

# Fallen Man Short Guide

## Fallen Man by Tony Hillerman

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# Characters

While Hillerman brings back his two cops, Chee and Leaphorn, he introduces major changes in their lives. He also returns Janet Pete, Chee's half-Navajo, half-white fiancée, but also adds a new woman to Chee's life, Bernadette "Bernie" Manuelito. Hillerman also assembles a cast of minor characters.

Joe Leaphorn is now retired and no longer a police lieutenant. Due to this change, he attempts to discover what to do with himself now that he has time on his hands. As he wryly notes, he has done everything at least once that he wanted to do when he retired. When Breedlove's skeleton is found on Ship Rock by some climbers, Leaphorn enters the case only because a decade earlier he had been in charge of the unsolved missing person case. As he becomes more involved in the mystery, he hires himself out as a private detective working for the Breedlove Corporation. His assignment is to prove that Hal Breedlove died before his thirtieth birthday and did not therefore legally inherit the Lazy B. Because of Leaphorn's retirement, he is no longer Chee's supervisor, so the relationship between the two men has changed. Leaphorn continues to be the logical one who looks for patterns and causal connections to solve cases, and Chee to a certain extent remains the impulsive one who tends to blunder into cases without thinking things through.

But Chee has now matured somewhat and learned from his mentor how to analyze patterns. He even keeps hidden in his desk a reservation map like Leaphorn's to mark locations of cattle thefts.

To solve the Breedlove case, the two men work loosely together to unravel the mystery.

Even though Chee has matured and uses some of Leaphorn's logical strategies, he remains conflicted about his Navajoness. On the strength of Leaphorn's recommendation, Chee has now been promoted to acting lieutenant, a promotion that Chee accepted only to impress Janet Pete, who wants him to be more upwardly mobile. This kind of ambition is not consistent with Chee's Navajo values and causes him much discomfort. He would much prefer to remain a regular cop assigned to drive about the Reservation. The responsibility of supervising his staff of officers does not sit well with him, and he escapes from the office with its paper work whenever possible. While in the past he had been the rebel who refused to follow departmental guidelines, he is now responsible for assigning duties to his subordinates and making sure that they follow through with them correctly. He is still learning how to handle his new duties.

Janet Pete, now almost Chee's fiancée, returns in this novel. Half Navajo, half white, and raised off the reservation, she lacks Chee's sympathy for traditional Navajo values. She refuses to accept Chee as he is and pressures him to take a job elsewhere, preferably in a major city like Washington, D.C., or Miami. She in fact wants him to enter the Civil Service, perhaps the Bureau of Indian Affairs or the Justice Department, both of which, she informs him, are recruiting experienced Indian reservation cops. Part of her reason for this pressure is that she fears that Chee will eventually be killed in the line of duty



(he is indeed shot in the novel); but another reason is that she finds living in New Mexico dull compared to life in the East. She longs to live in a city where she can visit art museums and attend Mozart concerts. Her confusion is made manifest when she reestablishes a relationship with the Washington-based John McDermott, her old professor and lover, who gives her entre into high society in the Capital. One humorous indication of the difference in taste between Chee and Pete is his mistaking a contemporary sculpture that she bought at a Washington art gallery for a knickknack that he assumes her odd roommate had picked up at a local flea market.

At the beginning of the novel Chee and Pete are informally engaged. By the end, they become estranged, and Janet departs to rethink the relationship once again. Hillerman clearly encourages readers familiar with their difficult romance from past novels to wonder if it is finally over.

The most fascinating new character in Chee's life is Officer Bernie Manuelito, a young Navajo female rookie trainee newly assigned to Lt. Chee's office. Because Chee is her supervisor and responsible for her actions, their relationship is complicated by the fact that she is headstrong. Like the younger, more spontaneous Chee found in earlier Hillerman novels, she chafes at orders that prevent her from following her own lights. For instance, at the novel's beginning, Chee assigns her to interview people who might have witnessed a fight at a high school dance. Instead, she spends her time parking her Tribal Police vehicle at the road leading to the place of business of Roderick Diamonte, a known drug dealer, in order to disrupt his dope sales.

She later becomes interested in investigating a cattle thief instead of working on the high school case. Since Chee can't keep her on task, he changes her assignment so that the two of them work together on the rustling problem. While working on this case, Bernie proves her intelligence and perseverance. Through hard work and Leaphorn-like research completed on her own time, she proves that Dick Finch, the New Mexico brand inspector, is abusing his office by stealing cattle.

Unlike Janet Pete, Bernie was raised Navajo and fully understands the culture.

Having grown up on the Reservation, Bernie, like Chee, values Navajo ways.

When the two of them look at Ship Rock, they both have the same reaction, that the monolith is always changing, always beautiful in different ways. Bernie also knows the mythology associated with the formation: Monster Slayer climbed the "Rock with Wings" to kill the Winged Monster but then, like Breedlove, could not get down. Spider Woman, another spirit, heard his screams and rescued him.

Bernie is also a good Navajo. Chee notices that "she was always using her days off to take care of an apparently inexhaustible supply of ailing and indigent kinfolks, which gave her a high score on the Navajo value scale." While Chee remains enamored of Pete, Hillerman suggests throughout the novel that he would find Bernie more compatible because she shares his Navajo values.



White characters also play important roles in the novel. Two who contrast significantly are Hal Breedlove and Eldon Demott. Breedlove is the son of Denver's Edgar Breedlove, who, during the Depression, bought the Lazy B Ranch from Demott's father in order to sell the mineral rights for a fortune. The elder Demott remained on as the supervisor, a position taken over by Eldon at his father's death. Eldon is a child of the West and wants to protect the ranch. Hal, on the other hand, was educated largely in the East, but as a boy visited the Lazy B during the summers and came to appreciate it.

But Hal did not grow up with healthy Western values. His wealthy father raised him to be a spendthrift, and, when Hal took over the ranch, he began using the proceeds to buy himself luxuries such as an airplane, a Ferrari, and a Land-Rover.

The Breedloves in general and Hal in particular represent to Hillerman the bad steward who does not properly care for his property. Eldon is the exact opposite.

He and his sister (who married Breedlove) harbor their resources and protect the ranch for posterity. As Hillerman makes clear, the two Western types —the Breedloves and the Demotts— are in conflict.

Another interesting western type is Dick Finch, a white New Mexico brand inspector who keeps his eye on cattle rustlers in the Four Corners area. He travels the region in a truck pulling a trailer that smells of manure. Finch treats Chee condescendingly and assumes that he as a white man is more intelligent than the Navajo cop. By the end of the novel, however, Hillerman is careful to show that Chee and Manuelito outsmart the inspector by identifying him as the cattle thief.



## Social Concerns

Fallen Man reunites Tony Hillerman's two cops of the Navajo Tribal Police, Jim Chee and Joe Leaphorn, to solve a decade-old mystery, the disappearance of Hal Breedlove. At the novel's beginning, two climbers discover his skeleton near the top of Ship Rock, a large rock formation that thrusts above the New Mexican desert. The novel addresses two major social concerns important in the West, the treatment of Navajo holy places and the proper use of land.

Called "Tse' Bit' a'i'", or the Sacred Mountain of the North, Ship Rock is a holy place in Navajo mythology. As Leaphorn notes, the mountain is so sacred that no Navajo would "be disrespectful enough even to climb it". White mountain climbers, however, view Ship Rock differently. They consider it one of the most challenging climbs in the Southwest, in part because several experienced climbers had previously died in the attempt. Many conservative Navajos, such as the recently deceased Hosteen Sam, believe that no whites should be allowed to touch the mountain, especially without permission from the Navajo owner of the surrounding land. When Sam became old and sick before dying, he spent his time at home near the formation looking at Ship Rock through a powerful telescope in search of men who were climbing without permission. When he saw any, he reported them to the police for trespassing in hopes that they would be arrested.

He told his daughter that if he were younger and could afford the trip, he would travel to New York City and climb the front of St. Patrick's Cathedral as an equivalent act of desecration.

The discovery of Hal Breedlove's skeleton near the summit raises questions about why whites blasphemy Navajo sacred places. Chee, the Navajo traditionalist, questions the white value system that makes men want to make the difficult climb. He concludes that Breedlove's scaling Ship Rock reflected a basic white assumption about nature: it was something to be conquered. To whites like Breedlove, climbing the monolith proved that they were the master of the universe.

This attitude, Chee believes, is destructive because it too often leads to the desecration of nature. Much of the novel explores such conflicts in values between white and Navajo attitudes.

A second social concern is the issue of appropriate land use in the West. The Breedlove family, centered in Denver but with financial ties in the East, owns the Lazy B ranch in Maneo, Colorado, just north of the New Mexican border. Hal Breedlove's father bought the land during World War II in order to strip mine it for its molybdenum, a hard metallic element used to strengthen steel that had to withstand high temperatures. While valuable during the war for its use in the aircraft industry, after the war its price collapsed and the older Breedlove decided to wait until it rose before selling the mineral rights. The threat of strip mining the ranch put the Breedloves in conflict with Eldon Demott, the foreman of the ranch.



Something of a "tree hugger" (Hillerman's term for an environmentalist), Demott, now Hal Breedlove's brother-in-law, wanted to conserve the land. He constantly argued with old Breedlove, who wanted to make as much money as possible off the ranch, not to overgraze the property because that would cause problems with erosion. As Hal Breedlove approached thirty, the age at which he would inherit the ranch, Demott attempted to convince him to value conservation. Conflict, however, developed between the two men. Because Hal needed money to maintain his extravagant life style, he decided to sign a new deal to strip mine the ranch. If this deal were to go through, the land would not only be stripped but the ranch's Cache Creek would, as Leaphorn notes, "be running water grey with cyanide and mining effluent". It is clear that Hillerman supports Demott's position, that the West should be maintained in its present state for future generations.



# Techniques

Fallen Man fits the structure of the traditional detective novel, with the exception that the novel has two detectives, Leaphorn and Chee. The men represent two traditional types of detectives. Leaphorn is the rational, Sherlock Holmes type who attempts to reason through the case. Chee, on the other hand, is more the Mike Hammer type who becomes physically involved. Hillerman does a good job coordinating the two styles of detecting and in places uses them to good advantage. In several chapters, for instance, he has the two meet to discuss the case in order to summarize what has happened to date and to advance two main story lines.

The main problem with Fallen Man is Hillerman's failure to adequately coordinate the two significant plot lines of the novel. The main plot concerns itself with the decade-old death of Hal Breedlove.

This plot is adequately explored and concluded, but loose strands remain. For instance, much is made of Tommy Castro, who was Elisa Breedlove's high school boy friend. His name is bandied about as a possible murderer of Hal out of jealousy, but the reader never meets him, and he remains a vague reference.

Nor is Elisa Breedlove adequately developed. At the end of the novel, when Leaphorn lies about the date of Hal's death, he does so because he respects Hal's widow. Why he should feel such respect is not clear given the scant development the character receives.

The secondary plot concerns the cattle rustling that Chee and Manuelito work to solve. While this plot, which revolves around Finch, is brought to a close, the closure is unsatisfying due to the sketchy resolution. Readers learn in the last line of the novel that Finch has been arrested, but they don't have the satisfaction of seeing the smug brand inspector caught and jailed by the Navajo cops that he considers his intellectual inferiors.

As in previous novels, some of Hillerman's most successful passages are the descriptions of New Mexican desert and mountains, and these descriptions place Hillerman in the local color tradition. He describes Ship Rock in ways that help his readership appreciate why the Navajos consider the formation central to their mythology, and he uses these descriptions to demonstrate the appreciation of the land that Chee and Manuelito share. In another section, Hillerman describes magnificently the weather patterns that unfold as Chee and Manuelito drive down the mountains from the Lazy B in Colorado to the New Mexican desert. The collision of Canadian and Pacific air masses, Hillerman writes, form "a towering wall of white fog, which poured down the slopes like a silent slow-motion Niagara". By showing that Chee and Manuelito share an appreciation for the beauty of this event, Hillerman suggests that the two also share the same Navajo appreciation of natural beauty.



# Themes

Hillerman works through three important themes in the novel. The first of these is indicated in the title, *Fallen Man*.

Two men fall in the novel, Hal Breedlove, who fell to his death a decade earlier, and Eldon Demott, who leaps to his death near the novel's conclusion. The term "fallen," however, refers not only to the physical events. It also refers to the theological concept of the fallen condition of the human being due to the sin of Adam and Eve. Both Hal and Eldon lived in a kind of paradise, the Lazy B ranch, which they each loved in their own way. Both fell from grace and could no longer enjoy the property. Hal did so by attempting to destroy the ranch by selling its mineral rights in order to make enough money to maintain a lavish life style filled with personal airplanes and expensive cars.

The cost of maintaining this style of living was the destruction of "paradise" by means of strip mining the mountains and polluting its creek. Eldon, on the other hand, in his attempts to keep the ranch pure, left Hal to die of exposure on a ledge near the top of Ship Rock and murdered Austin Maryboy to cover up this fact. His choice was either to go to jail or to jump to his death, and, unable to face life without the freedom the ranch offered, he chose the latter.

A second theme concerns the difference between white and Navajo values.

As in his previous Navajo mysteries, Hillerman expresses respect for the traditional Navajo way of life. Unlike Hal Breedlove and his father, who are ambitious and willing to destroy the land by overgrazing and mining it for profit, Navajos consider the land holy. Hosteen Sam, for instance, wants to protect Ship Rock, a holy place, from the damage that white mountain climbers inflict on it, and Joe Leaphorn expresses sympathy to the environmental arguments concerning land maintenance. Navajos view the land as filled with spirits and therefore attempt to protect it from white greed.

The most direct exploration of the difference between whites and Navajos takes place in the relationship between Chee and Janet Pete. Chee has long loved Pete and wants her to marry him and settle on the Reservation to live a traditional Navajo life. Unlike Chee, who grew up on the Reservation, Pete has been formed by white culture, a fact that Chee has a hard time accepting. Since she is half Navajo on her father's side, he assumes that she should share his Navajo heritage; it should be in her blood. But he comes to realize that she does not share, or even appreciate, his culture because her culture is different. Pete's, Chee reflects, is "blue-blooded, white, Ivy League, chic, irreligious, old-rich Maryland," not the Navajo culture in which he was raised. As Pete herself admits, "My culture is Stanford sorority girl, Maryland cocktail circuit, Mozart, and tickets to the Met". Pete, unlike Chee, is ambitious and aspires to a life in a sophisticated city, a stellar legal career, and a Porsche in her garage. Being formed by traditional Navajo culture, Chee embraces the Navajo suspicion of ambition. Chee remembers a friend who stopped winning rodeo competitions because his success was making him "unhealthily famous and therefore out of harmony". Chee himself views



ambition and the accumulation of wealth not as a sign of success but as a sign of not taking care of one's family, of keeping too much for oneself. Wealth and the fame that comes with it do not interest him. "Win three races in a row," he tells Pete, "you better slow down a little. Let someone else win" the prize.

Pete's response is that such attitudes would not get one into law school or out of poverty.

A related theme is the difference between Navajo and white senses of justice.

Navajo justice is not based on the principles of punishment or revenge. Instead, Navajos view crime as the fall into chaos, justice as the return to harmony. Justice for them is a flexible concept. As Chee tells Pete, if a drunken driver hits a Navajo, the Navajo doesn't sue. Instead, he or she holds a sing to cure the driver of alcoholism and to reestablish harmony.

Whites in the novel, on the other hand, view justice as absolute and fixed. The Breedlove Corporation, for instance, is anxious to prove that Hal Breedlove died before his thirtieth birthday, the age at which he could legally inherit the ranch.

If he died at twenty-nine and therefore never legally owned it, the corporation could take his widow to court to sue her to reclaim the ranch and then profit from selling the mineral rights to a mining company. When Leaphorn discovers that Hal did actually die before reaching thirty, he finds himself in a dilemma. If he tells the Breedlove Corporation, who has hired him to find the truth, what actually happened, the land will be destroyed and Hal's widow, whom Leaphorn respects, will lose her home. Although far more influenced by white thinking than Chee is, Leaphorn makes a Navajo decision. To allow Breedlove's widow to remain the ranch's owner and to protect the land from mining, he decides to hide the true date of Hal's death from his employers and to reestablish harmony. When Demott asks if Chee, whom Demott has shot, will support this undermining of white justice, Leaphorn replies that Chee is an authentic Navajo who strives not for revenge but harmony.



## Key Questions

Several contexts exist for discussing *Fallen Man*. One of these is Hillerman's interest in the different attitudes that westerners, both white and Navajo, hold about the land. Some whites tend to view the land as their own possession that they can exploit financially any way they want.

Other whites in whom Hillerman expresses interest are environmentalists, who have in some previous novels been presented as hypocrites. In *Fallen Man* Hillerman presents a complex view of Eldon Demott, who is both an environmentalist and a murderer. Hillerman's attitudes toward Navajo views of the land, however, remain more stable in this novel. Amos Nez, Austin Maryboy, Jim Chee, and Bernie Manuelito all maintain, in various ways, a deep respect for the land around them and want to protect it.

One good way to approach the novel, therefore, would be to discuss this complex issue.

The white versus the Navajo attitudes toward land is part of a larger discussion in the novel about the role of culture in human psychological development. This issue could also be the basis of a good discussion. Chee is clearly the product of Navajo culture. He calls himself a "child of the isolated sheep camp." Pete, on the other hand, is a child of white privilege.

Other characters, such as Hal and Eldon, are also products of their own cultures and experiences. Eldon has been raised on the Lazy B while Hal is the product of an Eastern prep school and college. A good issue to discuss is Hillerman's attitude toward the role of culture in forming one's character.

1. How would you characterize the relationship between Chee and Janet Pete? What seems to draw her to him?

Him to her? Is the relationship doomed or do you see hope?

2. Janet Pete seems both drawn to and disgusted by Chee's Navajo values. What seems to be her attitude toward the traditional Navajo wedding that Chee longs to have? What kind of wedding does Pete want?

3. While we never meet Hal Breedlove, we learn much about his background.

What was his background and how did it form his personality? What did Elisa see in him?

4. Hillerman clearly attempts to cast Bernie Manuelito and Janet Pete in stark contrast. How are the two women different? Which would make Chee happier?

5. By becoming an acting lieutenant, Chee feels that he has been disloyal to his Navajo values and culture. What are the conflicts that his new position subject him to? Do you think he will be successful in his new position?



6. Eldon Demott is a conflicted character. What are the various familial and social forces that have shaped him?
7. How has the relationship between Leaphorn and Chee has changed? Is it important that Leaphorn is now a private detective?
8. What seems to be Hillerman's attitude toward the Breedlove Corporation?
9. Hillerman clearly wants white readers to reflect on the treatment of Navajo holy places such as Ship Rock. How convincing is his comparison between Ship Rock and Christian cathedrals?



## Related Titles

Fallen Man continues Hillerman's interest in Chee and Leaphorn as both policemen and Navajos. While the earlier novels such as *Coyote Waits* (1990; see separate entry) and *Sacred Clowns* (1993; see separate entry) present Leaphorn as Chee's supervisor, this novel brings the two detectives together as more equal partners. It is interesting to note how both men have developed in interesting ways. In part to win Janet Pete's respect, Chee has become an acting lieutenant of the Navajo Tribal Police, a position with which he is not fully comfortable. As a Navajo, Chee feels conflicted about advancing up a hierarchy to achieve greater status. To make matters worse, the job does not fit his character. Always an impetuous cop himself in previous novels, he now has the responsibility of controlling the impetuosity of his subordinates, especially Bernie Manuelito.

Similarly, the retired Leaphorn has a new set of problems to address. No longer a lieutenant (the "legendary lieutenant" in Chee's mind), he must now take on cases as a private eye, a position with which he feels uncomfortable. His discomfort is epitomized by his distaste for accepting a retainer from the Breedlove Corporation. To make it impossible for the corporation to retain him, he asks for a huge amount of money and is surprised when its representatives offer him \$20,000 to cover his salary and expenses.

While he uses some of the money to hire a helicopter to fly over Ship Rock, he returns most of the money to his employers. Like Chee, Hillerman implies, Leaphorn is a good Navajo who does not want to accumulate large amounts of money.

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