

A Thief of Time: A Novel Study Guide

A Thief of Time: A Novel by Tony Hillerman

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Plot Summary

A Thief of Time is a novel in the mystery genre set in the Four Corners region. What begins as a missing person case soon develops into a complex web of crimes involving larceny, grave robbing, and murder. Two main characters, both officers with the Navajo Tribal Police, work tirelessly to solve the case.

Joe Leaphorn is a middle aged Lieutenant with the tribal police. He has recently lost his wife and quite possibly his will to live. After his wife died, he submitted his letter of resignation and requested to be placed on leave. Once his leave expires, Leaphorn will be retired. During this time, a friend asks Leaphorn to accompany him on a trip to a Chaco Culture National Historical Park to take a report on a missing anthropologist. Despite his shock and depression over losing his wife, Leaphorn finds that his police instincts are returning and he is becoming interested in the case. Leaphorn decides that he will work on the case during his period of leave, and then he will retire after having solved one last case.

Jim Chee is a young officer with the tribal police. Chee hasn't been out of college long, and he is in some ways a younger version of Joe Leaphorn. Chee's personal life is less than satisfying because a woman he cared about has recently moved away. During a boring assignment where Chee was supposed to watch some tribal property, someone stole heavy earth moving equipment. Chee is then assigned to the task of catching the thieves. While searching for the thieves, Chee finds instead a murder scene with two bodies and the missing earth moving equipment. Within a couple of days it becomes clear that Chee's theft case and Leaphorn's missing person case may be connected. They agree to work together.

Throughout much of the book Leaphorn and Chee can be viewed as dual protagonists. Most often they work alone but share findings. A chapter covering Leaphorn's progress is usually followed by a chapter detailing Chee's discoveries. During the course of the mystery, the reader is introduced to many traditional Navajo beliefs, and most of the time these ideas are juxtaposed against the realities of the modern world. Joe Leaphorn is the older more experienced character who has rejected many of the traditional beliefs. Jim Chee, many years younger, is trying to find his way in modern society while still retaining some traditional Navajo ways.

Along the path to solving the mystery, Leaphorn and Chee met a wide variety of memorable characters, and many of them seem to be involved with either the missing person's case or the murders or both. The characters seem to come from all walks of life. Some are highly educated scientists studying the culture of the Anasazi. Some are shifty but likeable charlatans. And others are business and trades people, like lawyers, national park employees, art dealers and collectors, and mechanics.

As Leaphorn and Chee get closer to solving the mystery, another murder occurs. The clues from this murder seem to be connected to Leaphorn's and Chee's current cases, but at first the two officers cannot tell if this recent murder has clarified or complicated

their task. As they near the solution it seems that the officers themselves might be in mortal danger.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

A Thief of Time is a mystery story centered on two protagonists, Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee, who are trying to solve a missing person's case and a string of recent thefts and murders. The story is set in the modern day in the Four Corners region, both on and off the Navajo Reservation

Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal is wearing a backpack and hiking at night in the desert. She is going somewhere secretly, and she has lied to her friends about her destination. She led her friends to believe she was going to spend the night in either Shiprock or Farmington, New Mexico when in fact she was planning on hiking to a secret destination near Bluff, Utah.

During the course of the chapter, told in third-person from the point of view of Dr. Friedman-Bernal, the anthropologist thinks about her life as a single and driven professional woman, her upcoming meeting with an academic colleague where she will reveal some of her recent discoveries, and her excitement around her current nighttime quest. Along the course of her hike, Dr. Friedman-Bernal sees the images of the southwestern United States that many associate with Native American cultures of the area. In one canyon Dr. Friedman-Bernal sees many pictographs.

When Dr. Friedman-Bernal reaches her destination she sees some unexplainable occurrences, like dozens of little frogs being tethered near a pool of water. The chapter ends with Dr. Friedman-Bernal in a panic after she sees evidence of grave robbing, hearing the sound of a flute, and realizing she is not alone.

Chapter 1 Analysis

This first chapter reveals the setting of the novel, The Four Corners region, and introduces the reader to the character Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Of equal or greater importance, this chapter introduces the reader to many Native American ideas and locations.

The crucial factor in the mystery that is about to develop is revealed in this chapter, and it centers on no one knowing the whereabouts of Dr. Friedman-Bernal. In fact, the mystery occurs and deepens as a direct result of misinformation. What few people have any contact with Dr. Friedman-Bernal shortly before this chapter (and novel) begins not only do not know her destination, they are led to believe it is hundreds of miles away. Another crucial detail revealed in this chapter includes the fact that Dr. Friedman-Bernal owns a small handgun.

Chapters 2 & 3

Chapters 2 & 3 Summary

Chapter 2 begins with an introduction to the main character, Joe Leaphorn. This chapter, like all chapters in the novel, is told from a third-person point of view, this time from the point of view of Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn of the Navajo Tribal Police.

Joe Leaphorn has been a career law enforcement officer, but his wife has recently died, and he has lost interest in his job and perhaps life itself. He spends his days at home bewildered after his wife's death. On this particular day a friend, L.D. Thatcher, has asked for his assistance in investigating a possible case of grave robbing. Leaphorn knows his friend probably does not need help but rather is trying to help Leaphorn by getting him out of the house. Leaphorn agrees to accompany Thatcher anyway.

Thatcher and Leaphorn travel to Chaco Culture National Historical Park because Thatcher has received a complaint against Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal for allegedly being a pot hunter. Once Thatcher and Leaphorn interview park officials, they learn that Dr. Friedman-Bernal has been missing for weeks. The case turns from an investigation of vandalism and grave robbing to a missing person case. While Thatcher speaks to park officials, Leaphorn's mind wanders. He contemplates that he has trouble concentrating, and perhaps he simply doesn't care anymore.

Thatcher has a warrant to search Dr. Friedman-Bernal's home. There Thatcher and Leaphorn see that Dr. Friedman-Bernal has made the preparations for a fancy dinner, and this leads them to believe that Dr. Friedman-Bernal had not planned to be away long. Despite having only two weeks left on his terminal leave, after which he will have retired, Leaphorn decides to solve one last case and find Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Leaphorn believes that his recently deceased wife would have liked Dr. Friedman-Bernal, and Leaphorn believes his wife would have wanted him to find the missing woman.

Chapter 3 begins with Officer Jim Chee's perspective on what has been an unpleasant week for him. He had been put in charge of guarding a motor pool from which a trailer had been stolen. During Chee's time guarding the motor pool, he receives a call about a minor disturbance involving a drunken woman. While he attends to the drunken woman, a backhoe, a large piece of earthmoving machinery, is stolen, and Chee is assigned to the task of catching the culprit.

Also during this unpleasant week Chee had been asked by a female friend, Janet Pete, to test drive a car for her. While test-driving the car, Chee spots a suspect in the backhoe theft, and he gives chase in his friend's car. Chee wrecks the car and spends most of the rest of the week in dread of what he will have to tell his friend about the damages to the car.

Chapters 2 & 3 Analysis

In Chapter 2, the action is mixed with near equal parts of Leaphorn's internal thoughts. We learn of the profound impact of his wife's death. Leaphorn cannot concentrate and simply does not care about much of anything. The fact that his wife died unexpectedly during what should have been a simple surgery has left Leaphorn in a state of bewilderment and depression.

The breaks with the current action that take place in Leaphorn's mind are significant in portraying his character. We learn that he first met his wife while a student at Arizona State University, and that he had been immediately struck by her beauty. And during their time together as husband and wife they had a close and loving partnership.

A few notable facts that will play a role in the unfolding mystery emerge during the search of Dr. Friedman-Bernal's apartment: Leaphorn and Thatcher learn that Dr. Friedman-Bernal had not planned on being gone for long, the two officers meet Randall Elliot, and Leaphorn reveals that he studied cultural anthropology while a student in Arizona.

In Chapter 3, we see the first of a pattern that will form the structure of most of the rest of the novel. A chapter focusing on Joe Leaphorn is most often followed by a chapter focusing on Jim Chee. In this first chapter focusing on Chee we see that his duties as a police officer are different from those of Joe Leaphorn. Whereas Leaphorn has many years of seniority, Jim Chee is a lower ranking officer, and he receives more tedious assignments.

Chapters 4 & 5

Chapters 4 & 5 Summary

In Chapter 4, the search for Dr. Friedman-Bernal leads Leaphorn to a religious revival conducted by a colorful evangelist called Slick Nakai. Before going inside the tent where the religious revival is held, Leaphorn looks around the parking area and notices that Officer Jim Chee's personal pickup truck is among the other cars and trucks. Leaphorn knows that Chee must be at the revival on unofficial police business because otherwise Chee would have driven a tribal police vehicle. Leaphorn also knows that Chee is not a participant in the Christian religious meeting because Chee is dedicated to the traditional Navajo ways. In fact, Chee is studying to become a hatathali, a singer of Navajo curing ceremonies. Leaphorn thinks of Chee as "the antithesis of Slick Nakai."

Once inside the tent, Leaphorn is able to speak with Slick Nakai. Leaphorn learns that Nakai knows Dr. Friedman-Bernal well. From time to time, participants in Nakai's religious ceremonies give Nakai ceramic pots. Dr. Friedman-Bernal studies the pottery of the Anasazi, and she sometimes buys pots from Nakai. Nakai is cooperative and helpful, and Leaphorn gets new leads from his meeting with Nakai. Leaphorn is surprised to discover that he finds Slick Nakai a likable man.

Near the conclusion of the chapter Leaphorn speaks to Chee and learns that Chee is at the revival meeting investigating the stolen backhoe.

In Chapter 5, Jim Chee continues his independent investigation of the stolen backhoe. During his investigation and regular daily tasks he constantly worries about how he will explain to Janet Pete that he has wrecked her car. A clue in the investigation of the stolen backhoe seems to come in the form of information about a recently rented U-Haul truck.

After combining all of the information he has collected, including information he learned after talking to Slick Nakai, Chee works all night visiting all the likely places he believes the backhoe might have been used. In the middle of the night he visits a location where he finds the backhoe. Chee sneaks up on the backhoe expecting to find and arrest the thief. Instead Chee finds a disturbed gravesite. He also finds two dead bodies, two men who have been killed with a gun.

Chapters 4 & 5 Analysis

In addition to the regular details, the pieces to the mystery puzzle, the reader learns more about the character Leaphorn and the physical setting of the chapter, the Checkerboard Reservation area of western New Mexico.

Leaphorn can't escape the feeling of loss after his wife's death. The most seemingly unconnected situations make him think about his deceased wife. Hearing Slick Nakai

preach about Christian beliefs reminds Leaphorn of the beliefs of his own Navajo clan. That in turn makes him relive the memory of authorizing his brother in laws to take his wife's body and give her a traditional Navajo burial.

Chapter 5 begins with Jim Chee's most stressful problem being his dread over telling Janet Pete that he has wrecked her car. By the end of the chapter that concern pales in comparison to the terror he feels when he discovers the two corpses. Jim Chee's traditional Navajo beliefs are clearly seen in his terror at being near a disturbed ancient gravesite and two recently killed bodies. He believes it is unhealthy and dangerous to be close to so much death, but he also knows he has a duty as a police officer. Chee manages to control his fear and fulfill his police duties.

The conclusion of Chapter 5 marks the beginning of a change in tone and urgency. Previously the two investigations involved a missing person case and some theft. Now murder has been added to the crimes, and the stakes are higher.

Chapters 6 & 7

Chapters 6 & 7 Summary

Chapter 6 begins with Leaphorn having breakfast at his home on a Sunday morning. After breakfast he is struck with an idea concerning the disappearance of Dr. Friedman-Bernal. He places a phone call to Chaco Culture National Historical Park and asks to speak to Maxie Davis. Leaphorn wants to know if she knows anything about a notebook Dr. Friedman-Bernal used to carry. During the course of the conversation, Leaphorn decides to travel to Chaco Culture National Historical Park in the hope of speaking directly to Maxie Davis and Randall Elliot, two of Dr. Friedman-Bernal's colleagues.

Leaphorn meets with Elliot and Davis and the three again search Dr. Bernal's apartment. They make a list of items that are missing from the apartment, items Dr. Friedman-Bernal might have taken and items that might give Leaphorn a clue to Dr. Friedman-Bernal's intentions. Toward the end of the chapter, Maxie Davis tells Leaphorn that Dr. Friedman-Bernal owned a pistol, and the pistol is not in the apartment.

In Chapter 7, Jim Chee awakes in his trailer still shaken by the experience of finding murdered men. He decides to take a sweat bath in the traditional manner. After the sweat bath Chee goes to the mechanic's garage to check on the amount of damage he had done to Janet Pete's car. While he speaks to the mechanic, Janet Pete arrives, and though Chee is at a loss to explain how he has done so much damage to the car, the mechanic steps in and explains to Janet Pete that the people who sold her the car had falsified the odometer reading. He also explains that the breaks may have been faulty. This deflects the blame from Chee.

Chee and Janet Pete go get a cup of coffee. Over coffee the two discuss both of their recently failed romantic relationships. After coffee Chee goes the police station and speaks to Joe Leaphorn on the telephone. The two agree to meet the following day to revisit the site of the murders.

Chapters 6 & 7 Analysis

In Chapter 6, the interaction between Maxie Davis and Randall Elliot is as significant to the plot as the few clues Leaphorn discovers in his second visit to Chaco Canyon. Randall Elliot makes a dismissive comment about a renowned figure in the field of archeology, and Maxie Davis seizes the opportunity criticize Elliot for his privileged background. She comes from a background of poverty and has had to work hard for her every achievement. She has no respect at all for Elliot who was born to wealth. In fact, she seems at times to despise him.

Elliot's reaction is also telling. During the worst of Davis's criticism of him he remains quiet. It seems that Elliot has a great deal of affection for Davis.

In Chapter 7, the verbal interaction between the characters also provides as much to the unfolding plot as the action. Jim Chee and Janet Pete have coffee together, and it seems that one of the many things they have in common is that they are feeling a loss after failing at relationships. The commonality seems to draw them closer since Chee and Pete, both Navajos, failed at relationships with non-Navajos.

Chapters 8, 9, & 10

Chapters 8, 9, & 10 Summary

Chapter 8 begins with Thatcher picking up Leaphorn, and the two travel to southern Utah to meet a well-known landowner and former politician, Harrison Houk. Upon meeting, both Leaphorn and Houk remember their last meeting nearly twenty years earlier. Leaphorn had assisted Houk during a time of tragedy.

During the meeting with Harrison Houk, Leaphorn and Thatcher ask many questions related to Dr. Friedman-Bernal's disappearance. In addition to large land holdings, Harrison Houk is also a dealer in valuable Native American artifacts. He has recently sold a pot matching the description of one studied by Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Houk patiently answers all questions and assures the officers that the pot was obtained legally. Leaphorn learns a few new details that he will have to verify later.

In Chapter 9, Leaphorn and Chee meet for their re-inspection of the murder scene. During the investigation of the details they discuss the particulars of the case and other aspects of the murder scene, an Anasazi archeological site. Leaphorn mentions St. John's Polychrome, a type of pottery that Dr. Friedman-Bernal studied, and the two agree that there seems to be much overlap between the missing person case and the murders. The two officers find two aspects of the crime scene peculiar. First, many jawbones have been removed from the gravesite and placed in a row. Also, Chee notices that one plastic bag out of a box of plastic bags is missing. At the conclusion of their re-investigation of the crime scene, the two officers agree to visit Chaco Culture National Historical Park once again in an attempt to clarify the relationship between the murders and the missing person case.

In Chapter 10, Leaphorn and Chee meet the Luna family at Chaco Culture National Historical Park. During dinner Bob Luna, the park superintendent, and his wife are able to answer many questions about the character and habits of Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Mrs. Luna tells the officers that Dr. Friedman-Bernal recently took a trip to New York, and that Randall Elliot recently took a trip to Washington, D.C. The Luna's children are also able to provide important information, most notably the fact that Dr. Friedman-Bernal owned a saddle.

Chapters 8, 9, & 10 Analysis

Chapter 8 shows that the interaction between Leaphorn and Houk twenty years earlier has left a deep impression on Houk. Houk believes that Leaphorn was the only calm and rational officer present after a tragic incident when Houk's mentally impaired son killed Houk's wife and other children. Houk believes Leaphorn tried to save Houk's son, and he still feels indebted.

In Chapter 9, during the examination of the crime scene details, Leaphorn asks Chee what he studied while a student at the University of New Mexico. Chee studied anthropology, just like Leaphorn had done at Arizona State University. This revelation further reinforces the notion that in many ways Chee is a younger version of Leaphorn. Also during this time, Chee and Leaphorn notice a few oddities that may have an impact on the cases. They notice that one of the plastic bags left at the scene is missing. And perhaps even more significant, they notice that someone has lined up a number of jawbones.

Chapter 10 deepens the mystery surrounding the whereabouts of Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Leaphorn had already seen evidence, the prepared dinner, that Dr. Friedman-Bernal hadn't planned on being away long, but in this visit with the Luna family Leaphorn learns that she took along items, such as the saddle, that indicate she was not planning on spending a weekend in town as she had told her friends.

Also of significance is the information the officers learn about the nature of the relationship between Maxie Davis and Randall Elliot. Elliot's obsession with Davis is more serious than Leaphorn might have originally thought. He learns that Elliot traveled to study in the Southwest to be near Davis. He also learns that Davis's feelings toward Elliot can be described as contempt.

Both Chapters 9 and 10 marks an important point in the plot because they are the only time thus far that Chee and Leaphorn have been in the same physical location for a prolonged amount of time. Previously they had worked on their cases independently and in different locations. During this time Leaphorn and Chee realize that their cases are certainly intertwined.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Harrison Houk thinks about all of the things he has learned from Leaphorn and Chee's visit. While he is pondering the matter, he sees a car nearing his house. When he notices the car, Houk immediately knows that he is in danger. The car is still far away because Houk's property is so large. He writes a note for his domestic servant, telling her that he will be in the barn when she arrives. And then he goes to the barn to try to find a hiding place. He moves bales of hay in an effort to create a hole where he can hide. Houk doesn't finish building the hiding places. He stops and thinks. Rather than continuing to try to hide, Houk instead decides to accept the danger but to leave a clue for the police. He hurriedly writes a note. So that the arriving person will not find the note he shoves it into his pants.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The most significant element of this short chapter is the revelation and confirmation that the danger is real and there are no coincidences between the existing murder cases and the disappearance of Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Because Houk chooses to write a note instead of finding a hiding place, we are left with the impression that Houk believes his death is certain.

This chapter is one of only two chapters not presented from the point of view of Joe Leaphorn or Jim Chee. The other chapter was the first chapter told from the perspective of Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Both Chapter 1 and this chapter end with the characters fearing danger.

Chapters 12 & 13

Chapters 12 & 13 Summary

In Chapter 12, Joe Leaphorn travels to New York to interview people in the business of buying and selling pots of the sort that Dr. Friedman-Bernal studies. His first visit is to Nelson's, a company that auctions valuable pots, including the one that Harrison Houk sold and Dr. Friedman wanted to study. The auction house personnel, particularly the female director of public affairs, are resistant at first, saying that they must protect the identity of their buyers. When Leaphorn is nearly ready to give up and acknowledge that the trip to New York has been for nothing, he mentions that Dr. Friedman-Bernal is missing. In fact she vanished "as if Eleanor Friedman-Bernal never existed." The auction stance of the director of public affairs softens, and she gives Leaphorn a name and address of the collector who bought the pot Harrison Houk sold.

Leaphorn travels to the residence of a wealthy art collector named Richard DuMont. DuMont purchased the pot that Harrison Houk sold and Dr. Friedman had wanted to study. Leaphorn hopes that DuMont will allow inspection of the pot, all accompanying documents, and answer questions. But DuMont seems more interested in playing games. DuMont says that he will not answer any questions until Leaphorn first tells all he knows so that DuMont can share the story when he shows his friends the pot. DuMont takes a macabre fascination in the tale of the murders and the missing anthropologist. In fact he seems delighted with the tales of violence and death.

After Leaphorn recounts the story of the pot and the murders, DuMont allows Leaphorn to read the document that came with the pot. Leaphorn believes the location where the pot was discovered had been falsified, and DuMont says that Dr. Friedman-Bernal said the same thing. Surprised, Leaphorn asks if DuMont met Dr. Friedman-Bernal, and DuMont says that the anthropologist came to his house just as Leaphorn has done with many of the same questions. He says that she sat in the same chair where Leaphorn sits, and he questions his servant about whether she drank from the same coffee cup.

In Chapter 13, Jim Chee continues the investigation in the Four Corners region while Joe Leaphorn is away in New York. Chee's first task is to track down Slick Nakai, but this is not easy because for some unknown reason Nakai has cancelled his scheduled revivals. Chee covers hundreds of miles looking for Nakai. At one of Chee's stops on the trail of Nakai he has to exchange flirtatious banter with a young woman in order to get information. The woman finally tells Chee that Nakai had been there not long before, and she overheard him making a phone call. She heard Nakai tell the person on the other end of the phone that he was worried, to be careful, and that something was "over in Utah."

When Chee resumes driving in his search for Nakai, he listens to the news on the radio. A news story says that Harrison Houk has been shot to death. Chee thinks Nakai must have learned that Houk had been killed, and feared that he might also be in danger

since he sold pots to Houk. Perhaps Nakai had called to warn someone else to be careful. Chee spots Nakai's trailer abandoned on the side of the highway. Farther along the highway Chee sees Nakai's vehicle, and Nakai is there too. Nakai had known that he was about to run out of gas, and so he had unhitched his trailer hoping his car would use less gas without towing the heavy load. Nakai still ran out of gas before reaching his destination.

Chee asks Nakai some questions and then drives him to the dwelling, a hogan, of one of Nakai's relatives. Nakai's relative, Amos Whistler, tells Chee of the location where the pot Harrison Houk sold came from. Whistler gives Chee directions to the remote location, but Whistler says he cannot guide Chee there because Whistler is afraid to ever return. Whistler says he is now a Christian and does not believe in many of the Navajo spirits, but he will not return to the canyon where the pot was found. Despite being a Christian, and despite not believing in Navajo spirits, Amos Whistler will not return to the canyon because he says, "I heard the Watersprinkler playing his flute."

Chapters 12 & 13 Analysis

When Leaphorn learns that Dr. Friedman-Bernal was so interested in the pot Houk sold that she traveled to New York to speak to the collector, he understands that a key to the mystery must involve the location where the pot was found.

In addition to the unfolding action that seems to raise as many questions as answers, we continue to learn more about the character of Leaphorn in Chapter 12. Even in New York, a world away from the Navajo Reservation, he thinks of his recently departed wife.

Chapter 13 reveals the outcome of Harrison Houk that had been left pending since the ending of Chapter 11. When Chee hears the new report of Houk's death on the radio, he instantly knows the incident is connected to his case, and it makes his quest to find Slick Nakai even more imperative.

The end of the chapter shows once again the power of traditional beliefs to the Native Americans of the region. Though Amos Whistler claims to be a Christian and no longer a believer in Navajo spirits, he will not risk a trip to the Canyon where he believes he once heard the Watersprinkler playing his flute.

Chapters 14 & 15

Chapters 14 & 15 Summary

Chapter 14 begins with Leaphorn on the return flight to the southwest. He thinks about what little he learned in New York, and he wonders what Chee has learned in his absence. Leaphorn thinks about Chee as a person. He believes Chee is too much of a romantic, too much of a dreamer, for police work. Leaphorn believes that Chee is foolish to try to stick to the old Navajo ways because, according to Leaphorn's way of thinking, the entire Navajo population cannot survive without adopting modern ways.

The following morning Leaphorn awakes at his residence in Window Rock, and during breakfast he receives a telephone call informing him that a police officer from Utah has come to meet with him about a recent homicide. On the way to police headquarters to meet the policeman from Utah, Leaphorn assumes that someone had found Dr. Friedman's body.

When Leaphorn arrives at police headquarters and meets with the policeman from Utah, he learns that Harrison Houk has been murdered, and before being killed Houk left a note for Leaphorn. The note reads: "Tell Leaphorn she's still alive up"

The police speculate about whom "she" refers to, and they agree that it is likely Dr. Friedman-Bernal. They have no suspects for the murder of Houk. Two .25 caliber casings had been found near Houk's body, so the police conclude that if the "she" refers to Dr. Friedman-Bernal, she might be a suspect in the murder.

Leaphorn calls Chee on the telephone. The two discuss their ideas on the likely origin of the pot that seems to be at the center of the murders and reason for Dr. Friedman-Bernal's disappearance. Leaphorn instructs Chee to call the police in Madison, Wisconsin to see if Dr. Friedman-Bernal registered a handgun. Leaphorn tells Chee that even if she didn't register it in Wisconsin she might have registered it in one of the many other places she lived.

While Leaphorn is in his office at police headquarters, his superior stops by and asks Leaphorn if he would like to withdraw his letter of resignation. Leaphorn declines. After leaving the police station, Leaphorn meets again with the officer from Utah, and then Leaphorn goes to his home to get his gun.

Chapter 15 begins with Jim Chee calling the Madison Police Department. He learns that Dr. Friedman-Bernal was the registered owner of a .25 caliber pistol. He then makes another telephone call and learns that a .25 caliber firearm was used to kill the two victims he discovered with the stolen backhoe. Chee asks the person on the other end of the phone to inform the people, including Maxie Davis and Randall Elliot, at Chaco Culture National Historical Park that Dr. Friedman-Bernal may still be alive.



While waiting for additional instructions from Leaphorn, Chee receives a call from Janet Pete and agrees to meet her for lunch. Over lunch, the two talk about their recent failed relationships, and Pete begins to cry. After she regains her composure, the two change the subject to Chee's current investigation. When Pete hears that much of the case involves archeological sites, she informs Chee that permits to excavate sites are recorded. This gives the two the idea to check to see if Dr. Friedman-Bernal had permits.

When Chee calls the office that administers digging permits, he learns that Dr. Friedman-Bernal did not request a permit to dig at the site where the pot sold by Harrison Houk was found. But Randall Elliot did, and his application was rejected. At the close of the chapter, Chee wishes he had thought to ask whether Elliot had also requested a permit to dig at the site where the backhoe and murder victims were found.

Before Janet Pete drives away, she apologizes to Chee for her earlier display of emotion. Chee says he is happy she called on him, and she hugs Chee. Chee then suggests that perhaps Janet Pete should consider becoming romantically involved with him. As Janet Pete drives away she has started crying again, and Chee regrets his suggestion.

Chapters 14 & 15 Analysis

The opening of Chapter 14 contains a full picture of Leaphorn's thoughts in Jim Chee. Previously it has been unclear to what degree the two men liked each other. Leaphorn believes that Chee's weakness is that he is too much of "a romantic" and a dreamer. Chee believes in preserving the traditional Navajo ways, as shown through his training to be a hatathali. Leaphorn believes that for the Navajo to succeed in the modern world the Navajo must adopt modern ways.

After Leaphorn learns that Harrison Houk has been killed and that Houk left a message saying that Dr. Friedman-Bernal is still alive, it is unclear if Leaphorn believes, as the other police do, that Dr. Friedman-Bernal might be the murderer.

In Chapter 15, while Jim Chee and Janet Pete have lunch, their conversation turns again to the subject of romantic relationships between Native Americans and whites. Both Chee and Janet Pete seem to believe that the primary cause for the failure of their past relationships can be attributed to dating non-Navajos. The fact that Janet Pete, a fellow Navajo, was able to help Chee in his investigation seems to reinforce the idea that Chee and Pete might be happier dating members of their own tribe. However, when Chee makes this suggestion and Pete does not react as he hoped, we are reminded that in matters of a romantic nature, nothing is ever simple.

Chapters 16 & 17

Chapters 16 & 17 Summary

The fact that Dr. Friedman-Bernal packed a saddle on the day she disappeared has led Leaphorn back to Bluff, Utah. His first intention is to meet with the person that lent the saddle to Dr. Friedman-Bernal. Leaphorn meets Dr. Arnold, a friendly man who says that he lent Dr. Friedman-Bernal the saddle some time ago, but she had returned it weeks ago and taken Arnold's kayak while he was away from home. Arnold says that Dr. Friedman-Bernal exchanged the saddle for the kayak nearly month prior.

During his visit with Dr. Arnold, Leaphorn learns that Dr. Friedman-Bernal often borrowed the kayak and requested that Arnold meet her and the kayak with his car at a specific location on the river. After meeting with Dr. Arnold, Leaphorn travels to the residence of the late Harrison Houk.

When Leaphorn arrives at the late Harrison Houk's residence, he notices that a kayak is present in the barn where Houk had been murdered. The kayak still has water inside it, and Leaphorn knows it must have been in the river not long ago, or the water would have evaporated in the dry climate of southern Utah. Leaphorn asks the woman that takes care of Houk's house if she will take him and the kayak to the river and meet them at a specific location the following day.

Chapter 17 begins with Jim Chee trying to discover if Randall Elliot had applied for a permit to dig at the site of the stolen backhoe and murders. He learns that Elliot had applied but that his application had been rejected. Chee decides to travel to Chaco Culture National Historical Park to speak to Elliot directly. Chee gets directions from the park headquarters to the location where Elliot is supposed to be working. A man at the site says that Elliot never arrived.

Chee goes to Elliot's apartment, and though he does not find Elliot, he makes some startling discoveries. First Chee notices a collection of jawbones just like the ones he noticed at the site of the stolen backhoe and the double murder. Then he notices a plastic bag that is exactly like the one missing from the murder scene. Chee uses the telephone in Elliot's apartment to call Mrs. Luna.

Chee wants to know about a trip Elliot claimed to have taken weeks earlier. Mrs. Luna gives Chee the name of Elliot's travel agency. The travel agency tells Chee that Elliot paid for tickets to Washington, D.C. but never picked up the tickets. Chee calls Mrs. Luna again and asks if anyone from law enforcement had recently come to inform the people at Chaco that Dr. Friedman-Bernal might still be alive. She says that a deputy came, and Randal Elliot was present when the deputy told her and her husband.

After driving away from Elliot's apartment, Chee has an idea and stops at a payphone. He calls the nearest airport that rents helicopters. Chee discovers that Elliot had rented

a helicopter earlier in the day. Chee asks if another helicopter and pilot are available. After reaching the airport and waiting for the pilot to arrive, Chee telephones police headquarters and learns that Leaphorn did not arrive at the location where he had asked to be met on the river.

Chapters 16 & 17 Analysis

In Chapter 16, all clues increasingly point to the unknown and unnamed location where the recently sold pot was found. When Leaphorn sees that Houk's kayak is still wet so soon after learning that Dr. Friedman-Bernal borrowed a kayak, he has no choice but to follow the lead and take a journey down the river. This journey provides yet another opportunity for the author to describe the scenic grandeur of the Four Corners region.

Chapter 17 is the last time the point of view shifts away from Joe Leaphorn. In this chapter Jim Chee makes a series of discoveries and connections that seem to implicate Randall Elliot in all areas of the case. In this chapter Jim Chee demonstrates that he has matured from the unlucky officer of the beginning of the novel to a competent investigator worthy of Leaphorn's respect.

It is notable that respect is something Chee desires. Before Chee embarks on the journey that reveals so many clues to the investigation, he admits to himself that a significant part of his motivation is the desire for praise from Leaphorn.

Chapter 18 & 19

Chapter 18 & 19 Summary

In the beginning of Chapter 18, Leaphorn paddles down the river in Houk's kayak. Before he finds where he thinks Dr. Friedman-Bernal most likely landed, the sun sets. Leaphorn continues to drift down the river in the dark. Using his flashlight he finds the spot where he believes Dr. Friedman-Bernal left the river. As he drags the kayak out of the river, Leaphorn gets wet, and he is in danger of suffering from hypothermia because of the cold winter temperatures. Leaphorn manages to light a fire.

After he warms himself and dries his clothes, Leaphorn searches the area and discovers the kayak Dr. Friedman-Bernal used. He returns to his fire and sleeps until dawn before he sets off in search of Dr. Friedman-Bernal. After dawn Leaphorn finds a set of Dr. Friedman-Bernal's footprints, and he follows them. Along the way he also finds evidence that this is a place that Harrison Houk often comes.

Leaphorn continues to follow the trail left by Dr. Friedman-Bernal and Harrison Houk. Along the way he sees many of the same sights described in Chapter 1, including the distinctive pictographs. At the last place described in Chapter 1, Leaphorn sees the same location with the tethered frogs. Leaphorn speculates that Harrison Houk's mentally ill son who had been presumed dead twenty years ago might not have died. Perhaps he has been hiding all this time, and Harrison Houk has been coming to visit him.

While Leaphorn investigates the location, he notices that an Anasazi gravesite has been plundered, and one of the most notable things Leaphorn sees is that several jawbones have been removed from the grave and set aside. This reminds Leaphorn of the murder site with the stolen backhoe. Leaphorn climbs a ridge in search of evidence relating to Dr. Friedman-Bernal's whereabouts. When he reaches the top he sees a man who calmly says to him, "Mr. Leaphorn, Papa said you coming."

Chapter 19 begins with Brigham Houk showing Leaphorn where Dr. Friedman-Bernal is laying severely injured. Leaphorn asks Brigham to explain what happened, and though Brigham is mentally ill and speaks of devils and souls and other nonsensical things, Leaphorn is able to understand what happened. On the night Dr. Bernal arrived at the site and saw evidence of grave robbing, she heard Brigham playing his flute, and she ran away. The next day she returned and saw Randall Elliot looting the gravesite. Elliot beat Dr. Friedman-Bernal and pushed her off a cliff into a canyon. She broke many bones, and was near death, but Brigham carried her out of the canyon and placed her on a bed he made from leaves. He has been tending her ever since.

Leaphorn explains that in order for Dr. Friedman-Bernal to live the two men must carry her out of the wilderness and get her to a hospital. Brigham is hesitant at first, but then he says that his father had told him that Leaphorn would come, and Leaphorn is



someone Brigham can trust. Leaphorn asks Brigham to find two poles so they can make a stretcher for carrying Dr. Friedman-Bernal. While Brigham is away searching for poles, Leaphorn hears the sound of a helicopter. He rushes out into the open hoping to attract the helicopter so Dr. Friedman-Bernal can be flown out rather than carried five miles back down to the river. But when Leaphorn looks to the sky he cannot see or hear the helicopter any longer.

While Leaphorn thinks about how long it will take to carry Dr. Friedman-Bernal down to the river, and how long it will take to float downriver to a landing site, and how long it will take medical attention to reach the landing site, Randall Elliot appears and greets Leaphorn. Elliot claims he just remembered that Dr. Friedman-Bernal had spoken of this site, and while he was flying overhead he saw Leaphorn. Leaphorn seems grateful for Elliot's help, and the two begin to carry Dr. Friedman-Bernal up the rim of the mesa.

While the two men carry Dr. Friedman-Bernal, Leaphorn thinks. He realizes that Elliot probably came to kill Dr. Friedman-Bernal after hearing that he had failed in killing her the first time. Now he also realizes that Elliot probably intends to kill him too. While the two men take a break, Elliot pulls a small .25 caliber pistol out of his pocket and tells Leaphorn to unbuckle his gun belt and surrender his gun. Leaphorn complies.

Elliot plans to force Leaphorn to fall off a cliff so his death will look accidental. Leaphorn wonders where Brigham is and thinks that intervention from Brigham might be his only chance. In order to stall Elliot, Leaphorn engages him in conversation. Because Elliot believes Leaphorn is about to die, he speaks with candor. Elliot admits that his motive for all of the violence and killings was in order to make a great anthropological discovery, and he admits that he wanted to make the discovery in order to impress Maxie Davis. While Elliot speaks, almost boasting, he stops in mid-sentence. Leaphorn looks at Elliot and sees that he has been shot with an arrow. A second later he is shot with another arrow.

Leaphorn looks around for Brigham and sees him not far away holding a bow. Then Leaphorn hears the sound of a helicopter. Brigham hears it too and flees. When the helicopter emerges over the rim of the mesa, Leaphorn waves.

Leaphorn checks to see if Elliot has a pulse, but can't detect one. He drags Elliot's body near a large rock. Leaphorn then extracts the arrows, breaks them, and hides them in his pocket. Quickly he covers Elliot's body with branches. Leaphorn thinks that soon the coyotes will find Elliot's body and eliminate the evidence.

Leaphorn hears someone approaching and is surprised to see Jim Chee. Leaphorn points to the stretcher containing Dr. Friedman-Bernal, but before the two men begin carrying the stretcher, Leaphorn asks Chee what he saw from the air. Chee states that all he saw was Leaphorn standing near a man he supposed to be Elliot.

While Chee and Leaphorn ride in the helicopter with Dr. Friedman-Bernal, Leaphorn thinks that by the time the officials return to look for Elliot the coyotes will have already eaten all but the bones, and the evidence of arrow wounds will have been eliminated.

Leaphorn also decides that he will take back his letter of resignation and find some way to care for Brigham Houk. The motion of the helicopter makes Leaphorn feel ill, and he asks Chee to sing a curing song for him.

Chapter 18 & 19 Analysis

Chapter 18 brings the reader back to the scene of the first chapter. Joe Leaphorn sees, in daylight, all of the strange appearances Dr. Friedman-Bernal saw at night. And this abundance of detail, even down to the tethered frogs, serves to increase the tension.

Unlike other chapters that shifted from the point of view of Leaphorn to the perspective of Chee and sometimes backtracking in time, Chapter 19 remains in Leaphorn's point of view and it continues immediately from Chapter 18. All of the remaining mysteries are answered in Chapter 19.

Chapter 19 also provides personal resolution for the two main characters. Jim Chee has earned the respect from Leaphorn that he desires. And Leaphorn has even come to reconsider his earlier thoughts about Chee's traditional Navajo beliefs. Perhaps most significant in regard to Joe Leaphorn is his decision to remain a police officer. And while he cannot entirely fill the void left by his wife's recent death, he now has another person, Brigham Houk, to care for.

Characters

Joe Leaphorn

This character is the protagonist. Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn is on "terminal leave" from his job of many years from the Navajo Tribal Police. When his leave is finished, Leaphorn will have retired from the police force. Shortly before the novel began, Leaphorn's wife of many years died. He has been feeling the shock and loss ever since, and many believe his decision to retire is a result of his depression over losing his wife. Leaphorn himself says that he is merely tired, that he has difficulty finding police work interesting anymore.

Earlier in his life Leaphorn left the reservation to study anthropology at Arizona State University, and he earned a master's degree. Leaphorn had plans to pursue a doctorate in anthropology, but he met the woman he later married. To be closer to his future wife, Emma, Leaphorn returned to the reservation and joined the police force.

Though born and raised on the reservation, Leaphorn does not believe in most of the traditional religious ideas of the Navajo. He takes a detached analytical approach to his job, and that is perhaps a result of his university training.

Leaphorn still lives in the home that his wife and he shared for many years. This understandably is difficult for him and may in part explain why he is willing to take on a missing person case while he is on leave.

Jim Chee

This character can be thought of as a secondary protagonist in that he often acts alone on a parallel path to the main character, Joe Leaphorn. Chee is an officer of the Navajo Tribal Police, but unlike Joe Leaphorn who is older and of a higher rank in the police force, Chee has not rejected all of the traditional beliefs of the Navajo people. In fact, Chee is studying to be a hatathali, or Navajo singer of curing ceremonies.

Chee's traditional beliefs are often at odds with his duties as a police officer. For instance, like other Navajo Chee believes that it is unhealthy to be near corpses or where death has occurred. This belief causes Chee a significant amount of discomfort when he has to conduct police work at a murder scene.

In some ways, Chee is like a young Joe Leaphorn. Like Leaphorn studied at Arizona State University, Chee studied at the University of New Mexico. Though not as devastating as Leaphorn's loss of his wife, Chee has experienced a recent loss when his girlfriend moved away. Chee admires Leaphorn's experience and wisdom at police work and seeks Leaphorn's approval. While Leaphorn has a nice home he and his wife acquired over time, Chee is younger and less financially stable. He lives in a trailer with no telephone.



Though he has the choice not to be assigned to Leaphorn's missing person's case, Chee agrees to help even though he at times feels intimidated by Leaphorn's impressive reputation and skills.

Randall Elliot

Though he appears in only a few chapters, Elliot is a significant character. In fact, he turns out to be the villain, the character behind all the murders and the disappearance of Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal.

Elliot came from a wealthy and privileged background. He attended Phillips Exeter Academy, Princeton, and Harvard. During the Vietnam War he joined the Navy, and his powerful family connections ensured that he became an officer and flew helicopters. Elliot is in love with Maxie Davis, an archeologist from a poor background. Davis had to work hard for her education, and she is not impressed by Elliot's background of privilege and wealth.

To win the affections of Maxie Davis, Elliot decides he must make a huge discovery in the field of archeology even if he has to break the law. His plan leads to serious crimes including grave robbing and murder.

Harrison Houk

Harrison Houk is a well-known person in the Four Corners region. He is a wealthy landowner and former politician. Houk has also gained a reputation for less than ethical business dealings. His tough persona is tempered by the affection he feels toward his mentally ill son, Brigham. Despite a horrendous tragedy where Brigham killed his mother and all of Houk's other children, Harrison Houk still loves his son. And despite many years of having to rely solely on himself, Houk still has the capacity to trust, as shown in the confidence he places in Joe Leaphorn.

Maxie Davis

Maxie Davis is an archeologist and colleague of both Randall Elliot and Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal. She is also the object of Elliot's affection, but she has little respect for Elliot who she believes never had to work for any of his professional accomplishments. Maxie Davis is described as a beautiful woman and a brilliant scholar.

Janet Pete

Janet Pete is a lawyer for tribal legal services. She has recently ended a relationship with a successful attorney, and she confides in Jim Chee because he has also recently ended a relationship. Like Chee, Janet Pete is a Navajo who failed in a romantic

relationship with a non-Navajo. Though never explicitly stated, it seems that Janet Pete has a reciprocal attraction to Jim Chee.

L.D. Thatcher

Thatcher is an officer with the Bureau of Land Management. He is a close friend of Joe Leaphorn, and he asks for Leaphorn's assistance in investigating a case of violation of the Antiquities Preservation Protection Act.

Slick Nakai

This character travels around the Four Corners region performing religious tent revival meetings. He is regarded as a charlatan by many, but most also agree that he is a likable person. Because he comes in contact with so many people in the region, law enforcement officials discover that he can often provide useful information.

Bob Luna

This character is the superintendent of the Chaco Culture National Historical Park. When Leaphorn and Chee arrive to ask questions, he invites them to have dinner with his family.

Mrs. Luna

This character is the wife of the Chaco Culture National Historical Park superintendent. She is very helpful in answering the questions of Leaphorn and Chee.

Brigham Houk

Brigham is the son of Harrison Houk. Brigham was born mentally impaired, and when he was fourteen he killed his mother and siblings.

Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal

Though she appears only in the first and last chapter, the entire novel centers on the disappearance of this anthropologist who studies Anasazi ceramics.

Objects/Places

Four Corners

This is the area near where the states of Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico converge. This is the physical setting of the book, and the location of the Navajo reservation. The Four Corners region is noted for its barren beauty.

Anasazi

The Anasazi were an ancient culture that inhabited the American Southwest. Many anthropologists believe the Anasazi thrived in the Four Corners region from around 1200 B.C. until 1300 A.D. The Anasazi left behind thousands of dwelling sites, including impressive cliff dwellings, but no one today knows why the Anasazi abandoned these sites.

Pot Hunters

Pot hunters are people that illegally dig in archeological sites to find ceramic pots to sell to collectors. These people are also referred to as "thieves of time."

Chaco Culture National Historical Park

This national park is where many Anasazi archeological sites are found, and it is the residence of the novel's characters who are anthropologists and national park personnel.

Chindi

Chindi is a Navajo concept meaning ghost. Chindis contain the evil elements of a once living person. If a living person has contact with a chindi, the living person can become sick or even die.

The Checkerboard

The Checkerboard is the informal name given to an area of western New Mexico that is a patchwork mix of federal lands, private lands, and Native American reservation lands.

Hogan

A traditional Navajo dwelling. Hogans have a wooden frame and can have a circular, hexagonal, or octagonal shape.

Pictograph

A symbol or shape, such as the characters drawn on the sides of rock walls in this novel.

Hatathali

A "singer of the blessing way." This is a traditional Navajo person who sings curing songs.

Backhoe

A large self-propelled earth moving machine, typically with a bulldozer blade in the front and an arm and bucket attachment for digging at the back. One of these machines is stolen in the novel and plays an important part in the mystery.

Themes

Loss and Grief

The two main characters and some of the minor ones have experienced the loss of a loved one, and the resulting grief influences their thoughts and actions. Aside from the primary element of mystery in the novel, the story can be thought of as a tale about how to cope with loss and find new meaning and worthy pursuits.

Joe Leaphorn has lost his wife of many years. Though she died in the hospital, her departure was unexpected. Thoughts of his departed wife color Leaphorn's every perception no matter the context. The most seemingly unrelated things make Leaphorn think of Emma. With her passing Leaphorn has lost all interest in life, and regaining this interest is his primary struggle. Leaphorn has to find a reason to want to live.

To a lesser degree the characters Jim Chee and Janet Pete have also experienced a loss, and they must endure and cope. Both have recently had failed romantic relationships, and both are unsure how to proceed with the rest of their lives in terms of career and personal areas.

Often when trying to console others, some well-meaning person will say that there is some person in the world who has experienced a greater loss. This statement is especially true when the character Harrison Houk is considered. Harrison Houk lost his entire family in a tragic and horrific episode of violence enacted by a loved one. Harrison Houk perseveres, though we don't understand how until late in the novel.

Tradition vs. the Modern World

The juxtaposition of the modern and the traditional is present throughout the novel, and it is perhaps most noticeable in the two main characters.

Joe Leaphorn is a Navajo. He understands traditional Navajo ways and thinking because he has been exposed to them for his entire life. However, Leaphorn has also been exposed to modern practices and ideas. Leaphorn is educated. In fact, he had intended to be a professional academic until he met his future wife Emma and decided to return to the reservation. Leaphorn rejects the traditional ideas, especially those of a spiritual nature. He prefers the science of his university training and his career as a law enforcement officer. Leaphorn believes the traditional Navajo ways are completely incompatible with the modern world.

Jim Chee is also a Navajo, and like Leaphorn he also university educated. But unlike Leaphorn, Chee has not turned away from all traditional ideas. In fact, he studies to be a hatathali, or singer of curing ceremonies. To Chee, the traditional and modern are not totally incompatible.

These two positions as exemplified by the two characters are at odds throughout the novel. By the end of the novel one of the two characters softens his stance.

Age and Wisdom vs. Youth and Enthusiasm

The two main characters exhibit an age-old struggle, the young versus the old.

Joe Leaphorn is an accomplished law enforcement officer. He has had a long and acclaimed career, and he has attained near legendary status in the Navajo Tribal Police. His every action exudes a sense of confidence. He thinks before he acts. While he is capable of definitive action, Joe Leaphorn is never impulsive. He has had a wife, a home, and a successful career. Joe Leaphorn is worthy of emulation.

Jim Chee, just starting out in his law enforcement career, is subject to all the characteristics of youth. Often he finds himself in awkward situations after an ill-conceived decision. He second-guesses himself constantly. Chee lives in a trailer more suitable for temporary lodging than permanent residence. He has no telephone and very meager assets. Jim Chee has very little besides a desire to achieve and a need for approval by those he admires. And while he does at times resent the authority of figures like Joe Leaphorn, he also admires and wants to imitate.

This theme as illustrated by the two main characters also has a touch of irony. Generally it is the elders who favor tradition and the youth who crave innovation. But in this case it is the mature Leaphorn who seeks a break with tradition and the youthful Chee who strives to retain tradition.

Style

Point of View

The point of view is always third person omniscient, and it comes from the perspectives of multiple characters. Most frequently the perspective is that of one of the two main characters, Joe Leaphorn and Jim Chee. There are two notable exceptions. In Chapter 1 the point of view comes from the perspective and Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal, and this is one of only two times she is physically present in the novel and the only time she is coherent. The second example came in Chapter 11, and the point of view comes from the perspective of Harrison Houk immediately before his death.

Regardless of the character focus, the narrator remains omniscient with that particular character. Often as much or more information comes from the thoughts of the character as from the unfolding action. For example, Joe Leaphorn or any other character rarely speaks of his recently deceased wife, yet we know so much about her because the narrator accesses Leaphorn's thoughts. And this access to a character's internal views seems to be seamless with external reality, so much so that exposition is accomplished without an intrusive and tedious break from the linear progression of the novel.

This shifting point of view and particularly the ability of the narrator to access primary characters' thoughts accomplishes much. We the readers are more sympathetic to the characters, and we get a greater sense of suspense and anxiety when those characters are in peril.

Setting

Setting plays a crucial role in the novel. In fact the setting is almost a character itself. From the author's detailed and vivid description of the Four Corners region we understand that so much of the story is determined by the harsh and unforgiving, yet austere beautiful, desert. This story could not have taken place in any other environment.

In the richly detailed descriptions of the Anasazi sites the reader gets the impression that the unseen Anasazi are present and all outcomes depend on Anasazi rules. The conventions of the urban world are suspended in this magical and dangerous place.

Perhaps one of the most striking features of the setting is the vast amount of distance a character must cover to accomplish the most seemingly simple task. With the telephone service unreliable the characters must often travel hundreds of miles to accomplish what the rest of us in the more or less urban part of the country can do by picking up a telephone or voyaging merely a few blocks.

Just when the reader might begin to feel accustomed to the unusual setting, midway through the book the author takes one of the two main characters on a trip to New York.

The urban setting is in stark contrast to the rural emptiness of the desert, and the character's delight at constant rain, the rain us readers so often complain about, gives us an understanding and perhaps appreciation of the circumstances of life in the desert.

Language and Meaning

The language is that of contemporary America, and there are very few, if any, peculiarities to the region. The language used by all characters is the same in the Four Corners region as the language used during the protagonist's trip to New York.

Despite the two main characters being in the field of law enforcement and many of the other characters being professional scholars and scientists, the language is that of the everyday person. While the thought process as revealed by the omniscient narrator is often methodical and analytical—as one would expect from a fine mystery story—the language is down-to-earth and easily understandable.

This use of everyday, everyman language makes the story more accessible and serves to draw the audience into the plot. The tension, the dangers, and the individual characters' emotions are all the more vivid through their depiction in our common manner of communication. Also, this language of common use seems to make the unfolding plot more "real." Rather than focus on the idiosyncrasies of wording, the reader is able to contemplate the implications of the events in the story.

Structure

The novel's structure is a significant element in the unfolding mystery. The structure enables the inclusion of dual protagonists and heightens the tension when switching between one character's perspective to another. It is almost as if the tale is by two different but compatible and parallel sources.

While the narration remains third person omniscient, it comes predominantly from each of the two main characters. Generally the author alternates characters and perspectives with chapters. This enables the author to backtrack and present each of the two main characters' stories without missing any details or holding up the unfolding action. When a chapter from the perspective of Leaphorn ends, a chapter from the perspective of Chee begins. This structure enables the alternating points of view. In fact, the point of view is dependent on the novel's parallel structure.

Three notable exceptions to this pattern exist in the novel. Chapter 1 comes from the perspective of Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal. Chapter 11 comes from the perspective of Harrison Houk. And the final two chapters stay within the perspective of Leaphorn rather than switch back and forth between Leaphorn and Chee. This last deviation from the usual pattern serves to keep the action unfolding in "real-time" and heightens the tension.

The dual, or parallel, structure almost makes this tale two stories in one.

Quotes

"It was more that Chee seemed to think an island of 180,000 Navajos could live the old way in a white ocean. Perhaps 20,000 of them could, if they were happy on mutton, cactus, and pinon nuts. Not practical. Navajos had to compete in the real word. The Navajo Way didn't teach competition."

Chapter 14, p. 147

"Why was he doing this on his day off? But he knew why. Much as Leaphorn irritated him, he wanted the man to pat him on the head. To say, 'Good job, kid.'"

Chapter 17, p. 177

"The reservation occupied more space than all of New England, but it had a population of no more than 150,000. In a lifetime of policing it, Leaphorn had met, in one way or another, a lot of its inhabitants."

Chapter 4, p. 49

"He had turned the bed ninety degrees so that his eyes would open in the morning to the shock of a different view. That broke his lifelong habit, the automatic waking thought of 'Where's Emma?' and what then followed."

Chapter 6, p. 63

"Trying to send money home to help Papa and the kids. Never any help for her. So she meets this many from old money, Exeter Academy, where tuition would have fed her family for two years. Where you have tutors helping you if you need it."

Chapter 10, p. 111

"If an Anasazi had risen from his thousand-year grave in the trash heap under the cliff ruins here, he would have seen the Humpbacked Flute Player, the rowdy god of fertility of his lost people. But the shadow was only the shape of Dr. Eleanor Friedman-Bernal blocking out the light of an October moon."

Chapter 1, p. 1

"For most of his life—since his early tens at least—knowing that he was smarter than most people had been a major source of satisfaction for Harrison Houk. Now, standing with his back pressed against the wall of the horse stall in the barn, he knew that for once he had not been smart enough."

Chapter 11, p. 114

"What will I do tonight when I am back in Window Rock? What will I do tomorrow? What will I do when this winter has come? And when it has gone? What will I ever do again?"

Chapter 2, p. 15

"When the rocks were hot enough and the fire had burned itself down to the coals, he covered the sweat bath frame with the tarp and slid under it. He squatted, signing the sweat bath songs that the Holy People had taught the first clans, the songs to force

contamination and sickness from the body."
Chapter 7, pp. 75-76

"This Zah is quite a comedian. He told me you'd think sneaking a big yellow backhoe out with one of my policemen watching would be like trying to sneak moonrise past a coyote."
Chapter 3, p. 32

"Jim Chee was a modern man built upon traditional Navajo. This was simply too much death. Too many ghosts disturbed."
Chapter 5, p. 62

"It was the same everywhere he looked. He should sell the house, or burn it. It was the tradition of the Dineh. Abandon the house contaminated by the ghost of the dead, lest the ghost sickness infect you, and you died. "
Chapter 4, p. 41

Topics for Discussion

At the end of the novel, Leaphorn asks Chee to sing a curing song. What might be Leaphorn's motive in this request? Has he completely reversed his thoughts on the value of traditional ways, or is he perhaps trying to show Chee that he appreciates the younger officer's superior police work?

Setting is an important element to any work of fiction. Is setting even more significant to this story. Could this mystery be set anywhere else, such as a densely populated urban environment?

At the beginning of the novel, Joe Leaphorn has submitted his resignation to the Navajo Tribal Police after the death of his wife. He has experienced a loss that seems to have profoundly changed his life. Is Joe Leaphorn the only character whose actions are guided by a sense of loss and feelings of grief? What sorts of losses have the other characters experienced, and how do those events guide their thoughts and actions?

Foreshadowing is an important element of fiction, and this is especially true in the mystery genre. Often effective foreshadowing is subtle and not immediately noticed. Were there times in this novel where foreshadowing was present but the reader didn't notice obvious clues until later in the story?

Often respect for tradition and those that have lived before is at odds with the modern world. In the case of the Anasazi archeological sites, how does modern realities, particularly opportunities for financial gain, affect some characters' abilities to remain respectful of these valuable historical sites?

Jim Chee and Janet Pete have recently ended relationships, and this similarity seems to draw them closer. What elements do each of these character's break-ups have in common, and how is this reflective of some larger themes in the novel, such as tradition vs. modernity?

Part of the enjoyment in reading a story in the mystery genre is in the reader's attempt to solve the case before the narrator reveals the culprits and ties up all loose ends. Is it possible in reviewing *A Thief of Time* to find specific revelations and points in the plot where the reader should have known all or much of the answers before Leaphorn (and Chee) solved the mystery?