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STAR TREK™

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U.S.S. EXCELSIOR
NILO RODIS CONCEPT III

CLASS: EXCELSIOR

CONCEPT: 1983

DESIGNED BY: NILO RODIS

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U.S.S. EXCELSIOR

NILO RODIS CONCEPT III



CLASS:

EXCELSIOR (PROTOTYPE)

DESIGNED BY:

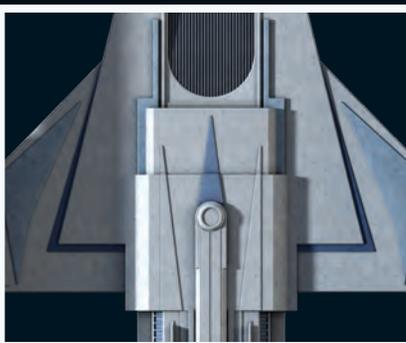
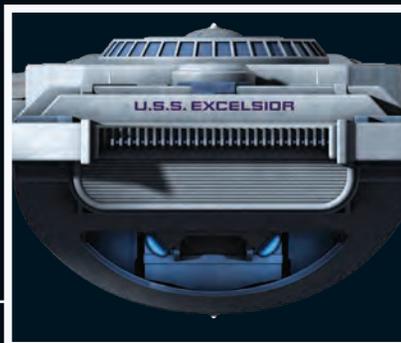
NILO RODIS-JAMERO

FILM:

STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

DESIGNED:

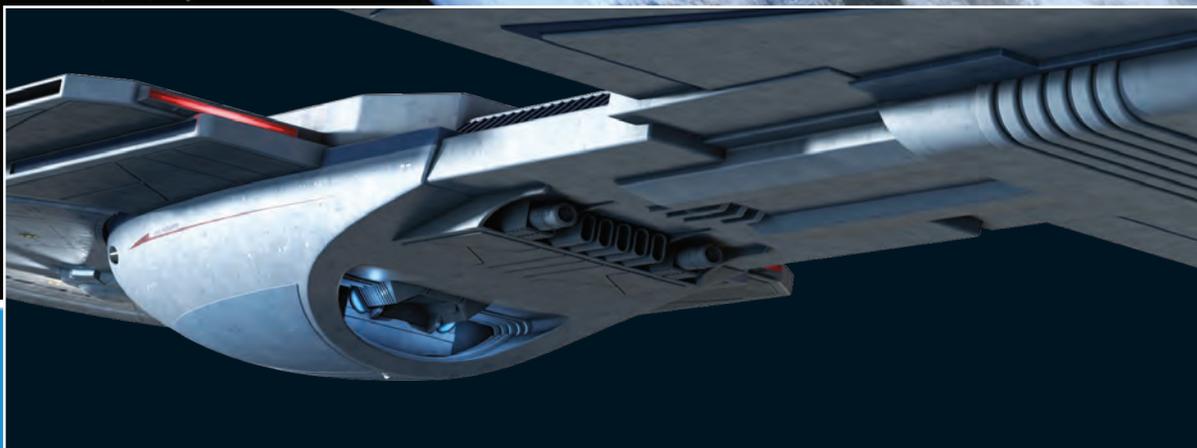
1983

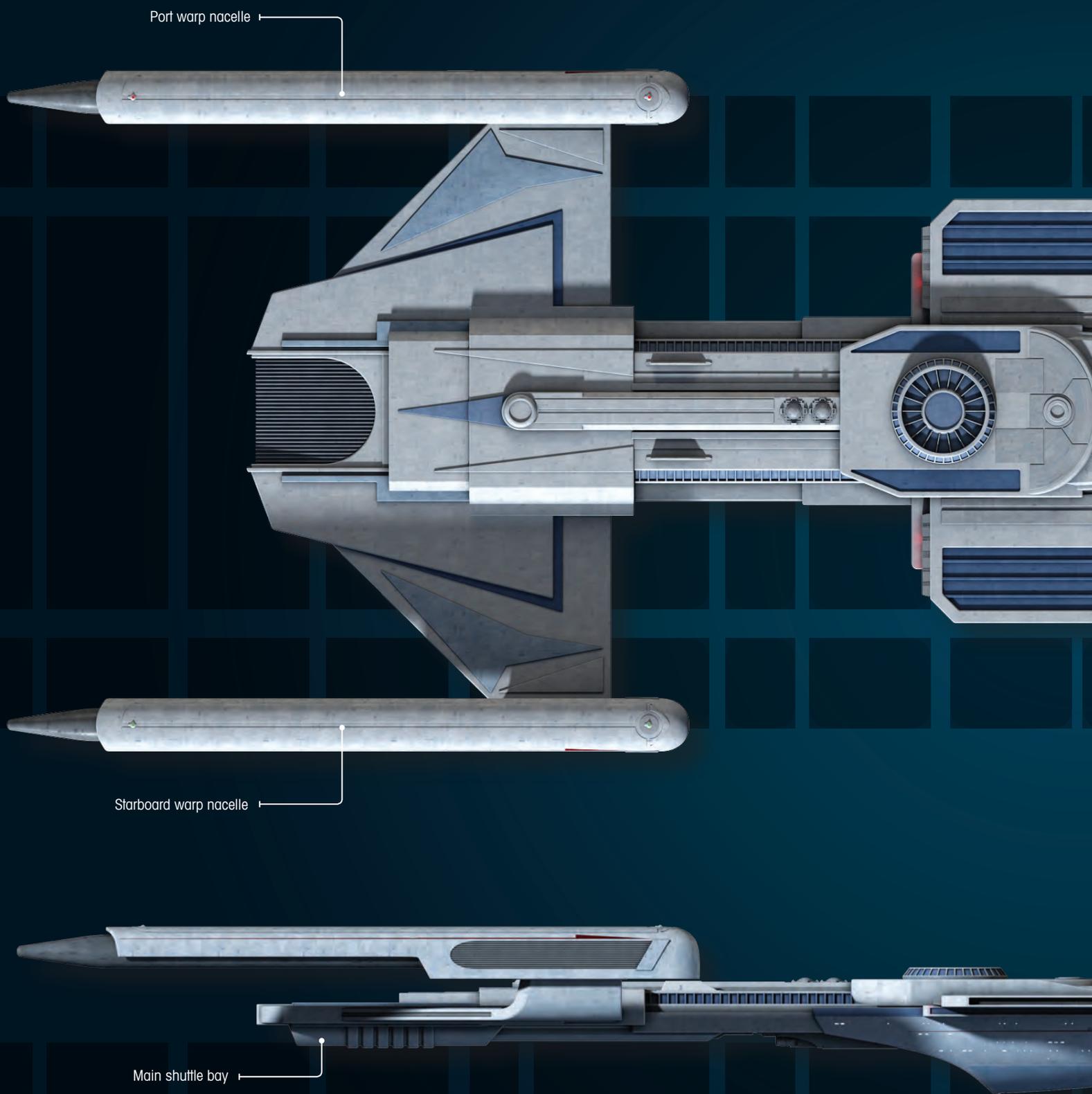




U.S.S. EXCELSIOR
NILO RODIS
CONCEPT III

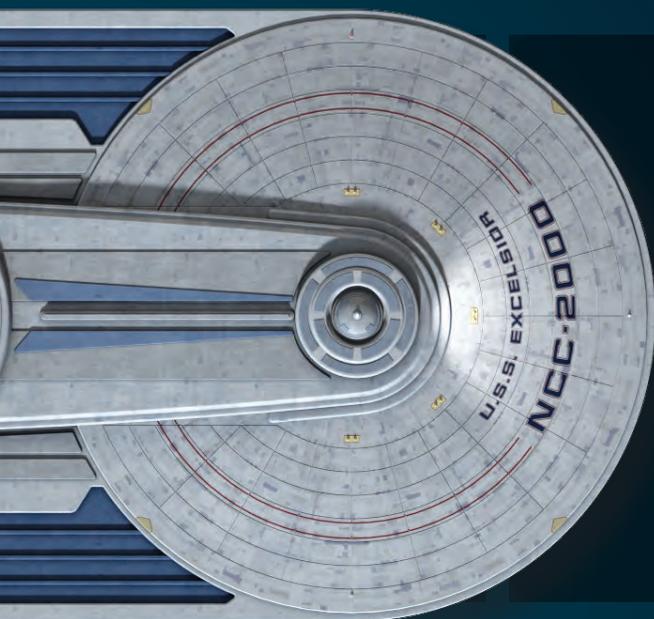
Nilo Rodis' third *U.S.S. Excelsior* concept for *STAR TREK III* adopted the traditional twin warp-nacelle configuration.





Port impulse engine

Starboard impulse engine

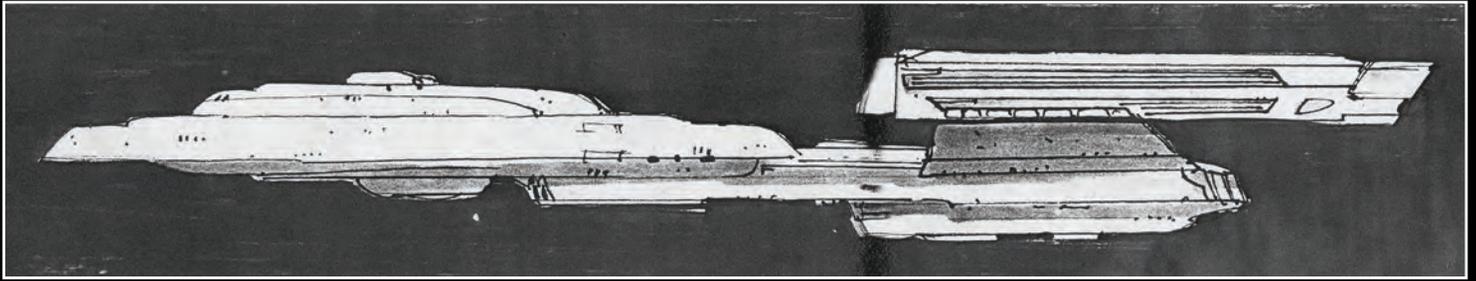


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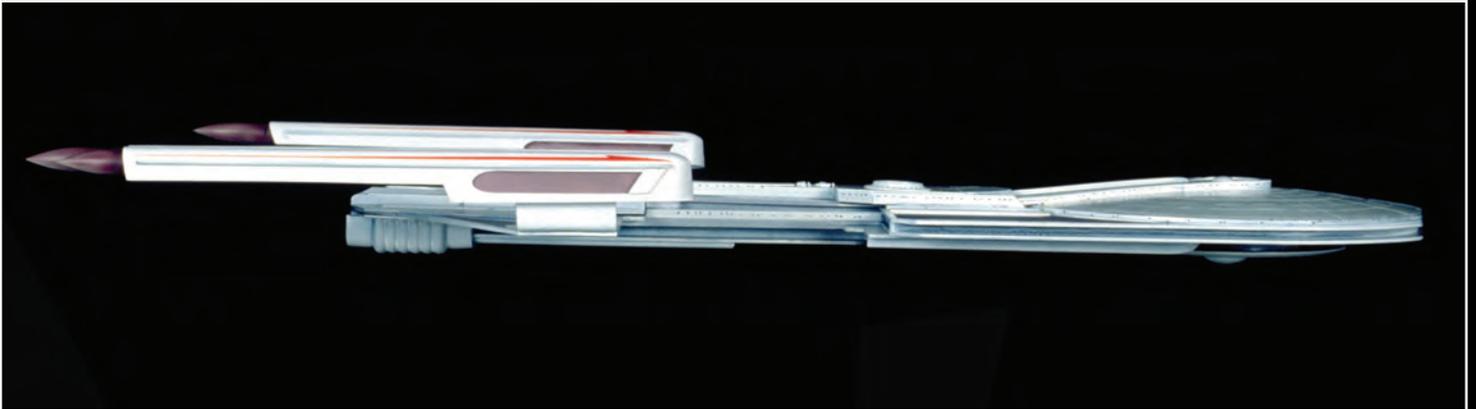


Main bridge





▲ An early concept sketch of the *U.S.S. Excelsior* by ILM visual art director Nilo Rodis-Jamero, adopting a thin, elongated configuration with two warp nacelles.



▲ Study model of Rodis-Jamero's *Excelsior* concept, built by modelmaker Bill George of ILM. This was one of several study models constructed for *STAR TREK III*.

DESIGNING THE EXCELSIOR CONCEPT III

Nilo Rodis-Jamero worked on several design concepts for *STAR TREK III*'s *U.S.S. Excelsior*, producing an elongated variant to contrast with the *Enterprise*.

The long lead time for story development and pre-production on *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK* allowed the design team at Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) time to work on several concepts for the *U.S.S. Excelsior*, the next generation of starship.

ILM visual art directors Nilo Rodis-Jamero and David Carson worked to produce and refine several different options for director Leonard Nimoy to choose a final design. Rodis-Jamero was keen to embrace the next stage of starship design. "I wanted it to age the *Enterprise* when you saw it," he said.

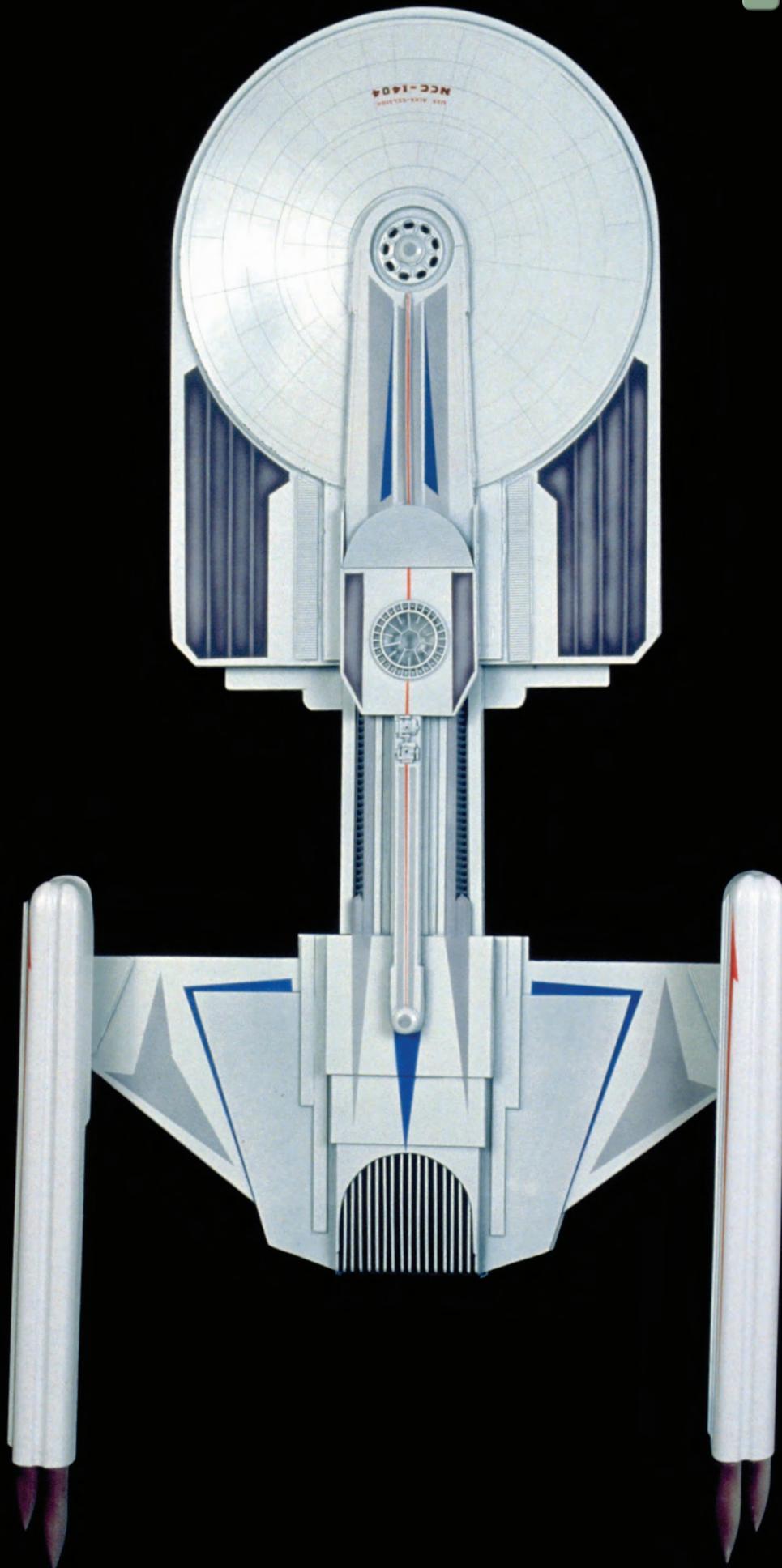
Rodis-Jamero experimented with two and four-nacelled variants, producing design sketches to be built into three-dimensional study models. "All of them were very different and very futuristic," recalled ILM model maker Bill George. "They still had the basic theme of the dish and the engines, but they did not look like the *Enterprise* at all,".

One of Rodis-Jamero's two-nacelled concepts was an elongated starship with a very thin profile, directly contrasting with the familiar configuration of the *Enterprise*. However, the Starfleet design lineage made it

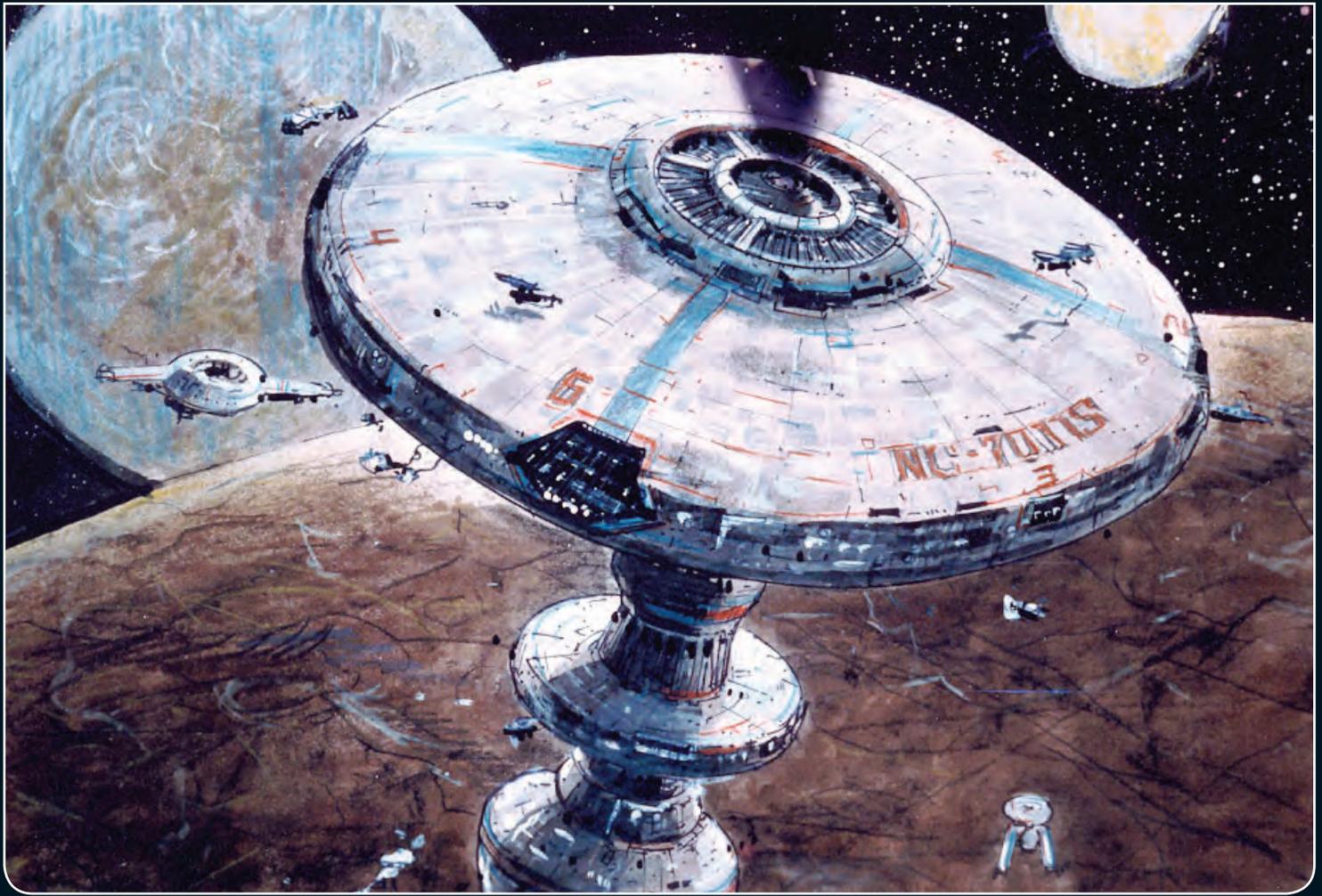
recognisable as a Federation starship, as with the other concepts produced.

Ultimately this version was not selected by Nimoy, who settled on a study model produced by Bill George. But Rodis-Jamero and Carson's work was an essential part of the concept design process.

The study model of this variant would eventually make it to screen in an episode of *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION*, 'Unification, II'. This model was dubbed the *U.S.S. Alka-Selsior* as a play on words to its original name and a brand of indigestion tablets.



◀ Although possessing elements of starship design that echoed the familiar nacelle and saucer configuration of the *U.S.S. Enterprise*, this particular Nilo Rodis-Jamero variant of the *U.S.S. Excelsior* adopted a thinner profile, as seen in this overhead view of the study model. This streamlined ship was later seen briefly in *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION*, and was named off-screen as the *U.S.S. Alka-Selsior*.



DESIGN PROFILE

DAVID CARSON

As visual effects art director for *STAR TREK III*, David Carson was involved in development of the movie from an early stage of production.

▲ David Carson worked on early concepts for *STAR TREK III*'s Spacedock. This concept painting establishes the spinning structure suspended in orbit of a planet.

Following the success of *STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN*, within days of its release Paramount Pictures gave producer Harve Bennett the greenlight to begin work on a sequel. The film that became *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK* was notable for its collaborative development during writing and pre-production, involving Bennett, director Leonard Nimoy, executive producer Ralph

Winter and the visual effects team at Industrial Light & Magic (ILM). Chief among the ILM team were visual effects art directors Nilo Rodis-Jamero and David Carson.

Carson's career in motion pictures began as an effects art director on the low budget science-fiction movie 'The Day Time Ended' (1980), before his work at ILM brought visual effects credits on 'Star Wars' sequel 'The

Empire Strikes Back (1980), 'Dragonslayer' (1981) and 'Return of the Jedi' (1983). In late 1982, development on *STAR TREK III* began, with Carson and Rodis brought in at a very early stage before a full script was available. "I don't know if I was mister *STAR TREK*," recalled Carson, "but I was certainly more familiar with it than (Nilo) was. We had done some work for Paramount on *THE WRATH OF KHAN*, and we were looking forward to expanding that role. The thing that was so different on *SEARCH FOR SPOCK* was that Harve, Leonard and Ralph Winter came to ILM and started working with Nilo and me when the script was still just an outline. It was pretty much the story that ended up being scripted. What was great was that as we began doing artwork and sketches of some of the moments that were in the outline, they could embellish certain areas or come up with little side ideas based on our artwork. And that's a great way to work."

"It was all too rare at ILM that we had an opportunity for visual input that early and during the scripting process," Carson continued. "That's something that typically was done by the studio's art department."

► David Carson (third from left) attends a production meeting for *STAR TREK III* with Leonard Nimoy and ILM colleagues, including Nilo Rodis-Jamero (standing).



► A pre-visualisation photograph concept showing the Spacedock recreation area and *Enterprise* arrival.



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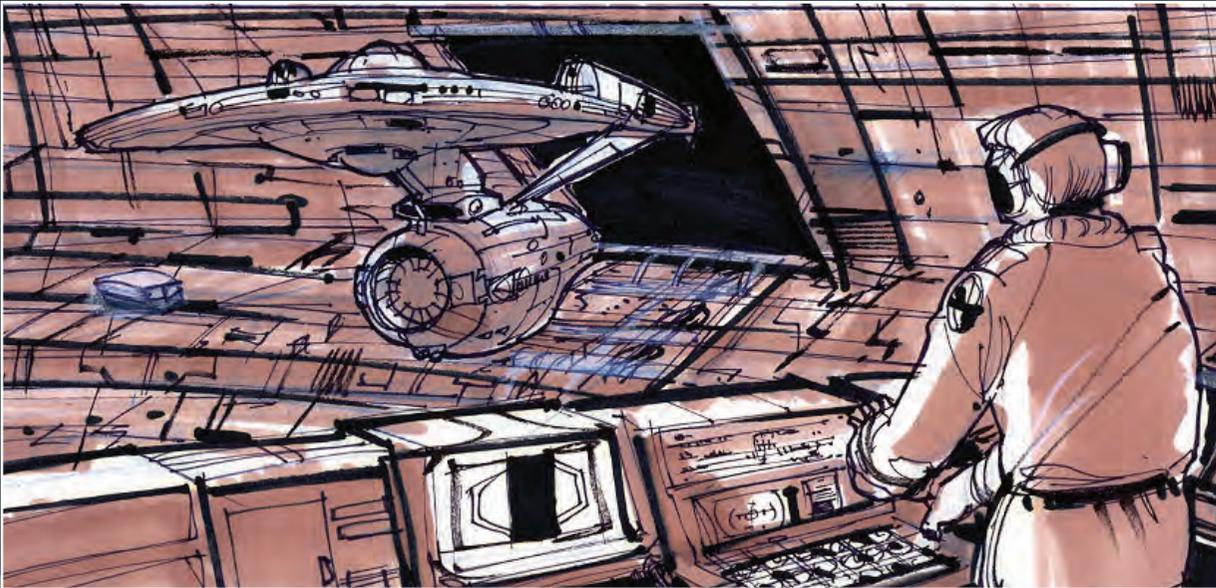
DESCRIPTION: EXT. SPACE - ORBITING SPACEDOCK

The slowly rotating Spacedock is huge. The Enterprise enters frame close to camera and approaches the Spacedock on an arc-like course.

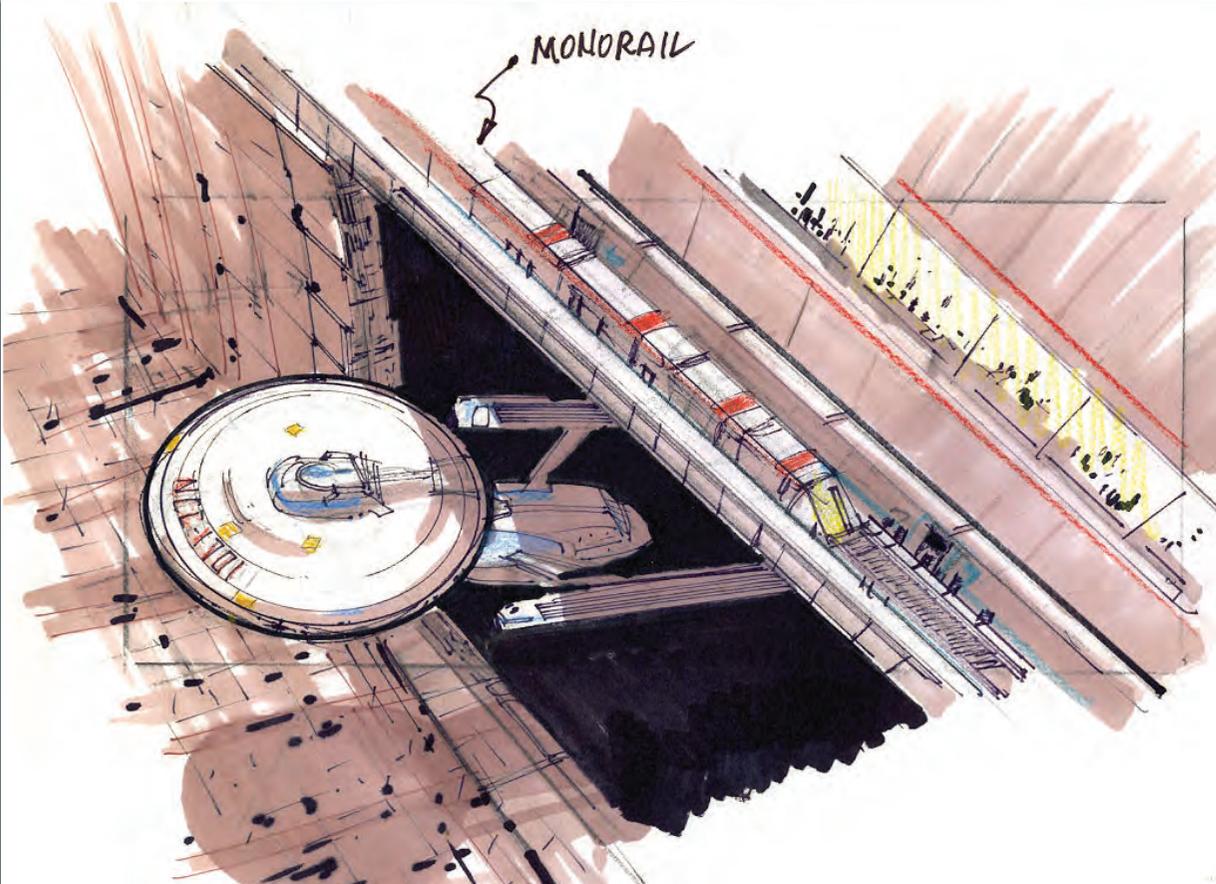
NOTES:

PARAMOUNT APPROVED

▲ An original David Carson ILM storyboard image showing the *U.S.S. Enterprise's* approach to the orbiting Spacedock. Note the arrow indicating approach direction.



◀ Carson's concept sketch of the *Enterprise* arriving through Spacedock's main space doors shows the action from the Starfleet controller's viewpoint, establishing the scale involved.



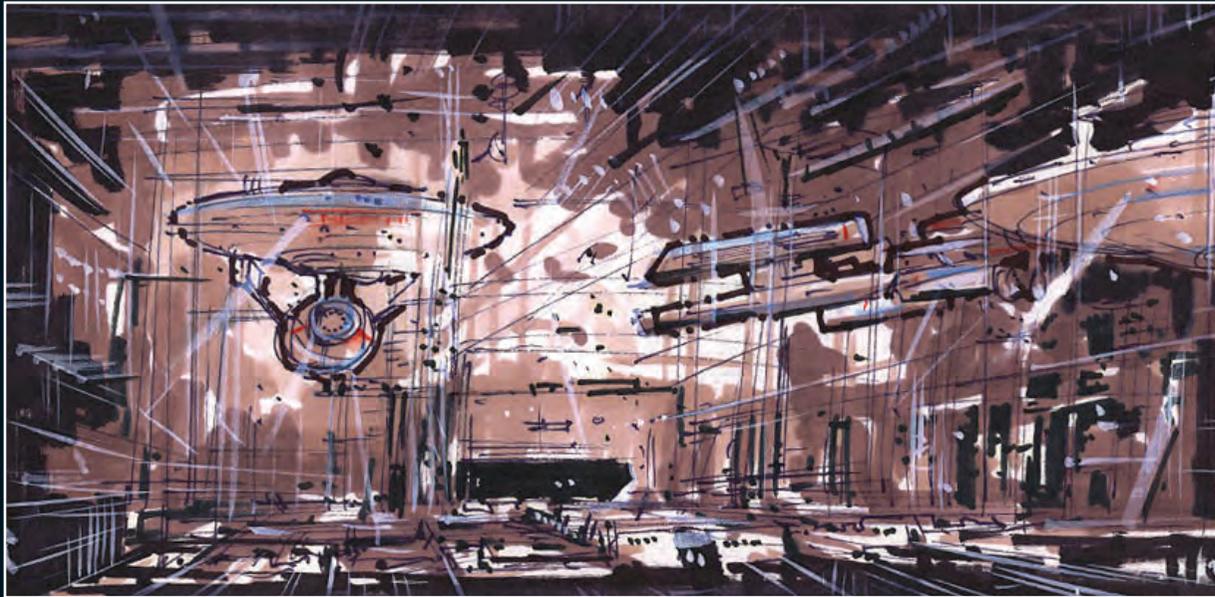
◀ The *Enterprise* arrives in another Carson concept, which included a monorail track running above the ship.

We just started doing this back and forth of artwork and story ideas. It was a really rewarding and creative period."

Carson and Rodis-Jamero began producing design concepts as storyline development and scripting continued into 1983. "My recollection is that there was a first design and that was the *U.S.S. Grissom*. I recall knowing what the *Grissom* would look like from very early on."

DESIGNING SPACEDOCK

Among Carson's central contributions to *STAR TREK III* and the continuing visual legacy of *STAR TREK* was the initial concept of Starfleet's orbital Spacedock facility. This key creation emerged from the longer-than-usual period available to the ILM team to work up their designs. "The *Enterprise* was going to dock at this space station and then they



◀ Another concept sketch by Carson further established the vast scale that would be needed for the interior of Spacedock. A concept for the *Excelsior* sits alongside the *Enterprise*.

would see the *Excelsior* – the next generation of starship,” Carson remembered. “I was trying to think, how can we make this space station interesting?” The eventual design would strike a contrast to the *Enterprise* docking facility as seen in *STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE*.

“In the first film it had been this big kind of skeletal structure that orbited Earth. I was trying to think of all the different ways you might have a space station. I thought, what if they went inside? What if the space station was so big that the *Enterprise* actually went into it? I did a drawing of a space station that was that big. It was a bit clunky, but it was kind of a stack of different shapes, but really big, orbiting the moon or something. Nilo took that and in his typical fashion turned it into a really wonderful design. So we presented this idea of the space station that you actually go into and that led to the incident where they are trying to back the *Enterprise* out of the door before it closes.”

A space station that was large enough for Federation starships to enter would require an interior large enough for action to take place within. Here, Carson was inspired by something as mundane as contemporary air travel, as he recalled: “We had been flying down to Los Angeles fairly often to have meetings with (Harve and Leonard). We would get off the airplane at the airport, and you could see the airplane you had just

gotten off, through the window. So I did a drawing – you got to this space station, and you look through the window, you should see the *Enterprise* sitting out there. All of these things went back and forth. Obviously Harve came up with the idea of trying to make it through the doors at the last minute, but a lot of the visuals came from us. It just kind of grew back and forth.”

CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Carson remembered the *STAR TREK III* design process as a very creative period, particularly for his collaboration with ILM colleague Nilo Rodis-Jamero. “We would usually work in parallel. In the early days it was great – we just had this outline and we’d both do artwork of whatever moment in the story seemed to inspire us. We’d just churn out quite a few sketches. Then the ones that were most promising we might polish up a little in color for



◀ The physical miniature of Spacedock, built by the ILM team from Carson’s concept drawings. Carson’s initial inspiration was taken from a contemporary airport.

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DESCRIPTION:
EXT. SPACE - ENTERPRIS
The Bridge of the Enterprise is wracked by a series of small explosions. One final explosion blows the entire area away.

NOTES:

SHOT # / SEQUENCE
211A

ELEMENTS:	STAGE	ANIM	PLATE	MATTE	NON-ILM
Enterprise	x				
Explosion	x				
Starfield	x				

ELEMENTS:	STAGE	ANIM	PLATE	MATTE	NON-ILM

FRM COUNT PAGE #

► Carson storyboarded key moments in *STAR TREK III*, including the destruction of the *Enterprise* to get the most from such a dramatic sequence in the movie.

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DESCRIPTION: EXT. SPACE - MERCHANTMAN - BIRD OF PREY
The Bird of Prey has appeared. It is a long-necked, scary-looking thing with variable wing attitude which we will see in time.

NOTES:

► This storyboard by David Carson shows a dynamic shot of the Klingon bird-of-prey circling the Merchantman, ready to attack.

presentation next time Harve and Leonard and Ralph would be meeting with us. It wasn't uncommon for me to do a drawing that would inspire Nilo, who would then turn it into his own drawing that would be much more impressive! He has a style that is just so bold and fascinating. He would often inspire me

and I would try to come up with an idea. I think we had a pretty good back and forth of seeing things differently or inspiring each other to embellish something in a certain direction. We were just trying to come up with cool visuals based on the outline and the script in progress.

"The first drawings that I did for Spacedock were of the outside," Carson explained. "Nilo cleaned those drawings up into something pretty close to what's in the film. I did the drawings once I had considered that it would be something that you go into, if it was rotating they would need to synchronize their motion with the rotating door. That was well received as well, and I did a couple of early drawings showing how that would storyboard out."

DESIGN GENESIS

While Carson produced concept designs for the *U.S.S. Excelsior* in concert with Rodis-Jamero, he also contributed further storyboard sequences to show a pre-visualization of the planned effects sequences. Other visual elements involved distinct locations, such as the Genesis planet.

"The basic look of Genesis had been established from the Golden Gate park shot at the end of *STAR TREK II*," Carson outlined. "So it was okay, Genesis was pretty lush, a lot of greenery. There were drawings where the snow stopped and the desert started. You got the idea they needed shots of the ground breaking up and fire coming up from below – there wasn't really much to explore there. I think we went around a lot as to how much was going to be practical set and how much was going to be designed at ILM."

It was thought that the final climactic sequence depicting Spock's return to Vulcan

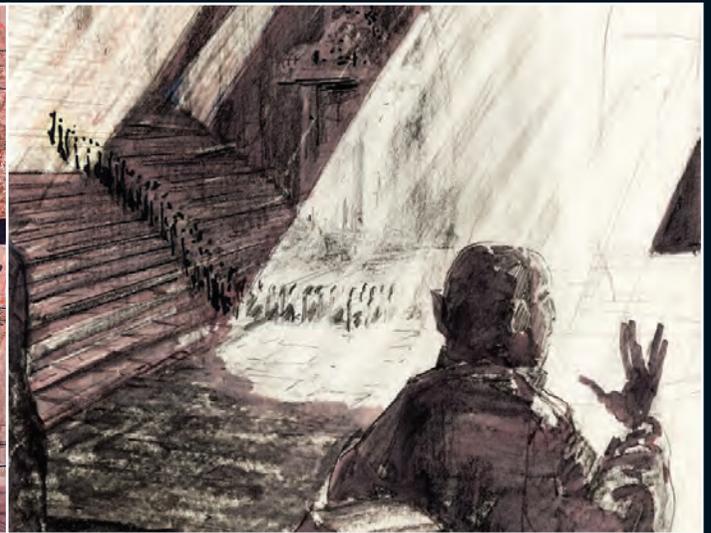


and subsequent ceremony would take place in a grand 'Hall of Thought'. "We wrestled quite a bit with the Hall of Thought," Carson said. "Leonard obviously was really interested in having this impressive hall that you walked through. We wrestled quite a bit with trying to come up with an impressive number of environments that you pass through on your way to the ceremony that could be constructed for a reasonable budget, and ultimately we failed! The Hall of Thought became the Hall of Nothing. You had to build it. We did one last idea of basically plywood shapes being held up by sticks so that you could afford to build something. It just wasn't feasible in the end. That whole kind of elevated

▲ Carson and ILM's remit on *STAR TREK III* also covered locations as well as starships. This concept drawing depicts the fiery death throes of the Genesis planet.



◀ Carson worked on visualisations for the climactic fight sequence on Genesis. Here, Captain Kirk has had enough of Kruge, and climbs to safety as the planet begins to break up.



▲ The final ceremony on Vulcan was initially envisioned as taking place in a 'Hall of Thought'. Despite working on various concepts for the sequence, including the two images seen here, Carson and the team were unable to come up with a suitable solution to realising the sequence on the budget available.

pedestal – the drawings of what it would look like were established pretty early on. I did a lot of drawings of the Hall of Thought and that final pedestal area.”

Carson’s work on *STAR TREK III*, along with the rest of the Industrial Light & Magic team, added layers to the visual language of the *STAR TREK* universe. This new aesthetic looked at what had come before and developed a new look that would carry forward in the decades ahead.

“We were looking for things that would require ILM’s participation,” added Carson. “There were a lot of things that ILM would have to contribute to in some fashion or another. We would just go through and say OK what’s this going to look like and start to do some artwork so we could visualize it for the next meeting. It was a great way to spend some time.”

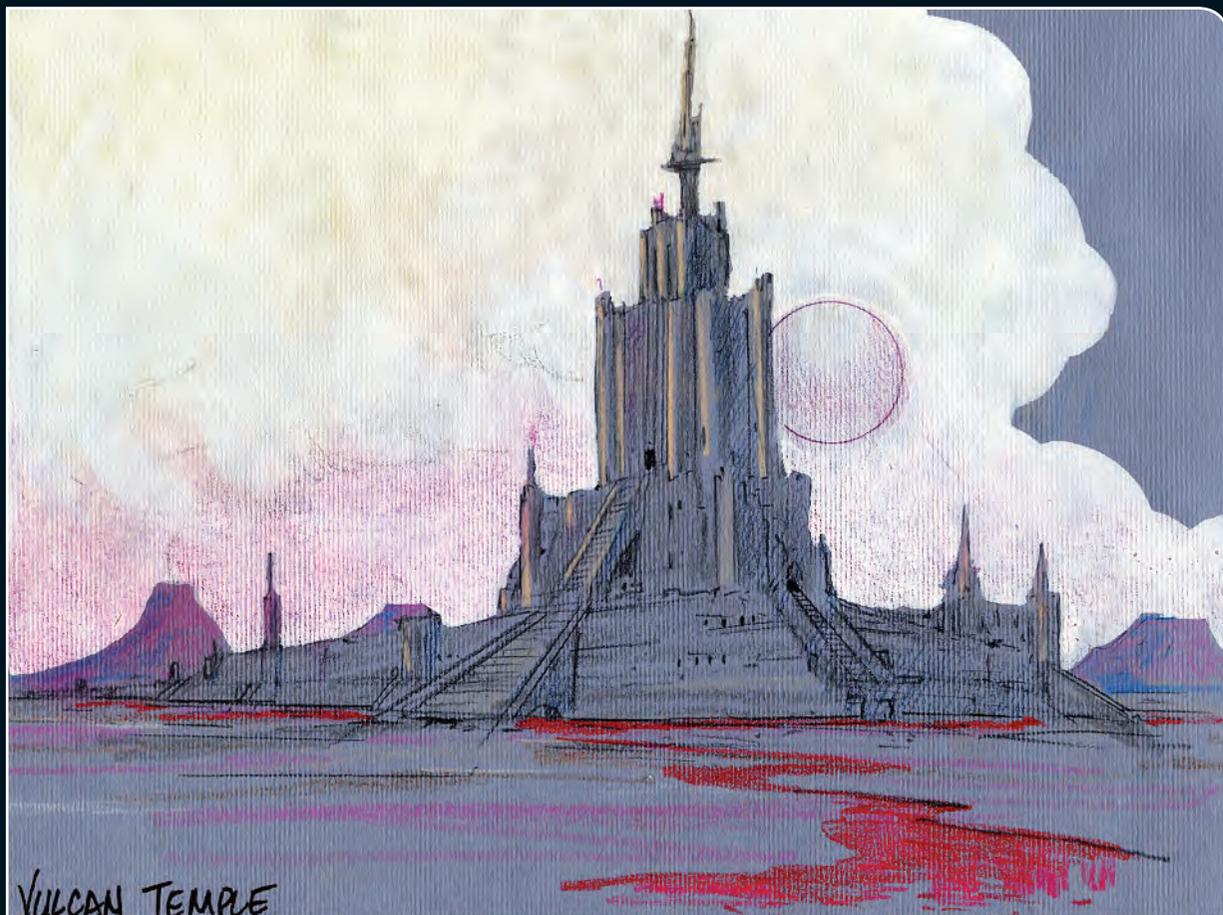
► This David Carson sketch depicts an ambitious sequence that saw Spock arrive at the Vulcan ceremony aboard a barge.



AFTER TREK

In the years following production of *STAR TREK III*, Carson continued to work for ILM, contributing in key visual effects positions to films including ‘The Goonies’ (1985), ‘Young Sherlock Holmes’ (1985), ‘Jurassic Park’ (1993) and ‘Titanic’ (1997). In 1987 he returned to *STAR TREK* as VFX supervisor for ILM on *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION*’s pilot episode, ‘Encounter at Farpoint’. Other work has included contributions to theme park ride design, including the Star Tours attraction at Disneyland.

In 2001 Carson joined acclaimed video game company Electronic Arts as Art Director, winning awards for work on games such as ‘James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing’. Recently he returned to motion pictures as VFX art director on the independent horror movie ‘Suspended Belief’.



◀ An early concept sketch by David Carson of the temple on Vulcan. This would ultimately be unused, but established the steps that form part of the final sequence as seen on screen in *STAR TREK III*.

David Carson worked on the *STAR TREK* franchise for a relatively brief period, but his contribution cannot be underestimated. For Carson, *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK* was a very happy and productive time in his wide career: "It was great; it was a unique

experience in that way. The back and forth of doing artwork with the script in progress was great. Of course, it was extremely interesting to work with Leonard Nimoy, who I knew as an actor. To see him work as a director was fascinating, and he did a great job."



◀ An alternative Carson concept sketch showed the Vulcan temple as an area on a cliff edge to be reached from above. The sequence as realised in the film established the structure as a raised area.

ON SCREEN



FIRST APPEARANCE: 'UNIFICATION II' (TNG)

TV APPEARANCES: STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

DESIGNED BY: Nilo Rodis-Jamero

KEY APPEARANCES

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION **'Unification II'**

As with many other starship study models designed and built throughout the history of the *STAR TREK* franchise, some end up being destroyed, but others eventually make their way to the screen. The third of the Nilo Rodis-Jamero *Excelsior* study models may have not been selected to appear in *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*, in 1984, but seven years later it would be seen – briefly – in *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION*.

Appropriately enough, 'Unification I & II' featured the return of Leonard Nimoy as Spock, with Captain Jean-Luc Picard

and Lt. Commander Data travelling incognito to Romulus to locate the missing Vulcan ambassador.

Meanwhile, Commander Riker and the crew of the *Enterprise-D* attempt to locate the Vulcan shuttle *T'Polu*. The trail leads to Surplus Depot Z15, a Federation facility for salvaged and scrapped starships. To discover what happened to the missing *T'Polu*, the *Enterprise* moves through a mass of wrecked starships.

Among the many vessels dumped at the depot, a long, flat, two-nacelled Federation starship can be briefly seen in the background as the *Enterprise* passes through. This is the affectionately named *U.S.S. Alka-Selsior*, designed by Rodis-Jamero, built by Bill George.

TRIVIA

Leonard Nimoy's appearance as Ambassador Spock in 'Unification' marked the third time a character from the original series of *STAR TREK* had appeared in *THE NEXT GENERATION*. Spock's frequent sparring partner Dr. Leonard 'Bones' McCoy (DeForest Kelley) appeared briefly in *THE NEXT GENERATION*'s first adventure 'Encounter at Farpoint'. Later, Mark Lenard appeared as Spock's father Sarek in 'Sarek', making his final appearance as the character in 'Unification I'. In season six's 'Relics', Scotty became the fourth and final original series character to appear, once again played by James Doohan.

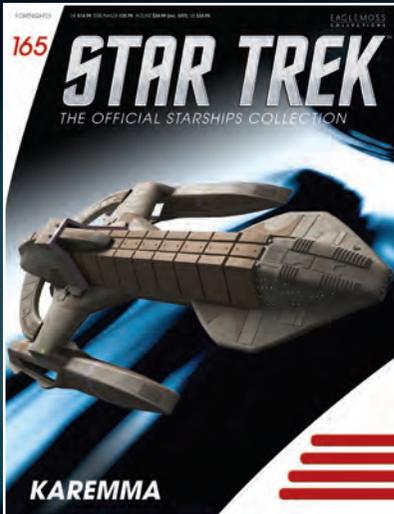


Spock's appearance in the two-part 'Unification' was envisioned to tie in with *STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY*, released in December 1991. Spock references the Klingon peace talks and Captain Kirk and the *Enterprise's* mission as seen in that movie. Although *STAR TREK VI* was released after the broadcast of 'Unification II', Nimoy shot the episode after work on the movie. In production terms, this marked Nimoy's final screen work as Spock for 18 years.



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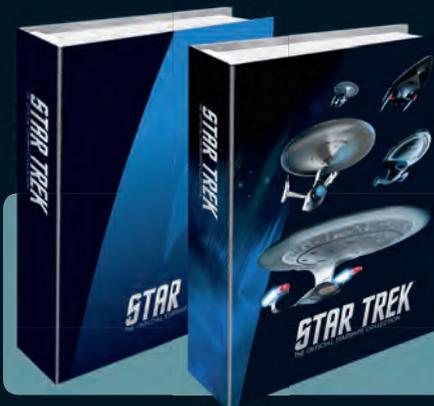
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