

Will this book be the 'next Harry Potter' ?

By Nigel Reynolds, Arts Correspondent

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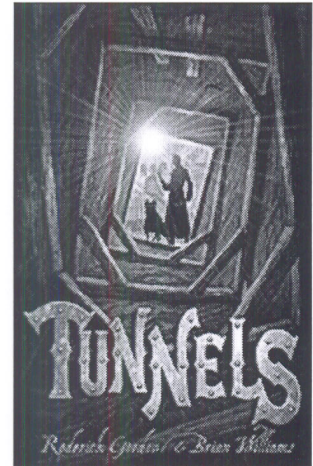
The Daily Telegraph today publishes the first extracts from *Tunnels*, expected to be the next sensation after Harry Potter, the first-time work of two British authors now set to become multi-millionaires. Yesterday, Barry Cunningham, their publisher and the man who first signed up JK Rowling a decade ago, was in New York considering film offers from three Hollywood studios for *Tunnels* - even though it is not due to be published until July 2.

"I have never had so many film people trying to get hold of me," he said.

The authors, Roderick Gordon, 46, and Brian Williams, 48, have been guarded about *Tunnels* but the extracts reveal that the book follows Will, a 10-year-old archaeologist, and his friend Chester. The fantasy adventure involves merciless villains, a tunnel to find a lost world and a journey to the centre of the earth.

Advance orders put *Tunnels* third in the Amazon sales chart - behind two Harry Potter titles. Mr Cunningham has bought two sequels - one of which is written.

Astonishingly, Gordon and Williams self-published 2,500 copies of the book - under another title, *The Highfield Mole* - two years ago because they thought they would have no success with mainstream publishers. Yesterday, a hardback copy was being offered on Amazon for £1,500. With deals struck for other countries, the authors have so far earned advances of £500,000.



advertisement Gordon, who has two young children, was made redundant as an investment banker in 2001. Williams, who studied art at the Slade in London, has worked as an artist, in films and as an actor.

The pair, friends since meeting as students, were fascinated by archaeology and wrote *Tunnels* in the garden of Gordon's home in Islington, north London, in the hot summer of 2004.

Williams said: "The basis for the story struck us as if someone had belted us on the head with a shovel.

"The idea of a secret world underneath our feet hit us in an instant and after that, Rod and I never looked back. We couldn't write fast enough."

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