

Sample chapter from

Dreams of Sixteen

by Benjamin Gayle

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0. Preface

This book is a collection of dreams that I recorded during the year of 2016. In my previous book of dreams, *The Frost Bug Dreams*, I sorted the dreams into categories, arranging them into a loose collection of pieces of stories that I made no attempt to further develop. The entries in *this* book are arranged in sequence by month and date.

I define *dream* as that which I experience in the state of sleeping consciousness: I go to bed, fall asleep (I hope), and dream (often). What I write down is whatever I can remember when I wake, whatever I can drag back across to waking consciousness. These are *not* stories that I have purposefully created – I dreamed all of it. Each entry is my objective attempt to describe what I experienced in the dream, and no more. The entries have been minimally edited for readability.

1. January

01 *January*

Performing maintenance on an old bicycle. I am worried about being able to find replacement parts because it had been modified. The drive chain, sprocket, and cog were moved to the left side. A belt-drive set was installed in its place on the right side. The belt is worn and needs to be replaced. The rest of the job is simple cleaning and lubricating. I wonder where I will get a new belt. I think I might have to modify the bicycle further to do without it. Then I remember the old Schwinn shop, a faded memory of an island unto itself, a wedge of a building that I had not visited for years.

The outside still looks the same as in my memory, brick with metal-framed windows, though now worn and tired. The inside is different. I step through the door into a large lobby, dark and elegant in its simplicity. Thin columns, blunt blades of dark stone, radiate from the entry point. There are a few displays, some that I recognise as bicycle-related, and others that are futuristic mysteries.

A man comes out to greet me. I tell him that I was looking for the old Schwinn shop, but must be in the wrong place. He assures me that this *is* the right place and proceeds to lead me into the building. Through the dark columns; through a transition area, a bare rectangular corridor of the same dark stone; into brightness, in what looks like a large retail store with

green carpet and racks and shelves of merchandise. I have the uncomfortable feeling of not recognizing any of it. The man tells me that they are dedicated to advancing, so everything has changed (for the better) in the years since I was last here. But, he says, they also honor the past that gave rise to the wonders of today.

He leads me off to the right, through a doorway, down a narrow hall, and into the old shop. It is just as I remembered except for the dust. Not many come back here, he says. Only people like me, clinging to their ancient treasures, would think to ask about it. I ask if I can buy the parts that I need, or if this is just a museum. We search for the parts on my list, looking and digging through the glass counter cases and the boxes stored below. It's like going to the old hardware store where they never throw anything out and never have closeout sales; the old items stay on the shelves until they are needed or wanted. We find what I need, and he sells the parts to me at their old marked prices.

When I am ready to leave, the man has to lead me out. There are two transitions that don't make sense to me. When we leave the old shop by the narrow hallway, we come out in a workshop where something is being manufactured (I don't know what, but it involves a lot of labor). From there, we go into a rectangular corridor of dark stone and come out in a park. Someone rides by on one of the new-fangled bicycles and waves. I'm not sure how I got out of the building, but it still looks the same on the outside. I hope that this is the last time I have to fix this bicycle.

. . .

Walking on a sidewalk, left side of the street, slightly uphill. A girl approaches me and begins complaining about some issue that I am vaguely aware

of. I tell her that I have nothing to do with that, there has been a misunderstanding. The person who did it looks like me, but I can't do anything about that. She insists that I get on social media and make a statement about it. I tell her that, while I understand the issue and why she is asking for this, I just don't *do* social media. I don't know how and don't want to. Can she help to connect me with someone who can do it for me? She seems to be both relieved and excited that I am not resisting and appear to want to cooperate.

She leads me across the street, farther up the hill, and into a cafe. She is looking for someone. The cafe has a bar like an island barrier that separates the front room of formal tables and chairs from a lower and less formal arrangement of booths and small circular tables. After a brief quiet conversation with the proprietor, we go down into the back room and sit at a table. The man she is looking for hasn't been seen for a while, but this is one of his usual hangouts. She wants to sort out some things about the situation, to talk through it and piece together the details. I am uncomfortable with the level of politics involved.

I can see the island bar from where I am sitting, and the entrance beyond it, but my hair keeps getting in my eyes, obscuring my view. The man shows up while we are talking. I recognise him as he enters the cafe, an old acquaintance that I am both familiar and comfortable with. I am not surprised to find that he is the man she was looking for; I know he will help me.

. . .

Coming to the end of an off-ramp from some highway. I must be near my destination. The directions don't make sense so I just drive around looking, maybe I will see it. I turn right at the end of the ramp. It is flat

and dry, not much to see here. I turn right onto the first road that I come to, might as well look everywhere. The road is wide paved asphalt with low concrete curbs and no lines painted on it. A white passenger van passes me on its way back out, empty. The road curves around to the right and changes from pavement to wooden planks mid-way through the turn. It opens to a wide hexagonal spot with low curbs, flat as far as I can see, and empty. I get the feeling that I should not have come this way.

07 January

Following two people walking in a corridor, an adult and a child. We are passing through some company's storage building on our way home. It seems strange to me that the walking path goes through the building instead of around it, but that is the way it has always been. I am wearing a costume with black robe, hood, and face mask.

We pass a man who has stopped at the water fountain. He looks like a sumo wrestler in a business suit. He looks up and asks, in a familiar and friendly way, are you a ninja? No, I am not a ninja, I am only dressed up for (what event was that?). He smiles and moves away down the corridor behind us.

The walls and ceiling of the corridor are plastic, like house siding, and it goes on for a long way. It ends in a right turn to a door that opens to outside. Opposite the door, to the left, is an alcove with vending machines, mostly for ice cream. This is a surprise; I had not known that these were here.

Out through the door, a short walk to somewhere, we arrive inside a kitchen. There are a few tables

opposite the food preparation area and a refrigerator standing off by itself. This is not like a house, but for some reason I think of it as home. I remember that there is ice cream in the freezer, but when I open it I am confused – there are two freezers. One of them has ice cream just like what was in the vending machines. The child puts some ice cream into the freezer, as if it came from a vending machine and she is putting it away to save for later.

. . .

Sitting at a long table, listening to two people across from me. At first, I think their bodies are hidden behind a tall table or bar, but now it seems that they are somewhere else and this is just a screen projection that I am looking at. They are a man and a woman in an interview with the man doing most of the talking. Two other people show up where I am and comment on the two on the screen. They seem to think that the woman looks like a man, but she definitely sounds like a woman.

. . .

Discussing my role in some operation or procedure. The woman tells me that I have been through it, apparently multiple times, something that I had invented or discovered. It eludes me now, as does the nature of the overall plan.

We must be implementing the plan. I come out of the trees, down a hill, toward a river or lake. I have to get to a bridge but it doesn't go all the way across. It ends like it is a pier instead of a bridge. Maybe it is a dock and a boat is the bridge. I don't see any boats here.

Sitting in an indoor place with a group of others. It is dim but for the bright outdoor scene on the other side of a large window. The images on the wall screen

keep changing – a briefing on our activities.

09 January

Going into a large building that used to be a shopping mall. It is now mostly empty. There are a few stores open, holding out, but it is difficult. We climb some steps to the second level. Somehow, they lead outside instead. A crumbling concrete walk leaves the building, makes a left turn and up some steps, then disappears into grass at the top.

Beyond the building and slightly downhill is something untended. It may have been a garden or park left to grow wild, but it has mostly withered. I walk through, probing for a memory of the place. Artifacts, deteriorated and weathered, litter the ground. The place feels solemn, almost sacred. There doesn't seem to be any point in staying out here, so we go back up the hill, down the steps, along and around the walk to where we had come out.

We go in to a different place – a second level to the old shopping mall, a balcony looking out over a vast abandoned commons. This is where I had expected the steps to lead when we came up. There are no stores open down there. We follow the balcony around to another stairway, and back down to the lower level.

There is a hardware store here, a rare opportunity. I go off on my own to look at the tools. Near the back of the store, they have some things that I have not seen anywhere else. I don't know what they are, but I am considering purchasing anyway. Given long enough to think about it, I put the items down and walk away. She is still shopping, so I go out and wait in front of the

store.

15 January

Gathering on the side lawn of some building. They are trying to herd us somewhere. We all still have badges, as if we are in class and not free to wander. These badges are different – they are pleated and show a special picture when folded on the pleats. Our regular badges are plain and we had to trade them for these as part of the deal.

17 January

Looking at a house that is built into a hillside. It is lower than the road. A small parking area is level with the upper floor entrance. There is a large field below and to the left of the house. The upstairs is small, open all the way across with windows, not much more than a closed-in porch. Stairs lead down from the center of the back wall. Downstairs is much larger and the style keeps changing as I go through. The heaters and cooking stove burners are built into the concrete floor. That seems strange, though I have seen a stove like that before. Will they sell it separately from the big house? I don't want both, can't afford both. Can I get a local farmer to mow the field for hay? I don't want to do it myself.

18 January

Repeating patterns of tessellation. Gears mesh, but

not chain-drive sprockets. Linear components come together, synchronise, bond, a zipper closing up no recognisable thing. The pieces nest together, over and over. I can't stop them from repeating.

. . .

Checking out a track racing team's bikes and talking to them in the lobby of the Fuji Electric Company building. A glass wall separates the lobby from the official entrance. They don't seem to know that I have been here before.

At the velodrome, I go in to find out the arrangements. I have to go back to the van to get my bike and gear. There is no one here to help me – what will I do with my things while I am racing? Sprinting around the final turn of the race, my rear tire blows out with a loud bang. I finish on a flat. Someone comments on my speed around the track. She obviously doesn't have a useful reference point for measuring my performance.

19 *January*

Going to the back door to check the weather early in the morning. It is too dark to see anything useful, so I go out the door, down the porch steps, and around and down the driveway to the street. It is much warmer than I had expected, and very wet and humid. There are a few centimeters of snow on the ground. It is fine, wet, and more the consistency of cake frosting than snow.

I go across the street to the row of mailboxes. The Postal Service had consolidated and optimised its delivery system, so we had to set up a mailbox over there like everyone else on the block. It is too dark to read the

lettering on the mailboxes and I don't remember which one is ours. I make a guess and pull mail out of a box, trying to read the name on it. I still don't know.

I put the mail back in the box and head back to the house. Going into the house, I tell her that I will shovel the snow, but need to put my other boots on first.

. . .

Observing a rabbit in a field. The weather is mild, not sunny, not raining. The rabbit is eating its way down rows of crops, carrots and celery. Some of the plants are damaged, as if they had been frozen briefly. There is an odd progression in consuming a carrot. Instead of working from one end to the other, eating the whole thing, the rabbit is eating half all the way down and leaving the other half as if it had been roughly cut down the middle, lengthwise. This continues indefinitely, the rabbit apparently unaware that its space is surrounded by another space full of noise and burning. Maybe it is insulated. Maybe the surrounding space *is* the insulation that isolates it from whatever else is beyond.

Oxygen and water, fuel processed for a delayed burn. I have to vent the process to regulate the reaction. Don't let it get too hot – it might get away from me, out of control. This space is burn. This space is noise. Sounds and words and images in a seemingly unrelated and unpredictable mix, an un-sequenced sequence that does not reach the rabbit.

21 *January*

Riding in a car again. Again, I don't know where we are going. We pass an odd artsy building up on a hill

to the left. I say it kind-of looks like the auditorium that we had been to, some time ago. She confirms that is what it is, but we seem to be going somewhere else and she doesn't comment on that.

That time when we went to the auditorium, there was no concert. There were musical instruments set up in a circular area. It was like a party and everyone participated. Someone asked if I could play an instrument. No, I can only make noise. Good enough. They cycled me through various noisemakers including drums.

The place where we end up is next-door to the auditorium, on the other side of the hill. (I found out later that they are connected by underground tunnels.)

25 January

Looking over a car in a parking lot next to a department store, and maybe other things too. I am working on a deal to acquire the car. When the deal is done, the seller has gone and left me with the car. I walk around it, looking more closely. The body shape, style, and lights tell me that it is from 1965. The way the sheet metal curves out to cradle the headlights and taillights was distinct for that year. It is dark so it is difficult to tell what the color is, but I can see that one of the taillights is askew. A closer inspection reveals that it is missing the screws that should be holding it in place. I check the other lights' lenses and housings and find that they are all missing their screws. I will need to fix that before driving anywhere, else they might fall off. I worry that I would not be able to find replacements for them. Can I find the right screws, or should I try

something else?

There is a department store that might have some screws, but not the exact type to fit the holes. Maybe I can just use some wire through the holes as a temporary measure. I go into the department store, intending to buy some wire, but something else is happening. The entrance to the store has been closed off into a lobby with a counter on one side. There are people behind the counter, others standing in line, and some just waiting around to be called. I find an unoccupied stool out in the open area and sit on the edge, leaning against it. A woman in a light-blue sweater comes up and sits on the other side, the same way, with her back pressed up against mine. Warm. I keep looking over to the doors where the regular store is, where all of the aisles of shelves of merchandise are.

Some time later, I am working the wire into the screw holes on the lights. It may hold temporarily, but I will need to find some screws soon.

. . .

Staying in some foreign place. Maybe I am a guest, maybe just squatting. The accommodations are not very nice. I am sitting on the floor next to some bedding, leaning back against a wall, when a dog comes in and approaches me. It occurs to me that maybe I should be afraid of it, but that (in my position, sitting on the floor) would be a waste of energy. It comes up to me, looking and sniffing, then lies down next to me. I pat it gently in an attempt to show that I am not hostile and think about its appearance. It seems to be a dog, but when I look at it directly, I am not sure. A superposition of states of dogness, or something else projecting an image?

Later, and in another place, I am lying on a makeshift bed of foam on top of wooden pallets, in a

dim room. The dogness comes through an open doorway and sits on the bed beside me, quiet. It sleeps beside me through the night. Others wander through in the night. I hear them comment on the dogness choosing to stay with me.

. . .

Emptying the house out, but I am not sure why. I am piling things up in the side yard. Many of the things I don't want and may dispose of. A man drives by in a pickup truck. I see him looking at the piles of stuff, then at me. He turns his truck around and parks in the street next to the side yard. Then he gets out and starts rummaging through the piles, picking things out and packing them into his truck without asking, as if it had been offered to him to take whatever he wanted. He doesn't even say hello to me. I am not sure how to handle this situation. I had been worried about being able to get rid of some things, but I still want to keep some of it. Can I filter what he is taking, or have I missed something important?

28 January

Working at the finishing end of some production machine. It is 1630 and some workers have been told to go home because there is not enough work. The supervisor looks at the job running on this machine and tells me that it is too complicated for me. He says that it is beyond my experience so I must go home as well. I hesitate. I am not running the machine, only catching and stacking the finished product at the end. The lead operator tells me that the supervisor is talking BS as I walk up the machine on my way out.

29 *January*

Training with two teams in military exercises. We are learning how to deal with being captured, and how to rescue those who are prisoners. Four of the five combatants on the other team are captured, and three from my team. The three of us left have to work together to rescue them. We all had preliminary POW training, how to survive as a prisoner, but not how to rescue prisoners. We have to give it a blind try before they give us the advanced class. There is a crude plan involving covering their aircraft with sand, burying them in a dune. I have not been able to reason that out so that it makes sense to me.

13. Bonus: Short Story

In addition to recording my dreams, I also write fiction. Here is one of my previously unpublished short stories, “A Retirement from Hell”.

T. Foor loved his job, his career. He wasn't the best. He wasn't the most accomplished. He didn't win special awards (*that* one didn't count, he knew it was just something the Company had cooked up to avoid having to pay him a retention bonus). He was just a regular guy, steady and stable, successful through perseverance. It really wasn't hard to persevere because he enjoyed his work so much. But it was time to retire – he was at the age limit and the rules were strictly enforced. He had made it this far by following those rules and not ranging too widely. He was not an experimenter, adventurer, rebel, or thrill-seeker – they tended to die young or be fired (that was worse).

One more assignment. He was distracted by thoughts of what to do afterward. The Company would take care of him, that was in the contract and the Company always honored its contracts. It always had, as far back as Time went, as far as anyone knew (and that was pretty far), the Company had always *been*, there had never been Time without the Company. There were speculations about a beginning (everything that *is* had a beginning, didn't it?), an origin, and what came before. But that was an event long-gone, outside the system, and nobody could even *know*.

What would he do with his time in retirement? The Company had a training program for that, to ease

the transition (it was a good Company). He felt a sudden apprehension: *this will be the last time I can do what I have enjoyed for so long*. The last time. It was the thought of there being an end that upset him. Ends were final, well most of them anyway, even if it was a transition to something else.

The assignment seemed mundane: an ordinary middle-aged house cat living in a third-level flat with two elderly human-companions. It brought visions of warm laps and rubs and flower boxes in grate-covered windows. Not very exciting, though cats had their own special character. Not dangerous, cats were some of the safest assignments in the current market. It would be an easy but still respectable end. A *boring* end.

Foor started recounting the techniques he had used with cats. He was, after all, allowed some professional discretion on-the-job. Some subjects needed a light touch, others had no discernible limits. He might have a little fun, add a bit of zing to make it memorable. There was that orange tabby that had got as close to breakdancing as any cat has ever been known to, a tail-chase and a single-paw vault into a back-spin. The human-companion's reaction to its paws-in-the-air wide-mouthed toothy *ta-daa* was particularly satisfying. There was a Siamese who sang along with the radio and wailed plaintively when it was shut off, then went on destructive rampages if it was not turned back on. That had been a normally talkative cat, so the singing might not have seemed unusual.

He needed to think up something a cat could do, without injury to itself (that was in the Rules), but that a cat just *wouldn't* do. Chasing invisible things up walls was out. He suspected that cats did that on their own. Anything that inflicted physical injury or death to others

was generally frowned upon, if not strictly prohibited. Terrorism, to use a modern word, worked much better if the terrorised lived to continue to be tormented and even to propagate their fears long after their root had disappeared. That was the ultimate goal of the Company: disruption without damage.

Foor knew that the worldly economy was based on trade of goods and services, value for value. He had never worked out how the Company managed – it didn't seem to participate in trade or even need to. The Company just *was*, as it had always been. He hadn't thought much about it because it did not affect him directly and it was an implicitly taboo subject. He was simply an instrument that applied the will of the Company, and he had always been content with that.

He started the preliminary preparations for the assignment. Protocol required that he formally accept the assignment, request further details, or reject it. After accepting, he would have access to the full case file so that he could prepare and plan. (Rejecting an assignment carried potential consequences. There would be hearing to determine if the rejection was justified. It usually wasn't, and this was one of the reasons that employees were fired.) Then he would have to submit his plan and await approval.

The case files provided good and useful information, but were never complete. This cat carried the title 'Captain Midnight'. That sounded more promising than the usual 'Fluffy' or 'Mr. Piddles'. He was described as very dark solid gray, not quite black, with a bluish tinge if the light reflected at a particular angle. Five years old, adopted as a kitten, and had spent most of his life in the same third-level flat. Favorite activities included napping, eating, and sitting in a flower box

surveying his domain. Batting a lumpy ball around the uneven floors of the flat was endlessly entertaining. No possessions on record. The elderly human-companions might need special handling.

Foor had a high approval rating and his near-textbook plan was approved almost immediately. He would enter through the television receiver, luring the cat close while the human-companions were away. Just a touch, one paw on the cabinet or screen, would be enough to make the transfer. Exits were usually left open and worked out in-the-moment. Sometimes it was necessary to leave in a hurry.

When he reported to the transfer station to start the assignment, his last assignment, his co-workers had gathered to see him off. He was embarrassed at the attention. He acknowledged them as they cheered politely, then moved into the transfer slot.

Captain Midnight was lying on a throw-rug in the living room when Foor arrived in the television receiver. Midnight was pointed in the direction of one of the windows, looking at a flower box and thinking about it. *So many things to do*, he thought, pleased that so many of those things were naps. He wasn't napping when the television turned itself on.

He heard the relay click, the high-pitched whine of the capacitor charging up to drive the picture tube, the static hiss rising out of the speaker as the tubes warmed up. He rolled his head around in time to see the picture screen brighten enough to look like frothing foaming dirty water. A bright ball of indeterminate color (it was a black-and-white set) floated into view, dancing around the screen as tossed by the churning water. He watched it for a while, then looked back at the flower

box. And back at the television picture, moving no more than necessary to redirect his gaze. He prided himself in that type of efficiency. There was something unusual about the picture. It wasn't the kind of show the ladies would watch, and they didn't watch while they weren't here. He had nearly fallen asleep while thinking about this but snapped back to attention when the strange noises started.

Fluttering and chirping, rustling of dry leaves, the rending of steel as a blade sliced open a can. He was suspicious. There was no smell, or rather there was no *different* smell, only the usual tang of warm electronics. And the ball was still where he had left it, underneath the sofa. He decided it was worth a closer look so he rolled over onto his other side. There was no noticeable difference. He couldn't just go back to sleep because the noises had a subtle variation that didn't repeat, that kept his senses on edge.

Suspicion was one of the forms of curiosity, he couldn't resist. He pulled his feet underneath him and rose, stretching casually, then sat for a moment. In five steps he was at the machine, nose nearly touching the glass of the screen. He heard the soft crackle as the electrical discharge reached his nose, or maybe it was afterward. Putting aside the discomfort of the shock, he knew immediately that something had changed, something was wrong.

Foor also knew immediately because the cat didn't respond like it should have. It was like floating in a transition area with no control over his direction. It wasn't vertigo, but he was slightly disoriented and beginning to panic. He pulled himself together and put on his best commanding-but-not-threatening daemonic voice.

“I am here to possess you. Submit now,” he projected. He should not have had to do that. His mere presence should have been enough. Had the schedulers at the Company played a trick on him for his last assignment? He felt the cat's response, weak in signal but strong in self-confidence.

“Nobody can possess me, I'm my own cat.”

Back-talk, and from a cat! Foor was experienced enough to handle it calmly. “No, I do not mean to own you. I am taking over for a while.”

“Like sub-leasing?” Midnight responded.

“More like occupying by force. You will follow my command or you will suffer,” Foor said with forceful intent.

“Sounds like Hell.”

Foor's rhythm was upset. “You have heard of the Company?”

“So you're one of those daemon-things that I've heard about?” Midnight asked.

“Yes,” Foor confirmed, annoyed at the casual and familiar address of the cat. Conversing with the subject was not exactly prohibited, but it was highly unusual and had never happened to him before. The novelty of it was at least interesting, if not infuriating. He could safely assume that the cat couldn't communicate the conversation to the outside world so it probably wasn't dangerous to continue.

“Do you have all of those special powers, like levitation and glowing in the dark and talking in thumbs? Like a superhero genie in a little red skinsuit popping from place to place?”

“No, it isn't like that.”

“You mean you can't do any tricks?”

Foor had not anticipated this. “I could make you

breakdance like it's 1985.”

“Ooh!” Midnight exclaimed, delighted at his fortune. “Can you add a moonwalk in there somewhere? I've always wanted to be able to do that. Yes – do it, DO IT!”

“I also know things about you that might disturb you,” Foor continued, ignoring the cat's exuberance. “For example, I know that your title is 'Captain Midnight'.”

“That's my callsign,” Midnight confirmed. “What's yours?”

“I am known as T. Foor.”

“What's the 'T' for, Foor?” he asked, pronouncing it like 'fur'.

“Just call me Foor.”

“Four?”

“*Foor.*”

“Fyer? Fewer? Fuhrer?”

“No! That is *not* how it sounds. You are mispronouncing it on purpose.”

“I'm not pronouncing anything. I don't have to, I'm a cat,” Midnight said, matter-of-factly. “T – hmmm. Thomas, Theodore, Timothy, Tanaka—”

“No—”

“Tamara, Tina, Teresa—”

“No. Where did you get all of those names, anyway?”

“Phone book. The ladies started putting pages from the phone book under my food and water dishes when they stopped subscribing to the newspaper. I read while I eat. How 'bout I call you Ted? You seem like a Ted.”

“No! My name is Foor.” He sighed before reluctantly adding, “'T' stands for my *title.*”

Midnight considered this for a moment.
“Teaweasel? Toeclipper? Taxiwhacker? Tr–”

“No – stop!” Foor nearly yells, exasperated.
“The 'T' stands for Technician.”

Midnight paused again. “Well, that's kinda boring. I like Taxiwhacker better. You wanna be one? I can teach you.”

“You can't teach that, you just made it up.”

“I am an expert.”

“You are *not* an expert and you are not certified.”

“I have a license. You wanna see it?”

“You don't have any license.”

“Sure I do.” Midnight flicks his collar tags with a claw. “This one says I'm a licensed cat – read it. It's official. Where's yours?”

“Where is my what?”

“Your license. You can't just go around technicating without a license. It's in the rules.”

“You don't know the rules and there is no license. I am trained and authorised by the Company, that is the only license necessary.”

“Maybe I should start my own Company. I *am* licensed, after all, that's a good marketing point. I'll call it 'Captain Midnight's Technicating and Taxiwhacking'.”

“There is no such thing as taxiwhacking.”

“Sure there is, the ladies told me about it. That's what you have to do if the taxi won't stop for you. It helps to have a cane or umbrella, something with some reach. A handbag can work too. Say, you seem pretty useful, you wanna join me? We could do things, go places. Or you could while I just *be*.”

“Maybe they should have called you 'Captain Vicarious'.” He knew that was a step over the line, but

it was too late. There was a rule against personal insults. “Your experience is almost entirely through others.”

“And yours isn't?”

Foor made an uncouth noise.

“What else would you be doing, going around possessing other cats?”

“No, this is my last assignment. I am retiring.”

“Why? Don't you like what you do? Isn't that who you are?”

“Well, yes, but I have reached the mandatory retirement age so I have to retire. It's in the Rules.”

“What happens then? What will you do?”

“I don't know yet.” Foor paused. “The Company has a training program for making that transition to something else. I have not been through it yet. I have been busy working and I suppose I didn't want to think about this ending. I don't want it to end.”

“It doesn't have to end. I have goals you could accomplish for me.”

“Personal goals are things you should accomplish yourself.”

“Sure, I could do it for myself, but that goes against my principles. You see, I'm on the path to true catness, to accomplish more with less effort.”

“You don't do things for yourself because you are lazy – too lazy to do and too lazy to learn.”

“It's not laziness, it's cat-nature. I'm ambitious. I'm out to out-cat all the other cats. That's where you come in.”

“I won't help you.”

“So watch this.” Midnight padded purposefully into the kitchen. Putting weight on both of his front paws, he depressed the pedal that pushed open the lid of the trash can. Once fully opened, it stayed open until he

depressed the pedal again. “See? I *do* know these things and I *can* do them. But why should I? You can do them for me.”

“That is not the way it works. I can only motivate you to do things, not do them for you. Ordinarily, that is. I don't seem to be able to motivate *you* to do anything.”

“Motivation without self-motivation is closer to true cat-nature. That's good, how far can we go with it?”

“We? *I* am doing the possessing here. This is my show, *this is my job*. This is all about *me*.”

“*You* are retired. There is no job, there is no you. *We* are on a mission now. I'm on my first life, by the way. I wonder if we can carry this on through the next eight.”

“That is a myth. You only get one life.”

“At a time?”

“No, only one life *ever*. No more. No second chance. No eight more chances.”

“You sound jealous.”

Foor paused to consider the absurdity of the situation. “You seem to think that you will profit from me staying. What would I get out of it?”

“You would rather go home to a boring retirement than spend a few exciting years with me? Really? What would you be doing?”

“I already told you that I don't know. I don't know what employees do in retirement. I have never known anyone who was retired. I have always been too busy working, I will stop.”

“You've already done that.”

“Not yet, this is my last assignment.”

“How's it going? According to plan, achieving

your goals?”

“No, this is all wrong. You are not cooperating. You should not be talking.”

“I'm not talking, that's just your imagination. I've heard that happens when you get old. The ladies—”

“I am not imagining things. This is different.”

“If it's that different, maybe you really are done and this is your transition to something else, isn't it?”

“No. There will be a ceremony, co-workers gathered to see me off into retirement. I have seen others off in that way.”

“Did you see them again, after that?”

“No.”

“What happened to them? Where did they go?”

“I don't know. They went into a transfer slot and . . . ”

Midnight waited for him to continue, then said, “And what? You sound like you just inhaled a stink-bug.”

“They gathered at the transfer station to see me off for my last assignment, *this* assignment.”

“So retirement is a kind of last assignment, right?”

“This cannot be retirement,” Foor cried. “To be stuck with a cat. *Possessed* by a cat? No!”

“That settles it, then. *We* are on a mission. Lets make some plans. Or better yet, you start planning while I take a nap. Oh, and just wait 'til you meet the ladies, they know all about retirement.”

No one at the Company ever heard from T. Foor again.

About the Author

Benjamin Gayle was born in Richmond Virginia, and has lived in the western mountains of the state for most of his life. Educated in math and electrical engineering, he has worked in a wide variety of capacities including factory automation in automotive manufacturing, and designing motor control systems for a drives manufacturer. He has been an amateur cyclist and bicycle mechanic for more than thirty years, and an amateur radio operator (N1NP) for nearly twenty. Reading was an early passion, followed by writing in his early teens, though that was set aside for decades for career and other responsibilities. He currently works a part-time job while continuing to write.

He has also produced *Spectrum*, a broad overview of the music of composer Charles Irving Gayle, available on CD.

Sample chapters and more information are available at www.AntonomasiaProductions.org.

Books by Benjamin Gayle:

The Turtle Test
The Frost Bug Dreams
Dreams of Sixteen
Dreams of Seventeen
Dreams of Eighteen