

NIGHTWATCHERS



A FILM BY
JULIETTE DE MARCILLAC

69 mins / 2023 / French, English Subtitles / France



EPF MEDIA GROUP, LLC
324 S. Beverly Drive, PMB 437
Beverly Hills, CA 90212
(323) 301-3663
Website: www.epfmedia.com
Email: larry@epfmedia.com

FILM FESTIVALS

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SYNOPSIS

Set against the backdrop of Montgenèvre, an idyllic ski resort on the French-Italian border, *Nightwatchers* unveils a starkly different reality hidden beneath its picturesque surface. While laws permit refugees to apply for asylum upon entering France, many are turned back to Italy by authorities without the opportunity to file an application. To continue their journey, migrants undertake increasingly perilous routes through the mountains, often risking their lives. On the French side, volunteers of all ages traverse these treacherous paths nightly, offering assistance and guiding migrants to safety further down the valley. The film immerses viewers in a single night's mission, highlighting the commitment of this invaluable network of solidarity.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"In Montgenèvre, an idyllic ski resort by day, a vast "migrant hunt" unfolds once night falls. Since 2015, the reestablishment of border controls and the heavy presence of law enforcement has forced exiled people to take increasing risks to try to enter France. Day and night, volunteers take turns watching the mountain and helping those crossing. With *Nightwatchers*, I take the viewer on a night patrol alongside these solidarity-driven volunteers."

Juliette de Marcillac

ABOUT THE FILM

"I spent all my childhood vacations in Montgenèvre, at my grandfather's home. In the 1990s, after the Schengen Agreement, the border post seemed abandoned: we could move from one village to another without any control. We still preferred to go through the forest. I know those woods, paths, and mountains by heart. Over the years, I saw the resort develop activities to attract a wealthier clientele. I also saw, since 2015 and the shift toward more restrictive migration policies, the border closing. Now, to cross, you must "show white paw" (prove you're not a threat).

In 2019, I found a flyer in my mailbox distributed to all the village residents. It said that on the night of February 6–7, a young man had died from hypothermia along the road to Briançon. Tamimou Derman was 28 and came from Togo. That night, no car stopped to help him.

Suddenly, I became aware of the tragedy unfolding night after night in the mountains. I started speaking with locals, then got involved with the solidarity shelter in Briançon. By day, I helped prepare meals, absorbed the atmosphere, and met exiled people. At night, I joined the patrollers. All it takes is to show up at their headquarters to be swept into a long night of watchfulness in the mountains. I quickly decided to stop closing the shutters each evening on what was happening out there and to make a documentary to expose the violence at the border.

Several extended immersive stays between 2020 and 2022 allowed me to build relationships with the people who became my subjects. I joined the teams and gained their trust thanks to

my strong knowledge of the terrain—a key asset in tense moments. Over time, I was able to make the camera's presence accepted.”

Juliette de Marcillac

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director

Juliette de Marcillac

Producers

Claire Babany

Eléonore Boissinot

Arno Moria

Cinematography

Florian Berthelot

Editing

Marie Molino

Music

Oiseaux-Tempête

Sound

Marion Papinot

Thomas Besson

Production Company

Dryades Films