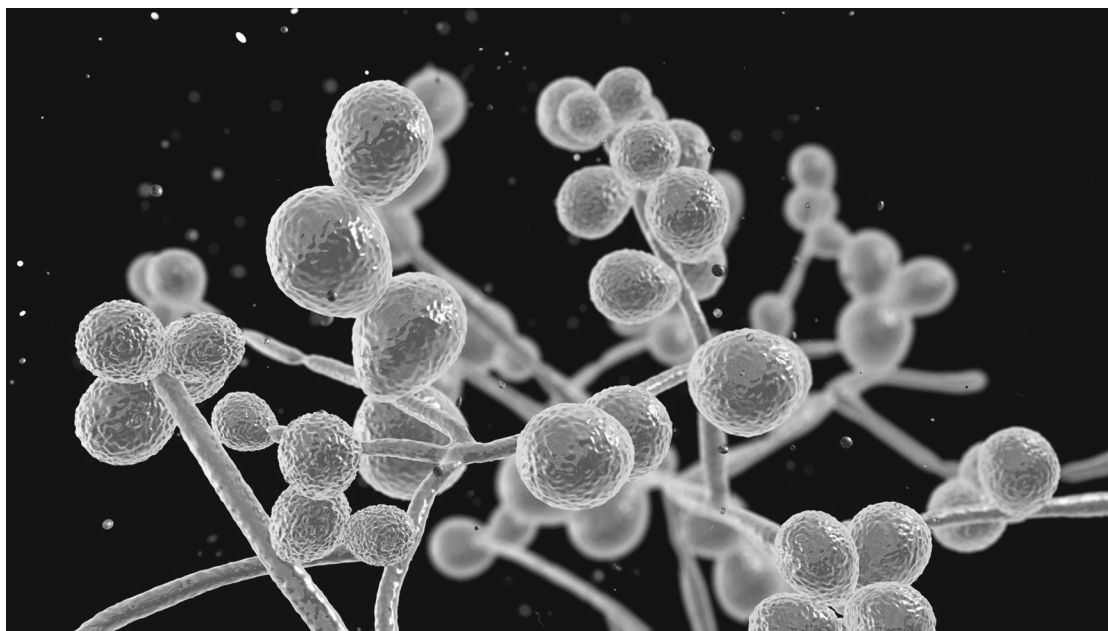


Fungi: The Final Frontier



I enjoyed Hua Hsu's piece on mycophiles – in particular, his discussion of the mycologist and mushroom evangelist Paul Stamets (Books, May 18th). I must admit that I was hoping for a mention of Stamets's twenty-third-century-sci-fi namesake, Lieutenant Commander Paul Stamets, a character on the show "Star Trek: Discovery." In the series, Stamets, played by Anthony Rapp, is a so-called Astro-mycologist who serves as the ship's "spore-drive specialist." His responsibilities include using spores from a particular species of fungus to move the ship instantaneously to any point in the universe, travelling along a subspace "mycelial plane." Real-world scientists have deemed this propulsion system non-viable, but the spirit of the concept – in a show whose purpose was to imagine foreign, even utopian futures – is in keeping with the real Stamets's advocacy for the use of fungi to improve our world. Stamets and other mycophiles seem to intuit that the ability to create such utopias might involve, as Hsu puts it, "giving oneself up to the weft of a connected world, and making peace with one's smallness."

Tracy L. Bealer
New York City

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