In THE FIFTH SEASON (having its North American premiere at the current Toronto International Film Festival), writer/directors Jessica Woodworth and Peter Brosens have created a dark, scary vision of a world without spring.

The film is set in a village in the rural Ardennes of Belgium. The locals depend on their crops for food, and have tried folk magic to end a snap of bitter cold—but their effigy of sacrificial Father Winter eerily refuses to burn. The fertile season never comes, and nature goes out of whack (the title refers to this distortion). Increasingly desperate, the villagers begin to contemplate the use of a species of magic that will be familiar to fans of THE WICKER MAN: human sacrifice. Hope of averting this bloodshed, and finding another way to stave off the apocalypse, falls to a group of unlikely heroes: two teenaged lovers, the local philosopher and his son. With this premise as their starting point, the directors create a tour de force of subtle filmmaking and brooding meditation on nature.

Despite the aforementioned similarity, THE FIFTH SEASON doesn’t play like a WICKER MAN remake; the movies are very different. Where WICKER MAN’s characters and imagery are colorful, FIFTH SEASON is all about gloom. WICKER MAN stars Christopher Lee, while FIFTH SEASON features a cast of haunting newcomers. And while WICKER MAN deals with many deep subjects, love is not one of them, whereas FIFTH SEASON is concerned in significant part with love and its absence, and how nature relates to those states. Many horror movies

and other sources have been distilled to make FIFTH SEASON a pure, cold and original vision.

But fans of THE WICKER MAN should hope this new film finds wide distribution. Since Robin Hardy’s iconic trip to Summerisle in 1973, no work has dwelled on that journey’s central tropes with anything like FIFTH SEASON’s enthusiasm. The filmmakers’ passion ultimately carries them away from Summerisle to their own wondrous, unforgettable appointment.