

Excerpt from:

Dreams

of

Twenty-One

by Benjamin Gayle

None of this is real, I dreamed all of it.

Dreams of Twenty-One

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Cover art “Window with vines in snow”

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0. Preface

This book is a collection of dreams that I recorded during the year of 2021, arranged in sequence by month and date.

I have been recording dreams for years, but much like 2020, 2021 was different. The Covid-19 pandemic brought new stresses and anxieties on multiple levels. There was a constant underlying fear of getting sick. There were fluctuations in product availability on grocery store shelves. I had to continue to work, and even work overtime, on an open factory floor where social and physical distancing were impossible and most workers refused to wear masks. I didn't sleep as well or as much, and what dreams came were difficult to hold onto long enough to record, resulting in more and longer gaps, shorter reports, and repetitive sequences. For this year, I am including some fragments to present a more complete picture of my dreams. These fragments are in double parens ((like this)).

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

Riding a bicycle to work. I have to change clothes both coming and going. A large block of unknown material covers my workbench. I have to carve and paint a statue of a dragon. My co-workers are all testing circuit boards. They also ride bicycles but don't accept me as one of them.

. . .

Visiting an old woman. She is locked up in a large building. Before I can reach her, she escapes, hurting herself in the process. We find her sitting in her car in the parking garage, bleeding. The engine is running but the car will not move because it is locked in place. It also has a tracking device and bells on it.

03 January

Performing maintenance on computers. I have to remove the heatsinks, clean them and the chips, then reassemble with fresh thermal grease. When I finish one, I slide it back into the rack and pull out another one. The racks stretch for as far as I can see.

04 January

Hooking up cables to computers. I have to test each one, then disconnect and move to the next computer. This repeats over and over.

. . .

Going on a turkey hunt. I won an all-expenses-paid trip. I don't want to go, but she convinces me that it will be worth the experience. The organiser leads me into a building and to an upper floor. It looks like an office with many cubicles and not enough light. The organiser leaves me here with no instructions. The turkey is larger than I expect, and scary. It chases me through the maze of cubicles and even follows me up onto desks and over cubicle walls. I need to escape, but I can't find a door to get out. Eventually, the organiser returns and rescues me, then has to write a report on what happened.

05 January

Driving a moving van. She is walking beside it as I drive. I'm not sure where we are going, but it is dark and we can't go back. I wonder where my bicycle is and hope that it is packed in the van.

06 January

Listening to someone sing. Sometimes she just hums. I eat dried apricots while listening. The songs sound familiar, but I don't know the names or words.

07 January

Setting up a printing press. First, I have to fix the cores on the paper rolls. They have collapsed, so I use a hydraulic expander to get the unwinder shafts through. Then I have to set the dies for the perforations, moving metal strips around on a magnetic cylinder. Tear sheets from previous jobs hang in a rack at the front of the machine. I compare samples from my setup until they match. This continues indefinitely. It seems as if they will never match.

08 January

Making connections. I am floating, flying around inside a space filled with power panels and racks of equipment and circuit boards. I have to connect power to everything, mating cables with two-pole connectors to every unit in every rack. I keep moving in the same direction, top-to-bottom then bottom-to-top, but there always seems to be another rack full of equipment to connect.

. . .

Testing a GPU at work. I have to construct an enclosed test fixture to measure the effects of airflow over the motherboard and GPU card. I vary the fan speed and location and measure the inlet and outlet temperatures and pressures.

Later, I have a work order for twenty-seven dollars. I have to climb up into a square metallic box to retrieve all of the available two-dollar bills. I only find twenty-two dollars, so I have to travel to a different location to get more. It seems like a long way to travel in the snow. Along the way, I see many co-workers who are traveling to collect materials for their

work orders. I ride in a plastic storage bin on a wide divided highway in the dark. The road is plowed, but still covered in snow and ice. Everyone else is walking. I pass them, pushing a bin full of parts, drifting through the turns.

09 January

Arguing about supplies. We have more hand towels than the inventory says we should have. After an extended debate, we still can't agree on what to do with them.

Later, I am cooking and using hand towels as pot-holders. The recipe calls for tomatoes, but I can't find any. A co-worker brings some and says that they are off-the books, not in the inventory count.

. . .

Visiting an unfamiliar city at night. As I approach, I see an oasis of colorful light. A large screen wraps around a third of its perimeter and towers over it. I can't see what is on the screen because of the angle of my approach.

Later, I am in a theater with a similarly large screen and rows of seats cascading up and away for as far as I can see. At the bottom, just below the screen, it looks like a city street busy with activity. The screen itself looks like a building with windows curving around and over the seats. In each window, I see people dancing. It looks as if there are more people dancing than in the seats watching. I walk all the way to the other side of the screen, then back to the middle where I climb up steps into the array of seats, occasionally glancing back to see if the view of the screen is better from here.

. . .

Coming home from somewhere. She is cooking something on the stove and has made a mess. A wide saucepan in cream enamel with flowers around the rim sits on a burner, overflowing with food. I pick up chunks of tomato, onion, and mushroom from the stovetop and put them back into the pan. Then I wipe the stove top clean. I watch and stir, turning the heat down when it bubbles up. She seems to have forgotten about her cooking project.

. . .

Driving various cars that don't belong to me. I am favoring a red coupe, model unknown, when I hear news of a hit-and-run involving a car that I had driven a few days ago, a black Datsun 240Z. It is still parked here, undamaged. I examine the car more closely, inside and out, looking for signs of the event. Inside, I find a small book. Notes that were handwritten in the margins and between the lines have been erased, damaging the print. I can't read the characters anyway, but it bothers me that some information has been lost.

10 January

Visiting a cold place. I watch as they demonstrate their transportation system. One person drags a sled out of an arched building that looks like a quonset hut. Black-painted metal mesh forms the body, curving up at the sides to make a long narrow basket about two meters long and a half-meter wide. While I am examining the sled, another vehicle shows up. I didn't see where it came from. Here is a capsule that looks like an express train locomotive, rounded at the front and aerodynamic, with approximately the same length and width as the sled and about chest-high, a fancy enclosed snowmobile. A

hatch at the front opens and a man climbs out. The two men demonstrate connecting the sled to the snowmobile, but they don't get it right the first time. It ends up connected backwards and the hitch will not pivot in the turns. The two men argue about this while disconnecting and reconnecting the hitch several times. No matter which way they connect it, it doesn't seem to work right.

. . .

Visiting a remote facility to inspect their manufacturing process. When we enter the building, the wide view of the manufacturing area makes it look like a modern high-tech operation. When we walk through, we see that most of the space is taken up by storage racks that hold reels of parts. We stop at a machine where a man sits holding a reel. The green-painted box is taller than me and labeled 'PCB Insertion'. Reels are mounted on the front, tapes unwinding up into the machine. An articulated arm inside the box picks and places parts onto a circuit board. The circuit board looks too large for the few reels of parts unwinding. When I ask about this, our guide says that it takes several passes, changing reels to place all of the parts. They run in batch mode, in steps until all of the parts are placed, before sending the boards through the oven. I am disappointed. This seems too primitive for my needs. As I watch, the articulated arm knocks previously-placed parts off of the board while placing new ones.

. . .

Playing in a band. We perform at a club, an informal event with no stage. Each musician has a station set up on the club floor amid the crowd. We don't all play at the same time, only when we feel like it, or can. I am having trouble with my setup. The drums and microphones seem to be working, but I need a network connection. Pulling the cables over and across

the crowded floor is difficult. By the time I have the cables connected, the show is over.

11 January

Connecting power cables. They have to connect in a specific order, and I get confused about which cable goes to which connector. I have to repeat the process over and over.

. . .

Escaping from bicycle thieves. I manage to squeeze through a crack in the sidewalk and down into a sewer channel where I crawl to safety. I had found the channel earlier while digging for a landscaping project. I wait for a while before crawling out to find a police officer. We stand next to the patrol car with its lights flashing as I explain what happened. I have not gotten my bicycle back yet.

13 January

Boarding an airplane. Inside, the seating section seems too wide for the body of the plane. A stewardess tells us that we can use our devices, but says that if we are engineers, we should stay on the bus for an important announcement.

. . .

Driving to work. I have to stop where a gate is closed across the road. I don't remember seeing that before. It is locked, I can't move it, so I have to back up and go around on a different road. Coming home from work, I find a different

gate closed across the road. Again, I have to find another way.

14 *January*

Walking to the bathroom at work. It seems like too far to walk until I realise that I am having trouble walking. My mechanical motion is not smooth and I am in discomfort. A co-worker pulls my insides out for an inspection and finds a cyst on an artificial organ that I didn't know I had. She calls another co-worker over to consult. He finds that a wire in the cable that connects the artificial organ to my headphones is broken. After he repairs the broken wire, the two put my insides back in, careful that they are in the correct order for proper cooling.

Later, another co-worker asks me to help her get into the space above the ceiling. She thinks there is a stash of perf-board hidden up there. She points at a ceiling tile, then at a ventilation duct. I tell her that we need to find a ladder. I am skeptical of her prospects.

. . .

Walking through a hallway at school on my way to class. A girl rushes around a corner and slams open every locker door down the row until she finds the right one. She digs around inside, pulls out a cigarette, lights it, and slumps to the floor, crying. A classroom door opens. A teacher comes out, sees the girl, and goes to her to assess the situation.

15 *January*

Troubleshooting circuits while keeping the newspaper informed. The reporters don't seem to understand or care about the problem. Tracking them down to make my report is a chore.

. . .

Discussing costumes with an unfamiliar group. We go through a sort of museum, looking at all of the costumes and talking about why they are problematic. The assessments range from inappropriate appropriation of culture to blatantly racist.

Later, I drive south to a small town where I will stay for a while. The locals don't like the smoke that my diesel car makes and want me to leave, but I promise them that this is only temporary, a short visit. I don't tell them that I am looking for work.

I stay at an unfamiliar house with a group of strangers. They are also interested in costumes and ask if I will wear one. I say *maybe*; I will have to see it first. A woman leads me through the house to what looks like a storage room. Others follow. The woman gets out a costume and lays it across a sofa. It looks like a fuzzy white snowsuit, but I can't tell what it was meant to represent – a polar bear, abominable snowman, or something else. I examine the costume more closely. It is much like a snowsuit that I previously owned. I open it up by unzipping the torso and legs at the seams and climb in, demonstrating for the crowd how to get in and zip it up. It is a bit large, but fits well enough. I walk around, getting the feel of it, noting what I need to fix. I will need gloves, a balaclava to keep my head warm, and a carabiner clip to keep all of the zipper pulls in-place, to keep the costume from unzipping as I walk. When I am satisfied with that, the woman says

we will go out to eat with me wearing the costume. I worry that others will be annoyed because the costume smells like fish.

. . .

Following a vaguely-familiar man. I'm not sure why, and neither, apparently, is he. We go through a parking lot and into a building, then up steps. At the top floor, he goes through a door into a room where he talks with an old man. They know each other and talk about things in a familiar way. I stay in the hallway and walk around in circles, looking at the cracks and holes in the walls. I follow the man back down, but lose sight of him in the parking lot.

Later, I am pushing a shopping cart loaded with textbooks and personal belongings through the same parking lot. I pass near a group of old men who stand in a rough circle, talking. One of them sees me and calls to me, so I push my cart in his direction. He looks at the books in my cart, then asks if I would like to have some of his books. He doesn't wait for an answer, just starts loading old books into my cart, all of them about physics. The old man is bald on top with a shoulder-length fringe of white hair. I think I should know who he is but don't. I'm not sure what I will do with the books. Then he asks if I would like some papers. Again, before I can answer, he sets a folio on top of my cart. I open it to find drawings and notes. One sheet has the original drawings for a poster I had seen in the building, upstairs in the hallway. I am amazed at this and say so. He tells me to use the books, then returns to the conversation with the group. I move on, pushing my cart, leafing through the folio and wondering what I will do with the books.

. . .

Preparing for a trip into space. I review the plan, then inspect the supplies. Three of us will share a spacesuit, all of us inside at the same time. I don't like that arrangement, but it is too late to object. The food isn't what I expect, cans and plastic jars and bottles and plastic-wrapped granola bars. I wonder why companies have not marketed these things as 'space-ready' foods yet.

16 January

Working at a remote location. I find a batch of circuit boards that all have the same problem. A co-worker had told me that they were good. When I confront him, explaining what failed, he says they do that sometimes, then walks off, ignoring me as if this isn't important. I have to fix them, then re-test. I have to dig through my suitcase to find the parts. I work slowly, carefully, taking my time.

Later, the circuit boards are fixed and I don't have any more work to do, so I look around for something that needs to be done. I find that some of the power supplies on the workbenches have frayed cables with wires sticking out; that looks dangerous. One of them is wet. I think that could be a problem, so I get a screwdriver. The woman at the workbench is still using the power supply, so I have to wait until she is finished. I stand beside the bench for a while, watching and waiting, and listening to her talk to a woman at the next workbench. I can't understand what they are saying. She eventually gets up to do something at another workbench. I unplug the connector from the power supply, drain the water out, and unscrew the terminals to release the wires. I am holding the connector, cable, and screwdriver when a woman in a blue hoodie with the hood up comes up to me and starts talking in

japanese. I catch a few words, but her meaning is lost. I gesture for her to stop and ask her to repeat that in english. She shakes her head and says, "When are you going to learn?" Then she walks off to talk to someone else. I look to a co-worker for help, but she also shakes her head.

17 January

Watching an advertisement. A man stands in front of stacks of green-painted wooden boxes, unpainted boxes, and barrels. He tries to convince me to ride over the edge in a barrel, but won't say what edge or when. I name some waterfalls, but he doesn't respond. At the end of the advertisement, he smashes the green-painted boxes.

19 January

Watching people talk. All around me, their words come out into speech bubbles labeled with percents. I can't hear them and can't read the words in the bubbles.

21 January

Sorting through junk. I find a speaker that matches another whose mate had been damaged. I put them together, then have to find the matching t-shirts that go with them. The closet is full of t-shirts, but not the right ones. Here is a bag of parts, connectors and brackets and loose components. I will take that home. A co-worker has to move to another work-

bench to plug everything in.

22 January

Cutting circuit boards at work. A co-worker asks me to help him. I follow him to his workbench. He explains where the boards need to be cut and hands me the saw. It has special three-pointed teeth shaped like a W with the center point higher than the others to cut a guide groove. I don't know why he can't do this himself. I start with the board flat on the workbench, then move it past the edge to cut all the way through. He approves of the cut. I put the saw down and return to my workbench. I have forgotten what I was doing.

. . .

Building and testing a circuit. When I attach it to my index finger, it reduces my body temperature by three degrees Celsius. I walk around the house with it, wondering if it will do anything else.

24 January

Surveying a project on a hillside. It is a muddy mess. The power pole is installed, ready to connect to something. I climb to the top of the hill, where she is standing next to a car. We stand there together, looking down the steep slope at the unfinished mess. I feel the need to explain, but don't know what to say. Later, we are at an unfamiliar house with others. It feels small, close, and quiet.

26 *January*

((copying files over and over))

28 *January*

Converting one product to another. I have to work outdoors on fake grass carpet in the narrow space between the building and a tractor-trailer. Protesters want to stop the operation because they say the product units have rights. I don't understand that, so I disassemble one unit, explaining what I am doing and why, transplanting the parts into a new and differently-shaped enclosure. This confuses the protesters. Co-workers take advantage of their confusion and lead them away, leaving me to get the job done without interruption.

I still have more than two hundred of these to do. The boxes come piled up in mail carts, but I stack the finished ones neatly on a pallet. As I am about to reassemble another unit, parts spread out on the fake grass, a co-worker interrupts. She is wearing a strange mask, toilet paper roll cores wrapped with fuzzy black pipe cleaners sticking out from her eyes and nose. I can hear the protesters complaining about that, but can't see them. She says I should turn on the trailer lights so that I can see better. That sounds like a good idea, so I go looking for the light switch. I see the lights, but no switch. She finally calls to me from the front of the tractor and points to a white knob mounted on the hood. She turns the knob *click* and the lights come on. I try to resume my work, but another co-worker interrupts. He wants to know if the woman will sell the cassette tapes that she has in her car. She says no.

Later, I ride in the passenger seat of the co-worker's car, an old white Toyota. We drive around the roundabout at

the front of the company building, then out onto a street. One of the tapes is playing. I don't recognise the music but I like it. She says the car is from the early 1980s, the same year the music came out. I wonder why she is driving such an old car.

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 more than 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.

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

Other books by Benjamin Gayle:

The Turtle Test

The Frost Bug Dreams

Dreams of Sixteen

Dreams of Seventeen

Dreams of Eighteen

Dreams of Nineteen

Dreams of Twenty