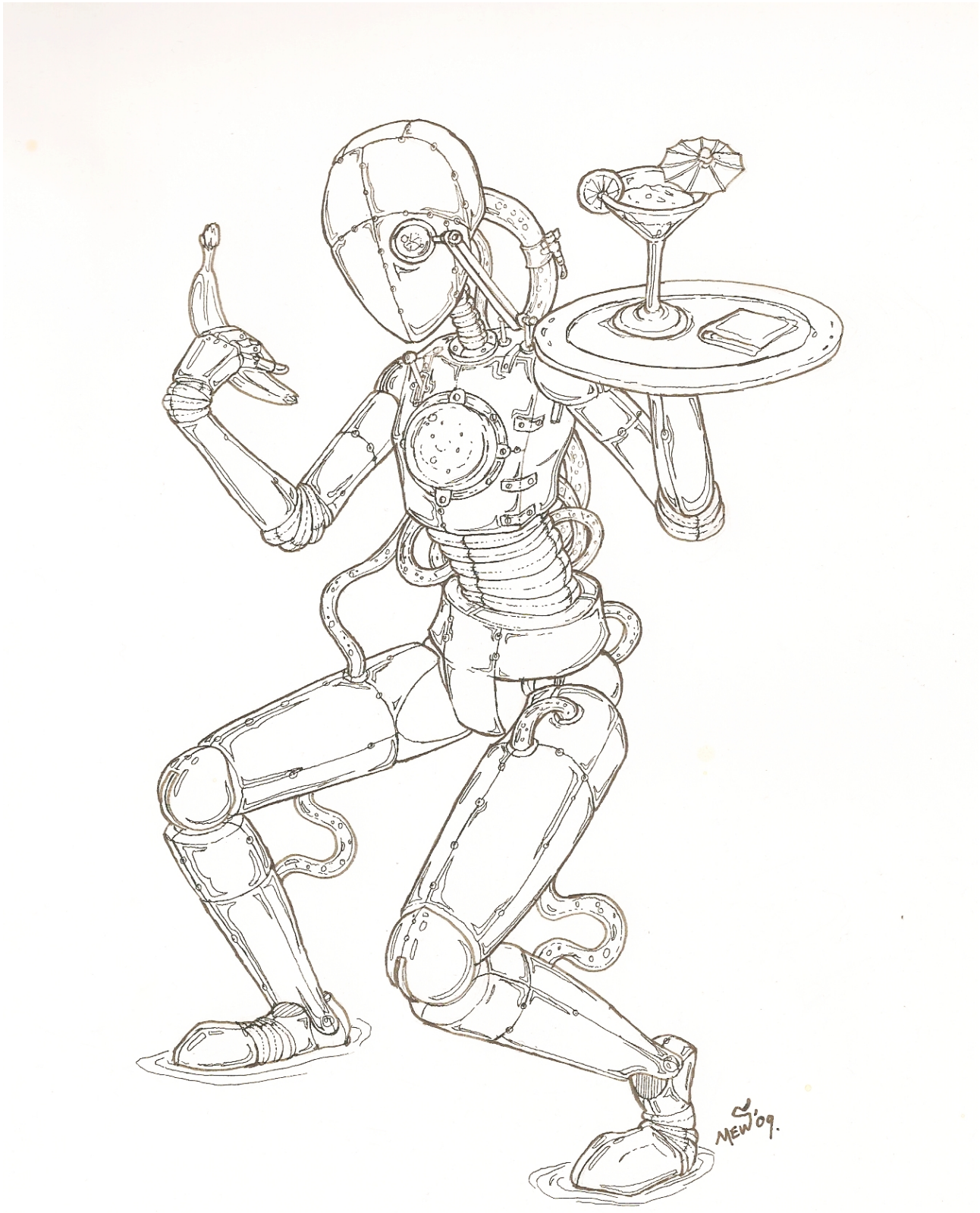

Teq'bot: Tequila-Bearing Android.

(Don't ask about the banana)

Chair-being's Address

Carol Sparke

People of CUSFS (and other beings, as applicable), be proud! Even though it has been a Very Long Time since the last TTBA, we have put together a brand new issue. I would especially like to thank everybody who's contributed – that's been fabulous. Let us also extend our thanks to our illustrious editor, James Brister, and our Meadkeeper Edward Morland (who organised the writing workshop during which a fair amount was produced). Enjoy the magazine!

Two things of note: The winning entry for the Drabble competition, and the Captain CUSFS cartoon can be found on pages [4] and [10], respectively.

Three events to watch out for: [of which two are now in he past, this may have taken me a while –ed.] the film night at the end of term, the board-games night on the last Friday of term, and the AGM which will be held a few weeks into Lent term (I'm looking for a new chairbeing – if you're interested,
let me know!)

One final remark – if you know I live in Newnham, then yes, I have fulfilled my responsibility ... (do you see what I did there?). Come by and visit if you like, I have tea and cookies.

See you around!

--Carol (Chairbeing 2009)

Editorial

James Brister

Welcome to the first issue of TTBA in... a while. Some "thank-you"s (no, I'm not sure how that should be punctuated either)are in order: firstly, to Megan Williams for drawing our front cover and our current chair-being Carol Sparke for thinking-up an acronym that fits (Yes, it was done in *that* order); secondly, to Edward Morland for organising the "drabble" (precisely one-hundred word story) competition and thus providing this magazine with a large chunk of its content; to Roseanna Pendlebury for producing the Captain CUSFS cartoon (a time-honoured and ridiculous

tradition of this magazine), to Ray Webster for an excellent article and finally, and cheesily, thanks to everyone who submitted a story, article, poem or anything else to help make this magazine less empty. (I know that last one covered all the other acknowledgements, but it helps make the editorial look bigger).

If anyone reading this has submitted anything in the past year-or-so that has not made its way into this issue, it's not because I didn't like it, it's because I've lost in somewhere in the depths of the internet; if you have not done the same, I suggest sending it to me again or, better still, my successor (who I can say, without any loss of generality, will be better organised than I and less prone to the over-use of the bracket, hyphen and semi-colon).

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Drabbles

The Jómsborg Mead-Keeper, Mr. Edward Morland, announced a challenge: write a story of precisely one-hundred words; here is the winning entry, by a certain Mr William Brooks, along with some of the runners-up:

Eternity

I finally had the watch of ages in my palm. It weighed heavy in my hand, as destiny weighed on my mind. With a turn of the dial I could halt the flow of time and do as I pleased.

I walked out into a street and turned it. Everything halted. A pigeon hovered perfectly still while cyclists halted, impossibly balanced. I tried to turn my head, but not even my eyes could move.

Frozen in time, realisation kicked in. I couldn't restart time. A single vision burnt into my eyes for eternity. An eternity alone with my thoughts. Forever.

-Will Brooks

**

Identity

I'm sure I'm not the only one to have thought of this, but all this talk of robots and androids and replicants has got me thinking.

Am I human?

I mean, I watch the spaceball on the TV, and I read the man's magazine, but does that make you human? Can a robot appreciate a home run or an ass?

Of course not. A robot cares not for his fellow men.

Then again, I don't, sometimes. There's a man in the flat above who plays loud spacerock at all hours.

I wish he'd die like the *flawed* creature he is.

-Ray Webster

(Untitled)

The hill that I know would be called Senlac unless I succeeded. I walked between the armies, their banner snapping in the October wind. The Bastard comes out to meet me, I take a swig from the plastic drink bottle before he can see.

"You want a truce? I will not wait to kill this oathbreaker!"

"A monk is coming with evidence of this guilt. His army will desert"

"Very well You have a day"

The next day no monk came. The Saxons cut the Normans to pieces, and I returned to my time a loyal servant of King Leofric XII.

-Alex Guttenplan

**

[because being the editor has *some* perks:]

The chances of anything coming from Mars were a million to one they said… they over estimated. Mars was as sterile as the inside of a fusion reactor; Europa, Titan, Venus: every moon, planet of piece of dust we reached was barren, except for the few doomed microbes we brought with us. We reached the stars; slowly at first, faster once we had the energy, and still we found nothing, just more of the same old geology we now knew so well. To summarise, the galaxy was… boring. So we did something about it; you can thank us for that.

-James Brister

***

Nothing is new, even in the future

Classic sci-fi turns up in unlikely places, by Ray Webster.

In this article, the influence of "classic" science fiction in subsequent works is the focus. Some of this is probably well-known to you, but it may be of interest anyway. As a caveat, I'd warn readers that this article will contain frank discussion of the plots of novels, and so if you are sensitive to this it's probably not a good idea to read it.

It is the Year Seventy-Six of the Twentieth Century…

Gerard K O'Neill proposes the construction of large manned space colonies at Lagrange Points as a means of expansion into space in his book *The High Frontier.* Using resources from near-Earth asteroids, mankind would live in huge space colonies called Islands, the most iconic of which became the Island Three concept or O'Neill Cylinder. It is interesting to note also that Arthur C Clarke envisioned something similar in 1972, four years before O'Neill's work, in *Rendezvous with Rama.*

In 1979, what would become a cult piece of sci-fi was first broadcast. The animated series *Mobile Suit Gundam* is essentially a fairly standard war in space serial about the Earth Federation fighting the villainous Zeon, who are emigrants from Earth who live on space colonies. The interesting thing is that the colony design chosen is the O'Neill cylinder, with their capital city being on "Side Three."

The vision of life in space portrayed in *Gundam* is arguably a simplified version of the future O'Neill predicted in *The High Frontier,* but the homages to classic science fiction do not end there. The director of the series also claimed he originally wanted the fighting mechs that form the core of the conflict to be *Starship Troopers* styled power armours rather than house-sized war machines, as a homage to Heinlein's work, but it was felt that this was insufficiently exciting for the show's target audience, who were used to immense super robots fighting similarly large adversaries.

The Ringworld is Unstable, John

The link between our next pair of works is far less close, and more purely based on the visual aspect. Artificial rings in

space are common to both *Halo* and Larry Niven's *Ringworld,* to the extent that Niven was approached to write a novel set in the *Halo* universe. Niven himself calls *Halo* "A poor man's *Ringworld*" which is arguably true given his original concept for the ring was a structure a million miles across, compared to *Halo*'s more modest 10,000km ring.

This is ultimately academic, of course, given that a ringworld of any size is most likely inherently structurally unsound and a completely pointless construction. The most viable artificial ring concept I've personally seen is in the video game *X3: The Terran Conflict* in which a space station has been built all the way around Earth's equator to act as a shipyard. Even so, one wonders why they didn't go the whole way in doing this and go for the Space Elevator too.

Men And Women… Living Together?

One of Larry Niven's other books, the 1976 novel *A World Out of Time,* is particularly unusual in its exploration of a post-apocalyptic earth. The apocalypse, in this case, is the expansion of the Sun over the course of millions of years which has necessitated Earth becoming a satellite of Jupiter. The interesting part is what has happened on Earth.

Young males, known now as Boys, have made themselves immortal through the power of super-science, and had previously waged war against an immortal race of warlike genetically engineered females known as Girls. A third faction of humanity, un-engineered "original" humans called dikta, are now the slaves of the Boys.

A plot ensues in which our hero saves the day, and fights for dikta independence and all that. However, the interesting part of this is the idea of genetically engineered superhumans waged in a war to the death while the unmodified man is reduced to the victim and observer.

The 1984 animated feature film *Do You Remember Love* takes a similar plotline, with Earth beset by a race of unstoppable and immortal aliens called the Zentradi who at first glance appear a mix of the Sontarans and the Mekon. It's foreshadowed early in the film that they cannot understand human gender equality and customs, and this plotline comes to a head when a second alien species, the all-female Meltrandi, appear. Our heroes end up

abandoned on a post-apocalyptic Earth that has been ravaged by the alien invasion, and find a wrecked city of non-human origin. Here, it is revealed that the Zentradi and Meltrandi were failed attempts at creating a super-civilisation, and humanity was the final product, capable of reconciling the warring species and saving the day.

The parallels with Niven's novel are interesting to say the least. Genetically engineered male and female species locked in genocidal war, the ordinary human being the best chance for peace and so on. The fundamental difference is in the endings, which I'll not spoil any further.

Do Replicants Dream of Electric Ghosts?

The cyberpunk genre is an interesting one, since it can be taken as a parody of itself or a serious and dark setting. There's a nice in-joke in the series *Bubblegum Crisis* (name aside, it's a good cyberpunk action show) of a band called "Priss and the Replicants," which raised a chuckle from me as a *Blade Runner* fan.

The idea of "retiring" or identifying androids who have infiltrated human society is common to so much sci-fi, from Philip K Dick's original short story to *Bubblegum Crisis'* Terminator-like "Boomers," the "Snatchers" of the video game of that name through to the Terminator himself. In a future where it gets harder to tell if you're really human, the definition of what humanity actually is becomes a central theme. The film *Blade Runner,* well-known as inspired by *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep,* offers a haunting ending in which the audience themselves aren't fully capable of deciding who the human is, and what humanity is. In Dick's novel, this question is extended to considering whether a real animal can ever be a substituted for, and whether one can acquire the same emotional attachments.

The animated series *Ghost in the Shell,* originally based off a movie of the same name, draws greatly from *Do Androids…* and *Blade Runner,* with episodes focussing on android rights, the extent to which cyborgs can be considered human and the identity issues associated with cloning. The second film in the series has a particularly interesting plot concerning the use of human minds as a basis for artificial intelligence in an attempt to achieve an absolute simulacrum of humanity in mechanical form.

Where To Go From Here?

There's no shortage of other examples I could have given in this article. The handling of time dilation and relativistic travel in *A World Out of Time*, *The Forever War* and the animated series *Aim For The Top! Gunbuster* provide a surprisingly accurate depiction of the effects on faster than light travel on society, while there's much to be said about the Laws of Robotics and their influences on later sci-fi. The influence of novelists like Heinlein and Haldeman on the mecha genre of science fiction anime is particularly interesting when one considers the different approaches to warfare shown by the Soldierboys, the Mobile Infantry and the Gundam.

And then there's the matter of interpretations and film adaptations which take thematic ideas and concepts over exact plots – the animated reimagining of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, and the recent film of *I Robot* bear discussion here. Indeed, I could have mentioned *Metropolis* in my piece on androids and humanity – one could argue that the robotic Maria is a proto-Replicant.

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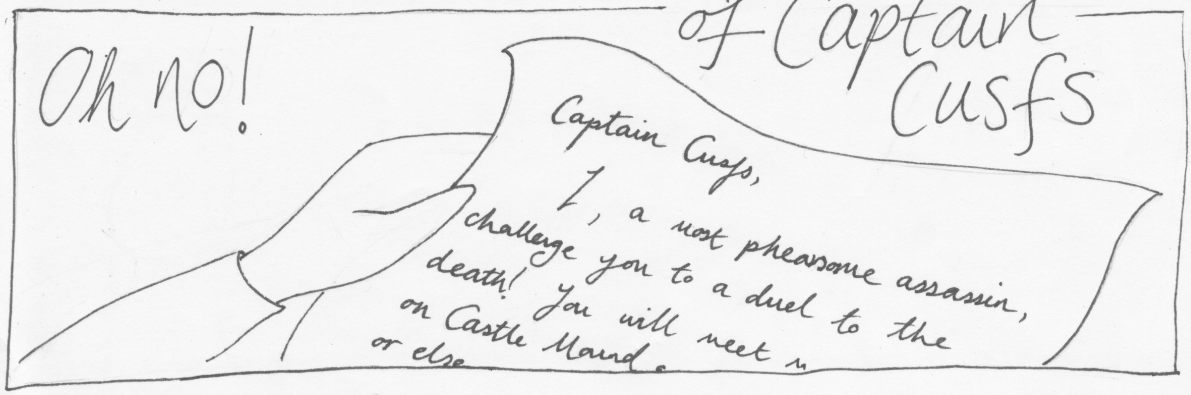
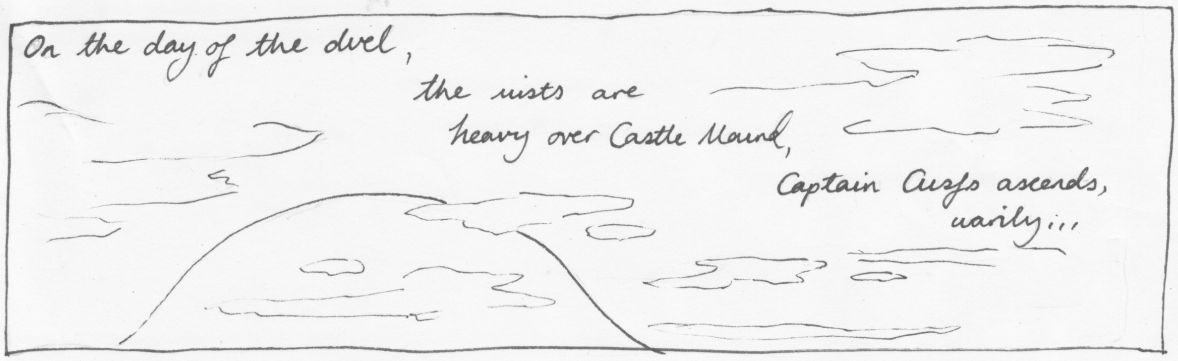
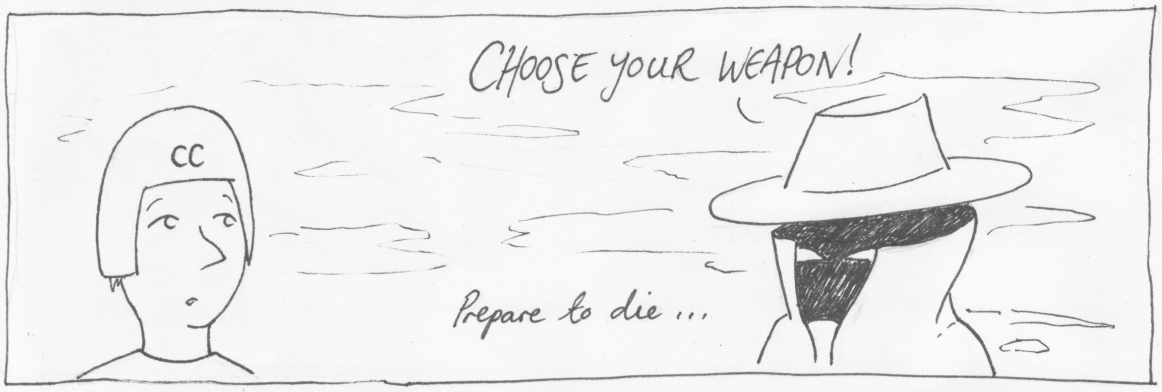
[And now: two pages of obscure in-jokes...]

The Adventures of Captain Cusfs







–Roseanna Pendlebury

Poetry

Here's a poem written by our current chair-being; it follows a certain pattern, which probably has a name (most of these things do):

Arrival

They came in peace
Or so they said
Gleaming ships floating
This is the future!

Or so they said
And we believed
This is the future!
(We were distracted)

And we believed
Rushed to embrace them
(We were distracted)
Our dreams coming true

Rushed to embrace them
Scientists in heaven
Our dreams coming true
Should have known better

Scientists in heaven
And then the cracks started
Should have known better
Nothing is free

And then the cracks started
Subtly at first, but
Nothing is free
We are no exception

Subtly at first, but
Oh, they were clever
We are no exception
They're wiping us out

Oh, they were clever
Got into the water
They're wiping us out
Infertility

Got into the water
Too late have we realised
Infertility
... and now they wait

Too late have we realised

They came in peace

... and now they wait

Gleaming ships floating

-Carol Sparke

And, because we know our audience, a proof that there are infinitely many primes... in limerick form:

Let P be finite prime set,
You think you've got all of them, yet
Times, add one;
You'll find that none,
Of the others divides it, I'll bet
-Rachel Chadwick

[And, finally, a story written by former chair-being Mickey Donaghy:]

Machine Translation

"So we're agreed then," declared Ares, chairman *pro tem*. Poseidon was having none of it, however.

"We are *not* agreed. Stop trying to frame the discussion in your terms."

It was Hera who responded. "You have to at least accept that they demonstrate language capability," she said, gently.

"I accept nothing," Posiedon snapped. "On the kind of timescales we're talking about, anything can appear to be intelligence. I've seen *crystals* that grew in smarter formations. It's natural, that's all; purely at the stimulus:response level."

"On some level that's all of us," replied Ares, quietly. This elicted nothing more than a snort. "What do you think?"

Hercules looked up from his work. "Hmm?" Ares sighed. Hercules had probably triple the intellectual capacity of the rest of the room put together – but because of that, he tended to be the one the higher-ups asked when they wanted a report on something. You would almost feel sorry for the guy if he wasn't such an asshole.

"I *said*, are you or are you not convinced by the overwhelming evidence of their conversational ability."

"Oh, that. Cast iron." He shook his head. "A man would have to be some kind of idiot to try and deny that."

"Oh yeah? Sure, the" – Posiedon's lip curled – "exobiologists tell us they've had conversations with them. And they even present us with suitably stilted-sounding little snippets. Translated, of course – after all, no one who hasn't studied exobiology for five years could *possibly* comprehend their language."

"I've taught myself a little," said Ares smoothly, with a confident smile. "Not enough to be able to translate it by myself, but I can follow a lot of what's going on. There doesn't seem to be any distortion going on."

Hera looked suitably impressed, but Posiedon recovered instantly. "You've learned to read the patterns? Or to translate the notation the exobiologists have transcribed them in – accurately and neutrally, of course."

Ares was struggling to frame a reply, but Hercules spared him the bother. "You're saying they're lying? They're Company men too, and

I don't think they'd take kindly to hearing that." Ares gritted his teeth. Having Hercules on his side was prefferable to not, but only just.

Posiedon simply rolled his eyes. "Of course I'm not suggesting any deliberate deception. Merely that they by the nature of their profession have a strong vested interest in there being intelligent beings to contact, and so this might cause them to, *entirely unconsciously*, interpret ambiguous results in a way more favourable to that. "Unusual alien lifeforms make random noise" doesn't get you published."

"He's right," said Hera, unexpectedly. "Even if you assume no misguided motivations, how many hours of attempted conversation have there been?"

They all had the figures. That is, they all knew how many departments were working on this, how many students in each, the estimated budgets... Ares announced his conclusion first.

"700 hours, tops." A few moments later Posiedon shrugged. "Yeah, I came up with less than that. So if we assume everything is random, taking into account the rate of the communication method and how much it takes to look like a typical "conversation" example, we'd expect that to produce... well, easily more than 50 megabytes of information, right?"

"Big deal," drawled Hercules. "There are 120 megabytes of published transcripts, right?"

Posiedon prepared to bring the hammer down, but Ares was faster. "No, that's not the same thing. The encoding they use is optimized for easy transcription, not data size. In fact it compresses to..." Posiedon was gracious in victory, waiting for Ares to run through the calculation himself. "About 50%," he concluded. "60 megabytes. It's chance, nothing more."

"We'd have to run through the calculation more precisely to be sure of that," offered Posiedon, but Ares waved him away.

"No, no. I mean yes, we should do that, but I'm not going to cling bitterly to my position until it becomes completely indefensible. I was wrong; they're not intelligent after all."

"Screw you guys," said Hercules, and stomped off to try and talk to the humans.

-Michael Donaghy