

***Fifty Shades of Grey* arouses sex toy boom**

NEW YORK CITY, US: The erotic bestselling novel *Fifty Shades of Grey* was devoured across the world by millions, from British housewives to Guantanamo Bay inmates...

Now manufacturers and retailers are hoping that its Valentine's Day movie release will fuel a boom in sex toy and bondage accessory sales. Fans are avidly awaiting the big screen sexual adventures of business magnate Christian Grey and the young graduate Anastasia Steele whom he seduces.

The expected blockbuster will screen 20 minutes of lovemaking between Grey, played by British actor Jamie Dornan who shot to stardom playing a serial killer on BBC series *The Fall*, and Steele, portrayed by Melanie Griffith's daughter Dakota Johnson.

And to cinemagoers hoping to get in on the action, American sex shops are stocking up on everything from blindfolds to bondage gear, determined to ride the wave of celluloid-inspired desire.

Sex toy sales benefit

"*Fifty Shades of Grey* was the most influential cultural phenomenon for sex toys' sales that I've seen," says Claire Cavanah, co-founder of Babeland, which has stores in New York and Seattle.

Her company has added 20 especially branded *Fifty Shades* items and says appetites have been whetted by film trailers.

"We're ready to respond," Cavanah told AFP.

Those willing to shell out the big bucks can indulge in an "Ultimate Date Night Set" for \$152, which includes a "greedy rabbit" vibrator. Those on a tighter budget might prefer a "vibrating bullet" for \$13.

Cavanah says the release of the novel, written by former TV executive, British mother-of-two, EL James, fuelled a 40% sales increase at Babeland's SoHo store in Manhattan alone.

Sales jumped more than 500% for pleasure balls, used by Steele to gear up for sex with Grey, as well as riding crops and cuffs that also feature prominently, she said.

Large increase in sales expected

British company Lovehoney worked closely with James to design official *Fifty Shades* sex toys in late 2012 and before the

movie release have branched out into luxurious items. Lovehoney co-owner Neal Slateford told AFP that the books were instrumental in making sex toys and bondage mainstream, and says he is expecting a large increase in sales.

"Bondage play, which was previously a relatively niche activity, suddenly became something that was enjoyed and talked about by millions of people," he said.

The books have been translated into 50 languages, and have sold more than 100 million copies worldwide, making it one of the fastest-selling book series ever. It's perhaps so mainstream that US discount retail giant Target, which specialises in everyday items, is selling *Fifty Shades of Grey* lubricant, blindfolds and "love rings."

Ready to explode

Slateford credited the books and growing acceptance of sexual openness with causing "the adult sex toy industry to explode."

"We have experienced spikes in sales after each movie trailer has been released which gives us a good indication of just how influential this movie will be," he added.

Its official spin-off merchandise includes replicas from the books such as handcuffs, a riding crop, spanking paddle, blindfold, the silver balls and now high-end luxury bondage items. US manufacturer California Exotic Novelties says its sales of pleasure balls more than doubled from 800-900-000 a year to a million in six months following the release of the books.

CEO Susan Colvin says the company is prepared for a corresponding increase in sales after the movie.

"We expect - and hope - there will be an increase in sales," she said.

Lisa Berman, CEO of publicly listed, West Coast-based sexual wellness retailer Peekay, agreed.

"Just having the movie come out will have a positive impact on sales for our entire industry," she said.

And she doesn't think it'll be a one-hit wonder.

Universal Pictures and Focus Features acquired the rights to James' entire trilogy - which includes follow-up reads *Fifty Shades Darker* and *Fifty Shades Freed*.

The industry "is more prepared knowing there's a movie, a DVD, then likely a second movie, a second DVD, and a third movie, a third DVD," said Berman.

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge

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