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STAR TREK™

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U.S.S. EXCELSIOR
NILO RODIS CONCEPT II

CLASS: EXCELSIOR

CONCEPT: 1983

DESIGNED BY: NILO RODIS

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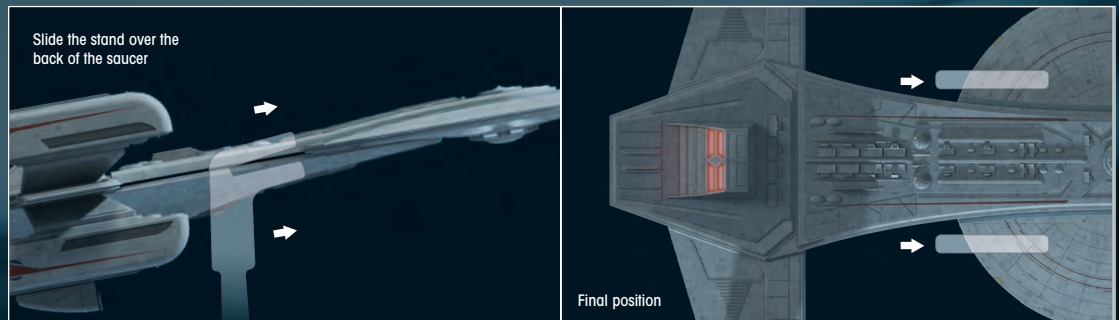
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U.S.S. EXCELSIOR

NILO RODIS CONCEPT II



CLASS:

EXCELSIOR (PROTOTYPE)

DESIGNED BY:

NILO RODIS

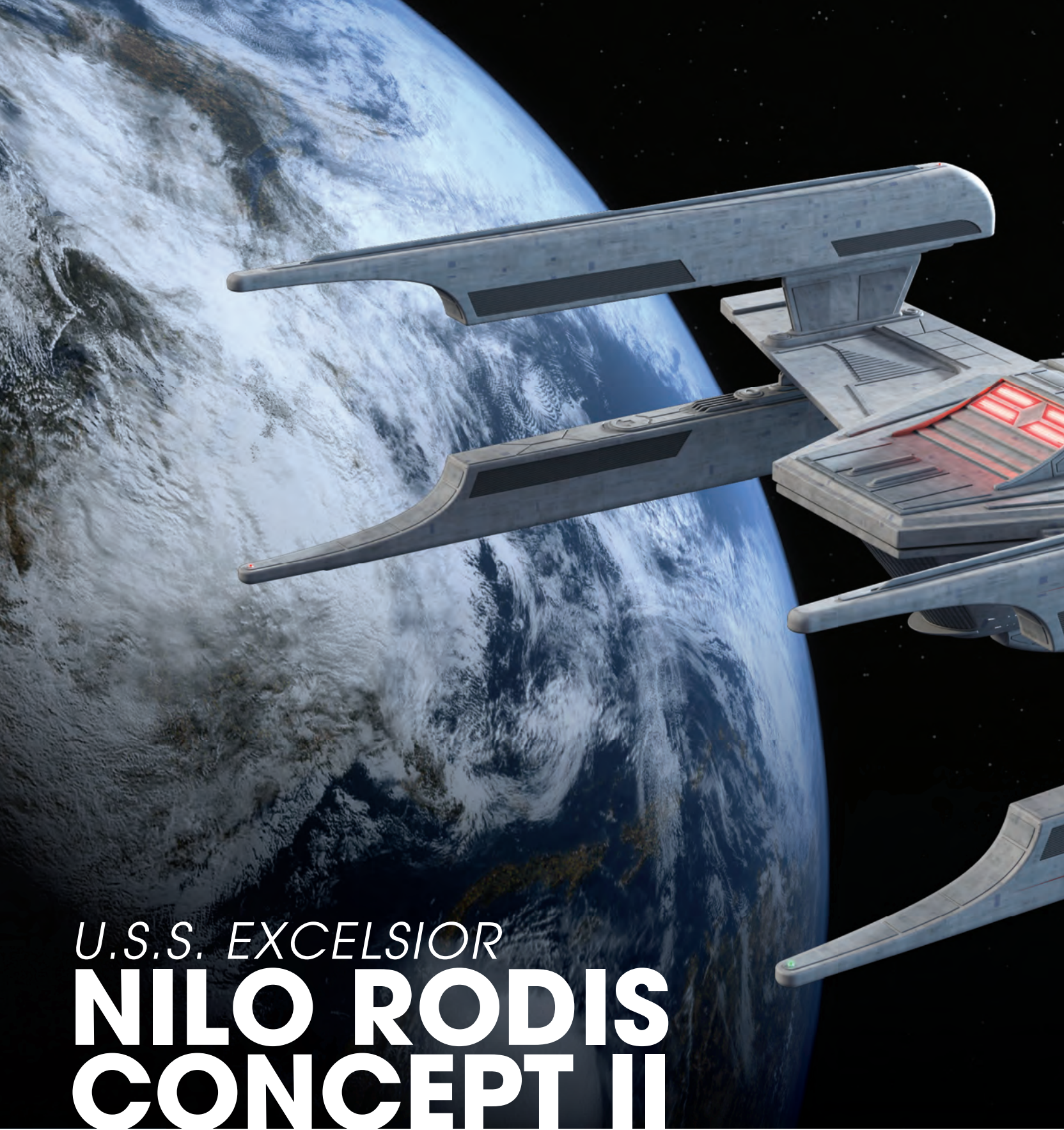
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ST III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

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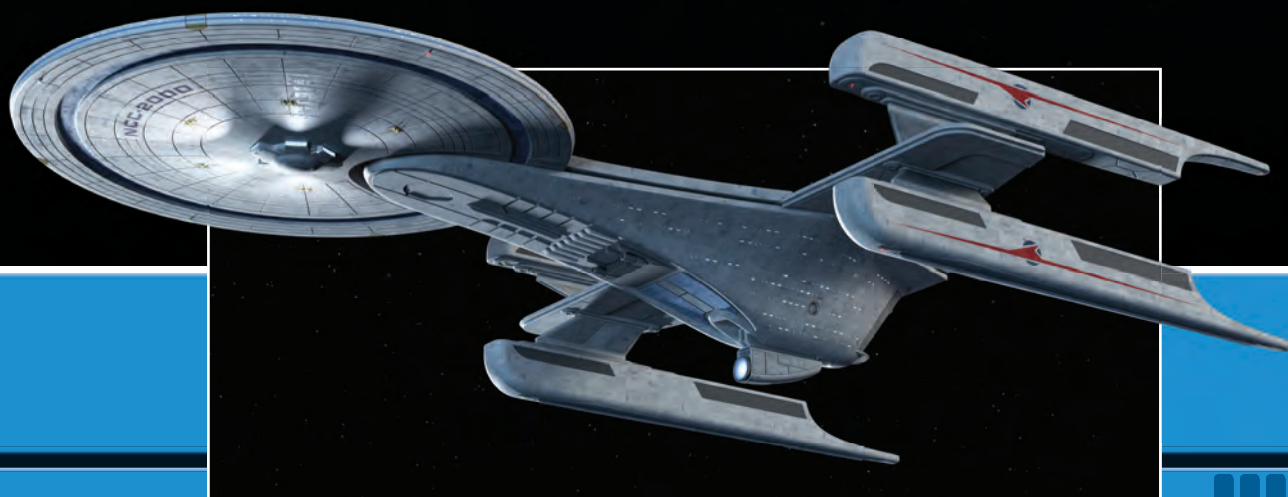
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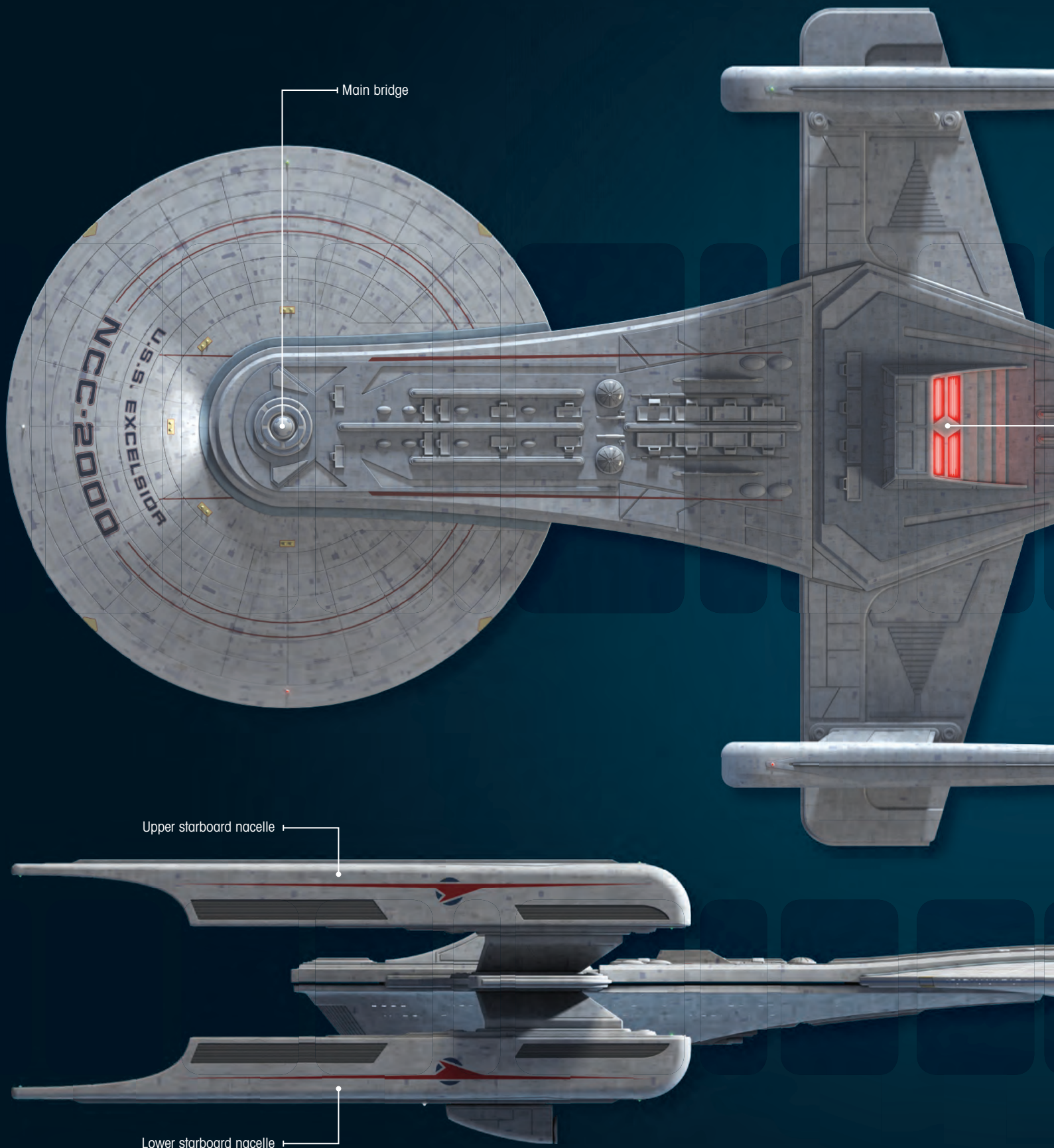




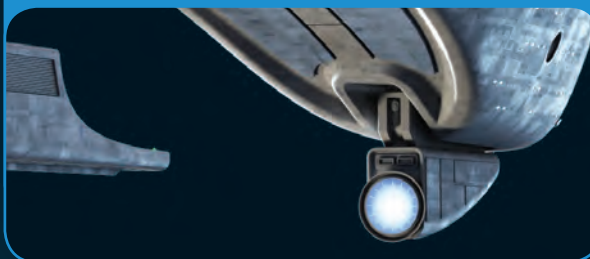
U.S.S. EXCELSIOR
NILO RODIS
CONCEPT II

Nilo Rodis' second unused *U.S.S. Excelsior* concept for *STAR TREK III* continued a quad warp-nacelle theme.

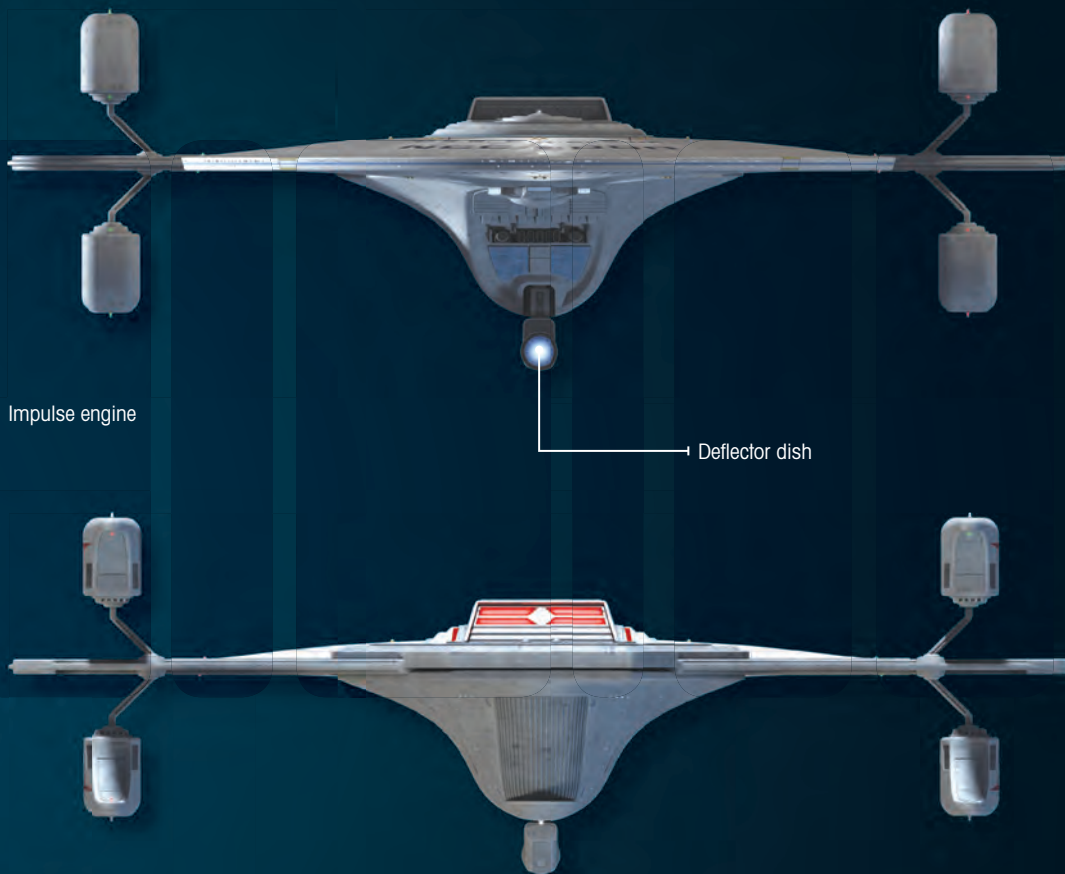




DEFLECTOR DISH



Upper starboard nacelle



Impulse engine

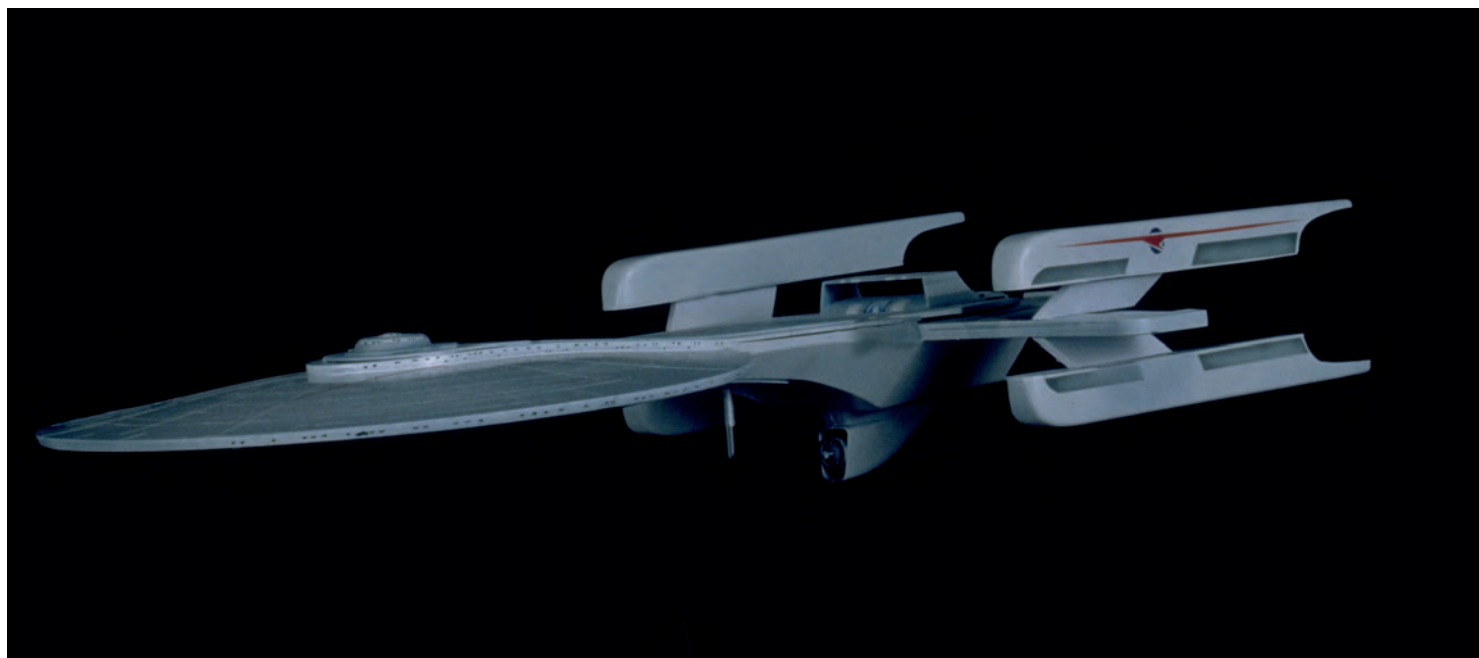
Deflector dish

Upper port nacelle



IMPULSE ENGINE





DESIGNING THE

III

EXCELSIOR: CONCEPT II

The ILM art department produced several designs for the *U.S.S. Excelsior*, one of which featured a round saucer and four nacelles.

When the *U.S.S. Excelsior* made its first appearance in *STAR TREK III* the idea was that it was a more advanced and powerful version of Kirk's *Enterprise*. The model was designed and built at ILM. VFX art director Nilo Rodis produced half a dozen or so sketches and then Bill George built concept models of each of them for director Leonard Nimoy to choose from.

Rodis' designs were all intended to show advances in technology, but still be instantly recognizable as Starfleet ships. "The most important thing was that the ships were part of a family," Rodis says. One of the designs he came up with kept the same basic shape as

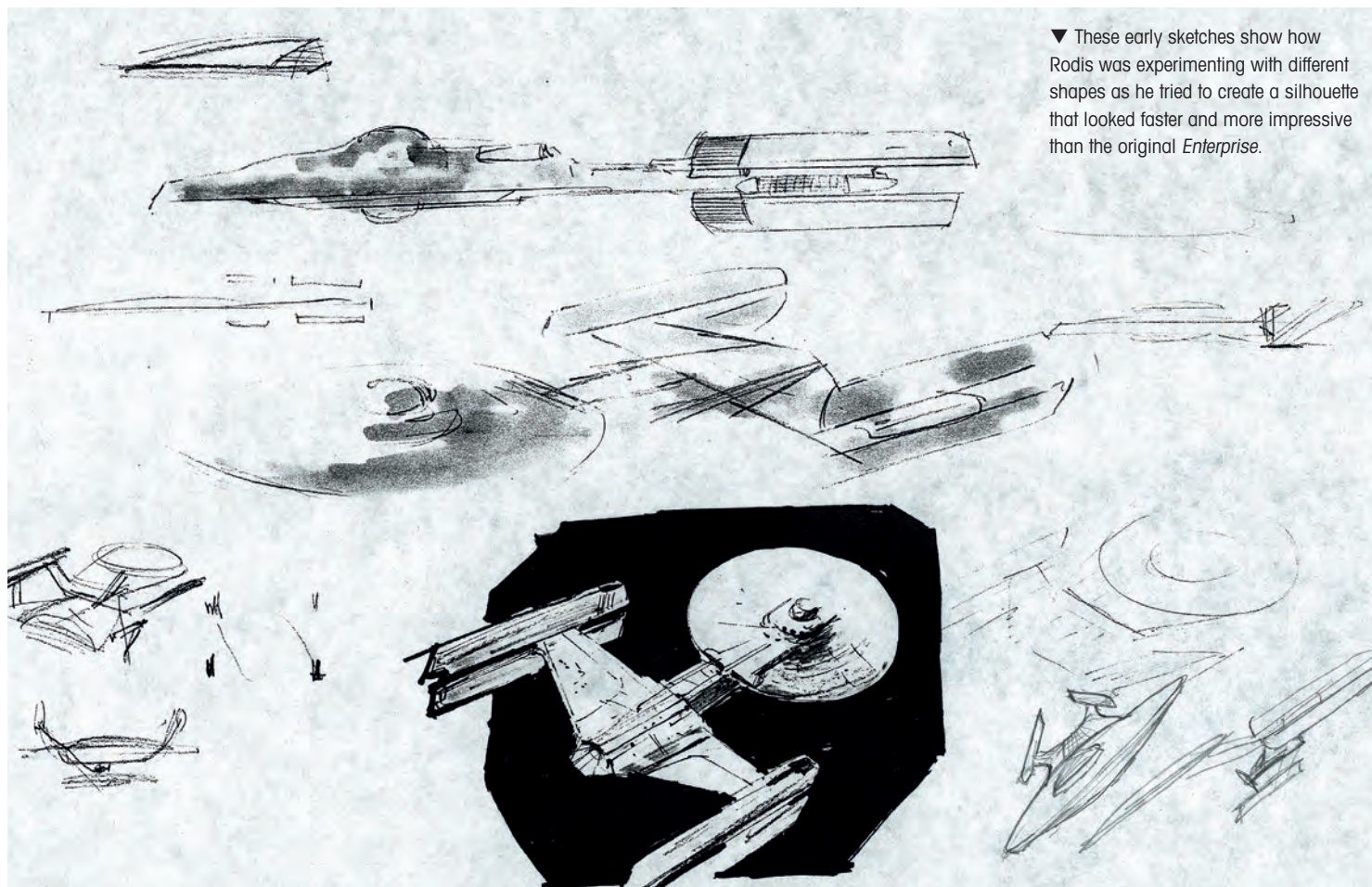
the *Enterprise* with a conventional round saucer, but as in several of the other concepts, he gave it four nacelles, implying that it was more powerful. "I looked at it from the point of view that the *Excelsior* had to be more massive and brilliant," Rodis continues. "I wanted it to age the *Enterprise* when you saw it."

When Bill George started work on the study models he remembers that he concentrated on stretching the proportions. "The interesting thing about that," George recalls, "is it was supposed to look super-fast, so when they pull up in the battered *Enterprise*, they look at it and go 'Wow, look at that. That's the future.' The art

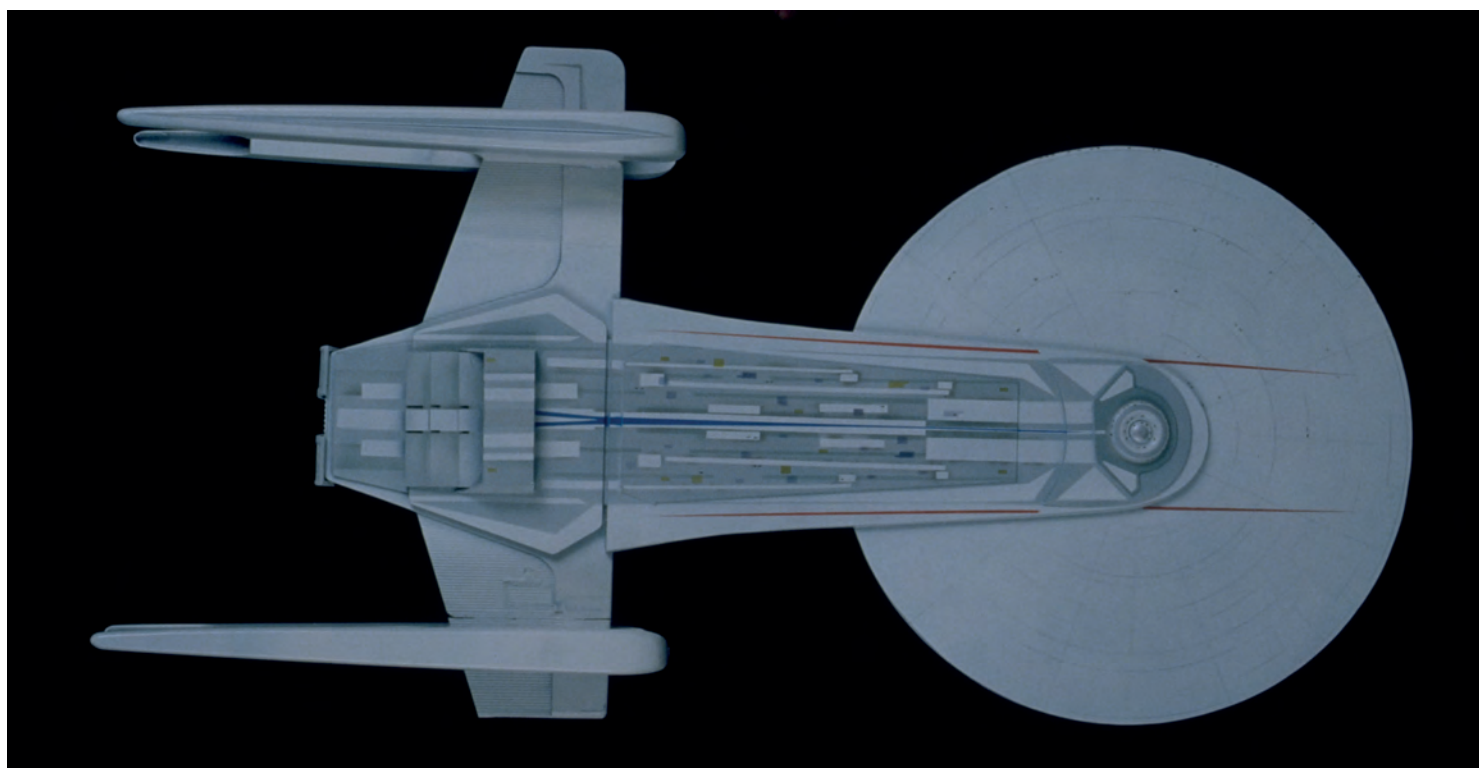
department had done a number of sketches, all of them were very different, very futuristic. It still had the basic theme of the dish and the engines, but they did not look like the *Enterprise* at all."

George's study model followed the art department sketches closely. The nacelle support pylons became triangular and flat, and were perpendicular to the engineering hull, which was barely wider than the nacelles themselves.

This study model wasn't chosen, but it would eventually appear on screen when then *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* VFX team used it as a background ship in the episode 'Unification.'



▼ These early sketches show how Rodis was experimenting with different shapes as he tried to create a silhouette that looked faster and more impressive than the original *Enterprise*.



▲ Bill George built several different study models of the *Excelsior* based on the drawings that art directors Nilo Rodis and David Carson provided him with. This version has a conventional round saucer section, a slim downed engineering hull, and four nacelles. It was not intended to appear on screen but would eventually be used as a background model in the *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* episode 'Unification'.



NILO RODIS-JAMERO

Designer Nilo Rodis-Jamero added four *STAR TREK* movies to a packed resumé that includes some of the biggest film productions of all time.

▲ Nilo Rodis-Jamero stands behind director Leonard Nimoy during a pre-production meeting for *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*.

Across four movies, designer Nilo Rodis-Jamero made an enormous contribution to the visual style of the *STAR TREK* universe, contributing iconic concept designs that have endured beyond the movies they were created for. Following work on *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK* as visual effects art director for Industrial Light & Magic

(ILM), Rodis-Jamero served in various design roles on *STAR TREK IV*, *STAR TREK V* and *STAR TREK VI*. In a wide-ranging resumé as part of the ILM team, and later as a freelance designer, he has worked on many other big-screen productions.

Born in Cebu in the Philippines, Rodis-Jamero moved to the United States with his mother and

stepfather, where he attended San Jose State University to study industrial design. Following graduation, he spent time at General Motors designing cars, but after realising that “gasoline was not in my blood”, he became a tank designer for the military. Shortly after, Rodis-Jamero was approached by Joe Johnston of ILM after being given a lead on a new talent from his former college, which led to an interview with ‘Star Wars’ writer and director George Lucas. By his own admission, Rodis-Jamero failed three questions: “Do you like science-fiction books? Do you like science-fiction movies? Do you like movies?” and was hired by Lucas to work at ILM.

ILM, GOLDEN COSTUMES AND STAR TREK

While at ILM, Rodis-Jamero worked as assistant visual effects art director on ‘Star Wars’ sequel ‘The Empire Strikes Back’ and ‘Raiders of the Lost Ark’, effects art director for ‘Poltergeist’, and as costume designer on ‘Return of the Jedi’, for which he described creating Princess Leia’s famous gold bikini as the most “fun” costume he ever designed.

In 1983, ILM was engaged to provide effects work for director Leonard Nimoy’s *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*, giving Rodis-Jamero his first experience of starships and Klingons, having never seen a second of *STAR TREK*. In addition to early, unused concepts for the *U.S.S. Excelsior*, Rodis-Jamero devised the concept for the Klingon bird-of-prey, one of the great icons of *STAR TREK* ships.

LEAVING ILM

Rodis-Jamero returned as assistant art director for *STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME*. By the time *STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER* entered production, the designer was working as an independent freelancer. “At the end of the day,” Rodis-Jamero has said in interview, “you would be designing maybe 150 visual effects shots. But what’s important was what it was contributing to the story. What I remember more than anything was Leonard (Nimoy’s) generosity. He put the onus on me to tell him what everything looked like, and he really influenced my decision to leave ILM. I realized

that it was not enough for me to just design 150 shots; it was more important for me to design the entire movie.”

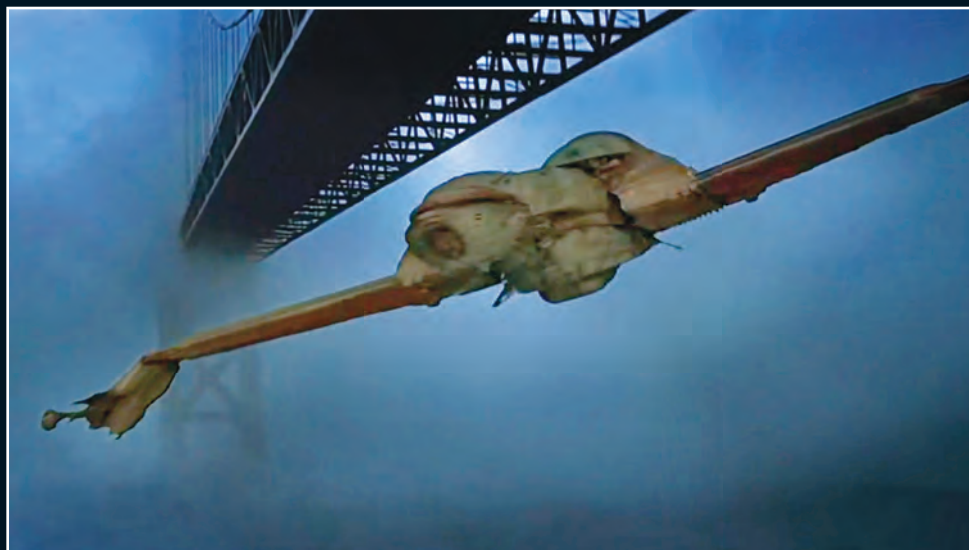
BEYOND STAR TREK

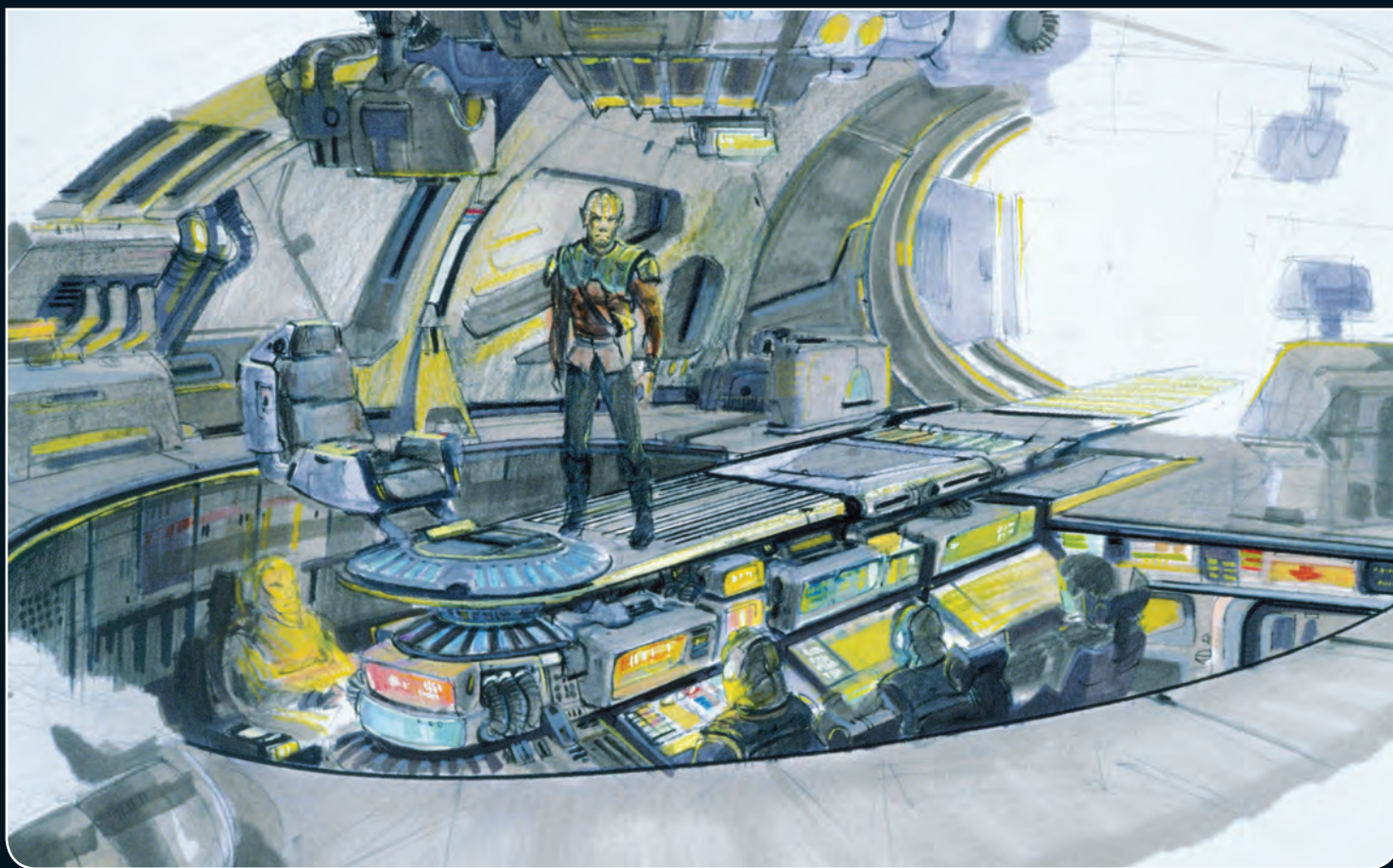
On *STAR TREK V*, Rodis-Jamero served as both art director and additional costume designer after director William Shatner had been impressed with his early concept designs. His final *STAR TREK* credit was as art director for *STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY*.

Rodis-Jamero continued to work in various design capacities across the motion picture industry, being production designer on ‘Johnny Mnemonic’ and ‘Virtuosity’ in 1995, and providing the striking visuals as art director for Tim Burton’s ‘Alice in Wonderland’ in 2010. In 1995, Rodis-Jamero created another screen icon when he concept-designed Buzz Lightyear for 1995’s ‘Toy Story’.

Having worked on some of the biggest science-fiction movies in the world and enriching the *STAR TREK* universe with his distinctive and striking style, Rodis-Jamero once summed up his deceptively simple approach: “I take all my designs to their simplest form, because audiences remember things better that way. You have to keep boiling it down, boiling it down, boiling it down. When you can’t boil it down any more that is the design. As a viewer, if you can’t remember it, what do you care? As a designer, what you really need to ask yourself is: ‘How simple can this be,’ so that when people go home they can draw it.”

▼ In addition to early designs for the *Excelsior*, the Klingon bird-of-prey stands as Rodis-Jamero’s most recognisable concept created for the *STAR TREK* universe.





DESIGN HIGHLIGHTS

NILO RODIS-JAMERO

Nilo Rodis-Jamero's visually distinctive *STAR TREK* work covered concepts for iconic spaceships, planets, props and costumes.

▲ Nilo Rodis-Jamero's concept art for the flight deck of the Klingon bird-of-prey in *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*. He was influenced by Art Deco design in his approach to the bird-of-prey.

From starships to spacedocks, whale probes to Klingon warships, Nilo Rodis-Jamero contributed designs and concepts that enriched the visual look of the *STAR TREK* universe, alongside his many colleagues at ILM and other movie production personnel. Here we present an overview of Rodis-Jamero's work on *STAR TREK*. Few examples of his sketch work have survived the intervening period since the films were produced, and some of these concepts are presented as images from the finished movies.

THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

Of all his contributions to the *STAR TREK* universe, the Klingon bird-of-prey stands as Rodis-Jamero's most-enduring concept 35 years after *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*. A collaboration between Rodis-Jamero, fellow art director David Carson and model maker Bill George, the bird-of-prey took a fresh approach to *STAR TREK* ship design, while remaining consistent with the aesthetics established by the designers who came before.

Although the original *STAR TREK* had featured



a Romulan bird-of-prey, the ILM designers took the long-necked, dual-wing configuration of classic Klingon cruisers as a starting point, with guidance from director Leonard Nimoy to echo the image of an attacking bird as inspiration. Taking the lead on the bird-of-prey concept, Rodis-Jamero said: "The only way I could go about it was to listen to the dramatic intent of the director. I never worried about the history of the design. Once I knew what the director wanted to get out of it, I could design around that. I might propose things that were slightly off, but they got the dramatic idea across. Then all we really had to do was to clothe those ideas in the look of the *STAR TREK* world."

Other considerations taken into account by Rodis-Jamero were the look of the Klingons themselves and a leaning towards metal and leather. This inspired the designer to make the bird-of-prey a more detailed ship with a Gothic, Art Deco sensibility, a direct contrast to the cleaner lines of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*. It was also heavily armed, with weapons on both wings and the nose; when the ship's cloaking device was deactivated, Rodis-Jamero felt the guns should become visible first.

Bill George took Rodis-Jamero's concepts and translated them into a detailed physical model, interpreting the feel of what his fellow designer had sketched out into a striking

new ship. Inspired by his love for *THE ORIGINAL SERIES*, George added the feather pattern on the underside of the bird-of-prey's wings, taking his cue from *THE ORIGINAL SERIES'* Romulan counterpart.

Since its debut in *THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*, the Klingon bird-of-prey went on to appear in a

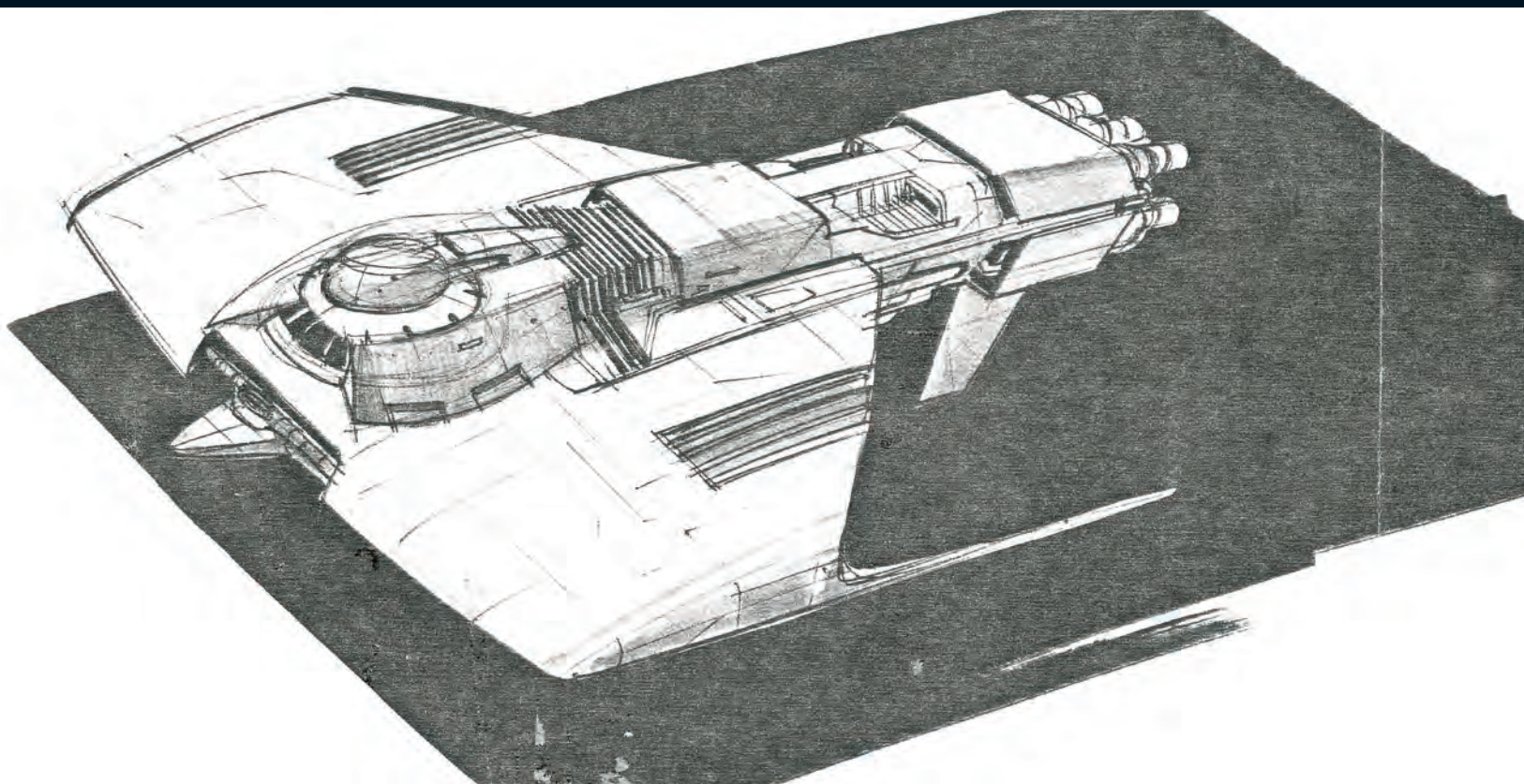
▲ The bird-of-prey makes its first appearance in *STAR TREK III*, attacking the *Merchantman*. Rodis-Jamero worked on the design for both ships.



▲ The Bird-of-Prey lands at the foot of Mt. Seleya on Vulcan in *STAR TREK III*. The ship was designed as a direct contrast to the *Enterprise*, envisioned as a more muscular, detailed vessel.



▲ Starfleet's Spacedock was envisioned as an orbital facility on a vast scale, the initial design worked on by ILM's David Carson before it was passed to Rodis-Jamero for development.



▲ Rodis-Jamero's original concept sketch of *STAR TREK III'S Merchantman*, a "beat up tin boat".

total of five *STAR TREK* movies and 45 TV episodes, becoming one of *STAR TREK*'s most popular ships of all time.

SPACEDOCKS AND FREIGHTERS

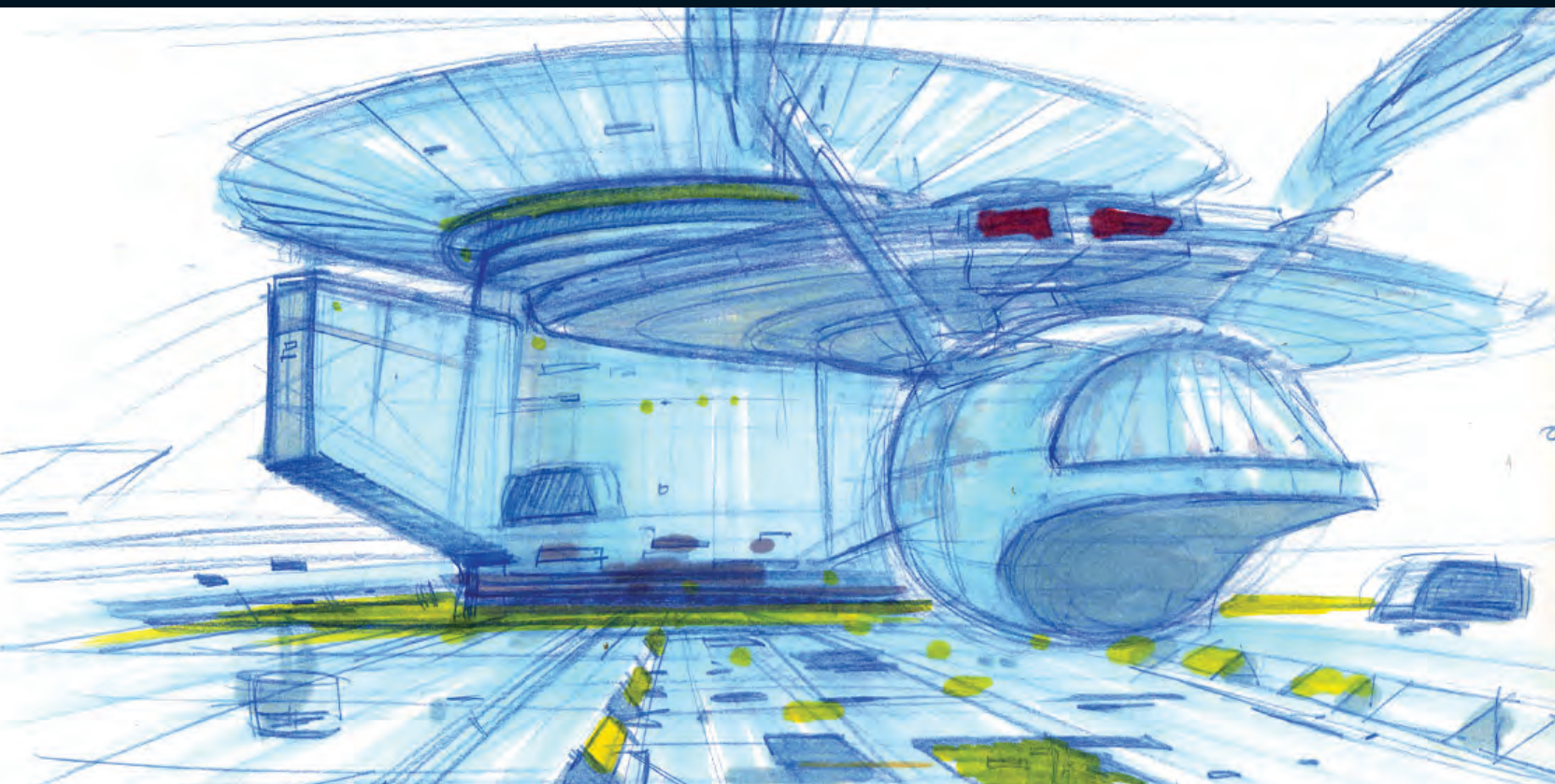
THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK called for a new orbital facility for the *Enterprise*'s return to Earth, to be realised on a scale never seen in the franchise. ILM art director David Carson took the lead on the concept for Spacedock, envisioning a structure so vast that the *Enterprise* would fly inside it. With this scale in mind, Carson produced concept sketches that were then passed to Rodis-Jamero. "Nilo took it and – in his typical fashion – turned it into a really wonderful design," Carson recalled. "So we presented this idea, and that led to (producer) Harve Bennett coming up with the idea of them trying to back the *Enterprise* out through the doors at the very last minute."

Working from Carson's designs, Rodis-Jamero considered the scale from the perspective of Spacedock's interior. "What I remember laboring over was the beams of light that spatially defined the interior," he said. "As

there was no architectural detail, you needed an element that defined how big it was. The only way to do that was with beams of light – to give you distance and some kind of perspective." From the concept designs, ILM's Bill George produced a series of study models, from which director Leonard Nimoy selected the final design.

The *U.S.S. Grissom* – an *Oberth*-class starship – formed a contrast to the other Starfleet ships seen in the movie. Rodis-Jamero outlined his approach to the *Grissom* in a previous interview, explaining: "It was fodder for the Klingons. I wanted you to see it, but I didn't want you to remember it because we were going to blow it apart anyway. With the *Grissom*, my design impetus was to make sure that even though it looked like another ship in the same family, it didn't steal the *Enterprise*'s thunder."

Outside the clean lines of Starfleet, the movie required a contrasting ship early in the story. The *Merchantman* freighter was conceived as a small, grubby ship. Rodis-Jamero sketched out concepts, taking a similar approach as he had with the *Grissom* so as not to divert attention from the *Enterprise*.



"The *Merchantman* was a derelict, used up, beat up, tin boat that was going to be destroyed by the German U-Boat," the designer outlined. "I didn't want it to be fancy. I wanted it to be lumpy so that when the bird-of-prey hovered over it, you just felt sorry for these guys. They didn't have a good-looking ship, and they were about to be blown up."

Rodis-Jamero's work on *THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK* was not restricted to starships. The ILM team were involved at such an early stage, they were able to visualise elements as the

story took shape. As a result, ILM's work fed into the final script. One such example was the deterioration of the surface of Genesis, as Rodis-Jamero explained: "I'd done a sketch of this that shows you paradise all the way to hell. I remember building a miniature of that set and flying it down to LA. I pitched it to Harve (Bennett) and Leonard (Nimoy), saying the best way to show snow is in the desert because when you have images that don't belong together visually, that tells you that something is drastically wrong. I remember I actually had

▲ An early Rodis-Jamero concept sketch for the interior of Spacedock, with the *Enterprise* shown against the vast scale of the interior space.



◀ The Spacedock interior as it appeared in the final movie, with the *Enterprise* making its escape.



▲ Rodis-Jamero saw the concept of Genesis in *STAR TREK III* as a paradise planet slowly deteriorating to hell.

powdered dust with me. I dropped this powder on the model and said, 'See, it works!'"

THE VOYAGE HOME

Unlike *THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*, *STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME* was light on new starships and alien worlds due to its largely contemporary 1980s Earth setting. Rodis-Jamero once again served as visual effects art director for ILM. Among the sequences he storyboarded were the approach of the whale probe towards Earth and Spacedock, the *HMS Bounty* bird-of-prey's slingshot around the sun, and the dramatic splashdown beneath the Golden Gate Bridge.

Rodis-Jamero worked on concepts for one of *THE VOYAGE HOME*'s central elements – the whale probe. He took a typically simple approach to the concept. The film's script described the probe as 'a simple cylinder,

non-threatening but huge in size with odd, eye-like antennae.' Collaborating on ideas with the Film-Makers' Cooperative, the designer came up with a cylindrical concept, evoking a whale-like image. The concept was translated into reality by the ILM modelmakers, including Jeff Mann, giving the probe a huge scale in the final execution of the model.

Rodis-Jamero was also instrumental in solving the problem of the film's requirements for two hump-backed whales to be free-swimming, full bodied miniatures that could be filmed from any angle. The art director felt the skills of robotics expert Walt Conti and his background in engineering would be key in driving this element forward.

THE FINAL FRONTIER

By 1988, Rodis-Jamero had left ILM to become a freelancer. Keeping continuity with *THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK* and *THE VOYAGE HOME*, the designer was once again hired as art director for *STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER* under director and star William Shatner.

Rodis-Jamero found working with Shatner to be a fruitful collaboration, responding to the director's desire for a harder-edged look. Shatner was impressed with Rodis-Jamero's dramatic concept designs. This led to the director's suggestion that his art director took responsibility for costume design, working alongside costume supervisor Dodie Shepard.

▼ *STAR TREK IV*'s Whale Probe. Rodis-Jamero's simple concept for this alien vessel echoed the image of a whale.





◀ Paradise City in *STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER* was a prime example of William Shatner's desire to see a harder, grimmer take on the *STAR TREK* universe. Rodis-Jamero responded to this in the visual concepts he produced for his director.

Rodis-Jamero worked directly on Klingon uniform requirements for *THE FINAL FRONTIER*. He worked up concept sketches for Klingon first officer Vixis, developing the sleeveless leather tunic look worn by both Vixis and Klaa. For Sybok's Vulcan robes, he maintained continuity with previous Vulcan design, adopting triangle-patterns as part of the fabric.

Shatner had wanted to redesign the Starfleet uniforms, but budget constraints prevented this. However, the grittier feel was seen in the field uniforms worn by the *Enterprise* strike force on Nimbus III. Rodis-Jamero leant towards a military look, with harder-wearing army jumpers with shoulder pads and Starfleet insignia belt.

The ironically named Paradise City also sprung from concept discussions, with the art director producing further concepts for buildings. The storyboards allowed the location team to scout suitable locations for an exterior city outpost set, one of the biggest exteriors ever constructed for *STAR TREK*.

THE FINAL FRONTIER was dogged by continuing budget constraints, and this curtailed the ambitious climax, in which rock men emerged from molten lava. Rodis-Jamero worked on concept art for the sequence, but it was estimated the sequence would require \$4 million to shoot, with each rock costume costing over \$300,000. Only one rock creature costume was made, and the ambitious sequence was abandoned.



◀ *STAR TREK VI* was Rodis-Jamero's final *STAR TREK* work. Among the concepts he devised for the movie were the gavel used by the Klingon judge.

◀ The gavel prop was made by Gregory Jein from Rodis-Jamero's concept. The script described it as 'a grotesque mailed glove'.

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

Rodis-Jamero's final *STAR TREK* work was *STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY*, where he once again served as art director under returning director Nicholas Meyer.

Few examples of Rodis-Jamero's work on the movie appear to have survived, but among these were designs for the Starfleet helmets worn by the assassins that beamed across to *Kronos One*. One distinctive prop devised by Rodis-Jamero was the Klingon judge's gavel. This design was echoed later in 'Judgment', a second season episode of *ENTERPRISE*.

ON SCREEN



TRIVIA

The collection of wrecked starships present at Surplus Depot Z15 in 'Unification I' includes the burnt out hulk of an unnamed *Nebula*-class starship. The footage of this ship first appeared in 'The Best of Both Worlds, Part II' as part of the aftermath of Starfleet's last stand against the Borg at Wolf 359. The battle-damaged ship was a 'kit-bashed' model made by Ed Miarecki and is identified as the *Nebula*-class prototype *U.S.S. Melbourne* NCC-62043. It was one of several ship models constructed by Miarecki to appear in both the Battle of Wolf 359 and among ships at Surplus Depot Z15, including the *Challenger*-class *U.S.S. Buran*. (Picture: Rick Sternbach)



Actor Graham Jarvis played Klim Dokachin in 'Unification I', the Zaldorn quartermaster of Surplus Depot Z15. Jarvis filmed his scenes for the episode on Friday 20 September 1991. The actor, who passed away in 2003, was a regular face on US TV screens, including the recurring role of Charles Jackson in drama series '7th Heaven', alongside *STAR TREK IV's* Catherine Hicks.



FIRST APPEARANCE:	'UNIFICATION I' (TNG)
TV APPEARANCES:	STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION
DESIGNED BY:	NILO RODIS-JAMERO

KEY APPEARANCES

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION 'Unification I'

As with Nilo Rodis' first early concept for the *U.S.S. Excelsior*, the second four-nacelled variant would eventually make it to screen in *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION*. The model constructed by the team at Industrial Light & Magic would have to wait over seven years for its only *STAR TREK* appearance in 'Unification I' as part of the *U.S.S. Enterprise's* visit to Surplus Depot Z15.

While Captain Picard and Lt. Commander Data travel to Romulus in search of Ambassador Spock, Commander Riker and the *Enterprise*

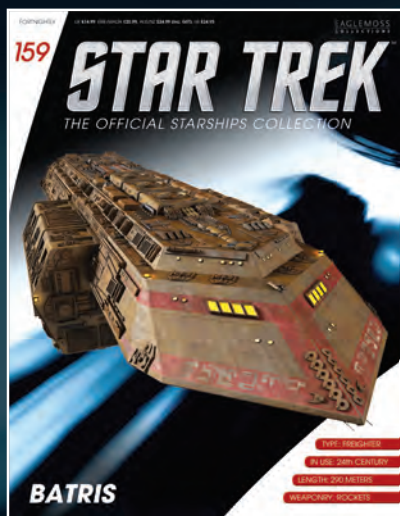
crew follow a trail left by debris from a Vulcan ship to Surplus Depot Z15.

This Federation facility located in the vicinity of Qualor II is a dumping ground for obsolete and damaged ships. Among the ships that ended up there are two separate Starfleet vessels displaying the quad-nacelle arrangement as seen in the Nilo Rodis *Excelsior* concepts. Also among the wrecks are an abandoned Klingon *K't'inga* class cruiser and two unidentified *Miranda*-class starships.

While at Surplus Depot Z15, the *Enterprise* engages a heavily armed smuggler vessel that has links to a Romulan plot to invade Vulcan.

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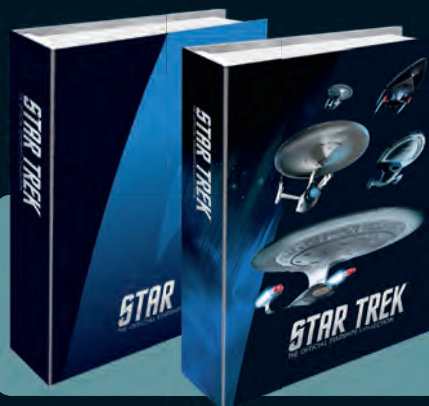
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