SOAP

THE GAME OF SOAP OPERA MAYHEM
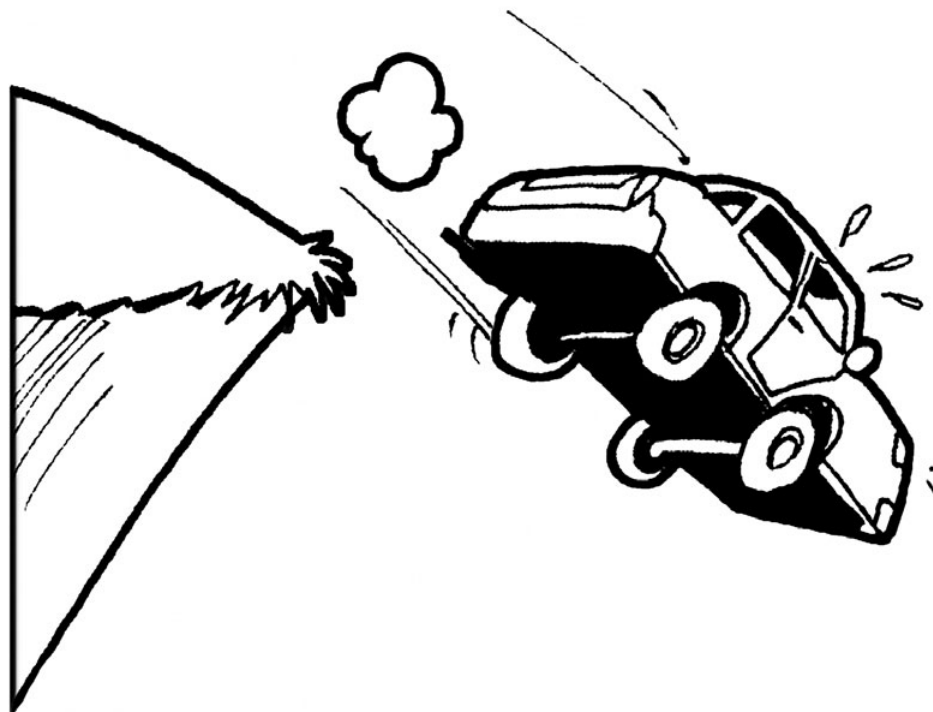

DEDICATED TO:
MIKE PYORALA
1967-2001

BECAUSE THIS GAME BROUGHT
A SMILE TO HIS FACE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the game of Soap, where your character is likely to be shot by ex-lovers, undergo a life-threatening operation, save a family member and have a car crash, all in the space of 90 minutes. To play this game you need only a few scraps of paper, a number of tokens (bottle caps, coins or poker chips for example) and a couple of friends who don't mind overacting.

Unlike most other roleplaying games, Soap can be played without a Game Master (GM). In other games, this person would write up the plot and control the flow of the action. In Soap, every player has the power to shape the plot and to direct the action, so there is no need for a GM. You need at least three players to play Soap. On the other hand, you can play this game with as many people as you like, although any group in excess of ten would probably be unmanageable. But if it works for you, don't let me stop you. The more players, the faster and more furious the action.

What is the point of Soap? You don't fight hordes of orcs or steal data from top secret research facilities. Well, you might very well do those things, but they are not the point of this game. Soap is all about what you would do to keep your dirty little secrets. Ask yourself that question. In this game, you'll be trying to unravel the other players' carefully constructed webs of lies before they unravel yours - usually by having them blown sky high in a freak motorcycle accident involving seven cows, a farmer's daughter, aliens and a gas station. Oh, and a small rodent.

So have fun with the game and don't be afraid to go nuts with some juicy soap opera weirdness. Bring on those killer cyborg Chihuahuas!

Have fun!

- Ferry Bazelmans

CHARACTER CREATION

Creating a character for a game of Soap is easy and takes only about five minutes. No number-crunching or long lists of equipment to peruse here. How much time do you think plot writers for soap operas pour into their creations anyway? Soap is not about layering your character in an attempt to produce a complex human being. Soap is about shallowness and the stereotypes actors in soaps usually portray, like the bitch, the hunk or the ruthless businessman.

THE QUICK QUICKSTART

For those who want to get started right away, without having to create a character first completely on your own, we have the quick quickstart rules (even though character generation is pretty damn quick to start with). Simply select a stereotype package from those that follow, pick one of the listed secrets and create a name for your character and you're good to go. Package characters function exactly the same as normal characters, so there's no need for rules changes. Each package con-

tains a concept description, a number of recommended specific roles for the package, a list of traits, and a few secrets to choose from. Of course, it works best if everyone picks a different stereotype. However, should two or more players wish to play the same package, they can select eachother as an unfriendly relationship only. Can't have competition running around, now can we? These packages are only meant to serve as simple guidelines of course, so you are free to mix and match elements from any of them as you see fit.

For example, where gender is implied, you are free to simply choose to play a character of the opposite sex. Such changes won't have any detrimental effect on the game and we encourage you to play in a manner that works best for you.

HUNK

Concept: You're gorgeous and you know it. All the girls swoon when you walk by, old ladies drop whatever they're holding and other guys question their own masculinity. This has caused any number of your buddies to seek consoling, not to mention the numerous small yapping dogs that have broken a limb or two in the past. Why shouldn't all the world revel in your beauty? You do.

Suggested Roles: businessman, lawyer, male model, actor, escort

Traits: vain, egocentric, manipulative, rich, handsome

Secret:
- has had plastic surgery done
- used to be a woman
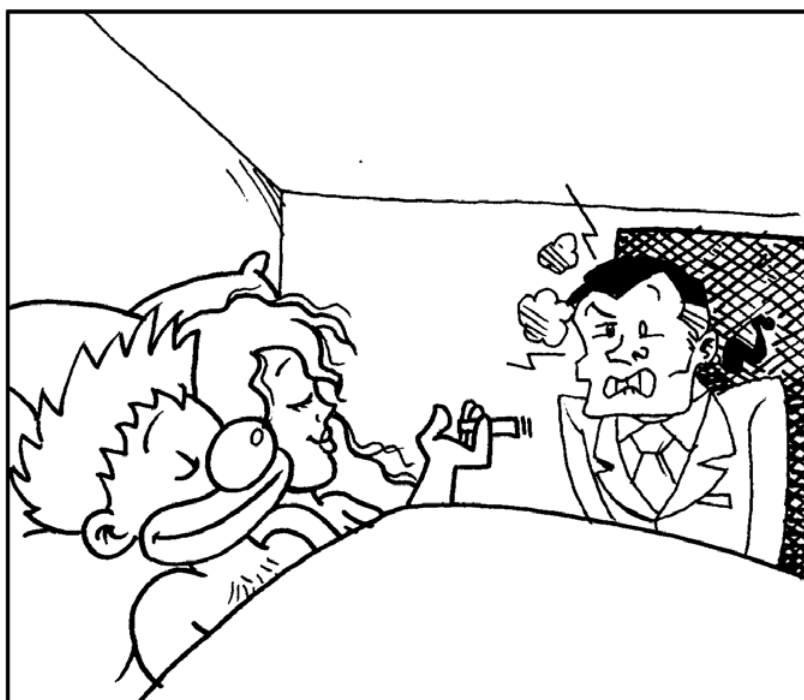
- killed someone in the past (like his twin brother...now he does not need to share those good looks with anyone!)
- is an illegitimate child of [fill in the name of other player character]
- cannot read or write

Goal: To seduce [fill in the name of other player character]

Relationships:
- Unfriendly: Loser, Arch-villian, Bitch, Hunk
- Friendly: Sweet Girl, Mother, Kid, Dilettante

BITCH

Concept: Nasty, smug, and full of yourself. Does that sound like you? Tell that guy crinkling his bag of chips to keep it the hell down, you're trying to read. You know how things are supposed to be done and you have no problem letting other people know it. Why not, you're always right after all. Not everyone has what it takes to get what they want, but you do. The world is your oyster and you'll damn well get the pearl even if you have to dig it out with a spoon. Nothing is too low for you. Blackmail, sexual manipulation, murder - they're all valid tools as long as they help get you what you want.

Suggested Roles: businesswoman, model, actress, rich girl, girlfriend, journalist

Traits: manipulative, bitchy, mean, murderous, cold-hearted

Secret:
- has a child no one knows about
- used to be a man
- was arrested for murder
- killed [fill in the name of other character]'s father/mother
- is dying

Goal: To get [fill in personal desire; person or thing] by ruining [fill in the name of other player character]

Relationships:
- Unfriendly: Sweet Girl, Mother, Kid, Loser, Bitch
- Friendly: Arch-villain, Hunk, Dilettante

LOSER

Concept: Whatever you set out to do, you botch it up. Lusting after that cute guy or gal? Too bad, they just ran off with someone else. Really need money 'cause you're drowning in overdue bills? Too bad, no one's hiring, and even if they were, they wouldn't hire you. Not to worry though, you can always count on your relationship with your parents... What's that? Stopped taking your calls, did they? Well, at least you'll always have Fluffy. Ran over by what, you say? Boy, it must suck to be you...

Suggested Roles: beggar, teen, loser son/daughter, servant, sidekick

Traits: whiny, weak, pathetic, boring, annoying

Secret:
- is the child of [fill in the name of other player character]
- never graduated high school
- is a drug addict
- tried to kill him/herself
- is still a virgin

Goal: To finally win over the heart of [fill in the name of other player character]

Relationships:
- Unfriendly: Hunk, Arch-villain, Bitch, Dilettante, Loser
- Friendly: Mother, Kid, Sweet Girl

ARCH-VILLAIN

Concept: Tired of goody-goody heroes with their lame catch phrases, bright smiles and perfect hair? We know how you feel. Who wants to be the good guy on a Soap anyway? What fun is that? Come to think of it, ARE there any good guys in the Soaps? And if everyone is some sort of bad guy anyway, why not be the best of the bunch? Now is the time to demonstrate why you should rule over all, to show the world just what kind of diabolical power you truly wield. Why, with just a simple phone call, you could wreak such havoc as would turn your opponent's faces pale. It is time to take your place as the master of villainy, to destroy your enemies utterly and to laugh hysterically over their smoking bones…
Suggested Roles: businessman, nobility, criminal, father, Don, cult leader, policeman

Traits: callous, evil, rich, murderous, cunning

Secret:
- has killed wife/husband
- stole large sums of money from the government
- deals drugs
- is a cannibal
- is clinically insane

Goal: To kill [fill in the name of other player character]

Relationships:
- Unfriendly: Mother, Kid, Sweet Girl, Loser, Arch-villain
- Friendly: Bitch, Dilettante, Hunk

SWEET GIRL

Concept: You know, that's a nice smile you have. I bet you were real popular with all the boys in high school. Hey, when was the last time you went to bed without giving your mother a kiss? Never, you say? Well, that just isn't that surprising. I mean, I just can't get over that smile. You've been grinning from ear to ear since we started talking. And what manners! You're something else. Wait a second, are those BUNNY slippers you're wearing? That's a bit much I think. Hmm, now that I think about it, you're wearing a bit too much pink there too. I mean, does your lip gloss really need to be pink as well? And stop calling me 'Mister!

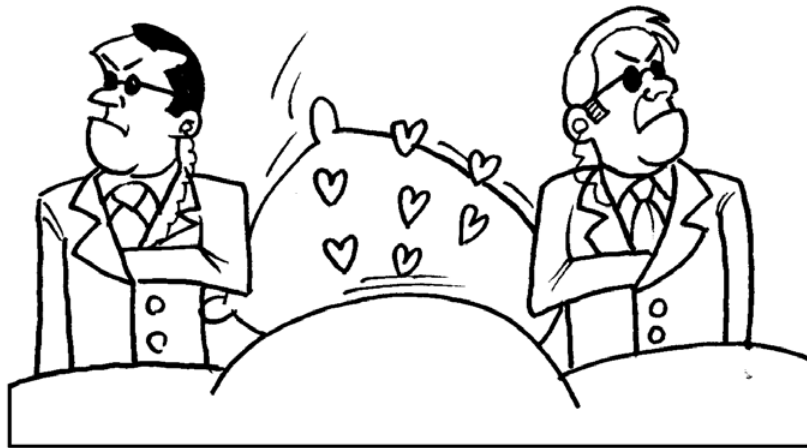Suggested Roles: model, girlfriend, daughter, actress, nun, teen

Traits: sweet, kind-hearted, dumb, loving, cuddly

Secret:
- still has a teddy bear
- can't read or write
- never finished high school
- is [fill in the name of other character]'s long lost daughter

- had relationship with a much older man/woman

Goal: To marry [fill in the name of other player character]

Relationships:
- Unfriendly: Bitch, Dilettante, Arch-villain, Sweet Girl
- Friendly: Mother, Hunk, Kid, Loser

MOTHER

Concept: There is no calling more important in life then that of a mother. Where would any us be without our mommy after all? For some, the need to nurture is all-consuming and nothing else really matters. You are such a person. To you, nothing is more important than caring for your child; your blessed little one. In fact, so true is your love, that you are willing to overlook the little one's faults, no matter what they are or how bad they seem to others. To you, your little one can do no real wrong and you will do whatever you must to protect him/her/it from those who disagree with you. You are the ultimate caregiver, warding off predators and fending off the ele-ments as those in your care go about their lives.

Suggested Roles: homemaker, rich woman, nobility, servant, nun

Traits: kind-hearted, caring, vigilant, smart, giving

Secret:
- had a baby in high school
- has killed to protect son/daughter/etc.
- is a robot
- is an orphan
- is clinically insane

Goal: To protect [fill in the name of other player character] from harm

Relationships:
- Unfriendly: Bitch, Hunk, Arch-villain, Mother
- Friendly: Dilettante, Kid, Loser, Sweet Girl

KID

Concept: Hi there. Boy, aren't you the excitable one? What's that you got there? A yo-yo? Well, isn't that nice? No, I'm sorry, I don't have any candy. This? It's a highlighter. I use it to cross out the names of all the peo-ple I speak to, that way I know who I've

already spoken to and I don't get confused. Sure, I guess you can take a look. Here. Ummm, I don't think your parents would like it if I let you keep sniffing it that way. Hey! Cut that out, that's not meant for the walls! Maybe you should give that back now. Hey, didn't your mother ever tell you it's rude to make that gesture. Why you little...come back here with that!

Suggested Roles: troublemaker, little brother, teen, mall rat

Traits: smart, adventurous, careless, lucky, cute, destructive, rude, delinquint

Secret:
  · is a clone
  · is a hermaphrodite
  · eats bugs
  · can't read or write
  · was born with Siamese brother attached to belly

Goal: To get into a stupid reckless situation and get rescued from it by [fill in the name of other player character]

Relationships:
  · Unfriendly: Bitch, Dilettante, Arch-villain, Kid
  · Friendly: Hunk, Loser, Sweet Girl, Mother

DILETTANTE

Concept: Life has been good to you and now you're surrounded by the trappings of wealth. Mansions, cars, boats, trip to Europe and the Orient - you have it all. Cash here, stocks there; hell, you're not even sure just how rich you are. When you're talking that much money, who can even count that high, anyway? You always get what you want, exactly the way you want it. And why shouldn't you? Filthy rich has its advantages after all.

Talent, skill, a sense of fair play? Only losers need those. YOU have money. If you can't beat'em, buy'em.

Suggested Roles: nobility, royalty, beggar (undercover, of course), rich kid, yuppie

Traits: rich, vain, cunning, hedonist, pampered

Secret:
  · is the black sheep of the family
  · killed a servant once
  · is an alien
  · once stole a lot of money from his father
  · uses drugs

Goal: To get married to [fill in the name of other player character] with a pre-nuptial agreement

Relationships:
- Unfriendly: Loser, Kid, Hunk, Sweet Girl, Dilettante
- Friendly: Mother, Bitch, Arch-villain

CREATE YOUR OWN

Here are the steps involved in creating a character on your own for Soap. Each step is followed by an example. You can find a character sheet included with this game at the back of this booklet.

1. PICK A NAME

First, your character needs a name. It should be easy on the ears and the mind, because the other players have to be able to instantly recall it during the game. That means it would be unwise to pick a name like Sir Gerhardt von Sturmbruckenschlossestein the Younger.

Example: John chooses to play Michael Ridgeway, a ruthless young lawyer making his way up the corporate ladder.

2. DETERMINE YOUR CHARACTER'S TRAITS

Your character's traits are used to earn you Plot Tokens with which to influence the game. Write down what's most important about your character in a few sentences. Pick the things that really make him stand out. For example, what could we say about Arnold Schwarzenegger? How about:

"He is a heavily-muscled and really strong Austrian ex-weightlifter who is now an actor. He is noted for his action movies and lingering accent. Arnold is also a very rich man."

Some people would probably argue that old Arnie has a lot more to offer, but let's face it, who cares? This is what most people would think important about our Austrian friend. Do the same for your character, summarizing his entire being in one small paragraph. Now underline a maximum of five nouns or adjectives that you feel are the core of your character. For Arnold these might be: "muscled", "strong", "acting", "accent" and "rich". It would be wise to select nouns or adjectives that are clear, strong and not too specific. Words you feel you can use in the game. It is okay to include words that modify the primary noun or adjective that is your trait, such as "really" or "very", as in "really strong" or "very smart". Doing so, will not give you any extra bonus or penalty in the game though.

These words you've underlined are your traits. Whenever you form a sentence in the game where you could argue you used a trait, you get Plot Tokens (explained later) to influence the action.

Note that your traits do not all have to be positive. A trait like treacherous can come in very handy at times.

Example: John decides to write the following down about Michael: "Michael Ridgeway is a young and handsome businessman. He is cunning and feared. His family has left him a lot of money and he is very rich." John then underlines "handsome", "businessman", "cunning", "feared" and "rich."

3. DEFINE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are the core of any soap opera. They produce the twisted plots and the hate (and sometimes love) that is so vividly portrayed on the television screen. To determine these relationships, pick two other players' characters to be connected to. You'll see two boxes on the character sheet, one marked "friendly" and one marked "unfriendly." You need to choose one character to have an unfriendly relationship with and one to have a friendly relationship with. A relationship can take many forms. You could write down "brother" or "partner in the firm" or even "old war buddy." Of course, this should make at
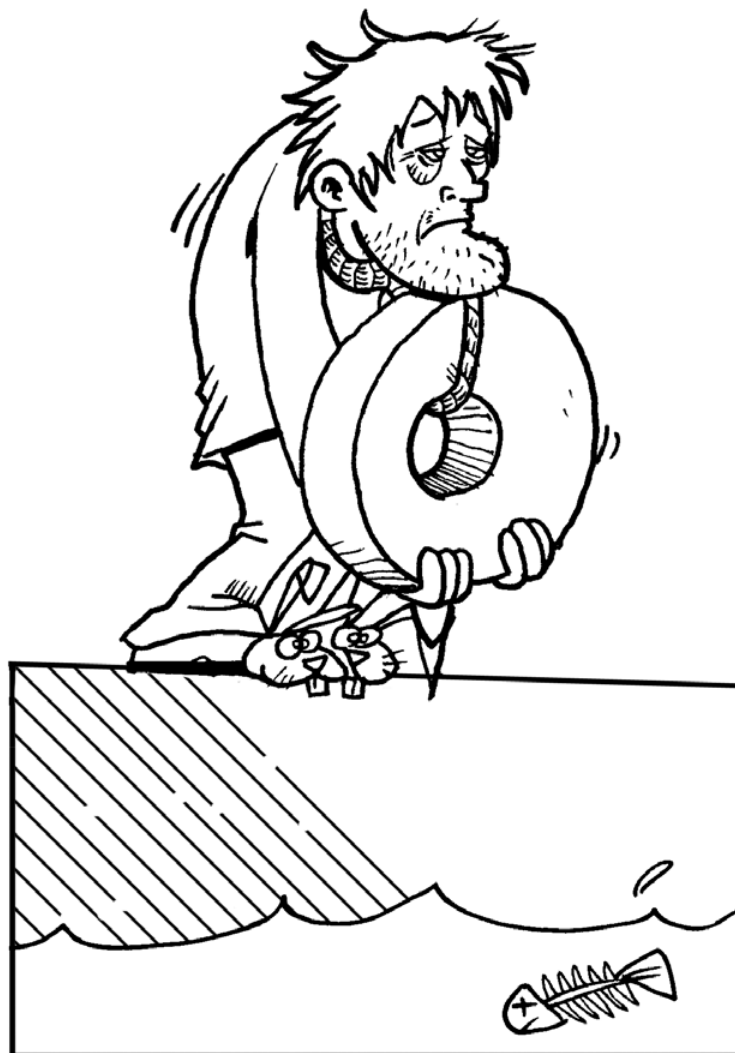
least a bit of sense. If someone makes a ninety year old character, putting down that your gorgeous young surfer dude is his brother is stretching it a bit. A character with whom you have a friendly relationship does not have to feel the same way about your character and vice versa.

It is suggested that before play begins you draw up a quick list of all the characters in the game and their relationships to one another. In the heat of battle it is often hard to remember who is related to who and how. You wouldn't want to forget about your grandfather's illegitimate lovechild's long-lost son that once burnt down your uncle's neighbor's second cousin's outhouse, now would you? Example: John chooses Mary's character Amanda to have an unfriendly relationship with (this fits in nicely with his starting goal - see below for details) and Louise's character Jane to have a friendly relationship with.

4. CHOOSE A GOAL

Your goal is something to strive for in the game. You should choose one of the characters you have a relationship (friendly or unfriendly) with and make them a part of your goal. Also, state your goal clearly at the beginning of the game to make sure everyone is aware of it. If you should attain your goal despite all the interference from the other players, you receive **two extra** Plot Tokens (more on those later) for your troubles and you can select a new goal. You can theoretically do this infinitely, stating your new goal every time you complete your current one.
Example: John decides Michael wants to kill Mary's character Amanda so he can usurp her piece of their parents' inheritance.

5. CHOOSE A SECRET

This is what makes your character do all

those despicable things. Write this secret down on your character sheet and don't show it to anyone else in the game. Also, if you should choose to play a series of connected games, keep it in a safe place. You then underline the five most important words in your secret. The other players can take guesses at your entire secret (all five words) at the end of their turn to try and take your character out of the running permanently and rack up some Plot Tokens for themselves. If it's hard to underline five words, try to make your secret a bit more complex.

Example: John thinks for a while and then decides that Michael had a hit-and-run accident with a nun. She was killed and he fled the scene of the accident. He writes this down and underlines "hit and run", "accident", "killed", "nun" and "fleeing."

6. CHOOSE A HOME SET

This is the natural environment for your character, a signature set so to speak. The shrewd businessman's office, the pastor's church, the rowdy bartender's pub, these are all good examples. Your character gets one set to call home. If you form sentences in this set, you will be at an advantage when bidding (see Bidding). You cannot choose the same home set as another player, though two home sets could be alike (such as when two players both claim their apartments as their home set).

7. TAKE TWO PLOT TOKENS

As your character advances his own schemes and tries to get other characters out of the way, he'll accumulate Plot Tokens, used to determine the outcome of situations (see Contested Sentences). Plot Tokens function as the core of this game's resolution mechanic. Take two of the tokens and place them in front of you.

After you complete Step 7, you'll have completed your character and are now ready to start playing the game. The last thing you'll have to do is determine who goes first. You can just nominate one of the players, look at who is the oldest or draw straws. It really doesn't matter.

RULES

The basic mechanic of Soap is the sentence. When it's your turn, you use a sentence to describe what the viewer at home would see if this was a real soap opera. You can use this to do several things. You could try to further your own goals or try to lure innocent characters to their messy deaths. It's your choice and the sentence can, depending on your intentions, involve your own character, several other characters or only characters controlled by no one in particular (so-called non-player characters or NPCs).

SENTENCES

Actually, the word sentence in Soap is a bit misleading, since a "sentence" is actually usually composed of a number of sentences describing a character (and possibly supporting cast) doing something in a certain set while delivering their lines. Each sentence consists of the Where and What, usually followed by the third W: Words.

Where means the set you use in your sentence.

What describes the action in the scene.

Words are the dialog for the scene.

THE FIRST W: WHERE (SET)

Your sentence always starts with a set, which provides the backdrop for a sentence. You state it to visualize the scene for yourself and the other players. It could be a bar, a deserted island or perhaps even a monastery. When you use a set for the first time, be sure to describe it with a bit more detail for the other players. Combined with a description of action (What) and perhaps dialog (Words) this makes up a sentence. If you place a sentence in your home set you have an advantage should it be contested (see Bidding). To avoid characters jumping between sets at the drop of a hat, a character needs to first exit one set (as the What in your sentence), before he can appear in another. You may not construct a sentence in which you exit a scene and immediately enter another.

Example: John decides to have his character (Michael) enter a new set when his turn starts. John describes the set:

"A sandy beach on a tropical island."

THE SECOND W: WHAT (ACTION)

Arguably one of the most important parts of any soap opera (or television series in general) is the action. To describe the action in a scene, state what the characters in the scene are doing. Name only the interesting things. No one wants to hear about Billy-Bob picking his nose in the back of the shot. However, were Billy-Bob to be holding a chainsaw, this would make for a quite different picture. Don't draw this out too long. Players falling asleep is a bad sign.

Example: John fills in the blanks with an action statement:

"Michael washes ashore, his face covered with barnacles and seaweed. He gets up slowly, groaning loudly."

THE THIRD W: WORDS (DIALOG)

Dialog makes the world go round. Well, at least in soap operas it does. Countless scenes involve only two people, one facing the other's back, moaning and wailing over their tragic lives. As such, you should put as much pathos and outrageous over-acting in your dialog as possible. "Camp" should be much too nice a word to describe your lines. Be creative and get your fellow players laughing. However, you do not have to include dialog if you don't want to.

Example: John thinks for a moment and adds his dialog:

"Where the hell am I? What happened? Oh my god, I'm shipwrecked. I bet Grant had something to do with this. He blew up the boat to get me out of the picture so he could marry Jane. Well, it won't be that easy to get rid of Michael Ridgeway!"

One important thing about sentences is that they don't necessarily have to involve your own character at all. Of course, getting Plot Tokens might seem more important, but it's twice as much fun meddling in other characters' affairs. Also, don't forget that your character is most likely a part of someone else's goal and that everyone is out to get everyone else anyway. In fact, it's more fun if you try to muck around with other people's characters a bit. It adds to the chaos in this game and that is always a good thing. Of course, the player whose character you are trying to lure to his violent demise or social downfall doesn't have to stand for it and can try to stop you by contesting your sentence (see Contested

Sentences). Note that you still have to make the other player's character leave one set first before it can enter another. No jumping across space and time with other players' characters here.

If you form a sentence that would reinforce your relationship (friendly or unfriendly) with a certain character, you get an extra Plot Token. This means that if you in any way help out a character with whom you have a friendly relationship, you get a Plot Token (even if you did not use one of your traits at all) and if your character behaves like a nasty little runt towards a character you have an unfriendly relationship with, you get an extra Plot Token too. Other players may veto your extra Plot Token if they think the sentence was too weak for you to really earn it. In that case, accept your fate.

USING YOUR TRAITS

Whenever you form a sentence that shows an action that uses one of your traits, you get one Plot Token. As you might have guessed, these points are used in bidding (which is what happens when someone does not agree with a sentence). If you use more than one of your traits in a single sentence, you get to take one Plot Token for each word used. You do not have to use a trait word literally, but you have to be able to explain how your sentence relates to your trait. If the other players don't think it's good enough, that's the end of it.

REVEALING YOUR SECRET

Your secret is both the most rewarding and the most punishing concept in the game. If you form a sentence that gives the other players a clue to your secret, you earn three Plot Tokens per "secret" word you involve in the sentence. You give a clue by including one or

more of your underlined secret words (chosen in character generation) in your sentence. The sentence is finished normally (which means it might also be contested) and only then do you announce that the sentence contained hints at your secret and take the extra Plot Tokens. Note that, unlike with traits, you do have to use the secret words literally. If the sentence was contested and you did not win, chances are one or more of your clues were left out by the player who formulated it. If this happens, you only get to take the three extra Plot Tokens for every word which made it into the final sentence. That could mean you end up with no extra Plot Tokens. Of course, in that case you don't have to announce that you gave clues to your secret either. Words from your secret can be used repeatedly to give clues and take the extra Plot Tokens. Each time you do so however, your secret becomes clearer and clearer, taking you one step closer to getting your character killed permanently (i.e. written out of the series).

When someone announces that they revealed something about their secret, they should repeat the sentence for the other players, so they can copy down the words they feel are important. These notes can then be used when guessing another character's secret

In this game, characters cannot die unless their secret is fully exposed. If that happens, the next time someone creates a sentence in which the character would die (and it would still kill the character after the inevitable bidding contest), the character is dead and cannot return to the game (see Life and Death). In the world of soap operas, no character is ever killed off before their secret is fully exposed. In essence, the mystery that surrounds the character is solved for the viewers and they lose interest.

HINDERING OTHER CHARACTERS

If you want something nasty to happen to someone else's character, you can construct a sentence that places the other character in immediate danger, be it physical, financial or any other form of peril.

For example, if Mary has just described her character Lydia Rosenbaum ordering a drink, John could form a sentence in which he describes the waiter trying to poison her (per-haps she's made some powerful enemies or she's just very rich and people want her money).

Most players will want to stop you from trying to violently dispose of their character, but of course they don't have to contest a sentence if something bad happens. They could for example decide to let it happen if they didn't want to lose the amount of Plot Tokens needed to win the bid.

Of course, there are loads of other things you could do to thwart other player's plans. If a character is in the hospital after a car crash, a player could state that the doctor mixed up medications and that a character has a seizure after being injected with atropine. Or if a character has been working late on a deal with another fashion design firm, one of the other players could form a sentence describing how the poor character's office is set fire to.

As I'm sure you've noticed by now, it's important to find a balance between advancing your own plot and thwarting that of the other players. If you want to be able to do something in a sentence that is likely to call for bidding, you need those Plot Tokens. Some nice and safe sentences once in a while do wonders.

After forming the sentence, you also have a chance to blow the lid off someone's secret. This involves you naming all five words you think are part of another character's secret. If you're right, the character whose secret you exposed, becomes vulnerable to getting killed off permanently (see Life and Death) the next time he would die as a result of a sentence. You also gain five Plot Tokens. If you guess only some of the other player's secret words, he does have to reveal the ones you got right. You need to guess all five secret words right in order to permanently get a player out of the game.

Once a player has formed a sentence and he has either taken a guess at another player's secret or declined, his turn is over and play passes over the player to his left.

CONTESTED SENTENCES

Whenever a sentence is formed by a player and one or more of the other players want it to run differently, the sentence is considered to be contested. Bidding is used to see who gets to make the decisions as to how the sentence should really play out in the end.

BIDDING

The player that formed the original sentence states it again and bids a number of Plot Tokens (at least one). Anyone who doesn't like the outcome of the sentence can place a bid, which only needs to tie to win. The current player can then overbid. This is repeated until all but one of the contesting players step down or someone runs out of Tokens to bid. If the outcome of a bid would be that the creator steps down, while two or more other player have bid the same number of Plot Tokens, those players must decide amongst themselves who gets to modify the sentence. The player who wins and alters the sentence loses all Plot Tokens bid and all other bidders lose none. Plot Tokens bid are lost, not transferred
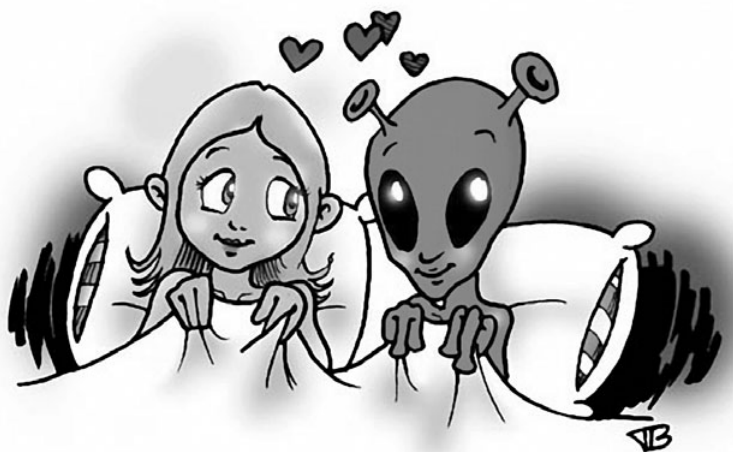
to the winning player. Remember that you have an advantage of one Plot Token when a sentence situated in your home set is contested (that means that if you bid three tokens, it counts as four).

The sentence can only be altered, not erased. If the creator of the sentence wins, it of course remains unchanged. In the case of the pyromaniac at the fashion design firm above, if the player who was "attacked" managed to win the bid, he would be able to say that the fire brigade arrived just in time, but not that the pyromaniac in fact did not set fire to the building. Also, you can only change the What and Words part of a sentence, not the Where clause.

LIFE AND DEATH

Obviously, as a character in a soap opera you're going to get shot, stabbed, bombed, kidnapped and perhaps even attacked by midgets in lederhosen or genetically engineered bovine soldiers in full battle armor. Whatever the outcome of a contested sentence however, characters cannot be killed permanently. Of course, it may look like Billy Joe Bob was cut in half by that gargoyle that John knocked off the church, but Billy Joe Bob was saved by a Mexican doctor with a staple gun and a lot of tape. In real soap operas we've seen people get ripped to shreds by automatic gunfire only to return a few episodes later. A player who is faced with the outcome of a sentence that would leave his character dead, is out of the game for two rounds.

If a character is killed after his secret is found out, his character is out of the game for good. The player can from then on only form sentences that involve other characters or NPCs and guess at other players' secrets. The Plot Tokens a player has when the character dies, can be used up in bids, but after they are

spent, the player doesn't gain any more. However, other players can still bid to help out.

ENDING THE GAME

After 90 minutes (or basically any other time limit the players agree on), the active player gets to finish his sentence. On the next player's turn, he should devise a cliffhanger, introducing some kind of tense situation to end the episode with. You see this in soap operas all the time. Mary walks in on her husband John, kissing the Spanish maid or John, mad with grief, floors it and drives his Jaguar off a cliff - only to freeze in mid-plunge of course.

SERIAL GAMES

In true soap style, your games can be linked into a series. If you choose to do this, the following special rules and modifications to the rules apply:

1. All players must keep their characters over the course of the series, unless they are killed permanently. In this case, a new character may be introduced in the next game or the player may revive his old character. If you choose to revive your old character, explain to other players how he managed to survive whatever horrible fate befell him. If a player chooses to continue playing the same character, this also means selecting a new secret for the other players to guess. Whatever you choose, the character gets the standard two Plot Tokens for new characters.

2. The player whose character was left in a cliffhanger during the last game gets to take the first turn.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

John, Louise and Silvia have decided to play a game of Soap and sit down to make characters.

John has decided to play Michael Ridgeway, an obnoxious lawyer who hit a man with his car and fled from the scene (secret). He wants to become partner in the law firm where he works by having his boss Joe Stockton (an NPC) killed (goal). John chooses Michael's office as his home set. Phoebe will be his unfriendly relationship and Charlotte will be his friendly relationship. He chooses "handsome", "cunning", "businessman", "feared" and "rich" as his traits.

Louise wants to play Michael's sister Phoebe, who has a drug habit and recently stole several thousands of dollars from her father (secret). She wants to kill her restrictive father (NPC), who always favored him anyway (goal). She chooses Phoebe's penthouse as her home set. Michael is her unfriendly relationship and Charlotte is her friendly relationship. Louise chooses "liar", "murderous", "beautiful", "rich" and "bored" for her traits.

Silvia plays Michael's girlfriend Charlotte, who is pregnant with his child but doesn't want to tell Michael (secret). She wants to ruin Michael, since he neglects her in his pursuit of success (goal). She chooses their apartment as her home set. Michael is her unfriendly relationship and Phoebe is her friendly relationship. For her traits, Silvia chooses "bitch", "rich", "beautiful", "unforgiving" and "callous".

They decide that Silvia begins play. She thinks for a moment and then starts her first sentence.

"Michael and Charlotte's apartment in uptown New York. The walls are adorned with priceless paintings and Ming vases decorate the corners of the living room. Charlotte sits down on the couch in the apartment she shares with him. God, I hate that bastard...She sighs."

Since this is Silvia's home set, she would have an advantage in case the sentence became contested. Since no one is objecting however, play passes to John.

John decides to start his own set, but doesn't include dialog in his sentence.
"The interior of a modern sports car. Cigarette stubs are scattered across the dashboard and tapes of classic rock bands lie strewn across the red leather seats. Michael is driving like a maniac with a cell phone glued to his ear, waiting for someone to pick up."

It is now Louise's turn and she decides to join Silvia's set.

"The entrance to the luxury complex where Michael and Charlotte live. Phoebe stands at the door staring at the doorbell. Hmm...maybe I should have called in advance.'"

It is now Silvia's turn again and she decides to try and force a negative turn of events for John's character Michael.

"Michael's sports car. Too busy shouting into his cell phone to watch the road, Michael accidentally runs a red light and ploughs into a cement truck. 'Aaaaaaaaaarrgghhhhh!!!'"

John doesn't want this to happen and he contests Silvia's sentence. Bidding starts with Silvia, who has to bid at least one Plot Token since she is the active player. John also puts up one Token. He has no intention of seeing his character crushed to a pulp so soon into

the game. Louise decides not the enter the bidding contest. Silvia backs down (she just wanted to deprive John of one of his starting Plot Tokens), so John wins the bid.

John grumbles and changes the sentence. He can't completely rewrite it, but he can change the "ploughs into a cement truck" part.

"Michael's sports car. Too busy shouting into his cell phone to watch the road, Michael accidentally runs a red light and rams his foot down on the brakes just in time to narrowly avoid ploughing into a cement truck. 'Jesus Christ, where did that truck come from?' "
It is then John's turn.

"A New York crossing. The police arrive on the scene quickly and Michael buys off the officers with a large sum of money before getting in his car again. 'Here officer. Buy your kids a nice toy or something.'"

Since John can argue that he used his trait "rich" he can take one Plot Token.

It is now Louise's turn again and she continues the set with Silvia.

"The entrance to the apartment complex where Michael and Charlotte live. Phoebe rings the doorbell with trembling hands as she looks around in near panic. 'I hope she's home. Have I got news for her.'"

Silvia responds on her turn with:
"Michael and Charlotte's apartment. Charlotte picks up the intercom. 'Yeah, what do you want? I'm not buying if you're selling.'"

After this, play continues with John and so on.

HINTS AND TIPS

Giving hints and tips on play for a little game like this might seem a bit pretentious, but Soap does have some aspects you might overlook if you're playing this game for the first time. Consider the following:

Imagine yourself as the viewer. Would you be interested in scenes of people driving to work or eating breakfast, or would you want to see explosions, slaps across the face and car crashes? I'm betting you chose the latter options, and that's exactly where many people err when they first play Soap. Don't be afraid to skip across space and time (within the confines of these rules of course) from scene to scene to keep the action flowing. If you leave a set, you can jump to any new scene you would like to (leave the office and cut to the nightclub for example). Sentences spent on traveling between sets are usually wasted, unless you have a very specific intent with them.

Don't be scared to get your character hurt. It will happen eventually. Since your character can't actually be killed until his secret is out in the open, any instant death scene ends with the character, at worst, mangled but alive. This isn't about logic or even reality after all. Play this game with reckless abandon, you'll have a better gaming experience for it.

Leave reality behind for a moment. Anyone yelling foul when things don't seem to make a lot of sense is probably not enjoying himself. Why is it that no one can get in a plane without crashing? Why is everyone an illegitimate child/former lover/rival/adopted son of someone else in soap operas? The proper answer for this game of course is: who cares?

Use sound effects. No, really. Nothing adds to the fun, chaos and action like the occasional

SPLAT, *AAAIIEEEEE* or *THUMP*. This game is all about insanity anyway, so why not?

OTHER GENRES

Soap was designed specifically to handle the strange plots and shallow characters of soap operas, but this doesn't stop you from taking the game into new territory. In essence, the game will work in any setting where you have a group of people, each with their own agenda and secrets. Since character creation and the rules are not genre-dependent, you probably don't even need to rework, modify or rewrite anything. Just decide on some conventions (like perhaps the naming of characters or what type of characters are appropriate) and play. Here are three you can use:

SPIES LIKE US

You have a license to kill and you're not afraid to use it. Each player chooses a code-name and a government agency to work for (or you could all work for the same one). Instead of goals, determine assignments for yourself. Although this means that the other players will know your assignment, their characters don't. Let the chaos begin. Shaken, not stirred.

A DAY AT THE COURT OF...

The courts of Europe were rife with scheming nobility, plotting courtesans and villainous servants. In other words, great material for Soap. Read up on your Shakespeare and "see those daggers before you".

GALACTIC CASTAWAYS

What if you were on board a spaceship, adrift in the galaxy after an unexpected and violent meteor storm? Tensions run high, factions emerge and Soap gets played. "Danger Will Robinson!" - mostly from the other characters.

SAMPLE CHARACTERS

We've included some sample characters for you to include in the game either as PCs or as NPCs. If you want to play one of them, simply copy the information down on your character sheet and play. You will still need to define your relationships and take the two Plot Tokens.

Thornton Smith-Smythe-Smith
Traits: Callous, mean, old, power-hungry, rich.
Goal: To prevent his eldest son Jonathan from getting his hands on his inheritance a bit early.
Secret: Killed a man once to close a business deal.
Home Set: The study in his mansion.

Jonathan Smith-Smythe-Smith
Traits: Athletic, conniving, cunning, handsome, rich.
Goal: To kill his father.
Secret: Has an illegitimate child with his sister Samantha.
Home Set: His office at the law firm.

Samantha Smith-Smythe-Smith
Traits: Dumb, greedy, rich, sexy, slut.
Goal: To marry an aristocrat from Europe.
Secret: Has a son fathered by her brother Jonathan.
Home Set: "La Vie en Rose", her beautician.

John St. Clair
Traits: Actor, cunning, fat, greedy, liar.
Goal: To con Jonathan Smith-Smythe-Smith out of his inheritance.
Secret: Did jail time for murder one.
Home Set: His rented hotel room.

Sammy Twinkle
Traits: Callous, cold, deadly, killer, sarcastic.
Goal: To kill Jonathan Smith-Smythe-Smith.
Secret: Killed numerous men, including old man Smith-Smythe-Smith's brother.
Home Set: His rundown apartment in the Bronx.

Penny Arlington
Traits: Calm, naive, rational, sweet, wise.
Goal: To expose Jonathan as the fraud he is.
Secret: In love with Samantha.
Home Set: Her office at the law firm.

Indigo Lieberberg
Traits: Cunning, musical, passionate, swinger, wise.
Goal: To seduce Samantha Smith-Smythe-Smith.
Secret: Is an ex-drug dealer.
Home Set: His nightclub in downtown New York.

THANKS

This game was inspired by several things. First of all, the obvious ludicrous plots of most soap operas (the - rare - tame ones are no fun at all). Secondly, there are a few games out there that need mentioning. If you like playing this game, you'll probably love Pantheon and Other Games by Robin Laws and the other New Style Games (Baron von Munchausen, Violence, De Profundis & Puppetland/Powerkill) produced by Hogshead Publishing, in addition to Once Upon A Time by Richard Lambert, Andrew Rilstone, and James Wallis, published by Atlas Games.

And then there's Slasher: The Final Cut by Precedence Publishing, in which the players play script writers for a slasher movie and try to introduce their own scenes and plot twists with hilarious consequences. This one is old and out of print, but very well worth the effort of digging it up somewhere. I'd have liked to add Dark Cults to this list, a card game from the early eighties based on storytelling in the style of H.P. Lovecraft's mythos tales, but the game has not yet arrived as I write this. I'm certain it fits right in there with Pantheon and Soap though, so if you can get a copy do so.

Further thanks go to the regulars at The Forge (http://www.indie-rpgs.com) for their enthusiasm and support. To Wim van Gruisen, David Goodner and Jesse Burneko for their suggestions when I designed the first draft of this game and to RPG.net for being my first contact with the online gamer community in late 2000.

And of course I can't leave out Aldo and the good people at Wingnut Games, for publishing Soap and doing a lot of the hard work involved in getting a product out on the market. Jason, thanks for the editing. To a non-native speaker and writer like myself your help was invaluable.

CHARACTER SHEET

NAME: _____

SEX: _____

AGE: _____

APPEARANCE: _____

PLAYER'S NAME: _____

BACKGROUND AND TRAITS (5 UNDERLINED):

SECRET (5 UNDERLINED):

GOAL:

RELATIONSHIPS:

FRIENDLY: _____

UNFRIENDLY: _____

HOMESET: _____

PORTRAIT:

NOTES: