



MARSHLAND

Spring
Season
2016

Release: 2014
Cert (UK): 15
Language: Spanish
Runtime: 105 mins
Director: Alberto Rodríguez
Writer: Rafael Cobos, Alberto Rodríguez
Cinematographer: Alex Catalán
Cast: Javier Gutiérrez, Raúl Arévalo, María Varod



The opening of Alberto Rodríguez's sixth feature shows an aerial view of the Guadalquivir marshes, the delta that leads from the Guadalquivir River into the Atlantic Ocean. From above, it looks like a twisted intestine or the interior of a human brain, a jigsaw of intersecting arteries.

It's an area that produces around 40 per cent of Spain's rice crop, and a place of spectacular natural beauty, home to the Doñana National Park, designated a Unesco World Heritage Site. Rodríguez's focus, however, is not on the landscape as tourist vista. Rather, he invites us to probe beneath the veneer of this immense inhospitable terrain through the narrative of a pair of detectives sent from Madrid in 1980 to investigate the disappearance (soon revealed to be the brutal murder) of two sisters from the small town of Villafranco.

Marshland initially positions Juan and Pedro as two contrasting visions of Spain. Gutiérrez characterises the former as a hardened pro, a boozing womaniser who opts for physical violence as a way of getting results. Arévalo's Pedro is cautious but also largely insensitive to the needs of the local community. But the film refuses to adhere to easy binaries. Juan's surname is Robles, which translates as 'oaks', testifying to a noble strain in his character: loyalty to his partner.



Pedro, meanwhile, is not averse to employing violence where he feels it is necessary. He is keen to differentiate himself from Juan, but the fact that their disagreements happen during shared activities suggests they may have more in common than Pedro is willing to admit. Indeed, the boundaries between criminality and legality are anything but clear in this powerful portrait of the fault lines of post-dictatorship Spain

Nest week, we move to Russia for the highly controversial *Hard To Be A God*. Intriguing to say the least!