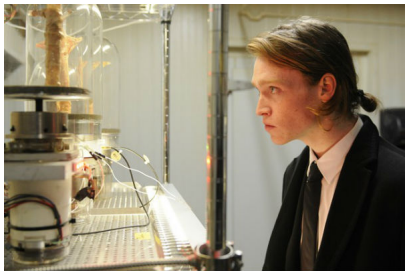
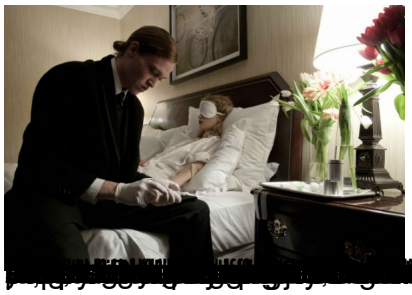
It's a sunny afternoon when I'm unexpectedly invited to plunge into darkness with Brandon Cronenberg. He's a first time filmmaker (and with that name you can guess his heritage) about to debut his feature at the Cannes Film Festival to an inevitable mix of fame, glitz, support, and snobbery. The movie is ANTIVIRAL, a vicious little cyanide pill of celebrity satire and body horror set in a not-so-distant future society where fans n' sycophants pay to be infected by a disease from their favorite celebrity. The familial influence on the material is obvious, but we'll spare Brandon further discussion of that, if only because it will probably be the focus of everything else written about him this year. The one similarity worth noting is that like his father, he's a pretty quiet and unassuming guy, which runs counterpoint to his decidedly sick and twisted imagination. Thank god, because I only need to get a certain amount of creepy out of a single interview and I'd prefer to get that from the film rather than the filmmaker.

Our meeting starts with some clips from ANTIVIRAL. The movie officially locked up the final sound mix just days earlier and only a handful of private screenings have been held so far. The first scene takes place in the office for the celeb-virus clinic where various clients discuss their donors of choice. It's an eerily antiseptic setting, with patients dropping lines like "Did you know he used to torment his lovers by packing his foreskin with spices before intercourse" to ensure that even an expositional scene can induce a quiet dry heave. From there, a client discusses his love of famed beauty Hanna Geist and how her natural deformities required fashion designers to create her special underwear. Perversion and obsession mingle in a delightfully distressing way as a detached employee of the mysterious company (THE LAST EXORCISM and X-MEN FIRST CLASS' Caleb Landry Jones) listens to the request and agrees to provide the disease in question. In the next scene, Jones wanders into the sleeping starlet's room to extract some blood and just when the needle punctures her skin in extreme close-up, the screen freezes.

Now, I've got a personal issue with needles, so at this point I'm squeamish and uneasy from that shot as well as the cold, dread-filled atmosphere of the film. Unfortunately that close-up wasn't supposed to be the end of the preview and the wonders of consistently undependable technology rob me of the money shot. "It's too bad because the next scene was really what I

wanted to show you," Cronenberg admits. "But I can promise a spectacular bloody vomit moment" At the very least, the guy knows what the good people of FANGORIA enjoy. A nice blast of bloody vomit certainly never hurt a horror picture.



Even if we weren't able to see that particular geyser of karo syrup, Cronenberg ensures Fango that there is plenty of that in his first foray into horror, more than he even expected from the outset. "It actually became a bit more of a horror movie as we were making it. It's not that we added stuff that wasn't in the script, it's just that there were certain things in the script that I imagined being tamer, and then when it came time to shoot it, we decided that we had to go all the way to get the right effect. You know, I never pictured blood everywhere in certain scenes [laughs], but it ended up that way by the end."

Certainly that's a statement that will ensure horror fans add ANTIVIRAL to their 2012 movie vegetation schedule, though Brandon didn't necessarily design his film in purely genre terms. "It's not really a straight horror film," he admits. "There are definitely horrific elements to it and I'm sure other people will consider it that, but it wasn't necessarily my intention." The origins of the project didn't come from a desire to dabble in genre games, it was routed more in personal experience. "I started writing it back in 2004. I was having this fever dream and thinking about the physicality of illness, the fact that this thing had come into my body from someone else's body and the intimacy of that. I thought that was an interesting platform to talk about celebrity obsession because I thought in that culture, you could easily imagine someone who sees things that way and wants to share that intimacy with the object of their obsession."