Comic Summary: Lage

By Kimba Rose Williams

ACT ONE

Arnie is thrown out of the main doors of the upper-class theater. The two-legged Manager tosses out Arnie's beanie after him, yelling about how stupid Arnie was to think that a beanie could hide the fact that he's a Merlock. The Manager tells Arnie to never come back, that this place isn't for "his kind."

Arnie crams the beanie on his head with a stubborn expression, then leaves. In the background, an old man observes.

Arnie tries over and over again to get into the theater. He sneaks in through the vents, but when he emerges the Manager is standing there, foot tapping. Arnie puts on an elaborate disguise, and makes it all the way into the theater. However, he doesn't even get to sit down before the Manager's hand comes down on his shoulder. Lastly, Arnie makes a run for it through the front doors, but is only in there for a second before he's tossed right back out, skidding on the street. The Manager comes out and yells that, if Arnie returns, he'll call the cops. Then the Manager slams the door.

ACT TWO

As Arnie picks himself up, Lage, the old man from before (and who was in the background of all of Arnie's attempts) approaches him. Lage tells Arnie that he's gotta stop. Arnie tells Lage to mind his own business. Lage sighs and goes to leave, but is distracted as three thugs – Laylyn, Marcus, and Brine – approach Arnie. They act all

chummy with Arnie, and promise that they can get him in. Arnie, young and innocent, believes them and is super excited. But it's obvious that the three have nothing but bad intentions. Lage intervenes and tells them to scram. He tells Arnie that he's got a bootlegged copy of the film. Arnie believes him, and the three thugs leave, furious.

As soon as they're gone, Arnie asks where the copy is. Lage reveals that he doesn't have one – he said what he needed to in order to get Arnie away from them. Lage tells Arnie that he's gotta be careful; that Arnie can't trust any two-leggers. Arnie flips out, saying that he *needs* to see this film, and that Lage just screwed up his only chance. Lage makes a deal with Arnie: Lage will walk Arnie home, and if, by the time they get there, Arnie can convince Lage that he really "needs" to see the film, Lage will take him. Arnie questions how Lage can get him into the film, and Lage reveals that he works at the theater as a cranker for the reels. It's the only way Merlocks can get into the theaters – as workers.

Arnie agrees, and Lage and Arnie begin the walk to Arnie's home. As they walk, the scenery around them changes from opulent upper class, to a decent middle class, to a dark, grungy, ramshackle lower class. This is the area that Merlocks live. Along the way, Arnie tries to convince Lage to sneak him into the theater. Arnie wants to see the film so bad, because there's a Merlock main character, which is a huge deal and has never been done before. At the end of their walk, when they're outside Arnie's house, Lage tells Arnie that he really doesn't want to see the film, that it'll only disappoint him. Just as Lage is about to leave, Arnie asks if he can come inside for a moment. Lage agrees.

The inside of Arnie's house is falling apart and 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. She's old and weak, but she still sits up and grins widely at Arnie when he comes in. Lage freezes in the doorway as Arnie gently and lovingly cares for his mother, fixes her cushions, and asks how she's feeling. She waves him off, and asks him if he was able to see the Merlock film he was so excited about.

Arnie lies and says that he'll go tomorrow, that he was too busy today. Arnie's mom apologizes, and promises that she'll be well enough tomorrow to take him. Arnie nods and says that he'd like that, and it's clear that the two of them are lovingly lying to each other; and that they've done this before. Lage sighs and interrupts, saying that he'll be taking Arnie to see the film himself, and that Arnie can tell her all about it when he gets back. Arnie and his mom are thrilled. Arnie's mom tries to invite Lage for dinner, but he declines.

Arnie shows him out. Lage tells Arnie to meet him outside the theater tomorrow, first thing in the morning, and Lage will sneak him in. Arnie thanks Lage and offers to walk him home. Lage declines and says that he'll be fine.

However, on the way home, Lage is yanked into a back alley. It's the three thugs. They've returned to make Lage pay for disrespecting them and taking away their "innocent little plaything." They start beating up Lage, violently. Help seems to have arrived when a cop yells from the alley entrance. However, the thugs weave a tale about how Lage had attacked them and they were only trying to defend themselves from the terrifying Merlock. The cop stands over Lage and pulls out his club, stating that attacking

a person of higher station is punishable by death. Lage isn't allowed to defend himself before the cop strikes him.

ACT THREE

The story cuts to the next morning, with Arnie practically dancing in excitement as he waits for Lage to arrive. He keeps checking the time, and getting more and more worried. The three thugs walk past, and one of them calls out, "You're welcome!" Arnie is confused, but thinks no more of it when the Manager of the theater walks outside. As Arnie ducks and hides, he overhears the Manager complain about how his stupid Merlock employee didn't show. Arnie reveals himself and, before the Manager can tell him to scram, offers to work the missing employee's shift. The Manager rejects Arnie, but Arnie, desperate, offers to work for only half-pay. This interests the greedy Manager, who reluctantly agrees. The Manager makes sure to emphasize that it's only for the day, but Arnie is completely fine with that.

The story then cuts to Arnie, in uniform, sitting next to an old-style film camera with a handle on the side. The Manager tells Arnie to crank the handle consistently for the whole film, and he'll pay him at the end of the day. Arnie is super excited, and bounces in his seat as a bunch of one- and two-leggers enter the theater. They're all dressed nicely, and snatches of their conversations reach Arnie: "I can't believe they put a Merlock in this film" … "Yeah, but he's a total idiot. He almost gets the Theolina killed!" … "Don't worry; he dies in the first fifteen minutes" … "It's hilarious; the best part!" In-between comic panels of the comments in the theater are panels of Lage's dead body in the alley.

Each comment causes Arnie to stop smiling, until by the time he's supposed to start the film, he understands what Lage was trying to tell him all along. Tears are in Arnie's eyes as he cranks the film, and bits of racist, stereotypical dialogue come from the screen.

The story cuts from Arnie's heart-broken face in the theater, to Arnie's silent and contemplative face back home. It's late at night, and Arnie sits next to his mother's bed. His mother stirring and grabbing his hand snaps Arnie out of his thoughts. She asks him how his day was, and if he liked the film. Arnie is silent for a moment as he stares at their clasped hands. Then Arnie smiles, wide and beaming, as he "describes" the film to his mom, and how it was about a super-amazing Merlock who saved everybody, and who was smarter and braver than everyone else. Arnie's mom smiles and closes her eyes, listening to Arnie's voice.