

The Ungin

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Matthew sat on the mismatched pile of boulders that they were using as a platform of sorts, so they could be heard when the talking started. He knew that his pack mates were scouting around the area, making sure that the assembled Uratha would not be disturbed. They'd be back soon, and then things could get started.

He rubbed absently at a scar on his arm, won just a few nights back, fighting spirits that barely took visible form, but could still deliver deadly cuts, and looked out over the clearing. There were several packs in attendance that he knew – even the 8th Street Brawlers had come out here, and they were loathe to go anywhere they couldn't feel concrete or asphalt under their feet. There were even more faces that Matthew didn't recognize – packs that had come a long way, perhaps, to this – this gathering of the People. Seeing his pack approaching the plinth of rock, Matthew Howling Heart shifted to Urshul and howled to the assembled group, to the sky, and to Mother Luna.

It was time to begin.

Werewolves are, by nature, territorial beasts. They run in closely-knit packs, and are quick to take offense when an outsider infringes on their claimed territory. Fights of dominance are common, especially among the Full Moons of the People. Despite this inherent violence of the Rage that pulses through a werewolf's heart, the Uratha are, at their base, comprised of the human and of the wolf – two very social animals. And yet, the Lunacy ensures that the Uratha cannot comfortably find niches with either their human or lupine kin. It is no wonder, then, that from time to time, werewolves of different packs meet with others of their kind – the only other creatures on the planet that can truly understand what it means to be Uratha. What it means to be one of the children of *Urfarah*.

The First Tongue name for any formal meeting of werewolves is *ungin*. An *ungin* can be of any size – from two local packs agreeing to meet monthly to make sure there isn't a large-scale problem that either pack can't see individually, to many packs gathering together for various purposes. There is no strict "script" that an *ungin* follows – however, there are several phases that a typical *ungin* goes through. An *ungin* is typically called by a particular pack who feels that they need or desire the assistance or attention of any number of other packs – from the pack in the next territory, to many packs spanning from across the country, or even globe. So long as this pack can assert its dominance very early on in the proceedings, the pack that has called the *ungin* is considered the "alpha" for the entire gathering.

The first section of this document will discuss reasons why an *ungin* might be called. The second section will outline the phases of a "typical" *ungin*, and the third section will offer suggestions on scalability. An appendix will be forthcoming that will discuss the *ungin* as called by a specific tribe or lodge.

Why Call an Ungin?

There are many reasons why a pack might call an *ungin*; the exact reasons are specific to the pack and the situation at hand, but they fall into the following general categories:

Gossip. This is not gossip in the typical sense – but rather, this is when a two or more local packs get

together to “trade notes”, so to speak. While they are supposed to be inviolate to werewolves to some extent, territories do not have that same protection against any other creature. Spirits, Ridden, Hosts, Pure, or even vampires, mortals, willworkers, or stranger creatures can all influence a pack’s territory, sometimes without meaning to. Unless the pack’s territory is particularly large, it is entirely possible that there are clues to the solution elsewhere – perhaps in another pack’s territory. Or, packs on opposite ends of town could both see an increase in a particular type of spirit, and work together to handle the cause of that increase. Keeping tabs on the general health and well-being of the area between and around pack territories, and sharing intelligence on that area is a good way for multiple packs to ensure the relative safety of their own territories.

Fresh blood. When a mortal undergoes the First Change, it is a time of mixed emotions for everyone involved. There is a sense of joy felt that the ranks of the People have enlarged, but that also means that there is one more werewolf to compete against for territory, mates, and other resources. However, the emotions involved don’t prevent the local packs from getting together, introducing the new cub to other werewolves, and otherwise inducting her into the culture. There may be one (or more, in the case of multiple new werewolves) Tribal initiations, offers or requests to join packs, or getting together with other new werewolves are all events that may happen at an *ungin* called for a new Uratha.

The larger threat. This happens when there is a discernable threat to an area that is bigger than any one pack’s territory. This could be a threat from the Pure, the Bale Hounds, Hosts, spirits, Idigam, or any other antagonist that the Storyteller decides to use. It could be no antagonist at all – natural (or unnatural) disasters can certainly threaten a large swath of territory, and the repercussions on both sides of the Gauntlet could well be catastrophic. Two or more packs can meet with all the formalities, sort out who is to be the Alpha to combat the threat, deal with said threat, and go back to their own territories, all without much of the typical distrust and vying for dominance that werewolves usually have with one another.

Negotiate boundaries. Packs that are neighbors (more or less) can meet to negotiate – sometimes violently – the boundaries of their territories. Even in a violent confrontation, however, there is a sense of propriety in regards to the *ungin* – a sacred trust that is not broken. Mercy Gems see wide use in these instances, as only those werewolves with low Harmony (or who are fools) are willing to kill or at least seriously injure someone who could potentially save their lives one day.

Preventative maintenance. If neighboring Uratha never meet one another, they are not likely to recognize one another should they accidentally meet in the course of their duties. What would possibly erupt into pack-versus-pack violence could be averted (or at least minimized), with a little pre-encounter meet and greet. This doesn’t need to necessarily be an entirely friendly meeting, or devoid of any tension, but a short period where the assembled werewolves can put faces (and scents) to names, and know who is a local and who might be a member of the Pure or Bale Hounds when encountered during a patrol of the territory.

The reasoning behind an *ungin* is revealed by the hosting pack during the initial phase of the gathering, if it isn’t expressly spelled out when the call to gather goes out.

What Goes On At an Ungin?

A typical *ungin* has several phases. These are all typically followed in one form or another at the largest *ungins*, but some of these steps might be skipped in the interest of size or time (talking over the Tales of Sacrifice or the Tales of Legend might not be the best idea if the *ungin* is surrounded by a score of Unihar, for instance), or combined into one another. An overview of each phase is below.

Assertion of Dominance (*Inim-Gam*)

When the outsider werewolves come in and gather, the hosting pack is expected to explain why they feel that they have the right to take the other children of Urarah away from their own territories and duties. By no means is the calling pack necessarily the eldest or most experienced of the attending Uratha; an *ungin* may be called by any pack, regardless of age or experience. Uratha that technically have a higher Renown total may defer to a local pack that has called the others in; in this case, the latter's knowledge of the local area on both sides of the Gauntlet supersedes the former's Renown. This is a general statement of purpose; the details of the situation are reserved for the phase Catching the Scent (*Dab Ir-Sim*), detailed below.

However, there are times – all too often, actually – where there is a dispute in regards to which pack should lead. These disputes are resolved through various means, and often reflect the task at hand. If the *ungin* called is for a war party, then ritual combat is often the answer. Conversely, an *ungin* called to delve into the Shadow to retrieve some bit of lost lore could settle a dispute of leadership by tests of wisdom or spirit knowledge – either in the form of quizzing would-be leaders on aspects of the spirit world, or a hands-on test, with disputants vying to see who can summon a particular type of spirit with greater speed or precision. The precise manner in which an Alpha or Alpha pack is best tailored to each individual *ungin* – although it isn't unheard of for a particularly strong pack to simply seize the leadership position and hold onto it through means fair or foul. These packs, however, subvert the meaning of the *ungin*, and almost always come to a bad end sooner or later.

However they are chosen, the leaders of this *ungin*, known as the Alpha Pack (*Ba-Gilim* in First Tongue) assumes control of the rest of the meeting. With the leader(s) chosen, the first informal phase of the *ungin* comes to a close, and segues into the next...

Tales of Sacrifice (*Me-lam Siskur*)

It is the nature of the Uratha to declare a territory to protect, and they are loathe to leave that territory unprotected for long. An *ungin*, by its very nature, seeks to call other Uratha from those territories to deal with some matter of business or threat. Therefore, it has become custom for the assembled visiting Uratha to state to the Alpha Pack and the others assembled just what it is that the packs have left behind in their territories to come to the *ungin*.

This serves three purposes. First, it is a sign of respect towards the pack that has called the *ungin* (which may or may not be the Alpha Pack at this point) – a way of saying “this is what we have left behind, because we felt it worthy to come to your call”. Most Uratha do not lay down their burdens or assumed tasks lightly, and attending an *ungin* takes time away from the territory. Secondly, it is a way of reminding the pack that called the *ungin* that there are other territories that need defending, and that their reason for calling the *ungin* had best not be frivolous, or terribly time-consuming. Lastly – and this

is more a side-effect than out of any intent – this provides information to the other packs about what is going on in the bigger picture. If trading news is the reason for the *ungin*, this portion may very well be simply touched on here, and expanded upon in more detail later.

A representative from each pack – typically the Alpha, but some packs like to use their Cahalith (if available) or other particularly charismatic member – addresses the assembled Uratha, and speaks of the tasks and duties that the pack performs. If there is something particularly troubling that is within the pack’s protectorate, it is spoken of here. Fine details are left out, as few werewolf packs want to give up the tactical advantage of knowing their turf. Traditionally, the formal method for this address begins with “This is what we have sacrificed to come to your aid”, and ends with “We offer our strength, our cunning, our wisdom, and our heart to your cause. Use it well”, although less-traditionalist werewolves typically omit this, particularly in the cases of those *ungins* called for non-combat reasons.

Old Business (*Sumun Dam-Gar*)

Even though the Uratha are territorial beings, word does spread amongst the People about others’ deeds and actions. Some of these deeds are worthy of homage and respect – others, not so much. Dislike, and, indeed, even outright hatred (easy enough for a race of beings that burn with supernatural Rage) can exist between two werewolves that possibly have never met one another. This friction, however, is hardly conducive to a successful Hunt. Therefore, this phase of the *ungin* is designed to get those feuds and disagreements out into the open, so the “hot blood” can be taken care of. It sorts out the divisive elements in the gathering, so that the assembled Uratha are acting more or less in concert.

The exact resolution for these issues varies according to the Uratha involved; two Rahu are clearly going to settle their dispute quite differently than two Elodoth, say. Resolutions include ritual combat, some other kind of competition (speed climbing, a race, a contact sport like football or rugby, etc.), debate, storytelling contests, drinking contests, contests of skill and/or stealth, or even so simple as a formal public apology for a past slight. In the case of werewolves of two divergent auspices – say, a Rahu challenging an Ithaeur – if the two disputants cannot agree on a fair challenge, it is up to the Alpha Pack to make the final determination on the challenge’s nature. Needless to say, any form of cheating during any resolution contest is looked very poorly on at best – especially amongst those Uratha with high levels of Honor Renown.

Catching the Scent (*Dab Ir-Sim*)

This is the most immediate phase of the *ungin* – when the business that has called outsider werewolves to the location is formally announced. If the Alpha Pack at this stage is not the pack that called the *ungin*, then the Alpha Pack orders this information to be brought forth. If the Alpha Pack is the same pack that called the *ungin*, then they simply announce what precisely the issue is. All information that the originating pack (whether the Alpha Pack or otherwise) is expected to be shared – keeping back information is seen as a betrayal of the People, as, in many cases, lack of information can get Uratha killed – or worse.

After the initial information is shared, other packs then add whatever information they can to the cause – starting with the Alpha Pack (if it isn’t also the pack that called the *ungin*). Packs then speak in whatever order the Alpha Pack determines, and speaks as long as the Alpha Pack allows, or until their information is spent. It is exceptionally rare – except in the case of very time-sensitive situations – for an

Alpha Pack to cut information short, unless it is clear that the information is misleading, false, or simply ridiculous.

During this sharing of information, one werewolf, chosen by the Alpha Pack, is declared the *dub-sar* (“scribe”), and is tasked with collecting all of the assembled information. There are a number of ways to do this – from writing the information down, to simply remembering it all (only useful for those with particularly good memories). More modern werewolves, notably of the *Farsil Luhai*, use PDA’s or Blackberry’s to store the information. Advocates of the modern technology claim that they are superior due to being able to be password-protected, or even having a spirit bound to them for security purposes. Others, stereotypically of the *Meninna*, hold technological items to have no place at an *ungin*, although not all *Meninna* think this, nor do all those who hold this thought belong to the *Meninna*.

Once the business is settled, there is one more phase before the task at hand is dealt with.

Tales of Legend (*Me-lam*)

It is said that those who do not study the past are doomed to repeat it. That is the exact adage that this phase of the *ungin* is designed to protect against. Cahalith often take center stage at this phase, and in fact often lead this phase by tradition, but any Uratha with a relevant tale to tell can reasonably expect a chance to share it. This is the only phase in which the Alpha Pack typically cedes control to another – usually the most respected or elder Cahalith present. Stories are presented in the order and length as decided by this Cahalith, and stories that are irrelevant to the situation earn the teller the scorn of the assembled People, and could very well lead to challenges at a future *ungin*.

The tales told during this phase are intended not only to shed insight onto the current situation by retelling stories from the past, but to reinforce commonalities. Thus, stories that include a moral about sticking by your pack, or how a pack overcame a particular adversary only by working together, are popular and well-received at nearly every *ungin*.


If not particularly pressed for time (rare in these modern times), this phase of the *ungin* lasts so long as the elder Cahalith chooses, at which point he or she cedes control back to the Alpha Pack, who then leads the assembled Uratha on whatever task they have gathered to undertake.

Scalability

This document is intended to present an *ungin* that can be scaled to use at any Forsaken event – from your local game with a dozen or two players all the way up to ICC-level convention attendance numbers. The outline as written above assumes a Regional-level event, such as NoWhere, ScaRE, Eclipse, etc. Guidelines for using this structure with larger or smaller events are given below.

Larger Events

At large National and International Conventions, there are a great deal of people, and scheduling may very well dictate how long the ST really has to implement this structure. Mention was made quite a few times in the phase outline above about time-sensitivity. Storytellers should stress that in any situation with a particularly large number of players, and/or short time, OOCly. Some phases can be tightened,



shortened, or even omitted entirely. It is possible to completely omit Old Business and Tales of Legend – although this could very well lead to IC bickering, and/or characters that are not reminded of where they come from (either or both of which could actually be used to the ST’s favor, of course). The phases Assertion of Dominance, Tales of Sacrifice, and Catching the Scent, however, should not be omitted, as these detail key portions of what the *ungin* is about, and how it is executed.

Smaller Events

It’s quite easy to scale an ungin as described in this document down for a smaller game. The primary reason for this is because a local game has quite a few less players than a convention game, so each phase goes much faster. However, a particularly verbose group of players can certainly eat up time. If this occurs, it is easy to omit sections as described above.

Also – there is no particular reason why every local game session has to be due to an ungin, although it is a rather good reason for various packs to get together. Used appropriately in a smaller game, an ungin can serve not only as an “excuse” for the PC’s to congregate, but can lead to some wonderful RP and good stories to tell afterwards.

