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**RUNELORDS** (continued from p. 33)

endowments – such as strength, stamina, or intelligence – to a member of the aristocracy. This transaction leaves the commoner an invalid unable to feed himself, and the runelords, who can collect multiple endowments from different peasants, as incredibly powerful, beautiful, super-warriors.

Farland's story follows the adventures of Gaborn Val Orden, a young but important prince. Despite the fact that his homeland is threatened by an army led by a vicious leader who has taken thousands of endowments, Gaborn vows to be a moral runelord, and to fight without taking endowments that are not given freely.

Farland's twist on magic is innovative but the moral implications of his created universe weaken the story. A world where one can take another's endowments would seem to dictate a power structure that gives the upper hand to those who are most willing to force the greatest number of peasants to hand over their physical attributes. Instead of survival of the strong it is survival of the cruel. And so the passages in which commoners freely offer their strength to Gaborn in the hope that he'll be a better defender of the land are not particularly convincing.

Still, Farland is such a gifted stylist that we mostly overlook these holes. He has spent time

in England and Scotland examining castles and fortifications first hand and this kind of research has paid off in the compelling descriptive passages. His characters are more than your usual fantasy stereotypes and, though he occasionally spends too much time describing them moving from one castle to another, the plotting is generally fast and smooth. With *The Runelords*, Farland proves himself to be an important new talent in the fantasy fiction genre. – *by Colin Leslie*

**FICTION**

**BUDDY BABYLON:** *The Autobiography of Buddy Cole*, Scott Thompson & Paul Bellini; \$17.95 paper 0-440-50828-2, 5 x 8, 272 pp., Dell/Bantam Doubleday, June *Reviewed from finished book*

*Buddy Babylon* is not for those of unforgiving morals. That said, be prepared for an over-the-top, laugh-out-loud read that is so full of subtle humour, you'll miss it if you read too fast.

Scott Thompson and Paul Bellini, who spent four years together writing for CBC-TV's *The Kids in the Hall*, continue their wacky writing synergy in *Buddy Babylon*.

Buddy is the last of 23 children born to pig farmers in the tiny hamlet of St. Hubert sur la Lac, named after the chicken restaurant nearby. Buddy's early arrival into his family's convoluted

world interrupts his brother Pierre's entrance into manhood, from which Pierre never recovers. Buddy meanwhile, embraces his rampant homosexuality with pragmatism. "It's true what they say about the gay life. It's easy to get in, but it's a bitch to get out."

Buddy's rise from the pits of pig poverty to living high on the hog in Hollywood, is a roller-coaster of gratuitous gay sex, hard-core guzzling of "Golden Wedding" whiskey with his lesbian friend, Kate, and endless lines of coke. He gets roped into a sham Hollywood marriage, ending up with a stepdaughter who has two heads, named Suzanne and Pleshette. His wife, Tandy, "doesn't use emotions in real life because she's an actress and doesn't like to bring her work home with her."

Buddy becomes so fanatical about safe sex, he even gives up phone sex.

Thompson and Bellini's edgy humour, irreverence, and panache makes Buddy's story an enticing journey, whether you approve of his lifestyle or not. Subtle innuendo is cleverly peppered throughout, "I papered the room with Anne of Green Gables wallpaper imported from Japan."

In the introduction, Buddy says he hopes his story is "not too boring." It is anything but. – *by Cece Scott, a Toronto writer and fiction contest editor of B&A Literary Magazine.*