“The Russians,” said Dowling, in his precise voice, “used to send prisoners to Siberia in the days before space travel had become common. The French used Devil's Island for the purpose. The British sailed them off to Australia.”

He considered the chessboard carefully and his hand hesitated briefly over the bishop.

Parkinson, at the other side of the chess board, watched the pattern of the pieces absently. Chess was, of course, the professional game of computer programmers, but, under the circumstances, he lacked enthusiasm. By rights, he felt with some annoyance, Dowling should have been even worse off; he was programming the prosecution's case.

There was, of course, a tendency for the programmer to take over some of the imagined characteristics of the computer-the unemotionality, the imperviousness to anything but logic. Dowling reflected that in his precise hair-part and in the restrained elegance of his clothing.

Parkinson, who preferred to program the defense in the law cases in which he was involved, also preferred to be deliberately careless in the minor aspects of his costume.

He said, “You mean exile is a well-established punishment and therefore not particularly cruel.”

“No, it is particularly cruel, but also it is well-established, and nowadays it has become the perfect deterrent.”

Dowling moved the bishop and did not look upward. Parkinson, quite involuntarily, did.

Of course, he couldn't see anything. They were indoors, in the comfortable modem world tailored to human needs, carefully protected against the raw environment. Out there, the night would be bright with its illumination.

When had he last seen it? Not for a long time. It occurred to him to wonder what phase it was in right now.

Full? Gleaming? Or was it in its crescent phase? Was it a bright fingernail of light low

in the sky?

By rights it should be a lovely sight. Once it had been. But that had been centuries ago, before space travel had become common and cheap, and before the surroundings all about them had grown sophisticated and controlled. Now the lovely light in the sky had become a new and more horrible Devil's Island hung in space.

– No one even used its name any longer, out of sheer distaste. It was “It.” Or it was less than that, just a silent, upward movement-of the head.

Parkinson said, “You might have allowed me to program the case against exile generally.”

“Why? It couldn't have affected the result.”

“Not this one, Dowling. But it might have affected future cases. Future punishments might be commuted to the death sentence.”

“For someone guilty of equipment damage? You're dreaming.”

“It was an act of blind anger. There was intent to harm a human being, granted; but there was no intent to harm equipment. “

“Nothing; it means nothing. Lack of intent is no excuse in such cases. You know that.”

“It should be an excuse. That's my point; the one I

wanted to make.” Parkinson advanced a pawn now, to cover his knight. Dowling considered. “You're trying to hang onto the queen's attack, Parkinson, and I'm not going to let you. -Let's see, now.” And while he pondered he said, “These are not primitive times, Parkinson. We live in a crowded world with no margin for error. As small a thing as a blown-out consistor could endanger a sizable fraction of our population. When anger endangers and subverts a power line, it's a serious thing.”

“I don't question that-”

“You seemed to be doing so, when you were constructing the defense program.”

“I was not. Look, when Jenkins' laser beam cut through the Field-warp, I myself was as close to death as anyone.A quarter hour's additional delay would have meant my end, too, and I'm completely aware of that. My point is only that exile is not the proper punishment!”

He tapped his finger on the chessboard for emphasis, and Dowling caught the queen

before it went over. “Adjusting, not moving,” he mumbled.

Dowling's eyes went from piece to piece and he continued to hesitate. “You're wrong, Parkinson. It is the proper punishment, because there's nothing worse and that matches a crime than which there is nothing worse. Look, we all feel our absolute dependence on a complicated and rather fragile technology. A breakdown might kill us all, and it doesn't matter whether the breakdown is 1 deliberate, accidental, or caused by incompetence. Human beings demand the maximum punishment for any such I deed as the only way they can feel secure. Mere death is I not sufficient deterrent.”

“Yes, it is. No one wants to die.”

“They want to live in exile up there even less. That's why we've only had one such case in the last ten years, and only one exile. -There, do something about that!” I And Dowling nudged his queen's rook one space to the right.

A light flashed. Parkinson was on his feet at once.“The programming is finished. The computer will have its verdict now.”

Dowling looked up phlegmatically, “You've no doubt about what the verdict will be, have you? -Keep the board standing. We'll finish afterward.”

Parkinson was quite certain he would lack the heart to continue the game. He hurried down the corridor to the courtroom, light and quick on his feet, as always.

Shortly after he and Dowling had entered, the judge took his seat, and then in came Jenkins, flanked by two guards.

Jenkins looked haggard, but stoical. Ever since the blind rage had overcome him and he had accidentally I thrown a sector into unpowered darkness while striking out at a fellow worker, he must have known the inevitable consequence of this worst of all crimes. It helps to have no illusions.

Parkinson was not stoical. He dared not look squarely at Jenkins. He could not have done so without wondering, painfully, as to what might be going through Jenkins' mind at that moment. Was he absorbing, through every sense, all the perfections of familiar comfort before being thrust forever into the luminous Hell that rode the night sky?

Was he savoring the clean and pleasant air in his nostrils, the soft lights, the equable temperature, the pure water on call, the secure surroundings designed to cradle humanity in tame comfort?

While up there-

The judge pressed a contact and the computer's decision was converted into the warm, unmannered sound of a standardized human voice.

“A weighing of all pertinent information in the light of the law of the land and of all relevant precedents leads to the conclusion that Anthony Jenkins is guilty on all counts of the crime of equipment damage and is subject to the maximum penalty.”

There were only six people in the courtroom itself, but the entire population was listening by television, of course.

The judge spoke in prescribed phraseology. “The defendant will be taken from here to the nearest spaceport and, on the first available transportation, be removed from this world and sent into exile for the term of his natural life.”

Jenkins seemed to shrink within himself, but he said no word.

Parkinson shivered. How many, he wondered, would now feel the enormity of such a punishment for any crime? How long before there would be enough humanity among men to wipe out forever the punishment of exile?

Could anyone really think of Jenkins up there in space, without flinching? Could they think, and endure the thought, of a fellow man thrown for all his life among the strange, unfriendly, vicious population of a world of unbearable heat by day and frigid cold by night; of a world where the sky was a harsh blue and the ground a harsher, clashing green; where the dusty air moved raucously and the viscous sea heaved eternally?

And the gravity, that heavy-heavy-heavy-eternal-pull!

Who could bear the horror of condemning someone, for whatever reason, to leave the friendly home of the I Moon for that Hell in the sky-the Earth?