

A boy archaeologist as the next Harry Potter?

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The publisher who discovered the Harry Potter books 11 years ago claimed yesterday that stories of a boy archaeologist may follow the boy wizard as the must read for children after the final volume by J K Rowling is published next month.

Two unknown authors have amassed advances of more than £500,000 for their debut book. Tunnels is a fantasy adventure book that Barry Cunningham, who snapped up J K Rowling's first book in 1996, believes will be the next major children's success story.

Tunnels, the story of a "boy archaeologist, merciless villains, a lost world and a journey to the centre of the earth", will be published on July 2.

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It has been written by two friends who met at university, Roderick Gordon, from Norfolk, who lost his job as an investment banker in 2001, and Brian Williams, an artist, from London. They self-published the book and it sold out at Mr Gordon's local bookshop.

Mr Cunningham, who was at the publishers Bloomsbury when he signed J K Rowling, has since founded his own company, Chicken House.

The authors have already completed a sequel and are working on a third volume.

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