

THE SALT MINES OF CRACOW

MAGNUM SAL

SALT FOR THE KING

1368 AD: The King of Poland establishes the Cracow Salt Mine. We, the managers of the mine, will work hard to be the best supplier of the king.

Yet another Polish game and another Polish Hit. When you open the box you perceive a small 42x31 cm board (depicting part of the village of Wieliczka, the entrance of the mine and people crowding the roads), a long mine shaft (with an elevator to lift the minerals), 2 sets of "Carcassonne style" tiles numbered I – II and III (18 mine chambers and 24 king's orders), 21 tools cards (printed on heavy carton), coins (in 1-3-5-20-50 Grosz, the Polish money) and wooden cubes in four colors (brown, green, white salt and blue water). Each player also gets a set of 10 workers (colored wooden meeples) of which only 4 are immediately available. Yes, MAGNUM SAL is another worker placement game, but with its own personality, as we will see.

The mine shaft is placed under the board, just where the mine entrance is depicted: then the 8 mine tiles numbered "I" are placed (4 on each side of the level -2 of the shaft); let's go down to level -4 and place the 6 mine tiles "II" (3 on each side); finally at level -6 are placed the last 4 mine tiles (2 on each side). All the tiles are "face down" (in the basic game) so you do not know what they offer. Now that our mine is ready the hard work may start: players have to find the minerals and to bring them outside to be sold and shipped to the king.

But while waiting for the labor bell to call the workers to the mine, let's make a short trip in Wieliczka (the board).

- The CASTLE dominates the area and we will place here the king's orders (tiles depicting different combinations of colored cubes that will grant a certain amount of money to the player that will be the first to satisfy the request).

- A road starts from the castle and passes in front of the INN: here we will place a marker in a short "track" numbered 5 to 8 (the marked number is the cost to hire a new worker).

- Opposite to the Inn there is the PUMP HOUSE: as you know mines have the irritating habit to be flooded when you find a spring-water, so sometimes you need a "mechanical" help (in game terms with the pump you may get rid of some blue cubes down in the mine, in order to facilitate the extraction of the minerals). The pump is free if you extract only one cube, but cost 2 coins

for two cubes, 5 coins for 3 cubes, 9 coins for 4 cubes, etc.)

- The road arrives now in a large MARKET PLACE where you will be able to buy or sell your minerals: at the set-up 2 brown and 1 green cubes are placed on the first cases of their tracks.

- On your right you also see the MINE ENTRANCE, but as the labor bell still has not rung we turn left and climb the hill.

- Immediately after the market place we see the TOWN SQUARE, where a lot of people are sitting around the water pit discussing and waiting (probably) for an employment at the Inn in front. Unemployed people will get some money from the king (in game terms going to the Town Square allows you to get 1 coin for free, a useful action when you do not know what to do or you cannot do other actions)

- Finally we enter the village center where we see a very busy WORKSHOP: here are placed some TOOL cards that will help you in the game, or will ... complicate the play of the other players.

Hey ... we were just looking at the shop when the labor bell rang so the game must start!

Each player is given 4 workers and one brown cube. The 8 king orders of phase "I" are placed on the castle and the first 3 are turned and placed to show which combination of minerals king Casimir the Great needs today. The first 7 tool cards are also randomly selected and placed on the Workshop: 3 of them are then revealed. A round marker is placed on the order track at the castle and a second one is placed on the appropriate case on the Inn track (this depends on the number of players). Assign the "first player" marker: he receives 10 coins, and the other players will get 12, 14 and 16.

The first player may now select two actions between the following:

- Place or move a worker in the mine: the very first miner must be placed on the first case of the mine shaft (level -1). Then each new miner may be placed on adjacent cases (first in the -2 case of the shaft, then on the level -2 mine tiles). The first to enter a new mine tile will turn it on the front side placing also on it the depicted number of cubes. You may put a worker in a case already occupied by another player, but it is FORBIDDEN to leave a case empty after a "chain" of workers has been established.

- Extract mineral from a mine chamber: you

use your workers to extract the mineral from a tile. Each worker may take ONE cube. Unfortunately you may also find blue water cubes in the mine chamber, and this obliges you to use one worker extra for each water cube. If, for example, you have 3 workers on a tile showing 1 brown, 1 green and 1 blue cube you need all of them to extract the mineral cubes, because the third worker is needed to help with the water. Alternatively you may use the Pump station to eliminate the blue cubes ... but this will cost an extra action, as we will see later. Once extracted the mineral MUST be transported on the surface passing through mine chambers and mine

Pietro Cremona

Each game is different and always new as well as a challenging and interactive game for expert players!

shaft cases. If you have a worker on each case you take the cubes for free and your action is over. But if you pass through cases without your workers you must pay 1 coin per cube to one of the players that have a worker on that case. After the transport lay down the workers that you used for the extraction (they are tired and must rest)

- Place a worker as an Assistant in the board: The Castle, the Pump Station, the Market and the Workshop have all a special circle with a meeple icon. Using this action you may place one of your workers (not from the mine) in those circles (only one meeple per circle). You will then get 1 coin every time that this building will be used (even if you use it).

- Pass: you decide to do nothing so you may rest all your tired workers (they stand up again)

- Visit a building: you may visit a building only ONCE per turn, in order to perform the special actions that follow

INN: when you visit the inn you may hire ONE NEW worker, paying the amount indicated by the marker on the inn track (from a minimum of 5 coins to a maximum of 8). Once you have done the payment move the marker one case on the right

WORKSHOP: when you visit the workshop you may buy one of the 3 face up cards: the left-most one cost only 3 coins, the middle one 4 coins and the right one 5 coins. Then move the remaining cards to the left and add a new card from the reserve to fill all the available spaces (if all the 7 cards are bought the workshop ... closes until the next phase).

PUMP STATION: if you visit the pump station you surely need help to eliminate the water cubes that invaded your mine. The cost depends on the number of water cubes that you pump away. This is a very strong action when used in combo with an "extraction" as you eliminate the blue cubes first and you are then allowed to use all your workers to

extract minerals.

TOWN SQUARE: when you visit this place you get 1 coin

MARKET PLACE: here you may sell some of your cubes and /or buy cubes (but you cannot sell and buy the cubes of the same color in the same phase). This action is very useful when you need to honor a king's order but you miss some cubes. Or you may sell some of your extra cubes when you need money (for example when you have to extract good minerals but you have to pay the transport cost to other players and you do not have enough money)

CASTLE: here is where the game is won or

lost. When you want to visit the castle you must send a worker here. He may not immediately enter the castle (after all a king is a king ... and he is not always available!) so you are obliged to queue for a couple of turns: you arrive at the castle yard on turn X, you advance in front of the door in turn X+1 and in the turn X+2 you enter the castle and may sell your cubes to the king. Which cubes depends on one of the three tiles shown over the castle: you give the right cubes to the bank, you take the tile with that combination and you receive the amount of money marked on the tile. Easy? Yes, unless some "recommended persons" (I can hear you!

But, YES, also at that time "recommended persons" existed!) will pass before you, will get your tile and will leave you with ... an open mouth! Very nasty ... but you probably wonders how we can be recommended: well, you need to go to the workshop when a "Royal privilege" card is available (I told you that after all a king is a king!!!). Anyway, once a king's order tile is taken from the castle the marker on the order track is moved down one position: when it reaches position "5" then Phase I of the game finishes.

The labor bell rings again and all the workers go back home (put all your meeples in front of you: of course if you hired new work-



ers you have now more possibilities for the following phases) and a few adjustments on the board should be made. The order marker at the castle goes back to the initial position, as does the Inn marker (the cost to hire the workers goes back to the minimum value). Take the king's order tiles of PHASE II and place them on the castle, turning the first 3 as usual. Also take 7 new tool cards and place them on the workshop, turning on the first 3. Eventually add a brown cube in the market, if it is empty.

The night arrives and, of course, all the workers rest (and will be available "standing" for the following phase). The day after the sequence is the same and the new first player (the one to the left of the previous first player) may start doing his actions, placing Assistants, buying tools, enter the mine, forming a chain of workers, and so on. Remember that now there are new mine chambers at level -4 that you may explore: of course the deeper the mine, the better the minerals.

The game works without problems: it is very rare to go back to the rules for clarifications as all the actions are pretty logical. After the first game all the players are ready for a REAL match. And now things change because a lot of dirty tricks are allowed while playing MAGNUM SAL.

I did not forget to describe the TOOL CARDS and it is time to look at them: we have 21 cards (7 randomly taken on each PHASE). They may be used "once" per phase (turn them down when you use them) and they are "free" (they are not considered actions):

- ROPE: will help you in the mine, allowing to add or move an extra worker
- PICKAXE: will help to extract one extra mineral from one tile
- BUCKET: you may take one blue water cube and place it in an adjacent chamber (probably receiving a "thank you" from one of the opponents that hoped to easily extract minerals)
- CART: will allow you to pass through 1-2 connected cases without paying the transport cost: VERY useful when you have the opportunity to extract 3-4 cubes in one action.
- FOOD: you may rest TWO workers without having to use the "Pass" action
- COMMERCIAL PRIVILEGE: you may sell for 1 coin more or buy for 1 coin less. You may even sell when the market is completely full.
- ROYAL PRIVILEGE: one of the most powerful cards, especially in Phase III, when the king orders assign a lot of money and there is a race to be the first to sell

The more Tool Cards you have at the end of the game ... the more BONUS points you get: so try always to buy a tool card when you have an opportunity, especially if you have an assistant in the workshop (because he gives you 1 coin back each time that you buy)

On Phase I usually players have no problems in searching minerals on different mine tiles: there are 8 tiles and it is not necessary to ... fight. But when you go to level -4 things start to change: with 6 tiles that show more and better minerals you cannot afford to be too late in extracting, so often you reach a mine tile discovered by another player and you try to be the first to extract, in order to take the better cubes. Remember that you have only 2 actions per turn and you MUST always consider what your opponents may do against you. Let's see a classic situation: with your second action you discovered with a 4 cubes mine (yellow, yellow, brown, brown) with a couple of blue water cubes. You have only the just moved worker. One opponent brings 2 of his workers on the same tile. On your turn you have to decide if you need an extra worker (to share the four cubes with your opponent) or if you take the pump action and extract one yellow cube. With the first solution your opponent will thank you, will use the pump action and then will extract the TWO yellow cubes. With the second solution he will extract the second yellow and one brown cubes.

On level -6 the fight will be even harder: with only 4 tiles and plenty of very valuable cubes you CANNOT leave an opponent alone in a tile unless you already have 3-4 workers in another tile and ... no opposition.

Pay a lot of attention at the available king orders: there is nothing worse in this game than collect valuable cubes for a very lucrative tile and when you are ready an opponent take it before you. If you are not yet in the castle queue you may hope for a second "good" tile from the stock, but if you were already in the castle you risk to lose your cubes or to be obliged to spend your hard taken cubes for a minor order !!! Disaster. Of course if a Royal Privilege is on sale at the workshop you have to try to buy it, especially in Phases I and II: in Phase 3 mine tiles are probably more important.

For beginners a few suggestions: first and most important hire 1-2 workers on turn 1 or 2, if prices are still low (this action is hard for the first player, with only 10 coins, but he may hire a worker with his first action and then, possibly place him as an Assistant at the Workshop, in order to receive 5-6 coins on phase I). This means that it is also a good idea to place an Assistant on the Workshop, if the first player is still not there, otherwise buy the best tool card. Finally put workers on level -1 and -2 of the mine shaft in order to minimize the cost of transport: at the beginning of the game the money is very important, also because the first king's orders are cheap.

Remember that the game will be won or lost on level -4 and -6 so try to get cubes to satisfy 1 or 2 king's orders on Phase I, if possible,

but sometimes is better to save cubes for phase II, when those orders are more lucrative.

NEVER allow one of your opponents to stay alone in a mine of level -4 or -6 with more than 1 worker, and, yes, try to use the combo the pump house/extraction in tiles with a lot of water cubes.

At the end of Phase III victory points are calculated: you get 3 coins for each cube still in your stock and a variable number of coins (from 2 to 20) based on the number of tools that you own.

Add the above to your pocket money and the winner will be the player with most money

The rules also offer a "variant" for players that do not like the "random" search of the mine tile: you place all the mine tiles face up, so each player knows perfectly where the best minerals are.

We liked very much MAGNUM SAL to the point that we played it several times in a very short period. Everybody thought that the "bad" experience of the preceding game helped him in finding the ... best strategy, discovering that everything changed on the following game. It is a very challenging and interactive game for expert players ☑

Pietro Cremona

INFORMATION	
Designer: M. Krupinski, F. Milunski	PLAYERS: 2-4
Artist: Piotr Nowojewski	AGE: 10+
Price: ca. 25 Euro	TIME: 120+
Publisher: Gry Leonardo 2010	
www.gryleonardo.pl	

EVALUATION	
Worker Placement Game For experts Version: multi Rules: de en pl In-game text: no	
Comments: Very beautiful components * good and clearly structured rules * you need to be on your toes permanently and adapt your actions, even better to plan ahead	
Compares to: Other Worker Placement games	
Other editions: Currently none	
	My rating: ★★★★★

(2010) 7,20/445/654