

INTERREGNUM

a screenplay by Nick Fox-Gieg
with text from the play *Ubu Roi*, by Alfred Jarry

INT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE, NIGHT.

Twelve elderly ARISTOCRATS sit around a conference-room table. Something approaches with booming footsteps.

ARISTOCRAT 1

No!

UBU enters, his face hidden by the peaked hood of a Spanish Inquisitor. He heaves his bulk into a chair at the head of the table and squeaks it forward.

UBU

So here I am, King in this country.

In the audience, RENÉ, 54, sits with CÉCILE, 35. Cécile looks around the room nervously.

Onstage, Ubu produces a covered silver serving plate and drops it on the table with a clang. With a flourish, he reveals a yellow paper punch-card.

UBU

Into the trap!

Hidden machinery rumbles, and ARISTOCRAT 1 is pulled underneath the table.

UBU

Into the trap!

ARISTOCRAT 2 follows. The remaining Aristocrats quiver.

UBU

You, what are you sniveling about?

ARISTOCRAT 3

You're so bloodthirsty!

UBU

Splendid, splendid!

ARISTOCRAT 3
Who will render justice now?

UBU
Me! Into the trap!

And ARISTOCRAT 3 is gone.

UBU
Now, hurry up, I want to make some laws.

INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - ARCHIVE ROOM, DAY.

René and Cécile stand in front of an endless wall of tiny filing cabinets. They open and close drawers, looking for something.

CÉCILE
Got it.

RENÉ
Bring it over here?

Cécile takes out a punch card, identical to the one in the play, and slots it into a baroque typewriter-like machine.

CÉCILE
Column Four, Row Sixteen?

René nods. Cécile turns a dial, positioning a hole-puncher precisely over that spot. She pulls a lever, and the machine punches the card. She extracts it and drops it into a stack.

Light, precise footsteps echo in the hall outside. KLAUS, 27, opens the door. He holds an empty cardboard box, and he wears an immaculate black officer's uniform. René and Cécile both make brave attempts to smile.

KLAUS (to Cécile)
Oh, great. Good first day?

Cécile manages a nod. Klaus scoops up the card stack and drops it into the box.

KLAUS

Thanks.

FLASH: INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - MACHINE ROOM, NIGHT.

The Machine Room is packed with giant clattering punch-card computers. A team of TECHNICIANS feeds cards into the machines. One card in particular is colored bright red; the name "Alain Dupuis" is hand-written on it. It is spat out into a pile of many red cards.

INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - ARCHIVE ROOM, DAY.

Cécile is back at the hole-puncher.

CÉCILE

Column Eleven, Row Four?

As she is about to punch Column Eleven, René grabs her arm.

RENÉ

Never punch Column Eleven.

FLASH: INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - MACHINE ROOM, NIGHT.
Alain Dupuis' red card, with his name still clearly visible, has a hole punched in Column Eleven.

FLASH: INT. MOVIE THEATRE - PROJECTION BOOTH, DAY.

As ALAIN, a thin 19-year-old, loads the projector, three SOLDIERS burst into the booth. Visible through the window, the AUDIENCE below reacts with alarm. One Soldier grabs Alain, who as he staggers rips the film out of the projector. Light plays crazily across the movie screen.

INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - ARCHIVE ROOM, EVENING.

CÉCILE and RENÉ close up the cabinets and get ready to leave.

CÉCILE

Hey, René? You've been really helpful.

RENÉ (absorbed in the filing cabinet)
Sure, thanks.

CÉCILE
Do I owe you a drink?

INT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE, NIGHT.

Ubu is at dinner with MA UBU. On an absurdly tiny table for two, a serving plate between them holds another punch card.

UBU
So here I am, King in this country. I'll start
by grabbing all the finance. Then I'll kill
everybody and leave.

MA UBU (smiling)
For heaven's sake, restrain yourself!

UBU (overlapping) RENÉ

I'll seize their property and This isn't a drink, Cécile.
put them down the trapdoor—

CÉCILE
 MA UBU It's not.
 Horrors!

UBU
-where their brains will be
removed by the De-Braining
Machine.

RENÉ
This can't be legal.

CÉCILE
It isn't. But it's a
classic.

MA UBU
What vile ferocity!

INT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE, NIGHT - LATER

The play has just finished; René and Cécile wait out the crush of people leaving. Cécile looks up suddenly:

CÉCILE
I'll be right back.

She's across the room, talking to a squat RESISTANCE AGENT, 30, carrying a large suitcase. She returns with the

suitcase — staggering a bit; it's heavy. She looks René in the eye.

INT. CONFINED SPACE, DAY.

René is trapped, in the dark. His breath steams in the cold. He's not alone; behind him many more people are stirring.

RENÉ (to himself)
"So here I am, King in this country."

INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE — ARCHIVE ROOM, DAY.

René, alone, is shuffling through the filing cabinets. He pulls out a bright red card labeled "Cécile Bouchier" and places it next to the hole-punch machine. Then he slots in a fresh, blank card. He begins to copy, punch by punch, the data on the original.

RENÉ (to himself)
Column One, Row Eight...Column Two, Row Twelve...

He does not copy Column Eleven.

René hears the sound of footsteps, approaching fast. He scrawls "Cécile Bouchier" on the new card, just in time. The door opens. Klaus sticks his head in — impossibly, he's wearing a pointed Ubu hood, covering his face.

KLAUS
Imagine...our own Cécile.

René stares at Klaus' hood. He blinks, and Klaus returns to normal.

KLAUS
Where's her card?

Slowly, René hands over the forged card.

KLAUS
Thanks. We'll find her.

FLASH: INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - MACHINE ROOM, NIGHT.

The machines and their Technicians work at top speed. The card with Cécile's name on it, the one that René altered, is fed into the machine along with the rest - and is spit out the front, rejected.

FLASH: INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - STORAGE ROOM, NIGHT.

René cracks open a heavy door, revealing a maze of file boxes stacked twice as tall as he is. He opens a box; it's full of yellow punch cards. He slips in Cécile's original, red card, and quickly and quietly shuts the door.

INT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE, NIGHT.

UBU

So here I am, King in this country.

Ubu produces a death's-head MASK and places it on his face.

UBU

Hum, there's only one thing left for us. War.

ARISTOCRATS (unison)

War! Praise God, that's the honorable thing to do!

This is not the same performance; René is wearing different clothes, and he sits alone. The seat next to him is empty.

UBU

Ah, what a sight! On all sides, burning houses, burning houses, and people bending under the weight of our finance!

Marionettes descend from the ceiling. Black flying wedges rain down fireworks. Tiny people below try to run away. Ubu holds his Mask at arm's length, like a ventriloquist's dummy:

UBU (as MASK)

But remember, we are not paid to make war. We have to do it at our own expense. Don't pay out a cent, a cent more than's necessary.

People grumble as a man squeezes past and flops down in the empty seat next to René. It's the Resistance Agent.

UBU (overlapping)	RESISTANCE AGENT
Hurrah for war!	Don't you get tired of this show?
ARISTOCRATS	
Hurrah for war!	RENÉ
	It's a classic.

The Resistance Agent pushes a heavy suitcase over to René.

UBU and MASK (unison)
That's it! Off with their heads!

INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - ARCHIVE ROOM, DAY.

René is at the hole puncher, stacks of red and yellow cards piled on the table beside him. The sound of footsteps comes from down the hall. The door opens.

Klaus enters. His head is covered with a ghastly Ubu hood again, and this time it remains so.

KLAUS
René? We can't find Cecile.

René says nothing. Klaus holds up a fistful of red cards.

KLAUS
How many?

René slowly rises to his feet.

KLAUS
How many?

Klaus punches René in the face. A drop of blood falls on the clean yellow cards stacked on the table.

FLASH: INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - ARCHIVE ROOM, EVENING.

Klaus, still hooded, pulls a bright red card labeled "René Carmille" out of the hole-punch machine.

FLASH: INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - MACHINE ROOM, NIGHT.

A Technician feeds the bright-red card into a computer.

INT. CONFINED SPACE (TRAIN CAR), DAY.

Again, René is trapped in the dark, crowded together with other prisoners.

RENÉ (to himself)
"So here I am, King in this country."

EXT. TRAIN STATION, DAY.

René is on a death-camp train; hooded, uniformed Ubu figures tend the engine and prepare for departure. The train begins to move – and a single red card flutters across the platform.

INT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE, NIGHT.

Cécile and René are sitting together.

CÉCILE (whispering)
So Column Eleven means death.

RENÉ (whispering)
The row number doesn't matter – anything in Column Eleven.

CÉCILE
Can't they just take the card and punch it in again?

René shakes his head.

FLASH: INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE - MACHINE ROOM, NIGHT.

Technicians feed card after card into the sorting machine... but the hopper for the fatal red cards remains empty.

RENÉ (V/O)

One card, maybe. But if thousands and thousands of people were made invisible, all at the same time...it would take years to find them all.

INT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE, NIGHT.

CÉCILE

They won't have years.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, DAY.

The train pulls away from the platform. A blizzard of red cards falls – and one of the cloud shimmers and transforms into Cécile. Her eyes meet René's.

CÉCILE (whispered)

Thank you.

FLASH: INT. STATISTICAL SERVICE – STORAGE ROOM, NIGHT.

René, pushing a dolly, carts three heavy file boxes into the dark storage room. He lifts the lid of the top one – it's full of red cards.

EXT. TRAIN STATION, DAY.

Dozens more cards transform into living people, their faces defiant. Soon, the phantom crowd – thousands and thousands of them – spills out of the station, filling the plaza and the surrounding streets.

The death-camp train leaves the station.

EXT. UNDERGROUND THEATRE, NIGHT.

René and Cécile are leaving the theatre; Cécile drags her heavy contraband suitcase. René takes it from her.

RENÉ (smiling)
I'll need more blanks.

CÉCILE (exhales slowly)
Can you do it?

RENÉ
Yes.

At René and Cécile's feet, something drops out of the bulging suitcase. It's a blank punch card.

END