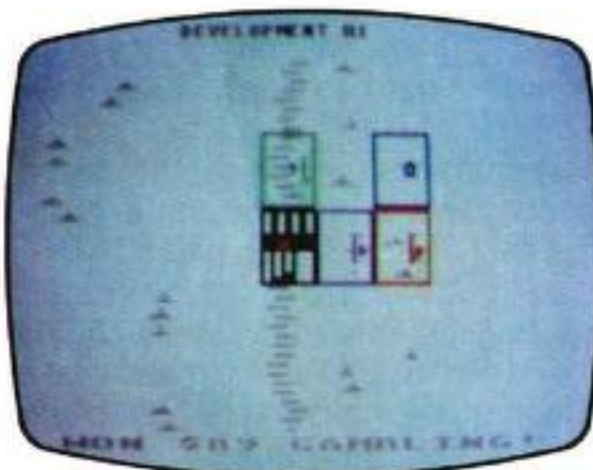
M.U.L.E.

definite rules apply. First, forget about smithore. Go for crystite. Second, if you have time left after developing your land, pay the assay office a visit and check around for crystite. Also watch other players' development turns because they'll be searching for the stuff, also.

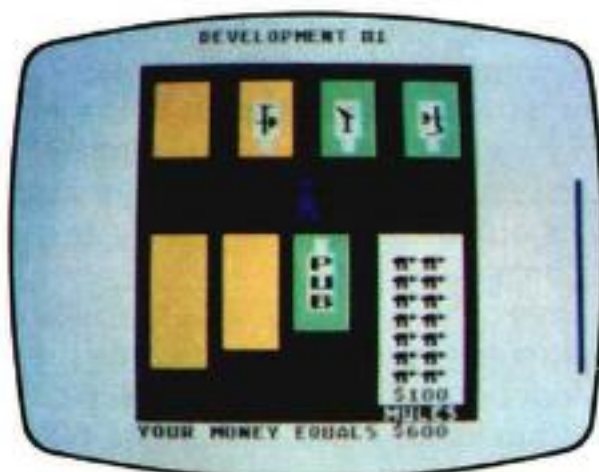
Player Type	MONEY	LAND	GOODS	TOTAL
Human (Green)	1000	3000	3000	13000
Elf (Purple)	1000	3000	3000	13000
Dwarf (Orange)	1000	3000	3000	13000
Dwarf (Blue)	600	3000	3000	4800

ALL PLAYER BUTTONS TO GO

Humans always start off with less cash.



Choose your first plot of land with care.



Time is of the essence during development.

THE AUCTION PHASE

All right, you just had the best development of your career. Now it's time to sell off the surplus and buy what you need. This is really the most crucial phase of the game.

First and foremost, don't ignore the value of psyching out the opposition (unfortunately, this only works on *human* opponents)! Hard-core

M.U.L.E.ies know the value of a well-placed comment like, "Gee, the store looks a little low on energy. I'll bet there's a shortage coming up next turn." (This often fools the others into buying out the stock, so use it only when you're the one making the most energy.)

Always buy low, sell high. Low prices are: food, \$15; energy, \$10; smithore, \$36-\$43; and crystite, anything below \$100. Even if you have a 20-unit surplus, *never* sell at these prices — unless you really need the cash for the next development phase. Let the whole crop rot before selling it to the store at a pittance.

If the store is stocked up on a particular item (therefore setting the price at a standard level), don't sell below the store's price — unless an opponent is lowering his or her price. Instead, perch right on the store's price line to get the highest price you can.

The price of necessities is always relatively low — that is, until the store runs dry. After that, anything goes, so keep an eye on what goods will be in high demand in a turn or two. It's always fun to watch the poor suckers offer hundreds of dollars for a unit of food! A good way to make sure the store runs out — don't sell!

If you have enough food and energy, but your opponents don't, seriously consider buying out the store if you can. That way, everyone suffers but you... and the price rises higher in the next auction!

Never sell anything during the final, 12th auction phase. The value of your goods remains higher if you don't.

IN GENERAL

If you have extra cash, buy smithore at \$36 or \$43, then sell it later when the price rises above \$50.

In the tournament game, always try to grab any property hit by a meteor. It turns the plot into a super crystite-producer.

Above all, stay flexible. If you have six energy plots and the store has, say, twenty units, convert those energy plots to something that will be more profitable. Constantly try to second-guess your opponents about what commodity is next on the short-supply list. Try to make what your enemies aren't. That way, you can really gouge the prices, especially in the essential food and energy areas.

Stay cool, calm, collected, and above all, greedy. Nobody ever said the First Founder was a nice guy! G