



These Days

Jack Cheng

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Connor Vast designs fake computer interfaces. Not the ones you see in sci-fi movies or primetime crime dramas, though he's worked on a couple of those in the past. The interfaces he designs tend to be static: they are the screens for prop computers in furniture showrooms. Young creative professional, child of the internet, refugee of the suburban Midwest, Connor goes about his life and work in New York City with a stream of status updates flowing constantly in the background. He meets K, a gamine twenty-four-year-old who doesn't own a cellphone. As he gets to know her, Connor realizes he's strayed from his younger ambitions of designing real interfaces, working on real technology. He soon falls in with a group of entrepreneurs out to invent the future, but it's the same future K is so adamantly against.

THESE DAYS is a foray into the world of startups and an examination of the human side of technology, of both the makers and the end users, who are often one and the same. It's about finding happiness and fulfillment in the digital age; a meditation on time, memory, and things gained and lost in an accelerating world.

These Days Details

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Author : Jack Cheng

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From Reader Review These Days for online ebook

Ling says

This book captures some essential features of what it's like to be a millennial - a story of self-discovery, interpersonal connection, and the search for love that is all too poignant for those who have had similar struggles. For weeks after reading this book, the emotions, scenes, and dialogue followed me around my daily life, like shadows of real-life characters. My main critique is that I thought the reader wasn't given much reason to sympathize with the protagonist relative to the other characters. He felt rather two-dimensional and under-developed, but given the themes of the book, maybe this was cleverly intentional.

HollyG says

I was NOT one of the Kickstarter backers, but I borrowed this book from my husband who was. He is a web designer/developer and he insisted that I read this book because a lot of what was in Connor's head was also in his. I guess as a person not in this industry it was a little slow going. There was a lot of detailed talk about the industry that went right over my head. I thought there were too many details during pitches that didn't really add to the story. So anyway, we have Connor who is not satisfied with the work he is putting out in the world. He leaves his job of 4 years to figure out what he wants in life and he stumbles into another company that seems to give him an opportunity to make a difference. He meets K and they start dating, but she has a lot of secrets that really work against their relationship. At first Connor seemed a little lost and I enjoyed K's POV more, but the more I was in her head the more I wanted out. Her life had a pretty big tragedy that she refuses to talk about and pretty much ruins any relationship she gets into because she was too afraid to be honest and communicate. Connor really falls for her and you start to feel really bad for him because he doesn't have any clue why things are going south with her. It was hard to read as Connor struggles to make something that is important and K not really being supportive because she has shunned all things technological. Connor is frustrated with work and his relationship and you are frustrated with him. About halfway through the book the story really picks up for those of us not in this industry. Overall, I liked the book. It was an honest voice for people in this line of work and also for those of us in relationships with those people. I didn't love the ending because I wanted everything wrapped up in a pretty package, but it was an honest and true ending. Not a bad read from this first time author.

Christy Moyer says

I wanted to love this book. Not only is Cheng an NYC local and a member of the tech community, he funded this novel—his first—on Kickstarter with a \$10K goal. Had I known about the campaign before it ended, I probably would have donated, too—the plot was both fresh and intriguing.

But the book fell totally flat. Cheng read like a first-time author from the beginning. There were so many adjectives and adverbs worked into a single sentence—as if he had just passed the 4th grade lesson on descriptive writing ("...a frontal view of a handsome table topped with lightly faded oak standing on gently faded wooden legs." *cringe*). He also had a strange predilection for brand name-dropping. In one page he mentioned 12 brands, from Napster to Netflix. It was totally off-putting and weird, and felt like he was writing for a YA crowd that might value those references. Add in his flippant start-up buzzwords ("pivot", anyone??) and the reading experience felt like one giant eye-roll.

These nit-picky observations aside, the plot was anticlimactic and the characters had no chemistry to boot. I think Cheng felt a lot of pressure to prove his ability as a writer coming from a technical background, and in the process completely overcompensated—resulting in a book that felt sophomoric, boring and somehow pretentious all at once.

Carrie says

I backed this book on Kickstarter because I really liked the premise...a guy completely engrossed in technology falling for a girl who doesn't even have a cell phone...and oh yeah, they meet at IKEA. I wasn't really sure what to expect and had no connection to the author but got into the story quickly and found myself really interested in why this girl had no cell phone. I honestly couldn't imagine life without mine. I liked that it was set in current day New York and referenced a lot of things I'm familiar with even though I live on the opposite side of the country. Someone asked me what it was about when I was reading and I think my exact words were, "It's sort of a hipster love story." And I think that's true. While I could relate to a lot of what was going on, especially as it related to technology, the characters themselves were very, very different from me. But I think that's what fascinated me the most because I think they were very realistic. I think this could easily be a true story. I definitely recommend checking this out because it's actually quite unique and different from most of the love stories I read. Maybe that's because it's written by a guy instead of a girl; maybe that's because of the technology laced throughout the book; maybe that's just because the author found a great niche. I liked that I was left wondering what happened to some of the characters, that I could imagine what they might have done next, but that definitely didn't leave me unsatisfied.

Ellen Chisa says

I backed Jack Cheng's Kickstarter project almost a year ago (July 2012). I did it sort of on a whim, and sort of because a bunch of my friends had and it seemed like the "cool" thing to do. I was skeptical about if it would come across as cliché, or anti-technology.

After that, I got a weekly update about the process of writing the book. I learned fascinating things about the cover design (which actually made me think I'd broken my fifth Kindle), the typography, and the process of editing at a high and low level. By the time I finally got the book Friday, I was dying to read it.

It didn't disappoint! I feel like this is the best interpretation that I've seen about where our current culture is headed. It might speak mostly to the micro-chasm of society that I'm personally a part of, but it hits on very real issues.

I was sad when I finished it.

Israel Derdik says

This book is the first novel I've read that accurately portrays the New York tech startup scene. As part of that world, I recognized a lot of the dilemmas and soul-searching that the characters go through. The ruminations of the main character resonated strongly with me as well. Overall, it was a great read and I'd be very curious to see how non-tech folks feel about it!

Ken says

I am seldom a reader of fiction that is not rooted in fantasy or science, so books set in our modern world are foreign to me. So I was pleasantly surprised to find how engaging *These Days* was. Author Jack Cheng has a fluid narrative that is colorful and evocative of New York City and the characters' physical sensations. Reading a book where the events are realistic — two twenty-somethings meet, one who's planning his future, the other who's escaping her past — was actually a refreshing change and gave me ideas for my own life.

The characters were also very relatable, at least on a personal level. I saw much of myself in the protagonist, Connor: makes his living online, connected to the social web, and perhaps a bit naive and needy in relationships. But I also related to his love interest, K, who never carries a cell phone and enjoys her time offline. It was in fact that technological divide between the love interests that led me to originally back Cheng's Kickstarter to publish this book. But this is not "a story about technology", as the crowdfunding video suggested. Connor uses technology to distract himself from the present but capture and relive the past, through photos, videos, tweets, and status updates. K, by contrast, is all about living in the moment but wants desperately to forget her own history. The scene describing her motivation for doing so was so evocative, I cried — I can't remember the last book to have that effect on me. These are the true challenges the characters are facing.

The book takes us through several anecdotes that demonstrate these opposing philosophies, but the narrative never really leads anywhere. Connor hates his job, quits, and gets a new one. He doesn't like his new job, thinks about quitting, but decides to stick around. He and K go out to dinner and have a conversation. They ride on the subway and make observations about the other commuters. With the exception of some flashbacks that are occasionally hard to place in the tale's chronology, it's vignette after vignette, without any real build-up.

That's why the novel's ending came as such a shock. And again, it's one I relate to personally, as something nearly identical happened to me, which may color my reception of the book. I look to fiction to vicariously experience situations I've not yet encountered, and to get into other people's heads and learn how they feel, that I might better empathize. But *These Days* offered neither alternative to nor insight into reality. I had hoped that the message would be either "Things don't have to be this way" as I find in the unreal fiction I normally gravitate to, or "Things **are** this way, but here's why". I received neither source of closure from this book. It was an abrupt and heartless ending that left me unsure why anything had just happened, what the characters' motivations had been, or what either of them was supposed to learn from this experience or how they were expected to grow from it.

I normally dive right from book to book, but I was preoccupied with *These Days* for days afterward. Perhaps that's a sign of a good book, that it stays with you and makes you think. But, like Connor, I don't know what just happened, and I don't know that I ever will.

Emily de Moura says

In two short months, virtually every aspect of his life had changed. And it all had something to do with her, with the creature purring gently beside him.

Not gonna lie, I'm a liiiiiittle bit disappointed - mostly at myself, I guess.

I picked *These Days* after I read *See You in the Cosmos*, a really cute middle grade book by Jack Cheng. I had liked his second book so I thought I should give his first one a try. The problem is that, even though *These Days* is a very contemporary book, it is also, in the end, the "man-meets-quirky-girl-and-she-changes-his-life" old trope that makes me go yikes pretty hard.

Connor is a young man trying to find his place in life thanks to the help of a young, pretty girl with a letter for a name and a quirky personality who he met at Ikea once. K is different, she's doesn't own a phone and is not at any social media, they don't really have much in common and she also has some quirky tattos and a tragic backstory that he never really learns but is told to the reader to, I don't know, see how tragic her life has been to this point. And that is... Not my cup of tea. The new spin Jack Cheng put on the old trope, that being the whole new techonological world and whatnot, was fun and very relatable, but not enough to change its true essence, I guess. I knew exactly how the book would end and, even then, I was bitter at it because I was hoping it would be different.

(view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

Frederic Jacobs says

I'm a programmer myself and have been doing startups for a few years now. I can totally identify with Conner regarding dealing with deadlines, investors, team spirit.

Startups are requiring a lot of attention and hard work to succeed and it might not always easy to keep up with relationships. Good hints regarding that subject in the book.

Nikki says

To start: I read this months ago, but have now decided that a review is needed.

I did not know about the kickstarter for this book, but instead received it through GoodreadsFirstReads. If I remember correctly, Jack Cheng himself sent it to me and told me to enjoy. It was one of the first books I won through a giveaway and was extremely excited about reading it.

Being a twenty-something myself, the idea of technology and its good and bad points drew me in. Being in university, I naturally have my phone on me constantly and love to update my friends with pictures and silly thoughts. But at the same time, what is it all for? Am I losing my presence in the real world?

Well let's see what this book has to tell me about my technology!

Don't let my star rating get you wrong, I really did enjoy this book. I would recommend this book to anyone who was looking for a contemporary read with an enticing premise and two very interesting characters who you just want to end up together in technology bliss, but you know they just can't because the girl refuses societies standard of technology.

First there is Connor Vast: a young man who designs fake computer screens for props in furniture stores. He is the kind of person who is always "plugged-in", meaning that he always is in contact with friends through status updates and such.

Then there is K (Katherine): basically, "the girl." But she is against everything that Connor is trying to achieve in his life. You get just a small taste of her ex-boyfriend through a message machine. These messages bring her down to a more relatable level, because really, who doesn't have that ex that just wants them back?

The basic summary is that these two people meet and a very unstable relationship forms. I really wanted that moment where K just tells Connor what is bothering her, but that never happened.

Theory: K does not own a cell phone. She doesn't like technology. She doesn't "update" her life online. So maybe, because of this, she is naturally cut off from others. She didn't tell Connor about what was bothering her because she doesn't like to open up about herself to others. When you are updating everyday, it's hard to draw the line between what to share and not to share. What if she doesn't think Connor needs to know, even though we, as readers, were screaming internally just wishing she would communicate with our beloved Connor?

Just a thought.

Just goes to show how bad the relationship was in the first place.

The beginning of the book housed a good story, with a good setting (New York City!!! Perfect place to fall in love) and characters. Unfortunately, however, by the end the book just fizzled out. It had nowhere else to go except to just end. It started strong, but just ran out of steam and I felt myself just reading so I could get through it.

There were points while reading that I would space out but my eyes were still running over the lines, and I would have to go back only to realize Connor was just working on his new project and I didn't understand what was going on anyway, so I would just move on, hoping to get to a more interesting point that would draw me back into the story. This is the kind of thing that brings down a star rating for me.

All in all, I didn't love this book even though I really wanted to. But I did enjoy it.

I really hope Jack Cheng writes more books! I can't wait to see what he writes next, because this was a perfectly good place to start.

Brynn says

"Sometimes it's about what you choose not to read," she said. "Every book we read or movie we see, every little experience becomes a part of who we are. If we're all watching the same things and reading the same things and listening to the same things, then our conversations would end up going in circles, reaffirming things we already know and agree about. There would be no surprises, no serendipity. It'd be like this big tragic echo chamber. It's just not for me." (44)

"A moment had a certain kind of intimacy too, an intimacy that couldn't exist if nobody, or everybody, had been there to bear witness." (57)

"Connor's week glided along on the wings of finality, at the tempo of impending closure, like the last lazy days of one's senior year of school: slow, savored, oozing with the honey of future nostalgia." (103)

"You do things and then you realize they're just echoes from the past, like you threw a big rock into the water a long time ago and now you spend the rest of your life riding out the ripples." (155)

"Walking around Times Square made you realize that this—this layering of voices, this push and draw of blinking lights and images tidal-waving across LEDs, this excitement telegraphed through the air, this laughter floating up, up like soap bubbles, this sheer sense of humanity and electricity mashed into a few square blocks—this was the world when the distance between people was utterly annihilated. In a way, Times Square was like the stream at its most hyperactive, during major events or outside the comfort of familiar personal networks: loud, strange, exciting, crude, annoying, frightening, crashing, blinking, distracting, overwhelming, bursting with the kind of life that one could handle only in small, infrequent doses." (160)

"If there was any sure sign of inexperience, it was believing that everyone had the same motivations." (182)

"There's a difference between not caring, and knowing what's important." (244)

"It was one of those walks enjoyed at the peak of one's intoxication, one of those festive New York nights when everything seemed to be musical and in tune. The people on the streets passed through and around each other like schools of fish, leaving effervescent trails of laughter in their wake. In every bar and restaurant window intricate coups and elaborate trysts were being plotted over pint glasses and vodka sodas, and cigarette smoke and cellphone screens still signaled hope of the night to come, and couples who'd been strangers just moments before smiled into each other's eyes, were scattered every few blocks in front of bodegas and dollar-slice joints like street-side ATMs. This was the city in all its flaunted potential, the time right before the curtains lowered, before the unabashedly public courtships were clasped by the elbow and ushered into cabs and private rooms. It was the time when both pursued and pursuing offered themselves up for the world to see, and said, 'Here I am at the bubbling crest of life, I am you and am in New York City and I know you are watching and I am watching too.'" (261)

"And wasn't that odd—that his most striking memories were also the ones least captured; ones he'd been so wrapped up in that he'd forgotten to capture in the first place." (291)

"What's more important than this moment, right now? Who cares what all those other people out there are thinking? They're all doing the same thing! They're off in some distant place in their heads, totally divorced from where they really are." (322)

Crystal says

I signed up for the Kickstarter on a whim, because I always like when someone is willing to explore how modern technology is having an impact on society through the lens of a love story. I wasn't expecting the torrential, soulful outpouring of the writing process on a near weekly basis!

Needless to say, I was quite excited to finally read the finished work, and it didn't disappoint. Upon finishing the first chapter, I was a little worried this love story would fall on the Manic Pixie Dream Girl trope, but don't fret! Both Connor Vast and K are given time for the reader to see the story from their point of view, and Jack Cheng paints a rich backdrop of New York City, people, and the start-up scene. Even though I don't have nearly as much experience with the technical aspects of coding, programming, or starting a new

business based on tech, I could follow along with the ideas Cheng was showing. I was especially impressed by Connor's difficulty in breaking away from the constant presence of the internet in the form of his smartphone and "the stream," which is sadly a mark that hits close to home for myself and quite a few people I know.

For a love story, this is one of the most complex I've read in a while. It has all the beauty, ugliness, and heartbreak of a real relationship, so Harlequin romancers may not find the book as satisfying. The book reads more like journal entries from someone's biography, and has as much meatiness to it.

I enjoyed it a lot, and if anyone wants my hard copy to sink their teeth in, I'd be willing to lend it out!

Todd Vogts says

In the summer of 2012, I was looking around on Kickstarter.com to become familiar with how the whole crowd-funding process worked. I was considering a venture with a friend, and Kickstarter seemed like a possible way for us to get our project off the ground. We ended up not pursuing our endeavor, but along the way of my journey through the site, I did come across the project of Jack Cheng. He was writing a book (his first) called "These Days," and I was fascinated because he was attempting to fund his foray into being a published author by getting donations from people from around the world. As an author myself, I was keenly interested in how Kickstarter could further my writing career.

So I dove in. I backed the book. I gave \$35, which qualified me for the "PATRON BUNDLE—The hardcover bundle, a limited-edition letterpress bookmark, and your name acknowledged in the back of the book." This gave me a hardcover book, a digital copy, and the rest of what is outlined in the description. Also, every week since I backed the project, I received email updates from Cheng that highlighted his thoughts and musings on writing and life, as well as updates on the progress of "These Days." I still get those updates, and I enjoy them greatly.

Eventually, my copy of the book arrived. I wanted to read it right away, but I waited. I was in the middle of various activities and another book I was reading.

Finally, though, I am proud to say I have read "These Days."

Since I backed the book, I was totally prepared to love it, and I can safely say I did enjoy it. I found the characters to be relatable. The prose flowed well, and the story was engaging. And New York City is a great backdrop for a love story, isn't it?

Through his story, Cheng painted an interesting commentary on how we interact with technology. He showed two sides: those totally enamored with tech and those who saw it as a nuisance. He didn't take a stance on tech being good or bad. Instead, he simply shared, in a more simplified way, the way both groups saw things.

I was fascinated by the picture of the New York tech startup scene. I have no experience with it whatsoever, but Cheng made it look exciting and fun. I love technology, so this aspect of the book resonated with me, even if some of the descriptions and whatnot did seem to slow the story down.

As I said, the characters were relatable, but they were frustrating. The female protagonist — Katherine, or K as she was known through most of the story — was incredibly closed off. Her past, which was the cause of her behavior, was revealed to the reader via memories, but her inability to share with the male protagonist — Connor Vast, a designer of fake computer interfaces and startup member — even though a romance blooms

between them, bothered me a great deal. One could argue that Cheng did this to highlight real life, but since it was a novel, I wanted at least some form of closure in terms of her opening up to him and them fully accepting each other for who they were: K was sans-cellphone and despised technology, and Connor seemed to be permanently attached to his cellphone and was one with the digital stream of Facebook and other online social updates.

It was this lack of closure that prevented me from truly enjoying the book. I chewed through each page hoping for that pivotal moment when she would open up and tell him what was truly bothering her, which would then lead to either the relationship progressing or it ending. At the very least, I wanted K to tell Connor she couldn't open up and leave him. I wanted some sort of climax. However, that never happened.

Instead, the book simply ended.

The way it ended was clearly a reference back to point in the book where it was discussed that the only way to move forward was to truly hit rock bottom, but I wasn't satisfied. As a writer and reading of mysteries, I love a good cliffhanger, but this wasn't a cliffhanger at all. It just ended. Was it done so as to leave the door open for a sequel? Maybe, but if so, I feel it could have been handled better.

Basically, the story fizzled out. It ran out of steam.

Again, maybe it was done to replicate real life. Things do just end, but I have often been told, and read as much from experienced writers such as Tom Clancy, "The difference between fiction and reality is that fiction has to make sense."

As I said, I really wanted to love this book, but instead I found it to be simply OK. It was an easy read, and it was fun to read because it did shine a spotlight on human nature and how technology can affect our lives and relationships.

I did find the whole process of how Cheng's book came to fruition enthralling. He raised his own capital, found an editor, typeset the text, and designed the cover. He did it all, and that is admirable. I especially like the cover design. It resembles a cracked cellphone screen. I took this to represent how life and relationships are fragile and can be easily cracked, just as a carelessly dropped cellphone can. For me, it tied in the concept of technology and relationships incredibly well.

I hope Cheng continues to write. I would love to see what his next novel looks like. Though his first attempt might have fallen a bit flat, I want to see what else he has up his sleeve.

If you are interested in purchasing Cheng's book, visit his Amazon.com page:
<http://www.amazon.com/These-Days-Nove...>

Anton says

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JD Estrada says

Time is the most valuable asset you have to invest in your life. Although intangible, it has its own weight, its own personality and cannot be recovered once spent. You can't earn more time than what you have in this life, for however long you live. Those are some pretty deep thoughts to come from reading a book, the thing is that reading *These Days*, I read myself in one of the characters while being able to compare the value of life experiences.

The details in life, the unexpected, the thrill of success, the pain of failure and disappointment, the elation of joy, the desire to switch an answer after you handed in the test, the exhaustion we sometimes go through, the satisfaction of knowing you did your best and the end result, be it good or bad just for the sake of closure. All of these things floated up while I read.

If I had to compare this book to anything, I'd compare it to a good cup of tea. You see, tea has nuance, it has structure, it is delicate, it has minutiae, it begs to be drunk slowly. This is not a book to blitz through; it's one to enjoy a sip at a time. For me, tea keeps me grounded, it's something I use as a reboot or a stabilizer... it's something that forces me to slow down or get burned. *These days* is a book that after finishing it is like a wonderful cup of tea. It's a book about time and technology, about how we use the time we have and how technology can either bring us closer or break us apart.

A wonderful read that urges the question, what is the next book going to be about?
