

**Academy27**

***Coffee,  
Warm***

*by James  
Wylder*



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Putting her apron on in the staff room, Tsetseg looked in the mirror. She really hoped she wouldn't actually have to make coffee like her dad had said, but she was glad to help either way. Still, with the uniform she at least looked like a Barista.

"Remember Chan-Yeol, my co-worker?"

She'd nodded.

"His husband runs coffee shop. Needs extra hand Saturday."

"I can do it," she'd answered simply.

He'd nodded, and that was that.

She was sure it was going to be hard work, but she was excited about the experience. Seeing the people coming in and out, the shop was located in the central part of Cheonsa Dome, by the festival square and the administrative buildings, so there sure to be all sorts of people from all walks of life.

"You all dressed in there, Sansar?"

"Yes sir!" she stepped out, where the owner, a middle aged man who had balded to a half-circle ring of hair around his head, was waiting. "It shouldn't be too bad today, I just need some help with the stuff that doesn't involve making coffee."

Wishes did come true. Would have been nicer if it had been a more important one though.

The actual work wasn't too bad, but she quickly understood why her dad had asked her here. Obviously the government would have sent in a temporary worker to help out, Shocho had everything perfectly coordinated and organized in that regard, but it quickly became clear that he really needed someone there who was something like familiar. Sure, Tsetseg had never met him before, but though she was still so so and so degrees separated from him, she was also that many degrees closer. The reason why came out rather suddenly, in between an Americano and a Latte.

"My daughter is in the hospital," he said plainly and suddenly.

"I'm sorry," she managed.

He gave her a kind smile, "It was kind of your father to send you over here."

"Its-its no problem!"

"Ah, we have another customer, could you--"

"Right yes!" she rushed over to the counter, and was so preoccupied that she only took stock of the customer when she was right in front of her.

She was wearing a black sundress with yellow flower print on it, and a black headband covered in a skull pattern. But it was her arm and leg that really caught her eye, and everyone's: they were metal. Polished chrome that reflected the world like a mirror. There was only one person this could be, and the name slipped out of her mouth like a bad soap opera character introduction: "Geraldine 'JackBox' McGraw?"

The other girl blinked, and then smiled, "That's me!" she scanned her face clearly trying to figure out where she had met her before.

"We uh, don't uh, don't know each other well. But my friend--well, I guess I say friend but um..."

She scanned her face, not quite being able to place where she'd seen Tsetseg before. "You know Sang Mi or Sang Eun?"

She nodded, "That's right. Well, both of them, actually." She gulped. "They talk a lot about you!"

JackBox laughed, "Did they now? I'm afraid I'm probably a lot more boring than whatever they said." She scanned her up and down again. "Are you... no let me guess... Tsetseg? Did I get it right?"

She startled, "How did you know?"

JackBox pointed to her own chest, where the nametag was on her own. She blushed, right, of course. JackBox then had a minor revelation. "Ah--wait you were in the group at New Years right?"

Tsetseg snapped, "That's where I saw you before. I felt like I knew you from somewhere."

They'd been in the same group that day, and she'd watched JackBox argue with Jae Hyun, but the two of them hadn't really... talked.

"I was a little distracted that day, but it's great to see you here. I kinda regretted I didn't get the chance to--hey, if you go on a break while I'm here feel free to come talk to me, love getting to meet the twin's friends."

She turned to walk away, and then spun on her heel. "Latte. I came in to order a latte."

They both had a laugh at that.

"So, you know that girl?" the owner asked.

"Sorta, I mean, yeah," it would take too long to explain.

"Why don't you go on break like she asked, things are slowing down anyway."

She was going to turn down the suggestion, but he looked so... NICE about it that she couldn't say no. Walking over to the table, she delivered JackBox's latte and sat down.

"On break already?"

"The boss insisted."

"I figured you'd take a bit more--I'm actually here to meet someone--no don't get up. I think you'll enjoy getting to meet him. He's like, a proper Maverick--speak of the devil."

"And here I am," a man said, sliding through the door. He winked at them, walked over to the counter, ordered ("Coffee, black, large.") and then sidled over to their table.

"You didn't tell me you were bringing a guest?" he said as he settled in. One Maverick on Gongen was unusual, but two? Two was downright odd.

"This is my friend Tsetseg, she happens to work here, I just thought she might enjoy meeting a real space pirate."

He just laughed, "Well don't oversell me. Name is Jack, Jack Wilgress." She found herself shaking his hand. It was rough--rough in a way that even her father's wasn't. "Your pal here called me in for a job. And when someone as well placed as her in the Accord offers you a job--"

Tsetseg tensed, her eyes got wide, "The Accord?!?"

A few eyes turned, and JackBox gave the rest of the room a pleasant look and a gentle laugh that assured them all they were talking about someone ELSE. "That's not the sort of thing you say out loud, Mr. Wilgress."

"Psh, everyone knows it. No use pussyfooting around with it."

"I didn't know!" Tsetseg ventured.

JackBox placed a hand on top of hers with such care that she immediately felt her pulse slow, "Don't worry, I just run a luxury import business that helps get goods to customers on Gongen from Titan, it's not anything scandalous."

Tsetseg had an incredible gut feeling that JackBox was lying, but just smiled back politely and decided to accept it. Where had she learned how to put people at ease like this?

"Well, now that we cleared that up, show me the job."

JackBox slid a padd over, and Wilgress looked it over, angling it when he saw Tsetseg trying to catch a peek.

Yamamoto Shinji

180 cm (5 ft 11in)

Wanted for...

The list of crimes made Tsetseg look away.

"A real bastard," Wilgress muttered. "Men who hurt kids are no men at all."

"Keep telling 'em that till they listen," JackBox sighed. "I want him caught—take him in alive to be clear. He was sighted coming to Gongen three days ago."

"I got here as fast as I could."

"Oh, I know. Wasn't a complaint. I've been tracking him for months now. Catching him is," she balled a fist, "...important to me."

Jack put a hand on her fist. It was different than when she'd been calmed down by JackBox, it looked... sincere. "I promise you, I'll take that man off your list of worries for good."

She nodded, took a deep breath, and dabbed a little something from her eyes, and slid a card over to him. "This is special dispensation for you to apprehend him, approved by the Chief of Police. I have a patron who wants to give him a show trial for political points, and he's fronting most of the bill. The Accord is fronting the rest, but either way there's no payment if you bring him in cold."

"Steep discount."

"You're the best in the business."

Wilgress grinned, "And I said I was going to stop you talking me up."

Tsetseg's heart was pounding again. What on Gongen was she listening in on? They were really plotting to catch a criminal? It seemed personal for JackBox, but she really didn't want to pry. She was relieved when the pass was pulled out—at the very least this was all above board, presumably. "You're a bounty hunter?" Tsetseg asked.

He nodded, "A Knave, specifically. The money is great, but I prefer bringing scum like this guy to justice to," he smirked, "being a space pirate."

She laughed, it was odd, she'd been a little scared when he'd sat down--but both him and JackBox were so much different than she'd expected from all she'd known about Mavericks in holodramas. They were a lot warmer, like a cup of coffee with just little milk to cool it down.

"I didn't think they'd let Mavericks, you know, hunt bounties here."

"They make exceptions," he said. "Sometimes a stiff-shirt has enough backbone to call in professionals when they realize there's a real nasty character on the loose. You go enough places, you find that people want the same things. A meal. A drink. Companionship. A place to lay your head. Safety. It's best if you can get those things yourself, but you're a special kind of scumbag if you let people get hurt cause you can't lower your chin."

She nodded. That made a certain amount of sense.

"Excuse me for a sec," they both watched as JackBox walked towards the restroom, and then Wilgress turned his eyes back to her.

"She fitting in here well?"

Tsetseg fumbled in her mind for what to say. He seemed nice, but would JackBox get angry if she said too much—not that she actually knew much to begin with. “She is, she’s made a bunch of friends who go to my school.”

He nodded, and he suddenly had the impression of a cool uncle. “I met her a few years back running a job on Titan Station. There was nothing I could do for her situation back then, churned me up inside I couldn’t, but it is what it is. Kid had to grow up too fast out there.”

“Her situation?” Tsetseg asked.

Wilgress looked back at her, examining her closely, as if weighing something on a scale in his mind. “...Well, if she ain’t said anything, it’s her private business. Let’s just say I’m glad to help her clean up the leftovers. And gladder to see she got the hell off Titan.”

Tsetseg sat on that, running through a million possibilities and implications in her head. By the time she had come up with something to say, Jackbox had returned.

“What’d I miss?” she said, sliding in.

“Eh, not much. Just enjoying the coffee,” Wilgress said with an exaggerated sip. “Though I probably should get on the job, if you’ll just sign the form,” he held the padd with the bounty information on it out to Jackbox, who pressed her thumb down on an oval near the bottom.

“Let me know when you’ve got him,” she said.

“I will,” he winked. “Well, no rest for the wicked,” Wilgress said as he got up. “A pleasure to see you again, Geraldine. And a pleasure to meet you, miss Tsetseg.” He gave them a bow, and sauntered out like a cowboy from a saloon.

“...You live an amazing life,” Tsetseg said.

JackBox looked at her with eyes that were once again, so warm. “And you live one I envy more than you know. Helping out here, good friends who care about you.”

“...I haven't really known them that long.”

“They're already willing to go to bat for you, don't sell yourself short. Plus I think you're pretty cool.”

Tsetseg felt a rush to her cheeks, “...Thanks.”

The door swung open, and a whole gaggle of teens swarmed in, they weren't from Academy 27 that was for sure. Not with hair that fancy. JackBox poked her. "Go help, I'll see you again. But really, good meeting you, for real this time."

"Same!" she said, rising up. "But do... did you really mean what I said about my life? It's kind of boring."

The girl from Titan looked down into her latte, "From my eyes, it's the most wonderful kind of life you could lead."

Tsetseg scampered off behind the counter, and by the time she was done, JackBox was gone. But when she went over to pick her cup up, Tsetseg closed her eyes and smiled. It was still warm.



# School Announcements

## *NEXT TIME!*

I guess not a lot happened inside the school this week, but hey not every week Cheonsa Dome gets visited by a legendary bounty hunter, am I right? But let's turn our eyes back to this glorious school, a place with a really high-quality water fountain on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor outside the art rooms. And also, a place where last year—well, last semester, but last calendar year—we had a strange incident involving one of the cleaning robots.

It was the bad luck of our fellow classmate Midi to get caught up in that strange robotic rampage—along with my good friend Sang Mi, who needs to remember that we have a special Track Practice this Saturday at Higen Park—and thankfully due to their brave efforts we'll never see any problems related to robots ever again!

None!

I'm so sure about that and there's definitely not going to be any extremely ironic consequences of me saying that! Nope, I'm sure that this week will be another ordinary one at Academy 27. But really Sang Mi you better not miss Track Practice my mom is bringing homemade granola bars.

Till next time, I'm your announcer from the Broadcast Club, Hee Jin!

## *Tune in Next Week For:*

### **Key Card**

**By Callum Philpott**

**New Academy 27 stories will drop each Thursday!**

**Read past stories and learn more about Academy 27 at:**

**[ArcbeatlePress.com/A27](http://ArcbeatlePress.com/A27)**

**Don't let your dreams be dreams.  
Make them everyone's problem.**

**Delirium**   
**BY XELABS**

It's not just a sleep aid, it's a dream aid.



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