



One Word Kill

Mark Lawrence

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In January 1986, fifteen-year-old boy-genius Nick Hayes discovers he's dying. And it isn't even the strangest thing to happen to him that week.

Nick and his Dungeons & Dragons-playing friends are used to living in their imaginations. But when a new girl, Mia, joins the group and reality becomes weirder than the fantasy world they visit in their weekly games, none of them are prepared for what comes next. A strange—yet curiously familiar—man is following Nick, with abilities that just shouldn't exist. And this man bears a cryptic message: Mia's in grave danger, though she doesn't know it yet. She needs Nick's help—now.

He finds himself in a race against time to unravel an impossible mystery and save the girl. And all that stands in his way is a probably terminal disease, a knife-wielding maniac and the laws of physics.

Challenge accepted.

One Word Kill Details

Date : Expected publication: May 1st 2019 by 47North

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Author : Mark Lawrence

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From Reader Review One Word Kill for online ebook

Dustin says

Mark Lawrence talks about his upcoming science-fiction trilogy, coming in April, 2019. Recommended!

"According to the press release, the series is set in late 1980s London and "is described as grappling with time travel and the 'many-worlds theory'. It also follows the budding romance of characters Nick and Mia as they strive to save themselves and the people they love from 'an impending doom that only they can see coming'."

|516472]http://www.unboundworlds.com/2018/02/...

Chris says

TBD.

But yes, folks, it's a winner.

Mark Lawrence says

My instagram giveaway ends today!

Hurry!

RUN!!

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BsTbP4ynRPW/>

I have copies!

You can check the early reviews here:

<http://mark---lawrence.blogspot.com/2...>

My first science fiction book! The whole trilogy should be released during 2019.

Read about it on ThatThornGuy.com

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James Lafayette Tivendale says

I received an uncorrected proof copy of *One Word Kill* in exchange for an honest review. I would like to thank Mark Lawrence and 47North for approaching me to read this early.

Starting on the 8th January 1986, Nick a gangly 15-year-old who is extremely intelligent is diagnosed with leukaemia. The doctors advise that he may only have up to 5 years to live. In the local hospital, he goes through Chemotherapy and shares a children's ward with many other suffering youths as they weaken and essentially fade from health and normality. He has to visit the hospital weekly yet when he is not there he is living the life of a normalish geeky teenager. Going to school, dealing with bullies, scared to talk to girls but what he looks forward to the most is the weekly D&D meet-ups he has with his best friends. They can forget about the monotony and hardships real-life presents and lose themselves in a fantastical adventure where their imagination is the only limitation. When he is playing, even Nick forgets about what ails him. It all seems pretty straightforward until intense déjà-vu affects the protagonist, a shadowy stranger starts stalking him, certain events that happen in their sessions are scarily close to some real-life events and what's even scarier than all is that a young lady has joined the group's D&D party!

It's no secret that in my humble opinion Mark Lawrence is one of the finest and most consistent fantasy authors currently writing. By profession, Lawrence is actually a scientist so it seemed like only a matter of time before he made the foray into the science fiction genre. This is completely unlike anything Lawrence has published before. This isn't like any science fiction stories I've read previously and for all the elements of time travel, parallel universes, complex mathematics and quantum mechanics, it features drug dealers, local psychopaths and the D&D group trying to learn how to dance to impress the ladies. It's a peculiar mix but I'm happy to say it works expertly.

The story is presented through Nick's first-person perspective and he is a very likeable character who is a joy to follow. The accompanying cast is surprisingly deep and well fleshed out to say that this is quite a short book. I'd estimate it's approximately 90,000 words. In addition to Nick, My favourite characters were Mia, the goth girl who joins the boys games, Elton, who adores his kung-fu practising, and John, the cool dude who loves D&D but doesn't mention it to any of his school friends. Also, a character called Demus who I will say nothing about but who is hugely important and influential to the overall narrative and progression of the tale.

It is difficult to summarise and this probably won't be accurate enough but this is the best I can come up with. This seemed like a mix of *Stranger Things*, *Donnie Darko*, the Xbox game *Alan Wake* mixed with the youthful antics and awkwardness seen in comedy shows *The Inbetweeners* and *The Big Bang Theory*. Some of the scientific language written does come across occasionally as confusing and very hi-tech and knowing Mark's profession I imagine it's all legit and accurate. Although the story is complex, multi-layered, unpredictable and ultimately enduring it wasn't too difficult for me to follow as Lawrence is an excellent writer. The writing is sometimes intoxicating and addictive however surreal and bizarre certain events may be and I loved the humourous flow and banter between the friends. Mark's prose is poetic and sometimes, in

a good way, hypnotising. I read *One Word Kill* within 24 hours and it was all I could think about to the extent where I dreamt about the shadowy character who stalks Nick!

The world building is admirable whether describing the suburbs in London, a friend's council flat or describing the London underground service. There are lots of brilliant references to the mid-80's such as the fact *Back to the Future* had just been released, kids play on their Commodore 64's and that everyone believes Hoverboards will be the obvious invention that the future will present. I really enjoyed, and I bet Mark enjoyed writing the descriptions of the D&D ventures. These sections are closer to what he has written before but with more humour, teenagers innocence and tropes including typical creatures like orcs, vampires, mages, clerics, warriors that will probably prompt a sense of nostalgia for his readers and the target audience. I regret that I've never played D&D. :(

This is not released until April 2019 but already in August 2018, this is one of the finest uncorrected proofs I have ever read. I did not notice a single error which is exceptional and shows the hard work Mark, Agnes and 47North have put into this tale. This works perfectly as a standalone. The ending is absolutely spectacular and wraps everything up perfectly. I loved the setting, the protagonist, the characters including the supporting and very minor players, the thrills and spills and emotions. To be honest, the very minor and possible negative that I have is that some of the terminologies threw me off balance very occasionally. 47North enjoyed this book so much they asked Lawrence to turn it into a trilogy of which all the books will be released in 2019. A note to his current fans, although a few scenes are dark and gruesome this is very different to his previous works. An exceptional time-travel adventure featuring a gang of geeks that's cleverly composed, thrilling and will hopefully aid Lawrence's to rise to the top of the game in another genre. I loved it.

Mitriel says

I posted some information about the book here:

<https://thatthornguy.com/2018/06/10/o...>

Lukasz says

4.5/5

With *One Word Kill* Lawrence steps into sci-fi territories. Protagonists don't wield laser guns or fly in spaceships. Instead, they play D&D and slowly approach adulthood. Story narrator's, a fifteen-year-old boy-genius Nick Hayes discovers he's dying. Cancer killed his father, now it tries to claim him.

Between sessions of chemotherapy and D&D, Nick discovers his dear friend may need his help in far future. Together with his nerdy friends, he must unravel an impossible mystery, save the girl and stop a psycho killer.

Time-travel fascinates me and I like the way Lawrence explores the subject in One Word Kill (especially when he showed what Terminator movie got right). Once again, he made a good use of his wit and ability to draw deeply relatable characters interacting in deeply human ways. The story flawlessly blends the fantastical with the all-too-mundane and spices things with occasional scientific ramblings.

Lawrence's graceful prose and urban setting provide the perfect backdrop for this fascinating tale of determined characters fighting to save a friend. I raced through pages and I'm hungry for the sequel.

ARC through Fantasy Book Critic

Melanie says

ARC provided by the author in exchange for an honest review.

Mark Lawrence + new series + D&D? Lord, help me.

[Blog](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [Youtube](#) | [Twitch](#)

Sean Conley says

Haven't read it yet, but honestly, I'm not gonna have time to update this once I get my hands on it so I'll just give it 5 stars right now.

Petros Triantafyllou says

Nick Hayes takes the news of his imminent death pretty well, or at least as well as any fifteen-year-old boy would. With an aggressive form of leukemia, the same disease he lost his father to a few years back, he knows that he has to live in full the last few months of his life. And what would that entail? Playing D&D with his friends, of course. But when the seemingly random events of his D&D campaign start mirroring real-life situations, or vice versa, he realizes that leukemia may not be his biggest problem yet.

"In hospital they ask you to rate your discomfort on a scale of ten. I guess it's the best they can come up with, but it fails to capture the nature of the beast. Pain can stay the same while you change around it. And like a thumb of constant size, what it blocks out depends on how close it gets to you. At arm's length a thumb obscures a small fragment of the day. Held close enough to your eye, and it can blind you to everything that matters, relegating the world to a periphery."

I was a bit reluctant to read One Word Kill. I may have enjoyed every single published work of Mark Lawrence so far, but a Science-Fiction novel was a big departure from traditional Fantasy, and a huge risk for me since I'm not a fan of the genre. But since the setting of the story is in the past as opposed to a

futuristic environment, and since it has been compared to Stranger Things which I fairly enjoyed, I thought I should give it a go. I ended up reading the whole novel, start to finish, in less than three hours yesterday night. And then I read it again today, for good measure.

I wanted to start this review by saying that this may be Mark's best work yet, but I realized I've said the exact same thing in my last 3 reviews of his books. By all accounts, Mark shouldn't be able to get better and better with every novel, since his work was perfect to begin with, but here he is, defying logic...

Standing at 60k words, with an insane pace and an ever-increasing momentum, One Word Kill won't let you breathe. It doesn't matter if you've never played D&D before (I have) or if you have knowledge of physics in general and of the quantum realm in particular (I haven't), this is a story worth reading. Due to its small size I'm not able to tell you more about the plot than what I've included in the blurb above without spoiling it, but I don't think I have to. What I can talk about is the other aspects of the book.

Pace and plot I've already told you about. The book excels at everything else as well. Even if you're of a younger generation, with Mark's vivid imagery and lavish descriptions you won't have trouble adjusting to the 80s setting the story takes place in. Same goes with the physics that replace the magical aspect of a fantasy book. Mark presents and explains the many-worlds interpretation in an easy to follow way, but that doesn't mean it won't get complex enough in places to make you think your way through many problems and dilemmas the story presents later on.

The prose combined with Mark's philosophical musings results in some quotes that will stay with you far longer than the story ever will, but I'll leave a snippet from the book to prove that to you.

"The equations that govern the universe don't care about 'now'. You can ask them questions about this time or that time, but nowhere in the elegance of their mathematics is there any such thing as 'now'. The idea of one specific moment, one universal 'now' racing along at sixty minutes an hour, slicing through the seconds, spitting the past out behind it and throwing itself into the future... that's just an artefact of consciousness, something entirely of our own making that the cosmos has no use for."

Finally, what shines the brightest among all other aspects of the novel is the characterization. You would think that 60k words wouldn't be enough to flesh out the characters but you would be wrong. Mark managed to make me care not only about the protagonist but the other characters as well in such a way that I won't forgive him for it, given the bittersweet ending.

All in all, One Word Kill is one of the best books I've read in my life, and I'm confident it will prove to be the same for you too.

Jane Kelsey says

4h 14min of reading time and I am left with so many feels and things to think about. I loved everything about his book. The writing.. the characters.. the plot. Full review to follow.

Michael Baker says

ARC:

Reading this makes me want to start up DnD.

In all seriousness, this is a short yet brilliant tale of a boy with cancer, that explores the perils and beauties of time travel, a friendship with his fellow group of oddball friends and a new girl, the journey fraught with danger. The ending twist is brutal and brilliant and leaves me with a smile on my face.

Mark has done it again.

T.O. Munro says

In Mark Lawrence's gradual migration away from the kind of world and characters of his debut novel *Prince of Thorns*, *One Word Kill* represents the greatest step so far. We find ourselves neither in the fantastic ice threatened world of Abeth, nor the magically enhanced post-apocalyptic future Earth of the *Broken Empire* and the *Red Queen's War*. We are instead on more nearly contemporary ground - South London in the 1980s – though Lawrence's gift for sowing peril and dilemma has bled through into that otherwise familiar milieu. Maybe some readers won't have lived through such a place and time – well you should have. After the conflicted 70s that couldn't decide whether to be brash or beige, punk or glam, the 80s were undeniably the best decade ever.

One Word Kill has some elements of a Young Adult story like John Green's *Looking for Alaska* (which I have read) or *The Fault is in Our Stars* (which I have heard a bit about). It focuses on the first person point of view of one teenage boy – Nick Carter – and his companionship with his differently geeky male friends and the solitary girl who infiltrates their role playing game gatherings. And this is role playing games 80s style! With polyhedral dice, character sheets, handbooks and dungeonmaster's screens and everything. For those who have come anew to real RPG – with painted figurines and everything – I can only say we were there first (along with Mark Barrowcliffe author of "The Elfish Gene"). For those who have only encountered RPGs through the medium of a TV screen and a console, think maybe of the TV show *Stranger Things* but with older teenagers – and all that entails.

In *One Word Kill* (as in *Stranger Things*) a real adventure intrudes and intertwines with the imaginary world in which Nick and his friends strive to lose themselves and their woes, and they have plenty of woes.

Not least the fact that Nick is dying – diagnosed with an aggressive form of leukemia. The schoolwork in which he was coasting - concealing his mathematical talent like a Ferrari ambling at low throttle through rush hour traffic – suddenly seems even less relevant. Each day differently precious, life itself suddenly fragile.

Unlike Mark Lawrence's previous oeuvre, there is no magic in *One Word Kill*, save the kind decided on the role of a d20 and scored off in reduced health against a character sheet or a wandering monster. For this is a book where the fantasy stays fictional and the fiction is driven by science. Lawrence dips his readers into

quantum mechanics and how the inherent craziness of that part of Physics spews out as a by-product the “many worlds” hypothesis. This idea that - at key junctures, or indeed every juncture, the universe splits into parallel worlds - different timelines that branch out along the two (or more) alternative outcomes to every event. For example, in our universe the UK voted for Brexit, but there is another parallel universe where the vote went the other way (and I know which one I’d be happiest living in).

So too there are different worlds, different futures, available to Nick – one in which he survives the leukemia, and many more in which he does not. A stranger appears offering Nick the chance to live in a version of the world where he survives the disease - provided he makes the correct choices. But at what cost to his friends and other aspects of his future? and why does the stranger have such an interest in the girl Nick has only just met?

What is familiar?

This is the ninth book by Mark Lawrence that I have read and the consistent standout feature of all of them has been the quality of writing. Lawrence’s prose is a joy to read with its sharp pithy observations on what it is to be a human in adversity. Nick’s condition necessitates several hospital trips, inherently grim clinical experiences which Lawrence conveys with an unfussy but expert eye.

The pain... kept lifting me from the shallow pit of my dreams.

Lawrence also captures the desperate search for escape from disease through a connection with others in one of Nick’s fellow oncology ward inmates.

She kept talking as I followed Mother out, as if the conversation were a rope and if she could only keep it unbroken I would be held by it, unable to leave.

In *One Word Kill*, Lawrence returns to the intimacy of first person point of view that we saw in his first six books. The reader rides in Nick’s head just as convincingly and enthrallingly as we once rode with Jorg Ancrath or Jalan Kendeth – though Nick, being neither a sociopath or an amoral coward, should be more relatable than his predecessor protagonists.

However, Lawrence also weaves in to the narrative the quality of companionship that lifted Nona through the trials of Red and Grey Sister. This is a book about friends standing by, with and for friends, whatever the sacrifice.

What is new?

One Word Kill is a more significant perturbation from Lawrence’s previous books. Its link to the world of fantasy is preserved only through the window of the role-playing games that Nick and his friends indulge in, while the plot is driven by devices of science fiction. Even then the science fiction remains relatively low key, a backdrop that allows engaging characters and quality writing to take centre stage.

There are more contemporary anchors in which to pin the reader’s experience. Through Nick’s eyes we see again The Challenger space shuttle disaster, through his ears we hear of the Brixton riots and we visit more familiar (for me at least) locations in South London than we did in the drowned world of the *Broken Empire*.

There are also the contemporary challenges and opportunities. For example the gut-wrenching male adolescent fear of dancing, the seeming impossibility of following a beat in any form of music, while at the

same time hankering after the chance of a slow dance, those moments of closeness and intimacy that were the height of male ambition - or indeed comprehension - in a more innocent pre-internet age.

What it left me thinking about

His own medical prognosis together with the promises and demands of the stranger haunting his footsteps, force Nick into some reflections on the nature of self and existence. We are all the product of our experience as recorded in our (sometimes unreliable) memories. Those experiences have conditioned our behaviours and expectations, heavily moderating the influence of mere DNA and made us definably us. Without those memories we would be a fraction, a ghost of ourselves – which is perhaps the greatest cruelty of illnesses like Alzheimer's.

But at the same time one could ask are we really merely the memories? There is in the TV series – *Altered Carbon* – the notion that we can be reincarnated into different bodies by having our memories downloaded and installed into a fresh physical form – a “restore from back up” if you like. But is such a restoration really the preservation of self or the making of a copy?

In a similar vein, if all of life's choices involve us splitting and progressing down different timelines how far should we care about the timelines our version of self doesn't follow. The alternative “me”s that we surely never meet?

I recently read David Gemmell's *Legend* – which incidentally was written around the same time that *One Word Kill* is set - and learnt that Gemmell's impulse to write his debut novel was born out of a potential terminal cancer diagnosis. He wrote the first draft while waiting to hear if he would survive or not and kept two endings to the book in mind depending on whether his own outcome was positive or not. In *Legend* too there are the mysterious monks, the thirty led by Serbitar, who can glimpse into the future, following many potential time lines yet with limited power to change which one they themselves end up following. The reflections on choice and mortality that permeate *Legend* also test Nick in *One Word Kill*.

Nick, pinned on the cusp of his own medical crisis, shares Gemmell's blunt range of possible futures, but must ask if – in his choices – he is saving his own future or being trapped by it?

And the final takeaway?

This is a book about young people so maybe it is a book for young people, but then it is also a book about the 80s so maybe it is a book for people who were young in the 80s, but it's also a book about friendships formed and tested – so really it's a book for everyone.

In *One Word Kill* Lawrence grabs some familiar science fiction conventions by the tail and gives them his own distinctive and brilliantly written twists.

It is a book full of well-crafted credible characters that the reader quickly cares about who are confronting life threatening dilemmas and facing villains the reader will be desperate to see defeated – in short an enthralling tale about people challenged by dire adversity, and isn't that at the heart of every great story?

Robin Hobb says

I've giving One Word Kill by Mark Lawrence six stars.

Oh. You think I can't do that?

Well, yes, I can. Even if you don't see them up there.

Because while a five star book is a good solid read, one that I truly enjoy, there are some books and stories that are more than that. They are the stories that stay with you for a lifetime.

My six star stories are likely different from yours. A story gets six stars when it doesn't waste a word. It opens the door, I enter the tale, and for that time, I'm in that world. It's a story that works perfectly for me. Other examples of my six star stories would be Smith of Wootton Major by J R R Tolkien. Or the Ugly Little Boy by Isaac Asimov. These stories have nothing in common, except that they worked perfectly for me.

Anyone who has read my books may have guessed that I have a few things that utterly fascinate me. The information we carry in our blood. The nature of memory. The possibility of myriad futures. The absolute wonder of suddenly seeing the world from a different perspective. The stories we tell ourselves to make sense of the world.

Now it would be a spoiler if I told you which of those fascinations One Word Kill dances with. But I will say that it treads the measure perfectly. It's not a very long book, especially by today's standards. But it's the perfect length for the tale it tells.

Buy it. Read it.

The usual Caveat. Mark Lawrence is someone I know as a fellow writer and consider a long distance friend, even though we've never met face to face. I got this story from him for free. I also have to admit that it took me awhile to figure out how to get the file to open on my phone, and then I misplaced it on my phone for several months and didn't even read it until he asked me if I'd liked it, and reminded me that I'd told him I'd managed to put it on my phone.

The wonders of modern technology!

I don't particularly enjoy reading things on a tiny screen. But a serendipitous 14 hour power failure left me with my (luckily) fully charged phone as my only toy. I started reading, grumbling over how small the font was, and soon forgot entirely about that as I was pulled into the world and the tale.

So. My usual spoiler free review. Go find it and read it. I think you'll love it. I now need to get several real copies of this book, because I know people who will love receiving them from me.

Swiffer says

My one line review:

"I clapped after reading the last line. Don't know if that's ever happened before."

I'm content to leave this review as simple as that, but I owe it to NetGalley and other potential readers to

provide a bit more information. I do think it's best that you go into this story completely blind -- Mark Lawrence has earned enough trust where I don't have to read an advance blurb to know that his stories are worth reading. That being said, I'll provide a few minor plot spoilers below, and try to only touch on overall themes, instead of major plot points.

The story is set in London during the 1980's, and focuses on unpopular teenager Nick who was just diagnosed with leukemia. Nick has a small group of friends that meet on weekends for Dungeons and Dragons, and we get to experience some wonderful role-playing sessions with some talented players. (I was especially nostalgic during these scenes, as I spent many a weekend in a similar position.). Nick and some other members of his group have exceptionally brilliant minds -- one has a brain that can solve computations in seconds, while Nick himself is a student of advanced quantum theory. Somehow, Lawrence combines cancer, D&D, and quantum mechanics into a complex story that highlights the bonds of friendship, pushes the boundaries of physics, and is also somehow a sweet and heart-wrenching love story. (Go ahead and pre-order now, I'll wait.)

Lawrence has some wonderful tricks up his sleeve that underlines his exceptional writing talent. There's a jaw-dropping reveal on page one that stuck in the back of my mind throughout the entire book, and how that revelation comes to fruition is as sneaky and unexpected as it is brilliant. The book isn't that long, and its pace invites the reader to fly through it in very few reading sessions. I encourage you to try and savor it for as long as possible, as it is over much too soon. Although it is the start of a trilogy, there is a definitive and wonderfully satisfying ending. (It also offers some sound and applicable life advice, which has had me smiling ever since.)

Great characters. Unique story. A setting that takes full advantage of what it has to offer, and a memorable ending that left me waiting impatiently for the next entry. This story is (quite literally) filled with infinite possibilities, and I'm damn excited to see what else Lawrence has in store.
