

Over the GW, which marks the feature acting debut of George Gallagher, isn't a horror movie, but it's scarier than most entries in that genre. Based around a young man's experiences in a drug rehab center devoted to the controversial practice of "reprogramming," the film has an unsettling ring of truth to it, which would come through even if it weren't touted as based on some of the childhood experiences of writer-director Nick Gaglia. As the lead character Tony, Gallagher (who also served as a producer) carries the film with a strong performance which is especially notable for its subtleties. He eschews the histrionic acting moments that often go hand-in-hand with drug rehab and psycho ward stories, but simultaneously develops a dense character arc which takes Tony from rebel to obedient drone slowly, and believably. The drug rehab facility is more of a cult center than a hospital, unlicensed by any medical board. Patients sometimes spend years in the Branch Davidian-like group, which manages to keep its members through physical violence and by convincing them that they'll die if they ever leave the organization. Director Gaglia himself spent years in just such a facility, the now-defunct KIDS of Secaucus, New Jersey, although he didn't let his star in on that fact until after the shooting. Recalls Gallagher, "Nick didn't tell me this was his story until we wrapped. I started crying because I felt so much empathy. It was four years he was there and he essentially never went to high school." Gallagher then adds an unsettling kicker for anyone who has seen the harrowing film, "According to Nick, *Over the GW* is a watered-

down version of what really happens in these places."

Reprogramming facilities like the one in the film unfortunately still exist all over the world, and in fact may be growing in number. Says Gallagher, "There are people who are in these places and the worst thing they ever did was masturbate. Their parents freaked out and decided they were sex addicts. These groups transport kids out of the United States. They accept Medicaid. They brainwash the parents, too. They convince them that their kid will die without this and that they should take a second mortgage out on their house. My character in the film believed he would die without it." Screening the film has put Gallagher in contact with many "alumni" of such places, and the filmmakers have received thousands of emails from victims of similar programs which prompted them to organize a special screening at the Pioneer Theater in New York for them. Gallagher elaborates, "We had people who flew in from all around the world for this screening. It was the most gratifying experience I have ever had artistically. I was more worried about what they would think than getting reviewed by the critics. I was worried that these people would say I didn't do them justice." Thankfully, the opposite was the case.

Next up for Gallagher is a project he's developing with writer Allan Knee ("Finding Neverland" playwright), which he will once again co-produce and star in. ▼

Over the GW opens on September 21st at the Laemmle Theaters in Los Angeles.

Don't Try to Send Him Back to Rehab

George Gallagher has a breakthrough with *Over the GW*

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