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PORT OF SHADOWS, a French film with English titles. Featuring Jean Gabin and Michele Morgan. Directed by Marcel Carne. From a novel by Pierre MacOrlan. Photography by Schuftan. At the Central Theatre, 47th St. and Broadway.

QUAI DES BRUMES By David Platt

We have had a warm spot for the gifted young French director of "Port of Shadows," Marcel Carne, ever since we saw his bizarre but delightful film "Bizarre Bizarre," with Louis Jouvet and Michel Simon last March.

Carne's second opus to be released here falls short of

being an important film but it has sterling cinematic qualities that set it apart. "Port of Shadows" starts out significantly enough to tell the story of a deserter from the French army. But it gets nowhere fast in this direction and finally winds up as a superior gangster film in a brooding atmospheric setting that frequently is fascinating.

Film Distinguished By Good Acting

Jean Gabin who is incapable of a bad performance (he was the hero of "Grand Illusion") creates a vividly real and warm character as the deserter. Michele Morgan, one of the loveliest of French ladies also gives a fine performance. Apart from Pierre MacOrlan's rather melodramatic tale, there is Carne's inimaginable direction which together with the music of Jaubert evokes and sustains a mood of ships in the night and the silences of early hours. Workmen unloading cargo, the deserted streets in the fog, the cries of a dog mingling with the whistle of a ship, the tragic looks that pass between strangers, the shadows that lurk near the wharf, these are among the real qualities of "Port of Shadows."

The story unfolds in Havre. Jean Gabin, the deserter, comes to this "port of shadows" and becomes entangled in the affairs of a beautiful girl and a band of desperadoes. The usual happens. Gabin falls in love with the girl, slaps one of her admirers vigorously in the face twice, kills a man in self-defense and then, because the law says desertion is a punishable crime, in turn is shot down on his way to liberty. The acting of Jean Gabin and Michele Morgan make these scenes much more impressive than they actually are.

As in "Bizarre Bizarre," "Port of Shadows" has a gallery of strange minor characters: A murderer (Michel Simon) who loves religious music—dogs bark at him. An artist (Le Vigan) who paints the things beneath things and then because he has painted them all commits suicide. A hotel keeper (Delmont) who, after shooting it out with several gangsters, nonchalantly steps outside and remarks on the "beauty of the night." The ship's doctor (Genin), a portly gentleman. In his youth he was a pure watercolorist. Now he hates cubism. A drunk (Amois), who divides his time evenly between the bar and the bed. His ambition is to sleep in a bed with two sheets.

In other words one of France's most gifted directors with the help of Jean Gabin and a cast of splendid actors has done exceedingly well with a relatively unimportant story