

# Pug's Guide to Dune – Emperor 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 Emperor is the easiest faction for new players to play (and pretty cushy even for experienced players). The Emperor's constant flow of income allows him to virtually abandon the pursuit of spice and concentrate more completely on his machinations.

The Emperor's disadvantages are his almost stunning lack of advantages. Of all the factions in the game, the Emperor has the most limited advantages, lacking anything to help in shipping, movement or combat (besides huge piles of spice).

The advantages of the Emperor are:

- 1) Spice for Treachery** (the Emperor collects all spice spent on Treachery cards by other players).
- 2) Good leaders** (the Emperor has a collection of fairly strong leaders).
- 3) Sardaukar** (the Emperor has 5 starred tokens that count double in combat).

Doesn't seem like much, does it? Well, believe it or not – that's all you'll need.

## HOW TO BEGIN

Any way you want. Well, almost...

The Emperor starts with a ton of spice and a ton of income. In fact, the other players will hand you the bulk of their starting spice during the bidding round of the first turn, so there is no need to be particularly frugal right away. Cards are nice, but not completely necessary. After all, the Emperor has no tokens on planet to risk and no stronghold to protect, so no pressing need for combat.

Also, the Emperor doesn't really need to go anywhere right away. He can afford to sit out a turn, maybe two. So what is the Emperor to do with himself?

The short answer is – don't be stupid. The Emperor, operating in this strategic vacuum and position of relative comfort will sometimes make rash moves – but if the player can avoid succumbing to the temptation to throw large numbers of tokens around on useless endeavors then he should be fine.

## THE EMPEROR'S SIETCH

One of the most common first turn moves is for the Emperor to drop about 10 tokens into Habbanya Ridge Sietch. This is so common that many feel that the Sietch 'belongs' to the Emperor and will hesitate to drop troops there for fear of fighting a large Imperial force on turn 1.

Does this make it a good move? Well, it certainly isn't a bad one. Why leave the stronghold open for someone else to grab?

There really isn't a faction who is eager to throw large numbers of tokens into Habbanya

Ridge Sietch early on. Wise Atreides and Harkonnen players will only have small numbers of tokens to move, and so are little threat. The Fremen will usually be busy chasing spice and securing Sietch Tabyr and the Bene Gesserit won't have the spice to do much of anything. That just leaves the Guild, who will likely be reluctant to go head to head with you right out of the gate.

So unless you have a better plan, go for it.

### **KEEPER OF THE BALANCE**

More important than any specific move is the general idea that the Emperor must keep in mind - The Emperor is in charge of game balance. No, I don't mean that the Emperor has the job of preventing wins (that job belongs to the Guild). I mean that the Emperor has to make it his job to maintain the balance between the various factions, making sure that you don't have to personally expend resources to prevent a player from winning.

Why am I bringing this up? Isn't it obvious that all players want to maintain a balance? Well, of course - but the Emperor doesn't have the magic fairy dust that the other factions carry around. The Atreides and Harkonnen are scary in combat and can pull out radical moves at unexpected times. The Guild has massive mobility by way of their cross-planet shipping ability and so will never be over-committed on planet. The Fremen are (for the most part) free from the bonds of spice and will be everywhere they want to be all the time, and the Bene Gesserit will be.....well, they'll be doing whatever the Bene Gesserit do.

The Emperor, on the other hand, only has his massive spice reserves going for him, and doesn't have the raw power to take on one of the other factions if they've been allowed to get out of hand. Massive spice expenditures can allow you to take advantage of opportunities but usually after other players have become weak.

### **SPICE MANAGEMENT**

Your spice resources are great, but not infinite. Do not squander them. There will be a time when the well runs dry (players have little spice to spend on cards or have full hands) and you'll need a reserve to carry you through.

First and foremost - don't overpay for cards just because you can. Some Emperor players get all giddy with spice and piss it away unnecessarily. You can afford to bid high, but don't get crazy.

And don't let the Atreides dupe you. A good Atreides player will bluff on bad cards when he knows that the Emperor is in the habit of 'stealing' cards from him. Don't be predictable enough to allow him to feel comfortable doing this.

Don't be afraid to throw a little spice around to make things happen. If the Emperor is only spending his spice on cards, revival and shipping then he is doing something horribly wrong. You have the resources to influence people and buy information. Often the Atreides will sell you information on Treachery cards up for bid (or in people's hands) for one or two spice, or even let you know where the spice will be blowing. The Fremen may tell you where the storm will be going for a small price. And the options for deals are only as limited as your imagination.

## **FREMEN**

The Fremen are the thorn in your side. As the least spice-dependent faction, they are least susceptible to your influence, and your precious Sardaukar tokens are ineffective against them. Smash the Fremen whenever possible or (better yet) encourage others to do so. Declare a bounty if you must. Your tokens don't work against them and they can keep you out of the West with a never-ending flood of troops.

Purging the Fremen from the 'East' is particularly effective as it will take them a bit of effort to reinstate their presence and in the meantime your Sardaukar are more likely to be fully effective in that region (barring a Karama card).

## **TIPS FOR THE BIG MAN**

**Treachery Card Denial** – The Emperor has huge say in who gets cards and who doesn't. Often there will be one or two factions who are dangerous but low on cards, and the Emperor can deny them their cards by arranging to subsidize their purchase by another player. Remember that the spice all comes back to you, so it really costs you nothing – but be careful not to do this too often or you'll find yourself running low on spice.

Just remember that you have to actually give the other players the spice before they can bid on the cards, so make sure that it's clear that they have to return the spice if they don't win the bid.

**The Hammer** – Why use your own troops when you can send a minion? Often players will be low on spice and will be more than happy to ship troops to deal with another player if you will fund the journey. Use these situations to conserve your own military resources and stomp factions getting out of hand.

**Deals** – As one of the two richest factions at the table, and the only one who can grant cards for "free", you should be the master of deals. Make sure to craft your deals carefully and don't allow the other players to extort more from you than you want to pay. And most importantly – don't get in the habit of allowing the spice to flow to generously. Keeping the other players poor is part of your strategy, so try to make the best deals with the players who are in the worst position to do you harm.

## **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.*

The Emperor must recognize his limitations in combat and wait for the other factions to weaken before he strikes. His lack of special rules in combat mean that he will have to resort to brute force to achieve his military goals, which means that he will either have too many tokens on planet or too many tokens in the tanks after a battle.

So weakening the other factions is everything to the Emperor. Bide your time and manipulate (i.e., bribe) the other factions into doing your bidding whenever possible and your spice will often allow you to take advantages of opportunities when they arise. Encourage combat and subsidize the cards and shipping of weakened players so that they will weaken the stronger factions (and remain weak themselves).

If you do these things well, and keep your eyes open, you'll be in position to seize the game-winning moment when it presents itself.

## **IN SUMMARY**

- Don't make rash moves.
- Don't get crazy with spice.
- Keep the balance.
- Buy the cooperation of other players.

*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.*