

Creed III (2022)



Creed & Damien face off in the ring. (c) United Artists

There is no trace of Rocky Balboa in this, the ninth installment of the franchise that began with 1976's *Rocky*. Like the other films, this one is not just about boxing—to me a hateful, destructive sport—but about the personal struggles of the man wearing the gloves. In this episode world champion Adonis Creed (Michael B. Jordan), son of Rocky's former rival, has been retired for several years from the ring and founded an academy to train the next generation of boxers, and then someone from his past manages to return him to the ring.

That past we see in a flashback to Creed's youth (played by Thaddeus J. Mixson) when he and teenaged Damien (Spence Moore II) were involved in a fight but the latter was the one arrested and sent away to prison, thus ending Damien's promising boxing career. Adonis will feel guilty because he had run successfully run away from the scene and his friend had kept quiet about his involvement. Indeed, Damien was closer to a brother than a friend, the two having been abused by foster parents and guarding each other's backs. Now released from prison, almost 20 years later, Damien (Jonathan Majors) shows up seeking help. He has kept himself strong by exercising in prison, and now hopes to resume a career in the ring. Although managing the current world champion, Adonis

agrees to take on his old friend.

Adonis has been living a comfortable life with his wife Bianca (Tessa Thompson) and young daughter, Amara (Mila Davis-Kent). The mother, having to give up a singing career due to partial deafness, produces music in her private studio. Their daughter is totally deaf, so the family communicates with each other through sign language. When Adonis agrees to his old friend working at his gym, he has no idea that the man has ulterior motives that will upend his life, even bringing the champ out of retirement to defend his title against his friend turned opponent. Adonis has long suppressed his childhood trauma, and now will have trouble sharing it with his sympathetic wife. And so the domestic scenes become as crucial as those in the ring.

The fight scenes are brutal, further convincing me that it is an inhuman sport—and yet the story is gripping enough to keep me watching and rooting for Adonis. This time around Michael B. Jordan not only continues to play Adonis, but he directs the film as well. The climactic scene in the ring is suspenseful, but the aftermath when Adonis approaches his rival is far more inspiring. This is a film that promises much to the viewer and delivers on it.

This review will be in the March issue of VP along with a set of questions for reflection and/or discussion. If you have found reviews on this site helpful, please consider purchasing a subscription or individual issue in The Store.