

# **Flawed Dogs: The Novel: The Shocking Raid on Westminster Study Guide**

**Flawed Dogs: The Novel: The Shocking Raid on  
Westminster by Berkeley Breathed**

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## Plot Summary

"Flawed Dogs: The Shocking Raid on Westminster" is the story of a dog called Sam the Lion's trials and tribulations. Beginning at a dog fight, the book opens with an image of Sam curling up and going to sleep rather than fighting, smiling when he imagines he hears Heidi's voice. The action then takes the narrative back three years, to his arrival at an airport, where Heidi spots him from the airplane window as he is unloaded. He is supposed to be adopted by an awful woman called Mrs. Nutbush, but Heidi sets him free, though she doesn't like dogs. However, as Heidi gets into the car of her uncle's housekeeper, Sam hops into her bag and goes with her.

Heidi must then adapt to life at her uncle's estate, as she has been orphaned and living with nuns for the past few years. However, Sam's presence is not welcome by the reigning dog, a poodle called Cassius who has ambitions to win the International Westminster Dog Show, one of the most prestigious shows in the world. Cassius sets Sam, who wins the local dog show, up to make it look like Sam has ripped the blankets of the baby on the estate. Still, Sam is pardoned until a few months later, when Cassius sets a plan in action that makes it look like Sam violently ran off with the baby. Thinking Sam is rabid, Uncle Hamish has the Sheriff take him away.

Sam then ends up at a home for unwanted dogs, but tries to run away home. There, Cassius stops him, and tricks him into a beaver trap, which severs one of Sam's legs. Some men then come and take Sam to the University Research Lab, where he stays for several miserable years, before arranging an escape. Once escaped, though, a car hits him, and he is adopted by the poor but caring driver, who makes him a false leg out of a ladle. However, the man thinks he has no choice but to enter Sam into a dog fight to settle his debts. At first, it looks like Sam will lose, as in the beginning of the book, but then he sees a poster for Westminster with Cassius's face on it, which gives him the spirit to win.

Sam then meets a dog called Peaches, who accompanies him back to the unwanted dogs' home, and they all come up with a plan to infiltrate Westminster. They do so by stealing Mrs. Nutbush's clothes and posing as her, then setting upon the competing dogs, making them all look ugly. When Cassius realizes that Sam is there, the two dogs get into a fight on an overhead catwalk. Heidi comes to help stop it, but Cassius turns on her. Sam has the dogs set a big bucket of muddy water on the catwalk, and he and Cassius fall to the floor. Sam, however, is all right, protected by his "angel," Peaches.

Later, the book ends with the unwanted dogs all on Uncle Hamish's farm, playing with Heidi, and with a visit from the rough-handed man to Sam.



# Chapters 1-4

## Chapters 1-4 Summary

"Flawed Dogs," a story about a lost dog searching for his owner while vindicating himself for a crime he didn't commit, begins with an Author's Note explaining that the events at the Westminster Dog Show were more complex than President Obama reported. With that aside, the novel turns to Chapter 1, in which a man simply known as "the rough-handed man" takes his little dog to a dog fight, though he seems sad about it. There, the dog smells a new scent and finds that he is facing a bull terrier, many times his size, and ferocious: ready to kill. Not knowing what to do, the little dog lies down in a corner of the arena, where he hears a young girl call "Sam the Lion," and he begins to smile.

In Chapter 2, the action then shifts to three years earlier, and describes the journey of a young girl called Heidi. Landing in Vermont, she has come to live with her Uncle Hamish. As they land, she watches the unloading of boxes, and sees that some of them contain dogs. A rich, overblown lady is waiting for them, and goes wild at the sight of one of them, who has what she calls a "Duuglitz tuft." However, she has to wait for them to go through customs. The dog, scared of his fate, tries to unlatch his box, and Heidi tries to explain to him how to do it through her window.

Heidi approaches the dog's box in Chapter 3, and has a seeming conversation with the dog, who can understand her but replies in italics. They seem to have immediate chemistry, and he kisses her on the nose. She thinks that this is disgusting, but undoes his latch anyway to set him free.

In Chapter 4, Heidi meets her uncle's housekeeper, Mrs. Beaglehole, an unpleasant woman who has come to collect her at the airport. Mrs. Beaglehole is displeased to learn that Heidi doesn't like dogs, even though her parents died in a dog accident. Away from the authority's eyes, the little dog escapes from the runway in chaos.

## Chapters 1-4 Analysis

A novel for young readers, "Flawed Dogs" has a traditional structure that is easy to follow. However, its timing is divided into two separate periods: three years ago, and the present day. This immediately creates dramatic tension, as the reader meets Sam when he is in a desperate situation, and seems sure to die. This creates sympathy when the novel then shifts to his arrival three years earlier. His immediate bond with Heidi is also sympathetic, though she doesn't care much for him at first, but still tries to help him.

Family, or belonging to people, is highlighted in this section, as animals and humans take immediate likes or dislikes to one another. Heidi and Sam have an affinity, while Mrs. Beaglehole and Mrs. Nutbush are presented as enemies: the former more



dangerous than the latter, who is more ridiculous than anything, but nonetheless a threat to Sam in this early portion.

The playful names that the author uses also help the reader to determine who is a friend and who is not: the sillier the name, the more likely the person will pose a threat to the protagonists at some point in the story.



# Chapters 5-8

## Chapters 5-8 Summary

The dog makes it into the town car with Heidi, where he snuggles into her bag. Meanwhile, Mrs. Beaglehole is still going on about Heidi's new life, and lectures her about problems she had at her former school, where she misbehaved a lot. Mrs. Beaglehole asks her to ensure that there won't be any trouble here, as her Uncle Hamish is still not well.

Heidi arrives at her uncle's estate in Chapter 6, which she remembers vaguely from childhood visits. She still doesn't like dogs, but is pleased to find that her uncle no longer breeds them. However, Mrs. Beaglehole does have a dog: Cassius. When she enters the house, Heidi meets Miss Violet, who was friends with Heidi's mother when they were young, and her baby, Bruno. Miss Violet is very kind, in contrast to Mrs. Beaglehole. The dog still in Heidi's bag, where he discovers some banana taffy. Nobody except Heidi knows what to make of the sound, and Mrs. Beaglehole says that it must be moles. However, Cassius knows that it is another dog.

Heidi finally meets her uncle in Chapter 7, when he summons her. She is upset that he never communicated with her, and left her to the nuns, but he defends himself, saying that he would have known what to do with a six-year-old girl. Meanwhile, Cassius stands nearby, knowing that there is a dog in her bag. Heidi and Uncle Hamish discuss her parents' death, and his estate, which he says will be hers. Exploring, she goes over to the window to see a dog show in progress (The Piddleton Open). However, after Heidi's parents' deaths, Uncle Hamish has never taken part.

In Chapter 8, Heidi takes the dog outside and tries to set him free, telling him that she is running away to Fiji. However, Mrs. Nutbush, the rich lady from before, recognizes the dog and tries to claim him. Heidi suddenly becomes very protective and says that no, he was a present from her uncle, and that his name is Sam the Lion. Miss Violet backs her up in this lie. Heidi enters Sam in the competition, and though he doesn't know what to do, Sam dances for the judges, who laugh, then are impressed by his special tuft. Uncle Hamish peeks out from his window to watch.

## Chapters 5-8 Analysis

Readers may be relieved at the lack of real drama in this section, compared to the violence of Chapter 1. Nevertheless, the author plants seeds here that foreshadow the disasters that will happen to Sam later on. Sam's problems and his glory are both present in this second section. Cassius represents the evil that Sam will encounter, and while later one does see that his motivation is mostly jealousy, he seems quite violent at this point, and continues to be throughout the book. Breathed does not hide this, making it clear that Cassius will make Sam's life as hard as possible.



At the same time, though, the joys of life are visible for Sam with Heidi, who has begun to love him, and at the dog show. There, he has charisma and makes the judges laugh, impresses everyone with his tuft, and even shows potential as a natural-born leader when he sets the dogs on Mrs. Nutbush.

The theme of "home" becomes apparent for the first time in this section, as well, as Heidi's love for Sam and growing affection for her uncle tie her to the estate and decrease her desire to run away.



# Chapters 9-12

## Chapters 9-12 Summary

In Chapter 9, Uncle Hamish confronts Heidi about Sam, coming outside and asking where she got him. Heidi, meanwhile, tries to set Sam free, which prompts Mrs. Nutbush to try to capture him once again. Sam cries out to the other dogs that she is a gopher, and the other dogs gang up on Mrs. Nutbush and chase her into the forest. When Mrs. Nutbush finally emerges, she is taken away by an ambulance, and asks Heidi to give her dog a home. Therefore, Sam is finally Heidi's by right.

While Heidi is sleeping in Chapter 10, Sam creeps off to see Uncle Hamish, who is delighted that McCloud is back as a dog estate. He tells Sam that one day, he will be a champion dog. Cassius, who has ambitions of winning the Westminster Dog Show, is listening, and becomes very jealous. Knowing that Sam is gone from Heidi's side, Cassius comes up with a plan, and goes into the baby's room to shred one of Bruno's sweaters, knowing that Sam will get the blame for it.

Nevertheless, months later (in Chapter 11), Sam greets Heidi as she gets off the school bus; they have made a game where he jumps out at her in a "beast" attack. They chat together, though Heidi still does not seem to totally understand everything Sam "says." Nevertheless, their closeness is evident, and Cassius watches them jealously.

The rest of Cassius's plan comes into play in Chapter 12. The poodle tells Sam that Bruno is missing, and Sam sets off in the snow to go find the baby, whom Cassius has taken into the woods. Sam gets him, but Cassius has shredded Bruno's bedding and barks loudly by his crib, alerting everyone to the apparent fact that Sam has violently stolen the baby.

## Chapters 9-12 Analysis

This third section is an exercise in juxtapositions, going from the comforts of home to the loneliness of betrayal. Here, Sam's future at first seems very bright, as he has found family (Heidi and Uncle Hamish, who both love him, and whom he can help in many ways) and a home, in the form of McCloud Acres, which was made to house dogs. His life is almost perfectly fulfilled.

However, his one obstacle, Cassius, will drive him to the other edge of the spectrum of happiness, leading to the other major theme of the book: animal cruelty. Though this is not shown in this section, the ominous events that Cassius sets up predict that worse and worse events will take place until Sam finally gets the blame for them. Moreover, the reader should remember that the book opened in a seemingly hopeless dog fight, suggesting that Sam's life will certainly get worse, and take him away from this happy home somehow.





# Chapters 13-16

## Chapters 13-16 Summary

In Chapter 13, Sam finds the baby, only to smell Cassius's scent on the baby's clothes. Luckily, Bruno is all right, and the humans - including Miss Violet, Hamish, and Heidi - come out to get the baby. However, all the humans see is Sam over the baby, and once the baby has been returned, Uncle Hamish picks up a rifle, thinking that Sam is diseased, and fires at him.

Wounded, on his side, in Chapter 14, Heidi comes to Sam's side. Her uncle wants to kill him, but Heidi tries to stop him. However, Hamish tells Heidi that Sam is very sick and has to be killed. Distraught, Heidi turns to her uncle, who starts to lead her home. They leave Sam there, and she calls out an apology to him as they head back to the house.

In Chapter 15, Hamish stands over Sam, but can't bring himself to shoot the animal for good. His robe is wrapped around the dog, and he looks at him with pity. However, he feels that he needs to protect his family, and so he calls the Sheriff to come finish killing Sam for him or do whatever needs to be done. However, Hamish does fire his gun into the air, so that Heidi will think Sam is dead and let him go. Sam, exhausted, is eventually taken away by some men, but is too tired and hurt to know who they are.

Sam wakes up to someone licking his face in Chapter 16, and finds himself in the dog shelter, being kissed by someone called Madam, who he thinks might be a miniature greyhound. The place is desolate and run-down, and the other dogs sit in front of the television watching Lassie, which they do over and over again. Sam meets the other dogs: Tusk, who attacks mailmen, Willy, who licked faces too much, Bug, and ugly dog, Blue, who clashed with her owner's house, Fabio, who has no front legs, Jeeves, who has many chins, and Pooft, who has a lot of gas. Sam says they should escape, but Madam says the door is open: it's just that they have nowhere to go, and want to be taken. She then reveals her problem: she is a cat.

## Chapters 13-16 Analysis

Animal cruelty, and the terrible things that can happen to dogs, are highlighted in this section. The author makes it clear that there are certain cases where a dog must actually be put to sleep: when he is diseased and threatens the family. Therefore, Uncle Hamish's motivations are not cruel, but rather make sense in this light, though they are still distressing to the reader. Still, Hamish's care is evident in his treatment of the dog, and even in how he covers Sam with his robe.

The fate of abandoned animals is also depicted here, in the rag-tag gang at the dog shelter. Though they are all a cheerful bunch and very friendly with one another, their living conditions are very unpleasant. More than that, however, the animals' penchant

for watching Lassie over and over again is sad, as they are unlikely to ever belong to anyone. The author is also careful to provide a various list of reasons for why they have been abandoned, showing the reader what can happen to dogs who are not wanted for sometimes very superficial reasons.



# Chapters 17-20

## Chapters 17-20 Summary

In Chapter 17, Sam runs out of the shelter, and decides that he will go back to Heidi. He follows the path home. However, once he gets there, he finds Cassius standing guard. Cassius is cruel to Sam, telling him that he is no longer wanted, and that Heidi no longer loves him. Furthermore, he tells Sam that he is now a "flawed dog." He walks Sam backwards into an open beaver trap, which crushes Sam's foot, causing him immense pain.

Everyone at McCloud's estate is upset the next day, lost in their own thoughts. Cassius goes to Heidi, who uses him for comfort, though he is not like Sam. Meanwhile, down on the estate, several men find Sam trapped in the metal device, and free him, to take him to a new place. There, they hand him over to a group at the New England University Research Labs. Sam does not know what is happening, but does know that his old life is over.

Chapter 19 simply summarizes that the horrors of the lab are too awful to recount, and that Sam stayed there for nearly three years. In Chapter 20, almost 200 dogs try to break out of the research lab. On a stormy night, they go for the fence, trying to escape. Sam sprains one of his legs in the process (and as he has only three now, this is seriously harmful), and then is helped by an employee called Simmons, who opens the gate for him despite threats from others that she will be fired. However, as Sam escapes, he is hit by a car, thinks he sees his "angel," who will come to him before he dies, and is picked up by the owner.

## Chapters 17-20 Analysis

Sam's character, and especially his resilience, are highlighted in these chapters. He refuses to be separated from Heidi, who he knows loves him, and immediately starts to make his way back. He isn't even completely deterred by Cassius and his cold remarks. It is only physical incapacity that will stop Sam, and this is the case when he gets crippled. Though the author does not go into detail about the Research Lab, most likely because it would depict too stark animal cruelty for the novel's target age group, this too reinforces the theme of animal cruelty, and how helpless animals really are when confronted with humans and their institutions.

Nevertheless, Sam refuses to remain helpless for very long, showing again his tenacity of spirit, and breaks out, albeit with the help of an employee. However, he is once again physically prevented from finding Heidi as he sprains his shoulder, and then is hit by a car.



# Chapters 21-24

## Chapters 21-24 Summary

Chapter 21 describes how the man in the car rescues Sam, lifting him up and putting him in the car. Just over a page long, the chapter is careful to include a description of the man's hands, which are rough. In Chapter 22, Sam awakens in the man's house. The man has made him a fake leg to replace the one he lost, out of a ladle: he calls it a "leggle," which both he and Sam find funny. While he goes to work, Sam hangs around his house, and is generally content, if not happy. However, it becomes clear that the rough-handed man is in trouble when someone threatens him in his truck, and Sam pretends to be a ferocious and dangerous dog. Because of this, though, the rough-handed man decides that his debts require him to put Sam in a dog fight, in the hopes of winning back some money. He begs Sam's forgiveness, though Sam doesn't yet know why.

In Chapter 23, the man and Sam drive to the fight, and Sam picks up on the man's fear and shame. When they get to the fight, the book picks up where it started, with Sam lying down and resigning himself to his fate. At that moment, however, he sees a poster for the Westminster Dog Show with Cassius's picture on it, and his feelings of revenge provoke him to fight with the pit bull. Though the pit bull is stronger, Sam is faster, and actually wins the fight by tricking the pit bull into running into the wall and knocking himself out. Then, the rough-handed man having won his money, Sam escapes from all the men trying to capture him into a heating vent.

There, in Chapter 24, he comes across a strange dog. The dog, called Peaches, looks funny but seems to know Sam already, including his name and everything he's been through. As the men close in on them, Peaches mentions that they should go out looking their best, and Sam comes up with a plan for revenge on Cassius. With this in mind, he tells Peaches, and also helps them escape out into the rain.

## Chapters 21-24 Analysis

By any account, Sam's fortunes would appear to be looking up by this point in the book, as the man takes Sam home, gives him food, a new leg, and looks after him. However, because of his description as a man with rough hands, the reader knows from the earlier foreshadowing that this will be the man who takes Sam to the dog fight that may kill him. This turns out to be the case by the end of Chapter 22, reversing Sam's fortunes once again.

At the same time, Sam's sense of justice prevails when he sees Cassius and is reminded of the wrongdoings that the dog did. Therefore, he wins the fight despite the odds, with the strength of his personality overtaking the brute force of the pit bull.

Readers may recognize that Peaches is actually the "angel" that Sam has been anticipating, as he knows all about Sam without being told. This is explicitly stated later on, but readers may get more out of the subsequent pages with this knowledge.



# Chapters 25-28

## Chapters 25-28 Summary

In Chapter 25, Sam returns to the home for unwanted dogs with Peaches and the poster he has taken of the Westminster Dog Show. Speaking in harsh terms, he tells them that no humans want them, but they do want the dogs who are shown at Westminster. Thus, he convinces them to help him with a plot to take down the show. The keeper of the dogs finds them gone in Chapter 26, for they've all headed for Manhattan. After a nap, Sam wakes up to find Peaches watching him. Peaches says that Sam was muttering Cassius's name in his sleep, and that dogs were not put on earth to take revenge. However, Sam is undeterred.

Chapter 27 begins two days before the big dog show, in New York. Jeeves, with his huge jowls, has nearly taken flight and, tethered to the building, surveys everything he can see so he can report back to the other dogs. A night watchman sees him and is incredibly startled; Jeeves quacks, and the man is so shocked he quits later that night.

In Chapter 28, Mrs. Nutbush reappears, with her new dog Mr. Toodles. The pair of them sit down, and Wee Willy crawls all over Mrs. Nutbush's face. He then climbs all over her body, making her tear her clothes off, according to plan. She runs off, and Sam takes the fancy collar and leash attached to Mr. Toodles, who is afraid of the gang, and worries that they are pirates.

## Chapters 25-28 Analysis

Sam again uses the force of his personality to rally the unwanted dogs together. One of his defining characteristics is his capacity as a group leader, and this comes out in full force with the plan to raid Westminster. The rest of this section, which describes the various exploits the dogs undertake, simply reinforces Sam's ingenuity, builds up hope for the rag-tag bunch of dogs, and provides some comic relief after all of the tragedies Sam has overcome thus far.



# Chapters 29-31

## Chapters 29-31 Summary

The dogs enter Westminster in Chapter 29. They do so ingeniously, all of them except Peaches and Sam bundled into Mrs. Nutbush's clothes. The "new" lady walks Sam, who has a leg newly constructed by Madam. Peaches once again warns Sam that he is doing the wrong thing, but Sam continues with the plan. However, when they present Mrs. Nutbush's pass, Mrs. Nutbush (who is behind them in line) stomps forward, and claims that Sam is her dog. The officials think that she is crazy and have her escorted away. All of the dogs enter the arena together, and Sam smells Cassius.

Sam gestures to the roof and points the way for Madam and Tusk up the spiral staircase. Meanwhile, he is ready to kill Cassius. The other dogs set about making the show's competitors unpleasant, with a combination of paint, hair gel, Super Glue, dye, cereal, and other assorted things, including hair clippers. Sam tracks down Cassius's scent, and comes across Mrs. Beaglehole, who is shocked to see Sam alive. Meanwhile, a news helicopter notices dogs dragging mud into a water tank on the roof, and think that the dog is actually a rhinoceros.

In Chapter 31, Sam calls for the dogs to get back into their costume, which is not in line with their plan. Still, they follow him just as the show opens and all of the dogs are seen to be a little off, thanks to the work of the unwanted dogs. The only one who hasn't been messed with is Cassius. Sam gets closer and closer to the dog, and is overwhelmed with thoughts of killing him, but then he sees who is holding Cassius: Heidi, several years older. Sam starts to dance and Uncle Hamish, in the audience, recognizes him. Cassius then escapes and bites the bottom of the fake Mrs. Nutbush, and the dogs all come tumbling down. Sam's fake leg also falls off. Cassius starts chasing Sam, and they end up nearly at the top of the stairs. The last-ditch dogs follow Sam.

## Chapters 29-31 Analysis

This section provides the showdown that the entire book has been leading to. Here, comedy turns to danger quickly, as Sam and Cassius have a final show-down after all of the strange grooming of the other show dogs. Mrs. Beaglehole also gets punished, though not as severely as Cassius later does, by choking on a chicken bone (though she survives), which foreshadows the justice which will come to Cassius, as well. The section ends with a near-literal cliffhanger, as Cassius and Sam stand poised above the other dogs, ready to fight each other to the death.



# Chapters 32-34

## Chapters 32-34 Summary

Sam and Cassius face off on the catwalk near the roof in Chapter 32. Heidy, however, has followed them, and tells Cassius that it must have been he who took Bruno. Cassius turns on Heidy, but Sam protects her. She is about to fall until Jeeves and Poof use their combined skills to act like a jet rocket and fly up to save Heidy. Sam asks Cassius if he will kill Heidy, and Cassius affirms this; Sam then gives the order to Madam and Tusk, who let the enormous vat of mud go flying.

In Chapter 33, Cassius and Sam lie on the floor, and Heidy takes Sam in her arms. Peaches' voice then comes to Sam, telling him that he will have a last day, but this is not it.

Chapter 34 describes the fate of the dogs, who go to live on McCloud's estate, which is now a sanctuary for people-less dogs. There, they all run free and happy, and the rough-handed man comes to visit Sam, his fortunes much improved.

## Chapters 32-34 Analysis

Sam's near-death experience shows just how lucky he is, in the end; this luck is reaffirmed by the very happy ending for all of his friends, as well, who can play on the McCloud estate. Cassius appears to have died in the fall, though this is never explicitly stated (again, probably because of the book's young target age), and the way is clear for all of the novel's good characters to have a happy ending. Readers should note that Peaches does truly turn out to be Sam's guardian angel, showing the goodness that can come in strange packages.





# Characters

## Sam the Lion

A dachshund, Sam possesses the rare "Duuglitz Tuft" and is therefore valuable within the dog-breeding community. However, he has a distaste for vulgarity and glamor, and much prefers Heidi's simple love to the glitz of the original lady who comes to take him away. This is also visible in his kissing Heidi on the nose as they first meet, a sign that he is immediately drawn to her. Sam is a very clever dog, and can often think his way out of situations; he runs away from the lady at the airport, and escapes into Heidi's bag. Later, the whole idea for the raid on Westminster is his. This points out another important characteristic of Sam, though: his fierce loyalty and protectiveness. He gets in trouble at the McCloud estate by being trapped by Cassius when he thinks the baby is missing and he goes to find it. In addition, he never forgets Heidi, although years and sometimes miles separate them. Above all, Sam is a high-spirited dog, who can dance in front of judges and make people laugh. This makes the contrast when he is down-and-out (for example, at the dog fight) all the sadder, though his high spirits win out in the end.

## Heidy

A young adolescent when she comes to live with her Uncle Hamish, Heidy was orphaned several years ago, when her parents died in a freak dog accident, partially and unwittingly caused by Uncle Hamish. Because Hamish did not think he could bring up a little girl, he sent her to live at the Saint Egregious Home for Troubled Girls, which Heidy hated, and where she often played pranks and misbehaved; the most frequently cited prank is when she made all of the nuns' toilets overflow. Heidy does not like dogs at the beginning, but when Sam picks her out, they quickly become friends. Later, when he is gone, she so misses him that Cassius nearly takes his place, showing that she has come to like dogs in and of themselves. However, Sam cannot be replaced in her mind, but she does not go to rescue him because she thinks he is dead. Therefore, when they find each other at Westminster, Sam is shocked to see Heidy more grown-up than ever, but Heidy is more shocked to see Sam, alive and well and now her dog again. Heidy is equal to Sam in almost every way, and the two almost seem to talk to each other. Like Sam, Heidy is courageous, fierce, and has a good sense of humor.

## Cassius

The villain of the story, Cassius is the poodle who already lives on the McCloud Estate. He belongs to Mrs. Beaglehole, the housekeeper, and takes an immediate dislike to Sam, as he sees Sam as an interloper on his territory. However, the worst comes when Sam wins the McCloud dog show, for Cassius worries that it will spoil his own chances at winning Westminster. Therefore, he comes up with a plan to get rid of Sam for good.



He tells Sam that Bruno, the baby, is out in the snow, and then Cassius himself shreds the baby's blankets and clothes, having hidden the baby earlier. Sam goes to find the baby, but when he gets it, it appears that he himself has stolen away with the baby. Cassius's plan then seems to have worked. However, as time goes on, he realizes that he will never take the place of Sam for Heidi, and that she really did love the little dog. Rather than feeling any pity, however, Cassius is struck with even more envy, and works his way to Westminster, where he has a final showdown with Sam. Overall, Cassius is clever, conniving, and heartless; the opposite of Sam for, though Sam is bright, he has little malice in his heart by nature.

## **Mrs. Nutbush**

The owner for whom Sam was originally destined.

## **Mrs. Beaglehole**

The housekeeper at McCloud Heavenly Acres; Cassius' owner.

## **Miss Violet**

A helper at the McCloud estate. Bruno's mother and an old friend of Heidi's mother.

## **Bruno**

The baby.

## **Uncle Hamish**

Heidi's uncle. A former dog breeder who has now adopted Heidi.

## **Sherrif**

The representative of the law who comes to shoot Sam.

## **Madam**

The head of the dogs at the National Last-Ditch Dog Depot, Madam turns out to be a cat.



## **Last-Ditch Dogs**

Tusk, who attacks mailmen, Willy, who licked faces too much, Bug, and ugly dog, Blue, who clashed with her owner's house, Fabio, who has no front legs, Jeeves, who has many chins, and Pooft, who has a lot of gas.

## **Rough-Handed Man**

The man who takes Sam in and places him in the dog fight.

## **Peaches**

Sam's "angel" and helper. Also a dog.

## **Mr. Toodles**

The dog that Mrs. Nutbush eventually adopts.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Dog Fight**

The opening scene of the book; the place where Sam must go to make the rough-handed man money.

### **Piddleton**

The town in Vermont where Uncle Hamish lives.

### **St. Egregious Home for Troubly Girls**

The seminary school where Heidi previously lived.

### **Duuglitz Tuft**

An uncommon tuft of hair found on Sam.

### **McCloud Heavenly Acres**

Uncle Hamish's estate.

### **Rifle**

The means by which Sam will be shot unless he escapes the Sheriff.

### **National Last-Ditch Dog Depot**

The home where unwanted dogs end up.

### **University Research Labs**

The laboratory where Sam spends some time and is experimented on before escaping.

### **Westminster**

The most prestigious dog show.

## **The Rough-Handed Man's House**

The place where Sam stays; not fancy, but comfortable enough for him.



# Themes

## Home

Both humans and animals struggle to find their rightful homes in "Flawed Dogs." Heidi's case is perhaps the most obvious, and the first presented: orphaned at the age of six, her Uncle Hamish sent her off to a religious school, feeling himself unable to deal with the demands of bringing up a little girl. She is certain that she will never feel at home on his estate in Vermont, and makes plans on the airplane to run away to Fiji or other exotic locations. However, she eventually finds a comfortable home at the McCloud estate. Similarly, and more dramatically, Sam himself experiences a wide variety of different homes, which not only contribute to the narrative but also show the reader the wide variety of ways in which animals can suffer (see below, under "Animal Cruelty"). Throughout the book, he starts in a crate going to Mrs. Nutbush, ends up living with Heidi, is sent to the unwanted dogs' home, then the research lab, lives with the rough-handed man for a while, returns to the dog shelter, and finally ends up at the McCloud estate once more. While not all of the residences are uncomfortable or terrible, others are, and the only place that Sam truly feels at home is with Heidi. Heidi's connection to Sam, as well as to her Uncle Hamish, are what make the McCloud Estate a home for all of them, in the end, as well as for the other dogs.

## Family

Family, as presented by "Flawed Dogs" is not simply comprised of relations, but also of those people or animals adopted along the way - kindred spirits. For example, Sam and Heidi have an immediate affinity for each other, while Sam takes an immediate dislike to Mrs. Nutbush: she is not like him, and he knows that he does not belong to her. On the other hand, Heidi's family relationships are significantly more complex, as her Uncle Hamish was convinced that he wouldn't like her, only to find that he does, in the end. The real conflict in the book is not just Cassius's cruelty to Sam, but also his threats that Heidi doesn't love Sam anymore, which challenge Sam's conception of his family. Without Heidi, he can only think about getting revenge on Cassius. Note that he does not feel the need to take revenge on Uncle Hamish, who he understands was acting in the interests of protecting his family, however misguided. Groups of friends can also become family, as the book demonstrates: the group of unwanted dogs, for example, have formed into a group that acts like a family, with Madam the cat at their head.

## Animal Cruelty

Though "Flawed Dogs" is full of humor, often childishly gleeful, it also has the important purpose of introducing various kinds of animal cruelty to young readers, without traumatizing them too much in the process, though emphasizing the importance of taking care of pets. Sam is mistreated in a variety of ways. The first that the reader sees



is the horribly mismatched dog fight, which his owner, though well-intentioned, has driven him to. However, abandonment can lead to emotional distress, as the book shows in the form of the unwanted dogs and their incessant watching of Lassie, pining for owners of their own. This abandonment is also apparent in Sam himself, who never stops loving Heidi, even when they are far apart. Even unintentional cruelty, such as dogs walking into traps meant for other animals, is depicted in the book, as Sam gets his leg snapped off in a beaver trap. Finally, the Lab setting is treated as too gruesome to discuss. All the same, enough monstrosities and unjust scenarios are present in the book that it is not suitable for very young readers.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view in "Flawed Dogs" varies, depending on the section of the story. Oftentimes, it varies even within the same section. This gives an omniscient tone to the book, where the reader has access to the thoughts of most of the important characters (notably, these are limited to the "good" or kind characters, with the exception of Cassius). However, the most prevalent narration is that from Sam's point of view, which helps to reinforce structural and plot aspects of the novel.

Because Sam is a dog, it is important that the reader be given access to his thoughts, which cannot be as implied from his actions in the way that those of the human characters might be. Therefore, each chapter has at least several lines from Sam's point of view, and most have much more. Sometimes, however, Cassius's point of view takes over in a close third-person similar to that of Sam's narration; this provides a contrast to the kind dog, as well as foreshadowing some of the troubles that Cassius intends to create for his new "nemesis." Nevertheless, Sam's consistent voice gives a pleasant and humorous tone to the book, without limiting it to what he can know, giving the reader the best of all worlds.

## Setting

The setting of "Flawed Dogs" is established as the present day (c. 2012), even before the first chapter. In the author's note (in fact, part of the fiction itself), Breathed mentions a speech President Obama made about last year's Westminster Dog Show. Through this situation of the President in the book, the reader can infer that we are, in fact, in the present day. As far as place goes, the most important two settings are McCloud Heavenly Acres and the Westminster Dog Show itself. Once a successful Vermont breeding farm, McCloud Heavenly Acres is now just the home of Uncle Hamish, who no longer has any desire to breed dogs. This is completely turned around by the end of the book, when the estate is once again home to dogs - just slightly imperfect ones, this time.

Conversely, the International Westminster Dog Show takes place at Madison Square Garden, in New York City. Navigating the arena itself becomes an important element in the "flawed dogs" scheme to sabotage the show. In addition to these two locations, other important locales include the airport tarmac, the home for unwanted dogs, the university research laboratory, the rough-handed man's house, and the dog fight arena.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the book is simple and straightforward. Younger readers may have a hard time understanding or pronouncing the names of different dog breeds, of which





many are mentioned in the book, but these are relatively unimportant to the overall plot. The most difficult vocabulary is around a fourth- or fifth-grade reading level. The dialogue is very playful, especially between Heidi and Sam. Sam speaks to her; this dialogue is always italicized, and, though it is clear that she can't completely understand him, the pair are so close that her responses imply that she usually gets the main point he is trying to communicate. On the other hand, Sam and the other dogs can communicate very clearly together, and he can even communicate well with Madam, the cat.

There is a certain playfulness to the language in parts, especially in the naming of characters. "Mrs. Nutbush" and "Mrs. Beaglehole" are just two of the silly names that Breathed comes up with for his characters, though the main characters tend to have normal names.

## Structure

The story is told in thirty-four chapters. This makes it slightly too long to be a child's first "chapter book," and the story is too complex (and violent, in parts) for this role, at any rate. However, the book is copiously illustrated, with at least one picture per chapter, and several beautiful full-page color plates inserted to illustrate important moments of the story. This structure, and the deliberate placement of the illustrations, helps keep the action tense and forward-moving, as the chapters are short (sometimes as short as one or two pages) and well-illustrated with action pictures. In addition, within each chapter, the story can oscillate among various points of view, which also reinforces the tension created by other elements of the narrative.



## Quotes

Ya gotta fight, little buddy! (Chapter 1, p. 5)

She didn't know that it was because of DOGS that Heidi's life was now shredded like one of her stupid uncle's giant canvas chewtoys? (Chapter 4, p. 23)

"You and I are going to be great friends," said Hamish. "And you are going to go great places." (Chapter 10, p. 65)

"I don't understand any of this," Sam said "But I know you're not touching the baby again." (Chapter 13, p. 81)

No. . . I can't finish it. You need to fetch him and. . . do whatever needs doing. (Chapter 15, p. 90)

It looked like what it was: a forgotten prison from a long-ago war, rotting in a frozen marsh. (Chapter 17, p. 101)

He knew with absolute certainty. . .like dogs know that a distant storm is approaching or that a stranger isn't to be trusted. . . he knew that world was gone forever. (Chapter 18, p. 111)

He carried the wounded og to his truck and laid him on his dirty coat, coiled on the passenger floor. (Chapter 21, p. 124)

And he. . . and all the rest of them. . . is why you will wait here forever while they take what should be yours. Because you're flawed and they're not. (Chapter 25, p. 153)

In this fashion did Sam lead his pirate commandos into the greatest dog show on earth in order to destroy it. (Chapter 29, p. 173)

Sam scanned the face staring at him and saw that the large brown eyes of a little girl - gleaming with possibility and wonder and wide open to the limitlessness of love - had softened into those of a young woman. (Chapter 31, p. 190)

"So, little buddy. It's Sam the Lion now, is it?" the man said. (Chapter 33, p. 216)



## Topics for Discussion

Why does Cassius pursue Sam's demise so passionately? Why do you think he cares so much?

Compare and contrast Sam and Cassius. In what ways are they similar? Different?

Discuss Heidi's attitude towards dogs. How does it change over the course of the book? Does she feel the same about every dog?

Why is Westminster such an important part of the book? Describe the event and its importance to at least three main characters.

In what way is Peaches really Sam's "angel"? Describe his character and the help he provides Sam in this context.

Compare and contrast the dogs at the National Last-Ditch Dog Depot. Why are they unwanted? What are their talents, and what might they have to offer?

Describe Uncle Hamish's role in Heidi's life. How has he changed her circumstances? List at least three instances, describing the causes and effects for Heidi herself.