



Pathfinder

J.A. Jaken

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Shai discovers he is a pathfinder and is desperate to find a genetically suitable partner to prevent his extrasensory talents from running amok. Unfortunately those talents make him a target for the brutal crime lords and other violent denizens who inhabit the city of Nhil-Rhar. Shai needs to learn how to use his pathfinder senses—no matter how much they terrify him—before he's trapped in a partnership that will enslave him for the rest of his life. (M/M - For content labels and excerpt, see details on publisher's site.)

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From Reader Review Pathfinder for online ebook

Kynthos-the-Archer (Kyn) says

Has just the right balance of sex and plot. Loving the plot and especially the angst. The book is now one of my fav, one I am sure to reread again. Loving how JA Jaken delivers her story.

Loederkoningin says

What would you do when you've been beaten to pulp a little too often during the 16 years you spent in orphanages and on the streets?

You make sure to fly under everyone's radar.

Which is exactly what the slender, green eyed Shai does. Especially now that he has finally managed to get a job in a nightclub, he's not willing to endanger his hard fought securities in a city in which The Agency and several ruthless syndicates wreak havoc, in a constant battle for territory and power.

Then one fatal night, Shai's working in the club when he locks eyes with a girl. Panic rushes through him when he realizes: this is no ordinary flirt. The 'sweepers' of The Agency have tracked him down. But why? Why him?

Before he can even attempt to flee to the streets again, Shai's brought into The Agency, with its clinical white rooms. Here he learns something that turns his life upside down. He's a pathfinder. He can sense people's thoughts, the past and the future. You think this is an awesome gift? Wait until you hear the catch! Most pathfinders don't make it to adulthood. They get sucked into their visions. Their minds get lost. That's why there's a built-in security in the form of a genetic imperative: a pathfinder must imprint on a 'guide', someone with the ability to keep him grounded during his mental endeavors. There's more. The pathfinder doesn't really have a choice in the matter, as imprinting is something that can be forced upon him...

All in all, what it seemed to boil down to was that Shai's life was seriously fucked. For someone who had always been fiercely proud of his independence, the thought that he was fated to be dependent on another human being for the rest of his life was a crippling blow.

Wow, this might be even creepier than Jacob from Twilight imprinting on Bella's baby girl! No wonder Shai rebels. But soon he discovers there's a fate far worse than the semi-consensual relationship the agency has in store for its new guinea pig. In a city that's drenched in anarchy, Shai's gift doesn't go unnoticed. Syndicates are out to claim this rare and shiny 'weapon'. And they will not shy away from brute force to have Shai imprint on a guide of their own choice.

Shai closed his eyes, trembling. "You're a guide." The hand on the back of his neck turned disturbingly affectionate, stroking lightly over his skin. "I am." Shai sucked in a long breath, trying not to panic. "But I..I already have a guide. You can't--"

"Your bond with him isn't completely formed yet. It will be easy enough to break." Shai's skin felt like it was trying to crawl off of his body.

Man, what a terrifying concept! Imagine what it would be like to be stripped off your free will and be forced to bond with someone purely based on a genetic imperative. Feel me shiver and shudder through the

computer!

And let me tell you, Shai's being put through the wringer. So please be warned that this story contains, however genetically invoked lust, non-consensual sex that some readers might object to. The author does not dwell on these parts though, making it clear that they are a necessity to the story. And although Shai is 16 years old, which is something that might bother you as well, this fact barely registered with me since he behaves as someone who is quite a bit older. So yes, there are a few tough and angsty moments, but nothing that made my stomach actually churn. And I promise, I'm not THAT tough, ha!

That being said; Pathfinder was remarkably good! I enjoyed every minute of this fast-paced, somewhat dark science fiction story. J.A. Jaken can write! At first, she appeared to be trying a little too hard to show off her writing skills, which resulted in a few beautiful descriptions of the city, but also in overly flowery language. However, as soon as she got caught up in her own story, she dropped that act entirely. The plot of Pathfinder is jam-packed with a cocktail of adventure, world-building, action, angst and hints of love, and kept me on the edge of my seat constantly.

The only complaint that I have is that everything felt a little rushed. I think some of the story's potential got lost in the execution. The author stuffed a bunch of intriguing ideas and tidbits in Pathfinder, that just screamed for further exploration. For instance, this book is populated by a few intriguing (side) characters, that I wished were fleshed out more. Also, I'd have liked a creepier build up to Shai's experiences with the syndicate, a little more insight in The Agency's freaky experiments and some time to reflect on the things Shai had to endure throughout the story.

Do I sound like an unsatisfied brat now? Because I'm honestly not. The only reason why I'm bringing up these points at all, is because I enjoyed Pathfinder so much that I craved more, more and MORE! So if you're into a fast-paced, science fiction story with a dash of angst and twistedness, then definitely give this book a shot. I know I look forward to reading more from this author.

Justin says

Plenty of rape. What? You were expecting a preamble? Rape is basically the theme of the book. Of course I mean this in a sexual as well as strictly denotative context. I do not strictly enjoy a book that lavishes itself in non-consensual sex while not providing an adequate need within the plot. While I felt some of the encounters were not necessary, the saving grace was that I felt a lack of reveling on the writer's part in that the scenes could have been far, far more explicit. The plot then managed to contain the acts in a reasonable necessity so that the story was endearing. At no point does it actually become sweet and I can't fathom the mind that would insinuate that there was genuine romance involved, or even a form of love beyond deep compassion. With all the rape, I'm not sure Shai would be a believable character if there were; He's remarkably well rounded for someone so abused, and if Jaken had made it a sweeter tale I would have balked.

I was torn between a three-star rating and a four-star. I was satisfied, with a substantial list of things considered, enough to push for the fourth star.

Dreamer says

Competent readable sci-fi m/m adventure with a non-con element. Shai turns out to be a gifted psychic

'Pathfinder' but he needs to bond with a 'Guide' to help keep him grounded in this world.

"Are you only what the Founders made you to be? Or are you a product of your upbringing? Or are you something else? Your choices are what you make of them, Shai. More than anything else, you need to find your own path."

Rosemary O'Malley says

I loved this!! Pathfinder is an exciting sci-fi adventure that, despite the numerous threads running throughout, was tidy and easy to follow. There's just a touch of existentialism going on in there, too, which I thought added to the overall result. I like the world JA has created. My mind had visuals reminiscent of Dick and Gibson; good things, in my opinion!

This one has some intense, dark moments. There's underage non-con (our hero is 16) and some viscious violence, but they are handled as tastefully as possible and certainly not glamorized.

I'd like to see more of Shai and Lorne, and more of the world in general. I can only hope more tales will be forthcoming!

Joanne says

I had to wait ages for it to be released by Forbidden Fiction before I could read it, and it didn't disappoint. A wonderful book which left me with a warm glow and a smile when I turned the last page. Well worth 5 stars

Bookwatcher says

Warning: noncon and violence... underage main character... and a very good surprise. Free but a superb quality of writing and plot.

It's no long available as a freebie (Review edited, January 2012. Original Review from September 2011)

Yes I think this review must start with a warning, because don't read it if you have problems with kidnapping, rape, and most of all, a 16 young-old main character.

The sci-fi plot is worth the reading?

YES. Certainly I'm VERY satisfied by its originality.

After world war 3, and an atomic cataclysm, the world had been reduced to an inhabitable wasteland (for what the main character know).

Humans are now living inside a wall closed metropolises. The main character was born and raised in Nhil-Rhar, a city full of corruption and violence.

Shai Lunaran is an ex street boy, and young but already very conscious of how humans can treat a weak boy like him... orphan, and from the age to 12 to 14 he live in the streets... so yes, some sad stuff happen to him

(just mentioned, not detailed explained).

When the story begin Shai is "happy". He is not the happiest person of Earth, but he is ok, cleaning tables and working for someone that finally is giving him an option... because in those hard times is not easy to find a employer that take someone just to work... boys like him are nothing more than merchandise, in a world where moral rules don't exist he is luck to don't be a prostitute or a slave.

The extrasensory powers of Shai

Very soon the story will be VERY dark, so again, my warning... don't read it if you have problems with noncon.

Shai is not a human like others. In this sci-fi world, right before the cataclysmic facts of the war something changed forever humankind. Using genetic engineering to improve human race the "pioneers" unleash powerful capacities.

Pathfinders: Humans with an uncommon insight, able to feel or see things away from them, enter other humans minds, telepathy etc. There is no limit to this human power. Pathfinders, in theory, can also predict the future, so obviously their are priceless... why? Because it's rare, in the time of the story is told, to find one. Almost all pathfinders are now closed controlled by Endgeress, also called "The Agency".

Guides: the controllers of the pathfinders. The founders knowing very well the risk of powerful humans like pathfinders create another genetic altered human, the guides. They form a bond with the pathfinder, being able to restrain and control the pathfinder skills. It's not only something done to protect humankind, but also to protect pathfinders. Without a Guide the Pathfinder could just leave his body, expanding his conscious and losing themselves. There are not so rare as a Pathfinder, so the number of guides is far above the number of pathfinders.

In a poor comparison, I would say Pathfinder are like ships, able to fly and go everywhere they want. Guides are their anchor, keeping pathfinders pinned on earth.

Shai is a Pathfinder and unfortunately he is also a rare case of one that life so much without knowing his own capacities, so were never spotted before.

Of course now with 16 year-old his time as a free human being will end. The agency want him... a drug lord want him... probably all free guide (one without a pathfinder) want someone as Shai. Force a bound to a pathfinder is not impossible... is just need: a lot of skin to skin contact, and of course, sex is the quickest way to forge a bound.

With a many twists of facts and surprises this story keep me anchored, as a pathfinder is with his guide. I couldn't stop reading... it's cruel, forced sex in a such young men is something that made me want to scream, but I couldn't put it down... because I read, read, and read... suffering with Shai, and hoping with all my heart that he would have his HEA... somewhere, someone would help him, save him... and well, I wasn't disappointed.

I can't and I wont give less than 5 stars, and I must tell you I'm very glad I had the courage to read it. It was not a easy reading, but its quality and originality is impressive.

I certainly recommend it, but saying also that it's cruel... very cruel... and I love it though

Edit (January 2012): "Note: Pathfinder will be published in 2012, so it's no longer free. For further details please visit the author's webpage <http://www.jajaken.com/> "

YEY! It will be published! YEY!

Pixie Mmgoodbookreviews says

4 Hearts

Review written for MM Good Book Reviews

<http://mmgoodbookreviews.wordpress.com/>

Shai finds out the hard way that he is a pathfinder, he has been told that he has to have a guide who will be bonded with him, and Shai has no choice about whom that guide will be. Being a pathfinder places him in danger when a crime syndicate snatches him, and tries to force a bonding with their very own guide. Now Shai is on the run with an Outrider guide, a guide who doesn't want a bond to form, and who Shai is beginning to trust.

This is a great science fiction story of a lost science which scientists are trying to revive. Shai is just slightly different from the others, sometimes he just knows things, he works quietly at The Hunted Lord until the night the Agency sweepers come looking for him, and from then on it is a journey of discovery, fear and resentment. Lorne is an Outrider, his clan lives out in the outside roaming the land and avoiding the city; Lorne was captured during a raid for medical supplies. Together they escape from their captor and begin a reluctant partnership.

The characters are all well written and the storyline is brilliant, it isn't a nice and easy relationship and it isn't a happily ever after. Both Shai and Lorne are in a position that neither of them wanted, but they try to make a go of it even while they both try to decide what they want to do. Shai has no choice, but to find a guide and Lorne might be the only one that he has any real choice in, Lorne doesn't want another pathfinder as his last bond-mate died, but as they get to know each other they decide to take a chance. It isn't easy for any of them though as they have the Agency and a crime syndicate looking for them.

I will give everyone fair warning Shai is 16 years old and to some of you that will be underage, there is also rape and dubious consent. But being honest it actually adds to the plot and storyline, it is all drawn together and makes an unfortunate kind of sense, no matter how you look at it the baddies are desperate and only care for results. The characters are all good and you can see where the Agency is coming from, but it doesn't mean you agree, and the Outriders seem to be the only ones who are still truly free and believe in free will.

I will recommend this to those who love futuristic, science fiction, escapes, chases, trying to make the right choices and having a slight hope of a true romance.

Elizabetta says

4.5 stars

His *pathfinder* abilities, prescience being one of them, always seemed like a curse to Shai. The lapses into a kind of psychic trance had certainly gotten him into trouble and earned him beatings as a child living in the orphanage. So he learned quickly to suppress and ignore them. Now, at sixteen and living a hard-scrabble life on his own, Shai learns that his ability is the result of genetic engineering and is coveted by others who would lay claim to him to use for their own gain. And, he learns that a curse can perhaps become a force to

keep him safe from abuse; if only a pathfinder can find his own path.

I love this premise and the world that Jaken shapes; a dystopia ruled by ruthless factions all vying for supremacy inside city walls built to protect against the devastation brought on by a Third World War. Shai's story unfolds with gripping action as he is forced to discover whether he is ruled by that genetic engineering or whether he can make his own choices and be valued as much for who he is and not merely what he is. This, as much as anything, is the crux of the story-- finding one's worth. Will he forever be at the beck and call of those who would use him?

This story reminded me a little of Lisa Henry's great novel, *Dark Space*, another sci-fi story about a symbiosis between the two main characters. In that story Brady and Cam's codependency meant life or death. The consequences for Shai are similar. He must find his "guide," someone (whose name I'm withholding as a possible spoiler) also genetically bred to help him develop and control his trances as well as keep him from getting lost in them. I love that this takes the idea of being tied to another, so intrinsic to the romance genre, a step further by making their lives *dependent* on it. That Shai's connection to his guide is enhanced by sex adds erotic spice to the mix (warning: there is non-con/rape; and the main character is under-age). I only wish that there had been more time devoted in the story to Shai's developing relationship with his guide. It does look like there will be a sequel, a good thing as I'm sorry to leave Shai and his world, and there is a lot more story to be told.

I have become a great fan of Jaken's work having read her wonderful *The House of Silence - Volume 1* series (2 books so far), also highly recommended.

Serith says

Pathfinder plays out like a dark and guilty fantasy (giving a trigger warning now that this contains dubcon/noncon situations). I... shouldn't have loved it as much as I did. But I really, really did. Seriously, I have tons of respect for the author to make the erotic elements *SO* relevant to the plot line. The concept was captivating, the pacing flawless, the world ironed out, the details revealed naturally, and I love how the circumstances drew the characters closer and closer. I found myself liking every direction the author threw the plotline. It all flowed so nicely that I never felt the presence of the author pulling strings to make things happen the way they did.

I adored Shai; he was a good victim but still has a spine to back him up. You can't help but sympathize with him right from the very start. His skittish nature fit the dystopian setting and made it all the more intimidating. Brought the danger to life. H was the perfect main character for the story.

So... I only have two critiques. One is a subjective opinion: I'm not a huge fan of reversing roles in bed. Switches make good characters mind you, but Shai seemed too submissive to top so it threw me off when it happened. It altered the dynamics. The second critique is it needed just one more round of editing to remove repetition: (view spoiler)

HOWEVER. This story -in all its entirety- was so good that I won't allow any of that outweigh my final rating or the fact that Pathfinder has placed as a Favourite Novel. I *need* this book in print now. Yes *need*.

Matthew says

Very well-written, well-told story of relationships in a science fiction world with a genetic compulsion.

Everything was well explained and believable, at least sorta. I think I wish everything had been explored in more depth. There was a lot of rape and near rape, based on the genetic/psychic bonds of the characters, but I felt like a lot of the characters could have been explored in more depth. Aaron Nichols, for example, was introduced at the very beginning but never really explored. And Shai had lots of other relationships that were mentioned. And then there was the Agency and I don't think the implications of the semi-consensual relationships of the pathfinders in the Agency were fully explored.

I also don't feel like I ever got lost in the world.

But I did like the ideas and the writing and sex and relationships.

One of the most interesting bits was the politics drifting around the edges. The City was anarchic with competing 'bands', 'corporations', or 'cartels' as the author calls them. And because of this, no one in the City was truly free. They were trapped in the City, slaves to greed and hunger and seeking safety. It mentions at one point that the Agency extorts protection money from surrounding businesses - that would be called a tax if the Agency was recognized as a government and had a legitimate monopoly on the use of force.

On the other hand, the 'Outriders' are free because they take care of themselves and each other and all contribute to their community what they can to make a complete, cooperative community, where everyone is free to leave, do what they do best, or contribute however they can. There's no real tax, but there's also no real sense of private property - it is communism at its most idealistic - in small communities.

Jo * Smut-Dickted * says

Loved almost all of it. Exactly the type of story I like. Guy discovers he has some unique abilities. All sorts of bad guy organizations want him - and he ends up in a heck of a situation where, unfortunately, he is not consenting truly to what is happening. The SciFi world is the ideal location for stories such as this. It was totally believable that a pathfinder and a guide would cement a relationship/develop the bond by physical means including sex. Kalil's personality made sense in light of what had occurred, and the Agency was just still creepy enough to bother. I did feel it lost just a tad bit of steam with Lorne - but only because I didn't feel the sizzle between the two of them enough. There was some chemistry - but whether that was only the bond or influenced by other personal means just wasn't clarified enough - and that dropped it a star. The ending also was sort of anti-climatic and so the last huzzah to add depth to the relationship sort of fizzled for me.

Warning: Underage main character. I don't have many limits so this didn't bother me. However it is non/con with rape. If you don't like this stay away.

I am rushing right out to get the author's other works!

Neyjour says

I really loved this story. I just could not put it down, and read the entire thing in one sitting.

The reason why I didn't give it a full 5 stars is because the ending did seem a tad rushed. Also, the

relationship between Shai and Lorne was left sort of "up in the air" at the end. It leaves you feeling happy and satisfied enough that they'll have a future together, but at the same time it also leaves you begging for a sequel. But unfortunately, I don't think there is one.

But despite that, this was a wonderful, entertaining read with terrific characters and worldbuilding, and never a dull moment. I've had some bad luck lately, with books I've bought that turned out to be pure dreck, so I was extremely happy to stumble onto this wonderful gem of a freebie. I highly recommend it. :)

Laylah says

This was definitely a can't-put-it-down read -- I had every intention of taking it slowly and instead I read the whole thing tonight. Jaken does a really good job of taking the pitfalls of the soulbonding trope seriously and exploring the ways that ~erotic destiny~ can complicate both withholding and giving consent. I also really liked Shai as a main character; he doesn't have much of the power that's respected in Nhil-Rhar -- the ability to enforce his will through violence -- but neither does he come across as completely helpless. He's learned survival strategies that work for a disadvantaged kid like him, and even when he's in a bad situation (and boy, does he spend some of this book in bad situations) he never just resigns himself to his fate.

Silkeeeeereads says

After reading the reviews, I was expecting this book to be a lot darker. Yes, Shai was only 16 but the way his character was written, he wasn't mentally sixteen. So, even though he's under age, the rapes he endured were much more about just the fact that he was raped and no lingering effect due to the fact that he's only sixteen.

He is a Pathfinder. In our culture he would be considered a psychic. All Pathfinders had to bond with a Guide to keep them emotionally grounded. Two men tried to force the bond on him and a third bonding was due to need and want.

This was not a bad read. I didn't hate it. It didn't produce a whole lot of emotion in me. I just didn't become invested in the characters. The sex was just kind of there. Wasn't arousing.

Yes, there was kidnapping and rape, so be aware of that.
