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by stanley lieber

He kept the big box of tapes under his bed. It would not be long until he would need a bigger box. He wondered sometimes if he should digitize the lot. He put it off and put it off. Someday, he thought, it would be difficult to get a hold of a working cassette player.

Stan recorded as the mood struck him. It could, and did, happen at the most inconvenient times. He had to set the ideas down as quickly as possible; once they were gone, they were gone. He operated the little 4-track machine with the unshakable confidence of a self-taught expert. Tape hiss was his enemy. Superior technique was his ally.

At some point he realized that the Chief was probably keeping recordings of his own. He wondered if the Chief's equipment was primarily digital, thus avoiding generation loss and tape hiss. This somewhat lateral insight set him on a cycle of acute obsession, pondering the higher fidelity recordings that must exist in the Chief's vault. Stan was his own biggest fan, so of course he had to get his hands on them.

Cy-bra was not willing to participate in any mission that would violate the Chief's trust. Raven told him to fuck off and hung up the phone. Dimension Man had to pick up his kids. John Ratcliff didn't reply to his e-mail, telephone calls, or forum posts. Stan was on his own. Eventually he decided to just ask the Chief for the tapes. Discs? Whatever.

"It's complicated," the Chief said. "But we could probably get you your songs."

The Chief winked at him, and motioned for Stan to step back behind his desk. He depressed a switch inside one of his drawers and a panel dissolved to reveal the largest collection of bootleg stork/ibis recordings Stan had ever seen. CD-Rs that Stan assumed must contain at least some of his tracks in perfect digital quality.

"Straight from the soundboard," the Chief confirmed.

Stan had to have them, and the Chief knew that Stan had to have them.

They could do business.