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ROMULAN  
**DRONE**

HOLO DRONE

LAUNCHED: 2154

LENGTH: 35 METERS

TOP SPEED: WARP 5

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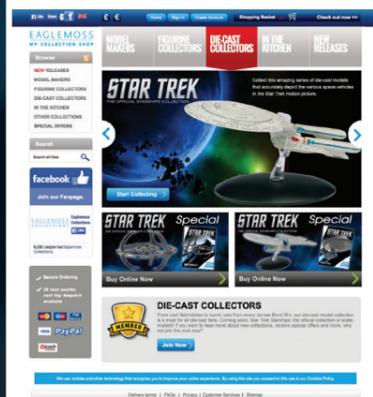
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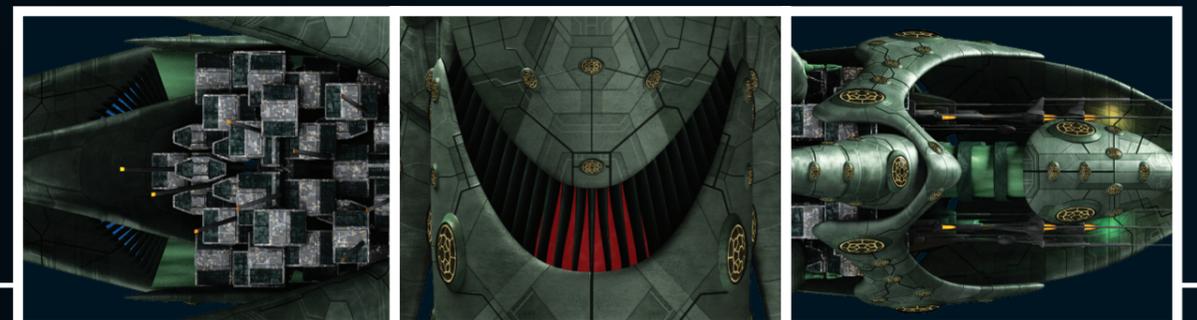
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# ROMULAN DRONE

## SPECIFICATION



OPERATED BY:	ROMULAN STAR EMPIRE
CLASS:	PROTOTYPE
LAUNCHED:	2154
TOP SPEED:	WARP 5
WEAPONRY:	TRIPHASIC DISRUPTORS
	HOLOGRAPHIC SKIN



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ROMULAN  
DRONE

▼ The Romulan drone was a small unmanned prototype that was covered in holographic projectors. It received instructions via a series of subspace antennae that projected from its nose.



# ROMULAN DRONE

In 2154 the Romulans launched an experimental drone that could disguise itself as other ships.

## DATA FEED

The drone project was tested in 2154, and successfully destroyed several Andorian and Tellarite vessels. However, when the Aenar operator, Gareb, rebelled and both drones were destroyed it was deemed to be a failure.

they weren't sufficiently sensitive to operate the ship. Instead, the Romulans had to rely on a captured member of the Aenar, a subspecies of Andorian.

Using a telepresence unit to control ships in this way was incredibly taxing and pilots required dangerously high doses of stimulants to counteract the resulting mental fatigue. However, the remote pilot could control two ships at once.

The drones were much smaller than the average starship, and only carried the systems necessary for their mission. The interior areas such as the corridors were narrow and cramped while the bulkheads were festooned with hanging wires and cables, making it difficult for a normal sized being to comfortably move around. Without the issue of crew comfort to worry about, there was no need for a fully functioning life support system – the only area of the ship possessing an environmental system capable of providing heat and air was the bridge. Not all of the systems were removed, and the drones still had inertial dampeners to counter the effects of rapid acceleration and deceleration in order to ensure the safety of anyone who happened to be on board.

The drones could reach speeds just above warp 5 and were extremely maneuverable – a distinct advantage during combat as they could dodge incoming missiles, as well as outrun larger ships.

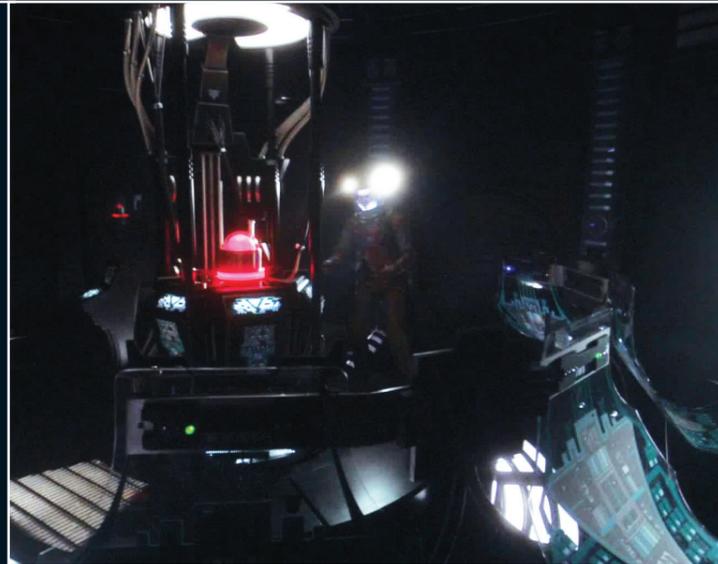
In the mid 2150s, the Romulans developed an experimental drone ship that could be remotely operated from Romulus and could disguise itself as other vessels using holographic projectors that were located on its outer hull. The Romulans built two prototypes, which were adapted from existing Romulan vessels, and as a result featured standard propulsion systems and command circuitry. Though the drone was unmanned it still had a bridge, although instead of accommodating a bridge crew the space was used to house a few consoles together with a large subspace receiver that enabled the vessel to stay in constant contact with the control station on Romulus.

## TELEPATHIC CONTROL

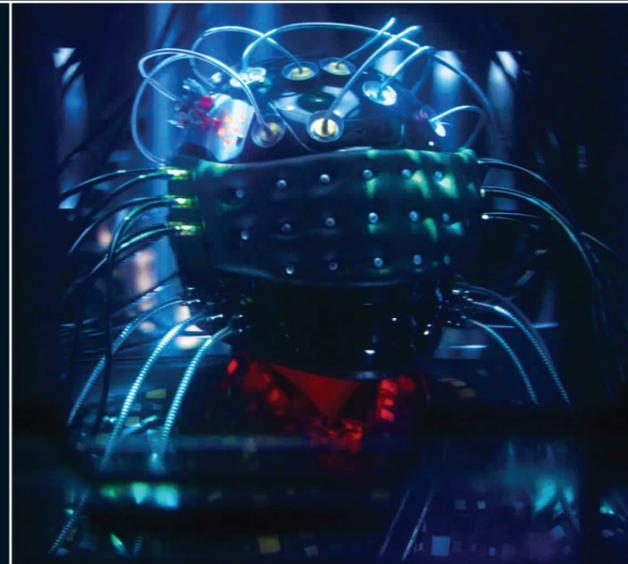
The ship was controlled by a telepresence unit, which allowed an operator to direct all of its systems. This system could control the ship from several light years away with no noticeable time lag. However, it had a serious drawback – it could only be operated by a telepath. Although the Romulans are telepathic like their Vulcan cousins,



◀ The surface of the drone was covered in multispectral emitters, which glowed yellow when the ship was powered up. These emitters generated a holographic and sensor field around the drone that could make it appear to be any vessel the Romulans wanted.



◀ Although it was unmanned, the drone still had a bridge (left), but it was remote controlled by an operator who was based on Romulus in an almost identical facility.



▼ The drones were controlled from a tower in the Romulan capital, light years away from the drones themselves, using a combination of telepathy and subspace radio.



▶ Both prototype drones were destroyed after their remote operator, the Aenar Gareb, turned on his Romulan captors. Gareb used one drone to destroy the other, and the *Enterprise NX-01* destroyed the second drone with a torpedo.



◀ The drones were extremely maneuverable ships that could perform acrobatic maneuvers at high speed. Their weapons systems used triphasic emitters that could simulate the weapons signatures of a variety of different systems from phasers to particle emitters and disruptor cannons. The holographic field made it impossible to scan the real ship and the hull was polarized to make it resistant to attack.



▲ The holographic emitters could be used to make the drones appear like almost any vessel that the Romulans had had the chance to scan. Only detailed scans could reveal the drones' true nature, since the Romulans couldn't conceal its power signature.

The drone's hull was lined with multispectral emitters. These acted as a camouflage system that provided the vessel with a holographic and sensor skin, which gave it the ability to masquerade as any ship it chose. The emitters also acted as an impenetrable shield generator, making it nigh on impossible for ships under attack to get a proper lock on the drone once the 'sensor skin' was activated, although it was possible to target the emitters themselves.

What the ship lacked in size it made up for in firepower, enabling it to inflict the maximum amount of damage on its target. An assortment of triphasic emitters made it possible for each drone to simulate the weapons signature of various alien spacecraft, such as Starfleet's phase cannons, Andorian particle

cannons and Tellarite disruptors. This advanced technology allowed the Romulans to lay the blame for a number of drone attacks on the armies of their enemies with the aim of setting them at each other's throats.

#### AUTOREPAIR

Since it had no crew, the drone was dependent on an advanced auto repair system. This allowed it to immediately address any damage inflicted upon areas such as the hull plating as soon as it occurred, making it all the harder for any ship going up against it to permanently cripple it.

Despite these innovations the ship had a number of weak areas that left it vulnerable to attack. The power supply was erratic and went offline on

more than one occasion. While the ship was out of action, it was possible for intruders to beam onboard, where it was easy enough to access the entire warp control system, as well as back up, through a door located just off the bridge, and thus bring the ship to a complete standstill.

Although it was possible for the ship to automatically repair itself, it took days to work around serious damage, leaving the ship vulnerable to further attacks. And while the drone could imitate weapon signatures there was nothing it could to mask its own unique power signature. Therefore it was possible for ships such as the *Enterprise NX-01* to read that signature and come to the conclusion that, whatever the drone appeared to be, its power matrix was undeniably Romulan.

#### DATA FEED

The drone project was an experiment that was put forward by Admiral Valdore (left) and supported by Senator Vrax. Valdore had once been a member of the senate but had been expelled after he questioned the need for continual expansion. After this he became more aggressive and was convinced that Romulus' best policy was to create dissent between the different powers in the Alpha Quadrant, leaving them vulnerable to an assault.



**TELEPRESENCE**

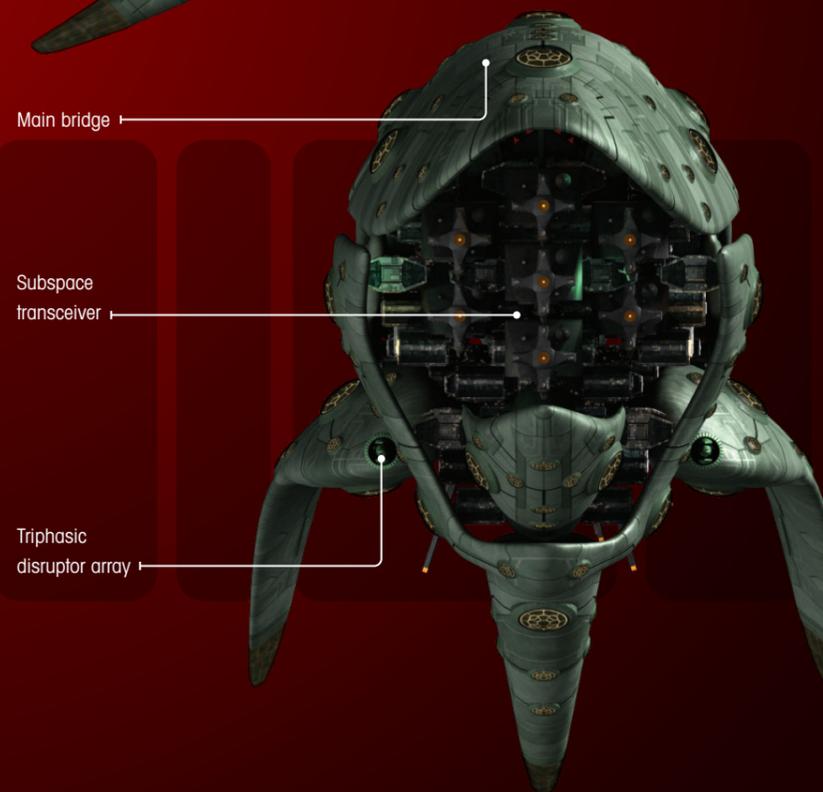
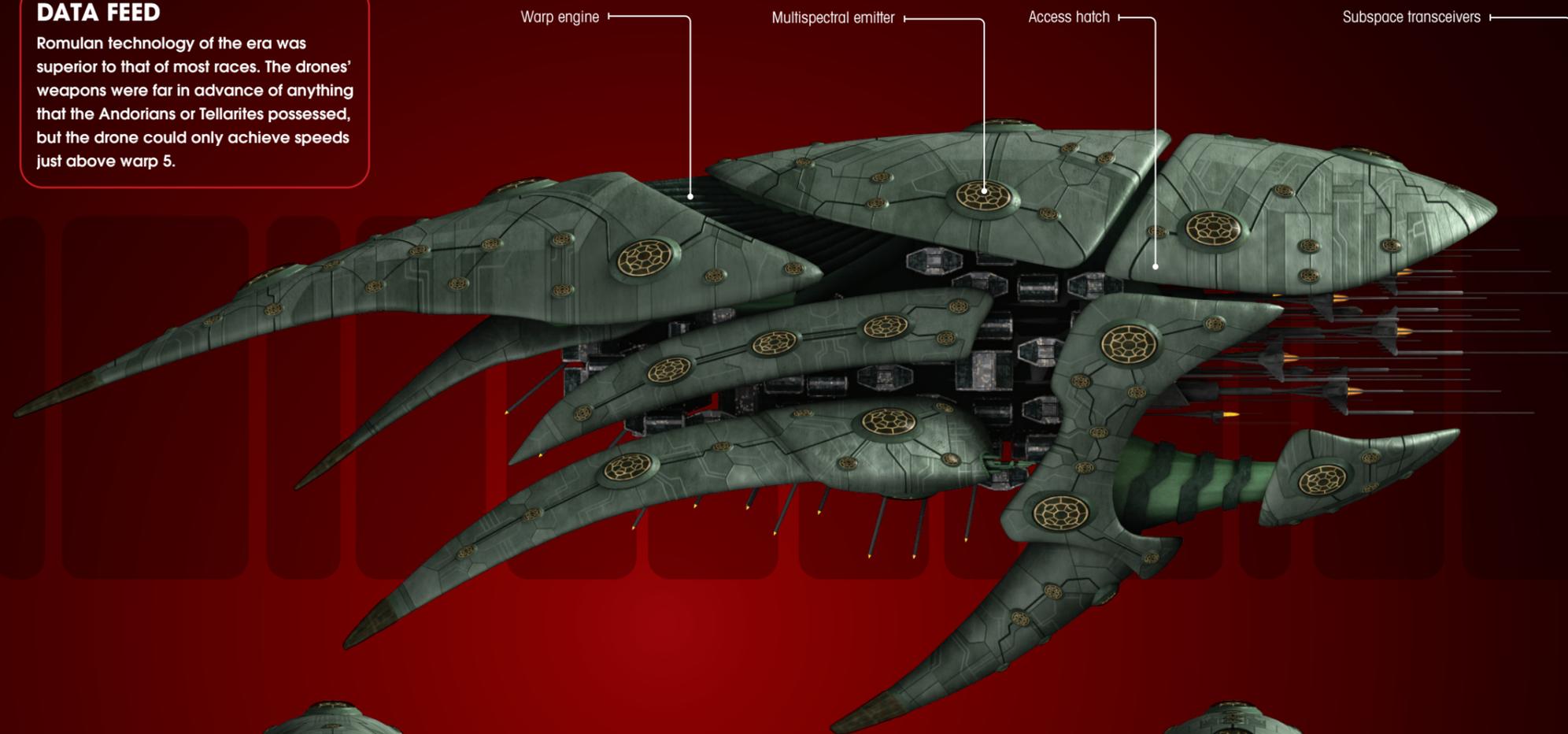
The drones were controlled by telepresence, a system that allowed a remote operator to access all of their systems. This was a technology that the Andorians had experimented with without success. The Romulan version required a highly telepathic operator, which led to them kidnapping Gareb, a member of the Aenar, a subspecies of Andorian. They convinced him that the rest of the Aenar had been killed and forced him to operate the drones. The system worked over vast distances and relied on a large number of subspace transceivers that could receive the data. In theory, jamming the signals would have disabled the drone.



▲ The drones were remote controlled from Romulus where a team of Romulan soldiers forced Gareb to carry out their instructions. Gareb also required regular medication to allow him to operate the drone or drones for extended periods.

**DATA FEED**

Romulan technology of the era was superior to that of most races. The drones' weapons were far in advance of anything that the Andorians or Tellarites possessed, but the drone could only achieve speeds just above warp 5.



Multispectral emitter

**REMOTE CONTROL**

A similar kind of telepresence system, known as an interface probe, was later developed and used by the Federation.

**QUICK SCANS**

The Romulan drone could emulate any ship that it had the chance to scan, and thanks to the multispectral emitters, could appear much larger than it actually was. It disguised itself as the *Enterprise NX-01* after a single encounter.

**MANY VICTIMS**

One drone appears to have been responsible for the destruction of over a dozen ships. It definitely destroyed the Andorian battle cruiser the *Kumari* and a Rigellian scoutship and probably destroyed over a dozen Andorian and Tellarite freighters.

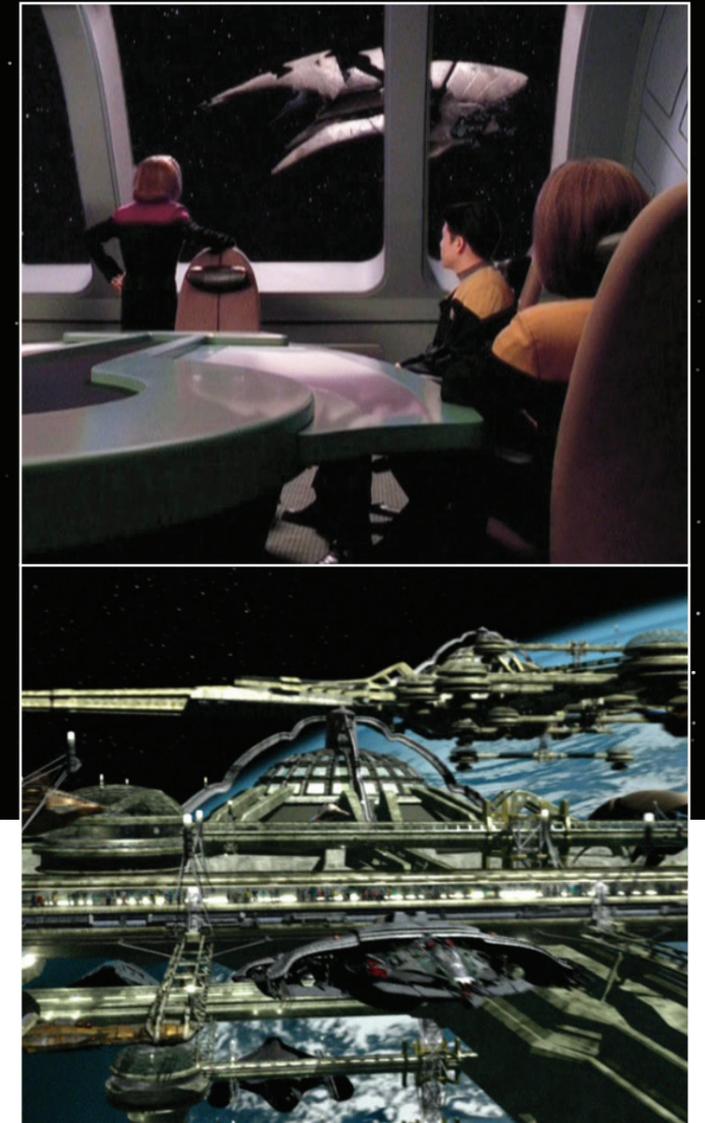
► The Romulan drone was an adapted version of a mysterious ship that *Voyager* encountered in a region of chaotic space. The original design shown here only appears on screen for a handful of seconds.



DESIGNING THE

# ROMULAN DRONE

► The design informally known as 'the flea' made two brief appearances on *VOYAGER* – the crew find a ruined version floating in chaotic space in 'The Fight' and eagle-eyed viewers spotted it docked at a space station in 'Natural Law'.



## The strange 'flea-like' ship that became the Romulan drone, had a long and complicated journey to the screen...

The Romulan drone started life one Christmas as the VFX team struggled to come up with several different designs for the fourth season *STAR TREK: VOYAGER* episode 'Vis à Vis.' Back then it was rejected, but months later it got finished and used for another *VOYAGER* episode, 'The Fight,' before finally being

converted into a Romulan ship in *ENTERPRISE*'s fourth season. It wasn't even designed by the *STAR TREK* art department. Every now and again, the VFX house, in this case Digital Muse, would take on the design of a ship themselves. As Muse's David Lombardi explains 'the flea' was one of ten or so

designs that he came with for 'Vis à Vis.' As he remembers, he was excited to be given the chance to design a ship himself, and, from the very beginning, he was very clear about what he didn't want to do. "We always wanted to get in a more alien looking spaceship that didn't look like something that was made

by a different human culture – something really, really truly unusual."

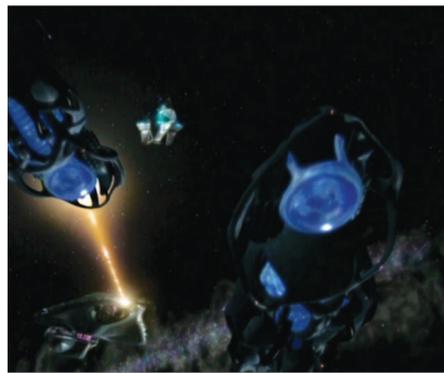
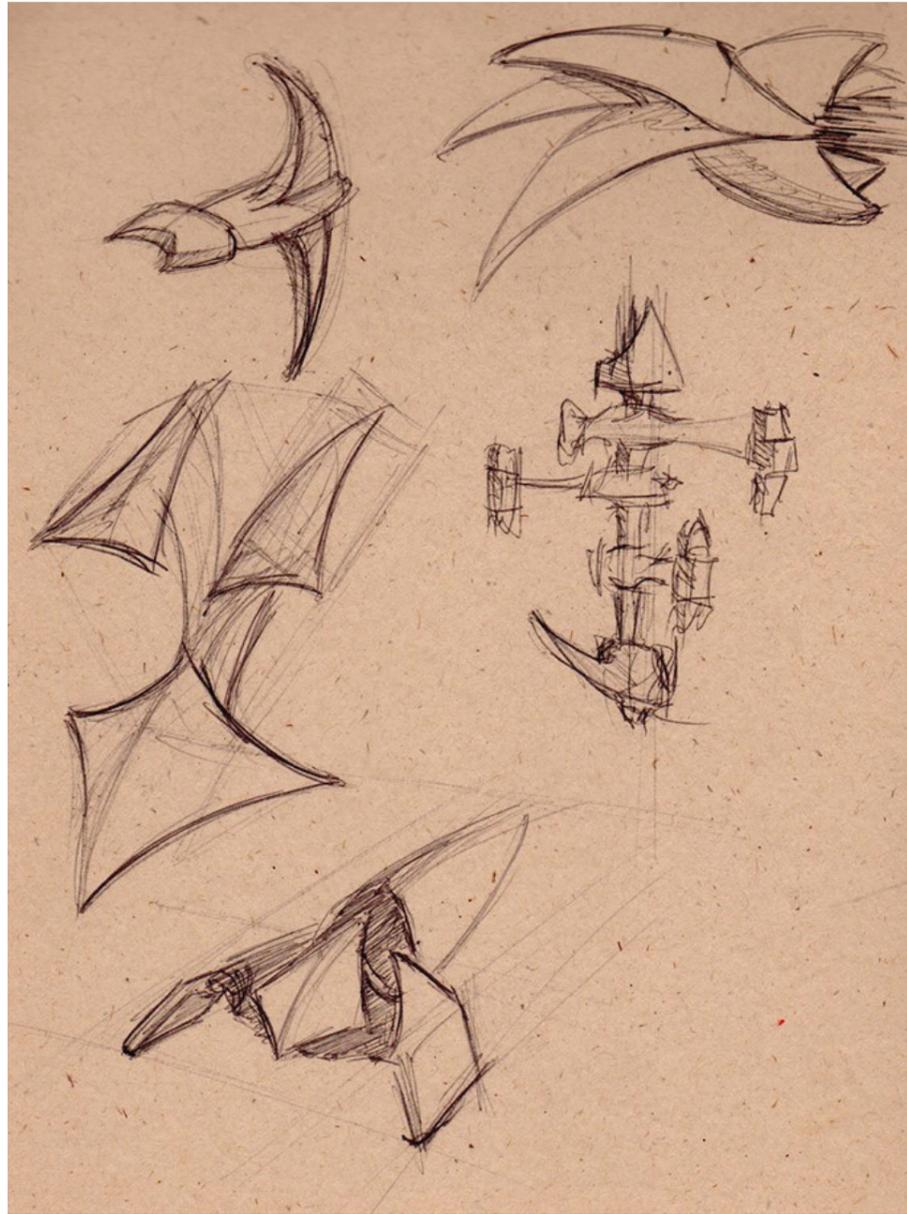
Although he was a CG artist, Lombardi started the process by sketching out some rough ideas on a piece of paper. "I was just kind of playing with shapes until I got to a point I liked. When I got to the one in the upper right corner of the page I went 'Oh there's something here.' It has what I think of as a kind of anime armor shape. There was

something about it that was a little bit insecty, but also I really wanted to break away from a traditional nose. I didn't like the idea that almost every ship looked like it was aerodynamic. I remember thinking 'You know the Borg cube wasn't aerodynamic and everyone really liked that!'"

Lombardi was also very conscious that a spaceship doesn't need windows. "I'm a big fan of form follows function. The

front was going to be this entire array of antennas and sensors instead of a window because why would you have a window in a spaceship when you're using monitors for everything anyway?"

Lombardi went on to produce a couple more sketches that developed the design a little more, one of which was reasonably detailed. "I remember very clearly taking a brown sheet of paper and doing a profile view of the



▲ The 'flea' was originally going to be one of the ships that tracked down the shapeshifting Steth in the episode 'Vis a Vis'. In the end the design that the producers picked was very different.

fully designed flea ship."

But, being a CG artist, it's not surprising that Lombardi turned to his computer in order to finish his design. "I scanned that sketch in and used it as a back drop to trace over and start modeling. I wanted to rough out the build because I think that helped me in the design process a little bit by seeing where things would kind of lay out. In particular the tentacles or the legs in the back, or whatever you want to call them, splay out and it was difficult to work out how they'd look in 3D."

◀ David Lombardi's original sketches for 'Vis a Vis' were produced over Christmas 1998. The version in the top right would go on to become the 'flea'.

### TOO ALIEN

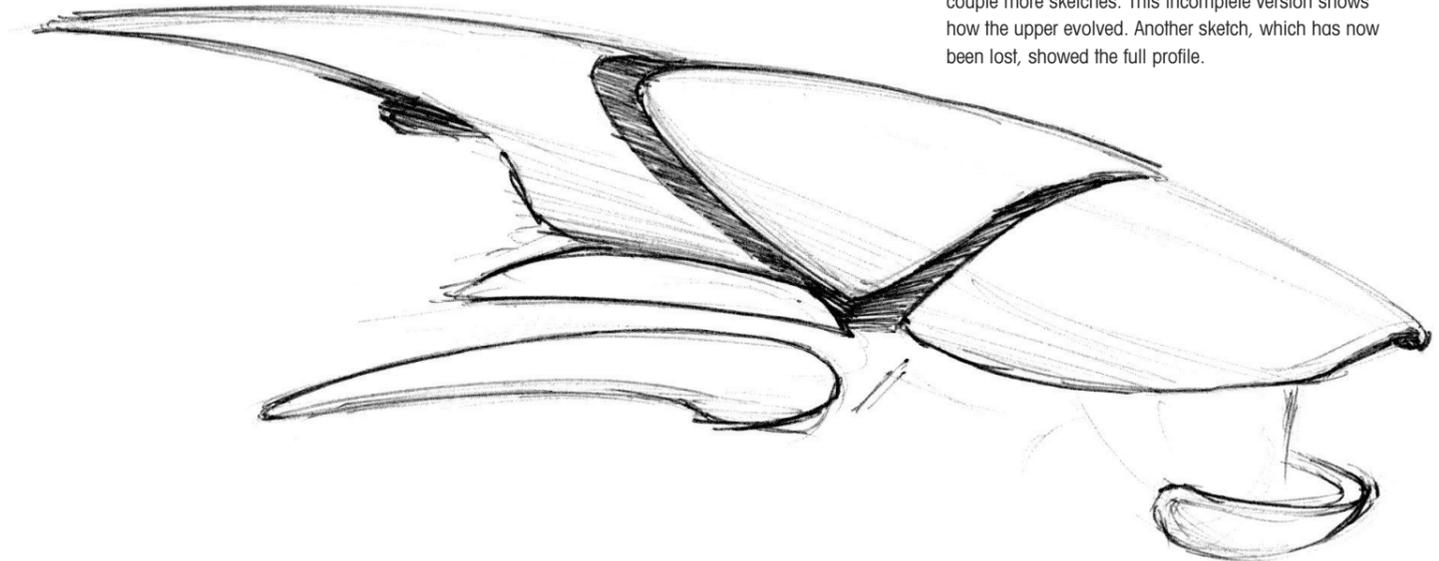
The 'flea' design had been greeted enthusiastically by VFX supervisor Ron B. Moore and his boss Dan Curry, but before Lombardi could finish the design the approach was rejected by their boss, *VOYAGER*'s supervising VFX producer Peter Lauritson, "It was something that didn't fit in the *STAR TREK* universe," Lombardi remembers, "I know Peter Lauritson liked to avoid having ships that look too much like life forms. *STAR TREK* has a very established history of styles of ships, and there are very good reasons for having that consistency."

However, the design was revived the following year for 'The Fight' a script that saw *Voyager* trapped in a bizarre area of space that threatened to destroy the ship. "We always figured we'd be able to use the design at some point," Lombardi says. "In 'The Fight' there was supposed to be something that was truly bizarre locked in this strange part of space. You weren't going to see it very clearly - I think it ended up in about four or five shots - so we thought we can kind of get away with it!"

### BACK TO THE COMPUTER

Of course, Lombardi had never actually finished building the ship so he went back to his model. "If I recall correctly," he says, "the main body panels had been done and maybe a few little details, but there was no texturing. We decked out all the little kind of little nurnies as we call them - the little spikes and bits and engines pieces and vents and things like that. It was supposed to look like it had had a rough go of it, so the texture had to look a little more corroded on the surface, that sort of thing."

The ship was never even given a



▼ As he refined his design, Lombardi produced a couple more sketches. This incomplete version shows how the upper evolved. Another sketch, which has now been lost, showed the full profile.

name. The files were simply labeled Episode 208 alien ship. It actually made a second blink and you'll miss it appearance in another episode, when it was seen docked at a space station in 'Natural Law'.

Obscure ships that have only made brief appearances always stood a chance of making a comeback in *STAR TREK*. Budgets were always tight and the VFX team would always push to get as much out of them as they could. By the time *ENTERPRISE* was in production,

*TREK*'s two favored CG houses, Digital Muse and Foundation Imaging, had merged to become Eden FX. They kept a book that showed all the models they had access to. Whenever the team met to consider what could be done for a new show, it would be pulled out and the producers would look at the models to see what, if anything, they could reuse.

This is exactly what happened when it came to the Romulan drone. Mike Sussman, who came up with the idea of

a camouflaged ship, had imagined that it would be a modified *Romulan Bird-of-Prey* but the producers wanted something a little different. They figured that since the 208 Alien ship had only been on screen for a few seconds more than six years ago, they could adapt and reuse it.

The art department produced a drawing showing it with a Romulan color scheme and with the surface covered in holographic emitters. Once this was approved, the drawing was passed on



▲ The design was completed for the episode 'The Fight'. The script now called for it to be a dead and battered ship, which influenced the color scheme and texturing.

DIGITAL MUSE STAR TREK REFERENCE

## Flea



## SPECIFICATIONS

Episodes 208-The Fight

Race Unknown and Unestablished

scale 150 Meters

Episode notes Derelict ship found in Chaotic space with all crew dead

model notes

construction digital muse

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to Rob Bonchune at Eden FX, who pulled out Lombardi's original model and modified it. The way he remembers it, this is where the ship got the name by which it is best known, "I got a sketch of that ship as a Romulan ship. John Eaves (I think) wrote 'FLEA' on it and that's what it became known as. But officially it was the Romulan drone and that is it."

Bonchune could see the logic of using the design for the episode: apart from the fact that it only been on screen for a

second or two, the 'flea' looked very different to the ships we had seen before and this was important because the script relied on us not knowing that it was a Romulan ship the first time we saw it.

## ALIEN SECRET

"It does have a very organic, alien looking design. When you find out that it's Romulan everyone is pretty surprised, because it looked like something the Romulans wouldn't have, and we made

◀ Obscure ships like the flea always stood a chance of making a comeback because they were preserved in a catalogue that was started by Digital Muse and then maintained by Eden FX. Each ship had a sheet that showed what it looked like, who it belonged to, and where it had been used. If it was sufficiently obscure the producers would suggest modifying the design, changing the colors and giving the ship to another race.

it move in a very different way. It could do these weird flips and turns. It can move the way UFOs do."

The reason for reusing the ship in the first place was to save money so, as Bonchune explains, Eden FX didn't spend too much time modifying it.

"I could have had our modelers Pierre or Koji do it, but that would have just added to what was on their plates. I was changing colors, adding antennas, and rebooting the lights, without rebuilding it, so I decided to do it myself. All those things were in place. It was really just changing colors. I illuminated some antennas I didn't like and changed the internal lighting."

## MORE POWER

The biggest differences came about because in the six years since the original CG model had been built, processing power had gone through the roof. This meant that Bonchune could go as far as he wanted with the holographic projectors that covered the ship's hull.

"On *VOYAGER* we didn't have the render power to turn on ray-tracing lights. By *ENTERPRISE* we could do that so I upgraded the lighting. I put some interactive light in for the holoprojectors and we could have them glowing, and I made some changes to the point lights at the end of the bigger antennas. It didn't take long. We gave them exactly what they wanted – a ship that cost virtually nothing."

◀ Rob Bonchune took Lombardi's original *VOYAGER*-era model and converted it into a Romulan vessel by changing the color and adding holographic projectors to the hull. The antennae made perfect sense for a ship that was remote controlled and projected an illusory field around itself.





## STARTING THE

## ROMULAN WAR

The Romulan drone and its attempt to start a war between the Andorians and the Tellarites was the first move in what would have been *STAR TREK: ENTERPRISE*'s future. By the fourth season the show was being run by Manny Coto, who decided to take a new approach and tell stories that laid the groundwork for the things we had seen on the original series. As one of his writers and the drone's creator, Mike Sussman, remembers, that meant the Earth Romulan wars were very much on the horizon. "We were still holding out hope that if the ratings stabilized maybe there might be a season 5, and maybe in some way we could revisit the Romulans and the Romulan War, so we wanted to lay the groundwork for that."

The process started in the three-part Vulcan story that showed the Vulcans adopting a more enlightened approach to the rest of the Galaxy. Sussman had written the closing scenes of the story

and very much wanted to show that the Vulcans' Romulan cousins were trying to manipulate things from behind the scenes. "We hadn't seen the Romulans in years but the final scene revealed that it was a Romulan agent who had been manipulating the head of the Vulcan government all along. That's the only time Romulans appear in that entire story. The problem was that episode was so over budget that we couldn't afford to hire a new actor to play a character we hadn't seen before, so I was told to cut the scene. I felt so strongly that I rewrote it and took a speaking character we had seen earlier and decided he was actually a Romulan spy."

By this point Sussman knew that his next writing assignment would be the first episode of the arc featuring the Romulan drone. When he started work on the outline, he had two definite elements to work with – the Romulans would be attempting to disrupt

[Left picture] The first episode in the Romulan arc saw Trip and Malcolm board the ship unaware that it was an unmanned Romulan drone. The reveal was designed to surprise the audience as much as it did them.

[Right picture] The Romulans planned to set various races at one another's throats, but instead their attack actually brought them together and laid the foundations of the Federation.



the relationship between Earth's allies and a killer of an ending for the first episode. The problem was he couldn't see how to knit these two elements into a story. "We knew we wanted to do a big cliffhanger where our people get to the bridge. You think they are going to find a whole bunch of Romulans, but instead they find out it's a drone and the people that we've been watching are on Romulus. While I was working on the episode I was trying to come up with something else about the ship – was it just super powerful? We'd already seen Romulan ships with cloaking devices. Personally, I didn't think they should have had a cloaking device at that point in history. I wanted to do something different."

Sussman's solution was to think about other unusual technologies the Romulans might have developed. "I started thinking about holotechnology and shapeshifting. That seemed related to cloaking technology so I thought it was fair game and we hadn't quite seen that on *STAR TREK* before. I pitched that to the producers but they were very lukewarm on it and told me to come up with something else."

Despite his clear instructions Sussman says he literally couldn't think of another solution to the problems the story was posing, so, nervously, he decided to write the outline his way anyway. "Without that element it was very straightforward – it's a bad guy spaceship and it's causing trouble. The whole thing that the holographic element gave me was that there was a war brewing between the Andorians and the Tellarites. That was juicy stuff. How would you do that if it wasn't one ship? Did the Romulans steal a ship? Were there different ships? It just solved so many problems if you could buy into this technology."

Fortunately, Sussman says, when the producers saw the outline they agreed with him. "I remember Manny said, 'You know what? It works.' It gave the story more layers. If you think of it as a murder mystery, the ship was able to frame other races for its crimes. It kind of made sense because the Romulans were very duplicitous." Sadly, *ENTERPRISE* was cancelled shortly afterwards and we never saw the next move in the Earth-Romulan wars so where the story went from here remains to be seen...

[Above Left] Sussman was determined to show that the Romulans were interfering in Vulcan politics and made sure that we saw a Romulan spy in the shadows at the end of the 'Vulcan reformation arc'.

[Above Right] In the original idea for the story that became 'Babel One,' the Romulans were using a drone ship, but it didn't have the ability to disguise itself as other vessels.



# ON SCREEN



FIRST APPEARANCE:	'BABEL ONE'
LAST APPEARANCE:	'THE AENAR'
TV APPEARANCES:	STAR TREK ENTERPRISE
DESIGNED BY:	DAVID LOMBARDI, ROB BONCHUNE

### KEY APPEARANCES

#### STAR TREK: ENTERPRISE 'BABEL ONE'

The Andorian Shran struggles to consciousness on the ruined bridge of his ship the *Kumari* and issues the order to abandon ship. When the survivors are rescued by the *Enterprise* NX-01, Shran tells Archer that his ship was destroyed by the Tellarites. The evidence from the *Kumari*'s sensor logs seems irrefutable but before long *Enterprise* is attacked by an Andorian battle cruiser and Archer starts to become suspicious. They track their attacker only to find a very different ship that Trip and Reed board in an attempt to find out more.

#### STAR TREK: ENTERPRISE 'THE AENAR'

Trip and Reed barely survived their time on the Romulan drone, but they have brought back data that reveals that it is remotely controlled by telepresence. To everyone's amazement, the operator seems to be a member of the Aenar, a blind, telepathic sub-species of Andorian. As Archer tries to recruit an Aenar of his own to try to disrupt control of the drone, the Romulans prepare for an even greater assault. Admiral Valdore launches both drones, determined to disrupt the building alliance between Earth, the Tellarites and Andorians...

### TRIVIA

The Romulans and the Vulcans shared history and the 22nd-century Romulan Wars pose several continuity problems. The first episode to feature the Romulans, 'Balance of Terror' explicitly states that no human has ever seen a Romulan and this was something that the producers of *ENTERPRISE* went to great lengths to maintain. However, the episode also makes it clear that Spock is surprised to see that the Romulans look like Vulcans and only believes it is "likely" they are related. Even by the second Romulan appearance in 'The *Enterprise* Incident', Spock knows a lot more about his Romulan cousins and by the time *ENTERPRISE* was made, all Vulcans and Romulans seem to know about each other. The Romulan officers we see are concerned that if the Vulcans examine the drone they will instantly know where it is from.



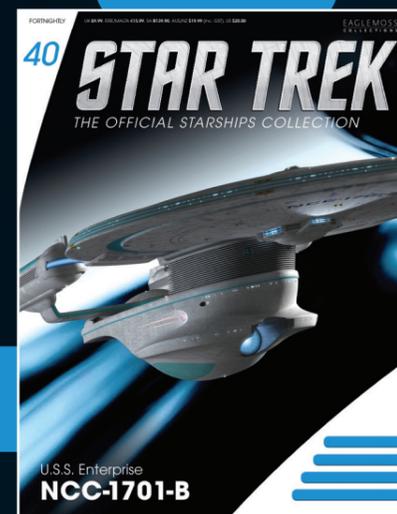
The Romulan drone appears in a three-part story in *STAR TREK: ENTERPRISE*'s fourth and final seasons. The episodes contain several references to *STAR TREK NEMESIS*, which had been released a few years earlier. Although it is never said on screen, the script names the Romulan admiral as Valdore – the name that was given to Commander Donatra's ship in *NEMESIS*. The story also features the first television appearance of the Remans, the vampirically-inspired slave race that *NEMESIS* revealed lives on the planet Remus.

## COMING NEXT

# ENTERPRISE NCC-1701-B

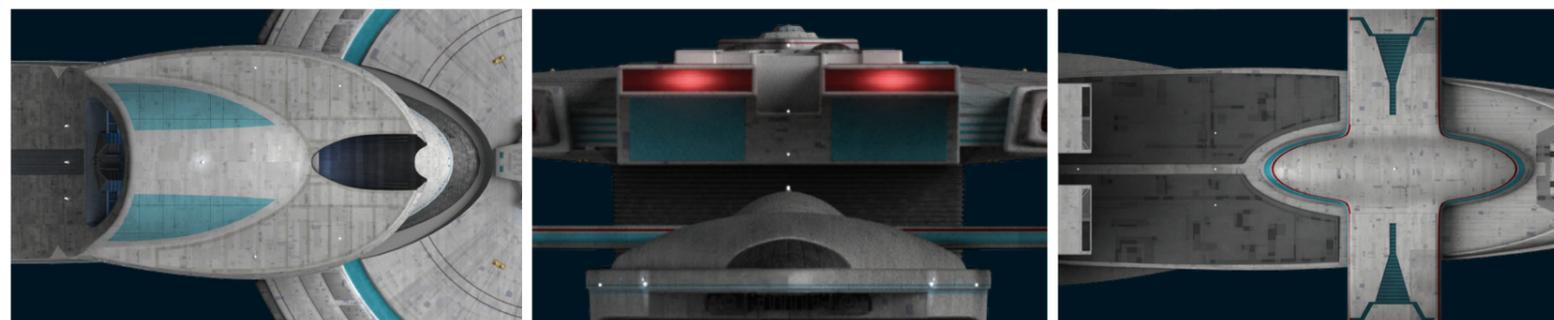


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- In-depth profile of the *Excelsior*-class *Enterprise-B*, the ship where Captain Kirk 'died'
- How John Eaves modified the *Excelsior* to make a new *Enterprise*



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