NIAGARA
CLASS

TYPE: CRUISER
LAUNCHED: 24th C
LENGTH: 565 METERS
MAX SPEED: WARP 9.6
The Niagara class was one of the most distinctive-looking Starfleet ships of the 24th century as it featured a third nacelle. Despite this unusual configuration, nearly all of the rest of the components were taken from proven designs.

The wreckage of the U.S.S. Princeton NCC-59804, a Niagara-class ship, filled the top right of the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D’s viewscreen. The Princeton was part of the 39-strong ship fleet that had been assembled by Starfleet to stop an invading Borg cube at Wolf 359, but the entire armada was decimated in a matter of minutes.

Nearly all Starfleet ships featured an even number of warp nacelles, with most featuring a two-nacelle configuration as Federation propulsion experts determined that this was the ideal layout for optimal warp field efficiency and vessel control. This did not stop Starfleet from experimenting with alternative nacelle configurations, however, and there were one-nacelle designs, such as the Freedom class, and the three-nacelle layout of the Niagara class. While there were some disadvantages to this arrangement, the Niagara class was a type of Starfleet starship that was in service in the 24th century. It was highly unusual in that it was the only known Starfleet starship to feature three warp nacelles. Examples of the Niagara class included the U.S.S. Princeton NCC-59804 and the U.S.S. Wellington NCC-28473.

The Niagara class was approximately 565 meters in length, and its crew complement was around 530. It comprised of a fairly rare saucer design that featured an elongated bridge module, and an engineering hull that was identical to that found on Ambassador-class ships such as the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-C. The Niagara class was equipped with warp nacelles that were the same as those found on Galaxy-class ships like the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D, but the shape of the Niagara’s nacelle pylons were unique.

PRIMARY DUTIES
The Niagara class’s primary roles were ones of exploration and diplomacy. It was equipped with numerous sensor arrays and scientific laboratories to aid in the study of planets and stellar phenomena. It also featured extensive diplomatic facilities, which ensured it was capable of handling multi-species conferences.

The Niagara class had three warp nacelles, and it shared parts found on both the Galaxy and Ambassador classes.
Ro Laren served aboard the Niagara-class U.S.S. Wellington, where she attained the rank of lieutenant. In the mid-2360s, she took part in a fateful away mission to Garon II. The specifics of the assignment were vague, but she disobeyed direct orders and as a direct consequence eight members of the away team lost their lives. Ro refused to speak in her own defense at the trial, leaving the court to find her guilty and sentencing her to prison on Jaros II.

Odd numbered design, there were certain benefits too. Niagara-class ships were able to operate on their upper nacelle pair only and keep the lower nacelle in reserve, or vice versa. This extended the life of the components, and added another layer of redundancy if a nacelle failed.

The Niagara class was therefore more suited to deep space missions when it would be far from any starbases or repair facilities, although it did not mean that it had a higher top speed. Like many Starfleet vessels of this era, the Niagara class had a maximum velocity of warp 9.6, but its cruising speed was higher than normal at warp 8.

The architecture of the Niagara’s saucer section was found on only one other Starfleet ship – the Freedom class. It was oval in shape and fairly thin compared to other Starfleet ships. The bridge module was located in the middle of the saucer section and it sat on top of a secondary shuttlebay. The main shuttlebay was located in the more usual position at the rear of the secondary hull. The primary hull also featured numerous windows and lifeboat hatches, as well as several type-7 phaser arrays.

SECONDARY HULL
The short “neck” section that joined the saucer to the rest of the ship was unique to the Niagara class, but the engineering hull was the same shape as that found on Ambassador-class ships. This was a substantial structure and looked almost round when seen from the front. The warp core ran the entire height of the secondary hull, and it could be ejected in the event of a catastrophic matter/antimatter containment failure.

As has been said, the Niagara class was mainly used for deep space exploration missions, but its multiple phaser arrays, as well as fore and aft photon torpedo launchers, meant it possessed significant firepower. Add in its robust defensive shields combined with the extra power generated by its third warp nacelle and the Niagara class was well up to the task of performing combat and defensive duties.

This was certainly true against familiar enemies in the Alpha and Beta Quadrants that Starfleet found itself up against, but in 2367 it was heavily outmatched by an invading Borg cube. The Niagara-class U.S.S. Princeton lined up with 38 other Starfleet ships to engage the Borg. It was swatted aside with ease as almost half its saucer section was torn off by the Borg cube’s cutting beam, and all three of its nacelles suffered heavy damage. Most of the crew perished in the attack, and the ship was damaged beyond repair. The lifeless hull was later towed to the starship junkyard at Surplus Depot Z15 located in orbit of Qaror II.
Most Starfleet vessels had two nacelles, although they could operate with one nacelle at reduced speed. There were Starfleet vessels built with just one nacelle such as the Freedom class. The Niagara class was the only type of Starfleet ship that had three nacelles in the prime universe, although a schematic seen on a display monitor aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701 appeared to show the Freedom class as having three nacelles.

**DATA FEED**

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It had been hoped to show the actual Battle of Wolf 359, with the Starfleet armada taking on the Borg cube, in ‘The Best of Both Worlds, Part II,’ but visual effects supervisor Gary Hutzel soon realized it would prove much too expensive – not to mention time consuming. It was clear that they would have to come up with another plan.

It was Judy Elkins, who at that time was employed by Boss Film Studios and would later work as a visual effects coordinator on STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE, came up with the inspired idea of using parts from commercially available model kits to build wrecked starships. This way they could film the aftermath of the battle and show numerous battle-damaged ships for minimal effort and money.

While many of the ships that featured in the ‘graveyard’ scene were ‘kitbashed’ from different classes of Starfleet model ships, there were a couple that were built specially for the episode by Greg Jein, Inc.

**STAR TREK VETERAN**

Greg Jein is, of course, a master model maker, who first worked for the franchise on STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE. He was working for Industrial Light & Magic when he was the lead modeler on STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION’s pilot episode ‘Encounter at Farpoint,’ where under his leadership they built the Farpoint station maquette, plus two studio models of the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D.

Jein’s model work was so good and so detailed that the company he created, Greg Jein, Inc, became the primary supplier of studio models throughout THE NEXT GENERATION’s entire run. One of the many models his company supplied was the Niagara-class starship featured in ‘The Best of Both Worlds, Part II.’

This ship, which Jein’s workshop labelled as the U.S.S. Princeton NCC-59804, was made from molds that had been created for other classes of Starfleet ship, plus a few custom parts. In Season Three, Jein’s workshop had built the Ambassador-class U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-C for ‘Yesterday’s Enterprise,’ and the mold of its engineering hull was used for the Princeton. The nacelles of the Niagara class, however, came from the four-foot Galaxy-class studio model that he had originally built for the pilot.

The other parts of the Niagara-class model were built from scratch, including the saucer section and the nacelle pylons. These elements came from Jein’s own production assets and no part of the ship was derived from commercially available model kits.

**QUALITY DAMAGE**

The Niagara class was also constructed as being pre-damaged from the get-go, with burn marks and a large chunk taken out of the saucer section, rather than being built intact and then damaged later. This meant that the model was of a higher standard than those that were ‘kitbashed.’

The only problem with the model was that it had three nacelles, and as scenic art supervisor Mike Okuda reminded Jein, Gene Roddenberry did not approve of odd-numbered nacelles. By this point, it was too late to change it, and the three-nacelled Niagara class was filmed in a such a way that it was hoped would not be too obvious.

Master model maker Greg Jein came to the rescue when battle-damaged Starfleet ships were needed for ‘The Best of Both Worlds.’
Sometimes history looks very different to the people who were there. According to legend, everything came right for STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION in its third year. This was when the ratings started to climb and the show consistently produced high-quality episodes. Any objective analysis holds it up as a year of transition and achievement.

Ira Steven Behr was there, and he’d tell you that was not how it seemed at the time. “I love it every time I read about the third season; when everything came together,” he laughed. “At the time we [the writing staff] were deranged. We thought we were all going to get fired. We thought Paramount was going to come with a giant suitcase and put us all inside – along with the sets – and float us out to sea. It was not whether the cup was half empty or half full; we just saw a massive, devastated wasteland with many smashed cups.”

TALENTED PEOPLE

Of course, things looked very different in hindsight, and Behr was amazed that such good results came out of one of the most difficult times in his life. “I’d like to explain it by the fact that there was a talented writing staff despite itself,” said Behr. “I think credit must be given to Michael Piller and Rick Berman, who somehow made the scripts better, and Ron (Ronald D. Moore), who came in and found his yellow brick road and walked confidently on it from the first.”

Behr joined the TNG staff on ‘The Defector,’ the ninth show of the third season. Paramount had originally talked to him about coming on to the team in the second season under Maurice Hurley, but at the time he’d turned them down. “Maurice was a really nice guy,” said Behr. “He was putting a very positive spin on it, but he was saying a lot of things that made me hesitate, so I decided against it. Then, the next year, the situation changed. Michael Piller, who I had known for a few years, was on the show, and Hans Beimler and Ricky Manning, who had worked for me on Fame, were there as well. Even though I still had some hesitation, I decided to accept. It made my sister smile when I told her that I was doing it, since we had watched THE ORIGINAL SERIES as kids.”

When Behr arrived Michael Piller was desperately looking for stories and needed someone who could help rewrite the scripts the way he wanted. Behr recalled that he had barely caught up on watching the old episodes when Piller walked into his office and asked him to write some scenes for ‘The Defector.’ “I did a bunch of things on that episode,” said Behr. “I wrote some of the stuff Jarok said about being alone when he was on the holodeck. I remember I thought, ‘How am I going to get through this? I don’t know what I’m doing!’ I remember writing those first scenes and giving them to Richard Danus, who was a story editor. I didn’t know him; I just walked into his office and said, ‘Read this and tell me if it’s any good.’ He came back and said, ‘Yeah, it reads like it was written by a writer.’”

Ira Steven Behr is best known as the guiding light behind STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE, but he first worked for the franchise a few years earlier when he wrote for THE NEXT GENERATION in the third season.

The first show Behr worked on after he joined THE NEXT GENERATION was ‘The Defector,’ which was written by the entire staff, but Behr contributed the pivotal scene of Jarok on the holodeck.

Yesterday’s Enterprise was written over a Thanksgiving weekend under intense time-sacle pressure, but Behr said the writers were happy to tackle far darker themes than they had in the past.
Despite Behr’s doubts about what he was doing, Michael Piller felt he always had the greatest faith in him. Behr fulfilled a very important function for TNG in new directions and develop the characters; he was effectively his deputy, who could break stories with the writing staff and make sure that the early drafts were ready for Piller to work on. "I thought he had that great ability to come up with the story ideas they put forward," said Behr. "He took the stories I had and he just knew structure. He just trusted me from the word go, and that certainly helped my ego on the show and my confidence."

HELPING HAND
"I broke stories the only way I knew how, and that was with as many of the staff as possible," continued Behr. "Michael was in the room a lot of times, and sometimes he wasn’t. He was rewritting so much. He was under the gun in a lot of ways. Obviously, Rick Berman wanted the scripts to handle on what was needed, and this forced the staff to rewrite more than they would have hoped. "We’d get scripts in where the first draft was so bizarre that all you could do was laugh hysterically," recalled Behr. "There was a script by a writer who went off to have a quite stellar career in television. We read the draft and all we could do was sit there with tears rolling down our faces. We were laughing so hard, but it was the laughter of doomed people, because we were going to have to rewrite this and make it work! We had obviously given up and written things in there that were meant for laughs. It wasn’t fun." Behr had some sympathy with the belief that TNG should have been more like THE ORIGINAL SERIES, and said that he felt most of the show’s characters were too perfect to be interesting. "I really don’t mean this as a knock on the show, because it proved itself a million times over, but it never engaged me," said Behr. "To me, as I’ve said many a time and often, THE NEXT GENERATION was the Connecticut of STAR TREK. It seemed very white and homogenized. I just felt it had no fire to it. I was told by Gene that human beings had no problems in the 24th century, but I really believe if you have no problems, you have no humanity."

ROUGH EDGES
Given this, it was not surprising that Behr was keen to give Picard and his crew some rough edges. He recalled there were "heated discussions" about the scene at the end of 'The Most Toys,' where it was clear that Data had fired his gun at Fajo, but was transported away before the beam could emerge. "As drama taken on its own, that was interesting and it was good, but on STAR TREK it felt like you were reinventing the wheel," Behr explained. "You were taking these characters to Obviously there was some level of debate about Data’s character when he was kidnapped by Kivas Fajo. Under extreme duress, Data finally decided that he had no choice other than to kill Fajo, but he was beamed out at the last second.

Exactly the same thing happened on the next script, ‘The Hunted.’ "Piller came into my office again," explained Behr. "And he just said, ‘This section needs work; this section needs work.’ And I thought, ‘Screw it, I’m not going to do this at all!’ I remember feeling, ‘What the hell have I accomplished? What am I doing here? How many decks?’"

This was a smaller pass than ‘The Defector.’ When we did have those moments – when it was just the two of us talking reality to one another – it stuck out in Michael’s mind. I think he thought it happened a lot more than it did! We were just too busy. He knew that I was always there for him and that I was always trying to get things done. I knew that he appreciated that, and we became close that season."

DIFFICULT TIMES
Getting things done was a difficult proposition. At this point, TNG did not have a completely clear identity and many of the writing staff felt that the show should be more like THE ORIGINAL SERIES. The problem was that Gene Roddenberry had different ambitions for this series and often rejected the story ideas they put forward, even though they would have worked perfectly well with Kirk, Spock and McCoy. Inevitably, many freelance writers had great difficulty getting a handle on what was needed, and this forced the staff to rewrite more than they would have hoped. "We’d get scripts in where the first draft was so bizarre that all you could do was laugh hysterically," recalled Behr. "There was a script by a writer who went off to have a quite stellar career in television. We read the draft and all we could do was sit there with tears rolling down our faces. We were laughing so hard, but it was the laughter of doomed people, because we were going to have to rewrite this and make it work! We had obviously given up and written things in there that were meant for laughs. It wasn’t fun." Behr had some sympathy with the belief that TNG should have been more like THE ORIGINAL SERIES, and said that he felt most of the show’s characters were too perfect to be interesting. "I really don’t mean this as a knock on the show, because it proved itself a million times over, but it never engaged me," said Behr. "To me, as I’ve said many a time and often, THE NEXT GENERATION was the Connecticut of STAR TREK. It seemed very white and homogenized. I just felt it had no fire to it. I was told by Gene that human beings had no problems in the 24th century, but I really believe if you have no problems, you have no humanity."

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Behr was attracted to characters who were not perfect, such as Miles O'Brien, who did not learn his lesson on the holodeck after dislocating his shoulder a few times.

In 'Sarek,' Spock's decision to shoot Fajo could be explained in terms of his program, but pushing the other characters to the limit wasn't as easy. However, even at this early stage Behr found someone who he would later develop on DEEP SPACE NINE. “I had big hopes for O'Brien,” said Behr. “He was already somebody who seemed very human and interesting to me. I wrote this scene with Ron Moore, who had just joined the staff in his first professional writing job. Behr acted as a mentor to him, looking over his scripts and teaching him everything he could.

“Never really set out to mentor people, but I have a way of working that is very intensive,” said Behr. “Ron and I did ‘Sarek’ together. That was the opportunity to show the captain in a different light. One of the things that Behr thought made the episode work so well was the parallels between Sarek and Picard. He definitely felt that Picard was a character who repressed his emotions and kept himself under strict control, much like the disciplined Vulcans. He could see that the scene with the mind-meld would be an interesting opportunity to show the captain in a different light. “I was just so excited about this mind-meld,” said Behr. “But it was a scene that Patrick [Stewart] really did not want to do at first, because he didn’t want to show Picard losing control. Rick and I had to convince him it was going to be a really good scene.”

Behr was also very pleased with the way they were able to portray Sarek, when he appeared toward the end of the season. “Sarek,” Spock's father was suffering from a debilitating disease that made it difficult for him to control his emotions. “I always liked that kind of scene,” Behr said. “It was one that caught my attention during the process of doing it. Basically, it was a character-oriented episode. Little did I know at that time that it would become part of my life as well. I had no idea that Alzheimer’s would strike my own family and I would have to deal with my dad for three years.”

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Behr remembered just how impressed he was with Piller’s script, but it was only when he looked back that he realized that he was witnessing an historic moment in television. “What Michael did was the most brilliant thing that happened,” said Behr. “At the time I have to admit it didn’t quite dawn on me. I knew it was a good episode, but I had no idea that it was going to be the seminal episode that changed everything around. By taking Picard, who I always felt was a cold fish, and making him a Borg, by making him a machine, Michael established his humanity. It was a brilliant move. I have to say I have experienced very few brilliant moments that I can look back on and say, ‘Yeah, that’s the moment.’ But that truly was. That was really Michael.”

To Behr’s mind, turning Captain Picard into a Borg was a stroke of genius by Michael Piller, who wrote the episode. Behr felt that it cracked it!”

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WRITING FOR THE FANS

“Ron loved THE ORIGINAL SERIES. His script for ‘Transfigurations’ was very seriously. Ron is a real fan, and he wrote for the fans. I remember reading the script for ‘Sins of the Father,’ and thinking it was wonderful. I remember being down on the set with Ron in the Klingon Great Hall. Man, it was a big set, and there were a lot of extras, and that freakin’ kid was vibrating out of his skin. He’s so excited. God bless him.”

“By the end of the year, Behr was shattered. He started working with Michael Piller on the story for ‘The Best of Both Worlds,’ but was delighted when his boss offered to finish the script on his own.

“I remember working on the story with him,” said Behr. “Then, he told me, ‘You know, I’m going to just take a pass at this. I’ve got an idea how to make it work.’ I was thinking, ‘Well, this is the last episode. I had been working on ‘Transfigurations,’ and I was already going to Hawaii and thinking of not coming back.’

The Final Season

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