

# Unexpected Overtime

\*\*\*

Disclaimer: This is a commission for youseethehat. All characters and concepts herein are owned by RPG for You and Me, and taken from the “Neon Heat” actual-play D&D podcast; the scenario itself, however, is a non-canon AU. Unless directly stated, nothing in this work should be taken as canon to these characters or the setting of Caldonyx.

Please check out “Neon Heat,” and support the creators!

\*\*\*

Caldonyx was home to a number of shops, vendors, and restaurants plying all manner of food, from the flavored slime of specially-bred snails to “calzones” made from inflated lizards. But one particular little restaurant- “The Hole In the Ground”- stood out from the rest. Or didn’t, really- it was a small, unassuming location, overlooked by many going about their business throughout the cold metal and neon lights of the cityscape, but those who *would* venture inside would find themselves transported to another, far greener world, with floors literally carpeted in algae, tables and chairs grown directly from massive bioluminescent fungi, all nourished by natural water features flowing along the walls as they were fed from runoff from the surface above. It was a calm, tranquil splash of nature in the busy city, and those who found it would quickly be taken in by the atmosphere, at which point the staff were only too happy to ply them with good food.

Or at least, they tried to act like it.

“Have a good night!” the waitress said cheerily to the family of karnaks getting up from the large glowing orange mushroom that served as their table.

The mother, a snakelike woman, said nothing, focused on marshaling her unruly brood out of the restaurant; the father, who more closely resembled a thorny lizard, offered only a grunt and a curt nod before loping after them.

Their waitress, a woman with black curly hair and yellow eyes containing slitted catlike pupils that denoted her Vel ancestry, maintained a pleasant smile until they were well out of earshot, then let her somewhat long face slacken into a look of exhausted irritation. She scanned the food scrap-laden mushroom. “Of course no tip, why would there be a tip...?” she murmured, before starting to gather the assorted dishes, though she let most of the food fall to the floor. This was a major advantage to having a restaurant almost literally built out of plants and fungi- trash could often quite easily be converted into fertilizer. Still, she had to manage a fairly sizable pile as she staggered off toward the back.

She passed by the counter along the way, where her Erro coworker was watching her. The glass bulbs filled with swirling white gas and lit by the deep blue light in his head that constituted his eyes wore a look of concern. “Dat da last one for tonight, Athena?” he asked her.

She chuckled slightly. "You tell me- anyone else who comes in would go through you first." She set the dishes down on the counter with a care and delicacy that came more from muscle memory than genuine concern, collapsing next to them and staring vacantly into space as she blew out a breath through burbling lips.

Zidol looked at her with concern. "You, uh... Ya doin' alright ovah there, Sedaris...?" he asked hesitantly. "It was a... uh... *busy* one today."

She looked over at him with hollow eyes. Her shift had started at around 10am and had been fairly quiet at first, as it so often was- but almost at stroke of 11, just as they were reaching peak humidity for the day, it was as if the place had been put under siege. The karnak family she'd just cleaned up after had been merely the sting in the end of a very long tail of unruly Toppers, drunken workers, and just generally people who had no business being in a public setting. It hadn't been *all* bad- she'd even struck up a decent conversation with a semi-regular named Rhozza, who apparently owned something of a spa nearby and had invited Athena to partake one of these days, which she was *seriously* considering taking her up on during her day off tomorrow- but for every tolerable patron, there were seemingly a dozen galling ones. It was maddening- the Hole always did steady *enough* business, but lately it had been *shockingly* busy, and the tiny staff was a bit overloaded- especially her.

Still, though- that was hardly *his* fault. "I'll be..." She broke off, yawning widely. "...I'll be... better once I'm back in my apartment."

He stared at her, his expression shifting.

She noticed, raising an eyebrow. "Are... *you* okay?" she asked him.

He straightened. "Ah-! Yeah- yeah, why wouldn't I be?" He smiled, but again, it seemed fairly strained.

Athena's frown became a bit of a grimace. She knew Zidol was lying to her- they'd known each other long enough and well enough by now that she'd gotten pretty good at spotting it. He never lied without a valid reason, though- he wasn't the type to be needlessly cryptic.

The problem was, that suddenly put her in an awkward position. If he was hiding something, she didn't want to pry it out of him and make him unhappy- but if he already *was* unhappy, she didn't want him to suffer in silence. She bit her lip, unsure what to do, and the low buzzing of her headache wasn't helping.

But in the end, she decided it was better to know than to guess. "You *sure* nothing's wrong?" she asked him. "You seem a little... frazzled."

Zidol blinked, wriggling uncomfortably. "Ah... Well..." He sighed. "It's just... I... had somethin' planned for tonight, but, uh... wonderin' now if... everything's gonna come together."

Athena squinted at him. "'Somethin' planned,' huh? And what might that be?"

He opened his mouth to reply- but was cut off by a voice from across the room. "Ah, Athena?" she called.

Athena looked in the direction of the voice, and standing there was a nakhiir woman with light terracotta skin, orange hair with yellow tips tied up in a bob with long bangs, and similarly yellow-orange eyes, slitted like a snake similar to her own. She waved slightly to her friend and manager, though noted her uncharacteristically hesitant tone and frowned with unease. "What's up Pahvi?"

The nakhiir woman looked deeply uncomfortable, her reptilian features twisted like she'd bitten into a lemon. "...So, I know you've had a rough day," she began, her tone extremely gentle and reassuring as she started to walk over.

Athena felt an icy pit form in her stomach. "Pahvi, please," she breathed.

Her boss grimaced. "Look, I'd take care of it myself if I could! But I really need to get out of here in a hurry tonight, it's urgent, and... well, the café needs a pretty thorough cleaning."

Athena groaned, sinking into her chair. "Today? *Really?*"

Pahvi shut her eyes. "I know," she sighed. "I've just... heard murmurings that the owners might be popping in sometime soon, and so we need this place looking top-notch, or we'll never hear the end of it. But I'm getting some renovations done 'round my place."

Athena blinked slowly. "*This* late?"

"My sentiments exactly," Pahvi growled. "I'm starting to get odd vibes off of this company. But, all the more reason why I don't really want them there without my supervision, so I can't linger tonight." She gave Athena a pleading look. "You *know* I wouldn't ask if I had any other choice."

Athena threw her head back and groaned. "Yes, yes I *do*, that's the *problem!*" She reached up and dragged her fingers over her eyes. "...You know my answer."

"Have I mentioned I love you?!" Pahvi replied with a relieved grin, laying a hand on her shoulder.

"I've gotten a few hints," Athena replied, offering a weary, good-natured smile, though it didn't quite reach her tired, faintly panicked eyes.

"Don't you worry, this is gonna be worth your while!"

Athena tried to hold the smile and nod before getting up, picking up the pile of dishes, and making her way to the kitchen; once through the doors, however, the mask crumbled, and she quickly started trembling.

The cook, a bald man with a series of red line markings running from the top of his head down across his eyes, bottom lip, and temples, looked up as she came in, shutting the door. "Long day?" he asked. His voice was low and gruff, as it usually was- strangers might have thought he sounded irritated and dismissive.

Anyone who knew him well, though- and Athena was certainly among that number- knew when he was expressing concern and sympathy, and she was certainly picking up on that now. "And about to be much longer!" she laughed, her voice immediately going rusty.

He grimaced. “Hell, *really*?! Don’t you do enough around here?!”

“I guess not,” Athena sighed. “But... from the sound of it, this is just a really inopportune time all around, and Pahvi needs the extra help.”

He grunted. “Doesn’t mean it *needs* to be you.”

“Not like we have a lot of staff to work with, Eisek,” she reminded him.

Eisek scowled. “Maybe, but it’s still bullshit.” He sighed. “I’d offer to stay and help you, but-”

“No worries,” she told him with a wry smile. “*Strictly speaking*, I volunteered for this, no reason for you to do extra work.”

He grunted again. “I mean, I kinda did...”

She frowned. “Whatcha mean?”

He flinched, his eyes widening a bit. “I mean... ah... well, just look.” He gestured at a series of freshly-cleaned pans and cutlery.

She blinked as she saw them. “Damn, where did *those* come from?”

“Ah... Kinda big, last-minute order. You were clear on the other side of the restaurant, Zidol told me. Dhomba, naturally.”

Athena growled a bit. “What *is* it with these people getting sudden cravings for dhomba right as we’re getting ready to close?!”

“No kiddin’.” Eisek straightened up. “All clean now, though, so ‘bout time for me to head out... if you’re *sure* you don’t need the help...?”

“Don’t let me keep you,” she replied with a dismissive flick of her hand. “I’ll... I’ll be fine.”

Eisek smiled warmly. “I’ll bet. Well then- seeya Artemis!”

“Catch ya later, Vulcan,” she said with a wave and a small grin. Something about using those codenames always made her feel just a bit more confident.

With that, Eisek strode out into the main area. Athena faintly heard him talking with Zidol, though didn’t catch any specifics- presumably just saying their goodbyes.

With another sigh, she walked over and grabbed a clean glass, filling it with cold water and chugging it. Once she got her breath back, she washed the glass and put it away, then steeled herself and left the kitchen.

She soon came upon Pahvi and Zidol at the door, both changed out of their uniforms. Pahvi looked up as she approached, her features twisted with gratitude and pity. “Seriously, Athena, thank you for doing this. I know it’s a big ask, especially at such last-minute.”

Athena made the dismissive flick again. “No problem,” she said with a tired smile, though her eyes were faintly pleading.

Pahvi gave her one last smile, then turned and nodded to Zidol. “Make sure to lock up when you two are done.”

“But den how are da thieves supposed ta break in?! Think o’ da poor, honest burglars, Pahvi!”

Athena was confused. “Wait- what do you mean ‘when *you two* are done?’”

Zidol looked over at her and “winked.” “Oh, I’m stayin’ too. Did I not mention dat?”

She stared at him. “No... No you did not. You *did* mention ‘having something planned’ for tonight, though.”

“Yeah, funny how plans work, isn’t it? Don’t worry, this doesn’t change anythin’.”

Athena raised an eyebrow. “...Are these plans right before dawn? What-?”

“*Right*, well, this is a fortunate mixup!” Pahvi interrupted, clapping her hands. “But I should get out of your hair. Like I said, lock up when you’re done! Have a good night!”

Athena blinked, caught off guard and just a bit irritated and confused. Pahvi wasn’t usually the type to lord something over them, and earlier she’d seemed apologetic and grateful- yet all of a sudden, she seemed positively eager to scamper off and leave the two of them to their arguably-voluntary overtime. She opened her mouth to demand an explanation-

“Night, Pahvi, ‘preciate it!” Zidol said with a wave.

As Athena whirled to face him, confused all over again, Pahvi quickly opened the doors and slipped into the Caldonyx night, leaving them alone. He quickly walked over and locked the door.

“Okay, just... hold on a second!” Athena cried, looking to the floor with clenched eyes as she held up a hand. “Why... are you two acting so *weird* today?! I don’t understand... is there a kori leak in here?!”

Zidol scoffed. “I would *know* if dat were the case.” He grinned. “As for what’s goin’ on here... how about you change outta dat uniform first?”

She blinked. “I... what? Why would I...? If we’re gonna be cleaning, I’d rather not-”

“Just because you’re stayin’ late doesn’t mean ya need to be uncomfortable,” he pointed out. “Hell, you’re doin’ a personal favor here, only fair that you get to wear what you want at dis point. Not like anyone’s gonna barge in an’ call management.”

Athena sighed heavily. “...Good point, well-made, but *not* my issue, Zi. If this place needs a deep clean, I don’t wanna ruin my street clothes!”

“I don’t think that’ll be a problem,” he replied with a wink.

Athena threw up her hands and headed toward the back of the restaurant, making wet squelching noises as she left deep imprints in the plant-covered floor. She was well and truly bewildered and starting to get genuinely angry, but trying her best to contain an outburst. She reached the employee lockers fairly quickly, popping hers open and grabbing her bag- then felt her stomach drop.

Her usual clothes, which she’d worn today prior to changing into her uniform this morning and always kept in her locker to change into after she clocked out, were missing. In their place was a fancy cocktail dress and a matching pair of dress pants.

Her first feeling was utter confusion; this quickly segued into disbelief, which prompted a flash of denial, causing her to dig around for the other, identical bag that *had* to be in there. It was quickly apparent that *that* was leading nowhere, though, and the confusion roared back, accompanied by genuine anger. This was a prank- it *had* to be. She was all-but certain Zidol was in on it, but it looked very much like Pahvi was involved too. Her head snapped to the door, her muscles tensing up in preparation to stomp back out and demand some answers... but then she threw her head back and groaned. She *had* been in this uniform *all day*, and a change of clothes was a change of clothes- if she was being pranked anyway, might as well take advantage.

A few minutes later, Athena stepped out of the changing room, her boots making solid squishing noises on the floor. She was grateful they’d had *this* little bit of mercy, at least- the boots *did not* match the dress, but they were a hell of a lot easier to deal with than heels or dress shoes. She scanned the room for her Erro lover- then froze.

The Hole had *some* kori lights in it, but anything non-essential had long-since been turned off; the room was lit now primarily by the enormous glowing mushrooms that constituted tables and chairs. But, in addition, one especially large mushroom had a candelabra set up atop it, filled with lit candles that gave off a soft, distinct glow.

She gaped and blinked at the candles for a moment- then jumped upon hearing a metallic clang... one that sounded like it was coming from the kitchen. “Zidol?!” she called.

“Everyting’s fine, be right there!” he yelled back.

Utterly bemused, Athena took a tentative step toward the kitchen... then uneasily stepped back, before walking over to the candle-covered mushroom and sitting down, letting out a sharp breath. She looked over at the clock, her face going sour. Now that she knew- or, at least, strongly suspected- that a prank was afoot here, she desperately wanted to confront him about it and see how deeply Pahvi was involved. No matter what, she wanted to *get this done* and *get home*, and it seemed like he was complicating that process-

The doors to the kitchen burst open.

Athena jumped, her head snapping to the noise- then her mouth falling open.

Zidol was wheeling a covered silver dish toward the table on a cart. When he reached the table, he made a show of dramatically lifting up the tray- then wobbling a bit and making a distressed noise as

he apparently misjudged the weight and nearly dropped it. He quickly recovered, then hastily placed it down in front of Athena. "Uh..." He coughed, then made an elegant flourish. "Yer dinner, madame!"

Athena stared at the tray in astonishment, before turning back to him. "The hell is this?!"

He flinched. "Ah... W-Well, it's, uh-!"

"*Thank you*," she quickly clarified, holding up a hand. "Seriously, *boly shit*, thank you, but- what?!"

There was a slight pause, followed by awkward laughter from him. "Uh... Surprise?" he finally offered.

"No shit it is!" She shook her head. "So, wait- *is* this just some elaborate prank, or-?"

"Elaborate,' most definitely," he cut in. "Dis has been in the works for a... *long* while now. But nah, no prank."

Athena blinked several times. "Does... Pahvi *know* you're doing this, then?"

He snorted. "I asked her about doin' dis like two weeks ago, after dat *she* basically took ovah all tha plannin'."

"...So... that whole 'renovations' story-?"

"Total bullshit." He shrugged. "I mean, to *my* knowledge. I don't know Pahvi's private life- maybe she *is* gettin' work done. But I feel like any repairmen who seriously tried to make *her* wait this late would get a reality check."

"Probably." Athena let out an ecstatic sigh. "I'm gonna have to thank her." She laughed slightly. "She certainly wasn't kidding about 'making this worth my while!'"

Zidol "blinked." "...Whatcha mean?"

She cocked her head. "...I... figured she meant, you know, *this*-" She gestured around at the dining room.

Zidol started laughing. "Oh. No, no, she was bein' serious! Guess she mighta just been, ya know, kinda *opaque* about it to keep the bit going."

Athena frowned, utterly confused. "Huh?"

"A *raise*, Athena, yer gettin' a raise," he said patiently. "She let me in on it, said you've clearly been bustin' yer ass lately and deserve it, so she moved some funds around. I guess that whole 'make it worth yer while' thing was her way o' hintin' at it."

Athena was stunned. It took the better part of ten seconds just for her to open and close her mouth, at a loss for words. "I... uh... wow. That... was *not* anywhere on my expectations list today," she finally laughed, sitting up a little straighter as she felt just a *bit* of the pain in her back recede.

"I *tought* you'd enjoy dat one," he replied with a smirk, the swirling gas in his eyes managing to make them look like they were twinkling. "And speaking of enjoyment-" He gestured at the covered tray.

Athena's eyes moved to it, abruptly remembering it was there and looking at it with equal parts astonishment, gratitude, and disbelief. "Oh yeah, totally overlooked that- *you* cooked this?"

Zidol paused, rubbing the back of his head. "Ah... Shit, ya got me stuck between not wantin' to *disappoint* and not wantin' to *lie*..."

"That's a 'no,' then?" Athena laughed, feeling just the smallest twinge of disappointment.

"I mean, I, uh... knew it's your favorite!" the Erro said defensively. "But... c'mon, you know I can't cook for shit!"

She raised an eyebrow, giving him a reproachful grin. "I think you *could*, given enough practice. I can get my dad to show you the ropes."

"Anyone can make the food *look* good, Athena, but ya sorta need to know what things taste and smell like to make 'em edible." He shook his head. "Which is why I asked Eisek to work his magic."

"Shoulda guessed," Athena laughed, reaching out to clasp his hand. "Well, you still got *this* all set up, and I... really appreciate it." She took a shaky breath. "Today was *awful*, and when the whole 'late shift' thing started I seriously thought I might break down."

Zidol "blinked." "Ah... shit. I... We just thought, y'know-!"

"I'm fine *now*!" she reassured him.

Zidol looked at her, before turning to the side slightly and rubbing the back of his head with his free hand. "It's nothin', I mean... You deserve a night like dis."

"Oh, come on!"

"You *do*!" he protested. "You've been runnin' yaself ragged lately, you deserve somethin' special!"

Athena stared him dead in the eyes, before her face crumpled and her eyes grew misty. She quickly darted forward, wrapped the Erro in a tight embrace, and planted her lips on his metal mouth.

He seized up as she did so, before wrapping his arms around her and returning the favor, as best he could.

Eventually, she pulled back, gazing at him with adoring eyes as she cupped his cheek. "Thank you," she said softly.

"O' course," he sighed back just as softly.

They held that look for a good twenty seconds- before a low rumbling noise disturbed the moment. They both slowly lowered their gazes to Athena's stomach, and she blushed furiously- and then



Zidol cracked up. Mild, poorly contained snickering, at first, which drew out a similar reaction from Athena, and from there things steadily ramped up, until they were both guffawing, her wiping away tears as he stared at the floor with a hand on his knee.

Eventually, they managed to hiccup themselves back to composure. “Okay,” he choked out, trying to stifle more giggles before they brought on another episode. “C’mon, now, listen to yer stomach and eat the thing before it gets cold!”

Athena took several shaky breaths, trying to prevent her own relapse. “You know what? Fair.” She reached toward the tray- then stopped, snapping her fingers. “Actually- one more thing!” She bolted from the table.

“Woah, woah, where’s the fire?!” he demanded.

“No fire, just- wait right there, I’ll be right back!” And before he could protest further, she sprinted off to the employees-only area.

He watched her go, confused and concerned, looking uneasily at the still-untouched and rapidly-cooling meal, then toward the door, drumming his fingers on the table-

-Only for Athena to burst out from the back. “Found ‘em!” she cried with triumph as she headed back to the table.

Zidol cocked his head. “Found what?”

“These!” she replied, pulling out and proudly displaying what looked at first like a glowing carton of cigarettes.

Zidol’s eyes brightened- literally. “Oh damn!”

Athena grinned smugly. “Was gonna give these to you after work, but since you’re giving *me* a gift...”

His expression softened again. “Daw, you’re a sweetheart!”

“Thanks pot, says the kettle,” she laughed, before thrusting the pack of kori crystals at him.

Zidol took and tore open the pack of Wisps, pulling one out and placing the thin tube of crystal to his mouth; it blazed with light, then dimmed, as he let out what sounded like a breath and his circuits hummed with satisfaction. “Damn, dat’s good...”

“I thought you’d like them. I can’t really make *you* dinner, but this is close enough, right?”

“Speakin’ o’ which,” he replied, inclining his head meaningfully at the shiny dish.

Athena rolled her eyes. “Okay, okay, twist my arm-!” She eagerly sat down.

With an exaggerated flourish, Zidol grasped the top of the cover- then paused, looking up with a slightly worried expression. “Uh... lemme just preface, dis’ll be... ah... *less fancy* than it looks. My *main* concern was it bein’ somethin’ you’d like, not so much bein’, y’know, upscale.”

Athena smirked and raised an eyebrow. “I’m not having dinner with my grandparents, Zi- frankly, I’d appreciate that *you* did it for me, but I might be a little disappointed if it got *too* ritzy.”

He sighed with relief. “Then I have good news for *you!*” He finally pulled the lid off the tray-

-and Athena gasped with delight as she was greeted by the sight of a massive hoagie, piled high with seared dhomba meat dripping with juice, sitting atop a pile of what looked like homemade fries.

“Tah-dah!” the Erro cried.

“Eisek, you absolute wizard,” she breathed, before looking up at Zidol. “And *you*, you *saint!*”

“Alright, alright,” he said with a laugh and a dismissive wave. “Flattery is all well an’ good, Athena, but seein’ you *eat* the thing will seal the deal!”

She obliged, reaching out to grab the sandwich and proceeding to absolutely *savage* it.

Zidol watched her consume the hoagie with a warm smile... which became just a bit concerned when she’d eaten a good sixth of it without stopping. “Ah... Glad ya like it, but might wanna pace yourself...?”

She looked up, swallowing hard and letting out a contented sigh. “Sorry... Sorry, I guess that... *was* kinda undignified...”

“Screw ‘dignity,’” he scoffed. “I just don’t want you to choke, that’ll put a bit of a dampah on things!”

She giggled at that, reaching out to grab a napkin and dab at her mouth, before proceeding to slow down and eat at a safer pace. While she was doing that, Zidol polished off his Wisp, placing it in the garbage pile before reaching for another.

Athena was around three-fourths of the way through the sandwich (and Zidol another two Wisps deep) before she finally leaned back with a heavy sigh of both pleasure and discomfort. “Hoo, damn... I *really* wanna finish this thing, but...”

“It’ll keep,” he laughed. “We can wrap it up and take it home.” He raised an eyebrow. “But... I hope you’re not in a hurry to leave...?”

She looked over at him with a smirk. “I mean, not *anymore*. Why?”

The Erro reached under the table- and came back up with a guitar.

Athena gaped at him. “*NO WAY!*” she barked.

He snickered. "Look, appreciate dis while you can, okay? You know I don't usually *serenade* people." He looked at her, his expression growing tender. "But... I figure tonight's a good night for it, y'know?"

Athena smiled. "You mean on top of everything, I get a rare Zidol concert?! You're spoiling me!"

"Like I said, keepin' on theme." Then, without further ado, he started to play.

Immediately, Athena recognized the tune- it was a style of music more common on the surface than down here, but she'd managed to hear this song a couple years ago, and it was one of her favorites. She felt her throat constrict a bit.

Then he started to sing.

"Been a long road, lost a lot of time, but you're still by my side. Can never be sure, setting out each day, that we'll come back alive. I listen hard to hear you speak, though I can't be sure you did. And I can only wonder- are you really into this?"

Athena's lip quivered.

"I'll stand outside your door and wonder, eyes wide, heart a racin': Should I take you down this path, is this where we should be facin'? 'Course, I know what *you* would say, though I have my doubts-"

"We're both in this together- so how 'bout we find out?" Athena cut in.

Zidol's eyes snapped to her, widening, before his expression shifted to one of gratitude. He never missed a beat, though, continuing to play. "Been a long road, lost a lot of time-"

"But I'm still by your side."

"And I can only wonder-"

"Yes, I'm enjoying the ride."

"I guess we'll be home soon enough, you can step away..."

"Or we can go around again. C'mon, wadduya say?"

Zidol played the last measure of the song, finally winding it down, and looked up at Athena.

She was looking dead at him, her face scrunched up in a grimacing smile. Her eyes were wet.

"Aw jeez, c'mon now, Athena, it's- oof!"

He couldn't get anything else out, as Athena practically lunged at him, wrapped him in as tight a hug as she could manage, and planted her lips firmly on his metallic mouth.

When she finally, eventually pulled away, he looked almost like he'd been flashbanged. "Ah... I... take it you liked it...?" he asked with a laugh.

She held up a hand. “Just... don’t talk for a sec,” she gasped, wiping her eyes. “If you do, I’m gonna hug you again.”

He blinked. “Ah...” He snickered. “I mean... dere are *worse* punishments- D’OH!” he cried out as she embraced him again, knocking them both to the mossy floor.

Eventually, Athena pulled back. “Told ya- I don’t make idle threats,” she hiccuped.

Zidol looked up at her fondly, gently brushing a metallic finger under her eyes to wipe away the tears before running them through her hair.

They stayed there in a contented embrace for a long time- neither of them was sure exactly how long, they just revelled in each other’s quiet company. “So... You feelin’ any bettah...?” Zidol whispered.

Athena clutched him tightly, nuzzling him. “Definitely,” she whispered back. “But... I’d like to make this last...”

“We got all night,” he soothed her. “You just enjoy yaself.”

“On it.”

And so they laid on the algae, the many colored lights shining down on them as they savored the peace and quiet.

\*\*\*