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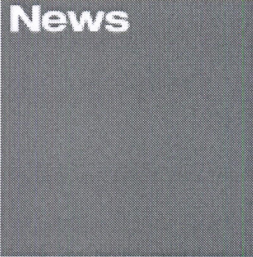


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Publisher claims to have found Potter successor

Editor who was first to spot the potential of JK Rowling's boy wizard tips fantasy tale about boy archaeologist as next big thing

Lindesay Irvine
Tuesday June 12, 2007
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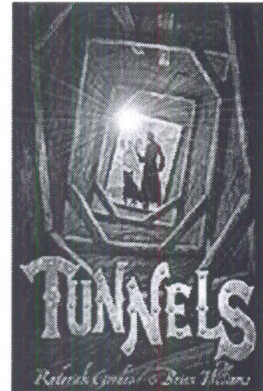
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An epic quest for an elusive golden grail, journeys around the world, fierce challenges, clues found in dusty manuscripts along with many a red herring. Not a children's story, but a story of children's publishing: Harry Potter and the Equally Lucrative Success, which, according to the publishers of the first in a new serial of books, reached a dramatic climax in a Norfolk bookshop.

JK Rowling's multi-million publishing sensation will leave a gigantic gap in the market for children's book market once the seventh and final book is published in July, and every children's publisher has long hoped to fill it.



Is this the new Harry Potter?

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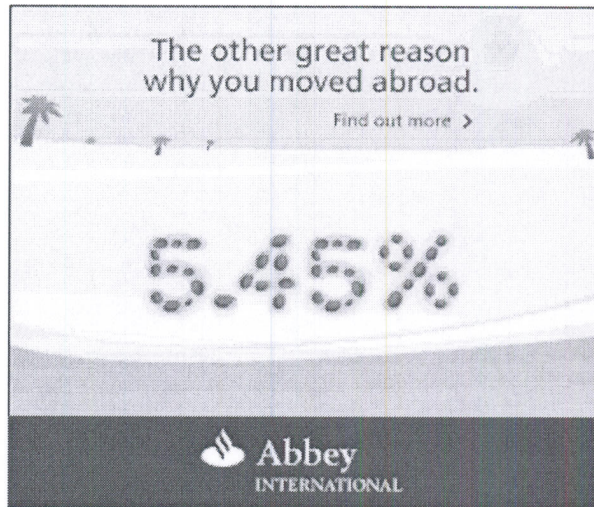
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Previous candidates for Rowling's turbo bestsellerdom have included Michelle Paver's *Chronicles of Ancient Darkness*, Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl* books, and the *Lemony Snicket* tales. While all have been successful by any normal measure, none has produced quite the same unit-shifting magic as Potter.

The latest candidate arrives under the aegis of the man who, as an editor at Bloomsbury, was the first to spot Potter's potential, and who has gone on to publish the popular *Cornelia Funke* books. Barry Cunningham is now tipping a fantasy tale about a boy archaeologist, who discovers a world of thrilling adventure after digging a hole, as the next enormously big thing.

Cunningham found the first of the books, *Tunnels*, after its joint authors Roderick Gordon and Brian Williams pooled their resources to self-publish a deluxe edition. The first print run, sold through Gordon's local bookshop in Norfolk, apparently sold out within hours - a sensational success for a self-published book - and word reached Cunningham.

With the backing of Cunningham - a man considered something of a magician himself in the publishing world - the book has gone on to sell pre-publication rights in 15 languages around the world, securing advances totalling more than £500,000. Cunningham is currently in Hollywood, in discussions to sell the film rights.

"I knew from page one that Harry Potter was magic," Cunningham said earlier, "Reading *Tunnels* gave me the same thrill, discovering a world of imagination just beyond our ordinary lives." He confidently predicted that "millions of children" would soon be feeling much the same way.

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