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ABC NEWS ANCHOR DIANE SAWYER DECODES THE MYSTERIES BEHIND THE HEAVEN'S GATE CULT, THE FOLLOWERS WHO LEFT EVERYTHING AND THE HISTORIC MASS SUICIDE

The Two-Hour '20/20' Special Features Exclusive Interviews With Rio DiAngelo, Who Left the Group Before the Tragedy to Serve as the Cult's Messenger, Former Followers and Family Members

'The Cult Next Door: The Mystery and Madness of Heaven's Gate' Airs on '20/20' Friday, March 11 (9:01-11:00 p.m. EST), on ABC, Next Day on Hulu



*ABC News

It remains the largest mass suicide ever on American soil: 39 people in Rancho Santa Fe, California, took their own lives because they believed a UFO would carry them to a higher level of existence for all eternity. Why did so many kind, intelligent people, including nurses, veterans, even a valedictorian, leave their daily lives, careers, families, friends and even young children behind? ABC News anchor **Diane Sawyer** and team decode the mysteries behind the Heaven's Gate cult. The two-hour special edition of "20/20" examines the secrets and backstory of Marshall Applewhite — the cult's compelling leader — his powerful partner and co-founder, and the controlling world they created for their followers. In 1997, Sawyer had the exclusive interview with Rio DiAngelo, a member who left the group before the tragedy to serve as a messenger to the world. 23 years later, Sawyer interviews him again. The special features exclusive never-before-seen tapes and intimate audio recordings of the cult leader, his followers, interviews with former members emerging from the shadows, loved ones of deceased followers and authorities who worked on the grisly case. Two survivors also share their experiences in the cult for the very first time. **"The Cult Next Door: The Mystery and Madness of Heaven's Gate"** airs on **"20/20" Friday, March 11 (9:01-11:00 p.m. EST)**, on **ABC**, next day on [Hulu](https://www.hulu.com).

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