

The Outpost by H. P. Lovecraft

When evening cools the yellow stream,
 And shadow stalks the jungle's ways,
 Zimbabwe's palace flares ablaze
For the great King who fears to dream.

For he alone of all mankind
 Waded the swamp that serpents shun;
 And struggling toward the setting sun,
Came on the veldt that lies behind.

No other eyes had ventured there
 Since eyes were lent for human sight—
 But there, as sunset turned to night,
He found the Elder Secret's lair.

Strange turrets rose beyond the plain,
 And walls and bastions spread around

 The distant domes that fouled the ground
Like leprous fungi after rain.

A grudging moon writhed up to shine
 Past leagues where life can have no home;
 And paling far-off tower and dome,
Shewed each unwindowed and malign.

Then he who in his boyhood ran
 Through vine-hung ruins free from fear,
 Trembled at what he saw—for here
Was no dead, ruined seat of man.

Inhuman shapes, half-seen, half-guessed,
Half solid and half ether-spawned,
Seethed down from starless voids that yawned
In heav'n, to these blank walls of pest.

And voidward from that pest-mad zone
Amorphous hordes seethed darkly back,
Their dim claws laden with the wrack
Of things that men have dreamed and known.

The ancient Fishers from Outside—
Were there not tales the high-priest told,
Of how they found the worlds of old,
And took what pelf their fancy spied?

Their hidden, dread-ringed outposts brood
Upon a million worlds of space;
Abhorred by every living race,
Yet scatheless in their solitude.

Sweating with fright, the watcher crept
Back to the swamp that serpents shun,
So that he lay, by rise of sun,
Safe in the palace where he slept.

None saw him leave, or come at dawn,
Nor does his flesh bear any mark
Of what he met in that curst dark—
Yet from his sleep all peace has gone.

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And shadow stalks the jungle's ways,

Zimbabwe's palace flares ablaze
For a great King who fears to dream.