

# When the invasion comes, you'll have done your research

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I'm going undercover. No voice recorder, no camera, no wide-brimmed hat with a "press" laminate stuck in the brim. That's because the 37th Committee on Space Research is in town, and the new X-Files box set has taught me to exercise caution when investigating extraterrestrial matters.

The committee, known as COSPAR, was founded in 1958 in London. According to the website, its purpose is to promote "scientific research in space ... (and) the discussion of problems that may affect scientific space research."

COSPAR's 37th Scientific Assembly started July 13 and runs till tomorrow at the Palais des congrès. There, under an umbrella of secrecy requiring that participants "register," scientists from around the world are discussing everything from the role of Alfvén waves in auroral processes to, probably, the impending invasion of the Klendathu bug monsters from *Starship Troopers*.

For those unable to attend the conference, there's still plenty of space in Montreal. For example, the John H. Chapman Centre, headquarters of the Canadian Space Agency, is in Longueuil. While there are no public tours of the centre, its innovative architecture is designed to look like a space station from above, which can be confirmed by aerial photos on Google Earth.

More accessible is the Montreal Planetarium, nestled behind an imposing statue of Nicolaus Copernicus. Inside, a collection of exhibits encircle the large, domed screening room. Of particular note among the various projects is *Extinctions*, which takes the audience on a tour of the various comets, cosmic dust particles and gamma rays that will soon destroy us all.

In the gift shop, freeze-dried astronaut ice-cream is affordably priced. You can also purchase meteorite fragments, though being familiar with the space-rock diseases in the *Andromeda Strain* and *Creepshow*, I wouldn't recommend it.

For those seeking to further explore the horrors of outer space, the Montreal Science Centre's new the Science of Aliens exhibit is a good place to start. Visitors are immediately confronted with a huge replica of the Alien Queen from *Aliens*, a large Vogon from the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and, for some reason, *Dracula* toys.

In an attempt to creep visitors out even further, another room contains alien-looking oceanic specimens, like sea spiders and vampire squid. Further on, the exhibit presents colourful musings on what life might look like on fictional planets Aurelia and Blue Moon.

But why speculate when the truth is on the Internet? Montreal has been the site of at least three UFO sightings documented on YouTube. One, a 1990 sighting over Place Bonaventure, was the subject of a CBC report. Others show a bright light over Highway 15, or a mysterious object above Square Victoria. Some people might be skeptical, but to websites like Ovni-Alerte, which tracks UFO sightings in Quebec, the evidence is clear. I'd present my opinion of this footage, but I'm worried I'd blow my cover.

For more information about the Canadian Space Agency, visit [www.space.gc.ca](http://www.space.gc.ca) or call 450-926-4800

The Planetary is located at 1000 St. Jacques St.

For show times, visit [www.planetarium.montreal.qc.ca](http://www.planetarium.montreal.qc.ca) or call 514-872-4530

The Montreal Science Centre is on the King Edward Pier. For more information, visit [www.montrealsciencecentre.com](http://www.montrealsciencecentre.com) or call 1-877-496-4724