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Captain Crunch Is Jailed Again

By Rick Carroll

Legendary phone phreak Captain Crunch got hung up again yesterday in San Jose U.S. District Court.

John Thomas Draper, 35, was sentenced to prison for a year for violating probation by federal Judge Robert F. Peckham.

"You have to pay for your long distance phone calls," the judge said. "Is that a very difficult moral concept to grasp?"

The judge also ordered psychiatric treatment for the electronics wizard with a penchant for making long distance phone calls on blue boxes, computers and other sophisticated gadgetry.

But Judge Peckham allowed Draper to serve his sentence under the federal work furlough program after his lawyer, Ronald Barkin, pleaded for leniency.

"His entire reality has to do with the technology of computers and telephones," Barkin said. "When he gets involved with the technology aspect he loses all sense of morality."

Draper, a perpetual tinkerer since childhood, surfaced six years ago with his discovery that a toy whistle — packed in Captain Crunch cereal boxes — duplicated the phone company's secret signals

and enabled anyone to call anywhere in the world free.

He is recognized as an authority in the illegal "art of blue boxing," another way of calling long distance for free.

Draper, already on probation on an earlier conviction for wire fraud, was arrested at a gathering of Pennsylvania phone phreaks and convicted there last year. The FBI said he used a new computer to gain access to the Bell Telephone System's WATS line, a felony.

"I was only demonstrating what the equipment could do," said the bespectacled Draper, whose rumpled look lends him the air of a mad scientist.

Two psychiatrists examined him and concluded that he has "an underdeveloped sense of people and is extremely suggestible and vulnerable" — especially when it comes to electronics. One of the doctors said he was psychotic and one said he wasn't.

The conviction, his third in six years, left Judge Peckham with no alternative but to revoke his probation and order him to prison.

Draper is now employed at a Palo Alto computer firm, where he said he is creating a new language that will enable computers to talk to one another.

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