***Doctor Who***

**The Rings of Akhaten**

**Series 7. Episode 7**



**Synopsis**

In this episode of *Doctor Who*, the Doctor takes his companion, Clara, to a set of inhabited rings around a fiery sun in which a ‘god’ lives. The inhabitants don’t use money but offer things of value in exchange for goods. The value comes from the memories, stories and sentimental value of the things offered.

Clara finds a young child, ‘The Queen of Years’, hiding from pursuers. She has been raised to memorise all the songs, stories and legends of her people and her purpose is to placate the angry god by singing to this god and to persuade it to sleep and not harm the people. The child, Merry, is worried that she will get her song wrong and awaken the god’s wrath. Clara encourages her to do it. Merry begins to sing but is caught in an energy bubble and transported to the god’s lair where a chorister sings constantly to try and keep it dormant. Merry is to be sacrificed, because the god demands a feast of experience and memory; it wants her soul.

The Doctor and Clara determine to save Merry. Clara gives up a ring which once belonged to her mother, to obtain transport to the god’s lair. Once there, Merry says she has to be sacrificed to save the people. The god’s wrath is felt within the orbital rings. Clara saves Merry and takes her back to the rings where Merry starts to lead the people in singing a song of joy and hope. As the whole population takes up the song in unison, the Doctor faces the angry god, calls it a monster and a parasite, and offers his whole extended lifetime of secrets, knowledge, pain, suffering, love and triumph. The god is overcome as the music swells, but this is not enough. Clara comes back to the god’s lair to stand beside the Doctor and offers a preserved leaf, the leaf that brought her parents together. She tells the god that her mother died young and the leaf represents the infinite possibilities her mother should have had but did not have. All the stories about what her mother could or should have been is contained in the leaf and she offers it up. The god-parasite absorbs the infinite possibilities of human life and potential and implodes, freeing the citizens of the rings. In gratitude, Clara receives back her mother’s ring from the people.

**Some excerpts to watch:**

* The Doctor facing down the angry god-monster-parasite
* Clara offering the leaf
* Merry leading the people in the song of hope

**Some questions for discussion:**

* What do you think this episode tell us about ideas of worship?
* What do you think this episode tell us about ancient ideas of sacrifice and placating the wrath of God or the gods?
* What is the importance of music in the ritual? In worship generally?
* What’s the difference between a powerful parasite entity and a God of love?
* What’s the importance of story, legend, history and song in human life and belief?
* How hard would it be to trade the objects that have sentimental value and what do you think the significance is of Clara getting back her mother’s ring?
* What does this episode tell you about loss, death and human potential?
* What do you suppose God actually *wants* from human beings?