Warp Chips: A House Rule For Collaborative Storytelling

Dungeons and Dragons emphasizes the Dungeon Master's role as the creator and impresario of the game. The DM creates the world, creates the NPCs, creates the story. The players, for the most part, are only really responsible for their own characters, and maybe a few related sub-NPCs like familiars, cohorts, or animal companions.

I like to introduce a small element of collaborative storytelling into the game by giving my players a resource they can expend to influence story points or newly introduced NPCs.

The rules below are draped in language that integrates them closely into my campaign setting, but really, it's a completely system agnostic house rule. You could easily call these Plot Points, Fate Chips, Destiny Tokens, anything you like. I call them Warp Chips, because the Warp is a thing.

This house rule only affects the development of the story and the world. It doesn't have any direct impact on game mechanics, so you can easily make use of it in any game system.

In the world of Yxra, certain unusual individuals seem to be singled out by the Warp. This strange bond with the otherworldly allows them exert a degree of minor influence on the reality around them, although they aren't entirely conscious of it. Weird coincidences seem to follow them. Sometimes things just go their way. But this gift isn't always the boon it seems — sometimes the Warp influences back in strange, darkly twisted ways.

Every player begins each session with one White Warp chip, represented by a white stone or token.

Using White Warp Chips

A White Warp may be traded in to create minor changes in the story arc, or to influence a newly introduced NPC or group of NPCs in a small way. The key word is *minor* — Warp chips can't cause sweeping changes to the campaign setting or story events.

When a player wants to use a White Warp, they choose one of the following effects:

An Ally Appears

Sometime within the next few minutes, an NPC or other entity allied with the players' goals contacts them. This ally might provide new information or important news. They might even provide direct aid such as assisting in a battle or providing helpful items. The ally doesn't necessarily have to appear in person — it might contact them by letter or some other method of remote messaging; it might send an emissary, familiar, or messenger in its stead. The player can't choose which ally appears. The DM may decide to introduce an ally that the players haven't even met yet.

A Memory Surfaces

One of the players remembers something that is pertinent to the situation at hand. The memory doesn't necessarily have to be remembered by the player who used the White Warp; at the DM's discretion, another player's character might be the one who remembers the information. The memory doesn't even necessarily need to belong to the character who experiences it — it could be a foreign memory interjected by the Warp. The memory might be pleasant, cryptic, disturbing, or take any other form, but shouldn't cause any direct positive or negative mechanical effect upon the player.

A New Way Opens

A hidden door or passage appears somewhere within the players'

current location. The player who used the White Warp somehow just *knows* the passage exists, but doesn't know its direct location. There may be some hidden mechanism to locate or unlock the passage. Where the passage leads is entirely up to the DM — it could lead to treasure or to a dangerous trap; it could be a shortcut to bypass danger. The passage may even take an unusual form, such as a magical portal, or a dimensional pocket hidden in the pages of a book.

A Person Altered

A newly introduced NPC acquires a quirk or change of some sort. The player who uses the White Warp suggests a change involving one of three scopes: Personality, Physiology, or Presence.

- **Personality**
  - Some aspect of the NPC's personality is changed in a minor way. A guard at the city gate becomes jovial and easy-going. The king becomes jealous of spellcasters. The orc chieftain becomes afraid of spiders. The goblin tribe in the valley has a love of pounding drum music.
- **Physiology**
  - Some aspect of the NPC's physiology is changed. One of the pursuing gnolls has a limp. The village alchemist is hard of hearing. The ogre that has been raiding the village only has one arm.
- **Presence**
  - Some aspect of the NPC's presence is changed. Most of the kobold warband has gone hunting when the players arrive at their cave. The dark elf ranger wanders away from the door to investigate something he thought he heard.

A Plan Delayed

A complication arises that delays or otherwise impacts a character's plans in a negative way. The target may be an NPC or another PC. The party rogue is sneaking into a merchant's vault and nearly trips over a sleeping guard. Some magical

lock prevents the necromancer from opening the ancient spellbook he just acquired. The invading orc army finds the pass partially blocked by a recent rockslide.

The player using the White Warp can suggest the complication themselves or leave it up to the DM. The White Warp can't directly cause the plan to fail entirely. Complications should be relatively minor in scope, but if not dealt with, could snowball into catastrophe.

A Betrayal of Trust

Someone betrays someone else. This might be a friendly NPC who betrays the players. It might be a henchman who betrays the villain and offers the players his aid. A mutinous pirate crew turns on their captain. An innkeep who sold the players a room for all week suddenly evicts them. The captain of the guard is secretly working with the thieves guild. The player who used the White Warp just *knows* the betrayal has occurred in some way, but may not know the specific details or have proof of the treachery.

The player can suggest a traitor, or leave it entirely up to the DM.

The World Shifts

Some aspect of the world around the players shifts in an unusual way. While sweltering through the desert, they finally spot an oasis in the distance. A sudden thunderstorm crashes down on the village. A tree falls, yielding a convenient footbridge across most of the river.

A White Warp can't change world geography in a major way. It can't suddenly make a major city appear in a different place, or cause a powerful earthquake to destroy the evil wizard's tower.

Other Uses

Warp chips can't change events, elements, or NPC qualities that have already been established. If a shopkeeper already dislikes the party for wrecking his shop, a White Warp won't

make him suddenly like them. Generally speaking, if the DM hasn't described it yet, you can potentially use a White Warp to modify it.

Other uses of White Warps than the ones listed above may be possible. A player can always suggest something. The DM has the final say on whether or not the suggested effect is a suitable use for a White Warp. If the DM believes a suggested change is beyond the scope of a White Warp, they should suggest an alternative; if the player decides not to accept the alternative, the White Warp isn't consumed and may used later on.

A Warp chip cannot be used to reroll a failed die roll, nor can it provide a *direct* numerical influence on a die roll or other game statistic. A player can't say "I want to spend a Warp chip to get a bonus on this attack roll," for example. Warp chips are narrative in nature, and meant to influence story and plot, not mechanics.

Warp chips may not always have a permanent influence. If the players use a White Warp to make the guard friendly and helpful, but later insult and betray his trust, his disposition may turn sour towards them.

That said, at the DM's discretion, the effect of a Warp chip may result in certain *circumstantial* modifiers. For example, if the player says "I want this guard we're meeting to be friendly and helpful to us," the DM may decide that Diplomacy rolls to influence the guard receive a small circumstantial bonus, because the guard is a friendly and helpful NPC.

The Black Warp Chip

Altering reality doesn't come without consequence. The Symmetry has its own influence. The DM begins play with a single Black Warp chip, represented by a black stone or token.

Every time a player use a White Warp, the DM receives another Black Warp chip.

The Black Warp allows the DM to transform a "Yes" — an instance where a player succeeds at or accomplishes something — into a "Yes, but…"

In the Warp Walkers universe, using a Black Warp should take on vivid otherworldly, bizarre, or disturbing forms. Some examples:

- "You successfully cast the fireball spell, but while tapping into The Warp, something goes weird. You try desperately to corral the arcane energies, but they lash out of your control. The magical energy coalesces into a small childlike humanoid form at the center of the spell's radius. The spellchild's flesh begins to glow red, then bright orange, then white hot, and it begins to shriek and scream before it is torn apart moments before the explosion rips outward. The final scream is so loud and horrific everyone feels sickened by what they've just witnessed."
- "You hear a click as the tumblers in the lock fall into place, then a sudden jerk in your stomach as reality warps around you. Metal creaks and groans as the lock warps and distorts. A massive tangle of purple and black tentacles, dripping with sludge, oozes out of the lock, too large for such a tiny space. It writhes, grasping at your wrist, before it plops to the floor with a nauseating squelch. Finally, tentacles stop pouring from the lock, leaving a grotesque mass the size of a large dog that twitches intermittently before falling still."
- "Your witty song charms the tavern patrons, and the majority of them are laughing, some of them even trying to sing along. Everyone seems to be having a great time, but as you play, the hair creeps up on the back of your neck in one of those involuntary shivers; people are laughing, but their mouths laugh wider and wider, past

what should be physically possible for their faces. Their teeth and tongues seem oversized and huge. Their eyes aren't laughing at all — they look positively sorrowful, some of them crying or clenching shut in agony. Suddenly, the phenomena ends as rapidly as it began — no one else seems to have noticed a thing."

The Black Warp shouldn't really cause any major mechanical effect. It doesn't prevent the successful action from being successful. A fire spell still deals damage according to its spell description. A lock is still picked. A bard's performance check still affects the local tavern patrons. The Black Warp just takes that action and distorts it, usually in horrible, terrifying ways.

Personally, I like to toss the black stone or token onto the table, and then pause a moment for effect before describing what happens.

Warped Session

If all of the players use all of their White Warps before the session ends, a Warped Session is declared. Two effects happen: First, at the end of the session, all players receive a 10% bonus to awarded XP.

Second, at the end of the session, each player votes for the player they believe made the best use of a White Warp. Players can't vote for themselves. Votes are written on pieces of paper and handed to the DM. In the event of a tie, the DM will cast a tie-breaker vote. The player with the most votes starts the next session with an extra White Warp.