



and will coincide with a Channel 4 series, *Alien Worlds*.

Aurelia is the planet of a red dwarf, a star much cooler than our own Sun. Only planets close to such a star could have sufficient warmth to support life. But the laws of physics dictate that a world in such a tight orbit would be unable to spin. It would be locked in orbit, so one side continually faces its sun, the other into the cold depths of space. Aurelia would have no seasons or days or nights.

The top predator on this world would be the gulphog, scientists speculate. Five metres tall, they have two big powerful legs, long thick necks, small heads and can run at up to 40mph. They hunt mudpods, six-legged creatures that scurry across the planet's surface and live in underground burrows.

Other inhabitants include stinger fans, which resemble plants with fans on top but are really flesh-and-blood animals that use slithery tentacles to move about to capture feeble rays of light that beam down on Aurelia.

Then there is Blue Moon. It orbits a Jupiter-sized planet that in turn orbits a pair of stars in a remote arm of our galaxy. This moon has a thick atmosphere of oxygen and carbon dioxide. So dense is the air here that animals of immense size are capable of flight.

These include skywhales, which float through the soupy atmosphere on 10-metre wings, soaring on the moon's powerful thermal currents. Their only predators are caped stalkers, eagle-like carnivores which can cut into skywhales' flesh, while huge trees that grow three kilometres high provide eco-systems to a fantastic array of other creatures.

These strange worlds and creatures will be displayed on

giant screens in the museum and visitors can control actions of the 'gulphogs' and 'skywhales' on display.

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. As Conway-Morris pointed out: 'Evidence from evolution strongly suggests that, although extraterrestrial regions supporting life will look alien, deep down they will be quite similar to those on Earth.'

Other scientists still believe such worlds are unlikely and that we may be alone in the universe. The development of complex life may simply be too rare to lead to such weird

Read on...

To learn more about the Science of Aliens exhibition, go to...

www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/aliens

alien menageries. After all the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (Seti) programme has so far found nothing.

Alternatively, intelligent life may be commonplace but not long-lived, as the late evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould pointed out. 'Perhaps any society that could build a technology for such interplanetary travel must first pass through a period of potential destruction where technological capacity outstrips social or moral restraint. Perhaps, no, or very few, societies can ever emerge intact from such a crucial episode.'

Foulger remains optimistic, however. 'I think complex life is going to be fairly commonplace, though it may take us a while to find it.'