

3 MAIN MALE CHARACTERS

Audition Note:

Read as much or as little as you like.

Two scene options are provided for Jacob; one scene option each for Owen and Bayne.

JACOB (scene option 1)

"I'm not crossing anything off," Jinx said, still circling. Her fingers trailed along the wall as she searched for signs of ... something. Anything. No seams. No panels. No doors.

No way this geek only has a single crummy laptop.

"Doesn't sound like you've got a bargaining chip," Jacob said. "You still owe me money. And before you ask, no, I don't take returns on merchandise."

Jinx leaned against the wall, trying to look sturdier than she felt. "So that's it? You dragged me here to shake me down?" She narrowed her eyes. "Why would you risk revealing yourself? That doesn't track."

Jacob stood, stretched, twisted his neck side to side. His spine popped twice. "You and your bodyguard caused a scene," he said. "You weren't safe." He paused, then added, "Also, I've got a problem with some of the stuff going down on this station. I intervene when I can. And"—a wry grin tilted his mouth—"I like to protect my investments."

"Thanks, I guess," Jinx muttered. "But sounds like DeeDee had it handled." She crossed her arms like she was loading ammunition. "And from what I've seen, you've got your own little racket going on. You're not exactly innocent."

Jacob propped himself on the edge of his desk. "Alright, super-sleuth. Enlighten me. What do you think you've uncovered?"

"Your delivery guy," Jinx shot back. "Razor-sharp. Led me, and anyone watching, straight to you." Her chin tilted upward. "Might want to rethink your hiring criteria."

"I don't have mules on this station." Jacob's face said, *meh*, as he leaned forward. "No one here wants outdated tech. Shoddy detective work, chief."

"Oh, please." Jinx kicked out her hip, staring him down unblinkingly. "The delivery spots are tagged with your symbol."

"Symbol?" Jacob echoed. "I don't have a symbol. I'm a tech-head, not a rock star." His eyes sparked to life. "Though, now that you mention it, maybe I should."

Jinx pressed on, unhindered by his testimony. “I found signatures on the scrambling chip and wristband I ordered from you.”

“Can we back up for a moment?” Jacob pushed off the desk. “You ordered a scrambling chip, and you’re under the impression that you got it from me?”

“Hi. I’m Jinx,” she deadpanned. “The one who purchased loads of technology from you, technology you had delivered to my station. Illegally.”

“Loads?” Jacob held up a halting hand. “That’s an exaggeration.” Tapping a finger to chin, he brought up a mental account. “Bootleg VR games. A wristband to run the programs. Oh, and *GetDown3000*.” He smirked. “A classic.” With a shrug, he added, “But loads of technology? No.”

“Well, I have a scrambler and a surveillance camera that prove otherwise. I’ve only ever ordered through the same contact channel. Yours.”

“Not me.” Jacob shook his head. “Don’t get me wrong, I’ve built scrambling chips. But sold one to you? No. And a surveillance camera?” He scoffed. “Not my product line.”

JACOB (scene option 2)

Jacob brushed past her. “Don’t give me that look. Judge all you want, but you wouldn’t even have a way in if not for my debatable lack of integrity. You can’t ask for help and then slap me with a morality clause.”

Jinx tailed him to a solo monitor at the far end of the room. “You’re running tours into someone else’s private world. That’s a little different from me trying to fix a broken system. For all I know, the lockdown happened because of you.”

“For the record,” Jacob said, punching in a series of commands, “this isn’t some shady side hustle. And I’ve been doing it for a while,” he said as screens lit up and systems hummed to life. “My quote-unquote ‘tours’ didn’t trigger this mess. Let that go. Something else is going on.” He shook his head. “And I never said I was perfect. I’m flawed like everybody else, though I’d like to think my shortcomings are a little less destructive than most. But hey, that’s just me.”

Jacob moved with quiet precision, hands flying across the interface in smooth, practiced motions. He cycled through startup steps like it was muscle memory. No hesitation, no wasted movement. This wasn't his first time behind the controls.

"There's gonna come a day when your actions are being judged," he said, eyes still locked on the screen. "So you may wanna cut me some slack." His fingers paused briefly over a sequence, hovered, then tapped. "I'm the type who'll stand by your side, assuming we're friends. That's just how I roll." He leaned in, squinting at a burst of rolling data, scanning for anomalies. "My guess?" he muttered, lips quirking at the edge. "You're gonna need all the friends you can manage not to piss off."

Jinx shook out her limbs, rolled her shoulders, cracked her neck, and twisted at the waist like she was warming up for a fight. She needed to move. Needed to clear her head.

"Why do you care what I think, Jacob?"

Jacob turned to face her, his deep hazel eyes steady. "I don't. I only care that you trust me."

Jinx froze mid-stretch, hands on hips, stance wide and unbudging. "And why would that matter?"

"Because you're someone who needs people she can trust." Jacob's tone stayed calm, unflinching. "You came here for a reason, a big one. And since you tracked me down, I'm clearly part of it. I don't believe life's random. If I'm right about who you are, there'll only be two types of people in your world: the ones who've got your back, and the ones waiting to stab it." He paused. "I'm about to prove which one I am."

OWEN

Owen reached out, his tone softening. “I’m sorry. I know a lot has been asked of you. I don’t mean to be forceful. It’s just not what I expected. I wouldn’t have authorized her entry into the VR if I’d known.”

Shaking her head, Jinx dragged her gaze between Owen and Claire. “Known what?”

No one could have predicted a denizen’s adverse reaction or that the program would go into lockdown. Owen was talking about something else, something specific to Laris. Jinx could taste the secrecy, and it churned her insides.

“Laris has always been sensitive,” Owen said, his words dipping with restraint. “She’s highly empathic. I hadn’t expected this trait to intensify so quickly. It makes her vulnerable. I would’ve”—he paused, seemingly searching for the right words—“held her back.”

Owen’s gaze shifted to the distance before refocusing on Jinx.

“Anything else I should know?”

Jinx leaned forward, voice dry enough to crack glass. “Hate to disappoint, but yeah, there’s more. Because of course there is.” She met Owen’s eyes. “I think someone crashed the VR.”

Owen turned to Claire, who blinked, then narrowed her eyes like she was already running mental diagnostics. “What makes you think that?”

“I can’t be positive,” Jinx said, guarded. “But something’s definitely off with the receptionist at the drop point. You know, the one at the Academy desk who’s about three blank stares away from glitching into a wall?”

Owen opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again ... then gave up and stared like she was a black box built to mislead.

Jinx took that as permission to rattle off every red flag, including the lovely jolt of pain Claire flagged.

Claire looked up, raising one eyebrow mid-scan, like Jinx had just said something mildly interesting, but the recap slammed to a halt. DeeDee was banging on the soundproof glass. Someone was about to enter the lab, and the lights on the keypad had started flashing.

Owen leaned in, lowering his voice like the walls might be listening. “Not a word of what you saw. You understand? Claire, you too.”

BAYNE

Mr. Important was the first to breeze in as the door slid open. The air grew brittle with his arrival. He didn't so much as glance at Claire as he moved straight toward Jinx, with Hadu and Owen flanking like loyal satellites.

"So you're the infamous 8-88?"

"Nope," Jinx said, deadpan. "I'm the super-normal Jinx."

His expression didn't flinch. Didn't crack. Just hovered there, blank and unreadable.

"Well, your countless visits to the Takal's office would suggest otherwise. I'm Bayne, the Head of Operations. It was under my orders that you were sent into the surveillance layer."

I know nearly slipped out of Jinx's mouth before she swallowed it. Claire had mentioned his name right before her little VR plunge. But with Bayne? Less was definitely more. He seemed the type to dissect everything. Then weaponize it.

"I didn't think I'd get the tour," Jinx said lightly. "So, thanks for the thrill, I guess."

Bayne didn't blink. Didn't twitch. Perhaps, his face came factory-set to *ice*.

"I know you spoke with Owen regarding your experience. Would you mind going over the details once more?"