

## Fango Flashback: “INSIDE THE WICKER MAN”

Written by Jason Tannis

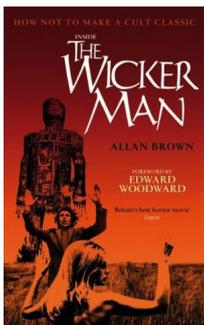
Sunday, 06 March 2011 10:40

---



The top coverline on last year’s reissue of Allan Brown’s making-of tale—“How Not to Make a Cult Classic”—is misleading for two reasons. First, it implies that there is a right way to make a cult classic. This is a status that is earned usually when a film fails to connect with the general public upon release but eventually garners a loyal following. *THE WICKER MAN* certainly fits that bill. It was barely released in 1973 and nearly buried by its owners but, as screenwriter Anthony Shaffer notes, it refuses to die.

The other thing that the title promises is a disastrous journey to this cult classic status. If you are looking for a story on par with the calamitous productions of *APOCALYPSE NOW* or *FITZCARRALDO*, you won’t get that. What you will get is a meticulously researched and entertaining report on this curious early ’70s gem about an uptight detective (Edward Woodward of TV’s *THE EQUALIZER*) sent to a remote Scottish isle to find a missing girl. Once there, he finds the community, run by the suave, charismatic Summerisle (Christopher Lee), to be a highly sexual pagan society whose values and rituals are in stark contrast to his own. And he senses something sinister.



Brown was lucky enough to have the co-operation of most involved. His timing was good as well as, since *INSIDE THE WICKER MAN* was written, its screenwriter and two of its stars (Woodward and Ingrid Pitt) have passed. Readers will hear about the difficulties of shooting in Scotland during a fierce early winter and making it look like spring. They will bear witness to the escalating battle of egos between Shaffer and director Robin Hardy and learn about the “virtual performance” of Swedish hottie Britt Ekland. There are many other amusing anecdotes of what happens when you get a group of artists in the middle of nowhere making a weird thriller. And, of course, horror fans will hear from the generous and erudite Lee. The octogenarian star was ecstatic to be playing something other than Dracula and has since been a determined champion of the film which he believes has his best performance. (His second favorite

## Fango Flashback: "INSIDE THE WICKER MAN"

Written by Jason Tannis  
Sunday, 06 March 2011 10:40

---

performance—GREMLINS 2. Seriously.)

From here, Brown recounts the rollercoaster ride of the film's release. The film's studio changed hands and its new administrations didn't get this strange film, having it shortened considerably to fit in a double bill. Within a month in early 1974, it had come and gone. In the late '70s, the film had another theatrical run thanks to Abraxas, whose founders were ardent fans of the film. In typical WICKER MAN fashion, there are alternate prints, a guest appearance by Roger Corman, missing negatives and lawsuits aplenty. Through this all, the film gained a somewhat larger audience.

INSIDE THE WICKER MAN does not have one strong single storyline. It meanders, taking breaks to look at the novelization of the film and to argue whether it should be considered a horror film or science fiction. On top of that, it has several appendixes. One could think of it as not just a behind-the-scenes story, but more like a DVD special edition bursting with a cornucopia of extras. The quality of the writing is strong, too. Brown's love and interest in the film come through clearly and he also takes a look at the road the film has taken with a healthy sense of the absurd.

Of course, your enjoyment of INSIDE THE WICKER MAN depends on your love for this film or your curiosity about the business of film in general. But if you part of the cult following of this film about a cult, this tome is like preaching to the converted.

{comments on}