

1/2/01 Tuesday's Rock, Serenity Pitt, the Zen Master
Time Closed: 11:56 p.m., C.S.T.

Granting that heaven has the same kind of relationship to hell (and hell to heaven) as two opposing entities that act against each other, with a balance resulting from their action and reaction, and with everything remaining being within that balance, then for each and every thing to be kept in a balance, it is necessary that the person who rules one rules the other. For unless the Lord controlled the rebellions from hell and imposed limits on the forms of madness that exist there, the balance would be destroyed, and with the balance everything would go.

Emanuel Swedenborg
Heaven and Hell

Since the Incident on the quays and his unfortunate fisticuffs with the one-eyed ruffian, Serenity's Peace had been more frequently ruffled. There were revolting Visitations that affected him physically, enervating him with dyspepsia by day and insomnia by night. Hellish or angelic visions disturbed his sobriety, which sights he durst not reveal either to Friend or Family, for fear of their righteous Judgement. Once, as he made a journal entry for some Brazilian hides, his quill seemed, for a ghost of an instant, to drip thick blood. Another time, recording a debit for woolens, he saw impressed upon his inner eye the piteous bleeding form of a bleating lamb. And often in the midst of his copying, he would suddenly notice that a strange power possessed him, and in lieu of the correct rows of numbers, he would find himself filling the columns of his account book with the initials "S.P.G." Serenity began to fear greatly for the sanctity of his mind.

But this morning he was more put upon than ever. As he and Thomas arrived at their offices, they found that the jamb of the door had been *gnawed!* The orange gash of exposed heart-wood seemed to greet them with an accusation, and what was even more astounding, through the lacunae of the new-made wound, a strange gift had been stowed. It was some kind of portfolio or journal, of antique design, bound with leather strips and covered with an unseemly brown skin, soft as neat, but ghastly, and almost human in texture. Son Thomas angrily surmised that the portfolio was an omen of ill intent perpetrated by some associates of the misused ruffian, or else by some others to whom their Sect's pacifism was anathema. Incensed, the young man urgently pressed his father to summon the constable. But Serenity, prompted perhaps by an inner angel or fiend, deflected his son's passion, and merely remarked: "Let us study it first. Perhaps this strange token intends us good." With that, he bid Thomas take his usual seat at the desk in the vestibule, while he himself retired to his inner sanctum, closed the door, opened the book and read.

Entry the First:

I arrived here after an illness on what I believe was October 27th or 29th, 1704, but to speak truly, I have lost track of time in this place, as the days and nights do not succeed one another in orderly progression, and except for these journal entries chronicling my experiences, I have no way of marking the passage of what I now timorously call my life.

Life! The very word seems hollow to my mind. For though I am corporeally formed, this dress of seeming flesh suffers such prodigies of humiliation, change and torment that I scarcely can deem the hand I write with mine! I, or what I used to brazenly call myself, rise and fall like a wave on a dark green sea, making as many shapes as does a dream. If I be dead and this place be heaven, it is a starker and lonelier dungeon than ever I imagined or that any scripture or theologian has foretold. A room, a cot, a table, this strange book to which I now commit my miseries, and lastly, a mind alive with twisting distortions — this is all that has been consigned to me after my passage hither — and yet . . . and yet . . . it is a world, nay, not a world, a cosmos! Nay! Nay! Not a cosmos, a chaos! For here, everything shifts in the blink of an eye, like so many hobgoblins of imagination, yet everything seems more solid than all my earthly possessions. Perhaps, then, this is hell. But if, indeed, I be in hell, I cannot think what failing of due merit consigned me to this place, having been in all my days most punctilious in the performance of every Christian duty.

Entry the Second:

After a fitful sleep, I awakened (did I awaken?) in the most beautiful room of what seemed to be an inn, but it was so fine in every respect that I believed that it could be no inn in England, and after hastily and properly dressing myself from a sumptuous array of costumes laid out on a green, silk-covered divan, I stepped eagerly into the wide, well-lighted corridor and asked one who seemed to be in this grand palace's employ, what place this was, and if I had at last ascended to the celestial abode. As the good servant that he seemed to be, although he was a black-skinned African, he quickly suppressed his mirth at my assertion, and politely answered in the most perfect French (which I do herewith translate). "Why, Sir, this may be heaven to many, but truly, most call it France, and the city of Nantes. And this place wherein you are a guest is what my Masters tell me is the finest accommodation in all of Europe: The Hotel Henri the Fourth." With that, he bowed low, and before I could thank him for his courtesy, he seemed, almost like a spirit himself, to disappear. Naturally I was curious concerning the means of my transportation to this magnificent commercial domicile, but there being no one now about who might conceivably satisfy me on this point, I resolved to exit my elegant lodgings and explore the town. For I was burning to know what manner of place this was which could afford to lavish such grandeur on its guests. The day was bright, but the dazzling city seemed a rival to it. The town was situated on a fine harbor, its waters laden with the bounty of innumerable stout and well-polished ships, the waters brilliant as gemstones. And the streets, not to be o'reshadowed, were nearly pearlescent, so clean their stones and white, their arbor-shaded avenues widely set at orderly right angles. The buildings too were new, expensively adorned, and all of a fine and tasteful modern design. As I wandered about in awe of all this grandeur, I soon came upon the architectural crown jewel of the city, not, as one might surmise, a church, a place of governance, or even a counting house, but rather, a magnificent theater. Moving nearer to this marvel, I saw that the playbill for the current fare was a play by Aristophanes entitled "Peace," and that the lettering of the advertisement was in the original Greek. "How now," thought I, "have the French so surpassed us in learning and cultivation that even their idle entertainments bespeak of the highest culture?" And as I was now standing

in the archway of this edifice's enormous portico, I looked up, and was surprised, nay, alarmed, to see a gargantuan dung beetle constructed through I know not what cunning devices, dangling above my head. An instant of extreme alarm darkened my heart, but in another instant this terror passed, as I jocularly recalled the comic theme of the play. I was thus uncivilly laughing to myself, when I remembered that I was in a gracious public thoroughfare in a foreign city, and so, quickly glancing about to ascertain if I had chanced to cause offense, I had occasion to notice for the first time the citizens of this celestial locale. All were costumed as if each were a member of a blessed and elevated aristocracy, the women, haughty and white under layers of crinoline and silk, and the men, even more genteelly attired in suits of colored silk, with long waistcoats and silk breeches, superb white stockings and linens, and polished shoes fastened with genuine silver or gold buckles. As these nobles — or gods — conversed, they leaned on high, gilt-crowned canes, and took snuff from exquisitely jeweled wrist-boxes, nodding their arranged and powdered coiffures in a most mannerly and elegant fashion as they imbibed the perfume of one another's speech. As I was absorbed in this enthralling scene, half-believing that the hotel's livery had misinformed me, and that this French port-town was indeed none other than heaven, I was suddenly and inexplicably presented with the person of my beloved, deceased patron, Lord Shaftsbury, the great defender of liberty and the author of the *Habeas Corpus* Act. Oh what a sea-change was here! Death had washed over my great and noble benefactor and had bartered his shining earthly aspect for that of a horribly deformed monstrosity! Puffed-up and varicosed with a hideous sort of gout, one-eyed, toothless, incapable of speech, he yet mimed feelingly to me, his last, large generous orb o'rebrimmed with tears. Repulsed as I was by his disfigured and (Pah!) odiferous personage, I was yet nearly unmanned by pity, my own sight blurred with spurge, when his ghastly, claw-like hand, rummaging through the leprous rags that festooned him produced first one, and then a second scroll. He shook them violently, warningly in my face as if their contents bonded me to my fate. Thus assaulted, I stumbled backwards, frantically attempting in my retreat to establish the significance of these documents. I fell to the ground, and in my flailing terror, I wallowed accidentally through the offal of some beast of burden, soiling my elegant borrowed garments. My pity giving way to indignation, I at once started to rise and remonstrate with this specter, when he, with an inarticulate and bestial whimper, threw the questionable papers at my bosom, their slight bulk striking with me with a mysterious leaden fire: my stock shares in the R.A.C.

Entry the Third:

After days of forced marching, fastened together by harsh wooden yokes at the neck and shackled with irons on our ankles, we arrived during the blackest of nights at an isolated harbor. The first object that saluted my eyes the next dawn was the sea, upon whose green bosom a slave ship rode at harbor. This object filled me with an astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, as I, and my wretched companions, were driven on board. Shivered momentarily from my yoke-mate, I was immediately handled in the roughest manner and tossed up in the air like a hempen sack to ascertain if my limbs were sound. After this indignity, I was branded on the chest with the initials R.A.C., the smell of my own burning flesh provoking my stomach to disgorge its meager contents. None of the agonies of my ordeal incited the slightest pity in my tormenters, who seemed to

view my miseries as the most frolicsome of diversions, laughing the more the more I groaned. It was then that I was persuaded that I had fallen into a world of evil spirits who were intent on nothing less than my murder. How could I have imagined otherwise? Everything about these demons differed from my own form. Their ghastly pale complexions, rotting brown teeth, noisome bloated breath — all produced in me the greatest disgust and horror. Their greasy, limp hair and the barking tones of their language — all these things united to confirm my most dreadful surmises. Indeed, such were the horrors of my views and fears at that moment that if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with the meanest slave in my own country. I was then yoked and chained once again to one who was so feeble and sick that he could scarcely shuffle his fetid limbs. Then I, with my captive twin, were crowded with all the others into the ship's dark hold, a place so close and noxious in its stench and heat that any death would have been preferable to a moment of life in such a pestilence. Our captors slaked their thirsts with a red fluid, which some among us said was human blood. And they drizzled an oil on their biscuits which many claimed was an effluent squeezed from the corpses of children. Also they devoured a noxious substance which they labeled with the horrible epithet "cheese," the which grisly tallow was identified by the prisoners as human brains. Now I, who was always rich with answers, had nothing but the paucity of my questions. Tormented with anxiety, I queried my manacle-mate: "Who are these people? Do they make their lives in this hollow infernal space? Do they have wives, and if so, where do they stow them? And were their wives creatures of mercy, or devils like to these?" My pain and trepidation multiplied my fruitless queries so that I babbled like an anxious child. I asked how the ship was sailed, and would we move over or under the waters. I asked if our captors were cannibals and if they would kill us and cook us before eating us, or would they merely tear at our living flesh with their metal hooks and taws. I asked to what hell were we bound. To my surprise and sorrow, the poor demented creature replied with words that I myself had written, oh!, so many, many lifetimes ago: "this is a state of war continued between a lawful conqueror and a captive." I must confess, that at this juncture, I lost all sense and reason, and made moan, at last, in my anguish, that I was a child of the living God and as such was entitled by divine fiat to the necessities of air and light. To which my impassive fellow-captive replied: "whatever Compliance the Necessities of Nature may require, the Wants of Fancy, Children should never be gratified in, nor suffered to *mention*. The very speaking for such a thing, should make them lose it."

Entry the fourth:

I am at Leaden Hall Street in London in the oil-polished paneled room of the Royal African Company. I am alone. It is eerily quiet. I am glad to be relieved of my former terrors, and to find myself returned whole in body and mind to my rightful and familiar haunts. I feel calm. Powerful. I place my hands face down on the great oak table, and as if by magic, my gesture generates a disembodied speech:

The *Idea of Solidity* we receive by Touch; and it arises from the resistance we find in the Body to the entrance of any other Body into the Place it possesses, til it has

left it. There is no Idea which we receive more constantly from Sensation, than Solidity.

Suddenly, although a moment before my hands had rested merely on wood, a paper appears beneath them on the table. It is the Company Charter. My hands, although not transparent, strangely provide no barrier to my sight, and I read the words granting our rights to “trade from Cape Blanco in the North to the Cape of Good Hope in the South with a license, which will last a thousand years.” The paper, or perhaps it is only the words on the paper, seem to be adhering my hands to the solid oak, and try as I might I cannot break them loose. “A thousand years, a thousand years,” I keep repeating this phrase to the walls as I try to lift my hands from the contract, wondering anxiously if I shall ever manage to pull them free.

Entry the fifth:

I find myself seated in the docket of a stiflingly hot, but august courtroom, a bewigged and scarlet-robed judge peering down on me as if he were the angel called upon by a stern Deity to divide the sheep from the goats on the Day of Doom. A black-clad advocate approaches the docket to depose me concerning my knowledge of a shipboard incident which has resulted in a charge of murder being leveled at one of the Company’s employees, a Captain William Lugan, of Bristol. The advocate queried me as to the character of said Captain. I was pleased to reply quickly and forthrightly that Captain Lugan was a man whom I deemed of sound morals and stout courage, as he had accomplished the hazards of the Atlantic crossing many times previous, always returning a healthy profit on our investment and trust. Moreover, I asserted my contemptuous opinion that the indictment itself was a miscarriage of justice, and had sprung solely from the Court’s misunderstanding of the good Captain’s regrettable but correct actions during that portion of the crossing in tropical latitudes where Providence finds it fit to test men’s characters and wisdom with pestilential heat. As it happened, one of the female captives had returned to her Master, Beelzebub, leaving behind upon her death her suckling daughter. The crew, sensible to their own incapacity for caring for the infant negro, committed the child to the people of its own color, but they, as the truly benighted savages they were, refused their charge, claiming the mother’s fatal illness to be infectious. Therefore, not wishing to invite the specter of pestilence to visit them in their already debilitated state, they cast the babe back on deck, where it lay exposed to the ravishments of the boiling equatorial sun. Whereupon Captain Lugan, a hard man but just, after consulting with the ship’s surgeon, whose opinion was that the child’s agonies were only being prolonged, and that life could not reside in such a vessel for more than an hour, ordered that this unfortunate bit of chattel be consigned to the waves — “a reasonable, nay, a merciful, injunction,” said I, “given the peculiar severity of the circumstances.” After my deposition, the court ruled “that there could have been no premeditated malice,” and dismissed the case. From the gallery, a hubbub of huzzahs from the Company’s Directors and stakeholders echoed discreetly about the humid room, and as I prepared to exit the docket, I too was forced to master the beginnings of a smile, which I did, but only to honor the solemnity of the occasion and the various dignitaries there at hand. But as I stepped down, the judge, having somehow grown even larger when my attention was diverted to my testimony, handed down, literally in this case,

from a great height, some sort of leather-bound portfolio. “What,” thought I, “is this?” the book in my hands suddenly warming and twitching, as if it were some kind of sentient animal. Taken aback by this unexpected development, I sought immediately to cast the book aside, but found to my dismay that I could not. And as I stared at the offending object, these gilt letters whelmed up on its calfskin cover, as a monster might rise up from the depths of the sea: “Fundamental Constitutions or Grand Model of the New Company of the Carolinas.”

Entry the sixth:

I am back in the hollow space of the ship’s hold, if space this is, its closeness is so compacted with death and darkness. The stench of this place exceeds any applicable description of loathsomeness, but here we captives must remain, for if taken on deck so near to our own shores, or to any shores, we will attempt to throw ourselves overboard, though we be shackled together and weighted with heavy irons. No risk, no alternative torment or demise, can stay our desire to escape our present fate. The whole ship’s cargo, for we are no more than that, although we are sensible living creatures and no mere bundles of furs or hides, is therefore confined to this hell. Words balk at any description of these horrors. The atmosphere here is absolutely pestilential. The heat of the climate, the stench of the bodies packed “spoonways” in spaces which do not allow for movement, even in cases of injury or death, the attacks of violent rectal fluxes and bloody cholics. These factors, plus the violent pitching of the ship, all but suffocate us, the air being unfit for respiration. This insupportable situation is aggravated by the galling irons, which work into our infected flesh. Even the tubs laid by for the relief of our bodily necessities add to our torments, for having surfeited with their filth, the few surviving children fall into them and have to plucked out by their terrified mothers before they are drowned in their own offal. The constant shrieking of the women and the groaning of the dying fester unremittingly into ever new and ever more gristly abominations. And I, John Locke, the promulgator of freedom, and now more bereaved than any, still hear him who is shackled to me saying with calm discernment: “When any number of men have so consented to make one community of government, they are thereby presently incorporated, and make one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and include the rest.”

Entry the seventh:

I heard bells tolling, and reasoned that it must be the Sabbath day, and marveled that there could be any remembrance of God in such a forsaken place. For now we were disembarked, but our sufferings were scarcely concluded on that account. Someone announces our port of call as Kingston, but if this be a town fit to be the namesake of a king, he must perforce be the king of the damned. Our sight is greeted with dunghills as high as the ships, and on the ground lie human bodies as naked as beasts, their wounds and orifices blackened by flies. Here we are taken to market, herded together and examined by auctioneers and port surgeons for skin abrasions, ophthalmia, missing fingers or toes or any other physical defects, which might adversely affect our price. We suffered, I suffered, I, the author of *An Essay on Human Understanding*, the unspeakable humiliation of having my genitals fingered and weighed for potential abnormalities which might render me unfit for breeding. Distracted by this fresh assault of indignities,

I yet overheard one speak jocularly of the coming “scramble,” and my exhaustion and humiliation were abruptly overcome by a more exalted terror. At the striking of a drum, the buyers rushed upon us like maddened swine, though no mere animal, even if goaded by the sharpest pangs of starvation, could possibly sink to such depths of depravity. The noise and clamor with which this onslaught was attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, once again swept us into a new dimension of torment, one scarcely thought possible on the green surfaces of earth, and hardly to be imagined in the deeps of hell. And yet, we few who were so savagely set upon, incredibly were counted among the fortunate, for those too ill or deformed to become property, were left to join the bodies heaped on the dunghills and scattered along the roads. This is where my previous shackle-mate and benefactor was left to wander, the unrecognized wisest of the wise, though he only quoted this poor scholar’s words. Bony, bereft, one eye now matted closed, yet did he speak these words with swollen tongue. Only through all this din, it was I alone who heard them: “As nothing teaches, so nothing delights more than history.”

Entry the eighth:

On Board

On the green sea of darkness, in ships of wood,
In chains we came, branded with misery —
This is the body groaning with desire,
The mind fixated on corporeal pleasures,
The spirit flayed in galling atmospheres.

In this deep pain, is any shape of good
Wending its way into the light and air?
Desire draws us up and drags us down,
Despair at last brings freedom from despair,
The eyes, the breath, the sufferings turn inward,
And burn these hells to bliss with loving care.

These ships, these wooden bodies, stowed with death,
Flame as they sink to freer, brighter depths,
The dark green sizzling with light and air.
As we go wending in and winding down,
Twisting on links of chain to paths of freedom,
Rending the body loose from its obsessions,
Tearing the skin that bound us in these lairs,
And finding home, our home, in one devotion,
One scintillating act of silent prayer.

Serenity saw that the rest of this strange journal was composed of elaborate whorls, astonishing glyphs, spirals, grimoires, magic squares, letters, sketches, icons, all enigmatic, but seemingly sapient, a code or language defying, and crying out for, decipherment.

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I saw the Aleph from every point and angle, and in the Aleph I saw the earth and in the earth the Aleph and in the Aleph the earth; I saw my own face and my own bowels; I saw your face; and I felt dizzy and wept, for my eyes had seen the secret and conjectured object whose name is common to all men but which no man has looked upon — the unimaginable universe.

Jorge Luis Borges
The Aleph

Serenity's state of mind was anything but serene. His placidity, calm orderliness, sobriety, equilibrium, even-temperedness, sweetness and inner light were all devalued in the panic of his recent mental bankruptcy. He kept up a good front for family, Friends and business associates, but his dispositional books were ensanguined. He suffered exposure to full blown rifts in time, in space, in bodily coherence. He had flown through the roof of the Meetinghouse. He had boxed with a common ruffian. His writing quill ran with blood. His premises had been attacked by a castoranthrop. He had read Locke's journal from the netherworld. He had witnessed, or he thought he had witnessed, the very depths of human depravity, hypocrisy and suffering. He was, as he confessed when his son Thomas inquired after him during one of his increasingly prolonged bouts of distraction, uneasy.

Always before when uneasiness had tread upon him, he hied him to the Meetinghouse, where he was wont to sit, absorbed in quietude, for hours on end, sometimes even to the neglect of his worldly duties. Always before these sojourns to the blessed shores of Tranquiland had brought him relief. But now he feared them. As soon as he would close his eyes, a small, almond-shaped flame would erupted from the base of his brain and cast a tubular-shaft of blue light upon his mind's mirroring lake. This light would project a moon upward to an inner spot in the midst of his forehead, slightly above the gap between his brows. It was as if a guinea coin revolved there, a coin the color of gold and cobalt, turning and turning, faster and faster, until it became transparent. This new transparency, appearing when his outer eyes were closed, became a kind of cycloptic inner eye, revealing to him the most disturbing sights.

Penetrating this third eye's tunnel, he found himself, not only in imagination, but in body, standing outside a temple, where rows of identical tables had been erected in a grid, which Serenity, who being a numbers man with an eye for such things, could see at a glance was twelve rows wide and twelve rows deep. At each table sat a one hundred and forty-four-times replicated sedate young man adorned with a prim powdered wig and dressed in a neat gray topcoat over neat gray breeches. Each table was also identically possessed of a large portfolio labeled "Prospectus for the R.A.C." The sun was hazy and high, but so bright that it bleached the scene free of shadows. The air was heartlessly calm. In the sky, which was almost white, a still whiter sun and moon appeared. As Serenity peered at this unusual heaven, it seemed as if the two spheres were slowly,

almost imperceptibly, drawing nearer to one another. As he watched this strange exposition of celestial mechanics, the sallow-faced young man at the table nearest to him interrupted his reverie with this address.

The sallow-faced young man: Dost Thou intend an investment, Friend?

Serenity: Who art Thou, Friend, and what place might this be. For of late, I have made many inward journeys, and I am ashamed to confess that I seemed to have lost my way.

The sallow-faced young man: Why, this, Friend, is the Temple of Jerusalem, and who I am, Thou shalt shortly know. And all these whom thou seest here with me are my brethren, indeed, my consubstantiated self (the young man made a wide gesture with his arm, and in so doing, he opened his blue-veined white hand, and revealed what Serenity thought to be a crescent-shaped white . . .). “But come, Friend, we are seeking subscribers for our venture, which we have no doubt will be a profitable one that will provide pecuniary security in perpetuity for those Dear Ones who risk this enterprise. (Serenity looked vacantly around while the young man and all of his replicas nodded sedately in unison.) The Prospectus, Friend. (The white hands with the whiter crescent-shaped scars, opened the book on the table. Serenity read.)

The following summary is qualified in its entirety and should be read in conjunction (at this point the two heavenly disks seemed to touch, then overlap, beginning to slightly darken the scene below them.) with the more detailed information, Financial Statements and the Notes thereto, appearing elsewhere in the Prospectus.

Description of the Company

The Righteous Almighty Company (hereafter the RAC or The Company) is located in the New Jerusalem in the porch of the long defunct temple near unto the Wailing Wall. Its purpose is to transmute earthly goods to heavenly ones. The proceeds from the offering are intended to help The Company expand from regional marketing and attain a global reach.

Growth Strategy

The RAC’s growth strategy includes, but is not restricted to, the following:

- ° The promotion of new brands or sects for the dissemination of The Company’s products and services
- ° A large-scale media campaign to attract new customers to The Company’s brands
- ° The acquisition of competitive companies and/or merger with compatible companies for the purpose of immediate growth and market saturation.

Social Responsibility

The Company's motto, "Life Everlasting," reflects its commitment both to its business enterprises and to the various communities and stakeholders whom it serves. Portions of the proceeds from the sale of its products and services are used to benefit orphans, the elderly and the indigent of the Elect. In addition, the RAC supports charities that benefit veterans and retired corporate executives.

Fluctuations in the Availability of Gullibility

The Company relies on the faith of its customers to render advance payment for products and services to be received at a future date. This faith is subject to volatility due to a number of market factors. Among these factors are competing claims by competitive doctrines; the tangibility of earthly pleasure; the enduring allure of sexual and gustatory appetites; vanity; greed; the arguments of scientists, rationalists, sophists, existentialists, journalists, agnostics, atheists, materialists and others. The Company's marketing strategies and/or products and services are also subject to cooption by demons. Given this market volatility, there can be no assurance that the RAC can maintain its market share. The discontinuance of advance payment by The Company's customers could also seriously affect The Company's operations.

Reliance on Growth Strategy

RAC's growth strategy depends heavily on the brand loyalty of its customers as well as its ability to dominate media coverage worldwide. The Company has developed this growth strategy based upon its millennia-old operating history and its extensive knowledge of the Faith Market. However, this strategy is based upon assumptions about consumer decisions and competitive conditions. If management has chosen the wrong strategy, the RAC may not grow or may not continue to operate profitably.

Management of Growth

The Company intends to grow by reliance on the strategy listed above. There are nevertheless risks that planned growth will not develop, or that new customers will not prove faithful or profitable. Additionally, there are several other risks associated with growth, such as the management team's ability to adjust to greater complexities, the entry of unexpected competition into the Company's market, internecine disputes among The Company's subsidiaries, changes in consumer buying practices, interruption of the supply of faith, lapses in quality control and/or strategic business errors.

Future Capital Needs — Additional Future Funding

If the proceeds of this offering, together with funds generated by operations, are insufficient to finance the RAC's future growth, additional funds may be needed from future public or private financings. If additional funds are raised by issuing equity securities, existing shareholders will have their proportionate ownership diluted — the last will be first and the first will be last. If debt financing is obtained, the interest expense will be subtracted from earnings and cash flow.

Should The Company not be able to secure additional equity or debt financing, it could be forced to curtail growth.

Lack of Diversification of Products and Services

The Company's products and services are limited to good faith promises. The RAC's operations rely upon advanced payment from customers and the payment of regular installments. Cash flow depends upon The Company's policy of remuneration to its stakeholders and customers at unspecified future dates. Should either the products and/or services fail to maintain market share, or The Company's collection and payment procedures require adverse adjustments, there can be no assurances of the RAC's ability to reward equity or pay its debts to customers or stakeholders.

Dependence on Founders and Other Employees

The loss of any of The Company's executive officers, and particularly that of its CEO and Chairman, could severely affect its growth and profitability.

Serenity had a hard time reading the last of these words, as the two disks in the sky had overlapped, creating an immense pool of shadow where once there had been light. As he stared about, the eclipse had also occasioned a change in the scene before him. The tables had increased their numbers. They were now stretched out towards a seemingly infinite horizon, and each young man held a gold or silver branding iron glowing with the initials RAC. Behind each table were long columns of human beings of every nationality and race, all naked, all shackled together, each one awaiting his or her turn to be branded. Rancid smoke from burning flesh and shrieks of agony corrupted the air. Almost nothing remained of the light, the whole scene now being submersed in a sickening gloom, like a deep bruise bathed with swimming flotillas of knife-shaped scarlet boats. Serenity's eyes were stung with fire and tears, but he could still discern, in addition to the people, that every species of animal on earth was also forced into columns to receive the brand. Yet, unlike the sorely tormented humans, none of the animals survived the operation. Everywhere stupendous heaps of their carcasses were being greedily devoured by the ravenous human slaves, the gristly remains stoking enormous furnaces, which vomited forth searing billows of smoke. Everywhere, too, the humans who had already been branded were kept busy about this scene, burdened with the most degrading labors. These unfortunates tore up vegetation to stoke the furnaces, flogged fellow slaves to keep them moving forward in the branding lines or fetched victuals and other comforts to the branders. Hoards of these sufferers were pulverizing the mountains for minerals or pumping oil from the ground and siphoning it off into sluggish, corpse-encumbered seas. Incredibly, in the midst of this horrifying spectacle, there was a kind of glassed-in alcove, in which a few sumptuous mansions graced terraces with flowering gardens, as precious jewels might grace the foils of noble metals. In this paradise, a few people disported themselves in the most sumptuous manner, festooning their lives with every luxury, while slaves pressed their gaunt and oily faces to the glass, their features further deformed by envy and admiration. Serenity burned to know who these privileged ones were, and what they had accomplished to merit so much ease and superfluity in the midst of so much deprivation and horror. He had no sooner posed this question to himself, when the voice

of the young man seemed to sound inside of his own head, like a knell of depraved conscience: "Our investors." At these words, the whole scene was engulfed in an indescribably noxious inferno, a cacophony of destruction and suffering that dropped Serenity, first to his knees, and then into a faint. His body collapsed like a lifeless sack, rolling, as it fell, face-up on the quaking earth.

It seemed as if an impenetrable blankness consumed his entire consciousness for God only knows what immensity of Time, but gradually, he became aware of a small gash of grayish light, bleeding somewhere above him. It was the edge of one of the heavenly disks, slowly separating itself from the shadow of its oppressor. Serenity had opened his eyes. He looked up, at first at nothing, and then at the bloodless face of the sedate young man, his powdered wig slightly askew now, a wan smile curving his thin and palled lips. The disks and their nebulous lights were behind his head, creating the corona of an unsettling nimbus. The young man's face moved close, closer. At last he spoke: "Friend, wilt Thou invest?"

The Elect

Our plan was most ingenious and straightforward.
It did not involve intense psycho-physical
Spiritual practice, nor great feats of courage,
Nor strength, nor prodigious stores of knowledge,
But only the simplest of accounting procedures,
And the discipline to turn all things to numbers.

Debits, credits, interest, options, futures,
By means of these fiduciary schemas
We could control the present, project the future,
Invent security and property, and keep
Our bodies out of the bellies of beasts.

We ate the beasts. And the great green risk that bred them,
We calculated to the farthest cipher.

*We sit in our white houses, our figures blackening paper —
There are no woman, no leaves, no feathers, no children among us,
No seas, no mountains, no scales, no depths of fur.
There are only these blanks divided in columns of numbers,
And an idiot stare, which smirks, and drools: "We won."*

1/16/01 Tuesday's Rock, Serenity Pitt, the Zen Master
Closing time: 11:28, C.S.T.

Koans are the folk stories of Zen Buddhism, metaphorical narratives that particularize essential nature. Each koan is a window that shows the whole truth, but from just a single perspective. One hundred koans give one hundred

vantages. When they are enriched with insightful comments and poems, then you have ten thousand vantages. There is no end to this process of enrichment.

Robert Ailen
Forward, *Book of Serenity: One
Hundred Zen Dialogs*, Thomas
Cleary, trans.

Senore Il Dottore Sandro Lieto completed his instructions to his advocate in Sun City with a flourish appropriate to his Aurora Dante Alighieri Fountain Pen, and afterwards, paused for a moment to appreciate the instrument's precious deep green lacquer finish and its other sumptuous appointments: rings with laurel leaves chiseled in vermeil, clip with period engravings, solid 18 carat gold nib with ebonite feeder *and* gold cap decorated with the portrait of the noble poet. "*Benissimo,*" said Il Dottore. He confidently sealed the sheaf of papers in a large soft-sheen black envelope embossed in florid gilt lettering with the return address: *Il Dottore, L'Auberge di Sedona. Il Dottore* stood and stretched to the full five foot eight inch trim height of himself, *molto contento*. From the armoire mirror an image in elegant quilted vermilion dressing gown *con* puffy citron *giallo* cravat smiled back at the Doctor and with courteous formality, intoned: "*Tu sei ancora un giovane intelligente, Il Mio Bello Incomparabile.*" *Senore* Sandro Lieto's self-admiration was interrupted by a woman's voice calling huskily from the four-poster in the lowlit bedroom. "*Caro, vieni. Sono fredda.*" *Il Dottore's* broad smile broadened. "*Si, si, mia bella. Vengo subito,*" he said, his strong, sure hands beginning to untie the sash of his gown. Then he whispered, arching his manicured brow at the seasoned, but still handsome face in the mirror, "*Anche subito veniamo insieme.*" In a few days, one of *Il Dottore's* many co-conspirators will open the sumptuous package and peruse these words with cold, sharp eyes fed only by pallid moonlight:

The quayside, which had once seemed to Serenity a scene of diverting Commerce and productive Mercantilism, was now a hell to be shunned. From every hold of every ship, from every deck of every barge, Serenity beheld the accumulated depravity and sufferings of the World. In the stacks of hides and crates of shoes and saddles, he saw the vast pampas of South America and the inland valleys of the Californias, and again and again, he witnessed the reenactment of the separation of cow from calf. His ears burned with the pitiful sounds of lowing herds, driven in dusty agony towards their slaughter. The glazed eye of the drowned calf pursued his every move, and his finely polished and buckled pair of shoes seemed constantly to be oozing innocent blood. In the casks of spermaceti, in the hoops of ladies' skirts, in the spines of umbrellas, in the flickering wicks of lamps, he saw a vast harvest of death fetched out of the sea. In the stacks and stacks of woolens, he saw sheep, bleaching the green vales of England back to bone, while row after row of the children of the poor, spun out their lives in mills while weaving shrouds.

He saw bundle after bundle of furs and he saw the endless manufacture of furs — hats, shawls, stoles, breeches, gloves, top coats, bootlinings — and in each of

these thousands of items, he saw the trapped innocent eyes of martins, beavers, ermines, raccoons, seal, otters, possum, muskrats, rabbits, woodchucks, mink, wildcat, badgers and bear. He saw the numbers in the books of the Hudson Bay Company, the Port de La Rochelle, the Dutch East and West Indies Companies and the Royal African Company: Fort Nelson 25,000 hare, Fort York 130,000 beavers, 9,000 martens, Port de La Rochelle 30,000 martens, 12,000 otters, 110,000 raccoons, 16,000 bear. The hunters shot, the trappers trapped, the furriers skinned, the fishers netted, the whalers harpooned and Serenity saw them all, ceaselessly plying their endless trades of slaughter. On earth, he saw vast tracks of forests laid bare with axes, and the oceans of the prairie dried with fire. And in the skies, he saw the partridges, the doves, the parrots, the pheasant, the eagle, the swan, the angelic wings that made a heaven of earth, all lost down the gullets of their murderers, their feathers plucked to adorn vain human skulls. And everywhere Serenity saw the brands — on carcasses, on skins, on living slaves: SPG, RAC, DEIC, BWIC, the letters boring and diving through a hole that grew smaller and darker and ever black with blood. His nights were a torment of multiplication, his days a rush of visions. Over and over, he saw the girl on the quay lashed on her naked back. Over and over, he saw John Locke on the block. Over and over, infants were thrown in the sea. And all of these individual agonies were reduced to the sums that blackened the columns of accounting books. Serenity tried, but he could not stop his fall, and day and night his mind wound down and down to the limit of chaos at the edge of computation — “Death counting, counting, counting, cannot count me.”

Although he quickly had a carpenter repair it, he was haunted by the gap gnawed in his door. It was like a great yellow eye, torn halfway from its socket, but always watching him as he did his work. One night, Serenity dreamed that he awakened. He rose from his bed, as under his nightshirt his body was transfigured. He grew warm spikes of water-resistant fur; his hands became clawed paws, his feet grew webbed. Behind him sprouted a flat and scaly tail. His nose became a snout with long dentition. He went down on all fours, his nightshirt torn off as he trundled through thickets of greenery hugging a river's edge. He reached the water and smoothly slid under its surface. A transparent membrane covered his earthly eyes, and his tongue curled up to seal his throat from the waters, his nostrils and his ears, like sensitive blossoms, closing their portals to the element. All night he built lodges and burrows. He gathered food. He ported his young to safety. He and his clan built intricate webs of channels. They blocked the Schuylkill, the Delaware, the Hudson, the Connecticut, the Allegheny, the Potomac, the Susquehanna, the St. Lawrence, the Merrimack. A vast inland sea began to rise, spreading across the colonies. Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware all covered, all drowned. It swallowed the quays of Philadelphia, the Meetinghouses of the Friends, the tobacco fields of New England, the cotton and rice plantations of the Carolinas. It raised the seven seas; it swept across the pampas and the Californias. It inundated the cane fields of Cuba and Haiti; it whelmed the slave ships; it swept over Africa's darkness and Europe's greed. It filled the boardrooms of London's joint-

stock companies. It lifted the Ark from its moorings on Ararat, and carried the animals and the Sons of Ham back to the safety of the forest's womb. He awakened that morning, innocent, drenched with sweat. He washed; he dressed; he put on his spectacles. He shut his mouth, and yet, with dry eyes wept.

Serenity began to exorcise those business contacts that encumbered his conscience, and to seek out new, and hopefully, cleaner ventures. He sniffed round the quays, despite his revulsion for them, seeking, questioning, ferreting out investments. That's how he discovered Japanese Wajima lacquerware, and the ineffable serving man who traded in it.

Nothing about this man, except for his smile, was simple or straightforward. Even his name was ambiguous, and was given out as Xuefeng, Jan, Ruren, or sometimes Colin Clout. He was equally literate and obscure, as far as Serenity could tell, in English, in Dutch, and in several oriental barbarities, but he made his bond with a mark, which at first Serenity assumed to be Japanese, but later, after inquiring of other tradesmen, discovered that it was not. Subsequent investigations proved fruitless, although the signature was obviously some kind of script, it remained indecipherable to the numerous foreign traders swarming the quays. Eventually, Serenity surmised that Xuefeng was his oriental name, Jan the name given to him by his former Master, Ruren perhaps some heathen religious title, and Colin Clout a self-appointed nick-name, taken from one of the two books in English that seemed to amuse him: *The Poetical Works of Sir Edmund Spenser*. (The other was Robert's Burton's *The Anatomy of Melacholy*.) Xuefeng wore a quilted high-collared linen topcoat of faded blue, which buttoned under the left armpit by means of a webwork of strange wooden cylinders fastened through hemp twine loops. His trousers, also linen, were ashen black, and almost as billowy as a skirt. His shoes were some kind of wicker-woven clopines, little platforms, which elevated his diminutive stature to something still well under the height of a typical European, and which he seemed more to balance atop of than to wear. And yet in this odd footwear, as Serenity observed on more than one occasion, despite his ungainly appearance, Xuefeng could be as lithesome as one shod in dance slippers. Xuefeng's head was entirely shaved, including his eyebrows, but was nearly always protected by a little scarlet skullcap, flannel, not silk, out of respect, he said, for "Master worm". Embossed around the rim of this hat were what seemed to be the same inscrutable characters with which he signed his name. The cap was crowned by a rather too-large, felt-wrapped button, which Serenity was always tempted to push, as he looked down on it from his superior height, as if the person before him were a little manikin on clog pedestals that could be mechanically activated or deactivated by the touch of a finger. Around Xuefeng's neck, and dangling down to his chest, he wore, on a chain of betul seeds, the great pendent of a single spermwhale tooth, the tooth carved into the figure of the creature it was extracted from, and nicked, with what Serenity later learned was 143 notches. Once, when Serenity inquired about this bizarre amulet, Xuefeng made a whooshing sound like a blowhole exploding, and then said: "Perdie! Even foolish men merit a memorial." The man's skin was the color of

yellowed sandalwood that had been polished to depths of extraordinary sheen for decades by affectionate devotees. His teeth: white, even. His eyes: black, and set back in caverns of constant mirth. His age: anybody's guess — 40, 60, 80, 100, more? If anyone knew, including the man himself, they kept the secret buried in their hearts. His history, as Serenity understood it, was a tangle of exotic occupations and more exotic travels. He seemed to be at home anywhere, but to belong nowhere, like the weather or the currents of the sea. His laugh was as infectious as yellow fever and more joyful than the happiest of children or the most exuberant of dogs. He lived, as far as Serenity could tell, where he conducted business, in a little cabin on his boat, docked on the quays. He was shrewd, fair, unhurrying, and by all local accounts, uncommonly rich. But where he kept his money, no one could tell, unless he fed it to the fish — not an entirely unreasonable or metaphoric surmise, considering the man's general eccentricity, and his habit of currying favor with what he called his "friends of the finny tribe." Often at dusk, when the sun beat the harbor to gold, he could be seen on his boat a-scattering crumbs, while below him the waters roiled.

Of Xuefeng's personal history, Serenity gleaned this: that he was born in Timor, but was captured as a child and shipped as a slave on the Dutch East India Company trader "ecept Shellach." As a ward of the ship's captain, Xuefeng served his master first as a personal valet, and later, as he proved clever with business, as a steward for the Dutchman's many foreign ventures. Trusted, he was allowed to conduct business for his master from a shore base at Deshima. When Serenity asked where Deshima might be, Xuefeng, answered: "Far, raught by ship to Japans, many ri, filled with Captain's rauin, near Nagasaki." When Serenity asked where Nagasaki might be, Xuefeng began counting: 3,000 ri from Japan to Java, 10,000 ri from Java to Holland, 4,000 ri from Holland to Pennsylvania — peregall 17,000 ri." By which obscure discourse, Serenity weened that the distance between where he was now and from where Xuefeng had traveled to attain his present state was many leagues hence, and not solely to be measured in sea miles. Xuefeng was what Serenity pined to be: happy, empty and actually Serene. When Serenity asked him if he had learned to be happy from the Dutch captain in Deshima, Xuefeng laughed and held up the whaletooth pendant, saying: "Nay, I gleaned hard nousell from my second Master on Misaki Isle." From this Serenity ascertained that the whale ivory and his happiness had something to do with an island called Misaki, but the Quaker was never able to pierce this mystery further.

After a time, Xuefeng became Serenity's sole trader and client (a development much abhorred by his pious clerk, and son, Thomas) and the Quaker's daily visits to the little office/boat became a regular feature on the quays. Xuefeng dealt in sugar, sappanwood, rattans, woolens, velvets, calicoes, incense, medicinal herbs, cloves, jasmine, pepper, glass and glass spectacles. On any given day, he might be seen exchanging bills of sale on curios, living exotic mammals and birds, oil-paper, umbrellas, poultry, copper kettles, copper cash, dry goods, clothing, pickled daikon, saké, dried fruits, slaves (as he once was), and, of course,

Serenity's chief interest, the exquisite Wajima lacquerware. When Serenity, indignant, once asked Xuefeng how he, a former slave, could still trade in his human brethren, and prosper from his fellows' sufferings, Xuefeng, laughed and said he had been freed, once by the last will and testament of his former Dutch owner, and once by the "red-haired barbarian." When Serenity asked if this red-haired barbarian had been a Dutchman, Xuefeng entered into a fit of hilarity so unrestrained that it that prevented him from responding. But finally, seeing that Serenity was angry, he said: "Xuefeng has a dog." Not placated by this flippancy, Serenity demanded an explanation, and Xuefeng, seemingly serious now himself, replied: "the words are only a probing a pole for the six compounds." Still confused, and getting angrier, Serenity blurted out "Speak sense, man!" To which Xuefeng replied:

"Erstwhile Xuefeng had a dog: above he takes people's throats; in the middle he takes people's loins; below, he takes people's legs. If you hesitate, you lose your life."

Xuefeng was composed now and mesmerizingly stern. The two men sat and stared at each other for a long time, until tears began to form (for what reason, alas!, he could not tell) in Serenity's eyes. Then, Xuefeng said: "The probing pole is the test of understanding: the words. The six compounds are the sense faculties. Do you understand?"

Serenity did not understand, but he now knew that he needed to, if he were to travel the many ri separating Philadelphia from heaven. He thought about the dog all night, wondering what it was or where Xuefeng was keeping it.

The next day, when Serenity returned to the boat, Xuefeng came racing out of the house, waving his hands and shouting: "Watch out for the dog!" When Serenity looked around, Xuefeng went back in the cabin, and refused to do any business with him that day.

Serenity went to the Meetinghouse to sit. He tried to think of the probing pole, the dog, but when he closed his eyes, all he could see was the image of Xuefeng's face. Xuefeng seemed somehow to be aware of this, for when Serenity returned to the quays to see him, Xuefeng, made a frame from the thumbs and index fingers of his two hands, and looking through it, said: "You have already seen this face today, but where is the other?" When Serenity inquired what other face he referred to, Xuefeng laughed and laughed, until Serenity, forgetting for a moment his practiced decorum, began to laugh as well. Then Xuefeng stopped abruptly, and gravely said:

"If you blot out sense and sound, what do you hear?"

The King Is In His Counting House

It is not only that we have troubles,
But that we endeavor to count them,
Making a sequence of our days and nights,
And following the surface of a grid.

Beneath that surface looms the realm of dreams,
Beneath the dreams there roils a well of fire,
Beneath the fire. a sea, not dark, not light,
Sweeps by in unsequestered ecstasies.

It is not merely that we have these needs,
But that we endeavor to quench them,
Making a horror of grasping and avoidance,
Destroying the fluid body on the grid,
Pushing our actions through a sieve of greed.