

It's not *Trainspotting*

Secrets & Lies
Directed by Mike Leigh
UK, 1996.

BY GREG BAK

It's the British Invasion all over again. Riding high on the critics' "Best Of" lists from 1996 are two films produced by Britain's Channel Four Films: Danny Boyle's *Trainspotting* and Mike Leigh's *Se-*

crets & Lies. While both films were produced by the same company, have British directors and working-class characters, they couldn't be farther apart in terms of style and content.

Boyle's gritty-yet-whimsical *Trainspotting* told the story of a bunch of Edinburgh junkies determined not to "choose life" — or at any rate, to avoid the empty lives of their working-class parents. Leigh's *Secrets & Lies*, on the other hand, is a melodrama of working-class parenting.

Cynthia (played by Brenda Blethyn) is the single mom doing her best. Life has never been easy for Cynthia (audio cut: violins begin to play, softly yet movingly). Her mother died young, leaving Cynthia to look after her younger brother and aging father. Cynthia became a mother herself at the age of fifteen, but gave her first daughter up for adoption. Five years later a second daughter arrived and Cynthia kept this one, struggling to pay the bills on a factory salary. As the movie starts, Cynthia's second daughter is about to turn twenty-one, and her first daughter, all but forgotten, is about to ring up on the telephone.

The twist is that — shock, horror — Cynthia's first daughter, Hortense (played by Marianne Jean-Baptiste), is black, and an affluent upper-class doctor to boot. Hortense and Cynthia's first post-partum meeting is brilliantly shot in a diner, where the women sit side by side in a booth looking never so much like strangers who just sat down beside each other on a bus. And indeed, a bus would have been the only place they possibly could have met prior to Hortense's investigation of her birth records; unless Cynthia had come to Hortense's office to have her eyes checked.

Unfortunately, director Leigh does not allow the clash of upper and working class values, or even the racial crisis of modern London, to intrude into his film. That Hortense is without exception and with hardly a pause accepted as "one of the family" by Cynthia and her other daughter, as well as by Cynthia's brother and his wife, speaks volumes about Leigh's oversimplification of class and race relations in Britain.

But Leigh has other bangers to burn. The focus in this film is on the secrets and lies that exist within every family, and the way these can complicate relationships. As the film builds to its maudlin close, the secrets and lies come out as fast as the hankies and tears (Oh, look! A thunderstorm just broke outside the window!).

But the skeletons in these closets are about as interesting as a diagram in a biology textbook, and the message behind the film as quotidian as the secrets themselves. As one of the characters gravely states in the closing scene, "I'll tell the truth. That way nobody gets hurt." I can begin to understand what drove the *Trainspotting* gang to try heroin in the first place.

Secrets and Lies is playing at Wormwood's from January 24 through 30. All showings are at 9 p.m.

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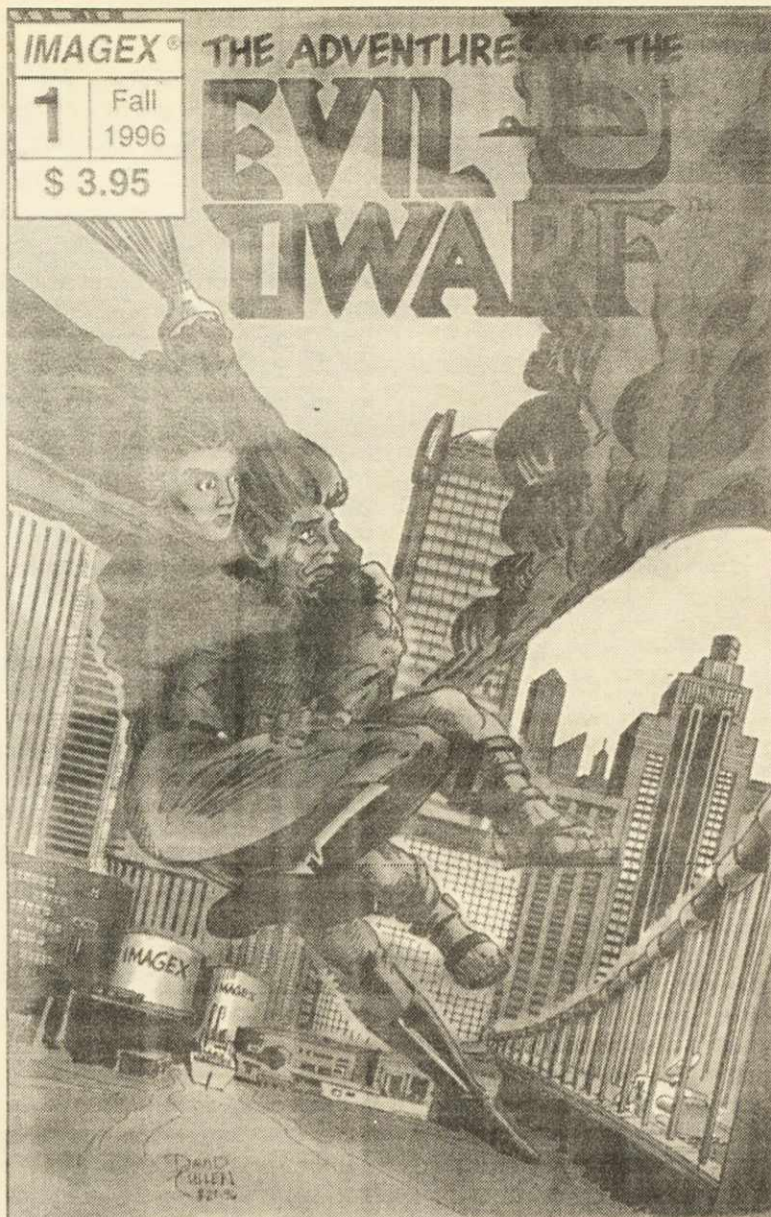
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Halifax gets its own hero

BY STEVEN PATTINGALE

He carries a parachute around with him. He's under five feet tall and could be the last of his kind. He is Halifax's newest hero and you can find him in *The Adventures of The Evil Dwarf*.

The story introduces us to Dwarf (who isn't evil, just misunderstood and given the moniker by the local news). He is strong, but lacks the superpowers of your everyday comic book character and fails to engage in the obligatory superhero battles. Dwarf is a do-gooder, more like Batman than Superman. But unlike Bruce Wayne, Dwarf isn't an incredibly rich detective — he sleeps under the MacKay Bridge and his sidekick is a bat, not a robin. The psychic, flying rodent — named Felix — also serves as the comic's narrator.

In this future world, the Federal Information Bureau (FIB) is the target of Lisa Black, an ace terrorist who indulges in the increasingly trendy habit of cigar smoking. Dwarf gets involved when Lisa is double-crossed and trapped inside the FIB's headquarters. We learn that Lisa and Dwarf both share a mysterious mark on their bodies. This is all I will tell you about the plot so that the creators don't sue me for spoiling the story.

The Halifax of 2025 AD is

composed of Old City and New City. I love the line about Old City: "All of the permanently off-line losers who will never make the rent cut on the other side of the bridge." And the description of the residents of New City? "Big brains, tiny necks, weak muscles and thick wallets."

This book was created by Chris Zimmer. It was written by Zimmer and T.H. Hatté, with artwork by David Cullen and colour by Jay Silver.

What are some of the good things about the artwork in this comic? There are no large-breasted women bursting out of their clothes and it doesn't look like Rob Liefeld's work (no extremely tight spandex here). Instead, the Dwarf's attire consists of a purple vest, green cape, and brown shorts.

My artistic complaint is that though the artwork starts off finely-detailed — with a wicked cityscape on a double-page spread — by the end it seems sketchier. Whether this is to promote a certain atmosphere I couldn't say, but I think the artwork was rushed. That put aside, it was a good first issue for *The Adventures of The Evil Dwarf*.

The 24 page first issue of *The Adventures of The Evil Dwarf* was launched by Imagex in November of last year. It sells for \$3.95 in most comic shops.