

Meet Richard Bach - Author of The Ferret Chronicles

Richard Bach recently allowed Ferrets magazine a glimpse into his writing process for these amazing stories.

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Courtesy of Richard Bach

The author of such literary masterpieces as *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* and *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah* now lends his extraordinary writing talent (and, for the first time, artistic talent) to revealing the secret world of ferrets through *The Ferret Chronicles*. The first two books in the series, *Rescue Ferrets At Sea* and *Air Ferrets Aloft*, hits stores June 18, 2002. This secret ferret world astounds with its complexity and depth of feeling — for ferrets live by the highest of ideals in a universe teeming with loyalty, courage, bravery and love. Richard Bach allowed *Ferrets* magazine a glimpse into his writing process for these amazing stories.

Q: What inspired you to write *The Ferret Chronicles*?

A: The books were inspired by a meeting with two ferrets at the home of a friend. Instant enchantment. The playfulness of the little guys, their joyful side-hops, their curiosity and intelligence. Sabryna [Richard Bach's wife] and I left their home charmed by creatures unlike any we had met. From that moment, we were followed about by imaginary ferrets for weeks, told each other stories about seeing them in the commonest and the strangest circumstances.

When I began spending hours watching a live ferret-cam on the Internet, I knew it was time to get a ferret of our own. Much research, and I brought home the first three of our remarkable friends: Zsa-Zsa, Chloe and Mistinguette. They were cousins, yet each a different personality: the glamorous rock star; the adventurous intellectual; the quiet, beautiful mystery-ferret.

The stories began to write themselves. All of a sudden there was Zsa-Zsa and the *Show Ferrets*, opening in Salinas, and the back-stories for each of them. Zsa-Zsa, for instance, the lovely Cuban kit, desperately poor, harvesting hibiscus blossoms south of Havana, practicing her songs and steps in the fields, dreaming of the stage.

Like every compelling tale, no story had to be invented, each simply unfolded: day by day I saw farther into the ferret culture, as though some sunlit fog was lifting, as I watched, from over their land.

The first story we imagined, *Samba Ferrets in Salinas*, led at once to half a dozen others, and those burst like popcorn over fire into dozens more. Ferret society, I was shown, is ancient and far-flung, long predating our own civilization, born in a different galaxy from ours. Ferret values captivated me: their love of action and adventure, their choice to decline the idea of evil, to live each of them to their highest sense of right, without malice or crime or war. Ferrets, in short, were animals who make choices that any of us can make, at any time: they choose every day to become the best creatures they know how to be.

Given this, *The Ferret Chronicles* fell into place, inevitable, a kind of modern Oz, though empty of witches and evils turned loose on innocents.

Q: How long did it take you to write each story, so far?

A: Each story seems to take about six months to write. First a cloud of notes, as I watch the terrain and architecture of the story, then I write, not knowing beyond the most general mileposts where it will take me. I love being taken off-balance by my characters, and as I write, the ferrets oblige daily.

Q: Can you explain the basics of the parallel ferret world?

A: It seems like most humans can't see these ferrets. It's true that, at the moment, most humans haven't seen the parallel world of the ferrets, existing on a dimension close alongside our own. Those of us who have found our calling, however, who have found what we most love to do and be, see them more and more. As we lift our values and choices to match theirs, of course, the ferret world becomes visible, communication possible. The ferrets who have crossed over from their world to ours, the ones who chose to be born on Earth and become friends to us, are extraordinary brave animals. They are just as courageous as we would be, choosing to share our lives with a world of creatures who have not yet renounced violence and anger and cruelty. Yet each of them holds within the key to their own lovely world beyond, each can share that key when we ask them with love, with gentle spirit and heart.

Rescue Ferrets at Sea tells the tale of Bethany Ferret, who realizes her dream of going into the Rescue Ferret Service and becomes a hero.

Q: The first two books in the chronicles are Rescue Ferrets At Sea and Air Ferrets Aloft. The next three will be Writer Ferrets: Chasing The Muse, Teacher Ferrets In The Classroom and Rancher Ferrets On The Range. How do you decide which professions to spotlight?

A: At the moment there are well over 50 titles of Ferret Chronicles stories on my wall, and notes for them all in the computer. I do not pick them as much as they pick me. I've been a flyer of airplanes all my life, for instance, yet the first story that begged to be written was of the seagoing Ferret Rescue Service. I don't know why that is. I admire the ideals of all the characters in the series that I've met so far, I'm impatient to adventure with those unmet, in whatever order they come.

Q: Do you have a favorite story or character?

A: I love these stories more than any I've written — surely I have a longer-term relationship with these characters than with any others. After they're on paper, they stand as examples for me. It sounds strange, but already I've asked myself, faced with a decision: "What would Bethany do? How would Boa or Stormy or Strobe meet this challenge?" I am deeply bonded with them all. They will be with me so long as I live, and I will not be surprised to find them, one day, waiting to greet me at the other side of my own Rainbow Bridge.

Q: Major characters for one story are mentioned or have a smaller role in other stories. It seems like the ferret world is tightly knit. Will each character eventually have its own book?

A: Each major character has her or his own book, shared with a number of secondary characters (secondary only in literary terms, not in the quality or depth of the life they represent). Yet the books can only hint at the relationships that exist between the characters beyond the page. The facts behind the stories are simple, but it can be a bit complicated to explain: Bethany, the rescue boat captain of Rescue Ferrets at Sea, shares adventures with Chloe, the rock-star/writer of Zsa-Zsa and the Show Ferrets, who may be falling in love with Boa, Bethany's chief Engine ferret. Boa, as a kit, was a close friend of Budgeron (the hero of Writer Ferrets: Chasing the Muse); of Strobe (chief pilot for MusTelCo in Air Ferrets Aloft and old friend of Stilton, the world's richest ferret and hero of Billionaire Ferrets from Rhode Island); and of Alla (the heroine of Archaeologist Ferrets at the Dig), who discovers the secrets of Pheretima: Sultana Ferrets in the Lost City.

These four friends were ranchkits who became ranchpaws at Monty Ferret's Rainbow Sheep Resort and Ranchpaw Training Center in Montana (Rancher Ferrets on the Range). Monty is one of Chloe's uncles. The rainbow sheep were cloned in Scotland by another of Chloe's uncles. Chloe's father was a business partner of Earnest, who is the manager of Zsa-Zsa and the Show Ferrets (Samba Ferrets in Salinas). Jasmine, the movie star (Celebrity Ferrets at Home), grew up on the neighboring ranch to Monty's, and the two have a warm bond (Rancher Ferrets on the Range).

Jasmine is grooming Zsa-Zsa to take over a company that Stilton wants very much to buy, though he doesn't know the depth of that company's activities. Mistinguette will meet Stilton in Billionaire Ferrets in the Boardroom, and change his life considerably, which is another book altogether. This is just the start. The Chronicles go on and on.

Air Ferrets Aloft introduces readers to Air Captain Stormy Ferret, who earns her name running cargo flights in the worst of all weather - fearless and true to her task.

Q: The names of several of your ferrets appear in these first two stories. Will all your ferrets eventually appear — and do the characters resemble their namesakes at all?

A: The characteristics of our own personal ferrets have shaped the personalities of 10 of the ferrets in the stories. Zsa-Zsa loves the spotlight, yet has a quiet side within; Chloe is thoughtful and analytical; Misty beautiful and ethereal (our own Misty died last year, though she still advises from the other side of the Bridge); Willow is the heroine of Teacher Ferrets in the Classroom, though she plays an important role as a kit in Air Ferrets Aloft. Budgeron, solemn and curious, is the hero of Writer Ferrets; Earnest, unflappable and absolutely dependable, is pivotal in Samba Ferrets; Stilton, brash and headlong, we found at a ferret shelter; Jasmine, our stunningly beautiful dark-eyed white, so mannered and sophisticated, had been abandoned at a cat and dog shelter, about to be euthanized when we found her; Vincent the fun-loving and careless (though he appears considerably more responsible in Rescue Ferrets at Sea); Boa, our big dark sable, as solid as his namesake in Rescue Ferrets. They all appear.

Q: You did the illustrations for these books, a first for you. Was it always a dream of yours to illustrate?

A: It has never been a dream for me to illustrate my books. Sabryna suggested that I do it, and instead of arguing for my limitations, I decided that I'd do my best, instead. Turns out that I rather like my drawings, though I have no idea what others may think, and am ready to be reminded that I am not a professional artist.

Q: Each book features at the front a fable in Ferrune, the language of ferrets; an English translation follows. What can you

tell us about Ferrune?

A: Ferrune is not so much the language of ferrets as it is their ancient alphabet. It was given to the early Sumerians and Phoenicians and Druids by early ferrets coming to Earth — readers familiar with those written languages will see the runic influences of the ferrets and through them, the shape of our own alphabet today. Ferrets, setting their claws just so, can write in Ferrune faster than the speediest human shorthand expert can set it down in Gregg. At the moment, as far as I know, I am the only human on Earth who can write and decipher Ferrune. After the Chronicles are published, I suspect that thousands of young readers will have taught themselves Ferrune, and will read and write it much faster than I. The key lies in a sort of Rosetta Stone within each book: a different ancient story from Antonius Ferret's Fables opens every volume, followed by its English translation. The dedication is in Ferrune, untranslated until each reader decides that it might be interesting to figure it out.

Q: What do you hope readers will take away from these stories?

A: My hope is the same as any writer's: I pray that my readers will find the stories entertaining. Though the Ferret Chronicles are not written as children's books, I'd not object if a few readers might share them, from time to time, with younger folks.

Q: Can you tell us a little about your own ferrets? (How/when you acquired; their personality; what you like most about them over any other type of pet?)

A: I couldn't have come this far in the interview without giving away my love and admiration for the character of the ferret in the universe parallel to ours, and to those ferrets who choose to be born here, risking their lives every day to share our universe with us, to teach us kindness and love.

It follows that I'm a little distressed that California, the state in which I grew up, is the only one of the contiguous United States to declare it illegal for humans to shelter and love the domesticated ferret. With a bit of antique discrimination, the laws of California have made it impossible for me to return to live in the state where I was raised. A strange feeling.

Q: What presented the biggest challenge to you in writing these books?

A: My biggest challenge in writing the Ferret Chronicles is the same as Budgeron's challenge in *Writer Ferrets: Chasing the Muse*. We both have had to give up the ambition, once and for all, that we might one day become sophisticated, literary writers. Budgie and I are writers of those simple tales that charm and claim our hearts, and that is all we shall ever be.

Q: What has been the easiest part about writing these books?

A: The easiest part of writing the books has been to give up the ambition, once and for all, that I might one day become a sophisticated, literary writer. I discovered that I don't much care for sophisticated literary novels — I don't buy them, don't read them. What a burden lifted! What lovely stories yet to write!

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