

Joker: *Folie a Deux* Where a clown is an epitome of evil



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Clowns have always clowned. Jokers have joked, and my boyhood memories of them have been one of joy and laughter. In circuses, they acted as hyphens between two sombre, serious and deadly acts. These were death-defying, and clowns came along to lighten our mood. But jokers as villains? Unthinkable. But yes one man visualised them like that. Brutal and sadistic. He is movie director Todd Phillips.

His *Joker* which hit theatres five years ago was a largely appreciated spin on the DC Comics 'bad man' with actor Joaquin Phoenix as Pagliacci Arthur Fleck in the costume of a clown. But beneath it lay a vicious rogue.

Now, we have a sequel, *Joker: Folie a Deux*, which though is not as gripping as the first outing. This is the problem. Often sequels squander away the goodness of the originals.

Along with Phoenix we have Lady Gaga as Harleen Quinzel. She is good though not as impressive as she was in *A Star Is Born*. Together they weave a story on screen, and it begins with

Fleck being in jail waiting for trial for the multiple murders he had committed a couple of years ago. When he falls ill, he is taken to hospital. It is there that he meets Harleen. The film follows the couple as they fall in love and indulge in numerous pranks that include starting a fire.

Fleck's lawyer plans to argue that her client has dissociative identity disorder and his "joker" personality is what drives the man to commit crimes.

In a parallel take, we see Quinzel and Fleck coming together, and what is more she admires his personality and misdemeanours.

The performances are sensational, and the movie weaves in and out of songs and music giving it a touch of illumination and brightness – all in an effort to drive away the darkness and gloom of the subject. Lady Gaga is arresting, though I felt she was a tad better in *A Star in Born*. Phoenix is steely and stern, fitting into his role with all the criminality it requires. A perfect pair that carries the work in a masterful way. Will the work have a chance at the Oscars?

The writer is a senior movie critic and author