

CANNED TUNA, a novel by David Memmott
Reviewed by Paul DiFilippo
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The Title of David Memmott’s new novel, *Canned Tuna* (Redbat Books, trade paper, \$16.00, 292 pages, ISBN 978-0-9971549-8-6), reminds me of the title of the 1964 novel by Charles Simmons, *Powdered Eggs*. I think this comparison is fitting, and maybe even indicative of a deliberate move on the part of Memmott, since his book is also set in the 1960s. But despite pages of gorgeous mimetic writing which evoke that era with grace and precision, overcoming simple nostalgia, Memmott’s book is a fullblown fantasy, a weird road trip through a cosmically shattered landscape that summons up comparisons to Bruce McAllister’s classic *Dream Baby*.

Two men, their ongoing lives offered in alternating chapters, pivot around each other in inexplicable orbits, until a bravura climax resolves their relationship, yet not without some tantalizing enigmas left over. Nico exists in 1969. A veteran wounded in Vietnam, he is back in his hometown of Boise trying to figure out how to live. He gets ensnared in the doings of a revolutionary group dubbed the P.A.S.T. Meanwhile, Milo exists in 1963, a young man working in a tuna-canning factory and focused mostly on trying to score some sex with his girlfriend Monica. Both men are subject to fantastical hallucinations and eruptions of alternate realities. But it is Milo’s world which comes apart most dramatically, precipitating a final merger of identities.

Memmott—a rare figure in our field, both a publisher (Wordcraft of Oregon) and an accomplished novelist and poet—managed to create an alluring personal voice for his novel which blends the vibes of Thomas Pynchon, Philip K. Dick, and Ken Babbs, whose Vietnam novel *Who Shot the Water Buffalo?*, should stand shoulder to shoulder with *Canned Tuna*. Memmott has given us a book which adds a trippy spin to Faulkner’s famed observation about the undead past and its heavy hand.