

After the End: GM Guide

Pre-game Introductions

Player/personal introductions - 10 min

Hello! Let's go around the room and share our name, pronouns, and a group or organization that you belong to, and what you like about being part of that group.

General safety briefings - 10 min

To get the most satisfying emotional and creative experience out of role playing, it's important to have a safety framework so we can take risks within a space of trust.

First, let's talk about touch. We'll use red, yellow, and green stickers on nametags to indicate what kind of touch we're comfortable with. Use red if you don't want other players to touch you, yellow if you are comfortable with players touching you with their hands on your hands, arms, and shoulders, and green if you are comfortable with hugs. During the game, initiate any kind of touch only when the other player is looking at you, and do it slowly with big gestures so that if they can decide whether to step forward or step back. <pass around the nametags and stickers> Go ahead and put a sticker on a nametag, but wait until the workshop for the first scene to write your character name on it.

Does anyone have a topic that they want everyone to avoid bringing up as part of the game? <summarize and repeat if any topics are mentioned>

We'll use the crossed arms gesture and a loud verbal "cut" if we need to stop the action for imminent physical danger. <Demonstrate this.> Now let's all do it together. Can anyone think of an imaginary situation when someone should use cut? <Comment on any examples. If no volunteers, say "For example, if two people are both backing up and could crash into each other.">

We'll use the look down gesture of holding your hand over your eyebrows, as if shading your eyes from the sun, in case you want to physically leave the game space with no in-game discussion, like to get a drink of water or just take a break. You don't need to explain to anyone why you're leaving.

We'll use the "ok check in" gesture to check in on a player if things are getting intense for the character. <Demonstrate this.> For example, if you are having an in-game argument and you raise your voice and the other person looks upset, you could use the ok check in to confirm that the player is not upset. If the other person doesn't respond to the check in, or if they respond with a thumbs down or not sure gesture, then you need to back off. If the other person responds with a thumbs up, then you have permission to keep up the intensity of the scene.

You do not need to wait for someone to check in on you if you are getting uncomfortable. You can use the thumbs down gesture to tell them to back off the intensity, or you can use the thumbs up gesture to tell them you are enjoying it and they can keep it up.

Let's all take responsibility for safety, including remembering not to bring in topics someone wants to leave out of the game, calling or responding to a call for a cut, and stepping out of the game space if we need to. This will let us lean into the emotions of each scene and play with more intensity and intimacy.

Introduction to this game - 5 min

Welcome to After the End. This game is about the feelings people have around belonging to a group, in this case, the Sublime Movement, a religion that could be described as a cult. Together, you players will co-create the world of the Sublime Movement and invent & explore your characters as they face a major crisis of faith. Your characters are the Celestial Siblings, the chosen group of believers, who work closely with the charismatic leader who you call Divine Parent, explaining and expanding their message to the regular members of the movement who you call the Celestial Cousins. We are your GMs, who will not be roleplaying with you, but will be keeping time and giving instructions as the game goes along.

For anyone who likes to see information visually and in print, we have a game briefing handout that is labeled Player Cuesheet. You do not need to read this handout if you prefer to experience everything in the moment, because we'll tell you everything you need to know as we go along. On the front of the sheet is a summary of the scenes, and on the back is a transcript of what Divine Parent says during one of the scenes, which could help in the event of any auditory challenges. Here are the handouts for anyone who wants one.

There are four scenes in this game. Before each scene, there's an out-of-game workshop where you will collectively decide on some parts of the group's story and individually pick out some parts of your character's story. We will give you specific instructions during each workshop.

After each workshop, you will roleplay a scene. Some of these scenes have multiple parts. We will set the scene and explain any special parts for particular scenes. To give you a preview of the shape of this game's story, here's an outline of the scenes and their emotional focus points. The first scene happens right after the predicted time of the Blessed Ascension. According to Divine Parent, during the Blessed Ascension, all the believers in the Sublime Movement would leave this earthly realm and be taken into a heavenly state. When you all find yourselves still here, but Divine Parent is gone, it's chaos. It's like the rug of reality has been pulled out from under you because something you believed in just didn't happen.

The second scene jumps back to ten years ago, when all of you were chosen to become Celestial Siblings. This scene is about the good parts of belonging to a tight group. It's like you were searching for some community, home, or purpose your whole life, and you finally found what you needed all along. You felt really special to be picked out, and you were glad to step

away from your old life and make a commitment to the Sublime Movement and your new, improved life.

The third scene was five years ago, when Divine Parent did something disappointing. This scene is about struggling with doubt, and how different people might either refuse to admit that anything was wrong at all, or might feel shaken up and let down. At that time, you all found a reason to stay with the Sublime Movement, but for some, it was a seed of doubt.

Finally, in the fourth scene, you come back to the present time, to a time shortly after the first scene ends. With Divine Parent gone, it's up to you Celestial Siblings to decide what to say to the Celestial Cousins at the Spiritual Summit. Some of you might leave the Movement; the rest of you will answer the big question about how to interpret the fact that you're all still here and not in a heavenly state, and what to believe now.

Game Workshops and Game Play

Scene 1 workshop - 30 min

Let's start the workshop for Scene 1: The Anticipated End.



Everyone should pick a character name and write it on a name tag, along with your character pronouns. This is your Sublime Movement name, a name that you took to symbolize that you left behind your old life and became a new person when you became a Celestial Sibling. We have a list of suggested astronomy, constellation, and star names that you could pick from, or you can feel free to make up your own name. You have one minute.



S1 phrase

Start to imagine what your character is like. Pick and keep a card that has a phrase that your character was once overheard saying. Ignore the number on the back of the card for now, but keep the card for later. You have one minute.

Now, you should all collaborate to answer the two group questions. The first one is: **What pose, vocalization, and/or group contact action do you all use to begin and end your Celestial Be-In rituals? (For example, everyone may raise their hands with palms facing down, close their eyes, and make a humming sound that starts soft, gets loud, and then fades away.)** You have 5 minutes to answer this as a group.

The second question is: **What did Divine Parent leave behind in the inner sanctum, which you will find when you go looking for them? (For example, their golden pen, a handful of change, or crumpled receipts. This cannot be a goodbye note or anything that gives explicit instructions or explanations for Divine Parent's absence.)** You have 3 minutes to answer this as a group.

Now, we will make some character connections. Each of you will make 2 character connections between your character and 2 different other characters (it's ok if some of you have more than 2 since it might not work out exactly even). First, every Celestial Sibling has 1 or 2 roommates. You often talk with your roommates before falling asleep, including about any doubts you have about Divine Parent. Please pair off into groups 2 or 3 with your roommates, and quickly make up together a recent conversation you've had about the Sublime Movement, and the positions your characters took during that conversation. You have 5 minutes.

Now that you all have 1 connection, each of you will make 1 or 2 more connections. I will read a bunch of possible connections one at a time. When you hear one you want, raise your hand. The people who have that connection will then step to the side and take 5 minutes to make up together the positions your characters have taken during a recent conversation. Try to connect with someone who is not already your roommate.

- The two or three of you bonded over secretly continuing to watch a TV reality show, despite the Sublime Movement discouraging any consumption of mainstream media
- The two or three of you have ended up doing most of the cooking for the group and have spent a lot of time together in the kitchen, sometime complaining that others forget that if everyone meditated all the time, everyone would starve
- The two of you go out into the regular world to do a lucrative day job that helps fund the group, working in the same office so you can remind each other to not fall into the trap of valuing what the world values
- The two of you have had a prohibited on-again off-again romantic relationship, coming together because of mutual connection but then repeatedly resolving to be true to the Sublime Movement
- The two or three of you both sneak out to smoke or drink sometimes, even though the Sublime Movement discourages this, and talk about how some of the ideas of the Movement (like prohibiting tobacco or alcohol) don't seem very grounded in Divine Revelation
- The two or three of you sometimes can't sleep and end up in the kitchen eating snacks and talking about the ideals of the Sublime Movement

<Read through the possibilities. If there are no volunteers for one, skip it and come back if needed. If there are more than the target number of volunteers for a connection, tell them the desired number and have them work out who takes it.>



S1 /D1, D2

Now, as the last part of this workshop, we will do the individual prompt cards. Check the number on the back of your character phrase card. The person with the highest doubt number should look through a Scene 1 prompt deck, pick a card, then pass the remaining cards to the next highest doubt number. They should start with one of the decks. After they have passed along the rest of that deck, they should do the next Scene 1 prompt deck. So, each of you will end up with 2 individual answers to 2 specific questions about your character. This is information you can use during the role playing later. The two prompt questions are: **What did you think would happen during the Blessed Ascension?** and **Who was the last person you argued with about what would happen at the predicted time of the Blessed Ascension?**

<suggest a 5-minute break>

Scene 1 play - 30 min

The main part of this scene is set in the present time, but we will start with a few personal flashbacks that happened recently. These flashbacks are short warm up scenes about the last argument you had with someone about what would happen at the predicted time of the Blessed Ascension. For this personal flashback scene, you pick another player, tell them who they are portraying during the flashback, and then act out the flashback together. Any of the players in the flashback can end it by saying “And that’s a wrap.” If the flashback lasts over 3 minutes, a GM may also say “And that’s a wrap”. A GM will ring a bell at the 2-minute mark. After up to 10 minutes for personal flashbacks, you will all begin the main scene.



The purpose of the flashback scenes is to give you a chance to get further into your character by exploring a scene from their past. Would anyone like to volunteer for the first flashback? <If no volunteers at all, go directly to the main scene. Otherwise, use the timer and ring the bell at 2 minutes, and say “and that’s a wrap” at a good stopping point if they are still going at 3 minutes.> Would anyone like to volunteer for the second flashback? <If no volunteers, go to the main scene. Otherwise, use a timer and ring the bell at 2 minutes, and say “and that’s a wrap” at a good stopping point if they are still going at 3 minutes.>

Now you’ll all play the main scene, which happens at the present time, right before the time predicted for the Blessed Ascension. Divine Parent went into the inner sanctum to wait alone. You Siblings set up a be-in circle in this ritual room. This was the moment you'd been preparing for, every day, for the last ten years.

Remember that at some point in the scene, at least one of you should go into the inner sanctum <show them where that space is> to look for the Divine Parent. At that point, a GM will help set the scene for what you see there.

Start the scene by doing your Celestial Be-In ritual and then counting down together from 10. When you reach zero, that is the time the Blessed Ascension Event should happen. You will all be here together in the ritual chamber. I will call “Action” and you should do the ritual and start the countdown.

The scene will end when one of you initiates doing the Celestial Be-In ritual again, and gets everyone to join in. A GM will ring a bell 2 minutes before the time limit for the main scene, to signal that you should wrap it up.



Ready? Action!

<Set a timer and ring the bell at 18 minutes.>

Scene 2 workshop - 20 min

Let's start the workshop for Scene 2: The Elevation. This scene happened 10 years before the first scene.

Probably some of you have not joined a niche religious movement, but you can still imagine a broad notion of what it feels like to join a group. You might draw on a time when you decided to join a church or a club, accept a new job you loved, get married or make a relationship commitment, become part of a crew, gang, or team. You might imagine the feeling of being called up on stage at the concert of a band that you were a big fan of, being singled out to become part of the performer group for an amazing concert with an enraptured audience.



Everyone should pick & keep a card that has the special role your character was selected to take on in the Sublime Movement. You have 1 minute.

Now, you should all collaborate to answer the two group questions. The first one is: **What did Divine Parent say when they announced a small group of you would be elevated as Celestial Siblings? (e.g., Did they give a reason, or was there no justification? Was there an expansion of the Movement's doctrine?).** You have 3 minutes to answer this as a group. Someone should write down the group answer on the question card when you're done.

The second question is: **What are some distinguishing, unusual, or surprising tenets or dictates of the Movement? (e.g., veganism, collective finances, group marriage, peculiar dress code). The only facts about the Movement that you cannot change when making up this information are that the Movement has no gender roles and that it made all of you feel accepted and welcomed.** You have 5 minutes to answer this as a group. Someone should write down the group answer on the question card when you're done.



Now, as the last part of this workshop, we will do the individual prompt cards. Check the number on the back of your character phrase card from the first workshop. The person with the highest doubt number should look through a Scene 2 prompt deck, pick a card, then pass the remaining cards to the next highest doubt number. They should start with one of the decks. After they have passed along the rest of that deck, they should do the next Scene 2 prompt deck. So, each of you will end up with 2 individual answers to 2 specific questions about your character. This is information you can use during the role playing later. The two prompt questions are **Who was I before I joined the movement & what did I find here that I needed?** and **What do you remember Divine Parent saying to you when you were selected as a Celestial Sibling?**

Scene 2 play - 40 min

This scene is set 10 years before the first scene.

The scene can start with some personal flashbacks about a pivotal point in your past that made you decide to seek out this path. These flashbacks may be surreal or dreamlike; or they may also be realistic. Select 1-3 other players, tell them who they will play within your flashback, tell them if it's a dream or real life, then instruct them about what generally happens in the scene. Then act out the flashback together.

Any of the players in the flashback can end it by saying "And that's a wrap." If the flashback lasts over 3 minutes, a GM may also say "And that's a wrap". A GM will ring a bell at the 2-minute mark. After up to 10 minutes for personal flashbacks, you will all begin the main scene.

The purpose of the flashback scenes is to give you a chance to get further into your character by exploring a scene from their past. Would anyone like to volunteer for the first flashback, particularly someone who didn't have a chance to do one before? <If no volunteers at all, go directly to the main scene. Otherwise, use the timer and ring the bell at 2 minutes, and say "and that's a wrap" at a good stopping point if they are still going at 3 minutes.> Would anyone like to volunteer for the second flashback? <If no volunteers, go to the main scene. Otherwise, use the timer and ring the bell at 2 minutes, and say "and that's a wrap" at a good stopping point if they are still going at 3 minutes.>



Now you'll all play the main scene, which is set ten years ago. Divine Parent announced that the time had come for a band of Celestial Siblings to be Elevated, to serve as leaders for the growing number of Celestial Cousins. You were brought together, many of you meeting each other for the first time. This scene opens with all of you Celestial Siblings-to-be together, having been asked to get to know each other and strengthen each other's faith in preparation for the Elevation ceremony where you will dedicate yourself to the movement. You might ask each other about what drew you to the Sublime Movement or bring up difficulties from your prior life and ask each other for help moving onto a better future.

This part of the scene will end when a GM rings a bell. At that time, Divine Parent will lead you through the Elevation ceremony, which will be the rest of the scene. The scene will end with the end of this ritual.

As an out of game note, Divine Parent was physically present, and you all saw them during the Elevation ceremony. However, during this scene, they are only going to be represented by a voice, so that each of you can imagine what they look like, and not have to imagine that they look like a GM.

Start the scene when I call "Action".



<Set a timer, and at 10 minutes ring the bell in a long, sustained way, and start the Elevation ceremony.>

<GM instructions for the Elevation ceremony>



[Divine Parent Speaks:] “My children, form yourselves into a circle. The Elevation is beginning. Let us open together with the Calling Ritual.”

[PAUSES until siblings have assembled]



[Divine Parent Speaks:] “You each will share a few words about why you were called to become a Celestial Sibling. Hold this chime while you reflect on your beliefs about your calling. Ring it once before you speak. Ring it again when you have finished sharing. Then pass the chime to the Sibling to your left. Begin.”

[Celestial Siblings complete the Calling Ritual]



[Divine Parent Speaks:] “As the stone falls, you release that which has held you down.

Each of you will come to the altar and select a Burden Stone. Announce a thing that you will give up from your former life, then release the Burden Stone into the water. Begin.”

[PAUSES until all Celestial Siblings have released a Burden Stone]



[Divine Parent Speaks:] “As the feather rises, your spirit feels the uplift.

The last of you to release a Burden Stone will pick up the feather for the Vow of the Rising. Name the role you will take in the Sublime Movement and why you are the right person for this role. When you have finished sharing, pass the feather to the Sibling to your right. Begin.”

[Celestial Siblings complete the Vow of the Rising]



[Divine Parent Speaks:] “Children, the Elevation will close with the Naming Ritual. You each will say your new name in the Sublime Movement, announcing it like this, “Call me Divinity, now and forever.” Celestial Siblings will respond, “Welcome, Divinity.”

[Celestial Siblings complete the Naming Ritual.]



[Divine Parent rings the bell and Speaks:] The Elevation Ceremony is ended, let us go forth into our new lives together.

<suggest a 5-minute break>

Scene 3 workshop - 15 min

Let’s start the workshop for Scene 3: Doubt. This scene where you all talked happened five years before Scene 1, but the discovery happened a year before that.

You should all collaborate to answer the two group questions. The first one is: **What did some of you discover Divine Parent had done? (This should be something that could cause doubt about their truthfulness and their worthiness to lead the Movement. It should also be something that some people are able to explain, dismiss, or interpret in a way that makes it seem ok. For example, putting money in a personal bank account rather than the group account, inappropriate romantic or sexual involvement with someone inside or outside the Movement, expressing cynicism about the Blessed Ascension, etc.)** You have 5 minutes to answer this as a group.

The second question is: **Which of you found out what Divine Parent had done, and how and when did this discovery happen? This discoverer can be more than one person, but not the entire group.** You have 2 minutes to answer this as a group.



Now, as the last part of this workshop, we will do the individual prompt cards. Check the letters on the back of the role card from the last workshop. The player with the earliest letter of the alphabet number should look through the deck, pick a card, then pass it to the player with the next earliest letter of the alphabet. They should start with one of the decks. After they have passed along the rest of that deck, they should do the next Scene 3 prompt deck. So, each of you will end up with 2 individual answers to 2 specific questions about your character. This is information you can use during the role playing later. The two prompt questions are: **What changed in your feelings about Divine Parent after you all talked about this discovery?** and **How often have you thought/talked about this incident since?**

Scene 3 play - 20 min

There are no flashbacks in this scene, which happened five years before scene 1.

In this scene, one or more of the Celestial Siblings, who a year earlier discovered something Divine Parent had done, has finally called together the whole group to tell everyone else. In this scene, those who know already should tell those who don't know. Then, everyone should discuss what it means for the group and for each of you.

The scene will end when one of you says "It's over. Let's never talk about this again." or something similar. A GM will ring a bell 2 minutes before the time limit for the main scene, to signal that you should wrap it up.



Start the scene when I call "Action".

<Set a timer and ring the bell at 18 minutes.>

Scene 4 workshop - 15 min

Let's start the workshop for Scene 4: Now What? This scene is set a few minutes after the first scene.

You should all collaborate to answer the two group questions. The first one is: **Will any of you leave the Movement before the Spiritual Summit broadcast to the Celestial Cousins? If so, who?** You have 5 minutes to answer this as a group.

All players whose characters are leaving the group should now have a quick huddle to decide how you will leave. Will you all tell the others as a group together, or will some of you only tell one other character? You can split off from the group now to discuss this for 5 minutes.

For players whose characters are staying, the second question is: **At the Spiritual Summit, those of you who stay will give a short opening remark, take turns answering questions from the Cousins, and then give a closing remark before leading the Cousins in a be-in ritual. Decide which of you will open and close. Those are also the people who will answer the first and last question from the Cousins. Then decide the order of everyone else.** You have 3 minutes to answer this as a group.



S4 /D1, D2

Now, as the last part of this workshop, we will do the individual prompt cards, only for those of you who will stay in the movement. Check the letters on the back of the role card you have. The player with the earliest letter of the alphabet number should look through the deck, pick a card, then pass it to the player with the next earliest letter of the alphabet. They should start with one of the decks. After they have passed along the rest of that deck, they should do the next Scene 4 prompt deck. So, each of you will end up with 2 individual answers to 2 specific questions about your character. This is information you can use during the role playing later. The two prompt questions are: **Coming into the group discussion, what do you think the group should tell the Celestial Cousins?** and **During the Spiritual Summit, which question from the Celestial Cousins will you answer?**

<suggest a 5-minute break>

Scene 4 play - 20 min

This scene happens right after Scene 1, which is 10 years after Scene 2, and 5 years after Scene 3.

Before the main scene, there can be small goodbye scenes for any character who is leaving the Sublime Movement. The players with characters leaving should say which subset of the other Celestial Siblings are present at their goodbye scene, and whether they have one big, shared scene or multiple scenes. If any player doesn't want to act out a goodbye scene with others, they may instead narrate a goodbye note that their character leaves for the group.

Any of the players in a goodbye scene can end it by saying "And that's a wrap." If the goodbye scene lasts over 3 minutes, a GM may also say "And that's a wrap". A GM will ring a bell at the 2-minute mark. <If the leavers decided to have a big group scene instead of individual scenes, you can give them 5 minutes for the scene instead of 3.>



The purpose of the goodbye scenes is to give you a chance to wrap up your character's story if they are leaving the group. Would anyone like to volunteer for the first goodbye scene or goodbye note? <If no one is leaving or if no one wants to say goodbye, go to the main scene. Otherwise, use a timer and ring the bell at 2 minutes. All characters who are leaving the group should have a chance to do a goodbye scene or note. Unlike the previous scenes, don't cut off the number of scenes until everyone has had a chance.>

Now all the remaining Celestial Siblings will play the main scene. All of you remaining Celestial Siblings have just 5 minutes before the broadcast Spiritual Summit with the Celestial Cousins. You've been talking about what it all means and what to do next, and this is your last chance to agree on the path forward.

When the time for discussion runs out, a GM will ring the bell. All of you remaining Celestial Siblings should open the Spiritual Summit by jointly leading the Celestial Cousins in the opening be-in ritual. The character who is speaking to the Summit should stand up at the front of the room and look into the imaginary camera. <Indicate where the front of the room is and where the camera is.> In your previously determined speaker order, start with the opening remark, then have that character answer the first question. Each question answerer should first read the question from their card, as if it was selected from questions the audience sent in, then give an answer to the question while looking into the camera. Take turns answering the rest of the questions until the last question is answered. Then have that character give the closing remark and lead the audience in the closing be-in ritual, which ends the scene. <The players whose characters left will just be watching this part of the scene.>



Start the scene when I call "Action".
<Set a timer and ring the bell at 5 minutes.>

Epilogue and Debrief - 10 min.

Thank you for coming together to play After the End today, and I hope you all had an interesting and fun experience. To wrap up, I'd first like to give everyone a chance to say what they think happens to their character afterwards.

Now I'd like to give everyone a chance to share some moment of the game that was particularly thought provoking or meaningful.

Thank you all again for playing!

<Timing note: Playtest with 6 players took 4 hours, so this game may be more comfortable scheduled in a 4.5-hour slot so there isn't a lot of pressure to go quickly.>

Notes