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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY FIELD MANUAL

CHAMELEO

A STRANGE BUT TRUE STORY
OF INVISIBLE SPIES,
HEROIN ADDICTION, AND
HOMELAND SECURITY

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"GUFFEY UNDERSTANDS THE UNIVERSE IS
PREPOSTEROUS, LIFE IMPROBABLE, AND
CHAOS RULES: GET USED TO IT."

—PAT CADIGAN, AUTHOR OF *MINDPLAYERS*

A mesmerizing mix of Charles Bukowski, Hunter S. Thompson, and Philip K. Dick, *CHAMELEO* is a true account of what happened in a seedy Southern California town when an enthusiastic and unrepentant heroin addict named Dion Fuller sheltered a U.S. Marine who'd stolen night vision goggles and perhaps a few top secret files from a nearby military base. Homeland security goons, weird "cloaking" technology borrowed from an experimental project codenamed "Chameleo," new and exciting uses for spaghetti, and illicit substances in myriad forms come into play.

"ROBERT GUFFEY'S WRITING HAS IMPRESSED,
ENTERTAINED, AND ENLIGHTENED ME PRETTY
MUCH SINCE I FIRST MET HIM ... IF HE
WROTE IT, READ IT."

—JACK WOMACK, AUTHOR OF *RANDOM ACTS
OF SENSELESS VIOLENCE*



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To the inimitable Mr. Watts...
...and to Richard...
...without both of whom this book could never have been written.

“I warn you that what you’re starting to read is full of loose ends and unanswered questions. It will not be neatly tied up at the end, everything resolved and satisfactorily explained. Not by me it won’t, anyway. Because I can’t say I really know exactly what happened, or why, or just how it began, how it ended, or if it has ended; and I’ve been right in the thick of it. Now if you don’t like that kind of story, I’m sorry, and you’d better not read it. All I can do is tell what I know.”

—JACK FINNEY, *The Body Snatchers*, 1955

* * *

“...Listen, therefore, to the deposition that I have to make. It is indeed a tale so strange that I should fear you would not credit it were there not something in truth which, however wonderful, forces conviction. The story is too connected to be mistaken for a dream, and I have no motive for falsehood.”

—MARY SHELLEY, *Frankenstein*, 1818



Richard Schowengerdt, founder of Project Chameleo, in March of 2006. Photograph by Melissa Guffey.



*Robert Guffey interviewing Richard Schowengerdt in March of 2006.
Photograph by Melissa Guffey.*



Dion Fuller in Seattle, summer of 2004, standing beside the van he drove from San Diego all the way to Winona, Kansas. Photograph by Robert Guffey.



A more recent photograph of Dion Fuller.



Dion Fuller's farewell message to the NCIS and their invisible devil spawn.



*A UFO-like drone streaking off into the skies above Humboldt County
in July of 2012. Photograph by Dion Fuller.*

1.

My friend Dion first told me about the invisible midgets in the summer of 2003. Not long before, he'd caught his girlfriend Jessica having sex with some other dude in Pacific Beach, a suburb of San Diego, where they lived, and he physically threw her out of his apartment. Without Jessica's stabilizing influence, he sank deeper and deeper into his old habits. Pacific Beach was the worst possible place for Dion at that moment. The only people there were alcoholics and meth addicts and the policemen who arrest them.

He started drinking more and more. Then he went back to speed and meth and heroin and everything in between. One day he was riding along on his bicycle, drunk, and slammed into a building or a police officer or something like that, and broke his leg. As a result he couldn't go to work anymore at Bub's Dive Bar & Grill. Or so he claimed. It could be they just fired him for becoming more and more of a total fuck-up, something Dion had a talent for. Anyway, somehow he was able to wrangle a steady stream of disability checks out of the government while waiting for his leg to heal. With nowhere to go, he decided to start selling drugs out of his apartment, which was located at 1621 Hornblend Street between Jewell and Ingraham. That is when everything definitely took a turn into *The Twilight Zone*.

More and more fuck-ups and scumbags were hanging around the apartment. The place became notorious. The cops

drove by there all the time, just to make sure nothing was getting *too* out of hand. One night, in the midst of another twenty-four hour party, some kid in his early twenties named Lee dropped by the place and asked if he could stay there for awhile. Dion's reaction was sure, what the hell, why not. The place was a party house. People were coming in and out of there all the time. What was one more person?

This kid, however, was different from all the drifters who had stayed at the apartment before. Lee had recently gone AWOL from nearby Camp Pendleton. He had taken with him 1) twenty-five pairs of night vision goggles, 2) a nine millimeter pistol taken off the body of a dead Iraqi general, 3) a DOD laptop, and 4) an entire truck. How such a feat was possible in our post-9/11 lockdown society is beyond me. The truck was not stashed at Dion's apartment. The other three items, however, were.

Lee had the goggles—three or four of the pairs, at least—stored in a trunk. Dion—perpetually buzzed out of his mind—didn't think there was anything odd about any of this until he saw the DOD logo appear on the kid's laptop one evening (on July 18, 2003, to be exact). That's when the seriousness of the situation dawned on him.

"Hey, you can't turn that on in here," Dion said. "They can track that shit with satellites! They'll be here within seconds."

Lee just waved him away. "That's bullshit. They can't do that." Dion and a bunch of other people watched as the kid scrolled through a whole series of files marked TOP SECRET and ABOVE TOP SECRET. The file names were so technical-sounding Dion had no idea what they meant. As a whole, the files seemed to be a field journal written by a team of intelligence specialists stationed in the Gulf.

Lee opened some of these files and laughed while pointing at TOP SECRET blueprints for machines Dion didn't recognize.

Finally Dion said, “Fuck this, that’s it! You’ve got to pick up your lowjack shit and get the fuck out of here!”

Lee refused to go.

At that point there was a knock at the door. A very officious-sounding knock. All the people on drugs at the permanent party froze while Dion opened the door. A middle-aged woman flashed a badge and identified herself as Special Agent Lita A. Johnston of the Naval Criminal Investigative Services, the NCIS.¹ Two “men-in-black”-types stood behind her.

“We have reason to believe you have stolen military equipment stored on the premises,” said Lita. “We’re going to search your apartment.”

“Do you have a search warrant?” Dion’s father had been a narcotics cop for the Gardena Police Department, so Dion always knew exactly what his rights were.

After some amount of stalling, Lita had to admit she didn’t have a warrant. “But we can get one in about ten minutes,” she said.

“Come back in ten minutes then,” Dion said and slammed the door in her face.

Dion spun around and said to the assembled partygoers, “The Feds are coming. Pick up your shit and go.”

Despite the fact that Dion was always trying to convince me that drug addicts have better morals than straights, everyone at the party tossed their drugs on Dion’s floor and scampered out the back like mutant rabbits. Even Lee tried to bail, but Dion pushed him back down onto the floor of his bedroom and told him if he was going to jail then the kid was going to tag along.

1. If you wish to confirm the involvement of the NCIS in this most curious affair, feel free to contact me at cryptoscatology@gmail.com for further corroborating data.

Since the warrant was clearly imminent, the second everyone (except for Lee) was gone from the premises, Dion allowed the NCIS inside. Five minutes later chaos ensued as the cops arrived on the scene. The NCIS didn't know what to do. They seemed to be arguing with the cops, as if wires had gotten crossed somewhere. The cops were invading the territory of the NCIS, but the NCIS couldn't do shit about it. NCIS agents and cops kept bumping into each other like some slapstick skit from the Three Stooges. Everyone was working at cross purposes. While the cops were looking for drugs (and finding them stashed in every nook and cranny), the NCIS people were only interested in the equipment, particularly the night vision goggles. The NCIS goons began interrogating Dion and Lee right then and there, giving them the third degree, shouting the word "goggles" over and over and over again.

"Where are the rest of the goggles, where are the rest of the goggles, where are the rest of the goggles?"

Dion couldn't say because he didn't know. So they grabbed him and Lee, arrested them under the ostensible auspices of the Patriot Act, and dragged them to jail in downtown San Diego, where they gave them the Abu Ghraib treatment for six days straight. The NCIS agents had come to the conclusion that Dion was running some big-time smuggling operation out of his apartment. They accused him of stealing sensitive equipment from the ubiquitous military bases in San Diego and turning around and smuggling them over the border and selling them to foreign terrorists. The idea of Dion working up enough energy to do anything more than a slip a needle in his vein every day was sort of laughable, and I'm sure he explained that to them, but they would have none of it. If Dion had that much energy, he would've finished that damn book fifteen times by now, the one he'd been promising to write. Nonetheless, they accused him of treason again and again. They showed him photos of various people he'd never seen before and asked

him, “Do you know this person?” Most of them he’d never seen before. Three of them he did recognize: the kid, Lee; a local drug dealer named Sid; and a man named Mark Hampton, also known as “Mark the Shark.” Mark was a meth addict who had introduced Dion to Lee three days before the party. The NCIS told Dion that he had (and this is an exact quote) “walked into a five-year-long investigation of a smuggling ring operating out of Camp Pendleton.” Lee was one of the culprits, though low-level, and the NCIS wanted to catch much bigger fish than Lee. “Lee,” by the way, wasn’t even his real name. The NCIS told Dion that Lee’s real name was Doyle, but they didn’t provide a last name—or if they did, Dion couldn’t recall it when I eventually spoke to him about the situation.

The NCIS demanded that Dion rat out Lee and Mark. Though Dion didn’t know much about the situation, he knew enough to serve as a witness for the NCIS in court. But he refused to do so. Ingrained in him was that honorable jailbird motto of “Never Snitch.” It was something Dion took very seriously. He would go to jail himself before snitching on someone else, even if he knew the person was guilty.

After six days of non-stop questioning, the NCIS let Dion go. The police were holding a multitude of drug charges over his head, and yet (mysteriously) all such charges were dropped despite the fact that Dion could’ve gone to prison for many, many years based on how many drugs they found in his apartment.

Dion assumed the NCIS had come to their senses and realized he had nothing to do with the whole affair. Yes, the nightmare was over. Now he could go back to his half-life—his limbo-like existence without Jessica.

But apparently Lita Johnston and the NCIS hadn’t realized anything.

This is when Mr. Big came into the picture.

Mr. Big: that’s me.

2.

The same week Dion was getting the third degree in prison, I was getting a different kind of third degree in Torrance, a coastal suburb of Los Angeles.

On July 12, 2003, I became initiated into the third degree of Freemasonry at Torrance University Lodge #394. How I drifted into Freemasonry is a weird and complicated tale, best left for another time. The only reason I mention it now is because it plays an important role later on.

I returned home from the third degree early on a Saturday afternoon, called my girlfriend at the time, and told her I was still alive. She was happy to hear it, as she thought Freemasons were devil worshippers who made a regular habit of sacrificing babies to Baphomet.

The second person I called that day was Dion. The phone rang and rang. He didn't answer. Usually there was *someone* at his place who would pick up the phone, often someone I didn't know, but not this time. I didn't think anything of it. Maybe they were all passed out?

In between arguments with my girlfriend, the Insanely Jealous Poet who demanded we get married after we'd had sex for the first time only a couple of days before, I tried to call Dion over and over again. No luck. No luck. No luck. I started to get a little worried. I knew he had been upset about losing Jessica, and I knew he was doing drugs again. But, on the other hand, he had gone missing for several days in the past, so this was nothing new. I pushed the situation out of my mind and went back to my endless arguments with the Insanely Jealous Poet.

About twelve days later I received a phone call from Dion in the middle of the afternoon. He was out of breath, excited about something, and proceeded to tell me the entire story of how he had ended up in jail for the past week. My

initial reaction was one of stunned amusement. The idea of Dion being the head of a smuggling ring was ridiculous. Even more ridiculous was the irony of the NCIS and the San Diego Police Department wasting their considerable resources for over a week interrogating Dion about a smuggling ring while a whole slew of illegal aliens who might have plutonium bombs strapped to their backs were pouring over the border only a few miles away, unhindered. (But stopping *that* problem would require some amount of effort, whereas interrogating Dion was something that could be easily accomplished between doughnut breaks. Featherbedding: a true American tradition!)

Overall, Dion seemed relieved that the NCIS and the cops had finally come to their senses and allowed him to bail. He returned to his apartment to discover that it had been ransacked during his incarceration. Every drug addict who had ever stayed there was well aware of the fact that Dion was behind bars, so someone took the opportunity to rout through the mess left behind by the cops.

Based on his story, I didn't understand why the cops didn't charge Dion with drug possession. This seemed to puzzle me more than it puzzled Dion. Why would they just let him go?

Whatever drugs had been accidentally left behind by the cops—if, indeed, there even were any—had been swiped by the scavengers who swooped down on the place like vultures in Dion's absence. All throughout his six days in jail, while the NCIS grilled him over and over again about the current whereabouts of their precious night vision goggles, Dion kept pleading with them to put a guard on his apartment. The authorities had only retrieved a few of the goggles, so Dion thought Lee had stashed them somewhere in his pad without his knowledge. Dion understood very well what would happen to his place while he was gone. But neither the cops nor the NCIS listened to him. They kept accusing him of lying and just wanted him to confess to stealing the goggles.

It didn't make sense to me that the authorities would let him go. What had been the point of it all? Dion thought that maybe they had gotten Lee (or Doyle, or whoever the hell he was) to confess to the crime. Perhaps he broke under the pressure and told them where they could find the rest of their shit? Dion didn't seem to care about the details. He just wanted to move on.

Though all of this was odd and intriguing, my main concern at the time was that my girlfriend had tricked me into having sex with her without a condom because she claimed she was on the pill when she wasn't, so I was sweating hollow-point bullets while waiting to discover if her ploy had worked. I quickly forgot about Dion's weird drama.

Until a few days later when Dion called to tell me he was being followed. At first I thought he was suffering from some kind of meth-induced paranoia. Meth addicts are always seeing weird shit and suspecting people of spying on them, etc., so this was nothing new to me. What was different, this time, was how grand the scenario became. And how frightened Dion seemed. I'd rarely ever seen him frightened of anything.

He told me he had just visited the 7-11 on Garnet Avenue not far from his apartment in Pacific Beach. The second he entered, about a dozen jarhead-looking guys followed him in. Real military-looking types. They just tailed him around the store, right on his ass, being really blatant about it. Then he left the store and the jarheads followed him out. I started to laugh as he was telling me this, because I was imagining a whole parade of people trailing Dion down the sidewalk. But then Dion explained it wasn't like a parade at all. They would spread out and follow him in such a way that the casual observer wouldn't notice anything unusual. Dion couldn't help noticing these guys following him all around town. When he made the mistake of confronting them and asking what the fuck they were doing, they did not respond in any way. They acted like he was invisible.

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