Contents

Plates section to be found between pp. 119–20.

1 *Tales of the unexpected* 1

2 *The impact of evolution* 5

   A room with a view: matters of perspective 5
   The mind-benders: distortions of thought and space 11
   The inheritors: adaptation and evolution 19
   After Babel: a linguistic digression 24
   A sense of reality: the evolution of mental pictures 27
   The care and maintenance of a small planet: cosmic environmentalism 31
   Gravity's rainbow: the fabric of the world 34
   Chronicle of a death foretold: of death and immortality 39
   The human factor: light in the darkness 45

3 *Size, life, and landscape* 48

   A delicate balance: equilibria in the Universe 48
   Of mice and men: life on Earth 53
   The jagged edge: living fractals 59
   War and peace: size and culture 63
   Far from the madding crowd: the size of populations 68
   *Les liaisons dangereuses*: complexity, mobility, and cultural evolution 77
   The rivals: the evolution of cooperation 87
   The secret garden: the art of landscape 91
   Figures in a landscape: the dilemma of computer art 102
   Midnight's children: a first glimpse of the stars 112

4 *The heavens and the Earth* 114

   The remains of the day: rhythms of life 114
   Empire of the Sun: the reasons for the seasons 117
   A handful of dust: the Earth below 122
   Pebble in the sky: the Moon above 126
5  The natural history of noise

The club of queer trades: soundscapes 186
Sense and sensibility: a matter of timing 192
Incidental music: a harmless by-product? 194
The glass bead game: the music of the spheres 199
Player piano: hearing by numbers 205
The sound of silence: decomposing music 214
The imitation game: listlessness 218
The sound of music: hearing and listening 220
Adventures of Roderick Random: white noise, pink noise, and black noise 230

6  All's well that ends well

Bibliography 247

Illustration acknowledgements 263

Index 269