



He protects and he saves his friends under the waves, that's where you'll find **DIVER DAN**

BY SCOTT MOON

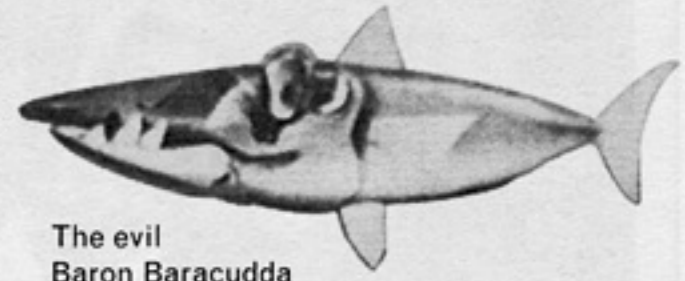
The year was 1960 and a new live-action show, Diver Dan, made its debut as a regular part of the animated line up on locally hosted cartoon shows all over the country. Caught somewhere between Kukla, Fran & Ollie and Stingray, Diver Dan reflected a "kinder and gentler" time - after the live TV puppet shows of the 50's, but before the fast-paced, action-packed cartoons of Hanna-Barbera in the late 60's.

Frank Freda starred as the brave under-sea explorer Diver Dan who, while searching for gold in the Saragasso Sea, stumbles into a world inhabited by talking fish. Suzanne Turner was Miss Minerva, the beautiful mermaid who, along with Frank Freda, was the only real-life character among the cast of unusual marionette fish puppets. As the lyrics to the theme song say, "He protects and he saves his friends under the waves," Diver

Dan's adventures usually involved battling the evil Baron Barracuda (and his dim-witted lackey, Triggerfish). Diver Dan was the brainchild of artist John Ferlaine, who created the show in the late 50's while he was working at TV station WCAU in Philadelphia. The show originally started out as a comic strip called "Finley". Unable to sell the idea for newspaper syndication, Ferlaine convinced WCAU to turn the strip into a TV

show, which they called "Fish Tales," and a pilot was made. John Ferlaine dove into the project, overseeing every aspect of bringing his underwater world to life. "I carved the puppets myself," Ferlaine told Planet X, "not because I'm a great puppet maker but because there was nobody else to do it. I cut them out of balsa wood... the diving helmet and the mermaid costume I made by hand too."

His Friends (and Foes) Under The Waves



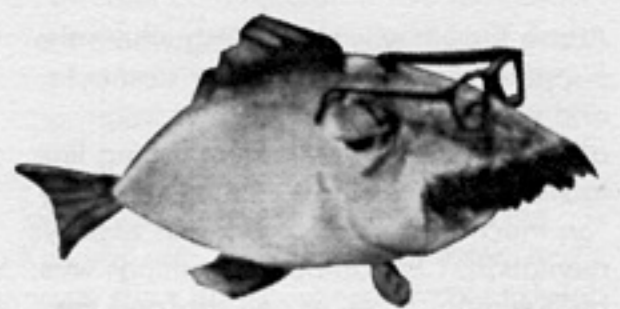
The evil Baron Baracudda



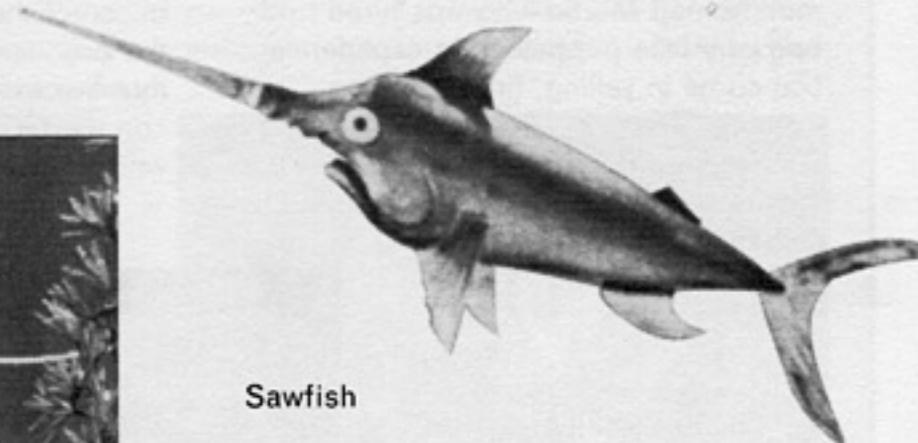
Triggerfish, the Baron's dim-witted lackey.



Finley, the fish that started it all.



Doc Stergeon



Sawfish



Skipper Kipper

Ferlaine even came up with the idea that gave the show its surreal, underwater look - filming through a fish tank. "I invented the idea," Ferlaine said, "I had a six foot tank built with goldfish in it; I found out they were the only ones that would swim at several levels. And we moved the tank around to get the various shots."

After filming two chapters of Fish Tales, WCAU was bought by CBS, and the project came to a halt. "CBS decided they had no real interest in it," said Ferlaine, "so I said 'Since it's my idea, give it to me.' They sold it to me for a dollar, including the pilots and everything."

Ferlaine then took his idea to Martin Young of Young Development. Young approached Philadelphia film producer Louis Kellman - and it was then that Diver Dan really came to life.

"He was 'Mr. Movies' in Philadelphia," said Jack Sky, Kellman's sound man for 13 years. Louis Kellman had a staff of cameramen, lab technicians, and editors that he employed to produce TV spots, short films and football games. The latter turned into NFL Films, where many of the former Diver Dan technical staff still work.

Frank Freda was hired to play the diver, while Suzanne Turner was chosen for the role as Miss Minerva, the mermaid. Voice-over artist Allen Swift, who previously worked on Howdy Doody, gave Diver Dan a distinctive flavor by providing the voices for all the characters - except the mermaid.

Kellman rented a warehouse in Philadelphia for a studio. "It was a building on, I believe, 19th Street near Lombard," Frank Freda told us. It used to be some sort of Union Hall and it was vacant." It was soon transformed into the underwater world of the Sargasso Sea, where Diver Dan and his friends

Suzanne Turner in a fetching pose as Miss Minerva.

