

Traveller Supplement:

The Burning - a festival celebrating humaniti's push
to the stars

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Introduction

(I should totally write one, and put it here)

Florid Prose

For three months at the beginning of ever new year, a fire ignites somewhere in the Domain of Deneb.

The place is agreed upon well in advance, typically a barren corner of some remote world with breathable air, a place on that rock without infrastructure of any kind. High desert terrain is favored, although perturbations in the continuum of environment have occurred over the history of The Burning, although infrequently. A prime candidate environment is a place that can't support human life except in its most robust forms, one that's unforgiving and harsh, symbolic of the interstellar reaches Humaniti set out in centuries ago is the perfect location. Such a cruel cradle that supplies a barest hint of the necessities for humans to come together and share stories then forms an epicenter for a gathering; a synthesized oasis, carved from harsh reality and transformed for ninety days into a wondrous celebration of the virtues of Humaniti.

This is *The Burning*.

It's where a temporary culture is formed, a spontaneous human weave of shelters, art, and spirit detached from many of the "normal rules" of modern Imperial societies sparks and takes root. A place where for a short while people passionately celebrate the key human virtues - creativity, generosity, expression, diversity, perseverance, art, and innovation. In these expressions of spirit, themes of self-reliance and human achievement are visible throughout and mingled among the various camps and exhibitions that make up Oasis.

And then, after three months, the temporary city of Oasis is gone. No trace left behind, the recent cradle of so much revelry is returned to its original barren state. At the end of those 90 local days Oasis transforms again, now to just a memory. Only to re-instantiate somewhere else in Deneb in ninety days.

Reborn, like a phoenix.

While it exists, Oasis a temporary city and hub of focus, a place of low-tech expression and persuasion. People travel there using low tech means: carts and pack animals, gas-burning or steam-powered engines, and the power of their own muscles. Pilgrims of The Burning leave their starships in orbit or descend to the edge of a 99 km radius, a ring around the future site of Oasis, beginning the overland pilgrimage inward towards their home for the length of their stay at The Burning. From the pristine harshness of desert playa, frozen tundra, or arid salt flat, an intentional city is formed by the new arrivals. A place forged from the harshness by pure will, an act symbolic of Humaniti's journey out across the stars.

It's not everyone's cup of tea.

Traveling to the current host world, striking out across arid desert laden down with enough water and supplies for three months timer, arriving at the agreed upon spot and then spending ninety days detached and apart from their normal lives in the cradle of an Oasis newly-formed by joint resources, intention, and sheer will is many kinds of trial rolled into one.

It is a time for forging new thinking, shaking convention off like the dust of the playa, pushing the boundaries of endurance with intoxicants, suspending normal definitions of decorum and propriety and being open to the core of what it is to be “human.” This is not everyone’s idea of time well spent, but for about 500,000 sophonts this is the essence of a good time. What it means to be human.

There are things waiting to be done back “real life.” Families to raise, money to be made, obligations to keep, a thousand of the chains both gentle and rough that society puts around the children of Humaniti keeping them from expressing themselves. But at The Burning, all of that is set aside for a cycle, for 90 days.

There you choose a new name. IDs are left behind. Your conveyance is left behind. All you have with you is what you moved overland with that 99 miles, what you trade for, or what others see fit to gift you, and perhaps some notions you brought with you from your old life. You’ll shed much of all that before you leave.

Oasis is a place of creativity and art. You choose a new name, but you also express yourself in fashion, in speech, in ways that might differ drastically from that of your old life. Noble titles are forsaken in Oasis, as are positions in industry and authority. The usual signifiers of Human society are left at the outer ring, purged bit by bit as you make the sojourn, finally gone when you see the lights of Oasis.

The Burning is meant to symbolize Humaniti’s trek across the stars, how we brought our gifts across a great and hard distance and forged a mighty society. While someone who describes The Burning as a touring festival would not be wrong, for some it is much more - a way of life, an avocation, a place to lose one’s self for a while, or to be reborn.

A mostly low-tech place, higher technology is present in the form of artistic expression, and in the gifts that comprise the economy of Oasis. No monetary transactions are allowed; value may only be exchanged by service or gift, or given freely.

Some people use their time at The Burning to recharge, to shake away accumulated stress and weight from their normal lives. Some use it to escape in a real sense. There are no ID-readers at The Burning, no official Imperium minders looking over your shoulder. That woman in the shocking orange bikini top, hemp-grass skirt and goggles, low-tech light sticks hanging from her waist, the faint thump of Mora pop surrounding her... she might be a Marquess, or an assassin, or a mother, or a free trader captain. You’ll never know, because she resides in The Void

Congregation, where members take an oath of silence for their time at The Burning. Instead of saying 'thank you' for the bottle of water you've given her there in the windy orange of late afternoon on the playa, she embraces you. She kisses your cheek, and gives you a small snow globe. Somehow this bauble floats of its own accord, casting small purple rays of light from its center.

Just another moment at The Burning.

People gather into clusters, forming temporary clans, neighborhoods, communities, and camps within Oasis. Each has its own identity, its own theme and manners of expression. Some recur time and time again, some are seen only once.

This one over here: "The Long Night." Over there, "Phoenix Fires." And just beyond "Wheels Within Wheels," with their spinning, colorful mobiles casting light and sound everywhere over their enclave. You carry some identity from your clan, your neighborhood, and your community. It's the way of Humanity, to band together, and to express identity. Someone well-versed in the ways of Oasis might stand a decent chance of identifying where you make your temporary home just by giving you a casual glance. This color, that placement of a scarf, it all speaks in an organic way.

There are parties, festivals every night. Classes, exhibitions, tutorial, conversations, concerts filling every day with music and energy. People create art, and then they burn it. Intentionally, solemnly, offering it back to the intangible place from which it first came to them in their mind. Lifelong friendships are formed, new alliances struck, old grudges forgotten. Some people seek enlightenment, some are just looking for -the- serious party of the year.

Whatever you're seeking at The Burning, they say, you find it.

On the last day, The Burning happens. A physical expression of effort, sacrifice, and catharsis in the form of an enormous bonfire. Flames reach towards the stars, and the intense drumming is heard for miles. Almost all the created art, detritus of Oasis from the last three months is consigned to The Burning, everything except that which is needed to make the journey back to the Ring, back to one's ship and life.

Three months from now, it will start again somewhere new. Some remote corner of a different barren landscape on a new world will host Oasis, the next Burning. Somewhere in Deneb, The Burning is either happening, or people are traveling to the next one.

Just the facts

The Burning is a temporary, three-month long “festival” that moves from location to location across the Domain of Deneb. It was founded over 700 years ago to celebrate Humaniti’s push into the harsh unknown of space, and activities celebrated and indulged in there are meant to pay tribute to determination, creativity, art, beauty, and Humaniti’s struggle as it pushed outwards from its various cradles.

Participants make planetfall on the host world to a point along a 99 mile circumference ring that symbolizes an orbital path around the planned site of Oasis. They travel overland inwards to the festival location in an act of will suggestive of making planetfall from orbit.

The location of Oasis itself is typically barren and desolate, the temporary community being formed wholly from brought-in materials specifically for the festival. The city is laid out in radial pattern around a central open plaza. The city stands for 90 days as a temporary community made up of clans and neighborhoods organized around themes. Attendance is usually between 350k-500k sophonts, mostly humans.

In the last days Oasis is de-constructed completely with a serious effort made to leave the location appear untouched by the event. The final event is called “The Burning” where art created on location and any other detritus is immolated in a gigantic pyre symbolic of the sacrifices Humaniti has made in journey across the stars. Participants then depart in all directions, making the sojourn back towards The Ring and up to their starships, the journey symbolizing ascent into orbit from the cradle, every bit as important as any experience at Oasis. The hostworld location changes for every instance of The Burning. There are some twelve worlds throughout Deneb that are recurring host locations, but a new world is selected every so often. These new locations usually see a spike in attendance. All hostworlds have a breathable atmosphere without problematic taint, with a strong tendency to desert/arid locations. The archetypical Oasis location will be difficult to get to, challenging on a day-to-day basis without being brutal or overtly dangerous. The philosophy is that it should be a substantial effort to get to, but not impossible. People should have to exert continuous effort to stay safe, hydrated, and unburned from the sun, but given all that the environment should be conducive to the festival’s activities. Constant rain, winter conditions, or other environmental factors that would drive humans indoors are not usually conducive to key activities.

The host world could be a garden world, where the festival is held in a high desert location. More typically it’s held on a completely arid planet with little surface water.