

Document Citation

Title	Les bas-fonds
Author(s)	Chase Weaver
Source	<i>Kit Parker Films</i>
Date	1979
Type	distributor materials
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Les bas-fonds (The lower depths), Renoir, Jean, 1936

FRANCE

LES BAS-FONDS

(THE LOWER DEPTHS)

(THE UNDERWORLD)

(France 1936) 92 minutes \$40.00

French dialogue with English subtitles.

Directed by Jean Renoir - Screenplay by Renoir, Charles Spaak, J. Companeex, E. Zamiantine, based on the play by Maxim Gorky - Cinematography by Jean Bachelet - Edited by Marguerite Renoir - Art Direction by Eugène Lourié, Hugues Laurent - An Albatross Production. Players: *Jean Gabin, Louis Jouvet, Vladimir Sokolov, Robert Le Vigan, Gabrielle, René Génin, Sylvain, Suzy Prim, Junie Astor, Camille Bert, Maurice Bacquet, Jany Holt.*

Where Maxim Gorky, in his play, rubbed with elbow grease the seamy squalor of those in the captivity of poverty, Jean Renoir, in his film adaptation, instead tugs at our arm and points to it; the abrasiveness of the original is thus reduced in Renoir's version. There is sunlight and there is hope, despite the hurt that the characters do to one another and to themselves. Renoir insists that some of them, at least, can climb or scramble out of the depths just as credibly as the Baron can lower himself into them, because the depths are a state of mind as well as a physical condition.

The Baron is down on his fortune and his gambling luck. Faced with prison because of his debts, he returns with Pepel—a thief raised in this trade, whom he has discovered looting his apartments (the contents of which he will lose anyway)—to the latter's quarters, a doss house that harbors the outcasts and the poor on the edge of the city. For the Baron, there is a new freedom in surrendering his worldly goods and taking his chances in a day-to-day existence. Here he can reflect, and strike up a friendly acquaintance with a casual prostitute, and not feel compelled to maintain a social/financial standing. For his part, Pepel, unhappy in his occupation and in his affair with the wife of the landlord of this tenement, thrashes about for a way out. Their neighbors are the tenants of other hopes and miseries, among them: an alcoholic actor/philosopher who affirms the human condition and prepares to kill himself; the scurrilous landlord, who will barter people for official favors; and the

younger sister of his wife, an innocent with whom Pepel falls in love.

The Lower Depths, despite its setting, is a flowing drama in Renoir's hands. His camera glides and sweeps and frames the characters in depth, and he elicited vivid performances, especially from Louis Jouvet as the Baron and Jean Gabin as Pepel.

Chase Weaver

—CIV