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THE STAR GODDESS



Janet Sciales Harduvel holds court as the "Star Goddess" on WLLD-FM 98.7. When she appears every other Monday on the morning "Freak Show," she seeks to make astrology both respectable and entertaining as she dispenses advice.

Times photo — FRED VICTORIN

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The Freak Show attracts 11 percent of its coveted market: Tampa Bay's young-adult listeners between 6 a.m. and 10 a.m. That places The Freak Show second only to shock-jock Bubba the Love Sponge, who enjoys 17 percent.

The Star Goddess, like most advice shows, particularly attracts female listeners. On April 22, two-thirds of Sciales' callers are young women.

The first is Sara, 24, a Gemini who has been trying to break up with a man since December. After several predictions, Sciales obtains the man's date of birth.

Sciales: Oh, I see what the problem is here. This is never going to work. You can't fix him.

Sara: No (laughing). Sciales: He's got a problem and he's had it forever.

Sara: Yep (laughing). Sciales: And he tells you, I don't even think he says, "I want to change it."

Sara: No he doesn't.

A Scorpio arrives

Sciales grew up on Long Island. But in 1969, she turned down a college scholarship in New York to attend the University of Tampa with no scholarship.

"I'm looking at snowdrifts higher than my armpits and a 4:1 ratio of girls to guys in New York," she said. "I can go to Harvard on the Hillsborough, which has a 4:1 ratio of guys to girls, and be where the weather suits my clothes."

It was the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. Linda Goodman's *Sun Signs* had come out the prior year. Sciales, a Virgo, took an interest.

"I was dating a Leo and I didn't know you had to worship him," said Sciales. She learned that from *Sun Signs*. "I tried it and it worked."

During her senior year, she began working at the officers' club at MacDill Air Force Base. Ted Harduvel, a Scorpio, walked in for a drink. He followed Sciales home that night and essentially never left.

Two months later, Harduvel was ordered to Germany. Sciales went along. They married in January 1974.

"Virgos and Scorpios get married all the time," Sciales said.

Europe was a four-year honeymoon.

Then the couple settled in Lutz, a rural setting Sciales loved.

"There was none of the pretentiousness of Carrollwood," she said. "Lutz has a real homegrown vibration."

Sciales taught phys ed at Buchanan Junior High and worked up astrological charts for all her friends.

One day, a doctor at MacDill asked her for one.

"What's the fee?" he asked. Sciales froze, then blurted, "50 dollars." The doctor wrote a check.

"It was like a light bulb went off in my head," she said.

By 1981, Sciales had opened an office in Lutz. But even today, her



Special to the Times

Laura Dern played Sciales in the 1992 HBO movie *Afterburn*.

presence is subtle, with simply a nameplate on the door. She says she didn't want to anger the residents of Lutz and "hang a big ole red hand out there."

But her reputation spread. Liz Richards, who hosted a local television talk show at the time, asked Sciales to make a guest appearance in 1981. She has worked in broadcasting ever since, including nationally syndicated radio.

That Leo thing

Casey, a 25-year-old Leo, is on the line at the Freak Show. Sciales' sky-blue fingernails, decorated with moons and stars, work across Casey's tables in the *Ephemeris*.

Sciales: You're going to meet the next Mrs. Casey.

Casey: Naaaah.

Sciales: Yeah you are. Yeah, ah...

Casey: When?

Sciales: Lemme tell you. She's petite, meaning she's under, like, 5'6".

Casey: Yeah!

Sciales: She probably has light green or hazel eyes.

Casey: Even better.

Sciales: And ah, her hands are really well taken care of. That's the first thing you'll notice, is how well her hands are.

Casey: Really? No kidding.

Sciales: Now that's all the good news.

The bad news is you don't meet her until between the first of September 2003 and the 30th of September. So that gives you a whole year to save enough money to be able to afford her.

(Casey protests.)

Sciales: Correct me if I'm wrong:

Don't you like great-looking babes?

Casey: Yes I do.

Sciales: Big hair. Well dressed...

He's got that Leo thing going on. They like women with big hair.

Casey: Yeah, it's true.

Top Gun

While in Germany, Sciales had noticed in her own astrological chart that a fixed star named Vindemiatrix, a sign of widowhood in the Virgo constellation, was prevalent. But Sciales shrugged it off. Most wives outlive their husbands, she figured.

But the readings when Christina was born alarmed Sciales, even

though Ted Harduvel didn't take astrology seriously. Sciales said she bought life insurance on him only after extorting his consent through 10 days of celibacy.

She studied further and concluded that Harduvel faced doom far from home. Then came his orders to South Korea. To fly the new "electric jet," the F-16. Sciales sobbed uncontrollably at the airport.

Capt. Ted Harduvel's jet disappeared on Nov. 15, 1982. He was 35 years old. Sciales' doorbell rang in Lutz at 1:30 in the morning. She saw Air Force officers through the peephole.

"I see three dudes in blue and my best friend crying," she said. "These people are not here to sing me *Happy Birthday*."

Once, over a bottle of wine, Harduvel had told his wife that if he crashed, it wouldn't be his fault. He was first in his class for F-16s, winner of two Top Gun competitions.

Yet the Air Force blamed his crash on pilot error.

Sciales spent the next five years proving the Air Force wrong. She coaxed documents from Air Force friends. She hired lawyers in St. Petersburg and Texas to sue General Dynamics, the maker of the F-16 and the nation's largest defense contractor.

And she managed to keep astrology out of the courtroom. On the air, she was — and remains — Janet Sciales. In U.S. District Court, she was Janet Harduvel.

In a two-week trial in 1987, Harduvel's lawyers convinced a jury that the F-16's problems started with its 13 miles of wiring. The wiring's insulation chafed against clamps and wore out, causing short-circuits. That made the navigation equipment malfunction.

Flying through dense clouds, Ted Harduvel relied on an instrument that showed he was in a 40-degree climb. Actually, he was in a 65-degree dive. He tried to pull out when he broke through the clouds, but it was too late. The jet bored a 9-foot hole in the mountain.

Janet Harduvel met reporters on the courthouse steps after hearing the \$3.1-million verdict. She said, "To me it was a question of my husband's honor, and that he was cleared."

Ted Harduvel would remain cleared, but the verdict would not stand. An appeals court threw out the judgment, ruling that defense contractors have broad immunity from lawsuits.

The legal war had cost Sciales years of effort, but no money. Her attorneys had taken the risks. After the *60 Minutes* segment, she sold the rights to her story for a six-figure fee. Sciales got a cameo appearance when *Afterburn* finally was filmed.

The Catch

Leah, 19, a Scorpio, asks about love. She and her boyfriend are serious about each other. Suddenly Sciales asks, "What's the catch?"

Here it comes. Co-workers know

from experience: This is ominous.

Leah sounds uncomfortable.

"There's a catch to this relationship," Sciales tells her. "What is it?"

Leah sighs, and says, "He's on vacation."

Sciales presses, and concludes the boyfriend is in jail.

"He's getting out on Oct. 31," says Leah.

Although Sciales is identified only as the Star Goddess on air, people who inquire receive her real name and office phone number. That generates most of her clients.

"I kind of work when I want," she said. "It depends on how much money I need."

Her consultations cost up to \$250. Sciales' younger sister, Marybeth, helps in the business. She said Janet Sciales seeks to make astrology both respectable and entertaining.

"At heart, she's an entertainer," Marybeth said. "She puts on a really good show."

On the respectability side, Sciales faces the world scientific community, which considers astrology a "pseudoscience."

"A horoscope can be harmless fun, if you don't call your astrologer before your doctor," says the director of the National Science Foundation.

But in the 1980s, Sciales spoke before the Tampa Bay Skeptics, who share that view. She even dickered with them about setting up a scientific test of astrology, but the two sides couldn't agree.

She is trying to predict weather through astrology. She contends the planets can predict when a hurricane will turn, but not its new course.

Home in Lutz, she coached softball throughout her daughter's childhood.

One year Sciales picked a team entirely of Virgos, because they can follow instructions, she said. They went 14-3. "I didn't want Cancers," she said. "They whine too much."

"I played softball for 11 years," said Christina "Kiki" Harduvel. "She may have missed three games. She drove me to Ohio (for a tournament). We've driven to Tennessee. We've driven to Miami dozens of times. She drove me everywhere."

The mom and daughter are dearest pals.

Sciales complained about their cell phone bill. Kiki recalled with a laugh, but "she was the one who was placing all the calls."

Sciales considers Ted Harduvel irreplaceable, but she has dated other men.

Her current significant other is Damian Weaver, owner of a home-repair business. He's 30. She's 50. Weaver was referred to Sciales as a client, but she didn't accept until she learned his birth date.

Weaver's Venus, the planet of love, was in the sun of Capricorn, representative of old things. Conclusion: He likes older women.

They have been dating for a year.

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