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PUBLIC DOMAIN SCORNFULLY PEERS THROUGH THE LENS OF REALITY TV

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HOW LOW CAN reality television go?

And is there any aspect of human life too personal to be on view to all? Apparently not, according to Public Domain.

Public Domain is a smart, vicious little satire of everything creepy about reality television -- which, come to think of it, is everything -- and if your idea of humour runs to the dark side, this one is for you.

Public Domain is all about a TV show that seeks out the biggest losers and celebrates the best of human misery.

Best of all, those losers don't even know they are part of the entertainment.

Public Domain is a TV show put together via hidden cameras and unaware participants. It's a bit like The Truman Show, but with way more bite.

Don McKellar and Jason Jones play the pseudo-corner hosts of Public Domain.

They make aimless chit-chat, insult the contestants and watch over viewer voting in a superior sort of way.

They also explain what to look for when voting on a grand prize winner from among the contestants: Despair, blighted hope, betrayal, failure, heartache, fear, doubt, futility.

The list is long and bleakly hilarious.

Public Domain shows a couple of already-eliminated contestants, but mainly focuses on three hopeless cases: Terry (Nadia Litz) a cute cokehead, Peter (Mike Beaver), a pathetic neurotic who hasn't left the house in years, and Bonnie (Nicole deBoer), a young lush obsessed with the '80s punk music movement.

The viewer gets to observe Terry pimping and lying to get her drugs.

The audience can see Peter totter around in his dressing gown in his filthy house and thrill to his tortured attempts to go outside.

People can look on as Bonnie drinks more and ignores her demented 11-year-old son as he sets fire to his pets.

It's all so wildly engaging!

The idea of surveillance as entertainment is insidious and creepy.

It's taken to a sick extreme in Public Domain, and while the film is often very funny, it is also quite disturbing.

Writer/director Kris Lefcoe gets her message across through a very strong script and terrific performances from a cast that includes Lindy Booth, Dov Tiefenbach and Salvatore Migliore.

This is Lefcoe's first feature, and it's a winner.

Public Domain, which won the Audience Award this week at the Beverly Hills Film Festival, is at the Royal Theatre only until Sunday.