

SOAP OPERAS

Weaponized Diamonds, UFOs, and Neck-Biters: More Fantastical Story Arcs From Soap Operas

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Whatever you may believe about soap operas is probably... accurate. They're dated, interminable, look inexpensively made; they repeat storylines and often perpetuate dated stereotypes about what "family" is supposed to look like. But the soap opera is *also* an incredible, unique form of storytelling that has endured since even before radio, sometimes pushing boundaries and featuring radical storylines; they're constructed under enormous pressure (shows like *General Hospital* crank out five hours of entertainment *per week* with no reruns) and are often considered "boot camp" for young actors just starting out in the business.

And sometimes, they need a break from all of the "who's the daddy" and "wedding of the decade" stories. Which is how we—and they—end up here: taking a slight breather from outlandish DNA tests and secret love triangles to enjoy some totally bonkers specific arcs

sure to quicken the pulse of fantasy, science-fiction and horror fans everywhere. When soaps open themselves up to the genre universe, inserting their typically mundane characters into over-the-top tales filled with laser beams, time travel, and even super powers, it's enough to give you whiplash of the best possible kind. We love the urban fantasy vibe of these tales, in which the ordinary lives alongside the impossible.

That's why only [one article about the fantastical story arcs of soap opera](#) just wasn't enough. It'll never be enough. Because even as they shunt *Days of Our Lives* from broadcast to streaming (starting September 12), soap fans will continue to seek and find their favorite shows, always ready for more wild stories that draw us in, get us hooked, then beg us to tune in tomorrow. Here are five more unforgettable examples of soap opera's best forays into fantasy...

The Ice Princess: *General Hospital* (1981)

With Luke and Laura an established, popular, ratings-driving couple (though highly problematic in retrospect, something we'll skim past for now), *General Hospital* wisely realized it couldn't go through the same old motions of break-up/make-up in telling their story. Enter an Australian spy/international financier (Robert Scorpio) and graft in more

than a little James Bond storytelling and you get the Ice Princess story—one of the wildest and most enjoyable off-the-beaten-track arcs the soap ever told. Its legacy is so enduring that while the whole thing started in 1981, there was even a call-back to it just this year.

What was the Ice Princess? An oversized, uncut diamond, which had been painted (!) black and fixed on a pedestal in order to disguise it. Scorpio showed up in Port Charles looking for the priceless gem and hired Luke to find it for him. But others also wanted a chunk of the rock—especially the notorious Cassadine family. So far, so not-very-speculative fiction, but wait: The Ice Princess wasn't just a painted-over giant gem—it held a secret formula for a weapon the Cassidines planned to use to hold the world hostage!

OK, so a giant diamond is kind of a red herring ... because the Cassidines' real game plan was to build a weather machine that would freeze the world with carbonic snow. Holy *Snowpiercer*! Of course, Mikkos Cassadine didn't really want to freeze the planet; he just wanted to get world leaders to pay him off to *not* do it. To showcase the power he now wielded, Mikkos made an example of Port Charles, freezing the small town and causing it to be declared a disaster area.

After much slow-motion spycraft, investigation, the introduction of an ice chamber and one of history's dumbest password choices (you could turn off the machine by typing in "ICE PRINCESS"), Luke and his gang ended up saving the world.

The end, right? Are you kidding? In 2013, Luke and Laura's daughter Lulu received what was originally thought to be part of the Ice Princess (it wasn't), but Lulu got frozen briefly anyway. And in 2022, after Luke was declared dead following a cable-car accident in Austria, Laura was given the Ice Princess at his memorial ceremony. And guess what? It was a fake again. Rarely has such an obvious MacGuffin gotten *quite* this much traction in a soap, but the Ice Princess remains a fan favorite.

Beam Me Up, Fallon: *The Colbys* (1987)

The Colbys (5/6) Fallon Boards a UFO (1985)



If you gotta go out, go out with a bang. Or an alien abduction, in the case of *The Colbys*—a prime-time *Dynasty* spin-off that ran for two seasons and, in its final episode, sent its main character Fallon into the heavens in a UFO. (Yes, seriously!)

Fallon Carrington (originally played by Pamela Sue Martin, then replaced by *General Hospital* veteran Emma Samms) went through a lot during her prime-time soap days: She fell for her long-lost brother, got run over by a car and paralyzed (temporarily) and was killed off (also temporarily) in the fourth season of the mothership show. But then came *The Colbys*, where she had amnesia, married her ex's cousin, and experienced further repercussions from the car accident. So far, so...well, par for the course, when it comes to soaps.

Then came the series ending. While out driving, Fallon's car breaks down and while using her very-of-the-era car phone to summon help...a light appears in the sky. An alien ship lands. Have the visitors come to fix her car? No way: They give her a ride, instead! The series ended with Fallon being greeted by an alien and zooming away into the sky. Now, that's a gutsy, nutty finale!

Except, it wasn't: When *The Colbys* was over, Fallon popped up again on the following season on *Dynasty*—and she was barely able to remember anything about her experience. Instead, she sought therapy in a support group for alien abductees. Did they ever show up again to help validate her story? Never! Dang aliens—if only they could have just fixed her

car in the first place.

Howdy, Pardner: *One Life to Live* (1988)

OLTL Old West 27



Cowboys had a longstanding history on *One Life to Live*, despite the show taking place in the Pennsylvania town of Llanview. That had to do in part with brothers Bo and Clint Buchanan, whose actors (Robert Woods and Clint Ritchie) had the passion for big hats and horses in their blood. So in 1988, the writers leaned into viewers' *Back to the Future*-inspired interest in time travel stories and sent Clint and Viki back 100 years to the Wild West.

It all started when Clint was shot in the head and rendered blind; he then regained his sight after a riding accident, but there was a little good news/bad news aspect at play: He was sent back to the Old West town of Buchanan City in 1888. He met the ancestors of his family (all played by current show actors). It was a storyline the show really invested in, with period costumes, stagecoaches, horses, and gunfights; they shot many scenes on location on an Arizona movie set where John Wayne had once filmed.

Reportedly, the whole plot was meant to resolve in an ambiguous way—as in, Clint would return to the present day and not be sure if his trip to the past had been a vivid hallucination or not. Alas, the Writers Guild of America went on strike and the rest of the story was

written by those refusing to strike. Viki went back in time to rescue Clint before he married her great-grandmother Ginny, and so it became part of *OLTL*'s actual history, and not a dream at all.

Vampires Take Over: *Port Charles* (2001–2003)

Spies may have ruled the roost over at *General Hospital*, but its spin-off show took a hard turn into the supernatural a few years into its six-year run. And we can blame, or credit, the charismatic actor Michael Easton for the direction it took. Though he started off playing Father Michael Morley in a time-traveling arc, he also began appearing as Morley's alter-ego Caleb—and that's when things started to get weird... Ultimately the show included angels, a vampire slayer, and other incredible supernatural plot-fodder.

Caleb was a neck-biter, but a *sensitive* one, in the tradition of *Dark Shadows*' Barnabas Collins. (Man, family reunions must have been tough in the Morley household.) A flurry of arcs (most of which were named after '70s and '80s pop songs: "Tainted Love," "Tempted," "Superstition," etc.) followed Caleb's tale as he pursued Livvie, a modern woman who reminded him of his murdered fiancée Olivia. (Wonder if *The Vampire Diaries* writers were paying attention...) Caleb was killed a couple of times and returned again and

again, ultimately landing on *General Hospital* in 2013 as a human who *thought* he was a vampire. (Really, don't ask. It's better if you don't overthink it.)

Harley's Superpowers: *Guiding Light* (2006)

If you ever needed supporting evidence in arguing that comic books *are* basically soap operas, allow us to remind you of the time that Harley Davidson Cooper, longtime staple of *Guiding Light*, had a one-episode arc in which she developed superpowers.

Yep, for one shining moment back in 2006, *Guiding Light* teamed up with Marvel Comics for "She's A Marvel." In the episode, Harley gets electrocuted at the movie theater after touching some faulty wiring with wet hands. The town of Springfield experiences a blackout, and Harley's brand-new superpowers surge into being, turning her into the heroine known as "The Guiding Light." What superpowers, you ask? Well, she could move really fast, emit electricity from her hands and send off sparks when she touched things, and had super hearing (a la Jaime Sommers of *The Bionic Woman*.)

The other side of the collaboration meant that Marvel created an eight-page comic to go with the episode, and according to the show's then-executive producer Ellen Wheeler, it was inspired by the wedding of Black Panther and Storm in another Marvel issue. "It's

amazing how much the genres have in common,” [Wheeler told *The New York Times*](#) in 2006.

The story also permitted the show to have some fun and bend its format a bit: When Harley surprises a thief in one scene, his hair cartoonishly stands on end, and the show’s opening credits were drawn like panels from a comic book, and transitions between scenes featured art by Marvel’s Alex Chung. Still, it’s remarkable how few people in the fictional town of Springfield expressed concerns about the weird change in Harley’s eyes or the blue streak that appears in her hair after the electrocution that landed her in the hospital...

Eventually, Harley dons a cool, belly-baring costume and sets about righting various wrongs around Springfield (while zapping machinery left and right). “I like being a superhero,” she says at one point. “I get things done!” But when her powers seem to take a toll on her relationship with her husband, she’s willing to ditch them. A quick dive in the water and—zap!—Harley is back to being her old spark-free self. (But at least she got to keep the costume.)



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