

Bugonia (2025)

My work focuses on South Korean culture, so I am tracking the trend of Hollywood directors remaking foreign films, including Korean cult classics, most with varying degrees of critical and commercial success.

On my radar is *Bugonia*, Greek filmmaker Yorgos Lanthimos's adaptation of the 2003 Korean film *Save the Green Planet*.

Bugonia's Halloween Eve opening night was the perfect macabre treat.

In both stories, a paranoid young man becomes convinced that aliens from Andromeda are living among humans and, in his mind, plotting to destroy Earth and the bees. He believes these aliens are disguised as powerful businessmen and corporate executives, and claims that their toxic chemicals are killing the bees.

Bugonia translates as "ox birth," referring to an ancient belief that bees could spontaneously generate from the carcass of a dead ox or bull.

The term comes from Ancient Greek and is mentioned in texts like Virgil's *Georgics*, where it describes a ritual to produce bees.

This idea is often used as a metaphor for modern issues, such as the declining bee population.

In the movies, they hold an executive captive in a remote location, subjecting them to increasingly severe interrogation and torture to force them to "reveal" their alien identity.

Both films shift between dark comedy, brutal violence, and genuine concerns as we learn more about the abductor's troubled and traumatic past.

As a twist, is he genuinely mentally disturbed, or is he actually right about an alien conspiracy?

In a broader trend, I see other Korean cult film remakes standing out...

Spike Lee's *Oldboy* (2013)-- from Park Chan-wook's original Korean film, titled *Oldeuboi*, and *The Lake House* (2006, and the original Korean film *Il Mare* (2000).

So, what makes Korean films interesting?

Korean cinema's distinctive and twisted tonal blend combines genres, blending violence with comedy, absurdism with genuine emotion.

We also see this genre blend in *Parasite* (2019), which made history at the 2020 Academy Awards as Best Picture.

Some in the film industry are unsure if the trend of adapting Korean cinema will continue, but since the Korean company CJ ENM was the investment distributor of the original 2003 films *Save the Earth*, *Parasite*, and now *Bugonia*.

More so, CJ ENM's market strategy is to leverage its extensive Korean intellectual property for English remakes to connect with global audiences.

The CJ Way

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Based on the goal of creating value for society, the CJ Way guides all decision-making and operations. CJ aims to become a global leader in lifestyle and culture through Korean food, media, and wellness.

CJ seeks to "contribute to the globalization of Korean culture," especially through K-Content-- expanding Korean storytelling, film, music, and drama worldwide.

About the Author

Don Southerton has spent his career helping companies and leaders worldwide work successfully with Korean businesses. Over the years, he has supported major Korean groups, global brands, and government agencies, earning a reputation as the "go-to" expert on Korean business matters. Known for his practical insights and cross-cultural expertise, Don is passionate about building strong partnerships, solving complex challenges and sharing what he's learned to help others succeed.

A published author of 16 books, he is frequently called upon by major media outlets to provide expert commentary on Korean business culture and its influence on global organizations. He has shared insights with *The Economist*, *Daily Mail*, *The BBC World Service*, *CNN*, *Bloomberg TV*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, *Automotive News*, *The New York Times*, *CNBC*, and *NIKKEI Asia*. Don is also a regular guest columnist for *Branding in Asia*.

His books are available on Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/author/donsoutherton>

Southerton is a writer on Medium & LinkedIn who shares insights on Korean business, culture, strategy, and more via his profile at donsoutherton.medium.com/ or <https://www.linkedin.com/in/donsoutherton>.

He shares what "he sees," often a contrarian to what others report.

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