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THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Another Harry Potter in the making?

14 Jun, 2007 | 0000 hrs IST | REUTERS

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The publisher who first signed up J K Rowling believes he may have found another *Harry Potter* - but this time it is a boy archaeologist.

In an industry that revels in hype and is always on the lookout for the next blockbuster, two unknown authors have amassed advances of over £5,00,000 and pre-publication rights in 15 languages.

Roderick Gordon and Brian Williams were signed by *Chicken House* publisher Barry Cunningham after he tracked down an early version of their book, *Tunnels*, that was self-published. "I knew from page one that *Harry Potter* was magic. Reading *Tunnels* gave me the same thrill," said Cunningham, who has also achieved worldwide publishing success with the children's books of German writer Cornelia Funke.

"*Tunnels* has it all: a boy archaeologist, merciless villains, a lost world and an extraordinary journey to the centre of the earth," Cunningham said after first stirring up interest at the international children's rights fair in Bologna.

The authors originally met at university, but then went on to follow very different careers - one as an investment banker, the other as an artist. They got together when Gordon was made redundant from his job in corporate finance. He then sold his house to self-publish a limited run edition of *Tunnels*.

Cunningham, hearing of their success, signed the pair up for a series of fantasy tales seen through the eyes of 14-year-old Will Burrows and set in a hidden world deep below London.

When working with British publisher Bloomsbury, Cunningham transformed the publishing industry in the mid 1990s when he signed J K Rowling, whose Potter sagas have now sold more than 325 million copies worldwide and made her the world's first billion dollar author. Pottermania is set to scale new heights in July with the last novel in her Potter saga hitting the bookstands and the latest film being launched in a deluge of global publicity.

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