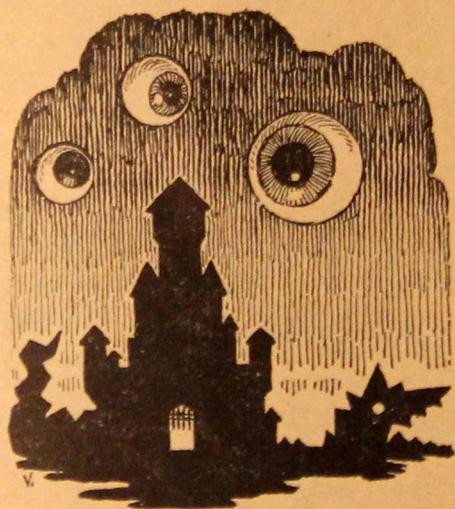


Above him were a thousand different-colored moons.  
Beside him was the girl. Across the room the dragon  
glowered. And outside, not far away, was . . .

# World Edge

By JACK EGAN

Illustrated by FINLAY



HARVEY CRANE was lying flat on his back, though how he had gotten there he was still trying to figure out. Above him he could see the flat pink half-sphere of the sky. Now, *that* bothered him. He squinted up at it for several more minutes before deciding it was the color that was wrong somehow. Harvey hunched up into a sitting position, yawned widely, and gazed around. Thirty yards to his left a stand of blue and yellow trees, triangular in shape, effectively blocked the horizon. In

front of him a tapered cylinder, balanced gracefully on its nose, performed the same function. To his right . . . there *was* no horizon!

"God damn," said Harvey Crane.

He crawled the ten feet or so to the Edge of the World and looked down. The all-pervading rosininess swirled below. Harvey tightened his belt to hold his stomach in place, inched far back from the Edge, and stood shakily up.

It was then that he noticed the girl.

She stood with hands on hips, critically appraising the ship.

*Aha! The ship! That's what it is,* Harvey thought triumphantly.

"I see you tried to land it again," the girl said dryly. *Again?* Harvey wondered, but said nothing. She walked over to the ship, lifted the gargantuan structure by a wingtip, and scowled back at him.

"Well, don't just stand there like an idiot. Come give me a hand."

He was surprised at the ease with which they handled the rocket. They soon had it righted, and the girl stood back and gazed at it worryingly.

"There," she said. It sounded final. A look of vague annoyance crossed her pretty features. She shook her long, brown hair into

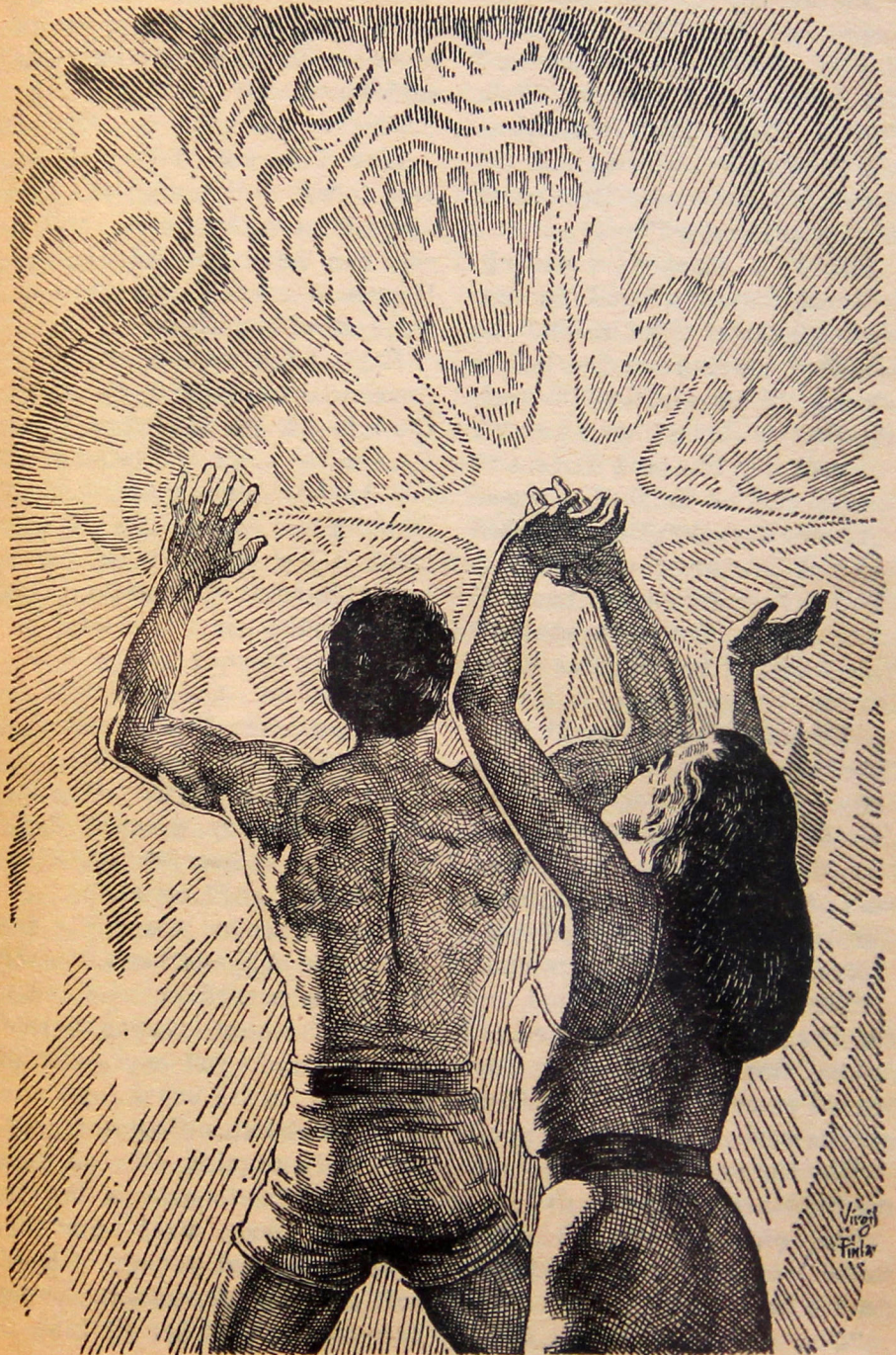
place, flicked an imaginary speck of dust off her spotless white trousers, rolled the sleeves of her blouse up, and . . . erased the ship.

"*Hey!*" shouted Harvey wildly, "You can't do that!" He stared in dumb amazement at the fading after-image of the ship. Beyond it, the long upward slope of the yellow, grassy hill was crowned by a huge Castle.

"Don't be silly, Harvey dear. Come on, it's playtime." He followed her, for some reason, up the slope to the Palace.

PLAYTIME, Harvey learned, consisted of a pleasant swim in the purple waters of the Palace moat, followed by a delicious feast of some sort of orange fruit faintly resembling wax-covered ladybugs. They—he and the girl and a pet animal with a disturbing tendency to change shape every three seconds—were seated in a rather large floral garden (there was a faunal one somewhere nearby, Harvey learned), gazing. That is to say, the girl was gazing at the garden, the animal at Harvey, and Harvey at *her*. It must have been a pleasant experience all around, for they started laughing after a few minutes.

"Say," Harvey said, standing. "I don't have the faintest idea who I am, where I am, or why, but . . . *who* are you?"



Virgil  
Finlay

She bit her lip, and said with forced gaiety, "My goodness, Harvey. Don't you remember? No, I suppose you don't. Well, I'm . . . Dana. Tell me, Harvey," she walked over to him and looked into his eyes. "How much *do* you remember?"

Harvey stopped smiling, frowned, rubbed a hand through his black hair. "Not much," he admitted, staring out the Palace window. "I keep having the feeling that if I *try* hard enough . . . but, I'm not sure I want to remember," he finished, puzzled.

"Now, Harvey," Dana laughed and put her arms around him. "You're here now, and that's all that matters. You've *always* been here." Harvey looked down at her fondly.

"Tsk tsk," he pronounced. "Now you *have* aroused my curiosity." He kissed her, felt an imperious snap at his pantleg, and turned to find an amazing likeness of a dragon turning a burning gaze at his exposed calf. "Hey!" he shouted, and jumped.

"*Timothy!*" Dana shouted, and the dragon reverted to her pet animal. She turned back to Harvey. "I'm so sorry, Harvey. Timothy is really very fond of you."

"He has an odd way of showing it," Harvey growled.

The pinkness of the outer world suddenly changed to a deep aquamarine.

"Oh dear," sighed Dana.

"Night already, and I haven't made up the bed. I suppose we can sleep on the cot tonight," she said tentatively.

"We?"

"Oh. I forgot. You just got here today, didn't you," she said absently, a little rankled. "Well, you can have the cot tonight, Harvey. We have *so* much to do the rest of our lives."

Harvey felt so suddenly overcome with weariness he didn't think to ask her just what it was they had so much of. He followed her docilely down a blue-lighted corridor and out onto a small balcony. A low cot, lined with silk and complete with canopy, reposed in the exact center of the porch. He turned to say good-night to Dana and found her already gone. The little Changeling sat panting in her place, its multi-morphic form vibrating slightly. Harvey grinned down at its angry dwarfish stare.

"Jealous, eh?" he said.

The bathroom was off to the right side of the balcony. Harvey found he needed nothing but a drink of water—it was purple. His chin showed no signs of erupting in its usual forest of thick, dark hairs. He swore good-naturedly at this (it had been his intention to grow a beard), put his razor away, and undressed for bed. A pair of loose, soft pajamas of neutral color lay across the cot. They fit him.

THE aqua sky showed thousands of vari-shaped blobs that whirled crazily overhead; he at first mistook them for clouds. Gradually it became apparent that they were moons, each a different color. Somehow the glinting gold one seemed familiar to him. Finally he gave up trying to chase down a forgotten memory and looked past them to the stars.

Now, what were stars? Harvey stared at the powder sprinkled across the sky. He *must* know what they are; he knew what they were called, didn't he? Or had he just imagined the name—made it up himself?

"Greeeeep," the Changeling said softly. Harvey switched his gaze from the sky to the outstretched form of a bear rug lying on the floor beside the cot. "Greeeeep." Hmm. The Changeling's body was barely vibrating. It must be asleep.

Harvey watched the animal for several minutes. A faint blue breeze sighed through the parapets of the Palace mounting above him. Below, in the courtyard, he heard the stealthy rattle of chains.

*Ghosts?* His mind rejected the possibility at once. He had never believed in them before—why start now? His mind worked furiously as the sound halted. Bridge. Drawbridge. He recalled seeing a drawbridge across the

moat when Dana had led him swimming yesterday . . . only, *they* had entered through a small door set flush with the surface of the water. Someone must be letting the drawbridge down, and it had to be Dana. Harvey raised up on his elbow and carefully put a foot over the edge of the cot. He crept to the railing of the balcony and looked down eighty feet of blue emptiness to the yellowness of the hill. Down it, a cloaked figure followed a crooked path to the Edge of the World. *Dana.*

Something sparked an irrational fear in Harvey as the figure grew smaller with distance. He wrapped his robe about him, slipped into his flight shoes (*there* was something to examine later. Where had he gotten those words?), and dodged into a hallway. All roads led to the courtyard, Harvey knew. At least, all that *he* had covered. He cast an apprehensive glance over his shoulder to see if the Changeling had followed him, then wondered at his apprehension. His memory of existence went back less than twenty-four hours, and this bothered him. He should have thought more about what the *ship* was, rather than *where* he was, he thought self-deprecatingly. But Dana had to be going somewhere, and in this world, bounded so tightly by Infinity, there was nothing left to do but

wonder where the hell she was going. He halted in the courtyard, located the path to the drawbridge, and found the drawbridge closed.

*Yeep!* Harvey thought. Either Dana was already back, or she had someone or something here to draw the bridge up after her departure. He whirled, saw nothing, and ran back to the garden, retracing their steps of yesterday to the small door unhinging out onto the moat. He stripped down to his trunks and slid out into the chill purple of the water.

IT became immediately obvious that swimming was *not* a nighttime sport. The water was extremely cold (Harvey twice bumped into floating cakes of ice), and harbored a species of life that, while seemingly harmless, certainly *felt* horrible. He pulled himself out on the far side and sat chattering for several minutes, massaging his legs. Somewhere on that small plain of grass, dear old Dana was up to something. And Harvey felt it imperative that he know *what*.

He shuddered to his feet and gaped back at the Castle. In the crazy lights of the whirling moons, shadows danced and played in the deep gouges of balconies and alcoves. The ramparts themselves stabbed into the night sky like the many-pointed noses of rockets on a spacefield.

*Spacefield? Rockets? What?*

A dim wave of remembrance washed over Harvey. He clenched his fists and tried to think. He tore at the black veil over the past with mental fingers, and it resisted. He opened his eyes and found himself running down the esplanade toward the spot where he had regained consciousness the day before. He slowed to a walk, hoping the crazily darting, heterochromatic moons would hide his mobile shadow among the moving shadows of the fixed plants and rocks.

Near the place where he had first met her, Dana halted and looked behind her. Harvey darted into the dubious shelter of a triangle tree and stopped, waiting breathlessly for her call of discovery. Nothing happened, and a few moments later he chanced a look.

A row of three eyes stared coldly in his face.

Harvey jerked back, shuddered to fight back a yell, and ran madly down the hill toward Dana, but she was no longer in sight. For one wild second Harvey thought she had disappeared over the Edge. A look confirmed the fallacy of the notion. But behind him, the three floating red eyes stared impassively. Angrily, he wrenched them from the air and flung the glowing coals out into Infinity, and had the satisfaction of watching them dwin-

dle into nothing. He had no idea what they were; all he knew was he hadn't liked them.

Disappointed at having lost Dana, he started back up the hill toward the Castle.

*Thud!*

HARVEY picked himself up off the ground and explored the night air in front of him with wary hands. He encountered solid surface and felt his way around it, astonished. It was the ship! Dana had done nothing but render it invisible yesterday! He located the rocket tubes and the heavy arches of the landing fins, and looked up when he judged he should be under the airlock. A sudden, frightful flood of memory poured over him.

My God! *Earth! The Universe! Me!*

"Harvey?"

Silence. He squatted down under the rocket's firing flange, hidden from view of the airlock.

"Harvey dear, is that you?" A light sprang out of the air twenty feet above the ground. Dana stood in breath-taking silhouette in a rectangular frame of familiar white. Harvey realized it was the first time since . . . since *the crash!* . . . since the crash that he had seen *white* light. White, the symbol of truth. He straightened, still under the flange, and waited while Dana decided to come down and look

around. He would soon get the truth.

"Harvey?"

He tensed as her shapely legs appeared, carefully feeling for the rungs of an invisible ladder. When she reached the ground, Harvey stepped around the exhaust flange and flung himself on her. They landed in the yellow turf, and Harvey found without surprise he faced a formidable opponent. Whatever the force that had enabled her to lift the ship yesterday proved equally useful against flesh; but Harvey found he also possessed new strength. His eyes fell on the tiny metal case strapped to her waist.

A Matter Disorganizer!

"Harvey! Stop it, Harvey! *You don't know what you're doing!*" she screamed. He laughed harshly and finally succeeded in wrenching the little metal box away from her.

"You were going to destroy the ship," he shouted incredulously. "In God's name, *why?*"

She stepped back from him, tears glistening in her eyes. "To keep . . . this from happening," she panted. She turned and yelled something at the Castle.

In the weird moonlights, a huge flying monster dragged itself from the topmost pinnacle and came in a banshee wail toward Harvey. He put down his fear and aimed the Matter Dis-

organizer carefully. The huge yawning mouth gaped out at him as he pulled the actuator. The banshee scream stopped abruptly; the monster vanished. Dana fell to her knees sobbing. "You've killed him! You've killed Timothy," she cried.

Harvey turned back to the ridiculous rectangle of white radiance suspended in mid-air and adjusted the MD's energy span. The solid metal walls of the rocket reared into the night sky.

"All right, Dana," Harvey said coldly, turning to the kneeling woman. "Where am I, and what's going on here?"

"I—I suppose I should tell you now," she choked out, standing without his help. Harvey felt suddenly cold. The night wind had ceased, and a blue heatlessness settled over the yellow field. Even the moons lost some of their giddy fervor.

"Go on. I'm listening." He felt his voice soften, and rebelled. He had been subservient for too long in this crazy world, he realized. He felt something else was necessary. "I remember now," he stated.

DANA sucked in her breath and stared at him longingly. "Oh Harvey, darling. I've lost you so many times already. Must we go through it again?" she said sadly. Harvey said nothing.

Her shoulders sagged. "Very well. It isn't a long story. You remember Earth, Harvey? Your Earth?"

"I remember."

"You know why you came . . . here?"

"No."

"Look at your ship, Harvey. It's old. It is *very* old. I'm going to tell you something. Something you already know, but won't admit to yourself . . ."

A frightened look appeared in Harvey's eyes.

"Well, go on. Tell me," he shouted impatiently, fearfully.

"After your ship left Earth, Harvey, it jumped the Light Barrier. But you and the others hadn't counted on the forces involved; everything but the *man* was designed to take that jump. *You never came out of Overdrive, Harvey. You're still in that ship, and you'll never wake up!*" She laughed/cried at Harvey's twisted face.

"You're crazy!" he roared hoarsely. "You're crazy! I remember! I know where I am, and how to get back!"

"Take a look around you, Harvey Crane," Dana laughed at him hysterically. "Do you think a world such as this *could ever really exist?*"

"All this, Harvey," she gestured at the chunk of land, the Castle, and the moons—"They're just symbols. This island: your



mind; the world edge is the end of Reality. Out there, the moons—*they are insanity.*”

“But you *wanted* me to stay here. Why did you change your mind?” He stared at her accusingly.

“If you wish, you can ascribe motives to my actions,” Dana said tiredly. “But they are your motives, not mine. Harvey, I’m just ‘real’ in your imagination. In Reality—the only Reality—I’m back on Earth, waiting. Harvey . . . go back. *I want you so!*”

Harvey stared at her, incredulous. “But *you*. Who are *you?*” he blurted.

She bit her lip and gazed at him sadly.

“I,” she said, her voice tremulant, “Am your wife.”

HARVEY’S memory tore back to a green planet called Earth . . . forgotten faces, places. He *looked* at Dana for the first time, and in that instant of full recognition, she began to dissolve.

“Harvey,” she pleaded, “Wake up. You’ve got to face Reality before it’s too late. Please . . .” she sobbed into nonexistence.

Harvey wheeled toward the ship and fled up the ramp. “No!

No! This is Reality!” he shouted. He stared up at the insane island-moons swirling in the sky; the soft, sourceless aqua of the air; the incredible bulk of the Castle on the Edge of Infinity, and he felt on the brink of Hell. Something was going to happen. Harvey’s breathing was loud in the thundering silence.

The Castle suddenly wrenched from the island and lifted ponderously into the air, an immense ghastly shadow looming closer. . . . Harvey screamed.

He spun around, intending to use the Matter Disorganizer on the Castle as it swung faster and faster toward the ship. The MD slipped from his grasp and sailed high into the air, toward the . . .

*No! No!*

Up and up . . .

*No! No!*

Up and up . . .

*No!—*

*“Please, Harvey . . . you’re trapped in your—in your imagination. You’ve got to face REALITY.”*

CLANK

It hit the ship.

The Universe dissolved in a vivid flash of white fire, and still Harvey could hear Dana’s whispered pleading . . .

THE END