



Meet The Barbarians

102 min

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A Heartfelt Look at Community

The promise of a French social satire that delves into Gallic xenophobia and a global refugee crisis does not, unfortunately, seem like something that might gather wide audience interest. However, if you add in the fact that *Meet the Barbarians* (*Les barbares*) is helmed by July Delpy, an icon of French cinema perhaps more would have their interest piqued. Set in a picturesque small town in France's Brittany region, this tale of life has moments of gentle humor, a dash of romance, and a whole lot of political commentary. The sleepy town of Paimpont feels a world away from the affairs of the outside world, but its bucolic, cloistered space is shattered in part thanks to the eager desire of the town's schoolteacher, Joëlle (Delpy), who, along with the encouragement of the Mayor arranges to welcome some Ukrainians into their midst. Proudly raising the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag, they're joined by townsfolk including, Anne a local shopkeeper and long-time friend of Joëlle, and councilor and local plumber Hervé, a man of Alsatian origin who nonetheless claims Bretonian identity with a discomfiting fervor who nonetheless reluctantly voted to accept the original slate of newcomers. Just before their arrival, they're informed that all Ukrainians have found placement elsewhere in the country and that instead, they are to receive a group from Syria. The family, traumatized from their journey and anxious to make sense of their new surroundings, is soon plunged into a community unsure of their previously committed generosity and neighborliness. With strong performances by other members of the ensemble, this gentle yet powerful story about integration, acceptance, and overcoming ignorance plays out in both entertaining and effective ways. Delpy is effortlessly engaging, playing the earnest teacher with a gleeful sense of plausibility. The film itself is a kind of family affair, with Delpy's father, Albert, playing a wonderfully off-beat local farmer while the rest of the group all feel believable in this somewhat heightened story of small-town life. Delpy manages to satirize the closed-mindedness of the citizenry while also recognizing the self-destructive zeal of those in over their heads. Prejudice knows no borders, of course, and time after time, the film manages to raise the obvious, only to allow the more subtle and transformative moment to have the final say. What we're treated to, then, is a light, entertaining, but also quite timely look at how we must all check our assumptions and work hard to overcome key biases, no matter where we're from. Rather than merely a bunch of bumpkins bounding around, the predilections of the residents of Paimpont are far more universal in just about any environment, in just about any locale. The film raises deep questions that are handled with subtlety and aplomb, with a droll comedy where we're laughing at our own fallibilities as much as those we see struggling on screen. *Meet the Barbarians* provides a light yet engaging look into how communities are built and maintained, and how differing aspects of their identities can form something better when people of disparate backgrounds are brought together.

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