

2004/April RICKY GERVAIS - Publishing News

You're the first English comedy actor to win a Golden Globe, the DVD of the second series of your TV show sells a record-breaking 143,000 copies in the week of its release, becoming the fastest selling DVD ever in the UK, and you've been asked to do a voice on *The Simpsons*. So obviously the next thing on the agenda is either walking on water or writing a children's book, and, as PN goes to press, the latter is what Ricky Gervais has chosen to do.

The obvious question is, why? And the answer turns out not to be because he can. "I started the idea [for *The Flanimals*] years ago, making up stupid animals for my nephew...it just sort of happened and became a labour of love," says Gervais. The labour of love turned into an actual book with the help of Gervais' friend Rob Steen, a comic strip artist who had once worked with him when they were both in the same band. "We made a dummy, some time around 1995, but no one was interested without a story, and I don't take advice well, so we forgot about it...Rob went to the US to work and I did my comedy."

Nine years later he realised, he said, that he was in a better position to do the things he wanted and dug the idea out again. "We did a half-arsed mail-out and somehow Faber saw it, called me in and said they'd take it...my name must help, but I'm insisting *The Flanimals* are bigger than me. Me and Rob have done everything and Faber have been great and never interfered - which is why I work with the BBC...the only way to get what you want, the only way to get anything approaching art, craft or creativity is to do *exactly* what you want to do; I don't like seeing my fat face on TV, the only thing I like doing is the work."

From all the characters he's invented, Gervais has chosen what he considers to be the best twenty six for inclusion in the book - creatures ranging from the Munty Flumple and Underblenge (who has a snerbulent splench sucker) to the Puddloflaj and the Grundit (who wanders around half-witted and grumpy) - and Steen is back on board providing the full colour art.

Gervais defines a good publisher as one who acts as a conduit to get a book out to the public, with few responsibilities - unless he were, he says, to go berserk - other than checking spellings “...I don’t care if someone says I can make it better, I just want the right quality.” Does he want to do more books? “Yes, but only when they come along...it’s the same reason I haven’t signed a handcuff deal with the BBC. I actually see other formats for *The Flanimals* before other books, but I’m not really thinking that far ahead.”

The book, which publishes 7th October this year, is basically designed to give parents a hard time pronouncing the words says Gervais, highly amused at the thought of a grown-up trying to get their lips around the likes of the Plamglotis. “I’m actually doing this for me, because I enjoy it, the word play and in-jokes...it’s weird and strange and cute and maybe even scary, but the most important thing is that I like it. We were nobodies when we did *The Office*, and we got to do it our way, and I wanted that with the book...I demand the creative power and there’s only room for one ego!”