# Calendar Explanations

## 10 – Amaltheia

Named after Amaltheia, a nymph who tended to goats and is known to foster abandoned children by letting them suckle the goats. She is said to have nurtured many infant-gods.

## 11 – Níðhöggr

Named after Níðhöggr, an evil serpent that is said to bring the end of days. The serpent has a ravenous appetite and devours nightmares and the souls of the damned. When those who are guilty of murder, adultery, or oath-breaking are sent to Hel, they wash ashore in Náströnd, where they spend the afterlife being chewed on by Níðhöggr.

If Níðhöggr ever runs out of nightmares or damned souls, it is thought that the serpent would turn its appetite upwards and swallow the sun.

### Night of the Serpent

In order to prevent Níðhöggr from trying to eat the sun, a yearly festival is held called the "Night of the Serpent", with the aim of ensuring a steady supply of nightmares and souls. During the evening, merchants sell frightening masks of monsters like ogres, giants, and serpents, as well as food like blood sausage and lamb's head. When the sun has set, children and their parents are sent home, while the other villagers don their masks. At this point, the villagers gather, typically at a courthouse, prison, or town center, for the executions.

Any prisoners awaiting the death penalty are gathered. At this point, prisoners may request a trial by poison, to see if Níðhöggr intercedes on their behalf. If the poison takes no effect, the prisoner is declared innocent, and they are released. If not, the execution continues. A rope is placed around the neck of the prisoner and the villagers form a procession dragging the prisoner to the graveyard.

During the procession, the masked villagers attempt to scare any children who peek out of their windows. The procession will make loud noises such as screaming, hollering, or hissing. They'll throw smoke bombs, set off fireworks, bang on the sides of houses, or throw pebbles at windows (not trying to break the windows. The event is meant to be scary, not criminal).

While this is happening, any prisoners being dragged are beaten, adding their screams to the cacophony. To appease the great serpent, the procession typically attacks the arms and legs first, removing the limbs that a serpent might find profane. The procession snakes through the town and when it finally reaches the graveyard, the prisoners are buried in an unmarked graved. By this point, typically the only thing left of the prisoners is their head and shoulders. The villagers line up and take turns shoveling dirt onto the grave. When their turn is done, the villager will leave the graveyard and doff their mask before quickly heading home.

The point of the masks is both to scare and protect the wearer's identity. If you try and determine who someone is under the mask, it is said that Níðhöggr will stop eating your nightmares and you'll be unable to sleep soundly.

The festival is held on the last full moon before winter starts, because it's expensive to feed prisoners over the winter, and the connection to the underworld is strongest during a full moon.

In some places, the procession is instead completed by newlywed couples who are expecting. They walk together to the graveyard with an offering, in the hopes that Níðhöggr will eat their child's nightmares, so they might actually get some sleep when the child is born. This particular tradition may be a result of Amaltheian festivities carrying over into Níðhöggr.

### Wash Day

Wash Day is a civic observance held the day after the Night of the Serpent. The town brings out water, soap, and large basins for the people to do the wash, particularly for large items such as sheets, tablecloths, mattress covers, or even curtains.

This day helps wash away any "bits" leftover from last nights procession.