

FLASH DIGEST



New publication,
first issue!

Edited by Terrie Leigh Reff



Flash Digest

April 2024

Edited by
Tyree Campbell
& Terrie Leigh Relf

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End of Term

Matias Travieso-Diaz

Bennu, the bird with a soul of fire, flew to the shrine of Sun God Atum-Ra in Heliopolis and prostrated himself before the unseen deity. It had been a long flight across the sands and the dark waters and Bennu was exhausted, but it was fear more than fatigue that made him drop his wings and shiver in the presence of his master.

"You have summoned me, O Lord, and I have rushed to come before you. What is your command?"

The response from Atum-Ra came out of the air like a burst of thunder that shook the walls of the ancient structure. "You know well what I desire." There was a momentary pause, as if the God allowed Bennu to acknowledge his understanding; but the bird remained in sullen silence. The voice then continued: "You have served me well for five hundred cycles of the seasons, carrying my commands to man and beast and seeing to it that I am properly worshiped throughout creation. You have grown old in my service and now you must come to rest. You will be consumed by my fire, and out of your embers will rise your successor, to continue your mission for yet another term. Make yourself ready to disappear into the eternal void."

"But Lord" countered the bird, finally regaining his voice despite the terror that

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God Atum-Ra in Heliopolis
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entered the bird, finally
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paralyzed him, "I do not want to burn. If I turn
to cinders, I will be gone for good, and there
will be nothing left of me."

"Not so," replied the voice of Atum-Ra. "I
shall cause a new phoenix to rise from your
ashes, fresh and young, identical to you down
to the tiniest tail feather, except for his
renewed strength and vitality."

"Maybe he will be *like* me, but not *me*. I
will still be gone. There will be no resurrection
for *me*."

"Bennu, how dare you defy the laws that
I have set in place to govern the world's
existence? Have you forgotten that your duty is
to serve at my pleasure for as long as I
command it, and not beyond?"

"I know my duty, but I'm not quite ready
to discharge it to its ultimate conclusion."

"Why not?"

"Every day I have spent in my service to
you has filled me with pleasure. I have watched
humans raise tall temples and humble
tabernacles in your honor, and witnessed and
partaken of the sacrifices that they have offered
in their altars to placate you and the other
Gods. I have soared through the skies in the
soft mornings of spring and the warm summer
afternoons. I have eaten the sweet fruits of the
earth and drunk its nourishing waters. I have
felt the caresses of the breeze, the gentle kisses
of the rain. I have endured high winds,
crashing thunder, and blinding lightning. I
have savored living in all its manifestations.

"My heart still beats strongly in my breast. My feathers are brittle and faded, but they still gleam at the touch of the rays of the sun as I wander aloft. I know the paths I must follow and am familiar with the ways of men and the gentle or fierce disposition of the beasts in the field. Please let me stay around a bit longer!"

The unseen deity spoke again with a stern voice that was a touch less peremptory than before. "What you ask for is not possible. Everything mortal has a destiny that must be fulfilled: a beginning and an end, a course to be completed and ended with nothing to follow it. I will, however, grant you a boon. You may take to the air one last time and fly as long and far as your wings can carry you. When you touch the ground, I will smite you and create a successor from your ashes. He will bring your remains to me and I will hold them next to my throne forever, and that will be your measure of immortality. Fly away, take a last look at the world — and then you must go."

Bennu uttered a grunt that reflected his dismay and inclined his body forward in obeisance. Then, forgetting for one moment his weariness, he rushed out of the temple and rose into the air, experiencing again the gentle touch of the breeze and the sights and sounds of the vast world that opened beneath his body. Alas, fatigue soon returned and, after two or three circles around the human habitations of Heliopolis, the bird began losing altitude and,

despite beating his ground.

Bennu felt for being granted was a sharp brandished in the into flames and leaving only a r passage through snap, and some themselves into t bird with a prom and yellow plume shone with youth

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despite beating his wings feebly, dropped to the ground.

Bennu felt a sudden burst of gratitude for being granted this last flight. Then there was a sharp snap, like a whip being brandished in the air, and the firebird burst into flames and was consumed instantly, leaving only a mound of ashes to mark his passage through the world. There was another snap, and some of the ashes rearranged themselves into the body of a large, beautiful bird with a prominent fiery crest, red, orange and yellow plumage, and bright blue eyes that shone with youthful intensity.

The newly risen phoenix punctured a wound on a nearby myrrh tree to bleed its gum, and shaped the liquid, as it hardened, into a waxy shell. The phoenix gathered the cinders that remained of his predecessor, dropped them into the shell, and flew back to the temple in Heliopolis to deposit the remains before the presence of the sun god.

The new phoenix then withdrew to carry out his duties for the first time, armed with a knowledge and dispatch that were imparted on him by the one left behind. For he retained all the memories of his predecessor, and in so remembering him at every turn, kept him pretty much alive.

Another chapter in the eternal cycle had just started, yet the progression of phoenix deaths and rebirths would continue for as long as the Gods ruled this earth.