

# **Rocky 3 Narrative**

**by Phillip W. Weiss**

**Rocky 3 is an excellent movie but it could have been iconic if the story had more depth. Clubber Lang, the antagonist, is portrayed as being nasty, angry, and vicious, a totally unsympathetic character, a bad guy with no redeeming social values, and someone who must be destroyed. But what the movie fails to do, and this is a major omission that changes the entire storyline, is validate Clubber's anger. The fact is that Clubber has legitimate cause to be angry. As Mickey himself admits, Rocky, through no fault of his own since it was Mickey he set up Rocky's fights, was ducking Clubber, refusing to give Clubber the same opportunity that Apollo Creed gave Rocky. This injustice is compounded by the fact that unlike Rocky, who got his shot at the title through sheer luck, Clubber has earned a chance at the title and to show the world that he is best and to prove that Rocky is nothing but a phony who has no business being anywhere near a boxing ring and is a pompous and effeminate fraud. Hence, Clubber is fed up and becomes more vociferous with his demands until Rocky has no choice but to take on this one last challenger, the man seething with rage who wants to unload everything he has on Rocky and not only beat him but humiliate him and possibly kill him and who is NOT a set up. Clubber is the first legitimate challenger Rocky will fight, a fact that causes Rocky to go into an emotional tailspin triggered by Mickey's admission that all of Rocky's fights were set up and that Clubber could**

win. Now, unsure of his own legitimacy as a professional prize fighter. Rocky experiences a crisis of confidence. All of Rocky's friends urge him to quit, to retire and just fade away. Mickey tells Rocky that Clubber will kill him. His wife, Adrienne, tells Rocky to quit. No one believes Rocky can win, and they are correct. Rocky had lost his edge, had become soft and complacent. He became civilized and concerned with material comforts, a far cry from his humble beginnings in the streets of Philadelphia where he made a living as small time hoodlum, a collector of debts, and slum dweller. That Rocky still existed, but now it was buried deep inside his brain, concealed by lies and denial as to degree of his own moral corruption. Rocky let himself get bought off. In return, Rocky wallowed in the delusions of grandeur based on nothing. His fights were fixed, his manager was a joke, his wife was weak, and his brother-in-law a first-class fool and drunk. They all sucked off Rocky, making him soft and pliable. So long as Rocky remained haplessly fooled, he was a gravy train for those around him. The last thing they wanted was for Rocky to lose. But then Clubber came along, and he wasn't a set-up, one of Rocky's chumps who would just be another paycheck for Rocky. Clubber was legitimate, his own boss, beyond corruption, unwilling to play the Rocky game, and willing to do anything to win the championship, including purging Rocky from the fardels of life. Reality came knocking on Rocky's door. Quit and he would be branded a coward or fight and risk being exposed as a fraud. Unsurprisingly, when they finally fight, Clubber destroys Rocky. Rocky is a fraction of his former self. The champion was reduced

to a simpering wimp, beaten like a dog and sent packing, his manager dead and his wife terrified by an uncertain future in which she is again poor and nobody. Then Apollo Creed intercedes, gets Rocky in shape, restores confidence in himself, and of course, Rocky being the good guy, beats Clubber in a rematch, an outcome that given the nature of the story is totally illogical. In the rematch, Rocky is in better shape, but has lost a lot of weight, is at least thirty-five pounds lighter than Clubber who looks to be in better shape than in the first fight and is determined to defend what it took him years to obtain. Clubber has as much of an incentive to win as does Rocky. Plus, Clubber is clearly a superior fighter. He is bigger, stronger, more aggressive and angrier. Clubber has already proved that he is willing to go to any lengths to be champion. Thus, there is no reason why Clubber would ease off in a rematch. If anything, he would be even more prepared to win decisively. He humiliated Rocky in fight one; in fight two he would be going in for the kill. Rocky may have regained his confidence but that alone would not be enough to cause him to win. Plus, Rocky would know that Clubber was not a set up and that he would be fighting for his life. Anyway, the movie needed a happy ending, so Rocky wins, regains his pride and confidence and the love of his adoring family and friends while Clubber is carried out of the ring, vanquished by the same opponent who was the proverbial good guy.

Clubber Lang is Rocky's alter ego. He is Rocky from Rocky 1. Yet, in the movie, Clubber is too two dimensional. He is a contrivance more than an actual character, and that treatment of Clubber weakens the story. Clubber had reason to

be angry. His anger wasn't superfluous. It had legitimacy. Mickey was blocking Clubber, preventing Clubber from getting what was his due. Not only was that unfair to Clubber, it perpetuated the lie that Mickey had woven around Rocky, who was living a lie that Mickey promoted ostensibly to protect Rocky from being killed. If Rocky had been truthful, he would have told Clubber, "I know where you are and I know where you are coming from." And to Mickey, Rocky should have said, "Mickey, you're fired." Again, to Clubber, "Clubber, bring it on. In fact, let's train together." That doesn't mean Clubber and Rocky are friends. Clubber is fed up. He wants to destroy Rocky. The problem is Rocky. He let himself be emotionally swindled by his own manager. To improve the story, I would have included a scene in which Rocky tells Mickey, "You weren't protecting me. You were protecting yourself. You had it good with me being champ. You still think I'm a chump a bum, who needs you. I don't need you for anything. You came to me for a job, and I gave you a job. Your job was not to protect me. I can protect myself. I'm from the street, no matter how much money I have. Now this guy Clubber is gunning for me, wants to fuck my wife and take what is mine, and I'm supposed to walk away from that, Mickey? Are you serious? You didn't do me any favors. I wear fancy clothes and have a big fucking house, but I'm still a street guy. You think I'm a nobody and maybe I am. But that guy Clubber thinks enough of me to hate me, so I'm not doing too badly. Now, Mick, pack our bags and clear out. You can go protect some other poor bum and get that scowl off your face." When asked about Rocky, this is what Clubber would say: "Rocky is nothing but

a chump, a bum dressed up, but still a bum. All his fights have been set ups. He lucked out with Creed who was just hot air. I would have murdered Creed in one round. They would have had to carry Creed out of the ring in a body bag. I wanted to fight Creed, but he ducked me because he knew he couldn't beat me, that I would kill him, I mean like make him dead. Creed was all noise, a black man acting like he was the white boss, just plain stupid. Now, this bum Rocky is nothing but a phony. You know it. He's a wimp. I can't believe he ran with gangsters, was in a hood, collected money. That takes guts, guts that he doesn't have, because if he had guts, he wouldn't be ducking me. He'd come out like a man, take his punishment as I set him straight." And then there is Adrienne, who tells Rocky he can't win. Rocky tells Adrienne, "Did you say I can't win? Am I hearing things? You didn't say that when Creed gave me a shot. Before Creed gave me a shot, you didn't give me the time of day. True, we fucked and that was good, but to you, I was just a punch-drunk bum, a nobody, which is exactly what I was. Well, to you I'm still a nobody. Clubber wants to fuck you. He says he's a real man. You and Clubber have something going on? You think he's more of a man than me? If you do, then get out. You can take everything. I don't need a damn thing from you. I'm from the street and that is where I belong. This house and fancy clothing is a lie. This isn't me. This is what you wanted. You can have it. I'm leaving and I am telling Clubber that you are now available. Meanwhile, I have business to attend to, and you're not part of that business. If you think, I'm gonna let a loudmouth like Lang push me around, then you have seriously misjudged

me. I dealt with clowns like him before and I will make him eat his words whether you believe in me or not. So, get on out of here, and take all you want. It is all junk to me, the car, the house, the furs, the jewelry, all expensive garbage. Give it to charity, for all I care. Let Paulie take this junk. He can have the house. I got to live. I thought we had something special. I thought you loved me and believed in me. But I was wrong. I was your gravy train and now someone wants to derail me. Well, think again, honey because this train will be going full speed and nothing will stop it." Again, to Clubber, "Bring it on, pal, but don't say I didn't warn you. You are just another me, so I'm already in your head. Where you are I have been, so quit the jiving because I'm through with talking. You want a part of me? Then come on by and try to take a part of me and see where that gets you. I will deliver a nuclear strike on you. You talk about body bags? I talk about incineration with me being the incinerator. I will flame throw you into oblivion. I will evaporate you and then blow you out of my ass like a foul wind. You want my wife? You can have her. She's all used up, so you can have sloppy seconds. I don't drive used cars. In fact, you can even have the belt. I don't need it. It's just a hunk of garbage. I just want the pleasure of beating you to a pulp. That will complete my life and shut you up once and for all."