

PUG'S GUIDE TO DUNE – HARKONNEN 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 Harkonnen are one of the most feared factions in the game. They don't have the dramatic powers of the Atriedes or the Bene Gesserit, but their treachery is so daunting as to give the other players pause before moving against them.

Their disadvantages are that they don't have the spice income of the Emperor or Guild and are therefore relegated to chasing it all game, and that they don't have any fancy-schmancy combat powers like the Bene Gesserit or the Atriedes.

However, the advantages of the Harkonnen are:

- 1) **Four traitors** (the Harkonnen get to keep all four traitors that they draw).
- 2) **Increased hand size** (the Harkonnen may hold 8 treachery cards instead of 4).
- 3) **Sneaky, hidden cards** (the Harkonnen may draw an extra treachery card that the Atriedes don't get to see, for every one they win).
- 4) **Carthag** (the Harkonnen start with a Stronghold, Ornithopters and Harvesters).
- 5) **Good token revival** (the Harkonnen may revive 2 tokens for free each turn).
- 6) **Starting spice** (the Harkonnen start the game with 10 spice).
- 7) **Stealing leaders** (the Harkonnen may steal an opponent's leader when victorious in battle).

Now that's a lot of juice.

So they start with a ton of spice, great position, and some really nasty 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 Harkonnen in the early game is to get a hand full of 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 more than 3-4 spice for your first card and no more than 7 for both. That will give a nice hand size of 4 cards (everyone else's max) or 6 cards (a very healthy hand indeed). Since the Harks have no special abilities in combat (like the Atriedes or Bene Gesserit) they depend on their Treachery cards to carry them through. A Harkonnen player without cards is a pathetic sight indeed, and one that doesn't inspire the requisite fear to keep your opponents from stomping your grapes – real hard.

Do not try to make early moves. Shipping costs spice that you can ill afford and moving out of Carthag just makes a tempting target for ambitious opponents. Even if you manage to survive their attempt on Carthag, 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...

MAKING YOUR MOVE

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

You shouldn't throw away your moves, but you do need to be moving early. Spice management is the key to your whole world (and that of the Atreides), so you'll need to be hunting it as soon as you can. That's the real point of you getting early cards.

Your increased hand size makes you particularly formidable early in the game, so try to jump into battle against any weaklings as early as possible. Even the mighty Atreides, with their peek into your battle plan, can do little against you if they don't have enough cards (or the right ones) to make good on their information. 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 Carthag (8 tokens is still a formidable force).

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

NASTY TRICKS

Traitors – Your traitors are a glorious asset – so don't throw them away too early. You do not have to call a traitor simply because you fought against him/her in battle. You may choose to keep this information hidden, and you would be well advised to do so in any battle that is of little relative importance. Fighting over a few spice? Don't worry about it. Are you losing a chump leader or not losing a leader at all? No problem. Is this some random attack made against you that you don't really care about. Keep quiet.

Evaluate how much you stand to lose before you decide to call a traitor. If your opponent uses a leader against you and you don't call a traitor then they are much more likely to play that 'safe' leader against you again in a more important battle!

Karama – If you are playing with the optional rules then you can use Karama cards to trade hands with your opponents. This is best done right before an important battle and can cripple them for many turns to come. Use it wisely though, as a crippled opponent may lead to the strengthening of another, who might be in position to win the game.

Stealing Leaders – Don't forget that you get to draw a leader from your opponent every time you beat him in battle. You can even steal the leader who was just used against you. This is frequently neglected by the Harkonnen player, so make sure to keep it fresh in your mind at all times.

Intimidation – Often your opponents won't want to risk going up against the Harkonnen in battle when they stand to lose cards and two leaders. Push them around mercilessly and extort spice from them in exchange for promises to not attack or to go easy on them in battle. Depending on your group, this works pretty well so long as you don't do it too often. Intimidation works particularly well when dealing with spice blows. Fighting the Harkonnen and their handfull of cards is so odious and dangerous (risking 2 leaders instead of just 1) that the threat alone will often allow you to extort spice from whomever is collecting it. It can work out much better for both you and your opponent to simply agree not to waste resources on fighting if they simply pay you off with some of the spice they will collect - but you have to stand behind your threats! If you back down too often your opponents will begin taking you for granted and if that happens you'll have to do everything the hard way from then on.

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 Harkonnen will make you dangerous throughout the rest of the game, and a solid contender. Maintaining a handful of cards is key, so make sure to cycle the bad or duplicate cards out of your hand as quickly as possible. Small attacks using Cheap Heroes are the best way to do this without suffering significant losses.

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

- First priority is buying cards.
- Remember to save some spice.
- Don't weaken Carthag (much).
- Be aggressive early.
- 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.