



Fifty Shades Darker, All Hype, No Pleasure

Description

A perfect flick for a Valentine's Day romance?

By **Luc Archambault**

(In case you haven't seen this movie, please be warned that there are major spoilers in the text ahead.)

It's that time of year again, the time for red roses, chocolate boxes and the occasion, for every self-respecting lover with a considerate touch, for a romance-filled movie (no, we are not talking about *Rings* nor *Murder to the Sixth Degree*). We are, of course, talking about *Fifty Shades Darker*, the follow-up to the 2015 *Fifty Shades of Grey*, launched also on Valentine's Day weekend.

The plot? We follow the ups and downs of a power couple, Christian Grey (Jamie Dornan) and Anastasia Steele (Dakota Johnson). If you remember the end of the previous instalment in this series, Christian and Ana had broken up, Anastasia having developed enough self-confidence to spread her wings.



But then, why should there be a sequel, and even a third episode if they had definitely separated? After their reconciliation and renegotiation of the terms of their BDSM contract, and in a surge of independence, Ana finds a new job in a publishing house headed by Jack Hyde (Eric Johnson, unrelated to Dakota Johnson), Christian's love rival. Of course, in perfect multi-billionaire white knight manner, Christian quickly buys the company of his challenger.



In the meantime, Christian's parents are organizing a masked ball, and in preparation for this event, he takes Ana to the Esclava beauty salon that he co-owns with his former dominatrix and initiator, Elena Lincoln (Kim Basinger). Ana is crushed initially but quickly forgives her beautiful prince. However, Elena, a good friend of Christian's mother, confronts Ana during the ball. As for Jack Hyde, he is fired on the spot by Christian after he reveals himself as a sexual predator, trying to possess Ana by force.

After offering her the job of her ex-boss, Christian then invites Ana to move in with him. But while he goes to her apartment to collect Ana's personal belongings, one of Christian's ex-submissives confronts her with a weapon. Christian returns to the apartment just in time and submits the assailant in a BDSM ritual. Ana, horrified at the need of her lover to express his libido through domination, flees the apartment.



Subsequently, Christian convinces Ana to come back to him and the next morning he asks her to marry him. She does not accept immediately, asking for time to reflect on his offer before giving her answer. Meanwhile, Christian has to travel for a business meeting but his helicopter suffers an in-flight break down and crashes in a dense forest.

While Ana and Christian's family are waiting at his place, desperate for news of him, he reappears at the apartment seemingly safe and sound. Ana, mad with joy, agrees to marry him on the spot. I'll let you find out the rest of the story by yourself, but you see where I'm going. The only revelation: the movie ends with a threatening Jack Hyde who remains in the shadow, lurking in the background. In fact, the major difference between the novel and the movie is precisely this character. His role in the movie has been toned down, but in the novel he clearly is the one who sabotaged the helicopter and represents a far greater rival in the novel than in the film.



Concerning the title *Fifty Shades Darker*, it is somehow misleading. What's so dark about this movie? The frolic scenes? Not by a long shot. They are all very tame, even when compared with the previous instalment. As for nudity, apart from a few brief scenes of breasts and buttocks, those who dream of full frontal nudity will be disappointed – nothing below the waist for these characters.

Yes, they make love three or four times, but nothing that would titillate a true follower of BDSM. No, the only dark side of this film stems mostly from Kim Basinger's Botox frozen face, which at times seems about to fissure. Moreover, the names given to secondary characters seem like a farce, totally assumed or not: Lincoln, the liberator of slaves? Hyde, the dark half of Dr. Jekyll? A little too easy, in my view.



And the question that really matters: how does all this translate as a story, as a movie? More importantly, is it a good film for a romantic rendezvous? Not so bad, some will say. It can titillate despite its vanilla flavouring, especially as Dakota Johnson offers a beautiful presence on screen, as usual. But we are not talking about great cinema here, even if this film remains interesting in its own way, with its tame side.

For a true love romance with your sweet half, I would rely more on red roses and chocolate, or your own BDSM imaginary if the heart tells you, rather than on this film.

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came back to Montreal to pursue his unrelenting quest for artistic meaning.

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