



Figments of the imagination: among the invented species are the stinger fan (above), the gulphog (top) and the skywhale (above right). They will materialise at the Science Museum in October

## Scientists on flight of fantasy with aliens to rival ET

By Richard Alleyne

OVER the years Hollywood has portrayed extraterrestrials in many guises, from the cuddly, childlike ET to the ferocious monster that is Alien.

Now scientists have decided to inject a little reality into science fiction by coming up with their version of what species from other worlds might look like.

The *Science of Aliens* exhibition is their best educated guess at how an alien might look, taking into

consideration their likely environments and the laws of physics, chemistry and biology.

Scientists, including the Cambridge palaeontologist Simon Conway-Morris, have come up with a number of species including the stinger fan, a plant-like animal, the gulphog, a dinosaur-type predator, and the skywhale, a flying sea monster.

Stephen Foulger, the manager of the exhibition, which opens at the Science Museum on Oct 14, said: "It is true that some scientists

believe complex life forms are rare or possibly nonexistent. But the majority still believe they exist. The problem is that they are so distant, we simply cannot detect them.

"This should not stop us speculating about what kind of worlds they might live on or what they might look like,

however. And that is what we have done."

The team has chosen two very different alien environments in which to place their extraterrestrials, Aurelia and Blue Moon.

Aurelia is the planet of a red dwarf, a star much cooler than our own sun. It is locked in such a tight orbit that it is

unable to spin, so one side continually faces its sun and the other into the depths of space. There would be no seasons, days or nights.

This would be the world of the 15ft-tall gulphog, the scientists speculate. They have powerful legs, long necks and small heads and can run at up to 40mph.

Other inhabitants include the stinger fans, which resemble plants but are flesh and blood and use flower-like tentacles to trap sunlight.

The Blue Moon is a Jupiter-sized planet with an

atmosphere so dense that animals of immense size are capable of flight, including skywhales, with 30ft wingspans. Their only predators are ice-capped stalkers, eagle-like carnivores that can cut into skywhales' flesh, while huge trees that grow 9,000ft high provide ecosystems to a fantastic array of other creatures.

Scientists stress that although such creatures may seem strange, they are only obeying the laws of natural selection that gave rise to life on our planet.



ET, the classic film alien