

# THE ATEF CROWN

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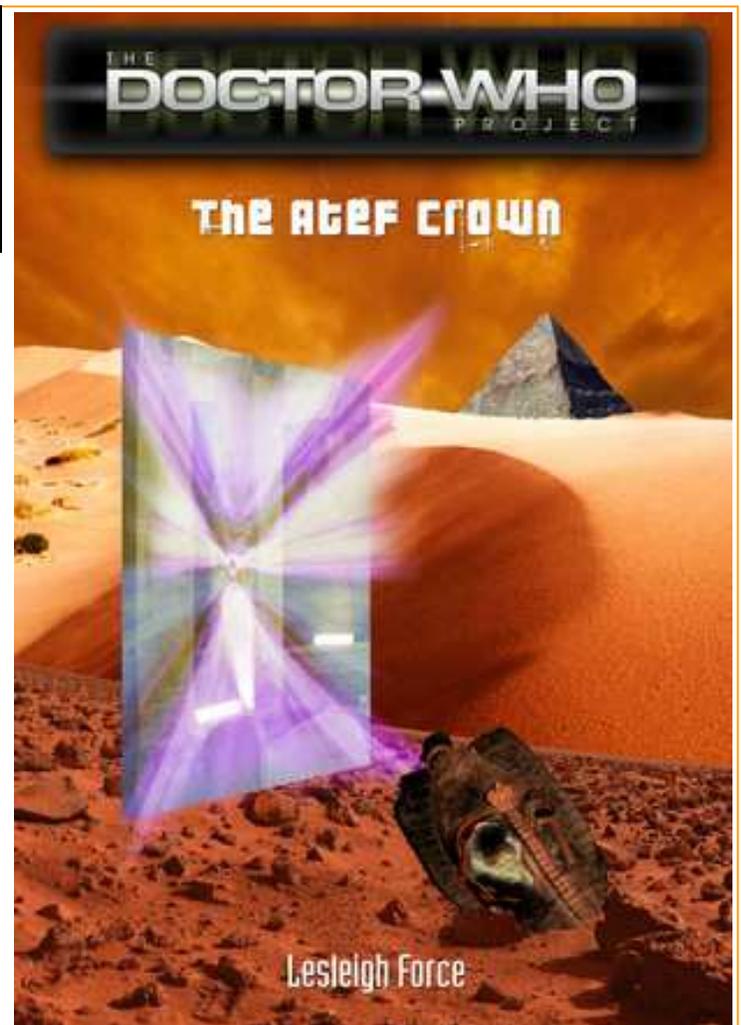
If there's one type of *Doctor Who* story which leaves the starting block with a clear advantage over its competitors it's the well written whodunit - one need only consider the way in which *Terror of the Vervoids* stands out like a beacon of hope during the unraveling of *The Trial of a Time Lord* to understand just how high a whodunit can dare to fly, and *The Atef Crown* is a good example. Moreover, it manages to grow in stature by switching from a missing persons puzzle to a mystery which taps into one of the golden oldies of the classic series.

It is said that the opening paragraph of a story is pivotal in regard to hooking the reader. In the case of Lesleigh Force's *The Atef Crown* the first paragraph admirably hits the spot, summing up in three short sentences a Time Lord who is caught up in the tedium of solo travel and desperately seeking something - or should that be someone? - to fill his time.

Predictably the Doctor's searching gaze falls not upon a holiday, nor a quiet day tidying up the TARDIS, but upon a challenge. Scrolling down a list of potential problems to solve the Doctor opts for a return visit to Mars and a closer look at its Osiran Pyramids, apparently left vacant after the Doctor's previous visit. Arriving a little later than planned the Doctor becomes entangled in an archeological dig being carried out by an expedition from Earth, one of whose members has disappeared. Inevitably the Doctor is suspected of abducting the missing Professor Hindley and put under arrest.

The Doctor's quick thinking awards him his freedom once again and with his former gaoler, Commander Cohen, now on his side the Time Lord is able to begin unpicking the mystery of *The Atef Crown*. As the adventure unfolds it becomes apparent that academic curiosity has ensnared Hindley in a trap designed for the long dead Sutekh. In finding the missing professor the Doctor must embark upon a series of ordeals which, although intended for the renegade Osiran, are the only means by which the trapped pair can escape. The final curtain is somewhat abruptly lowered, although in its defense it does make sense to end the story in a way that suits the Doctor's character as opposed to catering to the needs of the reader who demands a more staggered closure.

One of this story's positive qualities is its pacing. Running to a little over twenty pages there is not a hint of padding and the way in which the Doctor is quickly pulled into the mystery would not look out of place in a Russell T. Davies script. Furthermore, like its predecessor (see Duncan Johnson's *The Conspirators*), this adventure does a good a



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good job of handling a Doctor alone, bereft of a fellow traveler to share his experiences. *TDWP* makes a brave move in having its Doctor companionless for a time, and in so doing it allows the spotlight to fall squarely on the Time Lord and his actions. Still further, after so long with a variety of persons and personalities in toe, having the Doctor go it alone for a story or two gives the fans a fresh perspective on the loneliness of the maverick Time Lord.

With no companion to fill the odd scene the author delivers a solid serving of supporting characters, ranging from the rigid Commander Cohen to the curious Professor Wainwright. The figure of the pathetic Patrick is very well realized, and it's only a shame that more is not made of Christof Teff, the sabotaging antics of whom give the story a

sharp and insightful subplot. In fact, given Teff's fundamentalist leaning this adventure could have taken a very different route which would have given greater weight to Teff's activities. Instead, the odd aside regarding "divisions" on Earth only leaves the reader even more curious as to what is happening back home.

As a narrative *The Atef Crown* is given firm foundations in its prose and pacing, ably supported by a rich diversity of ingredients including Christian fundamentalism, an alleged

kidnapping and the ancient mystery of the Osirans. Robert Holmes' and Lewis Grier's 1975 story 'Pyramids of Mars' leaves behind enough minor loose ends for the eagle-eyed author to snatch up and weave into a brand new helping of Who, and in the safe hands of Lesleigh Force this past tale provides a potent mainspring from which to derive a new and exciting adventure. This is a fine story which offers an enjoyable evening's read.

**Rating: 8/10**