

## Pug's Guide to Dune – Fremen 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 Fremen are one of the least feared factions in the game. They don't get as much respect as most of the other factions and are often taken for granted, but you can turn this into a strength.

Their disadvantages would seem to be formidable. The Fremen have no powerful abilities in combat like the Bene Gesserit or the Atreides, no increased hand size or extra traitors like the Harkonnen, and no increased income like the Emperor or Guild. However the Fremen are not lacking in advantages of their own.

The advantages of the Fremen are:

- 1) **Good leaders** (the Fremen have some of the best leaders in the game).
- 2) **Rapid movement** (Fremen tokens may move 2 spaces).
- 3) **Free shipping** (the Fremen pay nothing to place tokens on the map).
- 4) **Free revival** (the Fremen may revive all 3 tokens for free each turn).
- 5) **Desert dwellers** (Fremen tokens are not devoured by sandworms and take half losses in the storm).
- 6) **Worm riding** (Fremen tokens can use sandworms for movement).

For a looked-down-on faction, they sure seem to have a lot going for them – so why are they scoffed at? The answer is that the Fremen player usually cowers instead of taking what is rightfully his.

### SETUP

Unlike the other factions (excepting the Bene Gesserit's single, foolish token), the Fremen don't have a fixed setup. They have options and have to decide where their 10 tokens start. Their options are, Sietch Tabyr, False Wall West and False Wall South.

I could pontificate on this at length, but I'll spare you the pain and just cut to the chase – Put half of your tokens in Sietch Tabyr and the other half on the False Wall South. You'll also have 3 starred tokens, each of which count double in combat. Spread these out however you like, but I usually put two of them on False Wall South and hold one in reserve.

So why have I chosen this setup? The short answer is that the Fremen should keep their tokens in large-ish groups whenever possible. Small groups of yellow tokens tend to get stomped out of hand (more on this later). So two territories. Fine. But why those two? Well, you should occupy the Sietch on general principle alone. Why leave it open for the taking by some other shmo? And the 'East' side of the map is much more difficult for you to reach than the 'West' side, so it's best to put some tokens on the far side of Dune while you can. After all, you can deploy tokens directly onto the False Wall West, so why bother committing them there now? You can also deploy into Sietch Tabyr and then still move, which is why I tend to put the starred tokens on the other, more difficult to reinforce side of the map.

## **BEFORE YOU BEGIN**

Before you even begin to think about what you should be doing, you need to adopt the proper mindset. Let's consider the other factions for a moment.

The Atreides and Harkonnen have formidable abilities in combat, but are in a constant struggle for spice. The Emperor and Guild have no fancy abilities in combat, but they are brimming over with spice. Finally, the Bene Gesserit are a special case. They are nasty in combat and generally low on spice, but thanks to their coexistence you can't touch them unless they want to be touched and they generally have....alternative methods of gathering spice.

You don't really need spice for anything more than treachery cards (and maybe the occasional bribe) which may give you the impression that spice acquisition is a low priority - but that couldn't be further from the truth. You need to run out and grab all that you can get your sandy little hands on. Why? Because you need to control the flow of Spice on Dune. If you can keep spice out of the hands of the Atreides and Harkonnen (the two most dangerous to you in combat) then you will be the master of combat on Dune. All the Emperor and Guild can throw at you is lots of tokens, but you'll win the battle of attrition because it costs them spice to ship and revive while it costs you nothing.

Its important to remember that if you can starve out the Atreides and Harkonnen (and hopefully the BGs) then you will choke out the flow of spice to the Emperor and Guild. After all, where do you think their abundant spice comes from?

## **HOW TO BEGIN**

Buy a card. You have three spice and nothing else to spend it on, so make sure you get one. If one or both of your cards are weapons and/or defenses then you are off to a great start, but even if they aren't - only the Atreides knows that (and even then, only about one of them) and they have better things to do than throw their scant early resources against the Fremen monster for a little spice. That would be a sure way for them to take themselves out of the game (unless they are very, very careful). Note that even if you are holding worthless cards - DO NOT get rid of them right away. A Fremen player with 2 unknown cards is still far more threatening than a Fremen player with no cards at all. Once you get a full hand of cards you can start thinking about how to get rid of your chaff, but try to keep your hand as full of cards at all times as possible.

Next you'll want to go for spice. Only a very foolish Atreides or Harkonnen player will go for the spice in a big way on turn one, and the Bene Gesserit are in a position to do nothing early on. So unless the Emperor or Guild feel like pissing away major resources early (very unlikely) then you are the Big Man on Planet. Go for the spice in a big way (6-8 strength). Show them right out of the gate that you have no fear of worms, storm, or the feeble troops of your enemies. After all, what's a little token loss to you? Nothing.

If the spice blows on the 'near side' of Dune, then ship new troops in to grab it. If the spice blows on the 'far side' of Dune, then ship new troops somewhere safe like False Wall West or the Polar Sink and use your False Wall South troops to grab it - but try to keep a force on the 'far side' for as long as you can because it takes precious time to get them back there once they are gone.

Go for the spice. The ONLY spice territory you can't get to on turn 1 is Sihaya Ridge - so no excuses.

## **GO BIG AND BE EVERYWHERE**

When you make a move for spice, go big. A large stack of tokens is always intimidating and you can make it so costly to get the spice that the trip won't be worth it even if they beat you (again, 6-8 strong should usually do the trick).

Your quick and free recovery means that the battles will cost you little but will drain precious resources from your opponents.

After a few turns, if you don't start to hear the other players whining that the spice is always appearing near you, then you may be doing something wrong.

## **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR CONTEMPT**

Many players will disregard the Fremmen and spend their time worrying about the factions with fancy powers while you go about your business.

If you are very lucky they will ignore you while they eat each other alive. That would be an opportunity to use your surprising mobility to go for the win, but you can't count on this. Instead, try to keep your tokens spread out, but not too badly divided.

## **SECRETS OF THE DESERT**

**Using the Storm** – The other players may be willing to throw a few tokens in front of the storm, but will almost always be unwilling to fight right in front of it. Your willingness to do so makes you dangerous, and provides opportunities to collect spice that the other players will avoid taking advantage of.

**Worm Riding** – This can really tip the balance in your favor. Remember that you can ride right into a stronghold or a stone territory. You can use this to consolidate your tokens or to strike – but don't be hasty. Getting over-excited and rolling into a stronghold where you'll get punished is foolishness.

Be sure to check the ornithopter rule. The rules as written and clarified by the designers allow you to ride into Carthag or Arrakeen and use ornithopters on the same turn – but not every group plays this as intended. Make sure you know in advance how your group plays this rule. Dropping a token or two into one of these cities and gaining ornithopter use can allow you to make radical and unexpected moves.

**Karama** – Want a worm without triggering a Nexus? You can use a Karama card to do just that. When you call a worm it doesn't only have to appear in the last territory the spice blew in - you may send the worm to any territory that you wish (including the territory where the spice blew this turn, if you wait until the end). This can be used to devour enemy tokens, remove spice from the map, or simply to move your tokens to a more useful location. And remember that the worm can be sent to any territory – even stone territories or strongholds (although it only devours tokens in the desert).

**Spice indifference** - Once the Fremmen get some good cards in their hand, they are fairly indifferent to the quantity of spice they hold. A Fremmen player who has been successful in having acquired spice as directed in this article will find themselves swimming in spice that they have little obvious use for - and this provides a unique opportunity. Fremmen spice can be spread around the table by way of bribes and deals with reckless abandon, allowing you to guide the direction of the game to your purposes. Since the Fremmen don't need the spice for revival or shipping, spice expenditures won't limit your other actions.

Okay, so I was hasty with that reckless abandon thing. Obviously you don't want to give spice back willy-nilly to the very factions to whom you were trying to deny it - but if you bend your mind to the matter, you will find new and creative ways to forge deals to your benefit.

## 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.

Your job is to be in the right place at the right time – all the time.

Controlling spice flow will make you a major factor, and if you spread your tokens out properly you will often be within striking distance of strongholds. While out gathering spice, or hanging out on stone territories riding out the storm, make a point of being where you need to be to go for the win. If you keep this in mind, then you will always be ready to seize opportunities as they present themselves. If the table is 'sleeping', or simply recovering from a particularly nasty 'bout of mayhem, you can often step in and go for the win before they know what's happening.

Cultivate fear through intimidation and successful attacks and your opponents will often think twice before standing between you and your well laid plans.

## IN SUMMARY

- Buy a card.
- Go for spice – or simply deny it to others.
- Move and attack in force.
- Use the storm and worms to your advantage.

*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.*