

Pug's Guide to Dune – Atreides Strategy

Let me begin by giving you a frame of reference. I play with the Basic Rules plus Optional Rules – no Advanced Rules and no expansions. If you play by a different ruleset, then what I have to say may or may not be helpful – but if you play with different rules then you've got bigger problems than the details of my little strategy article!

The Atreides are one of the most interesting factions to play, with one of the most powerful sets of advantages. They have a lot going for them, but suffer from the same spice addiction as their hated enemy – the Harkonnen.

The primary disadvantage to the Atreides is their horrible spice addiction. If the Atreides can manage to get their hands on some spice then there's often no stopping them.

The advantages of the Atreides are:

- 1) Prescience - cards** (the Atreides get to peek at the treachery cards up for bid).
- 2) Prescience – spice blow** (the Atreides get to peek at the next card on the spice deck).
- 3) Prescience – battle plan** (the Atreides get to peek at one aspect of the enemy battle plan).
- 4) Kwisatz Haderach** (after losing 7 tokens, one leader per turn may add 2 to his strength and can't be called as a traitor).
- 5) Arrakeen** (the Atreides start with a Stronghold, Ornithopters and Harvesters).
- 6) Good token revival** (the Atreides may revive 2 tokens for free each turn).
- 7) Starting spice** (the Atreides start the game with 10 spice).

Now that's one big pile of pretty toys.

So they start with a ton of spice, great position, and some really great abilities – so why don't they always win? The answer is usually that they squander their starting spice.

HOW TO BEGIN

The main objective of the Atreides in the early game is to get some weapon and defense treachery cards – but not at the cost of all of your spice. Buying one card in the first auction is good; buying two is better; but try not to spend all of your spice on cards.

The Atreides are dangerous when holding cards, and pretty darned frightening, so you shouldn't have too much trouble on early turns if you can get some cards in your hand. On the other hand, the Atreides are fairly pathetic if they are sitting around with only one card, because the Prescience doesn't help if you don't have the cards to capitalize on your knowledge – and there are players out there who will stomp a seemingly weak Atreides just to keep them from growing strong.

Do not try to make early moves. Shipping costs spice that you can ill afford and moving out of Arrakeen just makes a tempting target for ambitious opponents. Even if you manage to survive their attempt on Arrakeen, you will have used valuable resources that will cost you dearly to replace.

Going early in the turn can be particularly bad as it allows your opponents to pick their fights, deciding how hard to hit you and where, but going later in the turn can provide you with opportunities to strike – which leads us to...

WHEN TO MOVE, AND WHERE

So have I gotten the early moving thing out of your mind? Good. Now I'm going to put it back.

You do need to be moving early, just so long as your move is reasonably small and very careful. Spice management is the key to your whole world (and that of the Harkonnen), so you'll need to be hunting it as soon as you can and trying to keep the Harkonnen's lunch hooks off of it to boot. That's one of the main reasons for you to get early cards.

Your knowledge of what cards people are holding makes you particularly nasty in combat, so try to jump into battle against any weaklings as early as possible. Setting the tone early on with a good old-fashioned country butt-kicking will not only bring in some early spice, but it will banish from the minds of the timid any thoughts of engaging the Atrides in frivolous battle.

So going for spice is good (if you can get it without expending more resources than you are getting back), but murdering leaders can be just as good – and it has the added benefit of weakening your opponents and maybe getting them to burn some of their treachery cards early. If any of your opponents move before you, and they have a small pile of tokens lying about, then jump 'em. Otherwise, try for the spice.

This is why you needed to hold onto a small reserve of spice. You need to be able to get some tokens onto the planet, and maybe reinforce them with up to 2 more from Arrakeen (8 tokens is still a formidable force).

You will constantly be chasing spice in this game, and if you run out then you are doomed. Make spice acquisition your top priority and everything else will fall into place.

DON'T BE A PANTYWAIST

Timidity will get you nowhere. The Atrides are masters of information in Dune, but the information does no good if they don't get off their rump and get into the action.

With the right cards the Atrides Prescience can be even more devastating than the Bene Gesserit Voice, and when the Atrides already know what an opponent is holding and don't need the Prescience to win the battle, the Prescience can be used to look at tokens dialed or leader played – something that the Bene Gesserit can only dream of doing. This just underscores the importance of getting some useful cards as soon as possible.

Another reason to grow a pair is to bring on the Kwisatz Haderach. The Kwisatz only shows up after the Atrides have lost 7 tokens in battle, so you'll want to get out there and mix it up a bit. The high revival rate of the Atrides means that losing a few tokens isn't a big deal, and the traitor protection you receive from the Kwisatz will make your battles much safer – especially against your arch-rival...

HARKONNEN – YOUR NEMESIS

This isn't just a cute, thematic concept. The Harkonnen faction is in the same boat as you in many ways and will be your main adversary in the struggle for spice. The Harkonnen's 'hidden' cards and traitors will give you fits in combat, so try to make sure that there are other factions at the table who can take them on.

What this really means is that, when selecting victims to attack for spice, you should be careful not to cripple factions that might be able (or willing) to take on the Harkonnen war machine. The last thing you need is the Harkonnen growing strong through lack of conflict, so be prudent in your attacks.

One thing that you can do is to encourage players to purchase cards out from under the Harkonnen. The Harks will not usually be rolling in spice, so the other factions can generally do a good job of keeping cards out of Harkonnen hands when they put their mind to it (at least for a little while), especially with a little push from the Atreides. It is often in the Atreides' best interest to mess with card distribution a bit.

Beat them to the spice; beat them to the cards; and beat them into submission whenever possible.

WEIRDING WAYS

Assassination – Sometimes your knowledge of a player's hand is enough to ensure your victory in combat (with or without the Prescience). Take advantage of these opportunities to collect spice and kill off enemy leaders while you can. Some battles under these circumstances won't even cost you a single token.

Karama – Although the Atreides have a ability to look at another player's entire battle plan, I haven't actually seen it used much. Why? Well, mostly because the Atreides sometimes already know enough to see how the battle will go and it's often better to hold the card in reserve to stuff the Voice or to prevent the Harkonnen from stealing a leader or even to nullify the starred token advantage of the Emperor or Fremmen. In an important battle it can be a nice thing to have, but don't hold onto Karama cards for very long. It's much better to have weapons and defenses taking up those precious spaces in your hand than to hang onto a Karama card 'for a rainy day'.

Information brokering – Careful sale of information will bring you income, but reckless sale of information can lead to destruction.

Atreides information is best used by the Atreides, so don't go handing it out willy-nilly, but it can be a source of income when you fall on hard times – and sometimes you won't be in a position to capitalize on it anyway, so you might as well guild game events by making sure that it falls into the hands of the 'right' factions.

Bidding – For goodness sake, don't be so darned consistent! For example, when you start a bid, don't always bid 0 on useless cards (or cards you don't want). This just telegraphs exactly what the card is. Maybe bid 0 on a useful card to see if you can get everyone to pass (which would end bidding), or bid 1 or 2 on a useless card to encourage someone else to take it. The point is that you don't want the table to develop a level of confidence about how you are bidding. Keep them guessing.

HOW TO WIN

Dune is a game of opportunism, and nothing is a sure thing, so there's really no way to make grand strategies. Everything depends on the moves (and especially the mis-moves) of your opponents. Learning to stalk your prey carefully and striking when the time is right is the most important (and difficult) thing that you will learn in this game.

Getting off to a good start with the Atreides will make you dangerous throughout the rest of the game, and a solid contender. Maintaining a mix of weapons and defenses is key, so try to grab the cards that you need (without giving away what they are and losing them to someone else). Prey on the weak, especially when you are low on spice – but be careful not to cripple all of the factions faster than the Harkonnen. You certainly don't need to be making things easier on him!

Dish it out hard early on and your opponents will often think twice before standing between you and what you have foreseen must come to pass.

IN SUMMARY

- First priority is buying cards.
- Remember to save some spice.
- Don't weaken Arrakeen (much).
- Be aggressive early.
- Punish the Harkonnen.
- Make spice acquisition your focus.

Note: This strategy article is intended primarily for new-ish players. The game is far too fluid to allow any definitive statements on strategy, and it may vary a lot depending on the group you play with. Experience is the best guide (as the old timers will tell you), but I just wanted to point the newbs in the right direction.