

Pug's Guide to Dune – Guild 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 Guild is one of the easier factions to play. It takes a bit to learn to play them *well*, but the endless spice makes for a cushy ride for new players.

The Guild's disadvantages are his lack of any combat abilities and poor leaders. Of all of the factions in the game, the Guild stands out as being worst in combat.

The advantages of the Guild are:

- 1) Spice for shipping** (the Guild collects all spice spent on shipping by other players).
- 2) Cheap shipping** (the Guild only pays ½ cost for shipping).
- 3) Special shipping** (the Guild may ship tokens off planet or from one location on the planet to another).
- 4) Variable turn order** (the Guild can take their turn whenever they want).
- 5) End-of-game win** (the Guild wins at the end of the game if no one else has won).

A pile of spice and fancy movement. Is that enough to take the game? Let's find out...

HOW TO BEGIN

Unlike the Emperor, the Guild has assets on planet. This means that the Guild player, while having a *similar* situation to the Emperor, has to be a little more careful about how to begin.

The first order of business is to pick up some good cards (of course). The Guild will usually receive plenty of spice during shipping to cover any shipping of their own, so all 5 spice can go toward cards on turn one. Guild players should spend the first few turns making sure that they have a handful of good cards.

First turn movement options are generally fairly limited for the Guild. Starting spice of 5 will often only allow for the purchase of one card and, unless the Guild is very lucky, their hand won't be strong enough to go looking for trouble.

A good first turn move is usually to ship extra tokens (maybe 5) into Tuek's Sietch. It makes Tuek's a less desirable target for predators and makes the force in Tuek's far more useful for cross-planet attacks. If someone insists on attacking you on turn one, you'll have to evaluate your cards-in-hand to assess your chances. If you can't beat the attacker and don't think you have a good shot at one of the other strongholds then just pull your tokens back to your reserves and save your resources.

MOVING OUT OF TURN

The importance of this rule can't be overstated, but don't sweat it if you get it wrong the first few times. New players will tend to wield this power as a blunt instrument rather than the scalpel that it is.

Going last is usually great. You get to react to what the other players have done – avoiding battle if necessary – and you get to take advantage of the opportunities left by other (especially their mistakes). The flip side is that you can also deny yourself opportunities. Spice that you didn't feel like fighting over may be spoken for and, more importantly, you may find yourself locked out of the strongholds that you wanted to attack.

Going first, however, allows you to take advantage of the current board situation without interference.

Each has its advantages and disadvantages, but having your choice between them (or anything in between) is a tremendous advantage. The power of this flexibility will reveal itself to new players over time – but it should never be underestimated.

GLOBAL POLICE FORCE

The Guild's ability to move on any turn he want means that he'll be going last a lot. This also means that the rest of the table will usually pass the buck to the Guild when it comes to stopping the win. Any self-respecting Guild player (or any Guild player who wants to use his resources for his own nefarious purposes) will come to resent this fairly quickly. There is a delicate balance to be struck between wanting the game to continue and letting people know that they can't always lean on the Guild to make sure that this happens. To add insult to injury, the other players will often blame the Guild if someone manages to sneak in and take the win (or even go for it, sometimes) if the Guild could have done something about it. That just comes with the territory.

Sometimes going earlier in the turn will actually force someone else to get off their tuchas and take the initiative themselves. You can even help them out by subsidizing their shipping (which will come back to you anyways). What you don't want to do is take up the mantle and allow the other players to burden you with this responsibility on a regular basis.

On a personal note, I simply love getting the Guild to play policeman. If I can coerce the Guild player into wasting his precious resources on stopping the win, then I've killed two birds with one stone – AND the Guild has to busy himself on his turn fiddling with someone else instead of improving his own position. Sucker.

On the upside, the Guild can always go first and lock the contender out of the winning stronghold, which is often enough to ensure the game goes on. Just make sure to make the appropriate deals in advance so that you don't have to suffer any more losses than necessary.

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 shipping) and you'll need a reserve to carry you through.

Actually, it's even worse than that. As players get mauled, they will have less and less tokens to ship, so the Guild will suffer a drop in income as the game goes along even if the players are brimming over in spice (which they won't be). Also, the Emperor's ability to dole out treachery cards is better than your ability to dole out shipping, and after the Emperor gets some good cards he won't be blowing spice on cards every turn, whereas you'll be paying to ship your troops around the map and for fishing your pathetic losers out of the tanks – but more on that under "You Suck at Combat". The upshot is that you'll probably be going through spice quicker than the Emperor and will need to manage your spice well. The glut that you get at the beginning of the game shouldn't be squandered, and you really need to avoid giving the Emperor any more than you absolutely have to (i.e., don't over-bid).

But don't be afraid to throw a little spice around to make things happen. If the Guild 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 (and he may be less afraid of you than the Emperor). 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. Don't let the Emperor be the only faction at the table handing out the spice to make sure things go his way.

YOU SUCK AT COMBAT

Is that clear enough?

The Guild has a mountain of spice, but no special combat powers like Prescience or the Voice, no starred tokens like the Emperor or Fremen, and a set of truly craptastic leaders.

When the Guild fights, it's all about the tokens – and winning is difficult when you can't keep tokens on the board. Fortunately, there is no such thing as over-commitment for the Guild and so the Guild can feel free to drop large numbers of tokens into their strongholds to discourage predators.

What the Guild player really has on his side is his wily nature – which is to say, his ability to go last and avoid any battle that he doesn't feel like fighting. When the Guild player goes last he has the freedom to move an entire stack that is under attack from one location to another, and the spice to pay for the move often comes from the player attacking him! Usually the move is made to another stronghold that represents a better-odds battle, but dodging the battle can also allow you to go for spice or simply move away until you decide what it is you want to be doing.

The point is that the Guild player should always consider whether or not they want to be in a battle. With a hand of good cards and a pile of tokens, odds can be good – but care must always be taken and unnecessary battles should be avoided or you may just find yourself the leaderless whipping boy of the other players.

NAVIGATION 101

Deploy minions – Shipping is the source of your wealth and so you don't want to make a habit of granting 'free' (or even cheap) shipping, but it is often very helpful to subsidize the shipping of other players. Often this will be to send others to deal with situations that you don't want to risk your tokens/leaders on. After all, you suck at combat, right? So sending a faction with strong combat abilities and a few tokens will often be enough to deal with a faction moving in on the win (or on something that you want), and poor factions are often willing to play along for the chance to get tokens on the planet.

The Loaded Gun – If you can manage to hold two strongholds and keep a sizable number of tokens in one of them, you'll frequently be presented with opportunities to go for the win. If the other players aren't paying careful attention to you, then sometimes they will miss the fact that you are ready to cross-planet ship into your third stronghold. Be careful though, as large piles of Guild tokens are often the targets of small attacks. Perceptive players will be wary of your cross-planet ability and will attempt to 'thin the herd' every chance they get.

Running away – Sometimes the best defense is to not be there. Don't forget that you can actually ship your tokens from the planet back to your reserves. Use your massive mobility to ensure that they can't ever kick you while you are down.

Karama – The Guild can use a Karama card to prevent the shipping of another player. Holding onto this card can allow for extreme surprises, especially around the time you are planning on going for the win. The player that is planning on dealing harshly with you may just find themselves sitting on the sidelines while you make good your push for victory.

Deals – As one of the two richest factions at the table, and the one that people look to less for deals, you should make a point of seizing the 'master of deals' mantle away from the Emperor. 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.

Even more than the Emperor, the Guild must recognize his limitations in combat and try to avoid unnecessary combat. Why do I make this comparison with the Emperor? Because it is important that the Guild player not mistake his situation for that of the Emperor. The similarities between the two factions can lead to a player thinking that the two can be played similarly, but this is simply not the case.

Frequently the "Loaded Gun" trick will allow you to pull off the win. Have this ready to go whenever you have good cards and tokens to spare. But because the other players will sometimes be watching out for this trick, the Guild should avoid trying to hold two strongholds when they are weak. The other players, not knowing your cards, will be afraid of you going for the win and smack you down just to be safe.

Other than that, keep your leaders alive and your tokens available (by avoiding unnecessary battles). 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.

END OF GAME WIN

If the game drags on long enough, the Guild chances of making it to the end of the game skyrocket. All the Guild needs to do at this point is mess with the other factions just enough to prevent the win, and hold everything else in reserve for a last turn push. What push?

As the game approaches turn 15 the Fremmen will begin to position themselves for their own end-of-game win – but the Fremmen win is much more difficult to pull off. All the Guild needs to do is take either Sietch Tabyr or Habbanya Ridge Sietch away from the Fremmen (or prevent the Fremmen from taking them) on turn 15 and the Guild victory is guaranteed.

It's a cheesy win, but a win nonetheless.

IN SUMMARY

- Get a handful of cards.
- Don't get crazy with spice.
- Get your tokens on the planet.
- Buy the cooperation of other players.
- Be prepared for a cross-planet win.

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.