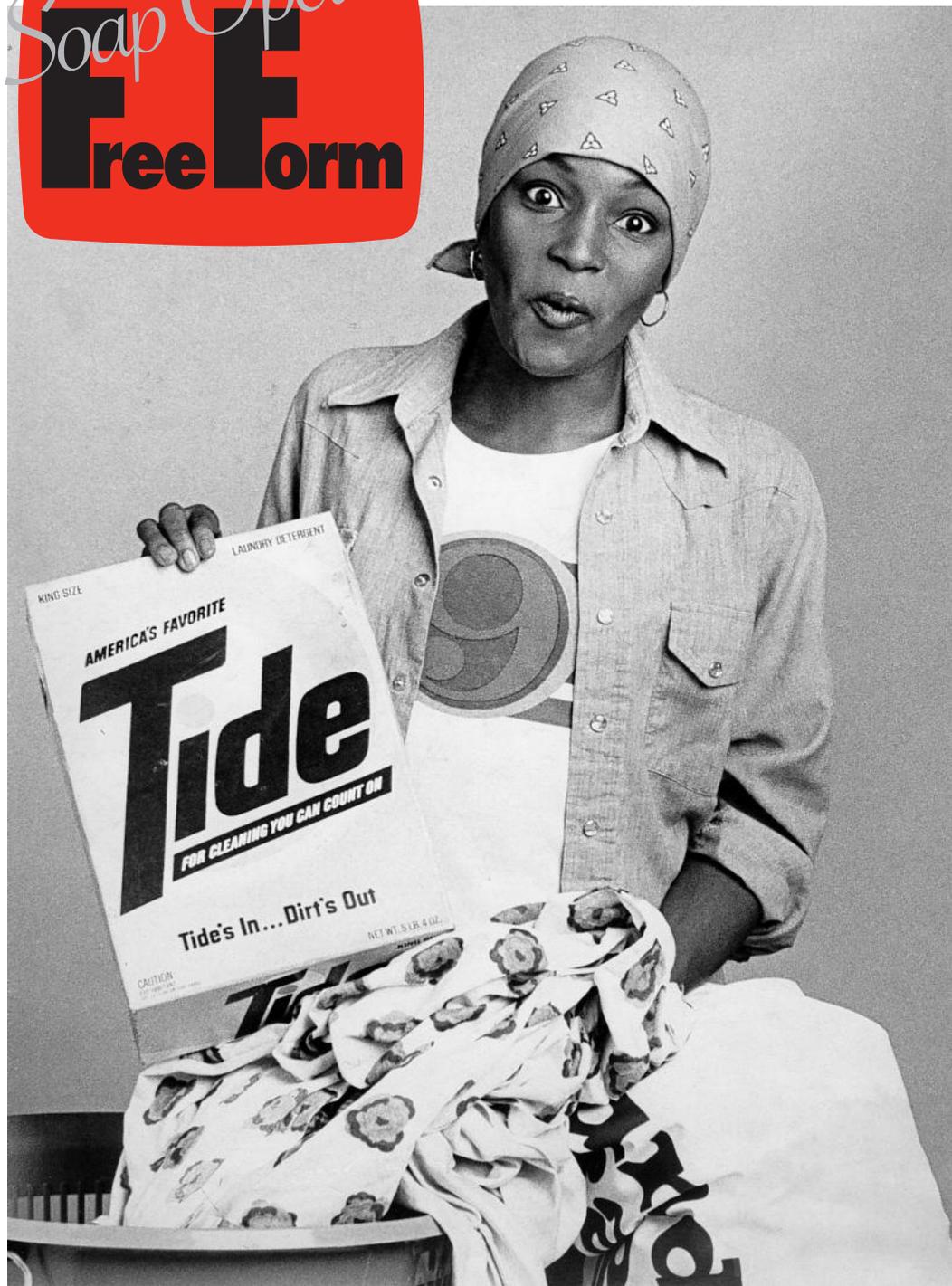


Soap Opera
Free Form



Welcome...

...to the Freeform Soap Opera, the purpose of which is a game that needs relatively little preparation and can be played over and over again without repeating itself. It aims to be a relaxing and fun game to play when no-one has another game prepared—the intermission game of your gaming group, if you want and since it's a soap opera you're playing, it is also a game that wants to stretch your imagination. In a soap opera, anything goes. No idea is too outrageous. To eliminate the need for a game master that has prepared a game, the Freeform Soap Opera contains a process whereby the entire group collectively creates the scenario while playing it.

-Thorbiörn Fritzon

TEASER

BARTLETT'S DEPARTMENT STORE

(A PANNING SHOT OF BARTLETT'S DEPARTMENT STORE. A MALE SHOPPER AND FEMALE SHOPPER NOD TO A STORE EMPLOYEE WHO IS HANDLING A FUR STOLE. THE SHOPPERS EXIT. A DETECTIVE ENTERS AND SAYS HELLO TO THE EMPLOYEE. BOTH EXIT. THREE TEENAGE GIRLS, JULIE OLSON, CAROL PROCTOR, AND DIANE WALK BY A DISPLAY CASE WHICH HAS A FUR STOLE IN IT. CAROL AND DIANE STAND BACK AND GIVE JULIE A NOD. JULIE OPENS UP HER PURSE, TAKES THE STOLE OUT OF THE DISPLAY CASE AND STUFFS IT INTO HER PURSE. JULIE WALKS BACK TO HER FRIENDS AND GIGGLES.)

CAROL

Julie, what did you do? You're the greatest!

DIANE

We'd better get out of here.

JULIE

Now don't act in a hurry. That's a dead giveaway.

(THE GIRLS START TO CASUALLY WALK OUT OF THE STORE. THE DETECTIVE AND EMPLOYEE BLOCK THEIR EXIT.)

DETECTIVE

All right. Hold it right there girls.

CUT TO:

I/E. OPENING TITLE

ED PRENTISS

(VOICE OVER)

Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

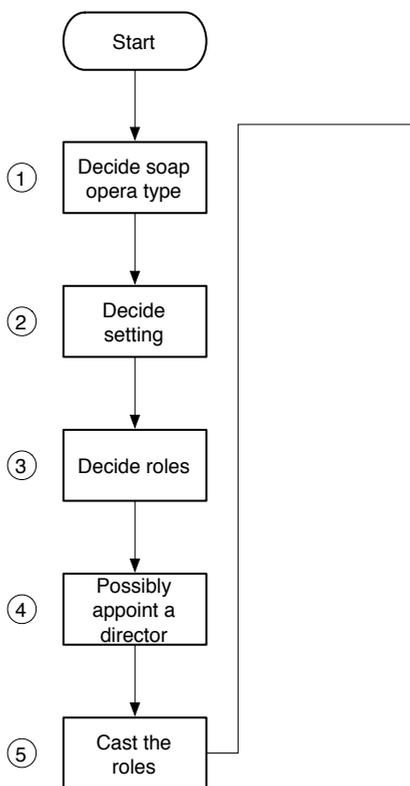
Remember that soap operas are all about dialogue and no action. You don't need a way to resolve action events in this game because there is no action at all.

Playing a title song and having one of the players reading a voice over adds flair to the game as well as acts as a marker for the game start.

the process

The process used in the soap opera is based on the time slots in a commercial TV channels airing of a soap opera or the likes of show. The game is played in real time in blocks divided by commercial brakes where the players plan the next block.

Before play, everyone decides on the name of the soap opera, the type (for instance US day time soap or prime time soap), the setting and the characters. Between each episode, there is a episode planning time that is one episode long. If the show has half hour episodes, (a commercial half our—21 minutes) the episode planning time is 30 minutes. At the stroke of the whole hour, the show starts and the first block of, for instance eight minutes is played. The game is played on a number of stages placed in the room and an optional director is responsible for cutting between the scenes in true soap opera fashion. Between the blocks there is commercial brakes of for instance four minutes where the players can rearrange themselves in new constellations and plan for the next block. After the commercial brake the game starts again and goes on for another eight minutes. At the end of the last block in an episode there should always be a cliff-hanger and after that there is a new episode planning brake for the length of an episode. This goes on until the game runs out of steam or a suitable ending can be created.



The Soap Opera Process with the five game preparation steps on this page and the game steps on the facing page

preparations

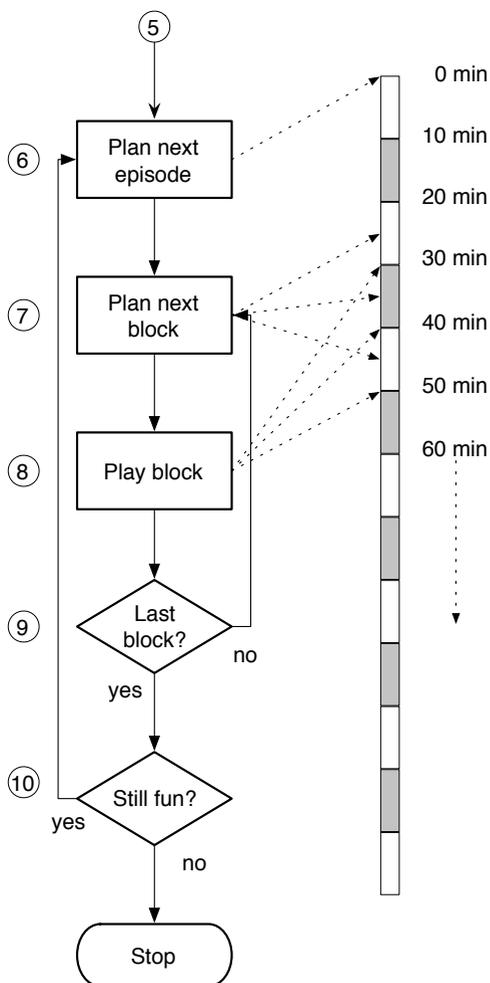
Collectively decide on: *The type of show, the episode length, the name of the show, a model show to be inspired by, a setting, a plot, the characters, whether to use a director.*

Organize the room in a number of stages that all players can play in pairs in a block, i.e. the number of players divided by two and so that they are reasonably separated from each other.

The game is played according to the sequence diagram left. It all starts with the game session preparation steps shown in the leftmost boxes in the diagram and then the game loops over the game steps shown in the rightmost boxes.

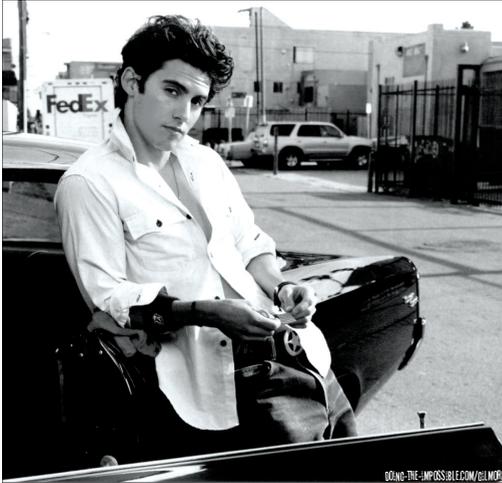
Don't let the game preparation take too much time, the game is supposed to be outrageously weird and cliché laden, just as real soap operas are. The worse ideas the better.

The word “block” in the diagram left means the play between two commercial breaks or a commercial break and the beginning or end of the episode. The block length differs depending on the episode length. The times shown in the diagram is for a show with 30 minute episodes.



Remember to end while it's still fun.

Planning the Next Episode



IF YOU want to be keen, alert, alive, at your best mentally and physically, get a sufficient amount of sleep. If you did not sleep well last night, you probably don't feel well today. Unpleasant as it is to lie awake, most of us suffer more from the dull, listless feeling that follows a wakeful night.

Much sleeplessness is due to overtaxed nerves.

Dr. Miles Effervescent Nervine Tablets

relax nervous tension -- act to permit restful sleep.

Try Dr. Miles Effervescent Nervine Tablets when you are Restless, Excitable, Irritable, when you have Nervous Headache.

Dr. Miles Effervescent Nervine Tablets dissolved in water make a pleasant sparkling solution. You will like both the taste and the action of these modern tablets.

Dr. Miles Nervine is also made in liquid form. See opposite page.



DR. MILES Effervescent
NERVINE TABLETS



Normally, an episode length of time (30 or 60 minutes) should be used for planning, but the first episode will be harder to plan so take some extra time for planning this. Make sure that you start playing at the stroke of the full hour. Every player should decide what the objectives for her or his character is for this episode as well as who it should talk to. Remember that soap operas are all about talk and no action. If you don't manage to finish the planning you have to play anyway. It doesn't matter since soap operas often have confused episodes that no one really understands and that has to be explained by an explanatory monologue at the end of the episode or at the beginning of the next one. This is common practice among soap operas so don't worry about it.

CONTINUED:

ED PRENTISS (CONT'D)

'Days of Our Lives' - a new dramatic serial
starring MacDonald Carey.

FADE IN:

POLICE STATION

(JULIE SPEAKS WITH DIANE, WHILE THE DETECTIVE INTERVIEWS
CAROL AT HIS DESK IN THE BACKGROUND.)

JULIE

You didn't give him your right name, did
you?

DIANE

Of course, I did.

JULIE

Well that was pretty dumb, I must say.

DIANE

He asked me. I had to tell him, didn't I?

JULIE

Well, you could have played it smart. The
next thing you know, your parents will be
coming down here.

DIANE

Well, gosh, Julie, I couldn't help it.

JULIE

Sure you could, I'm not gonna give him my
right name.

DIANE

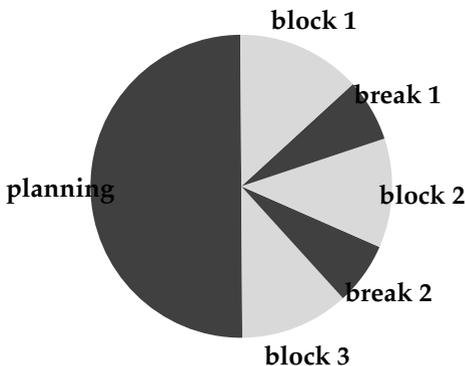
You're not?

*Remember that everything is a drama in
a soap opera—even giving your name to
the police officer. A little detail like lying
about your identity, even if done com-
pletely at random can be dwelled upon
for several episodes. The writers of soap
operas have as much trouble coming up
with new ideas as you and me.*

PLAYING A BLOCK

Then, at the designated time, at the stroke of the full hour, everyone has to be on their places and be ready to start play. If there is a director she or he is responsible for cutting between the scenes to create the dramatic tension, but has nothing to say about what is played at every scene---you don't want to create a new version of a game master. Players may leave a scene during play, for instance to storm out of an argument, but may not enter another scene during

the same block. Every player may only play at scene per block. The game play itself consists almost only of dialogue or monologue, sometimes sprinkled with light action, but the action should be few and far between and should only consist of simple single actions like striking or shooting someone, nothing elaborate. Soap operas normally neither have the budget or the inclination to do a lot of action



A NOTE ON EPISODE LENGTHS

There are two lengths an episode can have: 30 or 60 minutes and 60 is very rare—30 is the general rule. The episode length is called “the commercial length” which means that it includes the commercial breaks, so a 30 minute episode has a 22 minute playing length.

PLANNING

The planning of the next block is very time limited so everyone has to cooperate in order to make it as swift as possible. In general players call out what they want to do, things like “I want to discuss the testament with uncle Rolf” and such. After which everyone takes a spot at a scene where they will be playing the next block. A player doesn’t have to switch scenes but can very well keep on playing the same scene as before the break if that scene isn’t yet finished.

LAST BLOCK?

After the correct number of blocks, normally three, it’s time to finish off today’s episode. A soap opera episode should always finish with a cliff-hanger—it’s compulsory. The cliff-hanger can be pretty lame, but it has to be there and it can be as cheesy as the type of soap opera permits.

LAST EPISODE?

If a suitable last episode for the game can be found, i.e. something that’s sufficiently funny, bizarre or otherwise entertaining, the game should be finished with that, otherwise the game just finished when it’s lost steam or everyone has run out of ideas. Remember: it’s better to finish one episode too early than one too late—the memory of the game afterwards will be better that way.

If this, indeed, isn’t the last episode of the show, the game returns to the “Planning the Next Episode” stage and the players have one episode length of time to plan. (usually 30 minutes)

Episode 1

CONTINUED:

JULIE

Of course not.

DETECTIVE

(MOTIONS TO JULIE)

All right, young lady, you're next.

(JULIE GETS UP AND WALKS TO THE DESK, WHILE CAROL WALKS BACK TO SIT BY DIANE).

DETECTIVE (CONT'D)

Sit down. What's your full name?

JULIE

Grave hearing deficiencies are very common among soap opera characters. People can practically be shouting in the same room without anyone else hearing if the body language indicates that they are whispering.

Julie Horton.

DIANE
(SHOCKED)

Julie Horton?

CAROL

Shhh.

DIANE

But that's...

CAROL shakes her head to quiet DIANE.

DETECTIVE

(AS HE WRITES THE NAME DOWN)

Julie Horton.

(JULIE turns back and smirks at CAROL and DIANE.)

CUT TO:

HORTON HOUSE

INTERCUT: POLICE STATION (DETECTIVE)

The game should be cut between the different scenes to create dramatic tension. Use a director that cuts the scenes or appoint one person per scene to hand the "shot" over to the next scene, or go for broke and let any one hand over to anyone.

(CONTINUED)

A SOAP OPERA PRIMER

Even though most players knows soap operas intimately, it can be worthwhile to repeat all the intricacies of the soap opera genre.

A soap opera is an ongoing, episodic work of fiction, usually broadcast on television or radio. This genre of TV and radio entertainment has existed long enough for audiences to recognize them simply by the term soap. What differentiates a soap from other television drama programs is their open-ended nature. Plots run concurrently, intersect, and lead into further developments. An individual episode of a soap opera will generally switch between several different concurrent story threads that may at times interconnect and affect one another, or may run entirely independent of each other. Each episode may feature some of the show's current storylines but not always all of them. There is some rotation of both storylines and actors so any given storyline or actor will appear in some but usually not all of a week's worth of episodes. Soap operas rarely "wrap things up" storywise, and generally avoid bringing all the current storylines to a conclusion at the same time. When one storyline ends there are always several other story threads at differing stages of development. Soap opera episodes invariably end on some sort of cliffhanger.

Type of Soap Operas

The main types of soap operas are:

- US Prime Time Soap
- US Day Soap
- British Prime Time Soap
- British Day Soap
- Australian Soap
- Latin American Soap
- Native (your native country) Soap

Prime Time Soaps

Prime Time, or evening soap operas sometimes differ from the general format and are more likely to feature the entire cast, and represent all current story lines in each episode.

Additionally evening soaps and other serials that run for only part of the year tend to bring things to a dramatic end of season cliffhanger. Some of the larger, disaster cliffhangers that affect a large proportion of the cast sometimes serve to bring all current story lines together.

Plots and Story Lines

Most soaps follow the lives of a group of characters who live or work in a particular place, or focus on a large, extended family. The storylines follow the day-to-day lives of these characters. In many soap operas, in particular daytime serials in the United States, the characters are generally more handsome, beautiful, seductive, and wealthy than the typical person watching

the show. This is true to a lesser extent in soap operas from Australia and the United Kingdom, which largely focus on more everyday characters and situations and are frequently set in working class environments. Many Australian and UK soap operas explore social realist storylines such as family discord, marriage breakdown, or financial problems, and sometimes include significant amounts of comedy.

Romance, secret relationships, extra-marital affairs, and genuine love have been the basis for many soap opera storylines. In US daytime serials the most popular soap opera characters, and the most popular storylines, often involved a romance of the sort presented in paperback romance novels. Soap opera storylines sometimes weave intricate, convoluted, and sometimes confusing tales of characters who have affairs, meet mysterious strangers and fall in love, and who commit adultery, all of which keeps audiences hooked on the unfolding story twists. Australian and UK soap operas also feature a significant proportion of romance storylines. In Russia, most popular soap operas explores “romantic quality” of criminal and/or oligarch life.

In soap opera storylines, previously-unknown children, siblings, and twins (including the evil variety) of established characters often emerge. Unexpected calamities disrupt weddings, childbirths, and other major life events with unusual frequency. Much like comic books—another popular form of linear storytelling pioneered in the US during the 20th Century—a character’s death is not guaranteed to be permanent without an on-camera corpse, and sometimes not even then. For example, the death of Dr. Taylor Forrester on *The Bold and the Beautiful* seemed permanent as she had flatlined on-camera and even had a funeral. But when actress Hunter Tylo returned in 2005, the show retconned the “flatlining” with the revelation that Taylor had actually gone into a coma.

American Soap

American soap operas shares many common visual elements that set them apart dramatically

from other shows:

Overhead spotlighting, or back lighting, is often placed directly over the heads of all the actors in the foreground, causing an unnatural shadowing of their features along with a highlighting of their hair. Back lighting was always a standard technique of film and television lighting, though it was mostly abandoned in the mid-to-late eighties due to its somewhat unnatural look. The technique has nevertheless persisted in soap operas.

The rooms in a house often use deep stained wood wall panels and furniture, along with many elements of brown leather furniture. This creates an overall “brown” look which is intended to give a sumptuous and luxurious look to suggest the wealth of the characters portrayed.

Daytime soap operas do not routinely feature location or exterior-shot footage. Often they will recreate an outdoor locale in the studio. Australian and UK daily soap operas, on the other hand, invariably feature a certain amount of exterior-shot footage in every episode. This is usually shot in the same location and often on a purpose-built set, although they do include new exterior locations for certain story lines.

The visual quality of a soap opera is usually lower than prime time television shows due to the lower budgets and quicker production times involved. This is also due to the fact that soap operas are recorded on videotape using a multi camera setup, unlike prime time productions which are usually shot on film and frequently using the single camera shooting style. Because of the lower resolution of video images, and also because of the emotional situations portrayed in soaps, daytime serials feature a heavy use of close-up shots.

Soaps often reuse the same blocking techniques. For example, if a romantically involved man and woman are talking to each other face-to-face, one character will inevitably turn 180° and face away from the other character while they both continue to have a conversation. While this would virtually never happen in real life, and is not seen outside of US daytime seri-

CONTINUED:

TOM
(TRIES TO CHANGE SUBJECT)

Do you know what we'd do if we were rich
and crazy?

ALICE

What?

TOM

Go on an ocean cruise, just the two of us.

ALICE

Without the children?

TOM

Darling you're hopeless. What children?

(TOM HUGS ALICE.)

CLOSE-IN ON THE HORTON HOUSE FOYER.

(THE FRONT DOOR OPENS AND 33-YEAR OLD ATTORNEY MICKEY HORTON,
23-YEAR OLD BIOCHEMISTRY GRADUATE STUDENT MARIE HORTON, AND
HER FIANCÉ, NEIGHBOR TONY MERRITT WALK IN, ALL LAUGHING,
RETURNING HOME FROM A DOUBLE DATE.)

MICKEY

Well, I was a gentleman, wasn't I?

TONY

Oh, yes.

MICKEY

I mean at least I saw her home.

MARIE

Did you tell her you had another date
later?

The player power in the Freeform Soap Opera is absolute. The players can, and are encouraged to, come up with the most bizarre ideas. Every player must also act and react on anything that the other players introduce in the story. Remember that it is a soap opera. The power isn't limited to ones own character. If the player playing Marie in this example from the pilot episode of "The Days of Our Lives" claims that Mickey have dated two girls the same night without first consulting the player playing Mickey, it's nevertheless true.

als, it is an accepted soap convention.

In US daytime soaps, when a scene is about to reach a temporary conclusion and the episode is to switch to a new scene with a different set of characters, one character in the currently concluding scene will often be shown in extreme closeup and deliver a shocking announcement. No other character will respond and there will be no dialogue for several seconds while the music builds before cutting to a new scene. Additionally, in a construct unique to US daytime serials, the episode will frequently then return to this precise point in time after some intervening scenes, and the discussion will continue from the point where the revelation was made. Usually, however, when the discussion resumes the previously tense and dramatic mood created through music and closeup shots will have dissipated; the scene usually resumes in a relatively relaxed and sedate mode. The format of ending a scene to switch to other characters but to then return to the original scene at the precise time the viewer last left it is unique to US daytime serials.

British Soap

In the United Kingdom, soap operas are one of the most popular genres, most being broadcast during prime time. Most UK soaps focus on working-class communities. The most popular is ITV's *Coronation Street* (nicknamed *Corrie*), which regularly attracts the highest viewing figures for any programme.

It is set in a fictional street in the industrial town of 'Weatherfield' based on Salford, now part of Greater Manchester (There are two *Coronation Streets* in Salford and Macclesfield). *Corrie's* principal rival is BBC1's *EastEnders*.

The storylines focus on the experiences of families and their interaction, and on relationships between people of different ages, classes and social structures. In some ways *Coronation Street* has charted the changes in public attitudes towards religion, politics, community, family breakdown, the gentrification of working class areas, etc.

For example, in the first decade one of the

central social points on the street was the 'Glad Tidings' Mission Hall, where religious services were held and social contacts, parties, etc took place. By the start of the 21st century, no religious 'set' exists, with the only particularly religious resident on the street being the 70-year-old widow, Emily Bishop (Eileen Derbyshire). Religion, if it features at all, is mentioned in weddings and funerals, though here too, matching contemporary society, registry office weddings and non-religious funerals are increasingly common.

Early storylines featured self-appointed moral voice Ena Sharples (Violet Carson), and her friends: timid Minnie Caldwell (Margot Bryant) and bespectacled Martha Longhurst (Lynne Carol). When Martha was killed off the programme, Albert Tatlock (Jack Howarth) was allowed to be the unofficial third friend in the group. Ena and Albert had many differences, which they aired regularly, and Albert and Minnie were supposed to be married in the early 1970s. The marriage was eventually called off.

Headstrong Ena frequently clashed with Elsie Tanner (Pat Phoenix), whom she believed espoused a rather disgusting set of morals. Elsie believed in the right to let each person live life according to how they see fit, and resented Ena's gossip, which, most of the time, didn't have much of a basis in reality.

Most of the stories in the early days (and, to an extent, still today) addressed how working-class people made a caste system in their own mini-society and excommunicated others they did not wish to associate with. In reality, many of the people deemed too common (like Elsie Tanner, Hilda and Stan Ogden, played by Jean Alexander and Bernard Youens) were of the exact same stock as the people who were judging them.

Alternative Forms of Play



Even though this process theoretically can be used to play any TV series, it only really fits the soap opera format. But having said that, there are two variants that can be played that slightly deviates from the standard soap opera format: radio soap opera and soap opera parody.

Soap opera parodies are just like soap operas, only even more bizarre and out of control. The prime parody example is of course, *Soap*.

Soap was a parody of daytime soap operas presented in a half-hour prime time sitcom. Like soap operas, the show's story was presented in a serial fashion and included melodramatic plot elements such as amnesia, alien abduction, demonic possession, murder, and kidnapping.

The cast included former soap opera actors. Robert Mandan (as Chester Tate) previously appeared on *Search for Tomorrow* and *Donnelly*

Rhodes (as Dutch) played the first husband of Katherine Chancellor on *The Young and the Restless*.

Radio Soap

The other alternative form of play is a radio soap opera. The most fun way to play this is to rig some sort of microphone stands or microphone stand surrogates in a half circle, like the recording or live broadcast radio theatre studio settings used to be before tape and mixers. All players stand behind a microphone stands and plays the game using the voice only. If wanted, one player can be the narrator and another can even be the audio special effects director and make a lot of noise using various more or less strange devices.

CONTINUED:

TOM

Oh, that must be the hospital. I'll get it
in my study.

(TOM WALKS THROUGH THE FOYER AND INTO THE STUDY. HE ANSWERS
THE PHONE.)

TOM (CONT'D)

Hello, Dr. Horton speaking.

INTERCUT: POLICE STATION.

(THE DETECTIVE IS ON THE PHONE.)

DETECTIVE

Ah, Dr. Horton, this is the precinct
station. We're holding your daughter,
Julie.

INTERCUT: HORTON HOUSE

TOM

(SHOCKED)

You're what?

FADE TO: BLACK

FOR: HOUR GLASS INSERT (:32)

AND: COMMERCIALS #1

The cliffhanger is the soap operas primary tool for keeping the viewer churn low. The cliffhanger that ends a block before a commercial break must be good enough to keep the viewers attention over the break, and the cliffhanger that ends an episode must good enough to keep the viewers attention until then next day.