

The Nile Hilton Incident [15] 2017 | Morocco | 111 min

UK release date **8th March 2018**

Director **Tarik Saleh**

Screenplay **Tarik Saleh**

Cinematographer **Pierre Aïm**

Cast **Fares Fares** (Noredin Mostafa); **Mari Malek** (Salwa); **Yasser Ali Maher** (Police General Kammal Mostafa); **Ahmed Selim** (Hatem Shafiq)

A moody, intense Fares Fares commands attention as a weary urban cop mired in a world of backhanders and political influence, who decides, cussedly, and masochistically, to investigate a powerful parliamentarian and businessman in connection with a sleazy murder charge.

Set in Cairo but shot in Morocco and Germany, The Nile Hilton Incident draws more on vintage European and Stateside models in its take on systemic police corruption and its moody noirish feel: The French Connection, Heat and Jean-Pierre Melville are all there in the mix, while the Tahrir Square protest backdrop recalls the way the Rodney King riots were used in another rotten police saga, Dark Blue.

The investigation that comes to obsess Fares' character, police major Noredin, is based loosely on the case of a glamorous Lebanese pop star, Suzanne Tamim, who was found dead in her Dubai apartment in July 2008. In May 2009, a prominent Egyptian Shura Council lawmaker and businessman was convicted of her murder, along with the hitman he had paid to carry out the killing. When both men were found guilty and sentenced to death, justice seemed to have been served on a rich and powerful member of the Cairo establishment – but it didn't last long, with Egypt's Supreme Court quashing the earlier ruling on a technicality in March 2010, and commuting the politician's sentence to 15 years.

Saleh plays fast and loose with the facts, characters and dates, condensing the story arc down to ten days and shifting the action forward to January 2011, when the revolution that would eventually topple president Hosni Mubarak

kicked off. The murder takes place not in Dubai but in the luxury Cairo hotel that gives the film its name (now the Ritz-Carlton).

Noredin takes the same backhanders and protection money as his colleagues, but it's clear he didn't sign up for this. When Kammal assigns him to the case of Lalena, a celebrity singer who was found murdered in a room at the Nile Hilton, he becomes doggedly absorbed in the investigation, persisting even when it leads to the door of Hatem Shafiq, a construction magnate and member of parliament who beams down from billboards across the city with the promise that he is "building the new Cairo".

Genre touches are mostly well blended in with the film's social commentary. One important strand of this focuses, through the character of a Sudanese chambermaid who witnessed the crime, on the dire plight of sub-Saharan immigrants in a country where life is already tough enough.

There's a small loss of impetus in the closing scenes, when the street protests that exploded on 25 January provide rather too neat a conclusion to a necessarily messy story. But at least it allows a film poised between righteous anger and resigned cynicism to remind us how this particular revolution ended up. When a protestor stops others beating up the gun-toting Noredin because "we are not like them", the irony is deafening.

After: Lee Marshall, Screen Daily, 20 January 2017

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