

# Editorial

Victor Grech

Academia is conventionally partitioned in an almost Straussian binary classification into “‘science’, arguably the last metanarrative with any significant cachet in the post-postmodern condition (which Lyotard himself defined ‘as incredulity toward metanarratives [...] a product of progress in the sciences’),<sup>1</sup> and, on the other hand, the humanities.”<sup>2</sup>

Very simply put, the Sciences investigate the natural sciences while the Humanities study human culture. Science fiction (SF) falls under the Humanities and constitutes a sub-genre of narrative fiction that speculates on changes that may be brought about by science and technology. However, SF straddles the gap in its attempts to gain credence by alluding to science for legitimacy and plausibility.

Star Trek (ST) is a popular SF narrative that commenced in 1966, and comprises well over 700 hours of viewing time. Malta will organise and host the first academic meeting worldwide dealing with ST, this summer ([www.startreksymposium.com](http://www.startreksymposium.com)). The meeting is being organised through HUMS, the Humanities, Medicine and Sciences Programme at the University of Malta. HUMS proposes to explore and encourage interfaces between the Humanities and medical science, and aims to facilitate and disseminate cross-disciplinary research.



**Cover Picture:**

'Cul de sac'

Watercolours

**By Astrid Muscat Baron**

*Astrid Muscat Baron graduated MD from the University of Malta in 1988. Her paediatric specialisation initiated in Watford General Hospital, U.K. and at the Catholic University Hospital in Leuven, Belgium and then she continued working at St. Luke's Hospital in Malta. Dr. Muscat Baron attained the DCH (Lond.) followed by an MSc in Community Child Health at Warwick University, Coventry. Dr. Muscat Baron now works as a paediatrician in private practice and in local children's residential homes. Her interest in painting as well as in music started at an early age. Since 2008, Dr. Muscat Baron has been tutored in an open Art class by Mr. George Farrugia, mainly in watercolours; she also enjoys creating pencil and charcoal drawings. Several of her works have been displayed in collective art exhibitions Hospital between 1975 and 1978.*

Since disease remains uneliminated in the fictional ST future, doctors are often involved, not only as co-participants, but also on occasion as principal protagonists. Medicine, an applied science, is greatly aided in diagnostic and treatment modalities by ever improving technology. Indeed, advances in technology are often anticipated in SF and applied to narratives. A few examples in ST include whole body scanning (CT/MRI) and computer assisted diagnoses. These doctors' accoutrements and gadgets are naturally correspondingly high tech, as befits the ST storyline that ventures into the 24<sup>th</sup> century.

The topics in this conference are varied and a preponderance of medical input is notable in the abstracts submitted to date ([http://www.startreksymposium.com/index\\_htm\\_files/abstracts.pdf](http://www.startreksymposium.com/index_htm_files/abstracts.pdf)). These include an exploration of the ethics of reproduction, the Hippocratic oath as a possible origin of the Prime Directive of non-interference in less developed cultures, cell culturing techniques and bioinformatics approaches, cardiopulmonary resuscitation, nursing, and the “tricorder” as a diagnostic tool.

The Star Trek Symposium should prove an interesting meeting not only for individuals with an interest in ST, but also for those with a general interest in the Humanities.

**References**

1. Grech V. Infertility in Science Fiction [dissertation]. University of Malta; 2011.
2. Lyotard JF. The Post-Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis; 1984.