



## The Land of the Strays: Loodor Tales

**Summer Nilsson**

**Nancy Harrison, Illustrator**

Loodor Publishing

(276pp)

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*Adventures abound in the middle grade novel The Land of the Strays, whose animal cast learns to treat everyone with respect and compassion.*

With charming illustrations, Summer Nilsson's middle grade novel *The Land of the Strays* follows a band of pets as they learn lessons about compassion and camaraderie.

Leaving behind Black Mountain Farm, Grey, a kitten with a magic voice, is thrust in a new, urban life when she is adopted and brought to an apartment filled with fellow pets. Meanwhile, Davy, a cat, grieves his owner's death and dedicates his life to helping stray animals; and a rescue dog, Scout, tries to find his owner. When a kidnapping occurs, the fates of these animals collide: the pets race to rescue their missing friends and confront prejudice against stray creatures.

Though there are a bevy of story lines to track throughout the book, their overarching theme is one of acceptance. The pets in Grey's new apartment look down on the stray animals of the neighborhood for their lack of homes, refusing to look at or speak to them. As a former barn cat, Grey wrestles with conflicting loyalties; she relates to the strays and their struggles. Meanwhile, Davy models compassion to the other pets, creating a safe house for strays who need a place to stay. Notes about self-worth and teamwork play into these developments: it is revealed that one creature's hostility stems from her fear of being abandoned again by those whom she loves; she even struggles to accept Grey into the family.

When the pets have band together to rescue those who were kidnapped, each is given a part to play: Scout uses his training to direct the mission; a gecko acts as diplomat to the neighborhood snakes; and Grey is one of two creatures to use their magic powers. Notes of acceptance round the story out by its satisfying, unexpected ending.

Even though it explores serious concepts, the book is filled with light moments, too, as when the pets throw a wild, circus-themed costume party, or while they have free rein of the apartment building while their people are at work. Their costumes are delightful: a poodle, for example, dons a silk scarf to look like a fortune teller, while a greyhound wraps himself in foil to look like a chocolate kiss. The range of costumes and acts performed at the pets' talent show celebrates diversity, as does the unique perspective that each brings to their rescue mission. Detailed black and white illustrations show the animals in their various pursuits, conveying their emotions well. And while the narration has to split its focus between a large cast of animals, their roles are clarified in the helpful glossary.

Adventures abound in the middle grade novel *The Land of the Strays*, whose animal cast struggles to overcome their prejudices, learning to treat everyone with respect and compassion.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (June 7, 2022)

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