

February 2022
Issue 1

K-Pop Destroys Science Fiction

Omelas



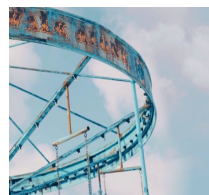


"Spring Day" album cover by BTS

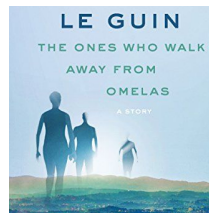
Destroy

February 2022
By Jacob Juliar

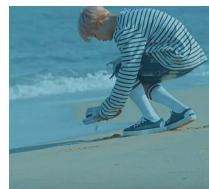
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Above: stills of "Spring Day" music video by BTS
"The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" cover by Harper Perennial



Still of "Spring Day" music video by BTS

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You Never Walk Alone

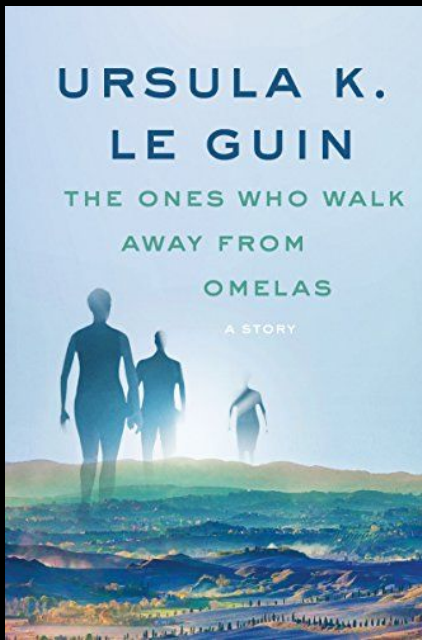
Sometimes I feel like I'm late to a party. I discovered Ursula K. Le Guin and BTS in the same year - 2018. This is beyond fashionably late because Le Guin was a legend when she died in 2018 and BTS already had an "ARMY." I was behind the times, but each fan has their own journey toward the thing they love. Discovering the connections between BTS and a short story by Le Guin has been one of the most exciting parts of my journey.

First, we will investigate Ursula K. Le Guin's short story "The Ones who Walk away from Omelas." We will look at the horrible cultural impact of the image of the neglected child and the knowledge we all have of abuse and hate.

Second, we will look at the video of "Spring Day" by BTS. Specifically, we will connect images in the video and lyrics in the song to the Sewol Ferry Disaster.

Finally, we will look at how BTS uses their power as artists to destroy systems of power. They use the language of a love song and connections to an American short story to avoid South Korean censors.

There are times when music is the background soundtrack to our lives, but there are times when a song becomes more than noise. That power is what this magazine has always been about.



Fighting Hate Alone

“Each alone ... They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back.”

Hate

Who has brought hate into your world?
How has hate affected your life - from housing to food to school? I always think these are questions we only worry about here in 2022, but writers and fighters have asked these questions for centuries. Ursula K. Le Guin wanted readers to think about the hate each person carries in their hearts.

Changing Hate

In Le Guin’s story, “The One Who Walk Away from Omelas,” most people in the city accept the hate and pain of one child alone in the dark. The narrator explains the residents accept this as long as they themselves can remain joyous.

Many people disagree with Le Guin’s narrator because the narrator tells us we have to fight this hate alone. “Each alone, they go west or north, towards the mountains. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back” (Le Guin 4).

Fighting Together

Maybe that is the purpose of the story: to make us disagree, to make us want to fight, to encourage us to fight against hate with others.

Sunny Spring Days

When BTS released their first English-language single, “Dynamite,” in fall 2020, they promoted the poppy, buoyant song on NPR. Dressed in orange-hued retro threads and seated in an intimately decorated record store in Seoul, they recorded three songs live with a full band: “Dynamite,” “Save Me,” and “Spring Day.”

Although “Dynamite” was the new catchy tune, the deceptively beautiful refrain from “Spring Day” became my family’s song for the rest of 2020 and throughout 2021. We walked around for months afterward singing “bogo-ship-da, bogo-ship-da” over and over again. Those words of longing and love were the soundtrack of our lives in an exhausting pandemic world.

I thought it was a romantic song - a song about losing a girl or boy you love - but it is about the dead.

Words of Grief

In the music video of “Spring Day,” we see images of sandy coastal beaches, innocent trips with close friends, and mountains of clothes, and all these images are connected to the Sewol Ferry disaster and the drowning deaths of 250 students of Danwon High School’s junior class.

After watching the video, “Spring Day” is no longer about longing for one you love but, instead, becomes a song of survivors wondering if the people they left behind in a sinking ship will come out alive. We are left alone with the grief of wondering whether our childhood friends, our children, will come back from dark cold waters ... and, in the end, knowing they will not.

A Song of Grief



Stills of "Spring Day" music video by BTS



Never Walk Alone



Government censorship is a monstrous ghost haunting modern South Korea. After a succession of dictators and tyrants, South Korean citizens seem freed of this specter, but state-sponsored violence against citizens casts a very long, often inescapable shadow.

This is where the creative and tragic genius of “Spring Day” begins. When the Sewol Ferry capsized due to government neglect and human greed, hundreds of citizens died. How can artists like the members of BTS use their voice and position in the world to express sorrow and rage without becoming the target of conservative government regulators trolling the Korean internet?

South Korean artists, according to the New York Times, “say that domestic censorship laws have forced them to dig deeper into their imagination, crafting characters and plots that are much more compelling than most.”

Digging Deeper into Imagination

RM and Suga wrote “Spring Day”- a love song about grief. BTS created a huge “Omelas” neon sign for their music video and told viewers “you never walk alone” against forces of hate, control, and darkness.

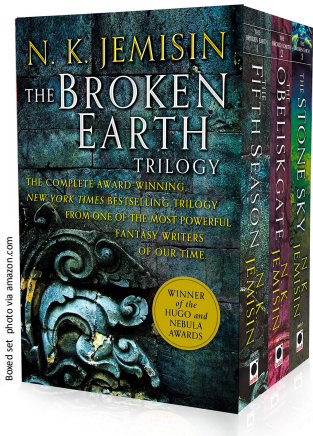
If any government agent intended to censor “Spring Day” lyrics, BTS could say the song is about love. If government representatives wanted to explain how the song is, in reality, about victimization and neglect they would, ideally, have to stand in front of the world and take responsibility for their inaction.

Although shadows of tyrants cloud our world and specters haunt our lives, BTS’s “Spring Day” reminds us we do not have to fight the darkness alone.



Above: stills of “Spring Day” music video by BTS

“THE ONES WHO STAY AND FIGHT”



The dinner table is engraved with impressions of robots and samurai and hearts and notes of love. No matter how many times you tell your son to draw on a clipboard and not the *dinner* table, the oak is a chiseled mess. The four of you are eating mandu pressed with your own hands, and you are telling stories about humans who can control earthquakes with *their minds* and that these people have been enslaved by ... and not one of the three people is listening. So you stop and apologise for telling a dumb story. Again.

Your daughter's head snaps up from her bowl of soup and she slaps the table with the palm of her four-year old hand. "Your story isn't dumb! Don't say that! Your story brought you joy!"

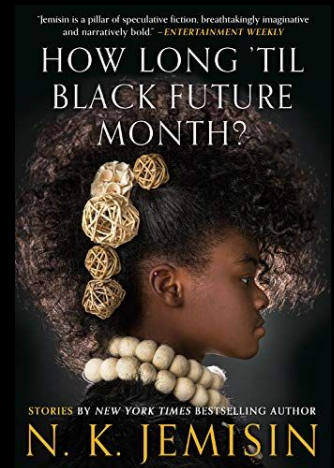
You wince. This loyalty is love, and you are still getting to know love. Like learning a second language - an experience all pitfalls and beautiful moments of understanding.

In late 2018, I bought the boxed trilogy of N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* and walked around in a daze for months. Once, when I was waiting at the dentist, the receptionist asked, "What are you reading?"

"I have literally no idea," I said. "It's the weirdest thing I have ever read."

As I finished reading the books, my Taekwondo friends passed them around from family to family, and I started *How Long 'til Black Future Month*. The *intimate* violence the short-story characters inflicted on others was frightening.

When I returned to school after break, my middle school teaching partner and I taught a story from the collection, "The Ones Who Stay and Fight," for a world building unit we were developing. That story is Jemisin's response to Omelas, and we asked students to respond in turn by imagining a world where everything was perfect *except for one thing*.



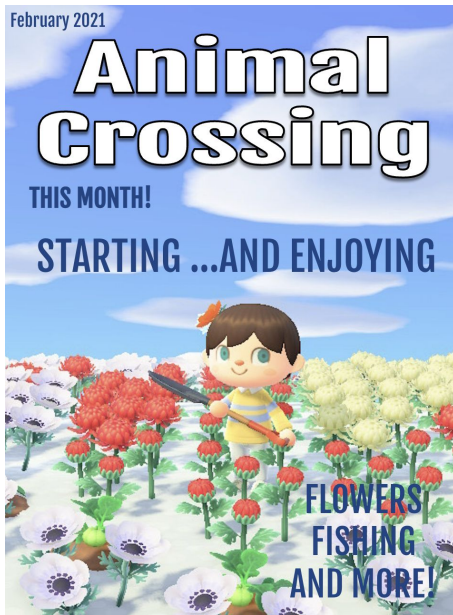
Still of "Spring Day" music video by BTS

That class developed into *Young People Destroy Science Fiction and Fantasy*, which is one of two dozen writing classes we offer through the Minnesota Writing Project at the University of Minnesota. Young people from around the country gather each summer to study discrimination in SFF, to build and people inclusive worlds, and - the students' favorite - gender dragons. Outside of their normal classes, schools, and circles of friends, they are often writing and experimenting with no personal or societal limitations for the first time. They leave the class *excited* to create.

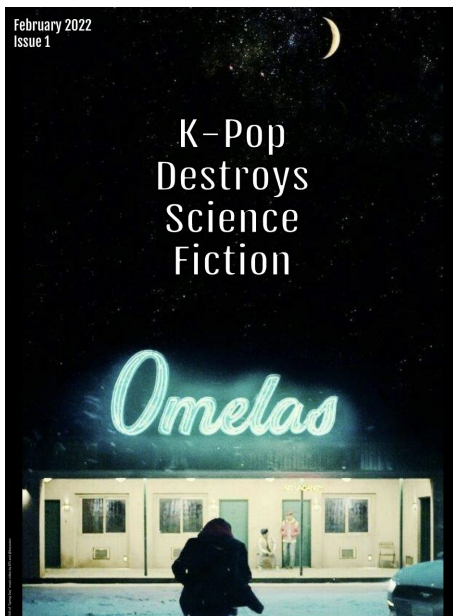
Each year, I look at the students as they return back to their communities, and I wonder, "How long have they been told stories about hate? How long have they been told to conform to others' expectations? How long they have walked alone?"

Do they leave our week together and know there are people waiting to fight alongside them?

A Note



... I researched and wrote this “issue” of K-Pop Destroys Science Fiction while instructing and supervising 100 7th grade students.



During the 2020-21 school year, I was working with a 100% online learning platform for students and families who wanted to continue learning from home. This program was called Wayzata Choice, and I was co-teaching classes with an incredible teaching partner. During our daily meetings, we were analyzing student assessment completion data and noted many of our students were submitting fewer and fewer assignments. In order to better engage our students (who we had never met in person), we created an “Interest Unit.”

During this unit, students could choose any activity they enjoyed, practiced, or were interested in researching. Tied to 7th grade language arts learning standards, students used databases to research and gather information on their topic. Using Google Slides templates, they formatted their research into beautiful magazines on topics ranging from bullet journaling to Minecraft to sports and travel. Not only did the unit fully grab the attention of our students for weeks of fun lessons, but over 95% of our students submitted the summative assessment! This was an outstanding achievement for us and our students.

Before the unit began, I created an exemplar using screenshots from the Nintendo game *Animal Crossing*. While I was impressed with how it looked when completed, my students did much better work than I had done! This school year, as I retaught the unit, I worked alongside the students and completed the daily formative assessments with them. I researched and wrote this “issue” of *K-Pop Destroys Science Fiction* while instructing and supervising 100 7th grade students.