

# Brick Mansions (2014)

Rated PG-13. Running time: 1 hour 29 min.

Our content advisories (1-10): Violence 6; Language 4;  
Sex/Nudity 2.

Our star rating (1-5): 2

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but violence  
takes lives away.

*Proverbs 11:30*

Detroit is becoming the city to go to for film depictions of the breakdown of law and order and the resulting violence. Director Camille Delamarre and scriptwriter Luc Besson have moved their story from the Paris of *District B13* (Besson directed *Banlieue 13*) to the beleaguered Motor City of 2018, thereby changing the theme from troubled immigrants to that of resentment over racism, poverty, and corrupt politicians involved in massive urban real estate deals. The film's title is the name of the huge high rise public housing project that has become so crime-ridden that the city has walled it off and placed a contingent of the National Guard at the gates. The Mayor (Bruce Ramsay) controls city and business matters, including a proposed renewal project from which he will profit. Inside Brick Mansions hip hop producer turned actor RZA's Tremaine Alexander reigns supreme as the drug lord.

Mainly, however, the film exists to provide a showcase for the incredible jumping and climbing skills of David Belle whose character for an unexplained reason is a resident of the decaying housing project. Belle, whose athletic and martial prowess was on display in the original French film, is the convict Lino Dupree, teamed with Paul Walker's undercover cop Damien Collier to take down the drug lord and his army of

goons. The latter is fueled with the black rage against whites described so well back in the 60s by James Baldwin. Alexander has obtained a Russian rocket with a nuclear warhead and has ordered the Mayor to pay a huge sum of money or he will destroy all of downtown Detroit. Were this film to have been produced in Baldwin's time the drug lord would have been a Black Panther, and his monetary demand would have been called a "reparation" for past injustices.

Collier has sprung Dupree from prison by an elaborate plot with the intent of overcoming Alexander. Dupree's motive for helping is that the drug lord has kidnapped the convict's lover Lola (Catalina Denis). The pair battle dozens of thugs as they cavort on and off the walls of the hallways and flee across the rooftops, tumbling over ledges, jumping across large spaces from building to building in exciting scenes that keep the viewer's adrenalin flowing full blast. There is even a somewhat ridiculous sequence that is equivalent to the old melodramas in which the villain tied the damsel in distress to railroad ties in anticipation of a train scheduled to pass by soon. The 21<sup>st</sup> version of this is to tie her to the rocket so that she can see the electronic timer count down the hours, minutes, and seconds until blast off. Will our heroes arrive in time to free her? And will the villain ever stop recruiting his goons from "The Gang Who Can't Shoot Straight"? No matter how many hundred bullets a second their heavy guns fire, they always miss our heroes. They do tear up the ground a lot, make the sides of a car door look like a large salt shaker, and provide plenty of work for window glaziers and wall plasterers. Oh well, at least fans of the actor Paul Walker, tragically killed in an auto accident, can pay him homage, even if it is in such a mindless movie. (No discussion questions for this one. Well, maybe, you can spend some time with these two: 1. Why did we sit through this mindless affair? 2. Given its Imdb estimate of a \$28,000,000 budget, how many quality films such as *The Lunch Box* or *Joe* might be made? )

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