

36

# STAR TREK™

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# OBERTH CLASS

OBERTH CLASS

LAUNCHED: 23rd C

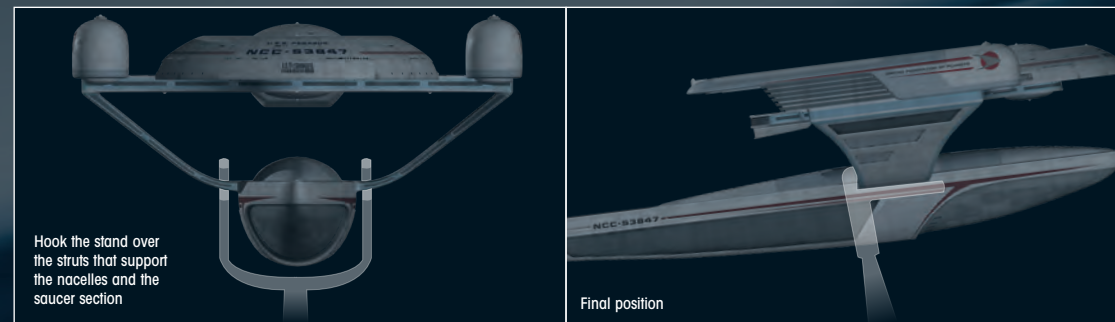
LENGTH: 120 METERS

CREW COMPLEMENT: 80

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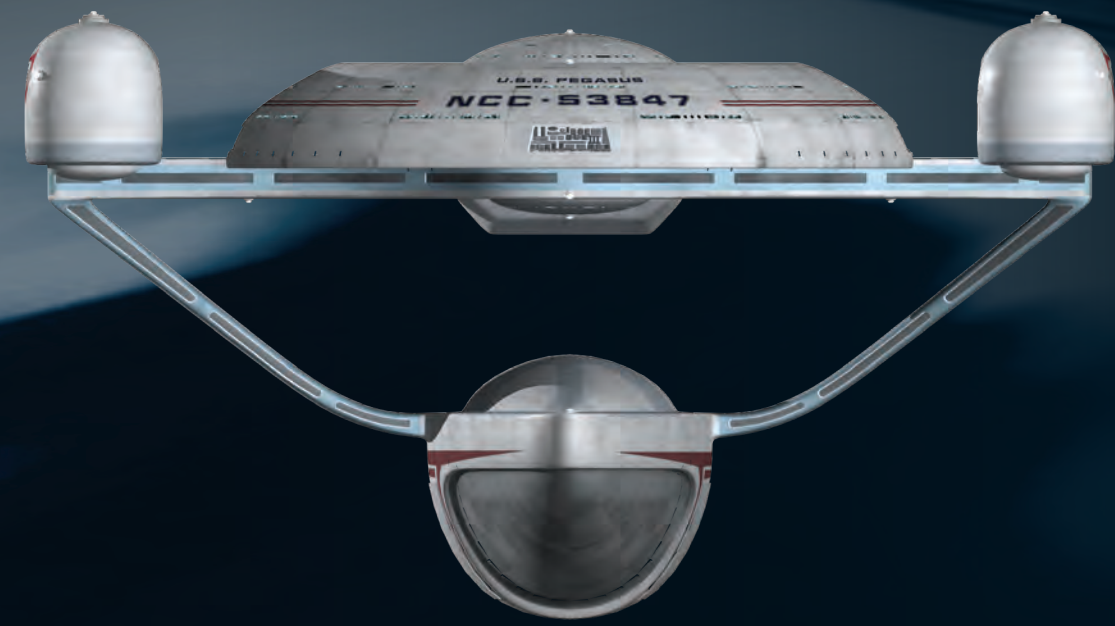
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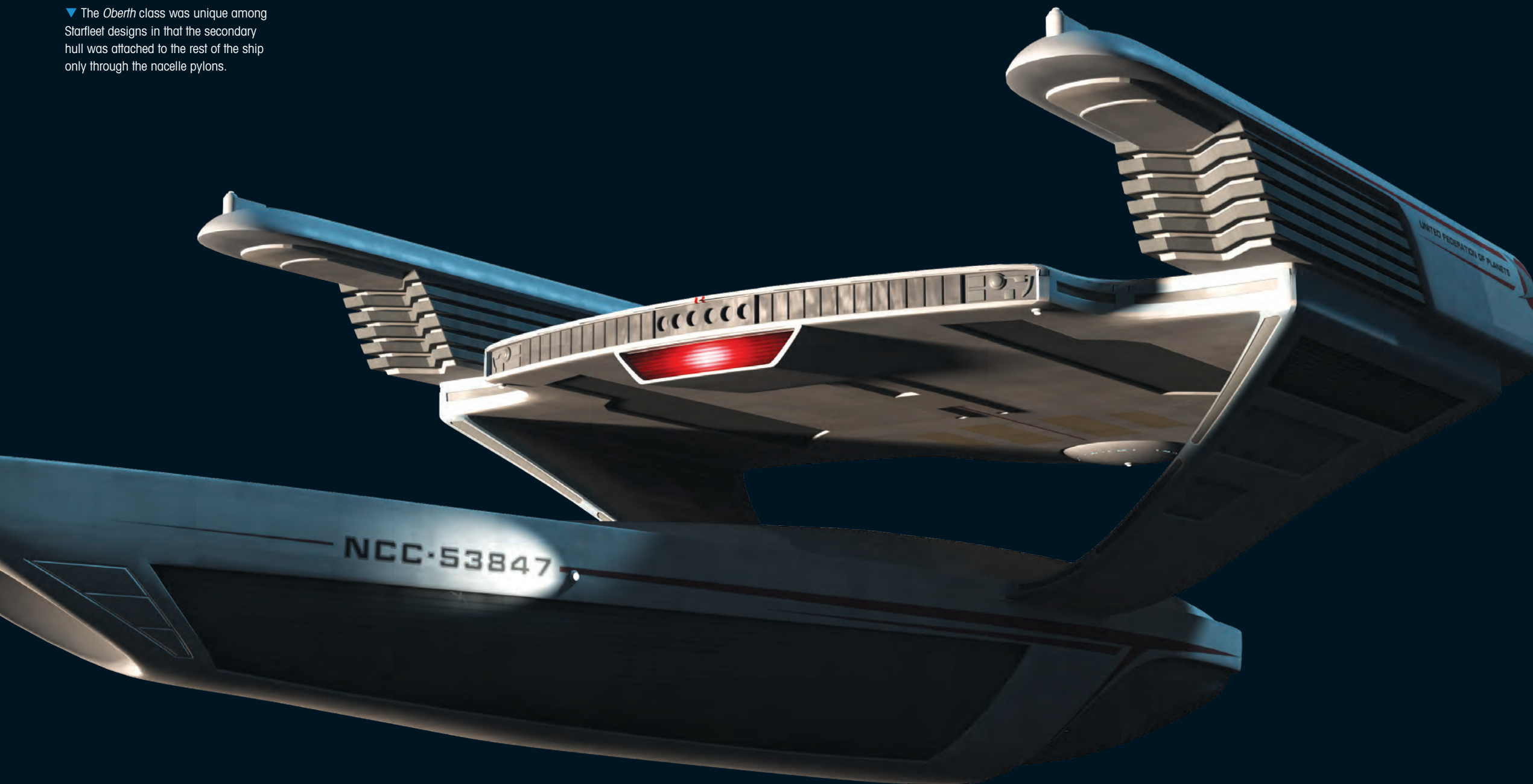
## OBERTH CLASS SPECIFICATION



CLASS:	OBERTH
LAUNCHED:	23rd CENTURY
LENGTH:	120 METERS
CREW:	80 (STANDARD)
WEAPONRY:	PHASER BANKS
CAPTAINS:	J.T. ESTEBAN, ERIK PRESSMAN



▼ The *Oberth* class was unique among Starfleet designs in that the secondary hull was attached to the rest of the ship only through the nacelle pylons.



# THE OBERTH CLASS

The *Oberth* class was an enduring design of starship that was mostly used to study astronomical phenomena.

The *Oberth* class was an extremely successful design of Federation starship that was in service from at least as early as 2285 to as late as 2375, nearly a century later. It was primarily designed to conduct science and research missions, and was often deployed to record, analyze and study unusual spatial phenomena.

The secondary role of the *Oberth* class was to act as supply and transport vessels. For example, in 2367, the *U.S.S. Cochrane* NCC-59318 was used to transfer Admiral Norah Satie to the *U.S.S. Enterprise* NCC-1701-D so that she could investigate a case of possible Romulan espionage. In addition, an *Oberth*-class vessel assisted in recovering the crew of the *Enterprise-D* from Veridian III, following the crash-landing of its saucer section there in 2371.

In emergencies, *Oberth*-class vessels were even deployed in battle. They took part in both of Starfleet's major conflicts with the Borg at the Battle of Wolf 359 in 2367 and at the Battle of Sector 001 in 2373, and they were even part of fleet engagements during the Dominion War.

## DISTINCTIVE DESIGN

Although instantly recognizable as a Federation starship, the *Oberth* class had an unusual design. The most notable aspect of its construction was that its secondary hull was connected to the rest of the ship only through the nacelle struts. This may have indicated that it was unmanned and contained cargo or sensor systems.

The overall length of an *Oberth*-class ship was roughly 120 meters, and the standard number



◀ The *Oberth*-class *U.S.S. Cochrane* NCC-59318 was used to transport Admiral Norah Satie to the *U.S.S. Enterprise* NCC-1701-D in 2367. The following year, the *Cochrane* met up with the *Enterprise-D* again so that Wesley Crusher could visit his mother, and it was used in 2369 to take Dr. Bashir and Jadzia Dax to *Deep Space 9*.



► The *U.S.S. Grissom* was conducting a survey of the newly formed Genesis Planet when it was destroyed in a surprise attack by a Klingon *Bird-of-Prey*.



◀ When the *Enterprise-D* was stuck in the path of a stellar core fragment, the tractor beam was modified to produce a repulsor beam that was bounced off the *S.S. Tsiolkovsky* to push itself clear of danger.



▲ Not all *Oberth*-class vessels were crewed by Starfleet personnel. The *S.S. Vico* was operating with a civilian crew when its hull was sheared off in several places by gravitational wavefronts while exploring the interior of a black cluster. Hull breaches led to a loss of atmosphere on several decks of the ship and the entire crew, apart from a small boy named Timothy, were lost.

of personnel on board was 80, although it was capable of operating with a crew complement of just five. Interestingly, although the *Oberth* class was a Starfleet vessel, it was sometimes loaned out to civilian scientists. For example, in 2368 the *S.S. Vico* NAR-18834 was operating with an entirely civilian crew while investigating a black cluster, one of the most ancient known astronomical formations in the galaxy.

In keeping with its primary role as a research vessel, the *Oberth* class was equipped with numerous science labs. One area, located in the saucer section, was a corridor-like chamber that featured science consoles and small monitors against the wall. Another section, known as science ops, contained multiple computer consoles and a personnel transporter pad.

Although specialized for scientific missions, *Oberth* class ships featured many of the systems

found on other types of Starfleet vessels. They were capable of high warp speeds, and were equipped with transporters and phasers. They also utilized specialized shields, as they often had to enter dangerous regions of space in order to study them. This shielding was supplemented by the use of immensely strong victurium alloy in the construction of the bulkheads to help maintain the integral structure of the hull when it was subjected to the stresses of powerful spatial phenomena.

#### CREW CASUALTIES

Despite the enhanced shielding, the crews of several *Oberth* class ships were lost during the course of their duties. In 2285, the *U.S.S. Grissom* NCC-638 was investigating the newly formed Genesis Planet when it was destroyed by a single disruptor blast from a Klingon *Bird-of-Prey*, whose crew were hoping to acquire the Genesis device.

In 2364, the entire crew of the *S.S. Tsiolkovsky* NCC-53911 died after they became infected with a variant of the Psi-2000 virus while monitoring the collapse of a super red dwarf star. The ship was destroyed soon after when it was hit by a stellar core fragment, but the *U.S.S. Enterprise* NCC-1701-D escaped a similar fate as it bounced a repulsor beam off the *Tsiolkovsky* to push itself clear of the fragment.

In 2358, most of the crew of the *Oberth*-class *U.S.S. Pegasus* NCC-53847 were lost while the ship was being used to test a cloaking device in violation of the Treaty of Algeron. During the trials, an explosion occurred in main engineering, resulting in several casualties. Many of the crew refused to continue and mutinied, forcing Captain Pressman and a few crew members loyal to him to abandon the ship in an escape pod. As they fled they saw an explosion, leading them to conclude

that the ship had been destroyed. It was not until 2370 that it was discovered that the *Pegasus* had drifted in phased-cloak form before rematerializing inside an asteroid, half of it in solid rock.

Despite these incidents, the *Oberth* class continued to be used into the late 2370s, but by this time it was slowly being replaced by newer designs of science vessels, such as the *Nova* class.

▲ The *U.S.S. Pegasus* served as a prototype for an illegal Federation cloaking device. After an explosion in engineering, the ship drifted through a large asteroid before decloaking, leaving parts of it encased in rock.



#### DATA FEED

In 2358, Captain Erik Pressman was in command of the *U.S.S. Pegasus* while it was being used to test an illegal cloaking device. During the trials, the crew mutinied and Pressman was forced to abandon the ship. It appeared to be destroyed shortly after with all hands and Pressman never faced justice. It was not until 2370, when the *U.S.S. Enterprise* NCC-1701-D discovered the wreckage of the *Pegasus*, that the truth emerged and Pressman was arrested.

**BRIDGE AND CREW QUARTERS**

The bridge on *Oberth*-class ships was found on the upper level of the saucer section and was arranged in a similar configuration to most Starfleet ships. Located at the front of the bridge was a viewscreen, with the side-by-side navigation and helm consoles directly in front of it. The captain's chair was in the middle of the room with the primary science station to port and secondary science consoles trailing along the wall to the back of the bridge. A communications station was positioned to the starboard side of the captain. The bridge also featured an emergency hatch set into the bulkhead, which led directly into space.

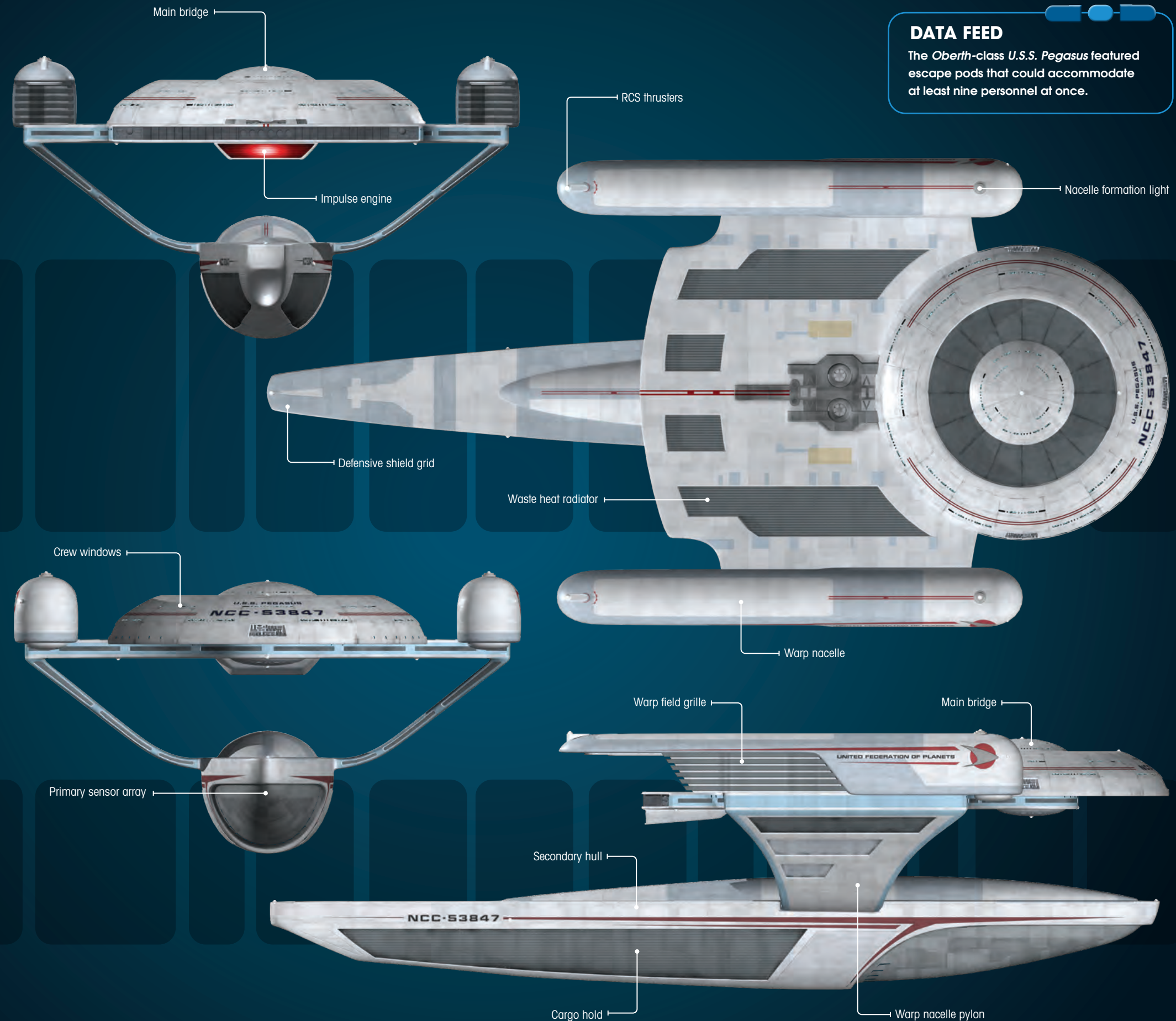
The crew quarters found aboard *Oberth*-class vessels included a main living area, with an attached bedroom and adjacent bathroom.



▲ Geordi La Forge discovered that most of the crew of the S.S. *Tsiolkovsky* had frozen to death when he searched their quarters.



▲ The science consoles on the bridge of the U.S.S. *Grissom* were more extensive than those on other Starfleet vessels.

**DATA FEED**

The *Oberth*-class U.S.S. *Pegasus* featured escape pods that could accommodate at least nine personnel at once.

**ROCKET SCIENTIST**

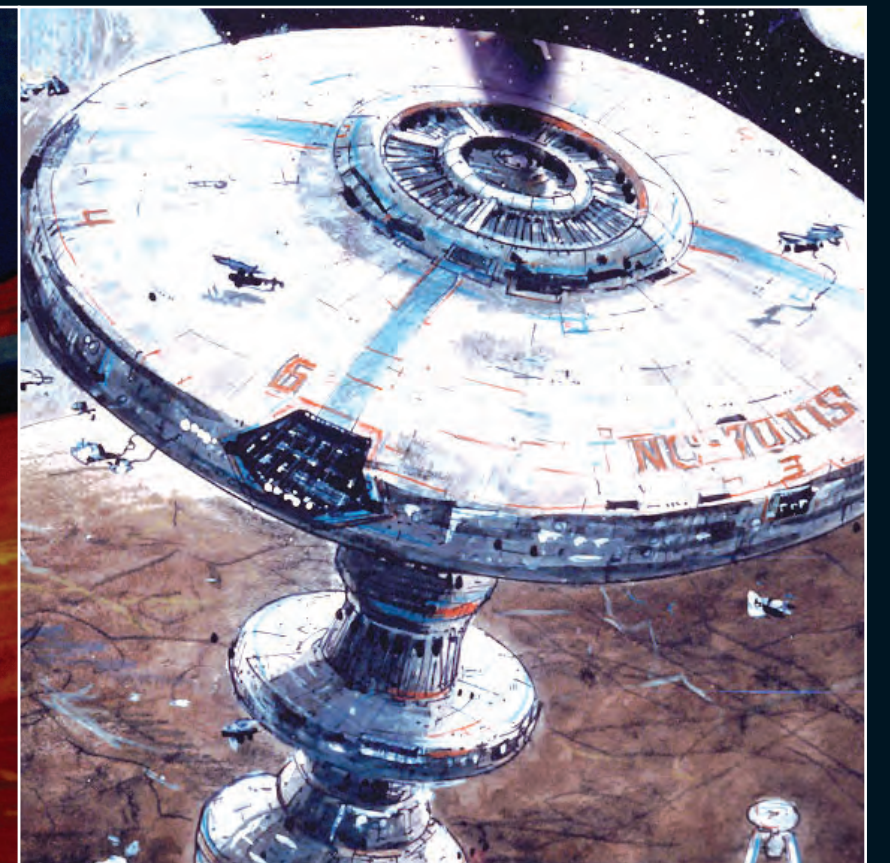
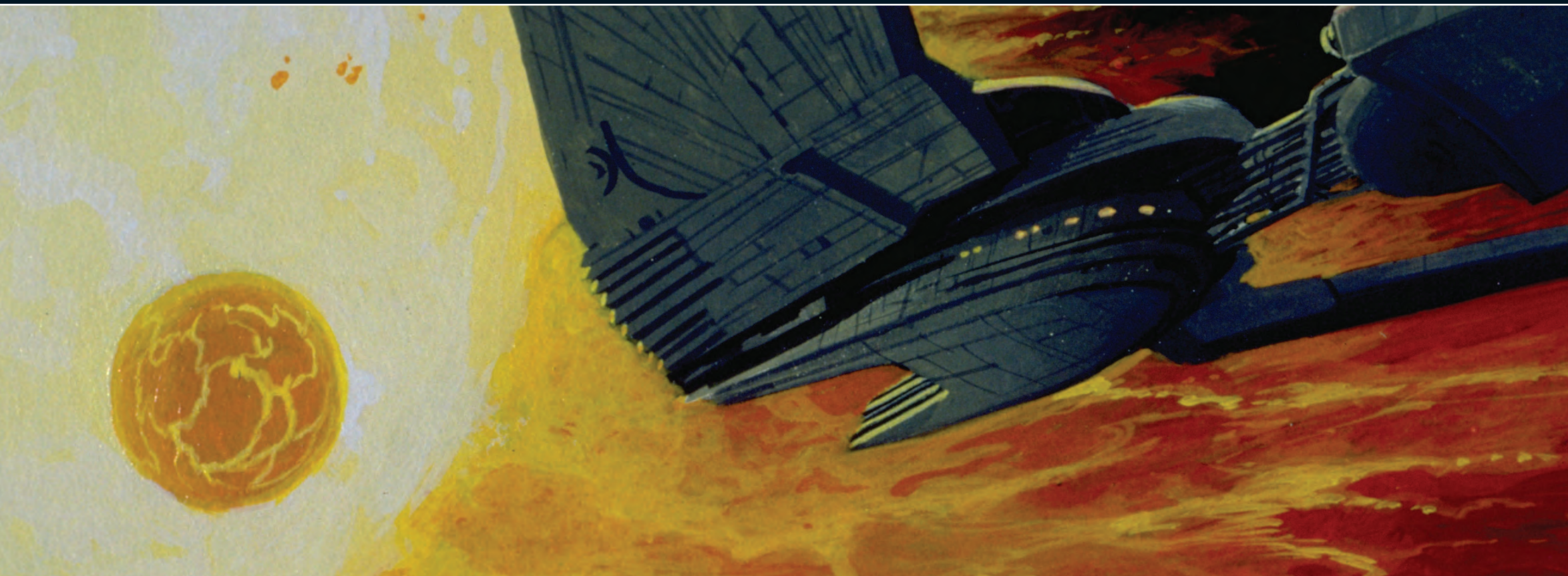
*Oberth*-class starships were named in honor of Austro-Hungarian-born German physicist Hermann Oberth. He is considered one of the founding fathers of modern rocketry and astronautics.

**ENSIGN RIKER**

William T. Riker's first posting after he left Starfleet Academy was aboard the *Oberth*-class U.S.S. *Pegasus*. He was the ship's conn officer, and his youthful appearance earned him the nickname of "Ensign Babyface."

**LONG PRODUCTION**

*Oberth*-class ships were in service as early as 2285. The dedication plaque on the S.S. *Tsiolkovsky* stated that it was commissioned in 2363, proving that new *Oberth*-class ships were still being constructed nearly 80 years later.



PRODUCTION DESIGN ON

III

# STAR TREK III

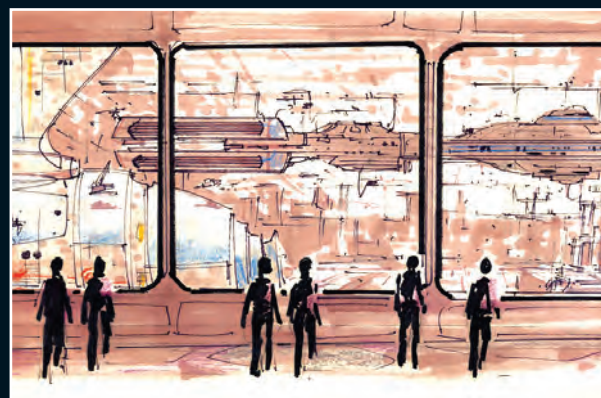
▲ Visual effects art directors Nilo Rodis and David Carson played a vital role in helping to define the look of *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*. They produced dozens of sketches for the most dramatic moments of the movie, including this one of the Klingon *Bird-of-Prey* and the Genesis Planet.

The designers of the new starships in *STAR TREK III* also helped to create the look of the entire movie as their stunning concept art shows...

The *Oberth* class, and indeed all the new starships that appeared in *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*, were designed by the art department and model shop at Industrial Light & Magic (ILM). The art department for the movie basically consisted of David Carson and his boss Nilo Rodis. Together, they looked through a three or four page outline of the story, tried to identify shots that ILM would be involved with, and work out how to make them as memorable as possible.

"What I was concerned with," Rodis recalled, "was finding images that stuck in your mind. You

know, if you go to an art gallery, some pictures just stop you dead in your tracks? That was what I had to think about; how do I make you stop dead in your tracks?"



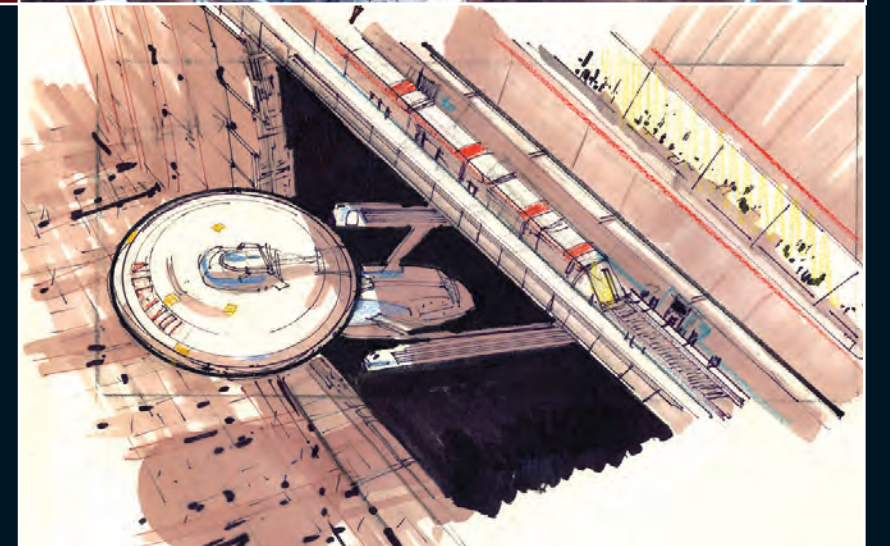
◀ Carson suggested that inside Spacedock people should be able to see the *U.S.S. Excelsior* through the windows of a lounge.

The outline they were working with was basic, but it proved to be very close to the finished script. As Carson explained, he and Rodis would simply produce sketches for moments that inspired them.

## MUTUAL INSPIRATION

"We'd churn out quite a few sketches," said Carson. "Then the ones that were most promising we might polish up a little in color for presentation. 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 would often inspire me."

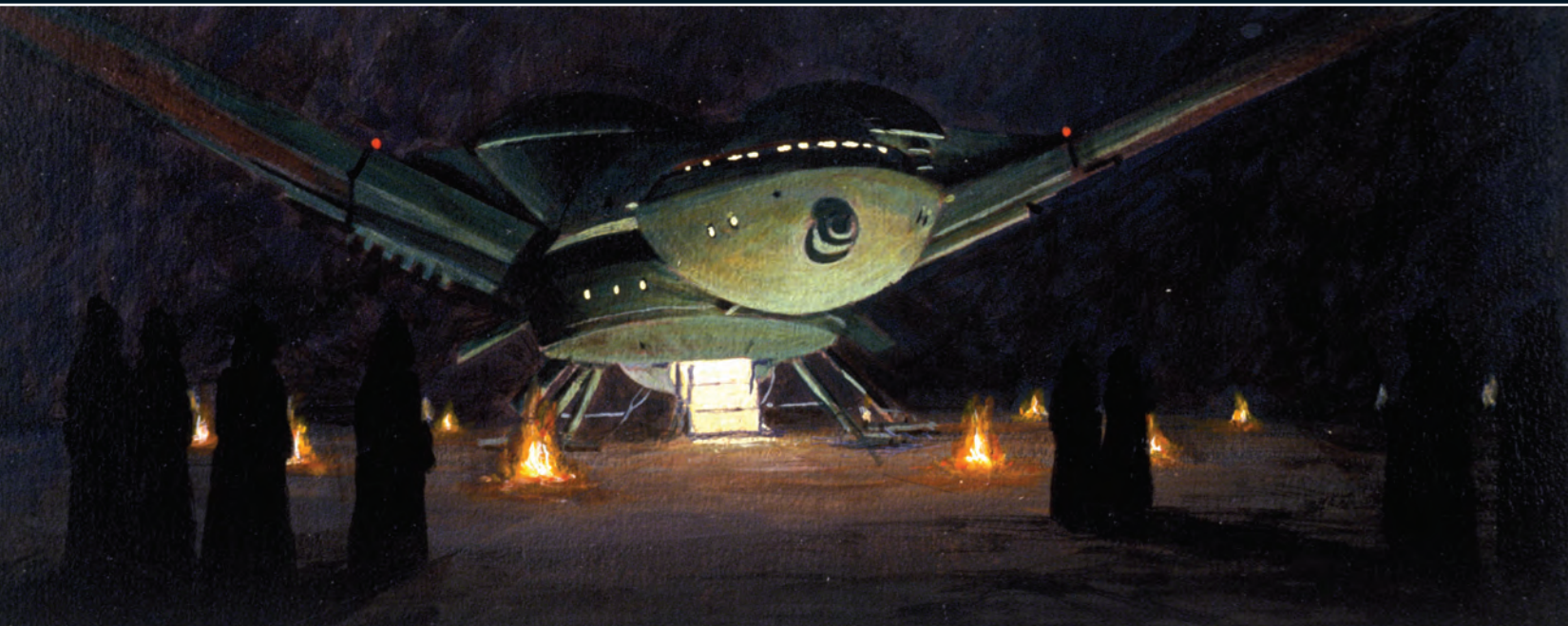
Carson went on to say that, because they were involved so early in the process, they felt free to make suggestions about how things could



look and work, and in some cases this actually influenced the story that was still being finalized by writer-producer Harve Bennett and director Leonard Nimoy.

"What was great was that, as we began doing sketches, they could come up with ideas that were based on our artwork," said Carson. "For example, the outline said that the *Enterprise* was going to dock at this space station where they would see the *Excelsior*. I was trying to work out how we could make this space station interesting, and I thought,

▲ Carson suggested that the *U.S.S. Enterprise* could actually go inside a gigantic new design of Spacedock that resembled a giant mushroom.



▲ The ramp down from the *Bird-of-Prey* originally faced forward, but it was turned around so that the art department did not have to build the front of the ship.

▼ The scene showing the *Bird-of-Prey* coming in to land on Vulcan was partly created with matte paintings and instantly established the geography of Mount Seleya.



"What if it is so big that the *Enterprise* actually goes into it?" I did a drawing of a space station that was big enough. It was a bit clunky, but Nilo took that and in his typical fashion turned it into a really wonderful design. So we presented this idea and that led to the incident where they are trying to fly the *Enterprise* out of the door before it closes. Obviously, Harve (Bennett) came up with that story point, but it started with a visual that we produced."

Rodis remembered that Spacedock's distinctive mushroom shape came out of his desire to insure that *STAR TREK* had its own, unique, design ethic.

"We pitched a whole bunch of design ideas to Harve (Bennett) and Leonard (Nimoy)," said Rodis. "I wanted to make sure it had nothing whatsoever to do with 'Star Wars,' so it was more reality-based in its own *STAR TREK* way."

#### VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

The exterior shots of the spaceships were handled entirely by ILM. However, there were other shots where Rodis and Carson's work overlapped with that of the art department at Paramount. This was headed up by production designer John Chilberg (who died in 1987); he worked with set designer Cameron Birnie and illustrator Tom Lay.

Cameron Birnie remembered that he was somewhat surprised by ILM's level of involvement. "It was the first time that I recall where the visual effects department was giving instructions to the art department rather than the other way round," said Birnie. "We did a scene where the *Bird-of-Prey* lands on Vulcan. I thought we were building the inside of the spaceship, the door, the ramp down, and then the environment that they were coming down to. They said, 'No, you don't have to do any of that. All we need you to do is build the ramp and the doorway.'"

The rest of the shot, which showed the mountainside, a stairway carved into the rocks, and the temple on Mount Seleya, was created by ILM, using matte paintings and elements that were filmed on different locations.



▲ Carson said that the basic look for the Genesis Planet was lush and verdant. They wanted to quickly establish this newly formed world as an unspoiled paradise.

◀ After a while, it would become clear that there was something very wrong with the Genesis Planet. Rodis suggested that a desert scene covered in snow would make this clear before the planet started tearing itself apart.

It was often very difficult to see where ILM's responsibilities ended and the Paramount art department's began. This approach could be seen in the way that the two art departments worked on the design of the Genesis Planet. Rodis and Carson produced sketches of this when they first saw the outline. As Carson said, this was natural enough, because no one was clear exactly which parts of the planet would be handled on the sound stage, and which parts would involve visual effects. He and Rodis produced drawings showing the ground tearing apart and 'the rock eels' which grew out of Spock's coffin. But along the way they also started to suggest what Genesis should look like.

"What I really wanted to do," Rodis said, "was

identify scenes that had anything to do with effects. But I tended to storyboard the moments around them to better understand what Leonard (Nimoy) had in mind."

#### PARADISE TURNED TO HELL

In the case of Genesis, Rodis said he probably did go further than anyone expected. "I was really, unbelievably bold and naïve in my younger days," said Rodis. "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 and Leonard, saying the best way to show snow is in the desert because when you have images that don't belong together



▲ Rodis produced some concepts for the bridge of the Klingon Bird-of-Prey that established the basic direction, but the final set was designed by the Paramount art department.

▼ One of the concepts for Vulcan saw Spock's body being taken on a barge on a submerged river, but the set proved too expensive to build. Another design was for the temple where Spock was resurrected.

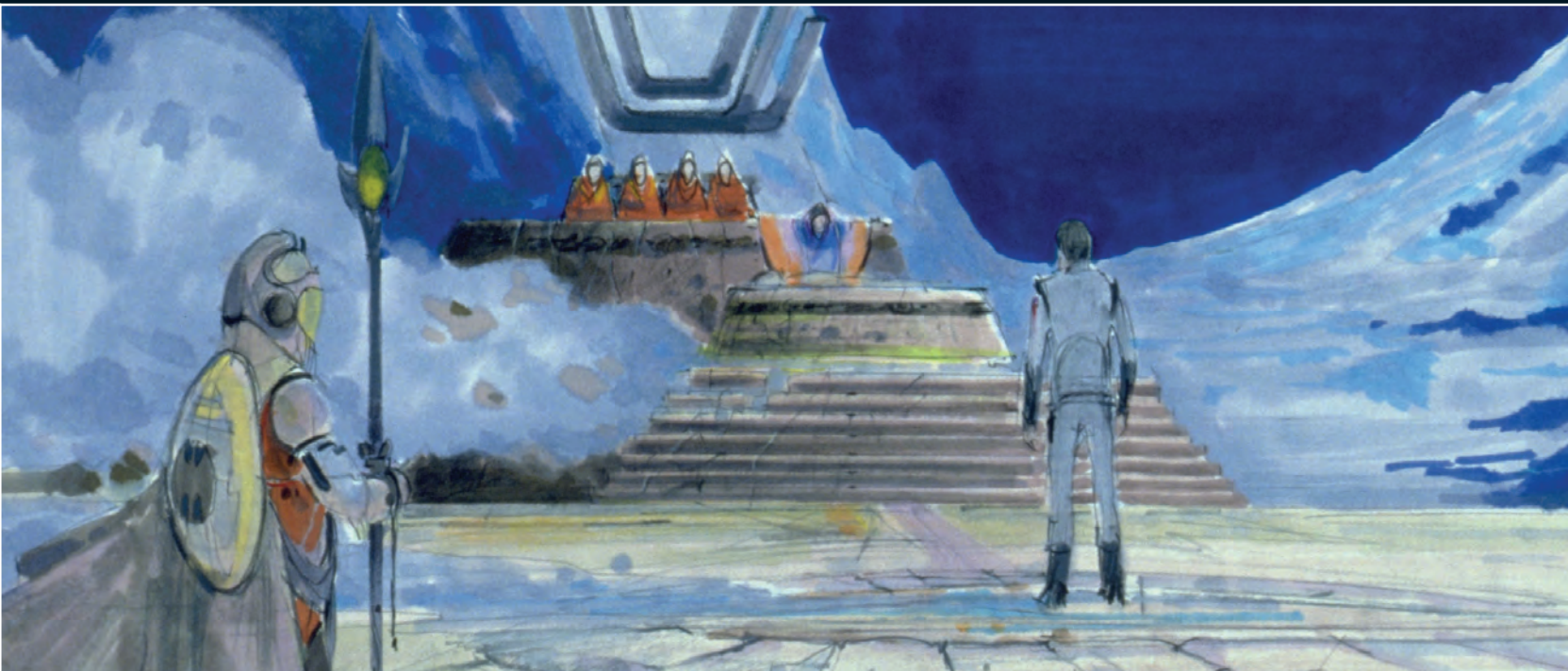
visually that tells you that something is drastically wrong. I remember I actually had powdered dust with me. I dropped this powder on the model and said, 'See it works!'"

**COMPLEX SET**

Rodis's concepts clearly influenced the design of the set, but the task of actually building the Genesis Planet fell to the Paramount art department. As Birnie remembered, the set involved a lot of complex rigging so that the ground could be pulled apart to create fissures that flames would erupt from. "That was handled by special effects," said Birnie, "but the art department watched over so we worked with them on physical things like floors falling through."

Genesis was built on Stage 15, which was one of the largest on the Paramount lot, and the sheer scale of the set meant that the art department took a slightly unusual approach to creating the final design. "We made a model of the set and reworked it and reworked it until we got it just right," said Birnie. "Then, rather than draw every single section to show them how to build the set, they took the model down to the stage and put it through a band saw. Every quarter of an inch they cut a section out of the model, then they laid each section on quarter inch grid paper and traced it. And then they gave each section to a different carpenter and said build that."

Rodis and Carson were also involved with the designs for the bridge of the Klingon *Bird-of-Prey*



▲ Carson remembered that the art department produced many different drawings of the altar where the *fall-for-pan* ceremony took place..

and the bar where McCoy is arrested, but again the designs were finalized at Paramount, where the sets were built.

**VISIONS OF VULCAN**

Both departments worked on the designs for Vulcan. In particular, Carson remembered spending days developing alternative designs for an area called the Hall of Ancient Thoughts, through which the crew would have passed on their way to the temple where Spock was resurrected. Carson said, "We wrestled quite a bit with trying to come up with an impressive number of environments that you pass through that could be constructed for a reasonable budget, and ultimately we failed! The Hall of Ancient Thoughts actually became the Hall of Nothing, because it was too expensive. I did this great drawing - it was a bunch of people on a submerged river, poling along on this barge. I knew as I was drawing it there was no chance. When Harve and Leonard looked at it, they said, 'Yeah, that would really be great but there's no way.'"

Carson was also involved with the design of the altar where the final ceremony was performed; this was something he remembered producing sketches for when he saw the very first outline. He also drew a series of storyboards showing the *Bird-of-Prey* coming in to land on Vulcan. Rodis

remembered that Leonard wanted the crew to make a journey up to the temple after they had landed, not least because it would be expensive to add the *Bird-of-Prey* to the shots of the temple.

**SIMPLE AND DRAMATIC**

"Leonard wanted a narrow passageway, a thoroughfare, for dramatic purposes," said Rodis. "The best way to do that was with a matte painting showing where the *Bird-of-Prey* landed relative to the temple that they were going to walk up to. From my experience, you have 15 seconds for that shot. The logistical implication of those 15 seconds has got to be very clear. It cannot be cluttered otherwise it won't stick in your memory."

Ultimately, that was what Rodis believed his job was about - taking a design for a movie and making sure that it served its purpose. *STAR TREK III* proved that everything that was designed had to work together. "At the end of the day," said Rodis, "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 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."



▼ ILM's original study model for the U.S.S. *Grissom* and the completed studio model (below).



III The *Oberth* class was designed to be merely cannon fodder for the Klingons, but the model proved to be far more enduring.

When envisaging the initial concept for the *Oberth*-class U.S.S. *Grissom* NCC-638, visual artist Nilo Rodis of Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) was very aware that its design had to be seen in relation to the entire movie and the other ships. The point of the U.S.S. *Excelsior* NX-2000 was that it was more modern than the *Enterprise*, while the Klingon *Bird-of-Prey* had to be menacing. The *Grissom* also had a particular purpose in the story, but it was something entirely different.

"It was fodder for the Klingons," said Rodis. "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."

Once a design direction for the *Grissom* had been established, it was handed over to model makers Steve Gawley, Bill George and their team, who then built a basic study model of it to show producer Harve Bennett and director Leonard Nimoy. "The *Grissom* was the smallest model," said Gawley. "As a matter of fact it was probably only double the size of the maquette (about 28 inches long). The reason was that we didn't see it up close, so we didn't need a large model."

While the *Grissom* had relatively little screen time

in the movie, it was far from the last time that the model appeared in the franchise. In fact, it made a brief appearance in the next film, *STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME*, where it was seen inside Spacedock relabelled as the U.S.S. *Copernicus* NCC-640. The model was next used to depict the S.S. *Tsiolkovsky* NCC-53911 in the *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* episode 'The Naked Now.'

The model was seen again as the U.S.S. *Cochrane* NCC-59318 in *THE NEXT GENERATION* fourth season episode 'The Drumhead,' and as the U.S.S. *Yosemite* NCC-19002 in the sixth season episode 'Realm of Fear.' It made its final screen appearance as the U.S.S. *Pegasus* NCC-53847 in the seventh season episode 'The Pegasus.'

Interestingly, a second studio model of the *Oberth* class was built to represent the S.S. *Vico* NAR-18834 in *THE NEXT GENERATION* fifth season episode 'Hero Worship.' As the story called for the ship to be shown severely damaged, the original studio model was deemed too valuable to cut up, so the model makers at Gregory Jein Inc. took molds of the original ILM model and cast the parts to construct a new model that could be torn up.

The original studio model was sold at auction in 2006, still labelled as the U.S.S. *Pegasus*, for \$21,600. The final appearance of the *Oberth* class was in the Battle of Sector 001 in *STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT*, where it was rebuilt as a CG model.

## BUILDING & FILMING THE OBERTH CLASS



▲ Model makers at Gregory Jein Inc. built a second studio model of the *Oberth* class so that its hull could be shown with severe damage.



▲ The original studio model of the *Oberth* class was relabeled and reused several times in episodes of *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION*.

# ON SCREEN



### TRIVIA

Actor Terry O'Quinn played the part of Admiral Erik Pressman in the *STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION* episode 'The Pegasus.' The production staff were so impressed with his performance that executive producer Michael Piller considered using the character in an episode of *STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE*, but the idea never reached fruition. O'Quinn is perhaps best known for his role as John Locke in the J.J. Abrams-produced television series 'Lost.'



The *U.S.S. Grissom* NCC-638 was named after astronaut Gus Grissom, the second American to fly in space. He was the designated commander of the aborted Apollo 1 mission, who died in the tragic Apollo 1 fire on 27 January 1967.



The Oberth class, the Excelsior class, the Spacedock-type station, and the Klingon *Bird-of-Prey* all made their first appearances in *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*. These designs continued to be used for many years after in the various screen incarnations of *STAR TREK*.

- FIRST APPEARANCE:** STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK
- TV APPEARANCES:** STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION;  
STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE
- DESIGNED BY:** Nilo Rodis and David Carson

### KEY APPEARANCES

#### STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

Admiral Kirk and his bridge crew risk their careers stealing the *U.S.S. Enterprise* NCC-1701 in order to return to the restricted Genesis Planet so that they can recover Spock's body. Meanwhile, the Oberth-class *U.S.S. Grissom* NCC-638 is conducting a scientific study of the Genesis Planet when it is destroyed by a rogue Klingon *Bird-of-Prey*. Its captain wants the power of the Genesis device for himself and is prepared to go to any lengths to get it. Kirk finds himself faced with having to make huge personal sacrifices if he is to defeat the Klingons and be reunited with Spock.

#### STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION 'THE PEGASUS'

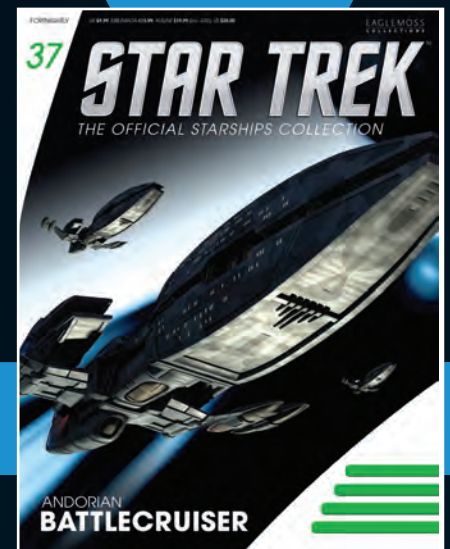
Admiral Erik Pressman boards the *U.S.S. Enterprise* NCC-1701-D with a top secret assignment to retrieve his former ship, the *U.S.S. Pegasus* NCC-53847. It was lost 12 years earlier, but has recently been found, and their mission is to recover it before the Romulans get to it. Riker served with Pressman aboard the *Pegasus* and knows what really happened. The *Pegasus* was being used to test an illegal cloaking device, and Riker realizes that if he reveals the truth, it could end the peace treaty between the Federation and the Romulans.

COMING IN ISSUE 37

# ANDORIAN Battle Cruiser



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- A look at how the writing staff brought the Andorians back



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