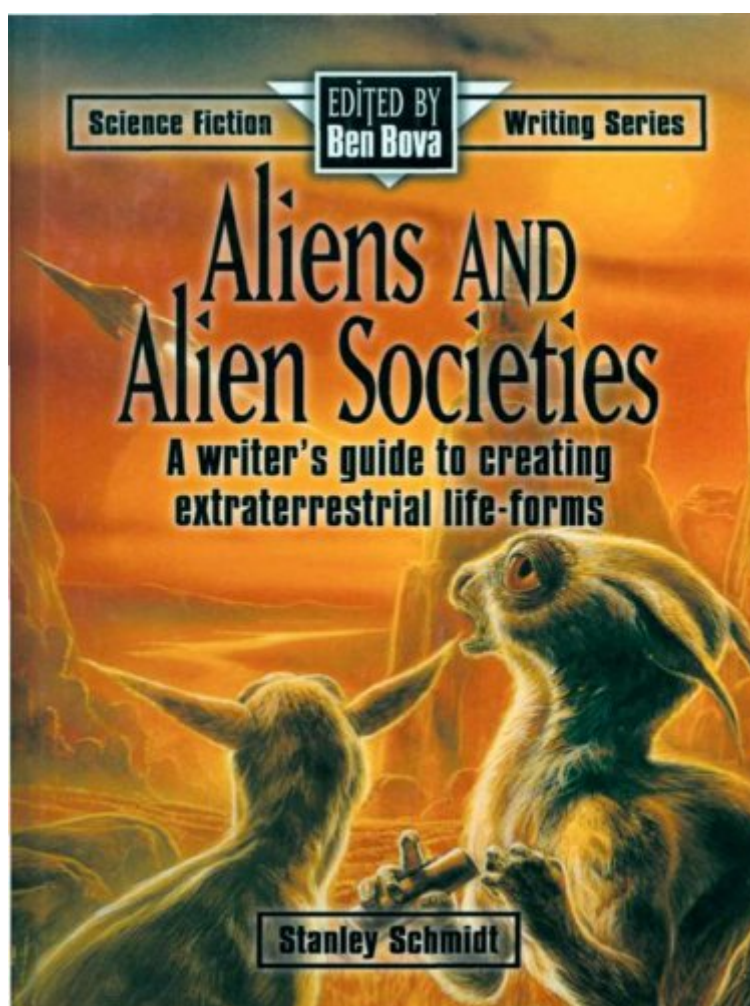


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Aliens & Alien Societies: A Writer's Guide To Creating Extraterrestrial Life-Forms (Science Fiction Writing Series)



Synopsis

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." - Hamlet, William Shakespeare

Stanley Schmidt guides you toward a better understanding of our universe to create beings who will live in your science fiction. *Aliens and Alien Societies* explains science to help you make your fiction plausible. You'll avoid bringing characters from solar systems unlikely to support life. Discover the galaxy's vastness and imagine the technology needed to cross it. Put biochemistry on your side to put viable creatures on your pages. Learn how engineering shapes life and why this suggests that intelligent inhabitants of other planets might have similarities to humans. Develop well-founded cultures and logical languages. Introduce aliens to people or other aliens. Portray them as individuals, true to their species. In this book, possibilities abound and lines between knowledge and conjecture blur enthrallingly. *Aliens and Alien Societies* is thoughtful, clear and utterly fascinating. It is filled with facts to help you write believable fictions about the things in heaven and earth.

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Customer Reviews

It is well written, It explains clear concepts. It is well organized. Any one interested in writing aliens should read it.

The details in this book are pretty thick but the author explains it in a way that even a layman can understand. Some of the science feels a little dated, given that the book was published almost 20 years ago, but it still makes for an interesting read. Definitely gets you thinking along the right tracks if you're planning to invent your own aliens for your novel.

A great read for anybody writing science fiction. Lots of detail with great references. Definitely one that I will keep and refer back to.

This is a good reference book. It explains what life might be like in certain star systems and what suns can support life. It has some science. It also tells you how to look at various cultures and develop your own through creative thinking and logic as well as looking at ecosystems on earth and how they could survive and develop as cultures. We really have everything here on earth that could be considered alien in one form of animal or another. This book helps you think about how and why your alien culture thinks and how it has evolved.

Great beginner's manual for writing SF.

The answer is no ... or yes, depending on what form and/or market your writing is goaled toward. If a science fiction novel was written to include every element presented in this manual, it would be as boring as reading a detailed summary of how to climb a step ladder. If you get too lost in the guidelines, you'll lose your creativity. A being with rubbery skin can live on a wet planet, but you don't have to detail that being's evolution from primordial ooze to rubber man down to the details of its DNA. Writing "hard" science fiction is much different from writing "fantasy" science fiction, or "softer" science fiction. Mieville's cactus people wouldn't exist if he'd followed the restrictive rules of hard sci-fi, and they are intriguing. Mieville didn't build a world with climate, rotation, axis position, mean distance from a sun, the type of sun, or any other hard facts, he just made his species absorbable and intriguing. The presumption that even "hard" science fiction is for mathematicians, physicists, professors, scientists, and total numbers-geeks is preposterous and insolent. You'll have to ask yourself, as a writer, "how far do you want to go?" Are you writing science or science fiction? Is this a thesis or compelling imagery? Schmidt pointed out that certain people write in to the

publisher when the hard facts are shaky, but remember that these are guys portrayed by the "comic book guy" in The Simpsons. Do you cater to the few who don't have a life or do you use your creative talent to entertain the majority? Even one of the stories mentioned by Schmidt, Stanley G. Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" didn't follow such strict guidelines as Schmidt presents, and still created one of the most intriguing aliens to have ever graced the written word. Weinbaum didn't explain Tweel's evolution, or any evolution on Mars, he didn't explain the rocket propulsions or the thermal sleeping bags or the reason Earth beings went to Mars, but he created a story that holds intrigue throughout many generations and is classified as "hard" science fiction (with humor). Heinlein rarely went into the details described in this book, nor Norton, but they are still classic Sci-Fi writers. Both Star Trek and Star Wars have broken apart Schmidt's theory of "necessary fundamentals". Actual "writing about aliens" doesn't start until chapter eight, continuing through chapter nine. Many readers may give up before then. Science Fiction (IMHO) 'supposedly' takes for granted the fact that warp travel, or faster-than-light travel is accepted, I find no need to extrapolate a hard-science based core for this, whereas the author seems to think it's mandatory. I honestly don't believe the modern science fiction reader requires an extensive physics lecture to believe in faster-than-light travel. Still, this book, IMHO, should be required reading for anyone who writes "hard" sci-fi or "fantasy" sci-fi. While the physics of the writing may seem overwhelming, the ideas you can (and will) develop from reading over the intricacies of foundation writing are invaluable. For the "hard" sci-fi writer this will be a beginner's manual, for the "fantasy" sci-fi writer it will be a guideline and an inspiration. Schmidt says, "The very essence of science fiction is that you'll be creating situations that no one has had to deal with before - and then inventing ways to deal with them." He quotes Hal Clement as saying, "Work out your world and its creatures as long as it remains fun; then write your story, making use of any of the details you have worked out which help the story." If you work within the strict guidelines of this book, Michael Crichton's "Jurassic Park" is "hard" science fiction rather than general fiction. (as would be many of Crichton's novels)

The Pros: The book is heavy with great references in both non-fiction and fiction, though the fictional references seem to be highly restricted to a clutch of about ten books rather than the broad range offered by hard sci-fi authors, plus there is an extensive reference, a glossary, and an index.

The Cons: With all the technical physics, technical astronomy, bioengineering, evolutionary and anthropological sciences introduced at the beginning, a budding writer might lose hope or interest before getting to the meatier parts of the book. These chapters, however, are necessary. My recommendation is that if you are serious about either "hard" or "fantasy" sci-fi writing, you should pick up a copy of this book, but not as a "starter" for goals or inspiration. Rather, this book will fill out

your thoughts and creativity after being stimulated by other, easier to read writing introductions.
Good luck, and Enjoy!

If you are interested in writing a sci-fi book, you will definitely enjoy having this book around to answer some in-depth questions about how your alien races might fare

Comprehensive and provided some good ideas for further study. Scientific, though it could have included more pictures. Review on some of the more important science fiction novels was very good.

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