

Pug's Guide to Dune – Bene Gesserit 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 Bene Gesserit is the most difficult faction for new players to play (and can even give experienced players fits). Requiring subtlety, patience and careful planning, the BGs can easily fall into crushing pitfalls, but they can also be one of the most fun and rewarding of the factions.

The Bene Gesserit's main disadvantage is lack of spice. Unlike the Atreides and Harkonnen who start with enough spice to buy cards and take a shot at the spice blows (or the Fremens who expend no resources to speak of to pursue spice) the Bene Gesserit start with little spice and so are ill-advised to start chasing it right away.

The advantages of the Bene Gesserit are:

- 1) The Voice** (the Bene Gesserit can command their opponents to play or not play particular cards in battle).
- 2) Co-existence** (the Bene Gesserit may occupy the same space as an opponent without combat).
- 3) Spiritual advisors** (the Bene Gesserit may send a token to accompany any token shipped to the planet by an opponent).
- 4) No useless cards** (the Bene Gesserit may use any Useless treachery card as a Karama card).
- 5) Great leaders** (every Bene Gesserit leader is a 5).
- 6) Guaranteed income** (the Bene Gesserit may call for CHOAM charity every turn, regardless of spice-in-hand).

Awesome abilities. So why don't the Bene Gesserit win more often? The short answer is that I really don't know – but it is probably because of hesitation and lack of focus.

SETUP

Yeah, yeah - you have one whole token to deploy at the beginning of the game. All I can say is that you should put it in a stronghold and not the Polar Sink. I don't care which one, and if you are in a quandry then you are really over-thinking this minor detail.

HOW TO BEGIN

Buy some cards.

The Bene Gesserit are brutal in combat, but pathetic if they don't have any weapons or defenses. After all, what good is the dreaded Voice if you don't have the cards to capitalize on your control? So the first priority is to grab as many weapons and defenses as possible. Once this has been achieved, the Bene Gesserit will have the freedom to enter battle with relative impunity.

While building up your hand you should be accompanying tokens to every stronghold your opponents ship to. Almost all shipping goes through strongholds, so almost all shipping is useful to you – at least in the first couple of turns.

ADVICE ON ADVISORS

Most Bene Gesserit players take advantage of the Spiritual Advisor rule to a fault. They drop a token everywhere they can and this can lead to the BG player spreading himself too thin.

There should be BG tokens in every stronghold – but concentrate more on some locations than others and hold some tokens in reserve. Having all tokens deployed to the map can make your play too predictable and your forces too small to do what you need them to do. Obviously Carthag and Arrakeen are the plums worth picking and so represent a greater payoff for larger numbers of tokens, but they also represent the greatest danger. Lasgun/shield explosions are more common in these two strongholds, and if the shield wall is blown the storm won't respect your decision to co-exist.

PATIENCE WITHOUT TIMIDITY

Of all the factions in Dune, only the Bene Gesserit can truly pick their battles. The co-existence rule allows the Bene Gesserit player to deny combat anywhere at any time, meaning that they can weather the lean times without fear of a giant hammer dropping on them at an inopportune moment.

Unfortunately, the warm, cozy, safe feeling that the Bene Gesserit derive from their co-existence advantage often leads to complacency. They tend to hide and wait too long before they actually do something. The most dangerous and terrifying Bene Gesserit players that I've encountered are those who have attacked aggressively (after getting a good hand of cards). Few things are more terrifying than seeing the Bene Gesserit ship a pile of tokens into a stronghold – because you just know that they're planning on dishing out some punishment, and as the joke goes....."Doctor says you're gonna die".

The BGs are not particularly effective early in the game, in spite of their devastating abilities. The early game should be spent gathering resources and carefully deploying Spiritual Advisors. As the other players begin to hammer on each other, the Bene Gesserit need only do what's necessary to prevent the win. Once a few other factions have waned in power, the BGs are ready to move. Particular emphasis should be given to Carthag or Arrakeen. If the Bene Gesserit can manage to get their hands on Ornithopters and Harvesters, they'll have the mobility they need to strike at the entire board with devastating effectiveness.

KNOW THY ENEMY

The Bene Gesserit, more than any other faction, profit from their knowledge about the treachery cards of others (yes, even the Atriedes). Every faction should endeavor to know what cards their opponents are holding, but the deterministic nature of the Voice allows the Bene Gesserit to capitalize on the information in a devastating fashion.

In short, if the Bene Gesserit can determine that an opponent lacks either a particular weapon or a particular defense then they can Voice the other aspect of the battle plan and be guaranteed a 5 point swing in the battle by ensuring that their leader lives and the leader of their opponent dies.

So stay alert, pay attention, and keep track of those treachery cards!

THE BENE GESSERIT PREDICTION

This is a total shot in the dark. Don't count on it for anything.

Was that clear enough? Okay, then let me step back from that a bit and say that there is a useful purpose for this rule. You can give yourself a safety net. This will vary widely from group to group, but try to pick the most dangerous player at the table and an early-ish turn. Most crazyness happens in the early turns and your prediction can cover your butt in case of an unexpected early win.

If you are careful, you can even precipitate the win, especially if you are in one of the last battles against someone going for the win. Throw the battle and win the game! If you get caught while attempting this nonsense though, you'll give away your prediction and no one will fear it for the rest of the game.

What is *really* cool is when another player fails to go for the win on a turn that you *didn't* predict, simply because you seem a little too eager for them to win on that turn. Use this to your advantage and mess with their heads whenever possible.

TREACHEROUS WHISPERINGS

Useless cards – No cards are useless to the BGs, which gives them total freedom in their bids. Not only are Useless cards very useful for you, but you will often get them for a song (if the Atreides make it obvious that they aren't interested). Don't hold them in contempt, though. Many BG players use their Useless cards in truly useless fashion, failing to realize the power that they grant.

If the Bene Gesserit are in need to weapons or defenses, then Karama/Useless cards should be used to auto-buy treachery cards until the problem is solved. Apart from that, at least one Karama/Useless card should be held for treacherous opportunities.

Stopping the win – No one is in better position to stop a win than the Bene Gesserit. With a few tokens in every stronghold, their declaration of non-coexistence at the beginning of the movement phase is enough to lock a stronghold and prevent pesky factions from trying to sneak in for the win.

When the BG turn rolls around they are free to move some or all of their tokens out of the stronghold (depending on if the culprit has already moved or not), and the devastating BG combat ability will often allow them to make a deal with the terrified resident faction – sometimes actually profiting from the conflict.

Further, the Useless card advantage means that the Bene Gesserit are much more likely to be holding a Karma card than any other faction at the table. This can allow them to manipulate game events to make winning much harder on other factions – especially when cancelling Prescience or starred token advantages.

Attacking for spice – The Bene Gesserit faction is the most brutal assassin at the table. With at least one weapon and a defense or two, the BGs can maraud around the table murdering enemy leaders at their whim and collecting spice for it to boot. Don't forget about this important income stream.

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 Bene Gesserit need to exercise patience early on, making sure to buy some weapons and defenses (and maybe holding onto a nice Karama/Useless card) and deploying troops across the board (but holding some in reserve).

Moving against Carthag or Arrakeen is a terrific move as it provides mobility that the Bene Gesserit lacks and Harvesters as a bonus. Attacks in spice blow territories become a win-win as the death of enemy leaders will provide spice and even if there are few BG tokens left over from the fight, they will each harvest 3 spice each. This added mobility also gives you the freedom to drop Spiritual Advisors into the Polar Sink instead of the territories your opponents ship to, and then move them almost anywhere on the planet.

Pick fights you can win. Spice is precious to the Bene Gesserit and cards lost may not be recovered for many turns.

When the table is weak, you are king (or queen, depending on how in-character you are). Wait until two or three factions have been hurt and then move in for the kill. It's truly surprising how devastating the Bene Gesserit can be when they are prepared and start to move against a weakened table.

IN SUMMARY

- First priority is buying cards.
- Bide your time.
- Keep some tokens in reserve.
- Try to hold Carthag or Arrakeen.
- Remember that battles are a good source of spice.

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.