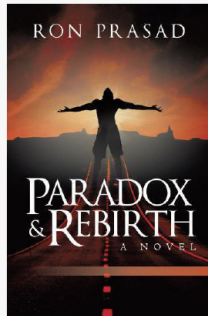


A kind of Easter Novel at Christmas

Paradox & Rebirth: A Novel

Ron Prasad
iUniverse, Inc.
New York Bloomington 2009

Review by Rod Drown



Debut Vancouver novelist Ron Prasad's *Paradox & Rebirth* is being stocked for the Christmas season at Langley Chapters outlet – news which thrills him to no end. He is equally thrilled by something else: *USA Book News*, to which Prasad had submitted his book in their **Best Novels of 2010** contest recently placed his book under the heading, "What's hot, new, and noteworthy in the world of books!"

The narrative of eventual renewal in *Paradox & Rebirth* begins, for a main character called Cirrus Jacobs, on a Christmas Day in Vancouver. To my mind, what transpires over the next several days is "Christmassy" mostly in the sense that there is snow on the ground and some good things do happen to him when, for the last time, he leaves his apartment where he has dwelled for several years to seek his new life – a place in his mind he calls *Paradoxum*.

The novel is based somewhat on Ron Prasad's consideration of a question many people who find themselves in "dead end" jobs may ask: what would happen if I just walked away from it all and started a new life? When the author was washing dishes in a downtown Vancouver hotel, he would see some of the poor and what might be termed the derelict in the area as he came out on his break for a smoke. Some of these people have ended up as inspiration for characters in his novel.

In my own life, I once worked at Riverview Hospital where, in the early 1980's, I knew a tragically alcoholic patient who claimed he had been a major league hockey player in his youth. Question: the pathways of life; how do we end up not where we wanted to be but, instead, where we are?

Cirrus Jacobs sheds his apartment because he feels an intense need for all he believes to be missing from his life. For days and weeks previous to his Christmas Day departure he has been planning a life-changing journey which he hopes will provide clarity and bring meaning to his life.

There is symmetry at times to Prasad's vision. On the other side of the country, in Montreal, is a man who has achieved every success he has set out to accomplish. Ray Porter journeys with his family towards Cirrus' city and, through destiny, their lives unwillingly collide. The result is anything but predictable.

A novel with karma, symmetry and a mystery named Nimbus

Both of Cirrus' parents had been killed when he was seven years old and, before Prasad's novel is done, another tragedy will unfold. There are hints, some of them rather vague, of Karma throughout *Paradox & Rebirth*.

'Karma' is an Indian religious concept which occupies in that culture's religious logic the same place (but not the function) that faith occupies in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), which view all human dramas as the will of God (as opposed to present—and past—life actions). In Indian beliefs, the karmic effects of all deeds are viewed as actively shaping past, present, and future experiences.

There are nice touches in Prasad's work. For example, he seems to hint that, to a degree, he believes people are enmeshed in a *constructed* as opposed to a *natural* reality, by having Cirrus (recovering from a beating received in the early days of his Christmas "freedom") nodding off to the original music score to the movie *The Truman Show*.

However, Cirrus does not travel alone on his way through the wet and quite uncomfortable streets of Vancouver. Nimbus, a seemingly somewhat psychotic voice within him, eventually surfaces and, throughout the novel (for me at least), the question always remains: Who or what is Nimbus? At first he appears to be a part of Cirrus and it seems indicated that he lives *within* Nimbus and cannot exist *without* him.

A typical Nimbus speech:

Then I must be your sadness and defeat. I am your fear, your disappointment, and your tragedy. I am the one who feeds your **trepidation, anxiety, apprehension, panic, and cowardice**. I reign over your hate, anger, and frustration. You have pushed me aside for too long and I've come to claim my place. I am with you always, lurking underneath your skin. I am half of your conscience and I live within your shadow.

In other words, Nimbus is the being who does not take chances. Is this true? Is it he who wrecks all Cirrus' dreams of peace and quiet glory? And another:

When are you going to realize that clenching your fists within your pockets does nothing? Being merely angry will get you no answers; **you have to change, you must take action**. There is little time left, because you are approaching fast. Turn around, before the darkness catches up."

At the same time, Nimbus *requires* that Cirrus face his fears for, in a general way, admitting our fears is useful because it is part of our survival technique. As Ron Prasad told me:

When the reader is first introduced to Nimbus, he lays root to his spot in the book as the unequivocal antagonist. Here is a character who is menacing, aggressive, and foul-mouthed: a perfect candidate as the quintessential bad guy.

As the story progresses, the reader realizes that he is simply the main character's conscience; one that has the incredible ability to be heard audibly by his host.

Have you ever asked yourself: what would my conscience say to me? How often do my thoughts dissipate so quickly that I barely remember thinking them? What if I had a moment to ponder as I would a human conversation? Nimbus begins as a character that seems ominously distant to all of us, but once we delve deeper, find he actually *lives inside all of us* as what we refer to as our own "conscience". It just so happens to be that Cirrus can actually hear him, and therefore, Nimbus becomes a character in his own right within the story. Is he guiding the main character towards redemption or ruin?

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Well, Cirrus will just have to listen and you will have to turn the page...



Ron Prasad: Raised by strong women

Prasad presents strong women

It is worth noting that, throughout the novel, it is from among the men in *Paradox & Rebirth* that danger lurks or misfortune most often comes. For example, there are the two thugs who beat up Cirrus in a Downtown Eastside alley and, of course, there is the companion named Gravity who is deluded. In Ray Porter's case there is the "bored-to-tears" store owner and his father at an out of the way convenience store along a lonely BC highway. By and large it is the women – among them Cirrus' grandmother, the DTES soup kitchen owner Judith Edgewater and her student volunteer Tara -- who, as the vernacular puts it, have it "together". There are some other interestingly-sketched characters:

- The young blonde artist girl of Cirrus' imagination is the link to the other family, that of Raymond Porter, at the other end of the country, who is moving to Vancouver
- Emily Porter, his wife
- Julia Porter, their baby daughter
- Anna, Cirrus' departed girlfriend

Ron Prasad is a personable, relaxed, enthusiastic man of 34 years. The book was 12 years to publication and went through six drafts. His father's death spurred on his starting the novel. In the beginning Ron Prasad didn't intend on becoming a novelist. As a boy he wanted to be an artist. Spending most of his childhood sketching comic book characters, he dreamed of being able to one day bring them to life. To his dismay and utter frustration, his traditional artistic skills didn't evolve at the rate he'd been hoping, and soon after his father's passing, he traded in his sketch pencil for a computer keyboard.

Possessed by the need to fulfill his destiny as an artistic conduit, he began writing feverishly in the early morning hours during the fall of 1998, and didn't stop for three consecutive months. With his first finished short manuscript, he had finally discovered a medium for artwork that he knew would never stop evolving. He has been writing seriously ever since, and has completed two full-length novels; in addition to a few other shorter works to date.

Getting to the in-between

When Ron started *Paradox and Rebirth* he had the beginning and the end but he did not know the "in between".

Each of the six drafts was dedicated to different things so far as his re-writing intentions were concerned. Four of the drafts were done with the editor at the publishing house that he found in Bloomington, Indiana. When he first started to write the novel, his love for Vancouver was certainly the inspiration for the setting. Upon his editor's suggestion, he rewrote the story to incorporate the actual setting and this gave the story the foundation it needed.

Ron Prasad told me that several incidents in the story are based on occasions – highly suitable and deeply appropriate occasions – that happened in real life but fit the story. They were what the story needed.

Ron Prasad reads Dante, poetry and philosophical works. He often visits bookstores and sets aside two hours of uninterrupted reading and browsing time. He likes reading such material as *Sophie's World*, which is a story in which a man introduces his young daughter to philosophy.

Readers interested in *Paradox & Rebirth* can purchase it bygoing to the author's website at www.ronprasad.com or by purchasing it online at [Chapter's](#), [Barnes & Noble](#), & [Amazon](#).

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