

Aliens in Popular Culture

Michael M. Levy and
Farah Mendlesohn, Editors



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aspect was mutually loathsome” (7). There may be hope for survival and future reconciliation. The aliens barely feature and are viewed only through human eyes.

In *The Watch Below* (1966), a small group of humans struggle to survive in the bowels of a wrecked tanker, while the refugee fleet of the water-breathing Unthans approaches Earth. Shared experience ultimately allows humans and aliens to come to an accommodation, while in *Federation World* (1988) two Earth Human applicants for citizenship in the Galactic Federation are involved with alien species while they train as potential First Contacts.

Caroline J. Mullan

See also: Brin, David; Cherryh, C. J.; Simak, Clifford D.

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Whitlatch, Terryl

Terryl Whitlatch (1961–) is an American artist, creature designer, and animal anatomist—she calls herself an “artistic scientist”—with over a quarter century of experience working in the film and media industries, where she has become an industry favorite, populating imagined versions of earth, alien planets, and fantasy worlds with unique yet biologically possible beings. The daughter of an illustrator and biology teacher, Whitlatch studied vertebrate zoology and anatomy at Sonoma State University, hoping to become a paleontological reconstructionist, before completing her education in art and illustration at California College of Arts and Academy of Art University.

As an artist, Whitlatch’s practice begins from anatomically rigorous studies of living organisms and proceeds through extrapolation of what is (or might be) strictly possible for extinct, extant, and imagined life-forms, given particular biological and ecological conditions. As a result, her work traverses science fiction, fantasy, and realist genres of creature design and rendering. Like the literary practitioners of “hard SF,” who value scientific realism in their fiction, Whitlatch has been lauded for her realistic accuracy and expressive range in the design of unreal yet plausible organisms. Whitlatch has contributed creature art and conceptual designs to dozens of projects, working as a client for natural-history museums and zoological organizations, such as the San Diego Zoo and World Wildlife Fund, and for media companies, especially on animated films, television shows, video games, and source- or artbooks for Lucasfilm and its subsidiaries, Pixar, Disney, EA, Chronicle Books, and many others from the 1980s onward. Her non-alien art and design work contributed significantly to the creature concept design of films

such as *Jumanji* (1995), *The Indian in the Cupboard* (1995), *Dragonheart* (1996), *Brother Bear* (2003), *The Polar Express* (2004), *Curious George* (2006), *Alvin and the Chipmunks* (2007), *Beowulf* (2007), *Brave* (2012), and *Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle* (2017), among others.

But Whitlatch is perhaps best known among SF aficionados for her role in shaping the alien ecology of the *Star Wars* franchise in the late 1990s and early 2000s—and to a certain segment of the fan population, most unfamiliar with her role and name, she is infamous. Whitlatch first worked for George Lucas, director of *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977), during the production of the 1997 Special Edition of the original *Star Wars* trilogy. These edits of the original films are notorious among traditionalist fans for digitally adding, altering, and editing scenes, largely in an effort to flatten overperceived inconsistencies in the original films. Many of the digital additions to the Special Editions are alien creatures added to bring “life” to what was, originally, a rather biologically sparse visual universe. Whitlatch created the alien creatures that inhabit Lucas’s edits, such as the mobile design for the dewbacks (a kind of desert lizard) used by Imperial stormtroopers in the Special Edition of *A New Hope* (originally the dewbacks were stiff, stationary props). Whitlatch also did the digital design of Jabba the Hutt, which was retroactively added into *A New Hope* to create continuity with his look in the original cut of *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi* (1983) (in 1977 he was a rather boring human). Her design for Jabba the Hutt was recycled in *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999), where he appeared as a young crime lord on the then rather populous desert world of Tatooine. Whitlatch was key to making *The Phantom Menace* an extravaganza of alien species and creatures. She contributed designs for all of the alien species who compete in the Boonta Eve podrace that eventually unites Anakin Skywalker with his destiny, as well as the alien creature designs for the inhabitants of the planets Tatooine and Naboo. This included the fan-hated and first all-digital movie character Jar Jar Binks, as well as Anakin’s pod racing nemesis Sebulba. Whitlatch also designed aliens for *Men in Black* (1997) and *John Carter* (2012), the Disney adaptation of Edgar Rice Burroughs’ *A Princess of Mars* (1912).

Whitlatch’s contributions to the visual presence of aliens in American culture, as well as her prowess as an alien and creature design artist, are cataloged in several books. *The Wildlife of Star Wars: A Field Guide* (Chronicle Books, 2001) showcases the many creatures she created for Lucas while also expanding on the designs of earlier *Star Wars* aliens—down to the anatomical level. Her picture book *The Katurran Odyssey* (Simon & Schuster, 2004) launched a fantasy trilogy written with David Michael Wiegler, based on her world-building art, about mytho-religious conflict on a planet of sentient lemurs; the trilogy has yet to be completed. Whitlatch’s significance as an industry leader in alien and fantastic creature design is further attested in a series of three books about creature design. Her importance to the field of SF and fantasy art has been recognized multiple times by *Spectrum*, a book series that operates as the key adjudicator of excellence in the fantastic arts; she has been regularly featured as a guest artist of the *Spectrum* Fantastic Art Live exhibitions since 2013; and she was a judge for *Spectrum 23* (Flesk Publications, 2016).

Between projects, Whitlatch is an educator. She was previously an instructor of Creature Design and Construction/Anatomy at the Academy of Art University, creator of a series of Gnomon Workshops online courses in creature design and anatomy, and international speaker for the art-education program Schoolism. Whitlatch is a prolific international guest lecturer and workshop leader and is currently a resident artist at Imagination International Inc. Studios, where she runs the Creatures of Amalthea creature design curriculum.

Sean Guynes-Vishniac

See also: Burroughs, Edgar Rice; Mœbius; *Men in Black*; *Star Wars*.

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“Who Goes There?”

John W. Campbell (1910–1971) is arguably the most influential editor of science fiction in the first half of the 20th century. As editor of *Astounding Science Fiction* from 1937 until his death in 1971, Campbell is generally credited with shaping Golden Age science fiction. A prolific writer of space adventure stories, Campbell published under multiple pseudonyms. The most pertinent is Don A. Stuart (transparently derived from the name of his wife, Dona Stuart, which has led to speculation about her possible role in the writing). His novella “Who Goes There?” was published under this pen name (in *Astounding Science Fiction*, August 1938) and has been filmed on three different occasions: *The Thing from Another World* (1951), John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982), and *The Thing* (2011). While Campbell’s science fiction published under his own name had been heavily focused on space adventure and space opera, the stories written under the Stuart name concentrate on social commentary and values. The stories written under Campbell’s own name offer little reason for analysis and feature archetypal characters who are poorly developed, stock penny-dreadful plots, and aliens who are either extremely benevolent or malevolent with no shading of gray.

The plot of “Who Goes There?” (1938) revolves around a scientific mission to Antarctica. Nearing the end of an Antarctic winter, the researchers find a frozen spaceship (from 20 million years previous) and attempt to thaw it out using thermite. The charge ignites the ship’s magnesium hull, but the crew members save the ship’s pilot, a seeming mass of vegetable matter who had frozen just feet from the ship while, the crew speculates, searching for warmth. The crew proceeds to thaw the alien, which revives it, and the alien proves to be able to replicate the image, memories, and personality of anything it devours so long as the alien has enough mass to do so.