

Past Lives

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Past Lives: A Cosmos of Discovery

Past Lives is a game where you and your friends take on the role of investigators and occult explorers. You will seek to uncover and halt the plots of dangerous conspirators as they strive to determine the ultimate fate of the world. Meanwhile, you will delve into the joined mysteries of the cosmos and your inner selves.

Past Lives is a game about secrets and discovery. In Past Lives, you and your friends will tell a story of your character's delving into inner and outer mysteries to discover a universe of strangeness and deep truths.

One of you will take the role of the *Mystery Keeper*, who is tasked with holding the secret combinations that will unlock the secrets of the universe and your character's true identity. The Mystery Keeper won't have a character, but will instead describe the dangerous situations flush with dark secrets the characters find themselves in, and help describe the adverse and beneficial outcomes of attempting to unlock those secrets.

The ultimate goal of each character, beyond the unlocking the secrets of past lives and perilous conspirators is to hone spiritual understanding to reach the point of *Transcendence*. This much sought state can mean different things to different characters, and their players. Achieving transcendence is guaranteed to do two things: make a permanent mark on the cosmos and to retire that character from play. Beyond that there are many options:

- Becoming one with the cosmos.
- Becoming a godlike being of wisdom and compassion.
- Piercing the illusion of the cosmos going beyond it.
- Achieving a moment of perfect grace.
- Becoming the living embodiment of a new principle.

Past Lives: Symbols, Locks and Gates

Past Lives builds its characters and worlds from a common set of building blocks, a group of ten symbols. These symbols each have a meaning with a variety of interpretations:

1) 	Air	6) 	Progress
2) 	Earth	7) 	Star
3) 	Fire	8) 	Moon
4) 	Water	9) 	Order
5) 	Life	10) 	Upheaval

These symbols are used to create *locks*, combinations of various lengths which must be guessed by the players and solved by building the required combination using the actions of their characters. These combinations layer the meanings of the symbols together, for example:

   or “Star, Fire, Order”

could mean the life of a prophetic and creative person trapped by a lifeless bureaucracy, it could be the secrets of a fanciful mapmaker (bringing creativity and order to the unexplored), or even an organization building an atomic bomb (a very literal “star fire”).

Locks can come from one of three *Gates*, indicating their difficulty. The easiest is the 1st Gate, using only the first 4 symbols, the next is the 2nd Gate, using the last 6 symbols, while the 3rd Gate uses all 10. The Mystery Keeper determines which gate lock comes from and determines the combinations randomly or by selecting symbols.

Unlocking Goals, Barriers, Dangers, and Opportunities:

As you play Past Lives, your character will encounter situations, such as a town with dark secrets or a nefarious plot being unleashed within the city you call home. These situations are called Frames, within which the Mystery Keeper can introduce dangers, which can hurt your character or those she cares about, and opportunities, which can provide new possibilities or relieve old wounds. Meanwhile, to resolve this situation to your liking your characters will need to accomplish goals and overcome barriers.

Goals, barriers, dangers and opportunities all take the form of locks, whose combinations are determined by the Mystery Keeper, who reveals the length and Gate of the lock. To unlock these, you must attempt a variety of combinations, to create a combination:

- Describe how your character acts to resolve this lock, based on a talent, a life (past, current, or future), or any other unlocked part of herself. This is called a *move*. This move can be any plausible action which isn't stopped by a lock. Particularly significant moves may cause the Mystery Keeper to introduce a goal or a barrier lock, representing its complexity or difficulty.
- Add symbols from that aspect to the end of your combination. You can skip any symbols, but cannot change their order.
- A combination is limited to a number of moves equal to the lowest move limit over all the set of aspects used so far on it. You can contribute to a number of combinations up to your combo limit, even if started by someone else.
- After any move you can attempt your combination against the front of the lock, even if you have fewer symbols than the lock. When you do:
 - 1) The Mystery Keeper tells you all of the symbols which match perfectly, and then all of the symbols which are valid, but in the wrong place in the combination.
 - 2) Then the Mystery Keeper tallies symbols which completely miss and determines a complication (if any) arising from them. These symbols are recorded by all contributors and can be used to unlock a character's inner mysteries.

Some locks will have multiple options. For these locks the Mystery Keeper should choose the closest match the the attempted combination, first considering perfect matches, then tie-breaking with the number of valid symbols. If both of these are the same, then the Mystery Keeper can simply choose one lock to use.

If all the symbols are a perfect match, then the lock is opened and the goal is achieved, the barrier overcome, the danger averted, and the opportunity realized.

Dangers and Opportunities

Both dangers and opportunities keep track of the number of attempts. After more attempts dangers become more immediate and deadly, and opportunities become less and less beneficial. The Mystery Keeper can also decide, if a pressing danger or opportunity is being neglected to announce that the attempt count is increasing, as event proceed while the characters are otherwise occupied.

Injury, death, madness, and so on can occur from danger being unleashed and running its course. Realized opportunities can recover or reverse these problems, transport your character to other versions of itself, or other benefits offered by the Mystery Keeper.

Character Versus Character

Most of the time player's characters will be cooperating, they may choose to act against each other. If this happens a character can create a defense lock, as a barrier to the unwanted actions of a different player's character until that lock is opened. To create this lock, the defending player makes a number of moves describing the character's defense, up to their move limit. However, in secret you keep only one symbol from each move, and then rearrange these symbols as you wish after describing all of your moves. This secret combination is now your defense lock.

A defense lock occupies one of your combinations under your combo limit. The defending player acts as the Mystery Keeper for this lock, including describing any complications which might arise, with the help of the Mystery Keeper.

Unlocking Yourself and Your Arts and Sciences:

The symbols you gain from complete misses while trying to unlock goals, barriers, dangers, and opportunities are the fuel for self-exploration. Cause complications, this adversity gives you the tools to unlock the barely glimpsed parts of your character.

Keep track of these complication symbols for each combination attempted by your character. This includes collaboration among characters, each of the characters involved gets each complete miss from the combination. These symbols can be kept indefinitely, representing lessons learned by not yet realized.

Once your character has a chance to reflect or otherwise look inwards, you may attempt to unlock more aspects. You can spend any of the complication symbols you have to produce a combination for any category of aspects (Talent, Co-Life, etc.) available to you. The one constraint is that *you cannot unlock an aspect if it would cause you to have more unlocked for that category than for the next shorter category*. For example, you cannot unlock future lives unless you have at least one co-life, and you cannot unlock your second future life until you have at least two past lives unlocked.

The Mystery Keeper tracks the combinations for all locked parts of your character, and provides feedback to your attempt as for goals or barriers, with all locks in that category as options. Completely missed symbols can cause internal complications for the character, at its player's option. If you do so you can add those symbols to the complication symbols you have stored. Other symbols used for these combinations are spent, and recorded under the appropriate *symbols spent* total, for determining when your limits increase.

Symbols can also be spent on *Arts* and *Sciences*, such as the Art of Influence, the Science of Summoning, the Art of Ceremonial Magic, or the Science of Invention. The first Art or Science costs one of each Element (Air, Earth, Fire, Water). The second Art or Science costs one of each Principle (Life, Progress, Star, Moon, Order, Upheaval). The third and last Art or Science costs one of each symbol (both Elements and Principles).

• Arts

Arts are flexible and creative regardless of their focus. Arts are made of the following aspects:

- 1) Tools – aptitude with the basic building blocks of the Art.
- 2) Techniques – skill at combining & refining the work of the Art.
- 3) Insights – understanding that leads you deeper into your Art.
- 4) Innovations – realizations and ideals that expands your Art.
- 5) Mastery – the mark of your achieving mastery of your Art.
- 6) Genius – beyond mastery, this is how you recreate your Art.

• Sciences

Sciences are structured and methodical, less flexible than Arts, but ultimately more potent. Sciences are made of the following aspects:

- 1) Methods – the exacting ways and forms of doing your Science.
- 2) Theories – the ideas and governing logic behind your Science.
- 3) Inventions – the novel creations you have built to better execute your Science.
- 4) Discovery – the result of your explorations opening up new territory to your Science.
- 5) Great Discovery – the revelation that completely redefines your Science.

• Self Aspect Categories

- 1) Talents – innate or learned skills of your character
- 2) Past Lives – lives your character lived in the past of this world.
- 3) Co-Lives – lives in the present on this and other worlds.
- 4) Future Lives – lives in a future of this or another world.
- 5) Realm Reflections – existences of your character in one of the disparate realms beyond the worlds.
- 6) Eidolons – spiritual existences when your character neared transcendence.
- 7) Deep Truths – truths of your character's meaning to the cosmos.
- 8) Transcendence – perhaps your ultimate goal, you become something else. This is what you make of it. The players should decide what transcendence means, but once this is unlocked your character has achieved it.

Create Your Mystery:

As a group you should decide who will be playing the Mystery Keeper. The Mystery Keeper is the player responsible for keeping track of the locks and frames defining the shadowy world of the game and the inner discoveries awaiting the other players.

Then the Mystery Keeper takes a Cosmos Sheet and as a group all the players decide what sort of worlds their investigations will occur within, what sort of futures lie waiting, and what the factions and shadowy forces that are trying to bring about those futures.

Once you've done this, create your characters (see right).

Then asking the other players questions and discussing how the Mystery begins, the Mystery Keeper sets up the current Frame, most likely a broad frame, the set of situations, goals, dangers, and opportunities which make up the context in which the characters will seek to discover truths of the world and themselves.

A Frame offers a set of locks which are used to build goals, barriers, dangers, and opportunities during the character's investigations and adventures within that situation.

As the game proceeds, the Mystery Keeper should introduce more frames for different places and times, including alternate worlds, futures, pasts, and other realms.

Create Your Character:

First think of a basic description of your character, who or what they are in the world they live in.

Then you get 20 special symbols, which you use to define your character's moves, rather than to unlock them. So two definitions will turn a 2-lock into 2 symbol move, of any two specific symbols you want.

You can use these special symbols to open up Arts and Sciences as though they were the correct symbols.

However, you can only define moves that you could unlock, so you must have more moves of a immediately smaller size in the same set to unlock another of the chosen size and you can only define moves in an Art or Science if you have opened it already.

Before the next session, the Mystery Keeper will determine the symbols for the remaining locks of the character, by choice or randomly and always using the 3rd Gate. But you can play before then, you just can't unlock parts of your character until the Mystery Keeper has determined them. Likewise after you unlock an Art or a Science, the Mystery Keeper determines those locks as well.

If the group wants to start out as more experienced characters, you can increase the number of definitions awarded, but if you do most likely you should limit the size of the largest lock that can be defined. With 20 definitions, it isn't possible to define anything more than a 5-lock. Any more definitions should come with a limit of a 5-lock, or possibly a 6-lock for large number of definitions - although this is not advised, as you will eliminate much of your character's inner journey.

Symbols and Complications Cheat Sheet

The Symbols	Associations	Combination	Complication
1) ≅ Air	Ideas · Logic · Words · Breath	Perfect Match	None
2) ○ Earth	Ground · Resist · Safety · Roots	Wrong Order	Negligible
3) △ Fire	Passion · Action · Will · Creation	1 Missing Symbol	A Problem Arises
4) ▽ Water	Healing · Flow · Change · Listen	2 Missing Symbols	Surprising Twist
5) ∞ Life	Growth · Nature · Survive · Feel	3-4 Missing Symbols	Try Another Way
6) ‡ Progress	Master · Invent · Wield · Tech	5+ Missing Symbols	Disastrous Shift
7) * Star	Explore · Wonder · Divine · Guide		
8) ☾ Moon	Dream · Alter · Influence · Love		
9) □ Order	Control · System · Rule · Build		
10) ◇ Upheaval	Destroy · Arouse · Rage · Take		

Dangers and Opportunities:

	Dangers	Opportunities
6 attempts	preview of danger	fully available
12 attempts	first victims	involves a compromise
18 attempts	danger unleashed	significant downside
24+ attempts	it runs its course	no benefit gleaned

- 1st Gate: Elements ≅ ○ △ ▽
- 2nd Gate: Principles ∞ ‡ * ☾ □ ◇
- 3rd Gate: All ≅ ○ △ ▽ ∞ ‡ * ☾ □ ◇

Cosmos Sheet (start here)

The Worlds

As a group, describe a few details of these worlds, based on the keywords.

Air World

Thought · Freedom · Travel · Beginnings

Earth World

Stable · Money · Agriculture · Protective

Fire World

Desire · Destruction · Energy · Willpower

Water World

Understanding · Sadness · Renewal · Rest

Choose one of these worlds as your starting world:

What era of history does it resemble?

How does it differ from real history?

The Realms

These otherworldly places lie beyond the worlds and their provincial time streams. Here dwell divinities, spirits, and strange beings who hold (or at least claim the hold) the secrets of the cosmos. There are innumerable realms, create them as you discover them in play.

The Futures

There are four possible types of futures. All the Worlds will arrive together in one of them. Secret factions of the worlds struggle to create one future or another.

As a group, describe a few details of these futures and their factions, based on the keywords.

Life Future

Natural · Verdant · Wild · Diverse · Survival

Who is trying to cause the Life Future?

Passionate · Suspicious · Subtle · Distributed · Aware

Progress Future

Technology · Transhuman · Dynamic · Reason · Shock

Who is trying to cause the Progress Future?

Wealth · Computer · Experiment · Network · Invention

Star Future

Space · Frontier · Discovery · Expansion · Bravado

Who is trying to cause the Star Future?

Imagine · Power · Acquisitive · Daring · Commercial

Moon Future

Cycles · Madness · Dreams · Transformation · Love

Who is trying to cause the Moon Future?

Prophecy · Devotion · Magic · Archeology · Song

Order Future

Rigid · Authority · Stasis · Peace · Sameness

Who is trying to cause the Order Future?

Government · Unify · Plans · Control · Honor

Upheaval Future

Chaos · Vibrant · Rebuild · Disaster · Hope

Who is trying to cause the Upheaval Future?

Destructive · Disparate · Violent · Disguised · Idealist

Name

Transcendence

Eidolons

Move Limit (2)

Combo Limit (2)

Symbols Spent

on Self Every 100 spent: +1 to move and combo limits.

Deep Truths

Talents

Self

Sheet

Past Lives

Dangers / Opportunities

Co-Lives

Realm Reflections

Future Lives

Complication Symbols

Spend to unlock



Art

Move Limit (3) Symbols Spent on Art

Every 50 spent: +1 to move limit.

Genius

Mastery

Innovations

Tools

Techniques

Insights

Science

Move Limit (3) Symbols Spent on Science

Every 50 spent: +1 to move limit.

Methods

Theories

Great Discovery

Discovery

Inventions

Character Self Combination Sheet

Transcendence

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Deep Truths

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Eidolons

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Talents

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Past

Lives

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Co-Lives

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Future Lives

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Realm Reflections

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Character Self Combination Sheet

Transcendence

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Deep Truths

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Eidolons

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Talents

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Past

Lives

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Co-Lives

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Future Lives

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Realm Reflections

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Art

Art

Combination Sheet

Character

Genius

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Tools

Mastery

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Techniques

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Insights

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Innovations

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Art

Art

Combination Sheet

Character

Genius

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Tools

Mastery

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Techniques

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Insights

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Innovations

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Science

Science

Combination Sheet

Character

Great Discovery

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Methods

Discovery

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Theories

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Inventions

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Science

Science

Combination Sheet

Character

Great Discovery

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Methods

Discovery

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Theories

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Inventions

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