



Creed

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATED M / 132 MINS.

DIRECTOR Ryan Coogler
CAST Michael B. Jordan, Sylvester Stallone, Tessa Thompson

PLOT Shunning his privileged life in LA, Adonis Johnson (Jordan) – the son of deceased boxing champion Apollo Creed – heads to Philadelphia to seek out his late father’s friend and former boxing rival Rocky Balboa (Stallone) in the hopes the aging champ will train him.

OVER THE DECADES, THE *ROCKY* franchise has displayed the same kind of resilience and underdog appeal of its lead character — just when you think it’s down for the count, it leaps up swinging. After 2006’s well received *Rocky Balboa* provided a fitting coda to the series, it seemed like the champ had retired his boxing gloves for good. Not so.

Reimagining *Rocky* for Millennials is Ryan Coogler, writer-director of the Sundance Grand Jury Prize-winning *Fruitvale Station*, here picking up the story of Adonis Johnson (*Fruitvale*’s Michael B. Jordan), an angry youth with daddy issues, raw boxing talent and a need to prove himself based on his own talents (hence the surname subterfuge).

Creed hits all of the boxing movie beats you’d expect, but the film generates goodwill and boasts a massive heart thanks to the appeal of the leads: Jordan commanding the screen with physical and emotional intensity as the dogged Adonis; Tessa Thompson as spirited musician neighbour/love interest Bianca and Stallone, who hasn’t been this good on screen in decades. He radiates dignity and warmth when Rocky’s saddled with one big final fight of his own, and what on paper seems like a cynical cash-in suddenly becomes the greatest *Rocky* film since, well, *Rocky*. **JAMES JENNINGS**

VERDICT A knockout success with kinetic action, appealing cast and a huge heart.

Rocky (Sylvester Stallone) and Adonis (Michael B. Jordan) punch some balls. (Steady up the back).



The Night Before

★★★★★

OUT NOW / RATED MA15+ / 101 MINS.

DIRECTOR JONATHAN LEVINE
CAST JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT, SETH ROGEN, ANTHONY MACKIE

Thanks to the responsibilities of adulthood, three 30-something friends (see left) are about to end a tradition spending Christmas Eve together, begun in the wake of the death of Ethan’s (Gordon-Levitt) parents in his teens. And, after years of trying, they scored tickets to New York’s most exclusive party, The

Nutcracker Ball. Cue drugs, drinks and misadventure. So far, so Harold and Kumar. Well, sorta: older and wiser. Jonathan Levine’s bawdy-bongy take on Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (co-written with Rogen’s producing partner Evan Goldberg) delivers a surprising and rare gross-out-cum-friendship-cum-Christmas fable that is both eye-wateringly hilarious and quite touching. The cast, including Jillian Bell and Lizzy Caplan, share an easy chemistry, cameos and superior knowing nods abound and one immutable truth emerges – you really can do anything to Miley Cyrus’s *Wrecking Ball*. A cracker. **DANIEL MURPHY**