

Some background information about the films you are viewing will be helpful:

***Útlaginn*** (“Viking Outlaw”) based on ***Gísli saga Súrssonar*** [The Saga of Gísli Son of Súr] cf. *The Saga of Gísli*, tr. George Johnston (1963) [on course reserve], or any other tr.

Protagonists:

- **Gísli Súrsson** [the least bad-looking of the lot]
  - o his wife, **Auðr** [whose voice narrates the film]
    - **Vésteinn**, Auðr’s brother & Gísli’s blood-brother
    - Vésteinn’s two sons
  - o his foster-daughter, **Guðríðr** [usually close by Auðr’s apron]
- **Þorkell Súrsson**, Gísli’s brother [looks a bit like a dwarf out of Tolkien]
  - o his wife, **Ásgerðr**
- **Þórdís Súrsdóttir**, Gísli’s sister
  - o her husband, **Þorgrímr** goði [has straight-cut bangs]
    - **Þorkr** (“the Stout”), Þorgrímr’s brother & Þórdís’s 2nd husband

Some minor characters to notice:

- Þórðr (“the Coward”), a bondsman in Gísli’s household
- an unnamed bondsman in Þorkell’s household [has blondish hair]
- an unnamed sorcerer [distinguishable by his white head of hair]
- Ingjaldr, a farmer in another fjord: a friend or kinsman of Gísli’s
  - o an unnamed female slave in Ingjaldr’s household
  - o Ingjaldr’s son, an idiot (i.e. epileptic?)
- Refr, an independent farmer (possibly a *þingmaðr* of Þorkr’s)
  - o his wife, noteworthy for her shrewish tongue
- Eyjólfur (“the Grey”), cousin of Þorkr & a headhunter [a bit squinty-eyed, too]
  - o Helgi (“Spy-Helgi”), a minion of Eyjólfur’s [balding in front]

The plot (its first half, at any rate) is really a murder mystery so I shan’t give up too much of it in advance, except to say that its driving force are the multifaceted and tense relations (somewhat simplified from the saga) among the three children of Súr.

The funky LSD-induced scenes are nightmares that Gísli has over the years and which seem to foreshadow, at least in his opinion, future events. The recurring motif (borrowed from *Njáls saga*) is of the Fates, personified as bloody-handed hags, weaving men’s destinies on looms made of human entrails and weighted with skulls.

The story is set in Iceland in the middle of the tenth century, where Gísli and his siblings have quite recently moved & established themselves as respectable, influential *bændr*. Þorkell and Þórdís live under one roof, Gísli lives close by. They have all married notable locals. Þórdís is married to a *goði*; Gísli and Þorkell’s wives also come from respectable families. We soon learn that the spouses also have histories which predate the saga: Auðr, Gísli’s wife, was apparently involved with Þorgrímr *goði* in her youth, while Ásgerðr, Þorkell’s wife, has had a thing for Vésteinn, Auðr’s brother. (Got all that?)

This 1981 film was directed by Ágúst Guðmundsson, shot in Iceland, and features an Icelandic cast. The version we’re watching is obviously dubbed and also somewhat shortened from the Icelandic original, all of which unfortunately makes it a little harder to follow than it ought to be. Studying the family tree above in advance and making sure that you know who’s who early in the film should help.