

Simplicity: Book One

Lucas Lamoreaux

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*In the fantasy novel **Simplicity**, a city tears itself apart as superheroes try to follow their moral codes.*

In Lucas Lamoreaux's gritty superhero novel, *Simplicity*, evil forces beset humanity, and flawed people with powers are the world's only defense.

A nameless city crumbles under the weight of religious extremism. In it, violence breaks out on such a regular basis that it has become accepted and anticipated. Among the disillusioned populace, people begin manifesting powers and fighting back. Alley Dog is one such person, but his power is monstrous and difficult to contain—he swells in size, and a beast-like spirit takes over his body. Other characters have more controllable gifts, which they use to defend others from the forces that besiege the city.

Before developing his powers, Alley Dog was a veteran who returned home broken. An empathetic store keeper helped him to relocate his humanity, but Alley Dog could not overcome the beast that his gift chained within him. His attempts to rescue a battered and abducted woman went awry, leaving her captors dead and Alley Dog feasting on the woman. When a teenager with super strength encounters Alley Dog, the two forge an unlikely partnership to confront the super villains—malevolent and powerful humans who see a chance to manipulate the city, turning its citizens on themselves as a wave of undead rises up.

The novel mixes superhero action with contemplative poetry, its style often evoking a blockbuster movie. Its action sequences are detailed, its characters are larger than life, and its conversations are rapid fire, focused on action and dynamic, as when Alley Dog talks himself down or fights against his inner beast to communicate with innocent beings. Characters' inner monologues, though, run long without adding much.

When the novel's action subsides, and its characters pause to recover or plan, the prose becomes musing, mixing in social commentary and political allegories. Extraneous events and characters slow the pace, and too many fall by the wayside. Alley Dog helps to center the text through these developments. The explanations made about his state of mind are visceral, and his work to regain his humanity holds interest. Beside him, the villains blend together, especially because their names, and descriptions of them, change. The story's abrupt conclusion teases future series developments, but still feels incomplete.

In the fantasy novel *Simplicity*, a city tears itself apart as superheroes try to follow their moral codes.

JOHN M. MURRAY (February 16, 2021)

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