

Blu-ray Review: ‘Promised Land’ Leaves Potential of Premise Unrealized

Submitted by [mattmoviemann](#) [1] on April 29, 2013 - 1:09pm

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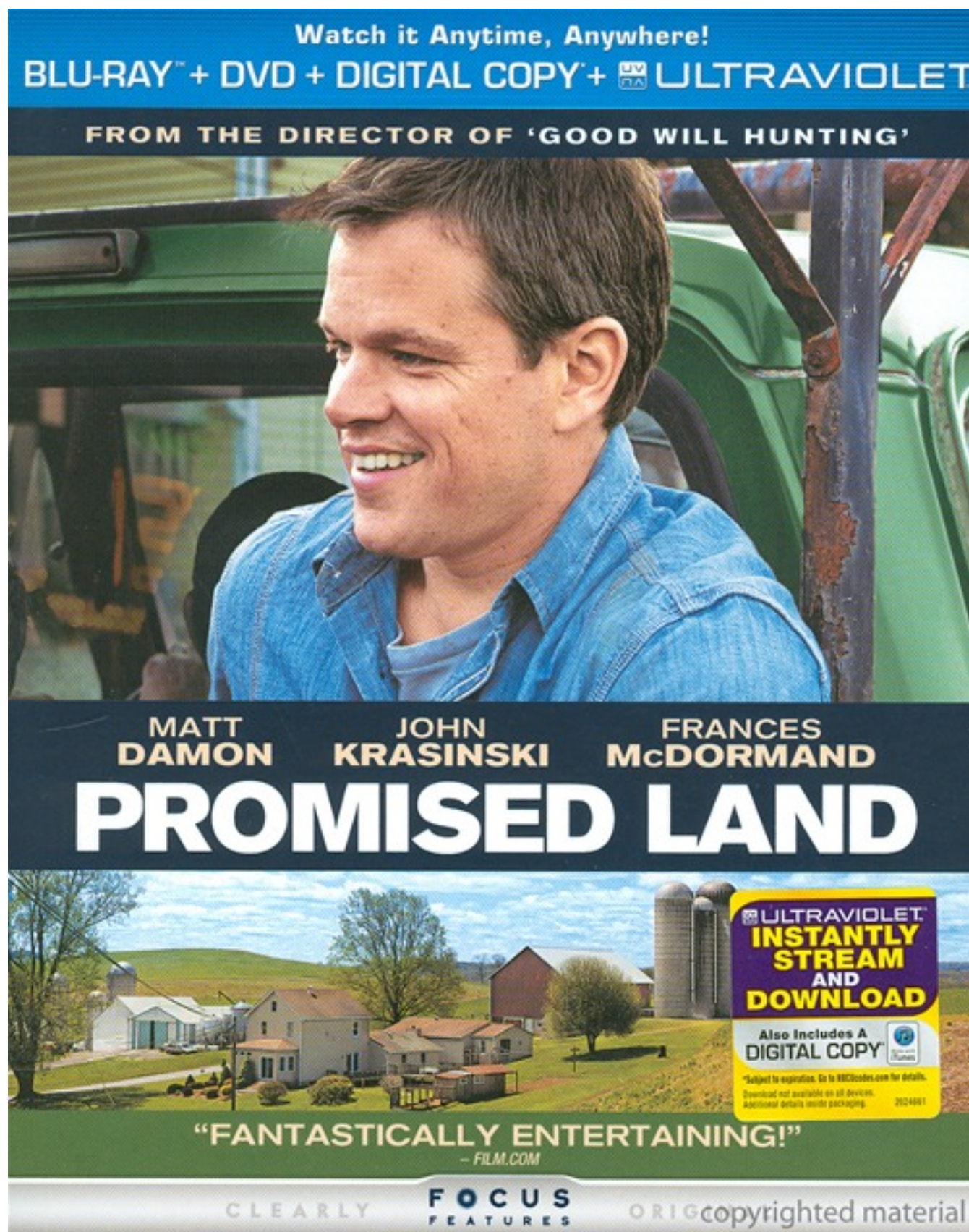
CHICAGO – When a film promises to tackle a timely topic like fracking, it has raised the bar of expectations considerably. Sure, the filmmakers don’t need to take a stand on the issues they raise, but they have an obligation to explore them with some level of depth or insight. Otherwise, they risk getting charged with committing a “bait and switch,” and that’s precisely what Gus Van Sant’s “Promised Land” does.

It sets up a juicy conflict between an energy company salesman, Steve (Matt Damon), and an environmental activist, Dustin (John Krasinski), only to paint their personalities in the broadest of strokes before obliterating their credibility with a series of hackneyed twists. Damon still manages to deliver a fine performance, but he’s ultimately let down by the script he co-wrote with Krasinski. It lacks both the wit and intelligence that made Damon and Van Sant’s previous collaboration, “Good Will Hunting,” so memorable.



Blu-ray Rating: **2.5/5.0**

As Steve goes house-to-house offering financial relief to rural dwellers in exchange for the right to drill on their property, he sports laughably artificial, region-appropriate attire covered in dangling price tags. It’s a funny sight gag, but Damon makes his character’s innate compassion for farming communities ring true. When he pitches his master plan, he appears to be convincing himself as much as the citizens that he has their best interests in mind. He’s basically a decent guy who believes he’s helping the very people he’s hurting, while Dustin is a stereotypical villain whose every move is designed to get under Steve’s skin. Krasinski has had an engaging screen presence in past films, most notably in “Away We Go,” but this role draws solely on the actor’s reservoirs of smug self-satisfaction. He is hatable from the get-go, and that makes his interplay with Steve less interesting. It’s depressing to watch acting giants such as Frances McDormand, Hal Holbrook and Rosemarie DeWitt wasted in such thankless roles. Their mere presence makes the picture infinitely more watchable, but it only deepens one’s regret of the unrealized potential onscreen.



Promised Land was released on Blu-ray and DVD on April 23rd, 2013.

Photo credit: Universal Studios Home Entertainment

One thing that can be said in the film's favor is that it doesn't condescend to its rural characters with the liberal venom that marred overtly broad satires such as "God Bless America" and the deplorable "Butter." Yet its glib attempt at tackling an issue as vital and important as fracking is insulting in itself. Damon and Krasinski's intention to make their film a conversation starter rather than a message movie is noble but dramatically inert. By avoiding the very questions it raises, the film emerges as a bipartisan letdown destined to satisfy very few. If Damon and his collaborators really wanted to provoke audience's minds, they shouldn't have delivered an ending smothered in forced monologues and reassuring smiles.

"Promised Land" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.85:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English and Spanish audio tracks, and is available in a Blu-ray/DVD/UltraViolet/digital copy combo pack. Extras include only one extended scene where Damon displays some of the motormouth eloquence he showcased throughout "Hunting," and a glib featurette where Krasinski claims that every film Van Sant has made is a "perfect piece of art" (apparently he's never seen the "Psycho" remake).

'Promised Land' is released by Universal Studios Home Entertainment and stars Matt Damon, Frances McDormand, Rosemarie DeWitt, John Krasinski and Hal Holbrook. It was written by John Krasinski and Matt Damon and directed by Gus Van Sant. It was released on April 23rd, 2013. It is rated R.



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