



The Big Time

Fritz Reuter Leiber Jr.

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You can't know there's a war on—for the Snakes coil and Spiders weave to keep you from knowing it's being fought over your live and dead body!

Fritz Reuter Leiber Jr. (December 24, 1910–September 5, 1992) was an influential American writer of fantasy, horror and science fiction. He was also an expert chess player and a champion fencer. Leiber (pronounced Lie-ber) married Jonquil Stephens on January 16, 1936, and their son Justin Leiber was born in 1938. Jonquil's death in 1969 precipitated a three-year bout of alcoholism, but he returned to his original form with a fantasy novel set in modern-day San Francisco, *Our Lady of Darkness* — serialized in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* as "The Pale Brown Thing" (1977) — in which cities were the breeding grounds for new types of elementals called paramentals, summonable by the dark art of megapolisomancy, with such activities centering around the Transamerica Pyramid. *Our Lady of Darkness* won the World Fantasy Award. In the last years of his life, Leiber married his second wife, Margo Skinner, a journalist and poet with whom he had been friends for many years. Many people believed that Leiber was living in poverty on skid row, but the truth of the matter was that Leiber preferred to live simply in the city, spending his money on dining, movies and travel. In the last years of his life, royalty checks from TSR, the makers of *Dungeons and Dragons*, who had licensed the mythos of the *Fafhrd and Gray Mouser* series, were enough in themselves to ensure that he lived comfortably. Leiber's death occurred a few weeks after a physical collapse while traveling from a science-fiction convention in London, Ontario with Skinner. The cause of his death was given as "organic brain disease." He wrote a short autobiography, *Not Much Disorder and Not So Early Sex*, which can be found in *The Ghost Light* (1984). A critical biography, *Witches of the Mind* by Bruce Byfield, is available, and an essay examining his literary relationship with H. P. Lovecraft appears in S. T. Joshi's *The Evolution of the Weird Tale* (2004). In 2007, Benjamin Szumskyj edited *Fritz Leiber: Critical Essays*, a collection of essays on various aspects of Leiber's work. Leiber's own literary criticism, including several ground-breaking essays on Lovecraft, was collected in the volume *Fafhrd and Me* (1990).

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