

FILM REVIEW: ‘Creed’ a Compelling, Character-Driven ‘Rocky’ Spin-Off



Phylicia Rashad and Michael B. Jordan play mother and son in ‘Creed’

By *Kam Williams*
For *The Skanner News*

When most people think of Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), what automatically comes to mind is the iconic image of a gutsy underdog easy to root for who held his own in the boxing ring against a variety of imposing adversaries. Each installment of the series has basically revolved around the hype leading to a riveting championship bout between a veritable David and Goliath.

Directed by Ryan Coogler, *Creed* is a worthy spin-off which not only pays homage to that tried-and-true formula but also represents a bit of departure for the beloved franchise. What’s new is the fact that this film devotes as much attention to character development as to ratcheting up the tension surrounding the fateful showdown.

The picture reunites Coogler with Michael B. Jordan, the star of his directorial debut, the critically-acclaimed *Fruitvale Station*. Here, Jordan plays, Adonis Johnson, a juvenile delinquent who’s had his share of scrapes with the law, thanks to a quick temper and a tendency to settle differences with a pair of unusually powerful fists.

Just past the point of departure, the hot-headed orphan is informed by Apollo Creed’s (Carl Weathers) widow (Phylicia Rashad) that he is the illegitimate son of Rocky’s original arch-enemy. That at least explains the incli-

nation to fight that’s ostensibly been baked into his DNA.

Fast-forward a few years, when Adonis has learned to channel his anger and explosive might via boxing. Over the objections of his adoptive mom (Mrs. Creed) he decides to follow in his father’s footsteps.

So, he moves from L.A. to Philly where he finds Rocky running a restaurant called Adrian’s. Adonis prevails upon the ex-champ to serve as his trainer. Rocky agrees on the condition the kid changes his surname to Creed, and the next thing you know the kid rises in the ranks to #1 contender and luckily lands a title fight with Pretty Ricky Conlan (Tony Bellow).

Meanwhile, Adonis falls in love with his next-door neighbor, Bianca (Tessa Thompson), an aspiring hip-hop artist on the verge of making it in her own right. Away from the gym, he spends some quality time with Rocky, too, offering a little heartfelt, if unsolicited advice that just might save his aging mentor’s life.

“Rocky” and the next Roman numeral might not be in the title, but this engaging and faithful seventh episode includes all the fixings to amount to a highly-recommended spin-off of the storied franchise.

★★★★ Excellent
Rated PG-13 for violence, profanity and sensuality
Running time: 95 min.
Distributor: Warner Brothers Pictures

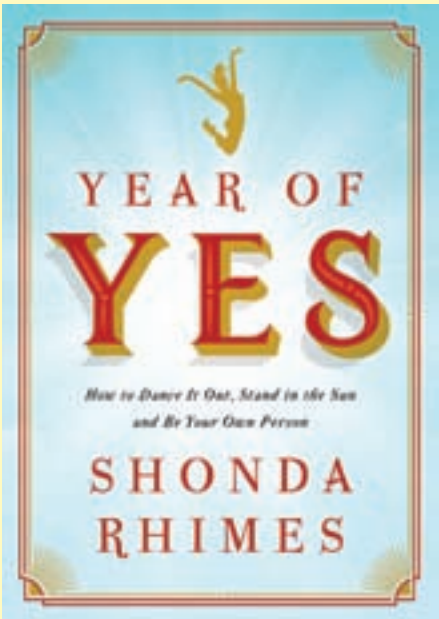
BOOK REVIEW: ‘The Year of Yes’

How to Dance It Out, Stand in the Sun and Be Your Own Person

By Shonda Rhimes
Simon & Schuster
Hardcover \$24.99/352 pgs
ISBN: 978-1-4767-7709-2

Book Review by *Kam Williams*

“In this poignant, hilarious and deeply intimate call to arms, Hollywood’s most powerful woman, the mega-talented creator of Grey’s Anatomy and Scandal, and executive producer of How to Get Away with Murder, reveals how saying ‘yes’ changed her life--and how it can change yours, too.”
-- Excerpted from the Bookjacket



Writer/producer Shonda Rhimes has created some of the most groundbreaking television series around. The gifted Renaissance woman is the brains behind such iconic characters as Scandal’s Olivia Pope, Grey’s Anatomy’s Dr. Meredith Grey, and How to Get Away with Murder’s Annalise Keating.

Despite being showered with accolades, however, Shonda pretty much remained under the radar for years, invariably turning down invites to deliver commencement addresses, to appear on TV talk shows and to attend posh showbiz soirees. And she always had ready excuses for remaining a homebody, between the

three daughters she was raising as a single-mom and the incessant demands of a skyrocketing career.

Truth be told, Shonda was a painfully-shy introvert given to panic attacks prior to press conferences and other public appearances. Fortunately, she was finally forced on Thanksgiving Day 2013 to face her agoraphobia when her sister Delores staged an intervention, asserting, “You never say ‘yes’ to anything.”

Shonda grudgingly agreed to embark on an ambitious, yearlong project during which she would not only

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