

BTS

SPECIAL EDITION

VOKAL

May 2023

"J.Cole Connects with BTS
Member J-Hope on New Single
"On the Street"-okayplayer"

"WORLD
DOMINATION
WASN'T
OUR PLAN"

"BTS JIN Perfoforms
Debut Solo Single
'The Astronaut' With
Coldplay"



WHAT MAKES BTS
AN INTERNATIONAL
PHENOMENA?



BY NAWAL SARWAR

The Boundless Optimism of BTS

Dave Holmes



IF YOU ARE JUST NOW CONSIDERING GETTING INTO BTS, IT IS natural to feel overwhelmed by the sheer amount of stuff. It's a bit like saying, right this second, "Let's see what Marvel Comics is all about." In the streaming age, BTS have sold more than twenty million physical units across fourteen albums. Their multi-album concept cycles, *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life*, *Love Yourself*, and *Map of the Soul*, have unfolded over multiple records and EPs. There are collaborations with brands, including a BTS smartphone with Samsung. There is a series of short films and music videos, called BU, or BTS Universe, and an animated universe called BT21, in which they're all represented by gender-neutral avatars. Their fan base, known as ARMY, is a global cultural movement unto itself.

"At that time, I don't think our label exactly knew what to do with us," RM says. "They just basically let us be and we had some lessons, but we also just chilled and made music sometimes." It got more intense. The family grew, occasionally by accident. V accompanied a friend to a Big Hit casting call in

Daegu for moral support and ended up being the person chosen from those sessions.

Jung Kook was signed in a feeding frenzy after being dropped from the talent show *Superstar K*, fielding offers from numerous entertainment companies before settling on Big Hit because he was impressed by RM's rapping.

"WHAT YOU SEE IS JUST PURE STAR POWER. PURE TALENT. IMMEDIATELY, I THOUGHT, OH, THIS IS EVERYTHING. IT TRANSCENDS LANGUAGE."

- JIMMY FALLON

Jimin was a dance student and class president for nine years running at his school in Busan; he auditioned at the behest of his teacher. And then, to hear him tell it, Jin got picked up off the street. "I was just go-

ing to school," he says. "Someone from the company approached me, like, 'Oh, this is my first time seeing anyone that looked like this.' He suggested having a meeting with me."

"Season two is when we officially underwent hard training," J-Hope says. "We started dancing, and

that's how I would say our team building started."

School in the daytime, training at night. "We slept during classes," V says.

"I slept in the practice studio," J-Hope counters.

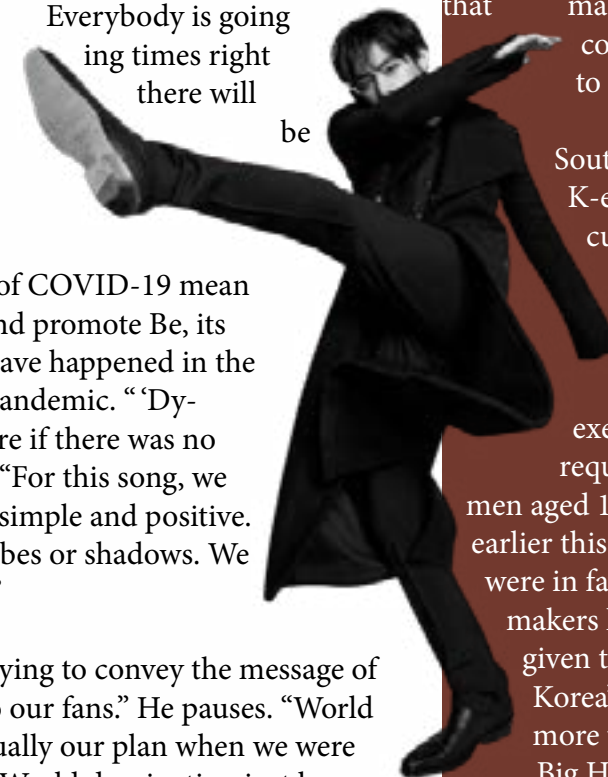
Hitman Bang kept the pressure comparatively low. And he encouraged the guys to write and produce their own music, to be honest about their emotions in their lyrics. Suga is on record saying that no BTS album would be complete without a track that scrutinizes society.

And yet for their new album, *Be*, they're putting that aside. Even this has a greater purpose that relates to mental wellness: RM, the group's main rapper, says, "I don't think this album will have any songs that criticize social issues. Everybody is going through very trying times right now. So I don't think there will be any songs that will be that aggressive."

Though the new rules of COVID-19 mean they can't come here and promote *Be*, its first single might not have happened in the first place but for the pandemic. "'Dynamite' wouldn't be here if there was no COVID-19," says RM. "For this song, we wanted to go easy and simple and positive. Not some, like, deep vibes or shadows. We just wanted to go easy."

Jin agrees. "We were trying to convey the message of healing and comfort to our fans." He pauses. "World domination wasn't actually our plan when we were releasing 'Dynamite.'" World domination just happens sometimes. You get it.

The fans offer a fascinating inversion of stan culture: Rather than bullying rivals like many other ardent online fan bases do, ARMY have put the positive message of the music into action. Their activism goes deep. "THE Boundless Optimism Of BTS" *Esquire*, 17 June 2022



What does military service mean for members of BTS – and their fans?

Elizabeth de Luna

On Tuesday, Kim Seok-jin, also known as Jin, became the first member of superstar septet BTS to begin service in the South Korean military. His enlistment follows an announcement in October from BTS's label Big Hit that confirmed all seven members of the group would serve, beginning with Kim. The label called it a "milestone moment" that made it "possible to respect the needs of the country and for these healthy young men to serve with their countrymen".

South Korean capital Seoul at night
K-everything: the rise and rise of Korean culture.

The announcement followed two years of deliberation over whether the biggest band in the world should be exempt from the 18-24 months of service required of all able-bodied South Korean men aged 18 to 28. A private survey conducted earlier this year showed that 60% of South Koreans were in favor of BTS's exemption and even lawmakers had made efforts to exempt the group given their significant contribution to South Korea's culture and economy – BTS brings in more than \$3.6bn a year.

Big Hit, a subsidiary of media conglomerate Hybe Corporation, promised that the band would return as a septet in 2025. That's not a surprise given BTS's massive popularity, but it is a small relief for their fandom, Army. Some groups, like Super Junior and Exo, stick together through years of uncertainty as individual members leave and return. But for many groups, enlistment is a natural end of the road.

"what does military service mean for members of BTS - and their fan"
The guardian, 15 December 2022