

The Days Beyond

Mark Hernandez

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Exploration of the future is an absorbing topic for fiction as well as nonfiction writers. Instinctually, humans want to see what lies ahead, yet at once fear what they might find out. Some prefer to remain in a trite state of “blissful ignorance” and simply hope for the best outcome to any situation. Others try to control upcoming events to a degree that sage advisors consider dangerous. Another interesting prospect is anticipation of one future, only to face circumstances never imagined in reality. This is the realm of science fiction.

In *The Days Beyond* two teenagers from rural Arkansas encounter alien technology dating back to the Cold War era and slam themselves into a treacherous realm via a teleportation device. Envision Roswell, Area 51, and government secrets... but with a surprising twist. This tale of young adult adventure encompasses established elements of the genre: threatening hostility, bizarre scenarios, and death-defying protagonists with more audacity and courage than the average astronaut. Incorporating traditional aspects of commercial fantasy into his high-tech situation, Mark Hernandez has created an unusual mix of Harry Potter and Star Trek in an exciting blend of two worlds.

Despite this novel's attributes, the delivery falls short of expectation in a few areas. *The Days Beyond* is the work of a gifted, enthusiastic storyteller, but the plot tends to meander in too many directions with confusing jumps that may leave the reader puzzled. Chapters are announced with story-disclosing titles which on occasion reveal more information than is necessary. Dialogue is overdone in places, so rather than giving the *illusion* of a real conversation with only essential, plot-advancing parts exposed, the pieces that could have been edited out of the scene remain, slowing down the pacing. Though fairly well scrutinized by a copyeditor, specific formatting mistakes appear throughout the book, especially associated with dialogue tags.

As the heroes—Mark and his sidekick Nate—traverse territory uncharted by twenty-first-century explorers, the experience thrusts the companions into new and unexpected predicaments. With a childlike sense of humor, the author, who is also one of the characters by name, guides them through the trials of growing up quickly, making decisions under the kind of pressure an average adult could not sustain without succumbing to stress.

Mark Hernandez showed an interest in art and creative writing as a child. He graduated with honors from his high school in the hills of Northern Arkansas, and then went on to study animation and film at the Rocky Mountain College of Art and Design. Writing remains his passion. *The Days Beyond* is his first novel. Expect more from this promising newcomer. The end of this story is not really the end.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (December 23, 2010)

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