

A white seagull is shown in flight, its wings spread wide, against a dark blue background. The seagull is positioned in the upper right quadrant of the cover, flying towards the left. The lighting highlights the texture of its feathers.

The International Bestseller

Jonathan
Livingston
Seagull

A Story

Richard Bach

Photographs by Russell Munson

Richard Bach

Jonathan Livingston Seagull

To the real Jonathan Seagull,

who lives within us all.

Part One

It was morning, and the new sun sparkled gold across the gentle sea. A mile from shore a fishing boat chummed the word for Breakfast Flock flashed through the air, till a

thousand seagulls came to dodge and fight for bits of food
busy day beginning.

But way off alone, out by himself beyond boat and shore,
Livingston Seagull was practicing. A hundred feet in the
his webbed feet, lifted his beak, and strained to hold a
twisting curve through his wings. The curve meant that he
slowly, and now he slowed until the wind was a whisper in
the ocean stood still beneath him. He narrowed his eyes in
concentration, held his breath, forced one... single... m
of... curve... Then his feathers ruffled, he stalled and

Seagulls, as you know, never falter, never stall. To
stall in the air

is for them disgrace and it is dishonor.

But Jonathan Livingston Seagull, unashamed, stretching his
again in that trembling hard curve - slowing, slowing, an
more - was no ordinary bird.

Most gulls don't bother to learn more than the simplest f

flight - how to get from shore to food and back again. For this gull, it is not flying that matters, but eating. For this gull, it is not eating that mattered, but flight. More than anything else, the Livingston Seagull loved to fly.

This kind of thinking, he found, is not the way to make oneself popular with other birds. Even his parents were dismayed by his whole days alone, making hundreds of low-level glides, ex-

He didn't know why, for instance, but when he flew at altitudes more than half his wingspan above the water, he could stay in the air with less effort. His glides ended not with the usual feeble splash into the sea, but with a long flat wake as he touched the water with his

feet tightly streamlined against his body. When he began his feet-up landings on the beach, then pacing the length of the beach with his feet, his parents were very much dismayed indeed.

"Why, Jon, why?" his mother asked. "Why is it so hard to rest of the flock, Jon? Why can't you leave low flying to the albatross? Why don't you eat? Son, you're bone and feather." "I don't mind being bone and feathers mom. I just want to do what I can do in the air and what I can't, that's all. I just want to fly." "See here Jonathan " said his father not unkindly. "Winter is coming. Boats will be few and the surface fish will be scarce. You must study, then study food, and how to get it. This flycatcher can fly all very well, but you can't eat a glide, you know. Don't forget that the reason you fly is to eat."

Jonathan nodded obediently. For the next few days he tried to fly like the other gulls; he really tried, screeching and fighting with the

flock around the piers and fishing boats, diving on scrap bread. But he couldn't make it work.

It's all so pointless, he thought, deliberately dropping an anchovy to a hungry old gull chasing him. I could be spent

time learning to fly. There's so much to learn!

It wasn't long before Jonathan Gull was off by himself again at sea, hungry, happy, learning.

The subject was speed, and in a week's practice he learned a speed faster than the fastest gull alive.

From a thousand feet, flapping his wings as hard as he could, he pushed over into a blazing steep dive toward the waves, a maneuver that seagulls don't make. In just six seconds he was moving seventy miles per hour, the speed at which one's wings are on the upstroke.

Time after time it happened. Careful as he was, working at the peak of his ability, he lost control at high speed.

Climb to a thousand feet. Full power straight ahead first

over, flapping,
to a vertical dive. Then, every time, his left wing

stalled on an upstroke, he'd roll violently left, stall h
recovering, and flick like fire into a wild tumbling spin
He couldn't be careful enough on that upstroke. Ten times
and all ten times, as he passed through seventy miles per
into a churning mass of feathers, out of control, crashin
water.

The key, he thought at last, dripping wet, must be to hol
still at high speeds - to flap up to fifty and then hold
From two thousand feet he tried again, rolling into his d
straight down, wings full out and stable from the moment
miles per hour. It took tremendous strength, but it worke
he had blurred through ninety miles per hour. Jonathan ha
speed record for seagulls!

But victory was short-lived. The instant he began his pul
instant he changed the angle of his wings, he snapped int

terrible uncontrolled disaster, and
at ninety miles per hour it hit him

like dynamite. Jonathan Seagull exploded in midair and sm
brickhard sea.

When he came to, it was well after dark, and he floated i
on the surface of the ocean. His wings were ragged bars o
weight of failure was even heavier on his back. He wished
the weight could be just enough to drug him gently down t
end it all.

As he sank low in the water, a strange hollow voice sound
him. There's no way around it. I am a seagull. I am limit
If I were meant to learn so much about flying, I'd have c
If I were meant to fly at speed, I'd have a falcon's shor
on mice instead of fish. My father was right. I must forg
foolishness. I must fly home to the Flock and be content
poor limited seagull.

The voice faded, and Jonathan agreed. The place for a sea
night is on shore, and from this moment forth, he vowed,

normal gull. It would make everyone
happier.

He pushed wearily away from the dark water and flew toward the shore, grateful for what he had learned about work-saving low-altitude flight. But no, he thought. I am done with the way I was, I am doing everything I learned. I am a seagull like every other seagull. So he climbed painfully to a hundred feet and pressed his wings harder, pressing for shore.

He felt better for his decision to be just another one of the flock. There would be no ties now to the force that had driven him there, there would be no more challenge and no more failure. And he just wanted to stop thinking, and fly through the dark, toward the beach.

Dark! The hollow voice cracked in alarm. Seagulls never fly in the dark!

Jonathan was not alert to listen. It's pretty, he thought, and the lights twinkling on the water, throwing out little

through the night, and all so peaceful and still...

Get down! Seagulls never fly in the dark! If you were mea

the dark, you'd have
the eyes of an owl! You'd have charts for brains!

You'd have a falcon's short wings!

There in the night, a hundred feet in the air, Jonathan L

Seagull - blinked. His pain, his resolutions, vanished.

Short wings. A falcon's short wings!

That's the answer! What a fool I've been! All I need is a

wing, all I need is to fold most of my wings and fly on j

alone! Short wings!

He climbed two thousand feet above the black sea, and wit

moment for thought of failure and death, he brought his f

in to his body, left only the narrow swept daggers of his

extended into the wind, and fell into a vertical dive.

The wind was a monster roar at his head. Seventy miles pe

ninety, a hundred and twenty and faster still. The wing-s

hundred and forty miles per hour wasn't nearly as hard as before at seventy, and with the faintest twist of his wing out of the dive and shot above the waves, a gray cannonball moon.

He closed his eyes to slits against the wind and rejoiced. A hundred

forty miles per hour! And under control! If I dive from five instead of two thousand, I wonder how fast..

His vows of a moment before were forgotten, swept away in swift wind. Yet he felt guiltless, breaking the promises himself. Such promises are only for the gulls that accept. One who has touched excellence in his learning has no need promise.

By sunup, Jonathan Gull was practicing again. From five to the fishing boats were specks in the flat blue water, Bre a faint cloud of dust motes, circling.

He was alive, trembling ever so slightly with delight, pr

fear was under control. Then without ceremony he hugged i
extended his short, angled wingtips, and plunged directly
By the time he passed four thousand feet he had reached t
the wind was a solid beating wall of sound against which
faster. He was flying now straight down,
at two hundred fourteen miles per

hour. He swallowed, knowing that if his wings unfolded at
be blown into a million tiny shreds of seagull. But the s
and the speed was joy, and the speed was pure beauty.

He began his pullout at a thousand feet, wingtips thudding
blurring in that gigatonic wind, the boat and the crowd o
and growing meteor-fast, directly in his path.

He couldn't stop; he didn't know yet even how to turn at
Collision would be instant death.

And so he shut his eyes.

It happened that morning, then, just after sunrise, that
Livingston Seagull fired directly through the center of B

ticking off two hundred twelve miles per hour, eyes close
roaring shriek of wind and feathers. The Gull of Fortune
this once, and no one was killed.

By the time he had pulled his beak straight up into the s
still scorching along at a hundred and sixty miles per ho

slowed to twenty and stretched his wings
again at last, the boat was a

crumb on the sea, four thousand feet below.

His thought was triumph. Terminal velocity! A seagull at
fourteen miles per hour! It was a breakthrough, the great
in the history of the Flock, and in that moment a new age
Jonathan Gull. Flying out to his lonely practice area, fo
for a dive from eight thousand feet, he set himself at on
how to turn.

A single wingtip feather, he found, moved a fraction of a
gives a smooth sweeping curve at tremendous speed. Before
however, he found that moving more than one feather at th

spin you like a rattle ball... and Jonathan had flown the
of any seagull on earth.

He spared no time that day for talk with other gulls, but
past sunset. He discovered the loop, the slow roll, the p
inverted spin, the gull bunt, the pinwheel.

When Jonathan Seagull joined the Flock on the beach, it w
night. He was dizzy and terribly
tired. Yet in delight he flew a loop to

landing, with a snap roll just before touchdown. When the
thought, of the Breakthrough, they'll be wild with joy. H
there is now to living! Instead of our drab slogging fort
fishing boats, there's a reason to life! We can lift ours
ignorance, we can find ourselves as creatures of excellen
intelligence and skill. We can be free! We can learn to f
The years ahead hummed and glowed with promise.

The gulls were flocked into the Council Gathering when he apparently had been so flocked for some time. They were, "Jonathan Livingston Seagull! Stand to Center!" The Elder sounded in a voice of highest ceremony. Stand to Center m shame or great honor. Stand to Center for Honor was the w foremost leaders were marked. Of course, he thought, the this morning; they saw the Breakthrough! But I want no ho wish to be leader. I want only to share what I've found, to show those

horizons out ahead for us all. He stepped forward.

"Jonathan Livingston Seagull," said the Elder, "Stand to Shame in the sight of your fellow gulls!"

It felt like being hit with a board. His knees went weak, feathers sagged, there was roaring in his ears. Centered Impossible! The Breakthrough! They can't understand! They they're wrong!

"... for his reckless irresponsibility " the solemn voice

"violating the dignity and tradition of the Gull Family..

To be centered for shame meant that he would be cast out society, banished to a solitary life on the Far Cliffs.

"... one day Jonathan Livingston Seagull, you shall learn irresponsibility does not pay. Life is the unknown and th except that we are put into this world to eat, to stay al possibly can."

A seagull never speaks back to the Council Flock, but it

Jonathan's voice raised. "Irresponsibility?
My brothers!" he cried. "Who

is more responsible than a gull who finds and follows a m purpose for life? For a thousand years we have scabbled but now we have a reason to live - to learn, to discover, me one chance, let me show you what I've found..."

The Flock might as well have been stone.

"The Brotherhood is broken," the gulls intoned together, accord they solemnly closed their ears and turned their b

Jonathan Seagull spent the rest of his days alone, but he
out beyond the Far Cliffs. His one sorrow was not solitui
other gulls refused to believe the glory of flight that a
refused to open their eyes and see. He learned more each
that a streamlined high-speed dive could bring him to fin
tasty fish that schooled ten feet below the surface of th
longer needed fishing boats and stale bread for survival.

sleep in the air, setting
a course at night across the offshore wind,

covering a hundred miles from sunset to sunrise. With the
control, he flew through heavy sea-fogs and climbed above
dazzling clear skies... in the very times when every othe
the ground, knowing nothing but mist and rain. He learned
winds far iniand, to dine there on delicate insects.

What he had once hoped for the Flock, he now gained for h
alone; he learned to fly, and was not sorry for the price
paid. Jonathan Scagull discovered that boredom and fear a

reasons that a gull's life is so short, and with these go
thought, he lived a long fine life indeed.

They came in the evening, then, and found Jonathan gliding
and alone through his beloved sky. The two gulls that approached
wings were pure as starlight, and the glow from them was
friendly in the high night air. But most lovely of all was
which they flew, their wingtips moving a precise and consistent
inch from

his own. Without a word, Jonathan put them to his test, a
gull had ever passed. He twisted his wings, slowed to a stall
hour above stall. The two radiant birds slowed with him,
in position. They knew about slow flying.

He folded his wings, rolled and dropped in a dive to a hundred
miles per hour. They dropped with him, streaking down in
formation.

At last he turned that speed straight up into a long vertical
slow-roll. They rolled with him, smiling.

He recovered to level flight and was quiet for a time before he spoke. "Very well," he said, "who are you?"

"We're from your Flock, Jonathan. We are your brothers."

They were strong and calm. "We've come to take you higher, to

the peak of the Great Mountain Wind. Beyond a few hundred

this old body no higher."

"But you can, Jonathan. For you have learned. One school is finished,

and the time has come for another to begin."

As it had shined across him all his life, so understanding

that moment for Jonathan Seagull. They were right. He could

and it was time to go home.

He gave one last look across the sky, across that magnificent

land where he had learned so much.

"I'm ready," he said at last.

And Jonathan Livingston Seagull rose with the two starbirds

disappear into a perfect dark sky.

Part Two

So this is heaven, he thought, and he had to smile at him
hardly respectful to analyze heaven in the very moment th
to enter it.

As he came from Earth now, above the clouds and in close
with the two brilliant gulls, he saw that his own body wa
bright as theirs. True, the same young Jonathan Seagull w
always lived behind his golden eyes, but the outer form h
It felt like a seagull body, but already it flew far bett

old one had ever flown. Why,
with half the effort, he thought, I'll get

twice the speed, twice the performance of my best days on
His feathers glowed brilliant white now, and his wings we

and perfect as sheets of polished silver. He began, delig
about them, to press power into these new wings.

At two hundred fifty mlles per hour he felt that he was n
level-flight maximum speed. At two hundred seventy-three
he was flying as fast as he could fly, and he was ever so
disappointed. There was a limit to how much the new body
though it was much faster than his old level-flight recor
limit that would take great effort to crack. In heaven, h
should be no limits.

The clouds broke apart, his escorts called, "Happy landin
Jonathan," and vanished into thin air.

He was flying over a sea, toward a jagged shoreline. A ve
seagulls were working the updrafts on the cliffs. Away of
at the horizon itself, flew a few others. New sights,
new thoughts, new

questions. Why so few gulls? Heaven should be flocked wit
am I so tired, all at once? Gulls in heaven are never sup

tired, or to sleep.

Where had he heard that? The memory of his life on Earth
away. Earth had been a place where he had learned much, o
details were blurred - something about fighting for food,
Outcast.

The dozen gulls by the shoreline came to meet him, none s
word. He felt only that he was welcome and that this was
a big day for him, a day whose sunrise he no longer rememb
He turned to land on the beach, beating his wings to stop
the air, then dropping lightly to the sand, The other gul
but not one of them so much as flapped a feather. They sw
wind, bright wings outstretched, then somehow they change
their feathers until they had stopped in the same instant
touched the ground. It was beautiful control, but now Jon
too tired to try
it. Standing there on the beach, still without a word
spoken, he was asleep.

In the days that followed, Jonathan saw that there was as
learn about flight in this place as there had been in the
But with a difference. Here were gulls who thought as he
of them, the most important thing in living was to reach
perfection in that which they most loved to do, and that
were magnificent birds, all of them, and they spent hour
day practicing flight, testing advanced aeronautics.

For a long time Jonathan forgot about the world that he h
from, that place where the Flock lived with its eyes tigh
joy of flight, using its wings as means to the end of fin
for food. But now and then, just for a moment, he remembe
He remembered it one morning when he was out with his ins
while they rested on the beach after a session of folded-

"Where is everybody, Sullivan?" he asked silently,
quite at home now

with the easy telepathy that these gulls used instead of
gracks. "Why aren't there more of us here? Why, where I c

were.. "

"... thousands and thousands of gulls. I know. " Sullivan
head. "The only answer I can see, Jonathan, is that you a
one-in-a-million bird. Most of us came along ever so slow
one world into another that was almost exactly like it, f
away where we had come from, not caring where we were hea
the moment. Do you have any idea how many lives we must h
before we even got the first idea that there is more to l
or fighting, or power in the Flock? A thousand lives, Jon
And then another hundred lives until we began to learn th
a thing as perfection, and another hundred again to get t
purpose for living is to find that perfection and show it

rule holds for us now, of course: we choose
our next world through what we

learn in this one. Learn nothing, and the next world is t
one, all the same limitations and lead weights to overcom
He stretched his wings and turned to face the wind. "But

he said, "learned so much at one time that you didn't have a thousand lives to reach this one."

In a moment they were airborne again, practicing. The formation maneuvers were difficult, for through the inverted half circle he had to think upside down, reversing the curve of his wing, and rise exactly in harmony with his instructor's.

"Let's try it again." Sullivan said over and over: "Let's try it again." Then, finally, "Good." And they began practicing

One evening the gulls that were not night-flying stood on the sand, thinking. Jonathan took all his courage in hand and spoke to the Elder Gull, who, it was said, was soon to be moving back

"Chiang..." he said a little nervously.

The old seagull looked at him kindly. "Yes, my son?" Instantly, though enfeebled by age, the Elder had been empowered by it; he

gull in the Flock, and he had learned skills that the others gradually coming to know.

"Chiang, this world isn't heaven at all, is it?" The Elder said under the moonlight. "You are learning again, Jonathan Seagull, aren't you?"

"Well, what happens from here? Where are we going? Is this place as heaven?"

"No, Jonathan, there is no such place. Heaven is not a place, it is not a time. Heaven is being perfect." He was silent for a moment.

"You are a very fast flier, aren't you?"

"I... I enjoy speed," Jonathan said, taken aback but proud. The Elder had noticed.

"You will begin to touch heaven, Jonathan, in the moment you touch perfect speed. And that isn't flying a thousand miles per second, or flying at the speed of light. Because any number of things can be perfect, and perfection doesn't have limits. Perfect speed, my son, is being there."

Without warning, Chiang vanished and appeared at the water fifty feet away, all in the flicker of an instant. Then he stood, in the same millisecond, at Jonathan's shoulder and said, "Fun, he said."

Jonathan was dazzled. He forgot to ask about heaven. "How that? What does it feel like? How far can you go?"

"You can go to any place and to any time that you wish to," Elder said. "I've gone everywhere and everywhen I can think across the sea. "It's strange. The gulls who scorn perfection of travel go nowhere, slowly. Those who put aside travel perfection go anywhere, instantly. Remember, Jonathan, he place or a time, because place and time are so very meaningless..."

"Can you teach me to fly like that?" Jonathan Seagull trembled

conquer another unknown.

"Of course if you wish
to learn."

"I wish. When can we start?"

"We could start now if you'd like."

"I want to learn to fly like that," Jonathan said and a s
glowed in his eyes. "Tell me what to do,"

Chiang spoke slowly and watched the younger gull ever so

"To fly as fast as thought, to anywhere that is," he said
by knowing that you have already arrived ..."

The trick, according to Chiang, was for Jonathan to stop
himself as trapped inside a limited body that had a forty
wingspan and performance that could be plotted on a chart
to know that his true nature lived, as perfect as an unwr
everywhere at once across space and time.

Jonathan kept at it, fiercely, day after day, from before till past midnight. And for all his effort he moved not a from his spot.

"Forget about faith!" Chiang said it time and again. "You faith to fly, you needed to understand flying. This is just the same. Now try again ..."

Then one day Jonathan, standing on the shore, closing his concentrating, all in a flash knew what Chiang had been t that's true! I am a perfect, unlimited gull!" He felt a g joy.

"Good!" said Chiang and there was victory in his voice.

Jonathan opened his eyes. He stood alone with the Elder o different seashore - trees down to the water's edge, twin turning overhead.

"At last you've got the idea," Chiang said, "but your con little work... "

Jonathan was stunned. "Where are we?"

Utterly unimpressed with the strange surroundings, the El
the question aside. "We're on some planet, obviously, wit
a double star for a sun."

Jonathan made a scree of delight, the first sound he had
he had left Earth. "IT WORKS!"

"Well, of course, it works, Jon." said Chiang. "It always
you know what
you're doing. Now about your control..."

By the time they returned, it was dark. The other gulls l
Jonathan with awe in their golden eyes, for they had seen
from where he had been rooted for so long.

He stood their congratulations for less than a minute. "I
newcomer here! I'm just beginning! It is I who must learn

"I wonder about that, Jon," said Sullivan standing near.

less fear of learning than any gull I've seen in ten thou

Flock fell silent, and Jonathan fidgeted in embarrassment

"We can start working with time if you wish," Chiang said
can fly the past and the future. And then you will be rea
most difficult, the most powerful, the most fun of all. Y
to begin to fly up and know the meaning of kindness and o
A month went by, or something that felt about like a mont
Jonathan learned at a tremendous rate. He always had lear
ordinary experience,
and now, the special student of the Elder Himself, he
took in new ideas like a streamlined feathered computer.
But then the day came that Chiang vanished. He had been t
quietly with them all, exhorting them never to stop their
their practicing and their striving to understand more of
invisible principle of all life. Then, as he spoke, his f
brighter and brighter and at last turned so brilliant tha
look upon him.
"Jonathan," he said, and these were the last words that h
"keep working on love."

When they could see again, Chiang was gone.

As the days went past, Jonathan found himself thinking ti
of the Earth from which he had come. If he had known ther
just a hundredth, of what he knew here, how much more lif
meant! He stood on the sand and fell to wondering if ther
there who might be struggling to break out of his limits,
meaning of flight beyond a way of travel to get a breadcr
from a
rowboat. Perhaps there might even have been one made Outc
his truth in the face of the Flock. And the more Jonathan
kindness lessons, and the more he worked to know the natu
more he wanted to go back to Earth. For in spite of his l
Jonathan Seagull was born to be an instructor, and his ow
demonstrating love was to give something of the truth tha
a gull who asked only a chance to see truth for himself.
Sullivan, adept now at thought-speed flight and helping t
learn, was doubtrful.

"Jon, you were Outcast once. Why do you think that any of
in your old time would listen to you now? You know the pr
true: The gull sees farthest who flies highest. Those gul
from are standing on the ground, squawking and fighting a
They're a thousand miles from heaven - and you say you wa
heaven from where they stand! Jon, they can't see their o
here. Help the new
gulls here, the ones who are high enough to see what

you have to tell them." He was quiet for a moment, and th
if Chiang had gone back to his old worlds? Where would yo
today?"

The last point was the telling one, and Sullivan was righ
sees farthest who flies highest.

Jonathan stayed and worked with the new birds coming in,
very bright and quick with their lessons. But the old fee
and he couldn't help but think that there might be one or
on Earth who would be able to learn, too. How much more w

known by now if Chiang had come to him on the day that he
"Sully, I must go back " he said at last "Your students a
well. They can help you bring the newcomers along."

Sullivan sighed, but he did not argue. "I think I'll miss
Jonathan," was all he said.

"Sully, for shame!" Jonathan said in reproach, "and don't

What are we trying to practice every day?
If our friendship depends on

things like space and time, then when we finally overcome
we've destroyed our own brotherhood! But overcome space,
left is Here. Overcome time, and all we have left is Now.
middle of Here and Now, don't you think that we might see
or twice?"

Sullivan Seagull laughed in spite of himself. "You crazy
said kindly. "If anybody can show someone on the ground h
thousand miles, it will be Jonathan Livingston Seagull."
sand. "Good-bye, Jon, my friend."

"Good bye, Sully. We'll meet again." And with that, Jonat thought an image of the great gull flocks on the shore of and he knew with practiced ease that he was not bone and perfect idea of freedom and flight, limited by nothing at

Fletcher Lynd Seagull was still quite young, but already no bird had ever been so harshly treated by any Flock, or much injustice.

"I don't care what they say," he thought fiercely, and his blurred as he flew out toward the Far Cliffs. "There's so flying than just flapping around from place to place! A.. does that! One little barrel roll around the Elder Gull, I'm Outcast! Are they blind? Can't they see? Can't they t that it'll be when we really learn to fly?

"I don't care what they think. I'll show them what flying

pure Outlaw, if that's the way they want it. And I'll make
sorry..."

The voice came inside his own head, and though it was very
startled him so much that he faltered and stumbled in the
"Don't be harsh on them, Fletcher Seagull. In casting you
other gulls have only hurt themselves, and one day they will
and one day they will see what you see. Forgive them, and
understand."

An inch from his right wingtip flew the most brilliant white
all the world, gliding
effortlessly along, not moving a feather, at what
was very nearly Fletcher's top speed.

There was a moment of chaos in the young bird. "What's going
mad? Am I dead? What is this?"

Low and calm, the voice went on within his thought, demanding
answer. "Fletcher Lynd Seagull, do you want to fly?"

"YES, I WANT TO FLY!".

"Fletcher Lynd Seagull, do you want to fly so much that you forgive the Flock, and learn, and go back to them one day they know?"

There was no lying to this magnificent skillful being, no proud or how hurt a bird was Fletcher Seagull.

"I do " he said softly.

"Then, Fletch," that bright creature said to him, and the very kind, "let's begin with Level Flight...."

Part Three

Jonathan circled slowly over the Far Cliffs, watching. The young Fletcher Gull was very nearly a perfect flight-stud strong and light and quick in the air, but far and away he had a blazing drive to learn to fly.

Here he came this minute, a blurred gray shape roaring out
flashing one hundred fifty miles per hour past his instructor
abruptly into another try at a sixteen point vertical stop
the points out loud.

"...eight... nine... ten... see-Jonathan-I'm-running-out-
eleven... I-want-good-sharp-stops-like yours... twelve...
but-blast-it-Ijust-can't-make... - thirteen... these last-
without... fourtee ...aaakk!"

Fletcher's whipstall at the top was all the worse for his
fury at failing. He fell backward, tumbled, slammed savagely
inverted spin, and recovered at last, panting, at an instructor's
level.

"You're wasting your time with me, Jonathan! I'm too dumb
stupid! I try and try, but I'll never get it!"

Jonathan Seagull looked down at him and nodded. "You'll never
for sure as long as you make that pullup so hard. Fletcher

miles an hour in the entry! You
have to be smooth! Firm but smooth,

remember?"

He dropped down to the level of the younger gull."Let's t
together now, in formation. And pay attention to that pul
smooth, easy entry."

By the end of three months Jonathan had six other student
all, yet curious about this strange new idea of flight fo
flying.

Still, it was easier for them to practice high performanc
was to understand the reason behindit.

"Each of us is in truth an idea of the Great Gull, an unl
of freedom," Jonathan would say in the evenings on the be
precision flying is a step toward expressing our real nat
that limits us we have to put aside. That's why all this

practice, and low speed, and aerobatics...."

...and his students would be asleep, exhausted from the d

They liked the practice, because it was fast and exciting

hunger for learning that grew with every lesson. But not

even Fletcher

Lynd Gull, had come to believe that the flight of ideas

could possibly be as real as the flight of wind and feath

"Your whole body, from wingtip to wingtip," Jonathan woul

times, "is nothing more than your thought itself, in a fo

Break the chains of your thought, and you break the chain

too..." But no matter how he said it, it sounded like ple

and they needed more to sleep.

It was only a month later that Jonathan said the time had

return to the Flock.

"We're not ready!" said Henry Calvin Gull. "We're not wel

Outcast! We can't force ourselves to go where we're not w

"We're free to go where we wish and to be what we are," J

answered, and he lifted from the sand and turned east, to grounds of the Flock.

There was brief anguish among his students, for it is the Flock that an Outcast never returns, and the Law had not

in ten thousand years. The Law said stay; Jonathan said go; and by now he

was a mile across the water. If they waited much longer, hostile Flock alone.

"Well, we don't have to obey the law if we're not a part Flock, do we?" Fletcher said, rather self-consciously. "B there's a fight we'll be a lot more help there than here.

And so they flew in from the west that morning, eight of double-diamond formation, wingtips almost overlapping. Th the Flock's Council Beach at a hundred thirty-five miles Jonathan in the lead. Fletcher smoothly at his right wing struggling gamely at his left. Then the whole formation r the right, as one bird... level... to... inverted... to..

whipping over them all.

The squawks and grockles of everyday life in the Flock were as though the formation were a giant knife, and eight thousand birds watched, without a single blink. One by one, each of the

pulled sharply upward into a full loop and flew all the way around to a

dead-slow stand-up landing on the sand. Then as though that happened every day, Jonathan Seagull began his critique of "To begin with," he said with a wry smile, "you were all on the join-up..."

It went like lightning through the Flock. Those birds are And they have returned! And that... that can't happen! Fl predictions of battle melted in the Flock's confusion.

"Well sure, O.K. they're Outcast," said some of the young "but hey, man, where did they learn to fly like that?"

It took almost an hour for the word of the Elder to pass Flock: Ignore them. The gull who speaks to an Outcast is

The gull who looks upon an Outcast breaks the Law of the Gray-feathered backs were turned upon Jonathan from that but he didn't appear to notice. He held his practice sess over the Council Beach and for the first time began press to the limit of their ability.

"Martin Gull!" he shouted across the sky. "You say you kn flying. You know nothing till you prove it! FLY!"

So quiet little Martin William Seagull, startled to be ca his instructor's fire, surprised himself and became a wiz speeds. In the lightest breeze he could curve his feather without a single flap of wing from sand to cloud and down Likewise Charles-Roland Gull flew the Great Mountain Wind twenty-four thousand feet, came down blue from the cold t and happy, determined to go still higher tomorrow.

Fletcher Seagull, who loved aerobatics like no one else, his sixteen point vertical slow roll and the next day top

triple cartwheel, his feathers flashing white sunlight to which more than one furtive eye watched.

Every hour Jonathan was there at the side of each of his demonstrating, suggesting, pressuring, guiding. He flew w

night and cloud and storm, for the sport of it, while the Flock huddled

miserably on the ground.

When the flying was done, the students relaxed in the san time they listened more closely to Jonathan. He had some

they couldn't understand, but then he had some good ones

Gradually, in the night, another circle formed around the students a circle of curious gulls listening in the darkn

end, not wishing to see or be seen of one another, fading daybreak.

It was a month after the Return that the first gull of th crossed the line and asked to learn how to fly. In his as

Lowell Gull became a condemned bird, labeled Outcast; and

Jonathan's students.

The next night from the Flock came Kirk Maynard Gull, wobbling on the sand, dragging his left wing, to collapse at Jonathan's feet. He said very quietly, speaking in the way that the dying fly more than anything else in the world..."

"Come along then," said Jonathan. "Climb with me away from the ground, and we'll begin."

"You don't understand my wing. I can't move my wing."

"Maynard Gull, you have the freedom to be yourself, your own here and now, and nothing can stand in your way. It is the Law that Is."

"Are you saying I can fly?"

"I say you are free."

As simply and as quickly as that, Kirk Maynard Gull spread his wings effortlessly, and lifted into the dark night air. The Flock awoke from sleep by his cry, as loud as he could scream it, from

feet up: "I can fly! Listen! I CAN FLY!"

By sunrise there were nearly a thousand birds standing in a circle of students, looking curiously at Maynard. They did not know they were seen or not, and they listened, trying to understand the Seagull.

He spoke of very simple things - that it is right for a gull that freedom is the very nature of his being, that whatever that freedom must be set aside, be it ritual or superstition or limitation in any form.

"Set aside," came a voice from the multitude, "even if it is the voice of the Flock?"

"The only true law is that which leads to freedom," Jonathan said.

"There is no other."

"How do you expect us to fly as you fly?" came another voice from the multitude. "You are special and gifted and divine, above other birds."

"Look at Fletcher! Lowell! Charles-Roland! Judy Lee! Are

special and gifted and divine? No more than you are, no m
The only difference, the very only one, is that they have
understand what they really are and have begun to practic
His students, save Fletcher, shifted uneasily. They hadn'
that this was what they were doing.

The crowd grew larger every day, coming to question, to i
scorn.

"They are saying in the Flock that if you are not the Son
Great Gull Himself," Fletcher told Jonathan one morning a
Speed
Practice, "then you are a thousand years ahead of your time."

Jonathan sighed. The price of being misunderstood, he tho
call you devil or they call you god. "What do you think,
ahead of our time?"

A long silence. "Well, this kind of flying has always bee

learned by anybody who wanted to discover it; that's got with time. We're ahead of the fashion, maybe, Ahead of the gulls fly."

"That's something," Jonathan said rolling to glide inverted while. "That's not half as bad as being ahead of our time

It happened just a week later. Fletcher was demonstrating elements of high-speed flying to a class of new students. pulled out of his dive from seven thousand feet, a long glide a few inches above the beach, when a young bird on its feet directly into his path, calling for its mother. With a te

to avoid the youngster, Fletcher Lynd Seagull snapped hard to the left, at

something over two hundred miles per hour, into a cliff o

It was, for him, as though the rock were a giant hard doo

another world. A burst of fear and shock and black as he

was adrift in a strange strange sky, forgetting, remember
afraid and sad and sorry, terribly sorry.

The voice came to him as it had in the first day that he
Jonathan Livingston Seagull,

"The trick Fletcher is that we are trying to overcome our
in order, patiently, We don't tackle flying through rock
later in the program."

"Jonathan!".

"Also known as the Son of the Great Gull " his instructor

"What are you doing here? The cliff! Haven't I didn't I..

"Oh, Fletch, come on. Think. If you are talking to me now
obviously you didn't die, did you? What you did manage to
your level of consciousness rather abruptly. It's your ch

stay here and learn on this
level - which is quite a bit higher than the

one you left, by the way - or you can go back and keep wo

Flock. The Elders were hoping for some kind of disaster,

startled that you obliged them so well."

"I want to go back to the Flock, of course. I've barely b
the new group!"

"Very well, Fletcher. Remember what we were saying about
being nothing more than thought itself....?"

Fletcher shook his head and stretched his wings and opene
at the base of the cliff, in the center of the whole Floc
There was a great clamor of squawks and screees from the c
he moved.

"He lives! He that was dead lives!"

"Touched him with a wingtip! Brought him to life! The Son
Great Gull!"

"No! He denies it! He's a devil! DEVIL! Come to break the
There were four thousand gulls in the crowd, frightened a
happened, and the cry DEVIL! went through them like the w

storm. Eyes
glazed, beaks sharp, they closed in to destroy.

"Would you feel better if we left, Fletcher?" asked Jonathan.

"I certainly wouldn't object too much if we did..."

Instantly they stood together a half-mile away, and the flocks of
beaks of the mob closed on empty air.

"Why is it," Jonathan puzzled, "that the hardest thing in the world
is to convince a bird that he is free, and that he can practice flying
himself if he'd just spend a little time practicing? Why is it so
hard?"

Fletcher still blinked from the change of scene. "What did you
do? How did we get here?"

"You did say you wanted to be out of the mob, didn't you?"

"Yes! But how did you..."

"Like everything else, Fletcher. Practice." By morning Fletcher had
forgotten its insanity, but Fletcher had not. "Jonathan, I once
said a long time ago, about loving the Flock enough to re-

help it learn?"

"Sure."

"I don't understand how you manage to
love a mob of birds that has

just tried to kill you."

"Oh, Fletch, you don't love that! You don't love hatred a
course. You have to practice and see the real gull, the g
of them, and to help them see it in themselves. That's wh
love. It's fun, when you get the knack of it.

"I remember a fierce young bird for instance, Fletcher Ly
his name. Just been made Outcast, ready to fight the Floc
getting a start on building his own bitter hell out on th
here he is today building his own heaven instead, and lea
Flock in that direction."

Fletcher turned to his instructor, and there was a moment
in his eye. "Me leading? What do you mean, me leading? Yo
instructor here. You couldn't leave!"

"Couldn't I? Don't you think that there might be other fl
Fletchers, that need an instructor more than this one, th
toward the light?"

"Me? Jon, I'm just a plain seagull and
you're... "

" ...the only Son of the Great Gull, I suppose?" Jonathan
looked out to sea. "You don't need me any longer. You nee
yourself, a little more each day, that real, unlimited Fl
He's your in structor. You need to understand him and to
A moment later Jonathan's body wavered in the air, shimme
began to go transparent. "Don't let them spread silly rum
make me a god. O.K., Fletch? I'm a seagull. I like to fly
"JONATHAN!"

"Poor Fletch. Don't believe what your eyes are telling yo
show is limitation. Look with your understanding, find ou
already know, and you'll see the way to fly."

The shimmering stopped. Jonathan Seagull had vanished int

After a time, Fletcher Gull dragged himself into the sky
brand-new group of students, eager for their first lesson
"To begin with " he said heavily, "you've got to understa
seagull
is an unlimited idea of freedom, an image of the Great Gull, and
your whole body, from wingtip to wingtip, is nothing more
thought itself."

The young gulls looked at him quizzically. Hey, man, they
this doesn't sound like a rule for a loop.

Fletcher sighed and started over. "Hm. Ah... very well,"
eyed them critically. "Let's begin with Level Flight." An
understood all at once that his friend had quite honestly
divine than Fletcher himself.

No limits, Jonathan? he thought. Well, then, the time's n
when I'm going to appear out of thin air on your beach, a
thing or two about flying!

And though he tried to look properly severe for his stude

Fletcher Seagull suddenly saw them all as they really were in that moment, and he more than liked, he loved what he saw. No more, he thought, and he smiled. His race to learn had begun.