

The Secret Agent [15]

2025 Brazil/France/Netherlands/Germany

161 mins

UK released **20 February 26**

Director **Kleber Mendonça Filho**

Screenplay **Kleber Mendonça Filho**

Cinematography **Evgenia Alexandrova**

Music **Tomaz Alves Souza; Mateus Alves**

Cast **Wagner Moura** (Marcelo Alves/Armando Solimoões/Fernando Solimoões); **Carlos Francisco** (Alexandre Nascimento); **Tânia Maria** (Dona Sebastiana); **Robério Diógenes** (Euclides Cavalcanti); **Alice Carvalho** (Fátima Nascimento); **Gabriel Leone** (Bobbi/Abdias); **Maria Fernanda Cândido** (Elza/Sara Gerber); **Hermila Guedes** (Cláudia); **Udo Kier** (Hans)

Director Kleber Mendonça Filho's new film is set in the Brazilian dictatorship of the 1970s and its visual brilliance, sensual big-city intrigue, shaggy-dog comedy, gruesome lowlife walk-ons and epically languorous mystery combine to create something special. It's about the everyday nastiness of political tyranny, high- and low-level, and with its subject matter and present-day perspective, could be compared with Walter Salles' *I'm Still Here*. Yet this is more ambitious, more totally complex and elusive.

Wagner Moura plays Marcelo, a man on the run, or preparing to go on the run, driving across the country in a vivid yellow VW Beetle, which irritates the local corrupt cops. He is a widower with a small boy currently being looked after by his late wife's parents; his father-in-law runs a cinema showing, among other things, Jean-Paul Belmondo in *Le Magnifique*, the trailer calling him "the Secret Agent". Marcelo is not exactly a dissident, not precisely a political agitator or really even a leftist, but he does now find it necessary to get out of Brazil with his son. Yet things are not that easy. In a previous life, Marcelo was an academic working in engineering who found that a minister with private commercial connections was ready to shut down his university department and transfer all its research, with its lucrative industry potential,

to a private company in which the minister owned shares. The resulting quarrel results in the minister hiring a couple of gargoyle hitmen to whack Marcelo.

So Marcelo is spirited away by a mysterious resistance group to a safe house in Recife, under the kindly, grandmotherly care of Dona Sebastiana (a wonderful performance from Tânia Maria). And they provide him with work in a government department responsible for issuing ID cards, ironically, considering the fake identity he is now working under.

It is here that Marcelo hopes to find information about his late mother, and also fatefully makes the acquaintance of a hideously corrupt cop (Robério Diógenes) whose department is using the chaos of carnival to kill people. The local population, already shark-crazy with the release of the film *Jaws*, are electrified at the news that a shark has been caught with a human leg in its stomach – and the mischievous press spreads urban-myth rumours of a supernatural “hairy leg” hopping around at night, terrifying people. So the film transforms political violence into black comedy and mass hallucination. This movie, visually and dramatically superb in every way, moves with unhurried confidence across the screen, pausing to savour every bizarre bit of comedy or erotic byway, or note of pathos, on its circuitous path to the violent finale, including an amazing cameo for Udo Kier as a troubled tailor. The Secret Agent doesn't have the imperatives of a conventional thriller and expecting these will cause impatience. It's more novelistic in its way: a movie of character, a showcase for Moura's complex, sympathetic performance – but also the platform for some thrilling, bravura film-making.

Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 20 May 2025 (abridged)

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