Lage: A Merlantis Story

By Kimba Rose Williams

PAGE ONE

Splash page

The upper class theater is lavish, with white cream and gold accents – think those old-timey theaters back when people dressed up to go to the "pictures." In lights, the theater marquee reads "FINAL WEEK: SHOWING GILL OUT."

NOTE TO ARTIST / LETTERER: *Those don't have to be the exact words, but something along those lines, saying that a special film will only be showing for the week. I don't want the name ("Gill Out") visible – cover it up with water bubbles or a kid's balloons or something. The name of the film isn't important, just the content (revealed later on).*

You can also put other films in lights, all with fishy puns, like "GONE WITH THE WAVE" or "IRON FIN," something like that. Have fun with it. Now that we've set the scene, here's the action: low angle shot, almost from street-level, of the front of the theater as ARNIE is thrown out the main doors. Arnie is mid-air, about to eat the pavement. The MANAGER (40s) of the theater looms above Arnie, and is the one who tossed Arnie out. He's a two-legger in a well-pressed uniform – think white shirt, red vest, maybe a gold or brass chain. Since this is a steampunk world, you can play with certain accents in this comic to match that general aesthetic. I see this as a low angle shot from Arnie's face about to hit the ground, angled up to see the Manager, the theater marquee, and some of the front of the theater. Maybe even some posters, if there's room and depending on how tight you want to make the shot.

1 Manager (burst): AND **STAY OUT!** You and **your kind** aren't **welcome** here!

2 Arnie: **Aaah!**

PAGE TWO

Panel 1: The Manager stands over Arnie. Arnie is now on the ground, but he's turned to face the Manager. The Manager tosses a ragged beanie (hat) at Arnie.

1 Manager: Did you think me a **fool**, that I could be misled by such a **pathetic** disguise?

2 Arnie: **No**, I just--

Panel 2: Low angle shot, over Arnie's shoulder and looking up at the Manager. Use this to emphasize the Manager's power and position over Arnie. The Manager looks down his nose on Arnie, snide and superior, one eyebrow raised.

3 Manager: This is an **upper class** theater. Or do you need to be reminded of your **place**, **Merlock?** Here's a **reminder**: it's the **slums** you crawled out from.

Panel 3: Back on Arnie. Arnie crams the beanie on his head, his face angry and rebellious. Make it clear that, if anything, the Manager's words have only incited Arnie to try again.

4 Manager (off panel): Have I made myself **clear?**

5 Arnie: **Crystal.**

NOTE: *What follows all the way through to the end of Page 3 is a sequence of panels where Arnie is trying to sneak into the theater. This is the only real comedic moment of the comic, so feel free to play around with that.*

Panel 4: The inside of the theater. Again, very lavish. Maybe instead of the traditional red velvet, since they're underwater, maybe make it look more like red leather with brass or copper finishes. Scattered around are a few two-legged Merfolk, dressed up nice. Maybe the lower end of semi-formal, where it's clear they dressed up for the occasion, but not gala-formal. However, there is a Merlock

in the theater – he is polishing the glass over the posters that are on the wall. This Merlock is LAGE, an old man in a ragged uniform (see APPENDIX: Image A) and holding a cane. Although the details aren't clear, the cane is really nice – brass with leather accents and an intricate squid whose tentacles form the handle and entwine down the cane. Although Lage is stooped, he isn't weak – think Alfred from *The Dark Knight* movies combined with Alfred from *Gotham* (Appendix: Image B). At the moment, however, he's not the focus. The main thing that needs to be in the wall (between the posters, maybe right next to Lage) is a VENT. Like an air vent, only it's used to circulate water instead of air. It should shake / rattle a bit. Random merfolk chatter around the room.

6 Random Merfolk1: Oh my Glub, that movie was **awesome!**

7 Random Merfolk2: **Quick**, let's grab some concessions.

8 Random Merfolk3: I haven't seen a movie in **ages**.

9 Lage (closer to the vent, like Lage saw what's going on): Aw, **jeez**.

10 SFX (very tiny; at the vent): rattle rattle

Panel 5: Panels 5-7 are right next to each other: Close-up on the vent. The rattling is increased. An outline is visible through the slats. Three screws are already on the floor, with the fourth halfway out.

11 SFX (vent): **RATTLE RATTLE**

Panel 6: Same shot, only the vent is now being lowered to the floor by Arnie (who is inside the ventilation shaft). He has a screwdriver in his hand, and a triumphant smile on his face.

12 Arnie: I am **good.**

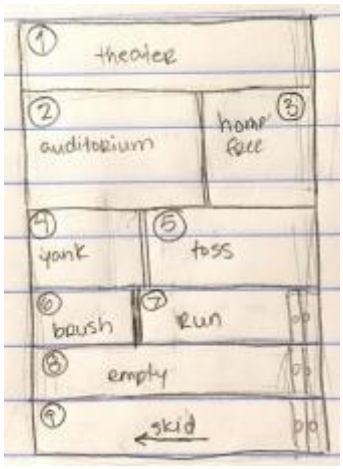
Panel 7: Same shot again. Arnie is halfway out of the vent. However, the Manger's legs are visible, and his foot is tapping. Arnie has seen the Manager's legs, and his face has that "oh crap I'm in trouble" look.

13 Manager (off panel): But **I'm** better.

14 Arnie (small; whispers): **Son of a sea biscuit.**

PAGE THREE

NOTE: *Okay, so this page is a bit complicated. I know there are 9 panels, but this isn't a Watchmen page. I see there being six rows. The first three are thicker than the last three. The first panel takes up the entire first row. Panels 2 and 3 are on the second row, with Panel 2 being the larger of the two. Panels 4 and 5 are, again, on the same row, with 5 being the largest. Rows 4 – 6 are all thin and wide, and all the same side angle. Here's a pic for reference (this is the only time I'll do this):*



Panel 1: Arnie, disguised in a flowy blond wig, make-up, a hat, an ill-fitting dress, and too-small heels, wobbles through the theater. He also wears a backpack. He has a bandage across his nose and cheek, from the last time he was tossed out. He's over halfway through, and hasn't been stopped. Again, not central, but Lage is leaning against the wall next to the auditorium door that Arnie is headed toward. Lage's cane is propped against the wall next to him, and Lage is the only one in the theater that is looking directly at Arnie. In the foreground a SECURITY GUARD (also in uniform) taps on the Manager's shoulder while pointing toward Arnie.

1 Arnie: Keep it **together**, man.

2 Security Guard: **Sir...**

Panel 2: Over Arnie's shoulder as he walks into one of the auditoriums. Arnie is in the back corner of the theater, behind the seats. This is a wide shot, showing the entire auditorium from Arnie's perspective. The film screen has an image on it (a fishy version of a common theater commercial). There are merfolk already seated. There are speakers around the top of the auditorium, which play the sound from the film. At the back of the theater (near Arnie) is the box that the film is projecting from. A hunched over Merlock is sitting on a stool next to the box, cranking a handle on the side. He's not central to the panel and we won't see him again; it's just necessary that the person running the projector is a Merlock (that isn't Arnie or Lage, obviously).

NOTE TO LETTERER: *the SFX (Panels 2 and 3) is a similar color to the artwork, sort of like background noise – no word bubbles; don't make it pop. See APPENDIX: Image C for stylistic reference.*

3 Arnie: **Wow...**

4 SFX (speakers): ... Silence your shell phones now.

Panel 3: Medium close up as Arnie, excited, steps all the way through the door and into the theater. He's home free!

5 SFX (off panel; direction of the screen): ... and, please, enjoy the show.

Panel 4: Same shot, only a thick hand (belonging to the Security Guard) has reached through the still-closing door and grabbed the back of Arnie's neck. It yanks him back, choking him.

6 Arnie: **Hrrkk!**

7 Security Guard (off panel): **Gotcha.**

Panel 5: Arnie is tossed out of the theater again.

8 Arnie: **OW!**

Panel 6: Panels 6-9 are all thin, with side-angles of Arnie and the front of the theater (the theater is on the right side of the panel). Panels 6 and 7 are basically one panel, but bisected so that, in Panel 6, Arnie stands up and brushes himself off; but in...

Panel 7: Arnie runs, full-tilt, at the theater doors. The blond wig flies off behind him.

Panel 8: Same shot, but nothing is happening. The blond wig slowly floats to the ground. A moment while Arnie is in the theater.

Panel 9: Same shot, but Arnie is tossed out of the theater doors MUCH harder than he was before, skidding across the panel from right to left. In his skid, his face snags the blond wig (which is on the ground) and drags it with him.

9 SFX: SCREEEEECH!

PAGE FOUR

Panel 1: The Manager, with the Security Guard behind him, calls out threateningly to Arnie from the front doors of the theater.

1 Manager (burst): If I **ever** see you around here again, I'll call the **cops!**

Panel 2: The theater doors are slammed shut.

2 SFX: SLAM!

Panel 3: Arnie is still slumped on the ground. He makes a comical sight. The dress is rucked up, revealing his regular baggy jeans; one heel lies on the ground, while the other hangs off Arnie's toe; and the blond wig is a tangled mess around Arnie's makeup-smudged face.

3 Arnie (small; under his breath): **Dammit.**

Panel 4: Same shot, only three sets of legs now stand in front of Arnie. Arnie's looking up (off panel), at who's standing above him.

4 Laylyn (off panel): **Now now**, didn't your **mother** ever teach you...

Panel 5: Low angle of the three two-leggers as they stand, almost menacingly, over Arnie. They are MARCUS, LAYLYN (the only girl), and BRINE (in that order). All three have a very polished, prep-school look to them – like all three are trust fund babies. They're all about high school age, and money and privilege practically emanates from them. All three of them have different-colored, pastel skin (you can choose the colors). They all look like butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, but their grins are a bit too sharp, their eyes too mean. They look like skeezy punks who hurt others just to have a good time. Basically, low-key make it clear that these guys are bad news.

5 Laylyn: ... to watch your **language?**

6 Brine: **Tisk tisk.**

PAGE FIVE

Panel 1: This is a larger panel, to make room for the confusing barrage of dialogue that the three bombard Arnie with (the reason for the excess of dialogue in this panel). Arnie is now standing up, with the three two-leggers gathered around. Marcus is still holding Arnie's hand, the other bracing his elbow, and it's clear that Marcus just helped Arnie up off the ground. Laylyn is smoothing the shoulders of Arnie's dress, while Brine is lightly pinching Arnie's cheek. The three are taking a creepy interest in Arnie, especially considering their vastly differing social classes. Arnie holds the wig in his hands, a brow furrowed in confusion and eyes narrowed in suspicion.

1 Arnie: **I'm sorr--**

2 Marcus: Just pulling your **leg**, kid.

3 Laylyn: **Oh**, isn't he just the **cutest!**

4 Arnie: **Um--**

5 Brine: It's absolutely **criminal** that they won't let you in.

6 Marcus: Have to admire the **effort**, though.

7 Brine: Indeed, **indeed.**

8 Arnie: Th-thanks? **Look**, I--

9 Laylyn: Well, that **settles** it.

Panel 2: Medium close up of Arnie pulling away from Brine, freeing his cheek. He is frowning in irritation.

10 Arnie: Settles **what?**

11 Brine (off panel; from the direction of Brine's hand): **Why**, we're going to **sneak** you in, of course!

Panel 3: Arnie scowls up at the three, suspicious. Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine's grins should be a little sharper. Marcus' arm is about to come down around Arnie's shoulders.

12 Arnie: **Really?**

13 Laylyn: But of **course! Anything** for you, **pet.**

14 Arnie: My name's **Arnie.**

15 Marcus: Of **course** it is. Just stick with us, **Arnie...**

Panel 4: Close-up of Marcus' hand, which is now gripping Arnie's shoulder possessively. A cane – spoilers: it's Lage's cane – smacks down on Marcus' hand.

16 Marcus: ... and we'll have some **fu—**

16.5 Marcus (burst): **NYOWCH!**

17 SFX: SMACK

PAGE SIX

Panel 1: Large front shot of Lage (POV maybe from between two of the gang) as he yanks Arnie behind him (causing Arnie to drop the wig). Lage's cane held in front of them defensively. Now you can put some more detail into Lage, since he's finally central. Lage is no longer wearing the little hat that comes with his uniform. Over his uniform jacket, Lage wears a patchy but well maintained aviator-style bomber jacket (again, have fun with the steampunky style). The folded up, red uniform hat peeks from Lage's jacket pocket. Lage is glaring fiercely at Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine.

1 Arnie: Wha--**whoa!**

2 Lage: What do you think you're doin', **punks?**

Panel 2: The gang stands together, glaring menacingly at Lage. Marcus holds his hand close to his body.

3 Brine: Nothing that concerns **you**, old-timer. **Now**, give us back the **kid.**

4 Laylyn: Yeah. We've got **plans.**

Panel 3: Lage glowers at the gang. Arnie shoves at the arm that Lage is holding up to keep Arnie back.

5 Lage: I'll just bet.

6 Arnie: **Hey!** Look, I don't know who **any** of you **are**, but I don't need your **help**, mister. They were just offering to take me to see the **Merlock** movie.

Panel 4: Lage looks at Arnie. Lage now holds Arnie's arm, as though to keep him from running back to the gang.

7 Lage: Well **I** can get you a **bootlegged** copy of it. **Free** of charge, **no strings** attached.

8 Arnie: **Really?** That would be **perfect!** Then I could watch it with my **mo--**

9 Marcus (off panel): **You little--**

Panel 5: Back to the gang. Marcus and Brine both look super-pissed. Laylyn, however, has a considering expression on her face as she looks toward Lage. Her hand is pressed against Marcus' chest (he's half-lunging), cutting him off.

10 Laylyn: We **understand**. Maybe **next time**, pet?

11 Arnie: The name's **Arnie.**

12 Laylyn: Of course. See you around, **Arnie... Lage.**

Panel 6: Wide panel with Arnie's face on one side (still with smudged makeup), Lage's on the other. In the far background, the silhouettes of Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine can be seen, walking away. Arnie is excited, while Lage is stone-faced.

13 Arnie: **So**, um, Lage, is it? Where's the **bootlegged** copy?

14 Lage: I don't have one.

Panel 7: Arnie reels back, shocked and furious. Lage looks completely unrepentant and neutral about his lie, and is leaning casually on his cane.

15 Arnie: B-but you **said --**

16 Lage: What I needed to, to get you away from those **no-good two-leggers.** I did you a **favor.**

Panel 8: Arnie turns away from Lage, poised to run after the gang. Arnie has a furious and determined expression on his face. Lage, behind him, lifts his cane, holding it by the long part (not the handle).

17 Arnie: A **FAVOR?** They may have been my **last chance** to see that film!

17.5 Arnie: It's not too **late;** I can catch up--

PAGE SEVEN

Panel 1: Small panel, a close-up of the handle end of Lage's cane snagging Arnie's ankle.

Panel 2: Arnie face-plants, again, onto the sidewalk. Lage stands over him, brandishing his cane.

1 Arnie: **Uhnf!**

2 SFX (where Arnie hits the pavement; small): thump

3 Lage: I know you've spent **a lot** of time down there, but maybe **this** time you'll **listen.** You don't --

Panel 3: Arnie has turned and is facing Lage from the ground. He has desperate tears in his eyes, and is borderline pleading with Lage.

4 Arnie: **No! You listen!** I **NEED** to see that movie.

4.5 Arnie: I have to... I have to go **after** them!

Panel 4: Medium close-up of Lage, whose hands are raised in placation. He has a shrewd look on his face, one eyebrow raised.

5 Lage: *sigh* **Alright.** Let's make a **deal.**

5.5 Lage: How about, instead of following those **punks,** you let me walk you **home,** wherever that may be.

Panel 5: This is a larger, side angle, wide panel. Lage is crouched to be more on Arnie's level. Arnie is staring at Lage with a rebellious look on his face, his jaw clenched and jutting out. Lage is holding his jacket open with one hand, revealing the theater uniform he is still wearing underneath. Lage's other hand is holding his cane, which he leans against to take weight off his bad leg.

6 Lage: And **if,** by the time we get there, you've convinced me that you **"need"** to see that awful movie, I'll take you **myself.**

6.5 Lage: I **work** for the theater, so I can actually sneak you in. What do you **say...**

Panel 6: Arnie looks at Lage with a determined look on his face. Lage's hand, held out for a handshake, reaches from off panel toward Arnie.

7 Lage (off panel): ... do we have a **deal?**

Panel 7: Close-up of Arnie shaking Lage's hand, sealing the deal.

8 Arnie (off panel): No **tricks?**

9 Lage (off panel): You have my **word.**

Panel 8: Lage is now standing, but focus on Arnie who is still on the ground. Arnie is grinning up, unashamed, at Lage. All that's visible of Lage in this panel is his legs and the cane. Arnie is still in his ridiculous disguise, sans the wig and heels.

10 Lage (off panel): Now, change out of that **get-up.** You look **ridiculous.**

PAGE EIGHT

NOTE: *The opulence of the upper-class part of town starts to decrease gradually from the top of the page to the bottom. Not significantly, but enough so that the transition from page 8 to page 9 isn't so jarring. Basically, the upper-class part of town gradually fades into the middle-class part of town. All of the people on this page should be two-legged Merfolk with differing pastel skin colors (except for Arnie and Lage, of course).*

Panel 1: A long, wide panel of Arnie and Lage walking, side by side. There should be a slight decline, as if they're walking gradually further and further down into the ocean depths (which they are). Arnie is now out of his disguise, and now wears the baggy pants, a hoodie, the beanie (hat) from page 2, and a backpack (to explain where he got his spare clothes from, and also where the disguise is now). Arnie is gesturing in the air, passionately trying to make his point. On the far left of the panel (Arnie and Lage are already past them), there are a THREE MER-KIDS, all chubby-faced and two-legged. They're throwing a bright red ball back and forth.

1 Arnie: ... and, for the **first time**, we have a **Merlock** main character! I'm not even **into** horror flicks, but I **am** into **representation**. This is **huge!**

2 Lage: Y'know, there's a **difference** between representation and **mis**representation.

Panel 2: Back shot of Arnie and Lage. The bright red ball hits Arnie in the back of the head, hard.

3 Arnie: What is **that** supposed to mea--**OW!**

4 SFX (from ball): THONK

Panel 3: Same shot, but Arnie has whirled around, hand rubbing the back of his head where he was hit.

5 Mer-Kid Leader (small; off panel): **Oh no--!**

6 Arnie: **Who--?**

Panel 4: The Three Mer-Kids are staring up at Arnie, two girls and a boy. The middle girl has her hands over her

mouth, to imply that she's the one who called out when they lost control of the ball. The little boy looks near tears.

7 Mer-Kid Boy (small): Sorry.

Panel 5: Arnie is kneeled down, holding out the red ball. He's smiling kindly at the Mer-Kids. The middle girl (the leader of the group) now has her hands clasped behind her back. In the background, the forms of three two-legged mothers running toward the kids should be barely visible.

8 Arnie: **Oh**, it's okay. **Here** ya go. Just try to be a bit more **careful** in the future, **'kay?**

9 Mer-Kid Leader: **Mommy** told me not to touch things **your kind** touched, cause I might get **comtabinatered**.

Panel 6: Reaction shot of Arnie's face, eyes wide in shock and hurt. The mothers have reached their children and are yanking them up into their arms, pure hatred in their faces, and aimed toward Arnie.

10 Arnie (small): What?

11 Mer-Kid Leader's Mom: **Stay away** from my **daughter**, you **freak!**

Panel 7: Arnie now stands, face bowed and in shadow. The mothers and the mer-kids are gone, leaving Arnie with the bright red ball still in his hands. Lage's hand is clasped on Arnie's shoulder.

12 Lage: Buck up. You've still gotta **convince** me.

13 Arnie: ... Wh-what?

Panel 8: Front shot of Lage as he leads Arnie by the shoulder to continue their walk. Lage is smiling encouragingly at Arnie. Arnie is subdued, his head bowed and hands clinging to the red ball. But Arnie is turned toward Lage, a smirk on his face.

14 Lage: About the **film**. C'mon, **kid**, is that all you got?

15 Arnie: Not even **close**, **old man**.

PAGE NINE

NOTE: *So now we're in the middle-class part of town. As Arnie and Lage journey to the bottom of the page, the quality of light should be decreased, since sunlight doesn't really reach the Merlock part of town (lower-class; not on this page).*

Panel 1: This panel is a large front shot of Arnie and Lage walking down the sidewalk (toward the "reader"), past the suburban houses. Lage's hand is still on Arnie's shoulder, and Lage's expression is definitely fonder than before. Since this is the middle-class part of town, the population is primarily composed of merfolk with tails (classic mermaids) and very few two-leggers. Everyone is still fairly well dressed, but they're all harried and stressed, like over-worked businessmen and stressed stay-at-home moms. Typical suburbia, but with merfolk with tails and a great deal of visible stress.

> 1 Arnie: He's an actual **Merlock**, too; not just some two-legger with **fins** and **gills** painted on. I don't care **what** you say – it's a **HUGE** deal!
>
> 1.5 Arnie: **And**, to top it all off, I heard that the movie was **amazing.**

Panel 2: Lage removes his hand from Arnie's shoulder. He looks cross. Arnie is confused.

> 2 Lage: The **only** ones who think that movie's "**amazing**" are the **damn two-leggers.**
>
> 2.5 Lage: And they only **think** that because the film was made for **them**, **not** for Merlocks.
>
> 3 Arnie: What does that even--?

Panel 3: Arnie makes a "time-out" sign with his hands (the universal "t"). He is <u>done</u>.

> 4 Arnie: **Okay**, y'know what? **Time out.**

Panel 4: Arnie and Lage are still walking (slightly downhill). At this point, the water should be significantly darker (but not entirely, yet, since they're still technically in the middle-class area of Merlantis). Arnie

is pointing at Lage, clearly done with his comments and wanting some answers. Lage's head is slightly bowed, his eyes in shadow.

5 Arnie: I'm **done** with your **weird comments!** I want some **answers.**

6 Arnie: What is your **problem** with the **two-leggers? Why** do you **hate** them so much?

PAGE TEN

Panel 1: Arnie and Lage continue their conversation. Lage is pointing at the red ball that Arnie is still holding. Arnie and Lage are officially in the Merlock / lower-class part of town. The houses and buildings are ramshackle and destitute. They're so deep that the sunlight doesn't reach, so the water around them is dark and murky. There are few Merlock adults on the street, which is probably due to the number of two-legged cops that patrol the streets, swinging their clubs. However, there is a group of MERLOCK KIDS out. They're sitting in someone's yard, rolling a rock back and forth, obviously bored. Note: use this as a chance to draw a parallel between the upper class Mer-Kids from before and the Merlock Kids. The Merlock Kids should be significantly more dirty, their clothes patchy and ragged.

1 Lage: How can **you** ask that? After what **happened** back there?

2 Arnie: Not **all** two-leggers are like that. I have a friend named **Faewyn**, and she's --

3 Lage: **Not** to be trusted. You may **think** you're friends, but you're **not.**

3.5 Lage: She's just **using** you.

Panel 2: Arnie is shocked and leaning away from Lage, who is yelling at him in sudden rage.

4 Arnie: You can't just **say** that --

5 Lage (burst): **The hell I can't!**

5.5 Lage: I **paid** for that right, when **they** took my **dau--**

6 Merlock Kid Leader (small; off panel): Excuse me...

Panel 3: The Merlock Kids are all standing together. They all stare at the red ball that Arnie is holding, wonder in their eyes. The group's "leader" is the little boy who stands in front.

7 Merlock Kid Leader: ... but what's **that?**

Panel 4: Arnie smiles kindly at the kids as he hands them the ball. The children are ecstatic.

8 Arnie: It's a ball, for **playing. Here –** have fun, **kiddos.**

9 Merlock Kid Leader: Oh **wow!**

10 Merlock Kid 2: **Thanks, mister!**

Panel 5: In the background, the Merlock Kids run off. Arnie is facing Lage again. Lage is running a hand down his face, eyes closed. He looks weary.

11 Arnie: **Sorry.** What were you saying?

12 Lage: Look, kid, all you need to know is **this:**

12.5 Lage: We're no better than **krill** or **algae** to them. They live their long lives on a **whim,** and enjoy **snuffing** ours out without a **second thought.**

Panel 6: Wide panel of Arnie's house, over Arnie and Lage's shoulders (we just see the back of their shoulders and heads). The house is just as decrepit as the rest of the Merlock area of town. However, pretty fabric drapes can be seen through the windows. A mailbox stands at a broken down gate, and the words "THE BLUEFINS" are painted on it in shaky, but still legible, blue paint.

13 Arnie: **Look,** I dunno what **happened** to you, but you can't judge a whole **race** of people based on the actions of a **few.**

14 Lage: ***hmph*** This it?

15 Arnie: Yup. **Home sweet home.**

PAGE ELEVEN

Panel 1: Wide panel, side angle of Arnie and Lage standing in the yard of Arnie's house. They're facing each other, and there should be some distance between them.

1 Lage: **Look**, I don't know about your other **"friend,"** but just **stay away** from the other three. I promise, they're **bad news**, and they **will** hurt you.

2 Arnie: **Alright**, fine. I will. And in **return**, will you take me to see the **movie?**

Panel 2: Close-up reaction shot of Arnie, who is shocked and upset.

3 Lage: ... **No.**

4 Arnie: **What? Why not?**

Panel 3: Close up side angle of Lage's face. His eyes are now open, and he's staring toward Arnie, completely serious.

5 Lage: The movie is... not what you're **expecting. Trust me**, you'll only be **disappointed.**

6 Arnie (off panel): But we--**I'll** be disappointed if I **don't** see it!

Panel 4: Wider shot of Lage, almost from Arnie's POV, but from the direction of the house. Lage has his hand on the gate, and is turned away, as though to leave. However, he is looking over his shoulder toward Arnie, eyebrow raised, as Arnie calls out to him.

7 Lage: My answer is **final.** I'm **sorry.** Have a **good life**, k--

8 Arnie (off panel): **Wait!**

Panel 5: Arnie is smiling. He has his hand outstretched toward Lage, beckoning him. His other hand is on the doorknob of his house.

9 Arnie: **Look**, I don’t want to leave things as they are. **Please**, come in. Rest your **leg** for a bit, and I’ll make you some **fried squid**.

9.5 Arnie: No hard feelings, **promise**.

Panel 6: Lage is next to Arnie. Arnie has the door open and is already halfway inside. Lage is smiling, soft and fond, like an actual grandfather would.

10 Lage: I would like that.

10.5 Lage: **Y’know**, you really **remind** me of her.

Panel 7: Front shot of Lage standing in the doorway, frozen in shock. His eyes are wide, surprised by what he’s seeing.

11 Arnie (off panel): **Who?**

PAGE TWELVE

Panel 1: Over the shoulder shot from Lage, looking into Arnie's house. Arnie's house is barely held together. But it's clear that Arnie takes care of it, because everything is as clean and neat as possible, with small vases of colored seaweed scattered around the place. The house is a single room, with a bed in the corner separated from the rest of the room by a barrier; this is clearly Arnie's "room." In the other corner of the room is Arnie's MOTHER, propped up on a bed and clearly sick, a chair by her bedside. She's old and weak, with an oxygen line running from her nose to a rusted tank; but she still sits up and grins widely at Arnie, who is making his way to her bedside.

1 Mother: Yes, **who** have you brought to see me today, **little starfish?**

2 Arnie: A new **friend**, mom. I'll tell you **all** about it later.

Panel 2: Arnie is sitting on the side of his mother's bed. He is holding her wrist, fingers on her pulse point, checking it against the watch that is also on her wrist.

3 Arnie: First things **first**, how're you doing today?

4 Mother: Just **fine**, sweetheart. Now stop your **fussing** and tell me...

Panel 3: Same shot. But Arnie has released his Mother's wrist and is now checking the oxygen tank. He leans slightly over it, one finger tapping the display. Arnie has a slight smirk on his face.

5 Mother: ... how was it? Was it everything we've **dreamed** it would be? Tell me **everything**; I'm **dying** to know!

6 SFX (from Arnie's tapping finger; tiny): tink tink

INSET PANEL: Close up on the oxygen tank display. It reads "17%" in glowing green numbers.

7 Arnie (off panel): **Well...**

Panel 4: Arnie is sitting up. He rubs the back of his head sheepishly. He looks to the side, like he doesn't want to look her in the eye when he lies.

8 Arnie: ... I didn't manage to make it today. I was too busy. But I'll go **tomorrow**, I promise.

Panel 5: Side angle of Arnie and his Mother. She is reaching up and stroking the side of Arnie's face lovingly. She has a sweet, sad smile on her face. Arnie has reached up and covered his Mother's hand on his cheek, eyes closed. It's a bittersweet, tender, private moment.

9 Mother: I'm sorry for being so **sick**, my minnow.

Panel 6: Flip the shot, so that Arnie and his Mother are silhouettes in the foreground. In the background, still in the doorway, stands Lage. He is frozen there, eyes glistening at what he's witnessing. One of Lage's hands is clenched tight around his cane, the other bracing him against the doorway.

10 Arnie: **Don't** apologize; it's **not** your fault.

11 Mother: **Still**. But I'm sure I'll be all better **tomorrow**. I'll take you, and we'll see the film together... I **promise**.

Panel 7: Close up on Lage's face. His eyes are closed, and his shoulders are slumped, as though he's finally given in. A breath blows out of Lage's mouth as he sighs.

12 Arnie (off panel): Sounds like a **plan**. **Love you**, mom.

13 Mother (off panel): Love you, too, **so--**

PAGE THIRTEEN

Panel 1: Reaction shot of Arnie and his Mother turning their heads and looking toward the door (from the POV of the door / Lage). They both look startled, as though they forgot Lage was there. Both Arnie and his Mother's hands are halfway lowered from their previous positions.

1 Lage (off panel): **Actually**, Mrs. Bluefins, the reason I'm here is to ask your **permission** to take Arnie to the theater tomorrow.

1.5 Lage (off panel): Unfortunately, however, I only have **one** extra ticket.

Panel 2: Arnie is now standing between his Mother's bed and Lage. Arnie is grinning widely, thrilled and triumphant. Lage has a little half-smile, exasperated.

2 Arnie: **Really?!**

3 Lage: Yes, **"really,"** you manipulative little **scamp.**

Panel 3: Medium close up of Arnie's Mother. She has her hands clasped together, and she's grinning with joy.

4 Mother: Oh, this is **perfect!** You can tell me all about it when you get back. Thank you **so much**, sir.

5 Lage (off panel): Oh, it's **nothing--**

6 Mother: **Nonsense!** Please, stay for dinner. It's the **least** we can do.

Panel 4: Lage has a small smile on his face. He has his cane in front of him, and is leaning with both hands on it. Arnie stands near him, leaning against the wall.

7 Lage: As much as I appreciate the offer, ma'am, I'm afraid that I really **must** be getting home.

8 Mother (off panel): Oh. Well, maybe **tomorrow**, then.

9 Lage: **Perhaps.** Nothing in life is certain. But if I can, I shall come. I **promise.**

Panel 5: Lage is walking back outside / off page. His hand is raised in a beckoning gesture. Arnie has pushed himself off from the wall and is following behind Lage.

10 Lage: Now, Arnie, a **word?**

11 Arnie: Sure thing!

12 Mother (off panel): Thank you again!

PAGE FOURTEEN

Panel 1: Wide shot of the house and the yard. Arnie and Lage are standing outside on the front stoop, facing one another. Arnie is only barely outside the open door. Lage's face is stern and almost a little sad. Arnie, however, is absolutely ecstatic. He can't stop grinning.

1 Lage: **Alright**, you got your way. I'll **sneak** you in, but I'm warning you now: you'll **regret** seeing it.

2 Arnie: I promise I **won't.**

Panel 2: Medium shot of Lage. He is slumped, and looks every year his age. He is wearing a sad smile.

3 Lage: **Yeah.** Anyway, meet me outside the theater **first thing** in the morning. I'll get you in through the service entrance.

Panel 3: Medium shot of Arnie. His eyes are bright with excitement. Arnie is grinning, and if it were possible to draw someone bouncing on their toes, that's what he would be doing.

4 Arnie: That's **perfect!** I'll see you then.

4.5 Arnie: Wait, would you like me to walk you **home?**

Panel 4: Lage's back is turned to Arnie, already walking away. He speaks over his shoulder, his arm raised in a good-bye wave.

5 Lage: I'll be **fine.** Go tend to your **mother.**

6 Arnie (off panel): Are you **sure--**

7 Lage: **Shoo!**

Panel 5: Narrow panel (tall and thin) of Arnie with his head out the door, calling after Lage.

8 Arnie: **Thanks again!**

Panel 6: Exact same panel, only the front door is now closed. Arnie is now inside with his mom.

Panel 7: Close up side profile of Lage's face. Lage looks burdened; his brow furrowed and mouth frowning. His eyes are shadowed.

9 Lage: Don't thank me yet, **kid.**

PAGE FIFTEEN

Panel 1: Large front shot of Lage walking down the sidewalk, toward the "camera." He is absentminded, looking at the ground as he walks. On Lage's left side (panel right) are rows of dilapidated buildings bisected with dark alleyways. On Lage's right side (panel left) is a pockmarked, cracked road. In the foreground, silhouettes of a couple of playing Merlock Kids should be seen in the lower left corner of the panel, the silhouette of a ball in midair between them. Note: these are two of the same Merlock Kids from earlier.

1 Lage (thought): Oh, Lage, he tricked you **good. Heh.** I suppose **turn about** is fair play.

Panel 2: Side shot, from the street, of Lage. He has stopped in front of a dark alleyway. Lage looks off to the side of the panel with a soft smile, toward the direction of where the Merlock Kids are playing.

2 Lage (thought): But maybe the stubborn **punk** has a **point.**

3 Merlock Kid 3 (off panel): **Hahaha!**

Panel 3: From Lage's POV, over his shoulder, of the Merlock Kids playing. There are five of them now, all dancing around and having fun with the red ball. The Merlock Kid Leader is tossing the red ball to Merlock Kid 2, and the other three are circled around waiting their turn. All of them have wide grins on their faces. They're taking endless joy from playing with the simple red ball.

4 Merlock Kid 4: Pass it **here!**

5 Merlock Kid 5: **Eeeee!**

6 Merlock Kid Leader: Catch it, **catch it!**

Panel 4: Again, shot of Lage. His eyes are closed, and he has a smile on his face. If you can, try and draw him a little sad, but soft and fond. He's thinking of his dead daughter, and is talking to her ghost (which is not there, just FYI). Behind him, unnoticed by Lage, three sets of hands are reaching out of the darkness of the alleyway. Note: these are the hands of Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine, so

they should be the same pastel colors of their respective skins from earlier. One set of hands is on Lage's left, one set is on his right, and the last set is reaching toward Lage's head.

7 Lage: Oh, **Finna**, you would have **really** like hi--

Panel 5: Same shot, only the hands have grabbed Lage. They have grabbed Lage's arms, and the hands that were reaching for Lage's head are now over his mouth, muffling him. Lage's eyes are wide with panic, as the hands drag him back into the darkness of the alleyway.

8 Lage: **Hrrmff!**

PAGE SIXTEEN

Splash Page
This is a low-angle shot. Lage is on the ground, one arm propping himself up while the other is held in front of him defensively. Lage's face isn't visible; this is almost an over-the shoulder shot, except all of Lage's back is visible from the low angle. Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine are all standing, looming, over Lage. They all have nasty grins on their faces.

Note: *This panel should be vaguely reminiscent of* ***Page Four: Panel 5****. Not exactly, but close enough that the reader should subconsciously make the connection between what they're about to do to Lage, and what they intended to do to Arnie in the beginning of the comic.*

Brine, with a cocky and mean look on his face, is holding Lage's cane over his shoulders, his hands resting over the ends (like a yoke). Marcus is holding his clenched fist in a threatening manner, while Laylyn just smiles, wide and sharp-toothed, down at Lage.

1 Laylyn: Remember him **now?** It's that pesky old geezer who was **sniffing** around, sticking his nose where it didn't **belong**, after we had a little... **fun**, with his daughter.

1.5 Laylyn: **Finna**, was it?

2 Lage: I **knew** it was you. But the **cops** said there wasn't enough proof--

3 Laylyn: Oh, there was plenty of **proof--**

4 Marcus: We weren't exactly **subtle**, after all--

5 Brine: But the thing is, no one **cares** about Merlocks.

6 Lage: **Damn you to hel--**

PAGE SEVENTEEN

Panel 1: Shot of Lage screaming as Brine brings the cane down on his leg, breaking it. Lage is reaching down toward his leg, the bone bending at an unnatural angle.

1 Brine (off panel): Speaking of, put in a **good word** for us when you **get** there, yeah?

2 Lage: **AARRGH!**

3 SFX (from Lage's leg): KRACKKK

Panel 2: Laylyn crouches down to Lage's level. One of her feet is stepping on Lage's broken leg. Lage's teeth are gritted in pain, and he's glaring murderously at Laylyn. Laylyn, however, is smiling sweetly, like a psychopath.

4 Laylyn: **Least** you can do, after you took away our tasty little **morsel** and turned him against us.

5 Lage: He'll **never** trust you--

6 SFX (from Lage's leg; under Laylyn's foot): krrukk

Panel 3: Lage's head snaps back as Marcus punches him in the face. Lage's jaw breaks, and blood flies from his mouth and floats in the water. Marcus has a triumphant grin on his face.

7 Marcus: We know. We're just making sure you don't **interfere** again. **Ever.**

8 Lage: **Agh!**

9 SFX (from Lage's jaw): CRACK

Panel 4: Lage isn't visible in this panel. It's just a front shot of Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine, all standing over Lage and beating down on him. Marcus is punching, Laylyn is kicking, and Brine is swinging the cane. All of them are clearly enjoying this.

10 Laylyn: Say **"hi"** to **Finna** for us, won't you?

11 SFX (from Lage, who's off panel): THUD! WHACK! CRUNCH!

Panel 5: Shot of the mouth of the alley. A silhouette in a uniform can be seen. This is the COP, 30s, a two-legged Merfolk. The alley should be dark (as well as the silhouette, obviously), with some light coming from the street to backlight the Cop. Hopefully, someone has come to save Lage.

12 Cop: **HEY!**

Panel 6: Close up on Lage's face, through the legs of Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine (which are silhouetted in the foreground). He's facedown on the ground, at this point. He looks through their legs (toward the panel), up to the voice that called out. Lage's jaw is hanging loose, drool and blood pooling from his mouth. One eye is swollen shut, and blood cakes his hair and the side of his face. Still, his one good eye is wide, hopeful that he'll be saved.

PAGE EIGHTEEN

Panel 1: The Cop pushes between Laylyn and Brine. He looks down at Lage, frowning. Now that he's not a silhouette, we can see what the Cop looks like. He has a bushy mustache and a square jaw. Since he's a two-legger, he has pastel-colored skin. The Cop is wearing a typical police uniform, blue with gold accents and well pressed. On his hat, the sleeves of his uniform, and the breast pocket is a golden trident symbol. From the Cop's hip swings a brass billy club-like thing, with a red button on the side.

1 Cop: **Oh.** It's a **Merlock.**

Panel 2: Shocked, the Cop catches Laylyn as she fake-swoons against him. Her hand is over her forehead, obviously playing up the "damsel in distress" gimmick.

2 Laylyn: Oh, Officer, it was **terrible.** This mean, scary monster **attacked** me and **dragged** me into this alley.

2.5 Laylyn: If it weren't for my friends, I shudder to think of what he would have **done** to me!

Panel 3: High angle shot of Lage, as if from the Cop's POV. Lage is looking up at the Cop, and one of his hands is reaching up. His body is broken and bent in unnatural ways, and he's bleeding copiously from the beating. Lage's jaw hangs, broken and grotesque.

3 Marcus (off panel): It's all **true**, Officer.

4 Lage (shaky balloon and tail): Nun-uhhhn...

Panel 4: Close up of the Cop's foot kicking Lage in the face. Lage's head whips to the side, blood spurting.

5 Cop (off panel): Silence, **bottom feeder.** I'm taking their **statements.**

6 Lage: **Uhhnnnn!**

7 SFX (from Cop's foot hitting Lage's face): THWACK!

Panel 5: Same shot, but of Lage's head laying on the ground of the alleyway. Blood is pooling under his head, and his

face is bruised and broken almost beyond recognition. He has a resigned, dead look on his face as the conversation continues above him. A tear is gathered in Lage's good eye. He should be looking right out from the panel.

8 Brine (off panel): We were **terrified** of the freak, but we **had** to protect Laylyn.

9 Cop (off panel): You did the **right thing**, lads. There's really only one sentence for Merlock **scum** who attack their **betters.**

Panel 6: A low angle shot of all four of them – the Cop, Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine – standing over Lage. Brine still holds the cane, Marcus is holding his clenched fist, and Laylyn has her arms crossed. The three of them are all grinning with sick joy down at Lage. The Cop has his billy club lifted into the air, his thumb over the red button that extended it into a long, brass weapon. The Cop isn't grinning, but he has a dark scowl on his face.

10 Cop: It's time to **finish** the job.

Panel 7: Same shot as panels 4 and 5. Only now, just before the weapons come down on him, Lage's eyes are closed in defeat. The tear that was in his good eye is squeezed out and trickles across the bridge of his nose, mixing with the blood that is pooled around his head. Note: make the panel dim, as though it's "fading to black."

PAGE NINETEEN

Panel 1: A wide, establishing shot of the front of the theater. Arnie is leaning against the wall, a few posters down from the main doors. The marquee should now read "FINAL DAY: SHOWING GILL OUT." However, a little two-legged KID is walking in front of the theater, holding a couple balloons. The balloons should cover the name of the film (again, I don't want the name shown). What matters is the "FINAL DAY: SHOWING" portion of the marquee, to show that time has passed and this is literally Arnie's last chance.

Panel 2: Arnie is checking his watch. Arnie bites his lip in nervousness. He looks worried.

1 Arnie (small; to himself): Where **is** he...?

2 Laylyn (off panel): **Yoo-hoo!**

Panel 3: From over Arnie's shoulder. Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine are all walking past Arnie. They're smirking at him. Brine is swinging Lage's cane; Laylyn is wearing Lage's old bomber jacket; and Marcus has Lage's uniform hat perched jauntily on his head.

3 Laylyn: See you around, **pet!**

4 Arnie: For the **last time**, my name is--

Panel 4: Arnie is pushing himself off the wall. He has a confused look on his face, brow furrowed in suspicion.

5 Arnie: **... W-wait--**

6 Manager (off panel; burst): **YOU!**

Panel 5: The Manager grabs the front of Arnie's shirt and yells in his face, furious. Arnie's hands are raised, eyes wide in shock. He's been completely distracted from Marcus, Laylyn, and Brine (note: they won't be seen again in this comic).

7 Manager: I **told** you not to come **back!** One of my projector employees didn't **show**, and I do **not** have the patience for you today!

7.5 Manager: I should call the **cops** on you **RIGHT NOW!**

PAGE TWENTY

Panel 1: Same shot as panel 5 on the previous page. Only the Manager is shoving Arnie away. The Manager is still furious. Arnie has his hands raised defensively as he staggers back from the Manager.

1 Manager: Get **out** of here! I've got **bigger** things to worry about.

Panel 2: Arnie has one hand braced against this wall. He caught himself, so he didn't fall over (like he has so many times before). His brow is furrowed, and he has a contemplative look on his face, like he has an idea.

Panel 3: The Manager is walking away, back toward the main theater doors (this is from Arnie's POV). The Manager looks over his shoulder, scowling at being spoken to by Arnie.

2 Arnie (off panel): **Wait!**

Panel 4: Side angle (with the posters in the background) of Arnie and the Manager facing each other. Arnie is grinning, while the Manager has his arms crossed, still scowling.

3 Manager: **What?**

4 Arnie: Why don't I **work** for you? I'll take the place of the guy who didn't show up **today.**

5 Manager: **No.** After all your **stunts** this past week, there's **no way** I'm letting you into my theater.

6 Arnie: I'll work for **half-pay.**

Panel 5: Reaction shot of the Manager. He's shocked, which is a change from his normal angry expressions. His eyes are wide and his mouth parted.

7 Manager: **What?**

8 Arnie (off panel): You only have to pay me **half** of what you'd **normally** pay an employee.

Panel 6: Same side shot as panel 4. The Manager is smiling, greedy. He has his hand held out, and is shaking it with

Arnie. Arnie is grinning, absolutely thrilled that his idea panned out.

9 Manager: I'll have a **replacement** by tomorrow, so this is only for **today**. Am I clear?

10 Arnie: **Crystal.**

PAGE TWENTY-ONE

Panel 1: Front shot of Arnie in the back of a theater auditorium. He's wearing an ill-fitting, too big uniform. Arnie is sitting next to the projector, his hand on the crank. Arnie has a huge, joyful smile – he's finally getting what he's been working for this whole time. Nothing could bring him down. See Appendix: Image D for reference on the projector. It should look just like that, but on legs and with a handle out the side for Arnie to crank. Make it look more steampunky, though. More gears, maybe some glowing blue accents, things like that. Have fun.

Panel 2: The rest of the theater auditorium from Arnie's POV. The screen is lit up, but nothing's playing on it yet. Some of the seats already have people in them, but for the most part the theater is only sparsely filled. Two MERFOLK, a man and a woman, dressed nicely, are shimmying along the aisle to their seats.

> 1 Merfolk Woman: I can't **believe** we're seeing a movie with a **Merlock** in it.

NOTE: *Panels 3 – 7 are all tall and thin, close up shots. All the odd-numbered panels (starting with panel 3) will be Arnie's reaction to what's being said by the Merfolk in the theater. The even-numbered panels (starting with panel 4) will be extreme close ups of Lage's dead body in the alleyway. I want these panels to be bisecting each other, like a quick series of snapshots.*

Panel 3: Medium close up of Arnie. His smile is starting to dim, as the comments from the Merfolk reach him.

> 2 Merfolk Man (off panel): Yeah, but he's a total **idiot**. He almost gets Theolina **killed!**

> 3 Merfolk Woman (off panel): **No!** I **love** her; she's truly dedicated to her craft. Not just **any** actress could work alongside one of those **freaks**.

Panel 4: Extreme close up of Lage's legs, both broken in multiple places. There are holes in his pants, and small crabs (think the underwater equivalent of rats) tear and feast on the exposed flesh.

Panel 5: Close up of Arnie's face (the panels are slowly zooming in on Arnie's reactions as he understands what Lage was trying to tell him all along). Arnie is no longer smiling, and he looks uncomfortable.

4 Merfolk Man (off panel): Too true. But don't worry; he **dies** in the first **fifteen minutes.**

5 Merfolk Woman (off panel): **Really?**

Panel 6: Extreme close up of Lage's face. His hand is curled in front of his face, but one eye is visible above it. It's wide and glossy, unseeing. Dead. He's in his theater uniform, jacket gone (stolen by Laylyn, remember). Blood covers everything. A small crab is tearing a piece of flesh off of his face.

Panel 7: Extreme close up of Arnie's face. At this point, his face should fill the whole panel, his eyes wide with terrible understanding. He is frowning, disappointed and disillusioned. He's broken.

6 Merfolk Man (off panel): Oh yeah. It's **hilarious**, the best part! And as soon as he's **gone**, the movie gets **good.**

7 Merfolk Woman (off panel): Perfect...

Panel 8: A long thin panel at the bottom of the page. From Arnie's POV, it's a lot like panel 2. Except everyone has turned in their seats and are glaring back at Arnie.

8 Merfolk Woman (off panel): ... Um, shouldn't it have **started** by now?

9 Merfolk Man: **Hey!** What are you **doing?** ...

PAGE TWENTY-TWO

Panel 1: Wide panel of just Arnie's eyes, squeezed tightly shut. A tear leaks from one eye.

1 Caption: "... Start the **movie** already, you lazy **frea--**"

2 Mother (off panel): **Arnie?**

Panel 2: Pull back to see that Arnie is no longer in the theater. He's back home, sitting next to his Mother's bed in a rickety chair. He's in regular clothes, not the uniform. Arnie is facing the panel, and his Mother is on his right side (panel left). Arnie's head is turned to face his Mother. She is smiling up at him, her eyes half-lidded from sleep. Arnie's hands are in his lap, but his Mother has reached out and placed one of her hands over his.

3 Mother: How was your **day**, my little **starfish?**

3.5 Mother: Oh, and how was the **movie?**

Panel 3: Side angle of Arnie looking down. His eyes are shadowed, his face serious and solemn.

Panel 4: Close up of Arnie's hands. His Mother is gripping one. Arnie's other hand is open slightly, revealing a silver coin – his payment for his day of work at the theater.

4 Mother: ... **Arnie?**

Panel 5: Arnie turns toward his Mother, smiling brightly. He looks excited, like he did before he knew what the film was about. But there's a tightness around his eyes that reveals that the smile is fake.

5 Arnie: It was **wonderful**, mom. It was **everything** we imagined and **more.**

Panel 6: Pull out to a wide, reverse-establishing shot of the outside of the house. A soft glow comes from the window, and in the foreground are the Merlock Kids, still playing with the red ball.

6 Mother (from inside the house): **Really?**

7 Arnie (from inside the house): **Yeah!** Bobby, the Merlock, was **amazing!** He was the **hero**, and saved **everybody.**

7.5 Arnie (from inside the house): He was so **smart** and **brave**; you woulda **loved** him...

8 Caption (lower right corner): The End.

APPENDIX:

Image A:



Image B:



Image C:



Image D:

