What effect does every nasty thing you post, paste, type, share or even think online actually have? The mass of negative energy that surrounds daily life on the internet can be overwhelming and without a clear portrait of consequence, director Michael Gallagher thinks kids today aren't learning a damn thing. SMILEY (available now on DVD and digital download), using the tried and true slasher for an era steeped in tech, imagines a new kind of urban legend, one which summons the eponymous murderer to do your impulsive bidding. Fango spoke with Gallagher about underslashing, oversharing and what exactly is wrong here.

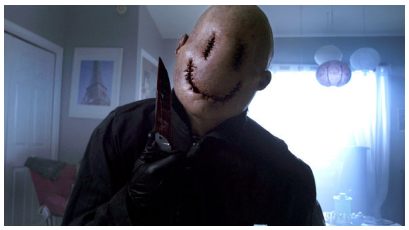
FANGORIA: Why make a slasher? Having gone ahead and tried to craft a contemporary one, rooted in tech, do you find the genre still relevant?

MICHAEL GALLAGHER: I would go so far as to say the slashing elements in SMILEY are of the "diet" variety. There's some real intense slashers that can be made. This was from the concept of doing something of the internet age, kind of a cautionary tale about sharing online and what kind of business they're getting connected with on stream and chat sites and all that. So, it was something we wanted to use the slasher framework for and really discuss the implications of that and some of the theories that go along with internet culture. As far as the slasher genre goes, I think it's the idea of someone who's pissed, who wants to have vengeance, revenge, or just wants to have fun, and is going around picking people out by hand. I think, personally, it's much scarier than the idea that there's ghosts in the house. That's sort of a trend right now, either someone's possessed or there's a ghost in the house. I'd like to see more of a man with a vendetta.

FANG: Everyone can a be bit cynical about the way technology infects our lives, but when did you feel so impacted as to make a film out of it?

GALLAGHER: I think, in my own life, for a long time I was really opposed to getting a smart phone. I eventually caved and got one and just the way I became attached to it made me really uncomfortable. And the way I see people engage with their technology makes me very uncomfortable. A lot of the youth, or teens, they just overshare. We're going to have politicians in the future, and we're going to be able to look at their search history and see what they've been up to. I don't know if we'll be able to elect anyone [*laughs*], because I feel like we've all wanted to see either "2 Girls 1 Cup" or some horrible effed up thing that's out there. We've all been curious. This is putting it in a genre setting and saying what if you did that

and could actually summon someone to murder. What would that be like? Personally, I feel like it's more of a problem with the generation that's grown up strictly with the internet and doesn't understand the consequences of that. So, this film is really for them. It's a cautionary tale to them, because most people who lived in the pre-internet , pre-streaming video era, they don't take it as seriously as these kids. They understand the consequences more than the children do.



FANG: What's interesting about SMILEY is that in a lot of slashers, the typical grating characters are jocks, but SMILEY is rooted in a new age where people who would be perceived as nerds—coding, hacking, staying online—they're the ones that are serious jerks.

GALLAGHER: I'm always surprised when people who are tech savvy in a movie are sort of awkward or shy. Sure, there's that, but everyone I know who really knows their shit with technology is much more like the Jimmy Fallon character from SNL. Most people I know who know the internet have a pretty good sense of humor, and they don't really have time for people who don't understand it. THE SOCIAL NETWORK was one of the first times I've really seen a great character in Mark Zuckerberg. It was someone who knew his shit and didn't have any patience for people who didn't understand. In this movie, it was the idea of having characters that knew their shit and are using that power to maybe kind of fuck with someone who's not up to speed.

FANG: Your killer, Smiley, essentially has an emoticon carved into his face. What's the line between that being effective and massively silly?

GALLAGHER: I have made a horror movie where the bad guy has an emoticon on his face. I think that's a slight accomplishment in itself [*laughs*]. I think audience will interpret or take away different things. I think the older audience, I think the people who are

much more ingrained in the genre will maybe not see SMILEY in the same way that a fourteen or fifteen year-old that's grown up on the internet and nothing else. I made this film for the teen audience, for people who watch the stuff I make online. Having them at screenings, and seeing them react to it—they really respond to it in a much different way than grown-ups respond to the film. It's one of those things where you talk about so many things that are inside baseball on the internet and referencing so many different things, the movie's really for that audience. The people that don't like it, they're usually a little older and they've seen everything you can see in the genre. This is sort of, I would say, this is really for the people who getting interested in horror.

FANG: Are you seeing the film reach that audience? It's interesting seeing an indie, or limited release film or something like DETENTION that's geared, or will speak to a certain age set. Are they finding it on VOD?

GALLAGHER: I think that's what we'll start seeing more of. We have these great channels and portals to get content out now directly to audiences at home. On SMILEY, we were fortunate enough to have a theatrical release and to come out and have people from all over to be able to see it. Now that the film is coming out on DVD and on iTunes, the real audience it's intended for can see it. I think we were able to, on a microbudget, do the most that we could. It's hard to get a movie out without a huge budget, but we've been extremely fortunate to have a huge response on our trailer and being able to talk about the film in so many outlets. I feel like, for the most part, our audience has been able to see it or is now able to see it. The response I've been getting is incredible. It's just one of the challenges of the time and the changing landscape of distribution.

FANG: How nihilistic are you yourself about of all this versus the film?

GALLAGHER: I think the film is very nihilistic; almost too nihilistic in a couple of cuts that we did. So, I don't know if that just comes from my own taste, or what. I just think that people, we're in a weird time where you have something like Anonymous where they go out and they do things for, more or less, social justice or things that they see are not done properly in the world. They're going to go and take that power away from those that have it and show that the people can do something and they can do it online. They can hack and create their own outcome. There are other people that do things that aren't for the greater good, that are doing things that if most people heard stories of what a group of kids online are doing, it would shock them. There's also things that they post and do, that are just like, "why?" The only reason is, is that it's for fun. I think that trend is growing and the idea that we're all kind of interconnected, we're so desensitized by horrible images and oversharing and access to content we've never

seen before. I think the kids are almost like blank slates that to feel something, they have to fuck with people. That's something I wanted to explore in the film. To me, that's scarier than any creature coming at you, or any paranormal concept; the idea that humans really just want to watch everyone die for fun, that's horrifying to me.