



## Recent Spanish Cinema '17: The Invisible Guardian



The Basajaun is sort of like a Basque Bigfoot, but it has more positive connotations, as a fabled protector of the forests. Naming a serial killer after it is culturally insensitive, like a “Kokopelli Killer” would be in the American Southwest, but what does the media care? Maybe, just maybe, there is a Basajaun tangentially involved in Amaia Salazar’s case, but it is her own family who will really complicate the investigation in Fernando González Molina’s *The Invisible Guardian* (trailer [here](#)), which screens during the [Recent Spanish Cinema](#) series in Los Angeles.

Salazar is from Navarre, but she has been gone so long many now consider her an outsider. She had her reasons for leaving, including profiling training with the FBI in Quantico. That is why she has returned. As the lead investigator on a serial killer case, Salazar quickly determines their suspect may have been active over seven years earlier. For some reason, the killer temporarily went dormant, but the monster has re-awakened and refined its M.O. The “Basajaun Killer” now strategically places a local pastry on the victims’ bodies. Rather awkwardly, the txantxigorras are very much like the ones baked in Salazar’s family bakery, now managed by her estranged sister Flora.

The case really hits close to home when Salazar’s ineffectual, anti-social brother-in-law through her other sister attempts suicide, under dubious conditions. She manages to clear him of formal suspicion, but in doing so, she sticks her neck out. Weird things bordering on the uncanny seem to be afoot and her flashbacks to the abuse she suffered as a child unnerve her even further. At least she can count on back-up from Johan Etxaide, an honest local copper and the wise counsel of her fortune telling grandmother and her FBI mentor now assigned to New Orleans.

*Guardian* is probably best classified as a thriller, but at times it knocks on horror's door. This is a massively moody and atmospheric film that makes the most of Navarre's narrow, ancient streets and the dark and murky surrounding forests. Molina keeps the tension cranked up, periodically flirting with supernatural elements to kick it up even higher. A midnight tarot reading? Sock it to us.



As the emotionally scarred but assertive and proactive Salazar, Marta Etura makes a rock-solid, sympathetic and believable sleuth-protagonist. Itziar Aizpuru is also terrific as her granny, Tía Engrasi, especially in their slightly spooky scenes together. Colin McFarlane adds some coolness in his all-too-brief scenes as the sage FBI instructor. However, *Guardian* is really distinguished by intangibles, like vibe, tactile “feel,” and general mise-en-scene.

*Guardian* is the kind of film that grabs viewers immediately and pulls them through quickly. It might not do much to boost Navarre tourism, even though Molina makes the most of the regional locales. It also makes us curious to see what he might do if he went all in on a proper horror movie. Enthusiastically recommended for fans of serial killer thrillers, *The Invisible Guardian* screens this Friday (10/20) as part of Recent Spanish Cinema at the Egyptian Theatre in LA.