

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Behind every individual event in this universe lies a complex web of cause and effect that stretches back into infinity. Here are a few of the causative agents that I would like to single out and thank for making this particular literary event possible.

First, thanks to Peter Tallack at Weidenfeld & Nicolson for having the good sense to commission this book, the skill to offer me sound advice and the patience to pretend not to mind when I whinged about having to take heed of it. Also thanks to John Woodruff for dotting all the t's and crossing all the i's (you might want to check that bit, John) and making the final copy readable. I am grateful to Richard Dawkins on several counts: for his own writings; for treating my crazy ideas with undue respect; for telling me that studying for a PhD would be a waste of my time and I would do better to write a book; and finally for setting in train the events that led to the opportunity to do so. Stretching further back into the causal mists, my thanks go to Michael Hayward for having the faith to let me write *Creatures*, and the patience to stick with it when a simple nine-month project blossomed into a five-year personal quest. Thanks also to Creature Labs for permission to write about the project, and of course to my fellow programmers and artists for helping to turn an idea into a real product. I am grateful to Dave Cliff for bringing me in from the wilderness and introducing me to the scientific community, and for endorsing *Creatures* as a worthwhile piece of science. Two sources of general inspiration especially deserve citing: the first is Douglas Adams for putting into dramatic form concepts that I have only ever been able to describe to a computer; and the second is A.K. Dewdney, whom I have never met, for writing a slim but inspiring work of fiction entitled *The Planiverse*, which focused my desire to attempt the creation of artificial life. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for teaching me to think for

myself, and of course my wife Ann and my son Christopher for putting up with all the angst and adding a spin of their own to the ideas that I bounced off them. Anyone else I should have mentioned will probably know what an awful memory I have and will forgive me.

Perhaps this is also the place to apologize to those scientists and philosophers whose work I have not acknowledged. Throughout this book you will find the phrase 'artificial life' used to describe a synthetic living being. There is also an established scientific discipline with the same name. These two are not quite synonymous, and so to differentiate them I shall be using the term 'A-life' when I'm referring to the discipline. Many brilliant people have done sterling work in this and related fields of enquiry, and we shall meet one or two of them in these pages. Yet A-life is not the same thing as the quest to create artificial life. It concerns itself with the broader topic of studying lifelike phenomena through the use of computer simulation, and only rarely are these phenomena assembled together into complete functioning organisms, and that is the topic of this book. Like many of the people researching what is now called A-life, I spent a great deal of my time in the wilderness, working in isolation, and only fairly recently did I discover the degree to which others shared (and frequently preceded) my own thinking. This is largely a personal book, and I hope none of my colleagues feel slighted if I fail to describe their work or omit to credit their discoveries. This is not meant to be a historical introduction to the fields of A-life and artificial intelligence (AI), nor do I claim to be relating the 'establishment view' of either of these topics. For those who are interested in the broader background, I have listed some useful books in the Bibliography. Rather than being an overview of the A-life field, you might look upon this book as a 'Zen' guide to how to be a digital god.

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