

Chapter 1 : Review: The Whitefire Crossing by Courtney Schafer | Grimdark Magazine

"The Whitefire Crossing, the debut novel of Courtney Schafer, is an exciting adventure fantasy in a unique world Schafer does an phenomenal job of making you care about these characters." (Read the full review).

There is the anticipation of the climb, planning, some struggles, renewed energy and even joy. Then, after the last exciting push, you reach the top and find yourself staring at another peak, another book. The story starts with a heartbroken smuggler and extreme climber named Dev. To fulfill a promise made long ago he takes on a dangerous job he otherwise never would have. He must smuggle a man named Kiran over the Whitefire Mountains into Alathia and then betray him. He is on the run from a mage named Ruslan, who is willing to do whatever it takes to get Kiran back. The mountains are perilous enough, but with Ruslan close behind casting spells, the journey is that much more dangerous and suspenseful. Secrets are slowly revealed, plans are made and completed again and again, until the steady climb reaches its fulfilling, slightly grim conclusion. It is exciting, but I frequently found myself wishing more action would happen instead of continually reading about characters making plans for it. The story is told from two perspectives, one in first person and the other in third. When Kiran reveals something to Dev, it is a surprise for him but not for the reader. Instead there is a feeling of relief that the secret has finally been revealed. The relationship between Dev and Kiran is tense. They are both hiding too many things from each other, but as things progress they become closer. I especially enjoyed how Kiran had to learn from Dev how to climb and do hard labor during their crossing. The story world is like our own in some ways. Mages sit at the top of the social ladder: The worst of these are the blood mages, which is exactly who Dev finds himself in trouble with. Alathia is in some ways the opposite of Ninavel. Magic is prohibited there. The only people who are allowed to perform magic are the mages who control city. There is a large border surrounding the city, and anyone who tries to bring magic over the border is met with harsh punishment. Getting caught smuggling Kiran could mean death, for both of them. The Whitefire Crossing is an adventurous fantasy filled with magic and betrayal. While slow at times, it is an enjoyable read that will leave you wanting to go out and scale your own mountain. For lovers of grimdark, though, this is not the grim, gritty, action-filled story with unpredictable characters that we look for. Though Dev and Kiran have some moments of moral dilemma, they are still basically black and white. You can tell from the start who is good and who is evil. I look forward to climbing that mountain, hopefully with blood mages close behind.

Chapter 2 : The Big Idea: Courtney Schafer "Whatever

The Whitefire Crossing, the debut novel of Courtney Schafer, is an exciting adventure fantasy in a unique world. On its surface the plot is a simple one: Dev, a smuggler and talented climber, is in desperate need of cash and so takes on a dangerous mission to smuggle a person out of the city of Ninavel and into the country of Alathia.

The second book, *The Tainted City*, is due for release in October. As a smuggler who carries magical items into Alathia, a country where they are illegal, Dev is used to accepting jobs that could get him into big trouble if he were found out. When he is offered a job involving smuggling a young man named Kiran across the border into this same country, he has a feeling this job could be more trouble than most. After some initial trepidation, Dev agrees to get Kiran across the border " but he never imagined the scope of what he has actually gotten himself into. Kiran, a young mage, is trying to escape from Ruslan, an older and more powerful mage. As a known informant takes more and more interest in Kiran, both men become increasingly worried about their situation. *The Whitefire Crossing* is a very good fantasy debut that both moves at a brisk pace and introduces an interesting setting and characters. What does make it stand from the typical fantasy adventure is the way it is told from the perspective of two likable but flawed main characters and how it slowly reveals information about each of them over the course of the novel. It wastes no time getting to the heart of the story, as the first chapter begins with Dev being offered the job in which he has to smuggle Kiran across the Whitefire Mountains into Alathia. From there, the two have to traverse the dangerous Whitefire Mountains and avoid the wrath of Ruslan, the very powerful mage Kiran is running from. At the same time, the two face a lot of difficult choices in determining how much each can trust the other " and whether or not they are willing to pay the price in order to do what they believe to be right. Dev and Kiran are very different men both in personality and background, but they also both are faced with these similar defining moments in which they must choose what type of person they are going to be. Neither of them always make the choice that best reflects on his character, but each does have understandable motivations and is also capable of recognizing and trying to remedy his mistakes. The story is told by alternating between the perspective of Dev and Kiran, the two main characters. He loves the adrenalin of dangerous mountain climbing and he combines that with smuggling goods over the mountain to make his living. As is usual with characters with roguish qualities, he has a good heart, though. Kiran is more serious, a bit naive, and is more academic than athletic, although he does seem to be a quick learner when he has to ride horses and climb mountains. As Dev and Kiran travel toward Alathia, Kiran also has to hide his mage powers, both to keep Ruslan from sensing him and to keep Dev from realizing he wants nothing to do with aiding a man sought by such a powerful mage. In Ninavel, children are often born with some innate magical ability due to being in that area that goes away once children get older. Many aspects of the setting have potential to be interesting. For those who do not like books that end on cliffhangers, be forewarned that there is one at the end of this book. By the end, the fate of the two characters is left in a precarious spot that feels rather unsatisfying. It did a good job of putting the two in difficult positions that showed who they are, but it also never quite reached deeply examining their characters. I moved on to the next book without giving it much thought after I put it down. *The Whitefire Crossing* is a fun fantasy novel full of danger and adventure. It has a lot of focus on the two main characters, a potential friendship between them, the choices they made, and their pasts that was well done and enjoyable. Where I got my reading copy: Review copy from the publisher.

Chapter 3 : Courtney Schafer - The Whitefire Crossing

*The Whitefire Crossing: The Shattered Sigil, Book One [Courtney Schafer] on blog.quintoapp.com *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. Dev is a smuggler with the perfect cover. He's in high demand as a guide for the caravans that carry legitimate goods from the city of Ninavel into the country of Alathia.*

Sep 01, seak rated it really liked it Recommends it for: Those who want high magic use. Recommended to seak by: You may already know it, but the short version of this true story is that a guy on his way to Harvard and a hugely successful career decides to give up all his money and stuff and make his way to Alaska. When I walked out, all I wanted to do was go on one big, epic adventure meeting random people, learning how to survive on leaves and grass hehe and sky and rainbows. I think we ended up heading to Vegas a week later on a In , a good friend of mine took me to a movie called Into the Wild. I think we ended up heading to Vegas a week later on a sweet road trip, nothing too life-changing though. Now, this does have a point. When I finished The Whitefire Crossing, not only did I want to be able to wield sweet magical powers and amulets and charms and stuff, but I really wanted to go mountain climbing. Dev is a guide for caravans through the Whitefire mountains from Ninavel to the country of Alathia, but he also makes money on the side by smuggling. And by makes money on the side, I mean the side job is really guiding the caravans. You see, the country of Alathia is a highly restrictive place when it comes to magic and you can make good money smuggling charms and magical artifacts through the border. They head out on the first caravan of the season. The city of Ninavel, where the story begins, was founded to be place for magicians to practice freely and some are even really scary. There are charms for most things such as healing or hurting things, there are all types of magicians, including the worst of which, bloodmages, and the story involves magic constantly. I thought this was a bit odd at the beginning, but it proved to move the story along quite well and it worked, so who am I to say. Sometimes you need to be in a certain mood to jump into a book no matter how good it is. As you may have noticed, I really enjoyed myself with this one. The Whitefire Crossing is perfect if you want something straight-forward and fun, focused on only a few characters and filled with magic. Also, be ready to go on your own adventures, this may just be the incentive you need.

Chapter 4 : Courtney Schafer (Author of The Whitefire Crossing)

Courtney Schafer made a comment in the group Fantasy Buddy Reads " Courtney Schafer - The Whitefire Crossing Q&A topic " Gavin--thanks so much for the narrator recommendations. I will definitely check them out and see if I can get a feel for what to look for in a narrato Gavin--thanks so much for the narrator recommendations.

Unfortunately, prior commitments prevented me from reading it until now. Dev is a smuggler with the perfect cover. The route through the Whitefire Mountains is treacherous, and Dev is one of the few climbers who knows how to cross them safely. But smuggling a few charms is one thing; smuggling a person through the warded Alathian border is near suicidal. Having made a promise to a dying friend, Dev is forced to take on a singularly dangerous cargo: Yet the young mage is not the only one harboring a deadly secret. Caught up in a web of subterfuge and dark magic, Dev and Kiran must find a way to trust each other--or face not only their own destruction, but that of the entire city of Ninavel. The author is a mountaineering and rock climbing aficionado. Her enthusiasm for these activities permeates every single chapter of *The Whitefire Crossing*. Her passion is contagious, especially at the beginning of the novel. And yet, I feel that at times it got in the way of the storytelling. Nothing that could have a negative influence on the tale itself, but it occasionally became a distraction from the plot. Indeed, some plot twists are just an excuse for Schafer to have her characters go through another dangerous rock climbing interlude. Still, although it can prove to be a distraction, her enthusiasm for mountaineering and other hardcore activities is more a strength than a weakness. The better part of the worldbuilding has to do with the Whitefire mountain range. Her wealth of experience allows Courtney Schafer to make the perilous crossing come alive. I also enjoyed the few glimpses the author offered regarding Ninavel, a city controlled by mages of all ilks, and Alathia, a country where most magic is outlawed and which is warded by a magical barrier. I would have appreciated more information concerning blood mages, but I have a feeling those secrets will be unveiled in the forthcoming sequel. One thing is for sure: There is more depth than meets the eye in this novel. Dev is an outrider and a smuggler. Kiran is a blood mage willing to do anything to cross into Alathia to escape his demented master. Unaware of the truth, Dev has no idea how dangerous crossing the Whitefire Mountains and smuggling Kiran through the magical barrier protecting Alathia will turn out to be. Schafer also introduces their individual back story by increments, which allows her to flesh them out and elaborate on their motivations. The first portion of the tale is more or less solely about the mountain crossing. Revelations are made that make *The Whitefire Crossing* resound with more depth than I expected, unveiling a variety of possibilities for the rest of the series. The pace is a bit slow at the beginning, but as soon as it picks up the novel becomes quite a ride. Schafer proved that she had a few unexpected tricks up her sleeve, and she brings *The Whitefire Crossing* to a satisfying close. The kind of ending that all but forces you to read volume two! Whether or not *The Tainted City*, which should be released later this year, can live up to that potential remains to be seen. Canada , USA , Europe. Looks like Night Shade is putting out a lot of good books these days. Marc maine character said First heard of this book here, just finished it last week, and really enjoyed it.

Chapter 5 : Pat's Fantasy Hotlist: The Whitefire Crossing

The Whitefire Crossing - Excerpt Chapter One (Dev) I knew right from the moment I opened Bren's back room door this job was going to be trouble. See, here's how it should go: Bren, waiting, alone, with a package on the table and my advance payment in his hand.

Really enjoyed this and am looking forward to reading Tainted City. I was not disappointed. This is fantastic read. Characters are well-rounded, with depth and fire and flaws, the world-building has layers and twists and logic and the plot was believable and well-crafted. I highly recommend empress Jun 7, This is an intriguing first novel. The story begins simply, with Dev, a man who started on the streets, but became a mountain guide and smuggler when his talent for climbing was discovered. Desperate for money he agrees to smuggle a person, Kiran, across magically guarded borders, unaware that Kiran is a runaway apprentice mage. The stakes build quickly, because magic is a potent force in this world. Most people hope to simply avoid the attention of mages, unfortunately for Dev and Kiran that is not an option. There are many secrets between characters, and trust is tough to come by because of those secrets. Characters are believable, and strive to do good while realizing that they may have to settle for the lesser evil. I received this book as a free giveaway at ChiCon 7. Following some friendly correspondence with Ms. Schafer, a copy of The Whitefire Crossing showed up in my mailbox, complete with an encouraging personalized message in the front. So I packed it and brought it up with me. Cracked it open Thanksgiving Day, and was immediately hooked. Kiran is the man being smuggled. And magic is outlawed in Alathia The story is told in intriguing fashion: This is a book about relationships. Dev and his fellow outrider, Cara. Dev and his former mentor, Sethan. Kiran and his master, Ruslan. The book is the first in a series, with The Tainted City due in late This first entry more or less stands on its own, and comes to an acceptable if not entirely satisfactory conclusion. The future of the series depends on how well the first two books do, and they deserve to do quite well indeed. I went into this review having given the book a 3. This is a really good book.

Chapter 6 : Courtney Schafer - Summary of The Whitefire Crossing

Summary of The Whitefire Crossing (BEWARE SPOILERS!). Dev thinks his life is finally under control. After growing up as one of the city of Ninavel's infamous Tainted children, he survived the loss of his psychic power at puberty and forged a new life for himself as a mountain guide.

Bren, waiting, alone, with a package on the table and my advance payment in his hand. Simple and no surprises. So when I saw Bren, waiting, not alone, and no package on the table, I got a little twitchy. He was young, well-dressed, and nervous, which settled me somewhat as other possibilities became more likely. Maybe a younger son of a wealthy family, hock deep in gambling debts? Bren sometimes worked as a collector. Whatever the stranger was here for, I wanted no part of it. Bren caught my eye and motioned me in. Just the young man I was looking for! The brighter, harsher light from the faceted crystal sphere only highlighted the cracks in the adobe walls and the wax stains on the table. I took a few steps into the room but left the door open at my back. They never turn out well. Eventually, as Bren had known it would, my curiosity got the better of me. I still wanted to be near an exit. I told him you were the best, most discreet guide I know, and you know the mountains like nobody else. You can take him along on the usual run. The Alathians were strict as hell on magic, piling on all kinds of laws and regulations to try and stop people from using it except in the tame little ways approved by their Council. Human nature being what it is, that makes for a thriving trade in certain specialty items. Easy money as far as I was concerned, but smuggling a few illegal charms and wards was one thing. Smuggling a person was a whole different story. The pay is very generous. Gods all damn this city. Worse, he had it on a platter, damn his eyes. I needed money, and badly. Bren looked like a kitfox with a mouthful of plump sage hen. To take my mind off my anger, I eyed the human package, Kiran, or whatever his name was. He looked a little old to be running away from his family in some kind of teenage snit. His black hair was long enough in front that it fell forward over his face and shadowed his eyes, making them hard to read. I could tell they were light-colored, probably blue, and that was about it. That might not mean much, since we were all children of immigrants here in Ninavel, highside and streetside alike. Make sure there are no questions, no records, and get him across the border into Kost, along with my usual package. Ten percent in advance plus expenses, the rest upon return with proof of delivery. It usually was, with a package and enough money for what Bren called "expenses. Bren had me over a barrel, but I had leverage of my own. His legal business was the import of gemstones, metals, and mineral ores. Eventually he said, "I think I can talk him into five charm-grade stones per item, but only for this run, you understand? This Kiran must be paying him an absolute fortune. Either that, or I was missing something about this job. I hesitated, weighing the pay against my niggling sense of unease. Kiran had been watching us with a small frown line between his dark brows. When do we leave? The accent made me even more curious about him. Bren turned that broad smile on him. You know where that is? I eyed the smooth, delicate skin of his hands, and sighed. An awful thought struck me. Bren made a few more pointlessly glowing comments about me as he ushered Kiran out the door. With a supreme effort, I managed not to roll my eyes. Thankfully, the instant Bren shut the door he lost all the fake cheerfulness. The ward tracings flared silver as they recognized him and revealed his strongbox. Bren removed a bundle of tightly wrapped items from the strongbox, laid a banking draft on top, and slid the lot across the table to me. And Gerran and I expect discretion on this. This job got crazier by the minute. I scowled at Bren. This was my last chance to back out. The high walls and buildings surrounding me blocked my view of the mountains to the west, but I could imagine their snowy serrated ridges deepening toward the blue of twilight and their vast shadows spreading out over the desert valley. I always got a little edgy after a long winter in the city, but this time I had other reasons for wanting out of Ninavel. My pace slowed as the evening crowds gathered. Ninavel is always liveliest after sunset, when cool night breezes relieve the searing daytime heat. People filled the streets, shopping, drinking, standing around in loose groups laughing and watching street performers. Out of the corner of my eye I caught sight of a kid darting through the crowd, chased by another, both giggling and shrieking. Taint thieves, both of them. I checked the protective amulets I wore on both wrists. Their silver shone untarnished, and the stones remained clear. The

crowd noise abruptly hushed. People melted away from the middle of the street like rime ice in noontday sun, clearing a path for a lone, distant figure. No, Ninavel is the haunt of mages, of all kinds, and ordinary men learn fast to stay out of their way. When Lord Sechaveh first came to the Painted Valley and started building Ninavel, people thought he was crazy. Only a moonbrained old fool would try to found a city in a waterless desert, they sneered. No rules, no laws, no taxes - spend time on water duty, and any other magic is fair game, no matter how dark. That promise drew mages like fire ants to peachflower honey, especially the ones who practice magic in ways forbidden elsewhere. From the fearful silence of the crowd, the approaching mage was a lot stronger than middling. The tradesmen gasped and shrank back. I sucked in my own breath with a startled hiss, as I glimpsed jagged red and black sigils. Blood mages, on the other hand And the bloodier, nastier, and more lingering the death, the better. A tall man, broad shouldered, with thick wavy chestnut hair coiling past his shoulders, highsider-style. Arrogant as all get out, in that way ordinary highsider men tried so hard to imitate. What would it be like, to know you could do anything you wanted? I darted a glance at his face, then nearly shit myself when his eyes locked with mine. For a long, frozen interval his cold hazel gaze pinned me in place, like a mudworm pierced by a dagger. At last he smiled - a smile whose predatory, amused malice turned my gut hollow - and strode on. I slumped against the wall, my heart hammering. I pulled myself together. I still had a visit to make before preparing for the trip to Kost. I ducked down the next alley and made for the far corner, where the mortar between the great stone blocks had crumbled away. It was all too easy to scramble up the hundred feet to the building roof, using my fingers and the edges of my shoes in the cracks. Above the soaring outlines of the western city towers, the dark bulk of the Whitefires rose like a great saw-toothed wall, the snow on their peaks pale in the twilight. My mood eased by the sight, I headed across the roof to a small cupola and a window glowing with warm light through a gauzy curtain. I made quick work of the window lock and pushed my way through the curtain, dropping into the brightly painted room beyond. Toys lay scattered over the floor, and she had to raise her voice over the excited shrieks of the kids playing on the far side of the wide room. I picked him up, tickling him gently, and tossed him into the air. Where he stayed, floating. I did an exaggerated double take. Tamin can only lift himself a body length! He darted backward in the air, out of my grasp. Look what I can do, Dev! My eyes roved over the group. I call the ward tricks tonight and the littlies have to do what I say.

Chapter 7 : Book Review: The Whitefire Crossing by Courtney Schafer – Hippogriff's Aerie

In The Whitefire Crossing: The Shattered Sigil, Book 1, fantasy writer Courtney Schafer combines adept storytelling with a deep knowledge of mountain climbing to bring listeners Dev, a smuggler who specializes in carrying items through the steep, treacherous Whitefire Mountains that divide the.

Quandary Peak, redux Last year I did a Thursday Adventure post talking about 14, ft Quandary Peak and showing off some pics from a mid-summer ascent. But Quandary deserves another Thursday Adventure post, because yesterday I had a particularly special visit to the peak: I took long-time blog reader and book reviewer, SF Signal Mind Meld Curator, and all-around awesome genre commentor Paul Weimer on his very first attempt at summitting a 14K peak. Paul lives in Minnesota and this was his first visit to Colorado. I offered to take him up a 14er, and he was foolish brave enough to accept. At the Quandary Peak trailhead: Paul Weimer right is ready for the challenge! On the left is our other hiking companion, my friend and fellow 14er enthusiast Dustin Putnam. We had to wear snowshoes to prevent postholing sinking thigh or waist-deep into the snow. No big deal, but snowshoes add pounds of weight to your feet, making an ascent an even greater challenge for a novice. The weather was another source of trepidation at first - yesterday morning dawned cloudy and rainy in Boulder, and I worried the visibility would be nil on the peak. But thankfully, once we drove through the Eisenhower Tunnel and crossed the Continental Divide, the clouds vanished and the day beyond was beautifully sunny and warm. The Quandary trail starts off with a nice gentle ascent through pine forest. But soon, the pines thin, and the views expand: Soon enough, the trail vanished into a snowbank, and it was time to put on gaiters and snowshoes. In the summer, the trail switchbacks up the ridge, often staying to the south side. When the ridge is snowcovered, you simply stomp straight up the ridgeline. At this point, Paul is beginning to curse my name. The slope is far steeper than it appears in the pic. And people unacclimated to altitude soon find that the air is very, very thin! Paul and I, onward and upward The real summit at last appears in view: Valley south of Quandary. The infamous Cristo Couloir drops straight down from the summit to the mining road at the base of this valley. Approaching the saddle before the final steep slope to the summit. Paul at the saddle. Paul was a real trooper, stubbornly trudging onward despite his need for frequent rests to gasp for air. The weather was perfect, not a thunderstorm in sight, meaning we could stay on the peak much later than is typical for Colorado. Paul and I at our turn-around point. Sequence of Paul glissading down Dustin standing beside the glissade track.

Chapter 8 : courtney schaffer | Tumblr

The Whitefire Crossing is an adventurous fantasy filled with magic and betrayal. While slow at times, it is an enjoyable read that will leave you wanting to go out and scale your own mountain. While slow at times, it is an enjoyable read that will leave you wanting to go out and scale your own mountain.

Dev thinks his life is finally under control. The thrill of climbing almost fills the void left by his vanished talent, and he earns good money smuggling illegal charms on the side. Terrified of Ruslan but determined to escape him, Kiran believes safety lies in Alathia, where spells prevent the darker uses of magic. Gaining his freedom will not be easy. Kiran must utterly refrain from magic, since the least act of casting will reveal his location to Ruslan. No untalented citizen of Ninavel would risk the wrath of a mage as powerful as Ruslan, no matter how high the pay. Dev signs on as an outrider guiding a trade convoy to Alathia, bringing Kiran as his supposed apprentice. His hopes for an uneventful crossing of the mountains are dashed when a freelance spy, Pello, joins the convoy and displays a disturbingly keen interest in Kiran. Dev fears Pello will sell them out to the Alathians, but Kiran knows far greater danger lies in word reaching Ruslan of his location. He begs Dev to prevent Pello from sending any messages back to Ninavel. Fearing Pello will confront Dev with the truth in an attempt to extort a bribe, Kiran resolves to get Pello alone and intimidate him into silence. Before Kiran can sneak away to meet Pello, Ruslan casts to start a massive avalanche that will strike the convoy. Unable to bear the thought of hundreds dead on his account, Kiran diverts the avalanche with blood magic, even though his casting reveals him to Ruslan. Furious, he confronts Kiran and demands answers. He pleads with Dev to abandon the convoy and guide him the rest of the way across the mountains on foot. Reluctantly, Dev agrees to continue, though he fears his desertion of the convoy will destroy his friendship with Cara and prevent him ever working as an outrider again. Dev and Kiran escape the convoy just in time before Ruslan arrives in a burst of magic that further weakens Kiran. After a difficult journey in which they face spells both strong and subtle from Ruslan, they reach Alathia and Dev finds a way to sneak Kiran through the powerful Alathian border wards. Kiran thinks his troubles will be over after the border crossing, but Dev has long suspected his bosses have other plans. Simon intends to use Kiran in a spell designed to destroy Ruslan and leave Kiran his mindless slave. When Cara and the remainder of the convoy arrive in Alathia, Dev tells her the full truth behind his actions in hope of gaining her help. When Dev reveals how deeply he cares for her, she decides to risk taking their relationship beyond friendship. Cara and Dev track Pello and catch up with Simon too late to stop him taking Kiran through the Alathian border. They instead attack and interrogate Pello, who insists his true employer is the lord of Ninavel, and his mission the protection of the city by stopping Simon. He gives Dev a means to track Kiran, and offers his help in freeing him. Dev, still distrustful of Pello, leaves him a prisoner and sends Cara to tell the Alathians about Simon, as a backup plan in case Dev fails to get Kiran free. But when Cara returns with the Alathians, she finds Pello has escaped his bonds and vanished. Dev attempts to free Kiran, but when his rescue fails and Simon captures him, he believes all is lost. Ruslan heals Kiran and reveals that he has been playing a deeper game than any of them realized. He planned all along for Kiran to run to Alathia and be sold to Simon, so that Simon would be drawn out of hiding and destroyed, while Kiran would realize how kind a master Ruslan has been in comparison to Simon. As Ruslan inexorably gains ground in the magical battle, Dev watches in frustration, believing he cannot help Kiran. Kiran breaches the Alathian border wards with a charm stolen from Simon, and he and Dev make it to safety just ahead of Ruslan, only to be arrested by Alathian mages. With the assistance of Martennan, an Alathian mage with his own agenda, Kiran escapes execution on the condition that he help the Alathian Council understand how Simon circumvented their border wards. But Dev is sentenced to hard labor in a coal mine—ostensibly for his illegal smuggling, but Dev knows the Council is using him as a hostage to keep Kiran obedient to their will. Cara intends to plan a rescue, but Dev pleads with her to instead go to Ninavel and save Melly, which she promises to do.

Chapter 9 : Courtney Schafer: November

The Whitefire Crossing: The Shattered Sigil, Book One by Courtney Schafer and a great selection of similar Used, New and Collectible Books available now at blog.quintoapp.com

One sub-genre that I did not expect was mountain-fantasy. *Whitefire Crossing* stars Dev, an outrider and smuggler from the desert city of Ninavel. Dev is tasked early on with smuggling not goods, but a living blood mage across the border into neighboring Alathia, a nation that keeps magic under iron-fisted control. Kiran is the goods, a young mage fleeing an even more powerful despot who also happens to be his adoptive father. In an odd authorial decision, Schafer attempts to split her points of view between Dev and Kiran, but does so with differing styles. Dev narrates in the first-person, and is the first character we meet, but Kiran is told in third-person limited point-of-view. Even having finished the novel, I struggle to grasp what purpose splitting the viewpoints serves. I know writers today are experimenting in an attempt to veer from old forms, and I recently read a book with three different first-person viewpoints all intertwining, but we have established tendencies for a reason. The only way to Alathia is over the Whitefires, a mountain range of epic scale and one Dev knows well. Children in Ninavel, thanks to a massive confluence of power resting beneath the city, are often gifted with something called the Taint. This Taint allows them to perform magical feats that would normally take years of training by a gifted mage. The Taint also leaves right around the time puberty hits, and when this happens to Dev, the only solace he can find is that on the mountain. Climbing, for Dev, is nearly as exhilarating as wielding arcane forces, and he is good enough at it that it becomes his career. Because his use of the Taint almost universally revolved around stealing, smuggling also comes second nature. Dev disguises Kiran as an apprentice outrider, and they attach themselves to a caravan heading through the established channels of the Whitefires. What follows is a harrowing dash through mountains both beautiful and deadly, with moments of tension to equal anything in fantasy. As Dev and Kiran navigate the playground that Schafer has created, she is able to dole out the lore and world-building at a lovely pace. We learn about magic, which plays a pivotal role in everything to do with this world, slowly and in a way that is absorbable. Schafer wields a deft paintbrush in these explanations, and while one might accuse her of too much telling at times, I found myself craving the conversations where her characters would talk about the world and its systems. Schafer also does something that I love and rarely see in magical fiction – she details the aftermath of large-scale magical warfare. In Ninavel and beyond, magic has consequence, especially blood magic, and Schafer is not shy in the details of who suffers and why. Often authors are so concerned with writing an amazing battle scene or wizard duel that they forget to follow the fireballs trajectory when it misses its target. It lands somewhere, and in *Whitefire Crossing* we are privy to that landing. But *Whitefire Crossing*, like much fantasy written, has its share of cliches. Simon Levantine, a villain introduced halfway through the book, might as well come from a vaudevillian stage show, cackling as a train bears down on his latest victim. My only other complaints with *Whitefire Crossing* were the use of modern-day curse words and an overly elaborate and barely believable scheme by one of the characters; a ploy too fine in detail and scope to be feasible. In all, Schafer has begun something worthwhile in *Whitefire Crossing*. She shows an intimate and detailed knowledge of human interaction and climbing jargon, has created a vibrant world full of people with varied and complicated personalities, and she knows how to write fast-paced scene-work. After finishing the first in her *Shattered Sigil* series, I am compelled to continue on to see where Dev and Kiran wind up.