LoveReading

YOU LOVED YOUR LAST BOOK...
BUT WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO READ NEXT?

Using our unique guidance tools, **LoveReading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

ALL GOOD THINGS

Written by **Stephen Ellcock**

Published By **September Publishing**

All text is Copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is brought to you by **LoveReading**. Please print off and read at your leisure.



In several decades of image hunting and disseminating I have learned much about the human urge to make art out of our curiosity, exploration and discovery, and I have seen too the profound joy that such art can bring in others. I have specialised in the discovery of lesser-known art – drawn from archives and libraries, images made by scientists, mystics, visionaries and explorers as well as artists. This book, a lifetime in the making, takes its shape and title from the very first English encyclopedia

– *OMNE BONUM* –

and explores our world and the human response to it one realm at a time, just as our forefathers did, the medieval scholars and monks who created those early books of knowledge and treasures.

In all Things, all Things service do to all:
And thus a Sand is Endless, though most small.
And every Thing is truly Infinite,
In its Relation deep and exquisite.

— Thomas Traherne (1636–74)

CREATING THE INFINITE ARCHIVE

I HAVE ALWAYS COLLECTED IMAGES,
THE PROBLEM IS THAT FOR MOST OF MY LIFE
I NEVER KNEW WHAT TO DO WITH THEM.

In the past I explained this compulsion away to myself as a search for pattern, meaning and a semblance of order in what has often been a ragged and disorderly existence, a defence mechanism for staving off chaos and dismay.

Like most children of the age of mass communication I became an obsessive consumer of images from the moment I learned to focus. A pre-school love of comics proved a gateway drug to the harder thrills of Marvel and DC comics and then, slightly later, the illicit, intoxicating, utopian visions of the then-thriving 'underground' press, followed closely by the dystopian grit of Punk-era fanzines. All of these multifarious publications, begged for, stolen, borrowed or bought with every last available penny of pocket money, unemployment cheque or student grant, were, however, merely grist for what was to become an all-consuming obsession. I would pore over every available item of newsprint searching for and tearing or cutting out any images that interested, inspired or startled me. I would do the same to my parents' and grandparents' newspapers and colour supplements, to my mother's copies of *She* or *Woman's Own*, my sister's *Jackie*s and *Disco 45*s, and to particular magazines my father naively assumed were discreetly hidden.

My unbridled butchery even extended to certain books.

The purpose of all of this vandalism was to provide me with the raw material for what my addled adolescent imagination initially conceived as a vast treasure store or infinite archive of images, which would be stored in hundreds, even thousands, of scrapbooks, or else assembled as gigantic, impossibly complex collages, all of which would eventually evolve into a visual map of 'Everything'.

These unnervingly megalomaniac tendencies were obviously a source of distress and deep concern for my parents and I was, at various times, threatened with psychiatrists, unspecified 'outdoor activities', Sunday school and membership of the Boy Scouts.

By the time I left home, I had accumulated dozens of boxes, suitcases and bags of all descriptions crammed with tens of thousands

of scraps and orphan images, many torn or cut from what are now incredibly valuable artefacts.

Encouraged by a couple of disapproving, deeply unimpressed girlfriends and recurrent bouts of ennui, I eventually abandoned my doomed attempt at constructing a physical version of the kind of universal, labyrinthine library that had previously only existed in the imaginations of Jorge Luis Borges, M. C. Escher or Giovanni Battista Piranesi out of old copies of *Oz*, *Howard the Duck* and *Ripped & Torn*.

Still, I had at least managed to fill a few scrapbooks and even succeeded in cobbling together a collage or two along the way.

Sadly (or, perhaps, thankfully), at some point between my first free festival and my first eviction, I had either discarded, lost or abandoned this entire mouldering stockpile of scraps.

Over the course of the subsequent, chaotic decades, my obsession with patterns may have been sublimated but it never left me, it simply manifested itself in different ways.

I managed to blag a fairly successful living as a professional musician/uni-digit keyboard prodder for a while, in spite of the fact I possessed zero technical ability and no previous experience. I did, however, discover that I possessed a natural aptitude and flair for arrangement and production, which are, after all, forms of pattern-making.

After a few years of critical, peer and industry acclaim[1] but widespread public indifference,[2] the band I was a member of split/imploded/self-destructed in the messiest possible manner. Unwilling to spend my days trapped in dank east London basements programming hi-hats and quantising bass guitars, I found a job in a bookshop where, to the consternation and bemusement of long-suffering colleagues, I became obsessed with 'merchandising', display, the arrangement and disposition of books on shelves, and so on. Once again, a deep-seated pattern – making impulse manifesting itself – and incredibly, strangely rewarding … for a year or two, at least.

Then, at a moment of crisis, I lost sight of the patterns and the pathways through the patterns and I stupidly succumbed to disarray and dissolution. What followed was a textbook careering off the rails, complete with all the cliched and tedious dependencies, addictions, depravities and degradations that feature in the lexicon of boring mid-life dissipation.

When the inevitable crash and burn occurred I was homeless, alone, seriously ill and, according to eyewitnesses, 'blue'. Bed-bound in unfamiliar homes for several months, I eventually succumbed to the constant encouragement and exhortations from sisters and exceptionally kind and well-meaning 'friends' I could barely recall, and signed up to Facebook.

I didn't own a laptop or computer at the time and the emerging world of social media revealed through the prism of my ancient mobile phone was, for all its vaunted possibilities, bland and terribly mundane. Gradually, however, I began to create a network of connections and, as I did so, the realisation dawned on me that social media is as much a visual as a verbal medium.[3]

From that point on I decided to forget all about attempting witty badinage with total strangers and concentrate instead on visual communication and, most importantly, the creation of themed albums which can now feature thousands of related images.

Nothing could have prepared me for the astonishing and overwhelming response I have received over the course of the past ten years from hundreds of thousands of 'friends', followers and sundry strangers from every conceivable continent and country, all driven to find meaning, validation and solace in images.

For all the flaws, frustrations and necessary compromises involved in participation, social media would seem to provide the perfect launch pad for an Infinite Archive, a panoramic work, dynamic and interactive, encompassing the whole of creation, containing multiple pathways that a reader can enter at any point or reread many times.

This book is the next step and cornerstone in the construction of that Infinite Archive.

The title *Omne Bonum/All Good Things* is a homage to the first attempt at creating an English-language encyclopaedia by the fourteenth-century scribe James Le Palmer. *Omne Bonum* was intended to be a vast tome, a compilation of all the knowledge available to the author in his time. In the author's words: 'Virtually all good things [are] contained herein.'

Following James Le Palmer's example and using images drawn from three thousand years of artistic creation, scientific enquiry and pan-global magical, philosophical and religious traditions, this book is designed as a visual journey from the beginning of Time to the vastness of the Eternity via all the realms of Creation: the four elements – Air, Water, Fire and Earth; the Vegetable, Animal and Human kingdoms; the wonders of Science; the Senses and the Heavens; and finally the spirit realm, Heaven, Hell and Infinity.

The images I have selected are but a few examples of our attempts to comprehend and visualise the Cosmos and our place within it. My deepest wish is to bring a little piece of Heaven down to Earth. Failing that, I would settle for giving anyone who visits these pages a glimpse of the wonder, beauty and mystery that still exist in the world around us.

Decades have passed since my manic-obsessive image-gathering days, and I and the World have experienced enormous changes, but I am still pretty much the same in many ways. I am still destitute, still pretty much unemployable, still ill, still ill-at-ease, still unwelcome in polite society and I am still collecting images, but at least I now know what to do with them …

1 OK, perhaps not universal 'critical, peer and industry acclaim', but still tilted towards the positive in spite of certain high-profile detractors. Let's say 75 per cent 'critical, peer and industry acclaim' for the sake of argument.

2 Honourable exceptions, the indie stalwarts of Greece, Portugal, Belgium, Japan and maybe one or two other major-label 'third-tier territories'.

3 Nobody ever seemed to suspect that, for the first eighteen months to two years I was posting on Facebook, I was using such an antediluvian phone (when I was out of my then office), that I literally could not see any of the links or images I was posting. It was pure guesswork (particularly risky in the case of YouTube clips from obscure Soviet archives).