

VINLAND

a synopsis by Pål Ødegård and Christer Andresen (based on events recorded in the Norse sagas)

The Viking saga of Leif Erikson, a chieftain heir who struggles to escape the violence of his father's pagan faith, and discovers America 500 years before Columbus.

LEIF ERIKSON is born the son of chieftain ERIK THE RED in Iceland, in the 10th Century AD. When his father is outlawed for slaying three men, Leif is forced to flee his home and live with his foster father, the slave TYRKE. While Erik the Red sails west and discovers Greenland, young Leif is initiated into a world of history and philosophy under Tyrke's tutelage. He learns of geography, of the possibility of great lands out west, and that science offers a peaceful worldview to counter the violent reality of his father's pagan faith.

Some years later, Leif is taken to his father's new home in Greenland, but he defiantly harbours an ambition to become more than just Erik's heir. When he turns 20 years of age, he sets out on his own ship to free Tyrke from slavery, and to explore the old country – Norway. Mid-journey, his ship is lost in a violent storm and Leif's men have to seek shelter on the desolate Orkney Islands. Leif meets TORGUNNA, the local chieftain's daughter, and they fall in love. But Leif refuses her request to go with him to Norway, claiming that the journey will be too perilous. Torgunna pledges to meet him again, wherever his travels may take him.

In the Summer of 999, Leif and Tyrke reach the Norwegian capital Nidaros, and Leif strikes up a friendship with the Christian KING OLAF. Leif is fascinated by the new faith that looks set to supplant the old, and agrees to accompany the King on a mission to turn a powerful pagan farmer to the religion of the White Christ. The mission turns into a massacre, which the King planned all along, and Leif witnesses men, women and children being turned to the new faith by sword. Nevertheless, he agrees to be baptised with the Christian King as his Godfather.

Leif brings a Christian priest back to Greenland, infuriating his father. Torgunna arrives there, with Leif's son TORGILS in tow. But Leif himself has no intention of staying. He hears stories of sailors lost at sea west of Greenland, who have sighted unknown lands. He hires a crew and sets sail across the North Atlantic Ocean, bringing Tyrke with him, and once again leaving Torgunna behind.

After many days, and a terrifying storm, the crew are on the verge of mutiny. But just as hope seems lost, a beautiful landscape comes into view, out of the fog – the lush green forests and hills of America.

Finally, Leif has discovered his own land, far away from his father and the Christian King. This is the dawn of a new age, and his men start building cabins in a clearing by a great river. But their joy is temporary. As Winter approaches, the Vikings begin to realize that they are not alone. Remains of a campfire, planted corn, and finally a belt of dreamcatchers that encircle their compound...

Unrest sets in as the Vikings start to sense that the land is not theirs for the taking. The forest seems unfriendly, the mountains ominous, the birds and beasts beyond Viking understanding. The men must fight off wolves and grizzly bears. And then: Whispering voices in the trees, moving shadows in the forest! Humans, or spirits? The shadows remain in the corner of the eye, always gone when you turn your head.

Before the men can return to Greenland and enlist more ships, Tyrke is found stumbling out of the woods, talking incoherently. He clutches wine grapes in his hands, delirious, and soon passes away in the grip of a deadly fever. Leif and his men depart, leaving behind the grave of Tyrke in Vinland, the first European to rest in the earth of the New World.

Upon his return to Greenland, Leif finds his father dying. Leif Erikson is forced to become the chieftain and give up his plans for returning to Vinland. His younger brother sets out to colonize the New World, but his men return with a tale of tragedy: Leif's brother has fallen in a violent conflict with natives. Leif breaks down and falls ill, realizing that his New World is lost, an impossible dream.

He dies in his bed, with Torgunna by his side, and his body is put to rest in his ship. The ship is then set on fire and pushed out to sea. Thus passes Leif Erikson, discoverer of America, his ship and body ablaze in the setting sun that slowly descends in the west.