Fonts and the Art of War

"So how did you convince them that Terrans were all functional illiterates?" In response, the Marine captain handed over a print-out, complete with an ever-so-slightly smug expression. The diplomat looked down. "This font is… interesting, Captain."

The smug expression got wider. "It's not just *interesting*, sir. It's the work of some of the DIA's finest graphic artists. We got hold of quite a bit of Imperial hand-written correspondence, all of which was certified by local sources to be the finest in atrocious handwriting. Then we analyzed it all, found the common elements, and built a special font around them. It's still perfectly legible to **us**, but to the average Imperial courtier it looks almost exactly like their equivalent of clumsy chicken-track scrawls done by a seven year old."

"And since they can't be bothered to learn our language anyway…"

"Exactly, Ambassador. They're letting their translation programs handle getting the gist of our correspondence that they're intercepting, but since the Imperials think that

we're all barbarian idiots they're not bothering to double-check for missing nuance. I'm pretty sure by now that they think human beings aren't even really capable of subtlety. Hearty, bluff plains apes from the savannah, that's us."

"That would explain why they talk very slowly around me, telegraph every diplomatic move that they're making, and keep offering my staff ridiculously obvious bribes."

"Sorry, sir."

"Don't be, Captain. It's damned useful. Thank you."