Top 75 Spaceships in movies and TV

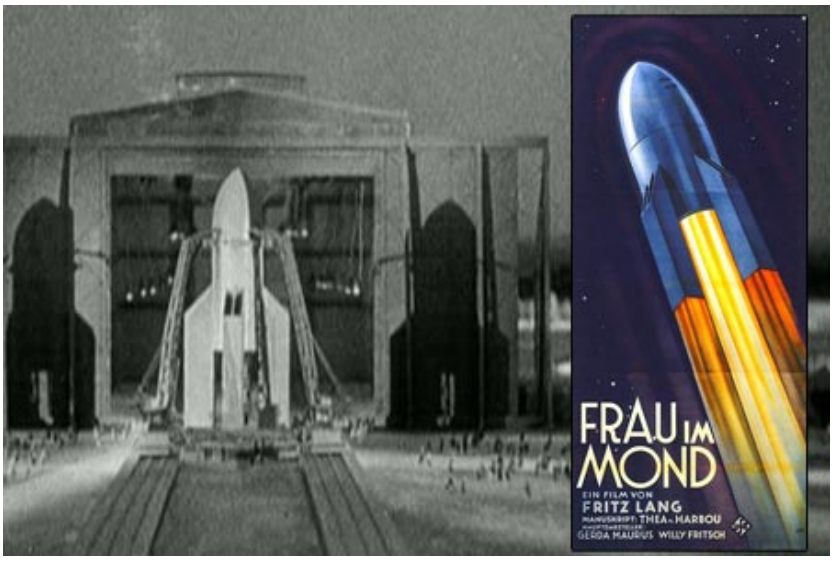
Originally published 14 July 2009 at https://www.denofgeek.com/movies/top-75-spaceships-in-movies-and-tv/



I've cut this article into as few pages as the internal workings at Den Of Geek allow, and you can see the entire list of choices in the table below.

These are personal choices of favourite spaceships, and the fact that some of the creators behind them have been kind enough to talk to me about them in no way implies that they endorse those choices or the placement of them in the list (at the time of the interviews, I didn't even know what the final placement was going to be). - *Martin Anderson*

75: Friede - *Frau im Mond* (aka *Woman In The Moon, By Rocket to the Moon,* 1929) |



Not only is the rocket in Fritz Lang's precocious space outing a beautiful example of Art Deco sci-fi before the bulbous curves of *Flash Gordon* took over, but it's also an amazing foreshadowing of the 'staged' separation that would ultimately take man into space (you can see a video clip of that sequence here). Even thirty years later, Hollywood was still stuck on the 'single stage' ship when depicting space travel.

The film was very popular with Wernher von Braun and his associates, who would ultimately take America to the moon with very similar methods (even if they wisely chose not to launch the Apollo missions from under the sea, as with the Friede). The first successful V2 launch from the rocket research facility at Verein für Raumschiffahrt bore the logo of the Friede from *Woman In The Moon*. Consulting rocket scientist Hermann Oberth had originally intended to build an actual working rocket miniature for Lang, but was constrained by budget and schedule. Happily the Friede has actually flown since, several times.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB | Mateen Greenway recreation |

74: BTA fighter - *Enemy Mine* (1985) |

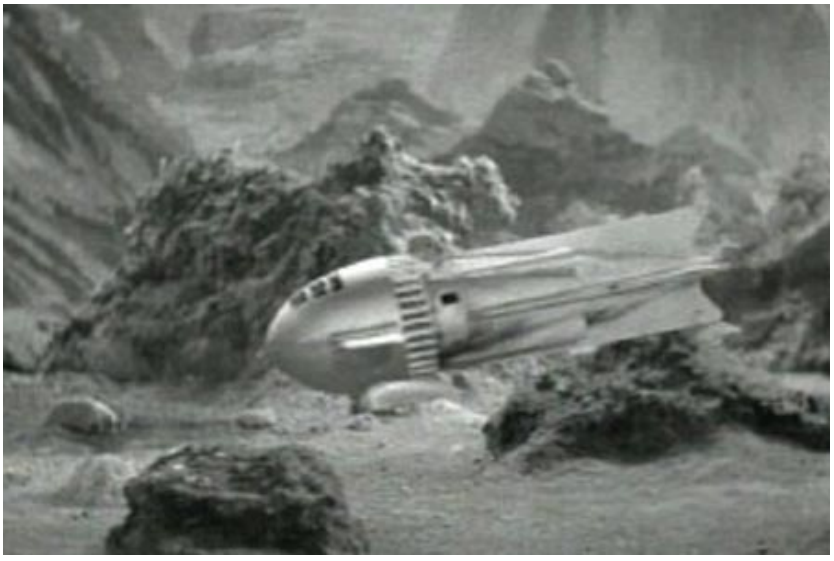
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Wolfgang Peterson's unofficial sci-fi remake of *Hell in the Pacific* (though actually based on the Hugo-winning novella of the same name by Barry B. Longyear) is a low-tech outing topped and tailed by some pretty cool sci-fi vehicles and environments. The BTA fighter that Dennis Quaid crashes onto Fyrine IV has some rather aquatic styling, and seems apt for a Roger Moore 007 entry. Six differently-sized versions of the craft were made by Joachim Weber & Patric Wollensack for ILM, with the 6-foot 'hero' model shown above getting a final paint-job. A number of model kits of the BTA fighter are available, and it's also a popular design for hobbyist CGI modellers. By the way, anyone who wants to take a walk around *Enemy Mine*'s Alliance space-station set can do so for the cost of a ticket to Germany - Bavaria Film Studios retain the set as a tourist attraction!

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB

73: Dr. Zarkov rocket ship - *Flash Gordon* (1936) |



In the absence of more detailed information I can only credit Ralph Berger, art director on the hugely popular RKO cine-serial *Flash Gordon* (1936), with the delightfully wacky art-deco stylings of Dr. Hans Zarkov's ship. It's basically a bullet-shaped, drag-resistant projectile with four spoilers and two aft stabilising fins, all apparently powered by some 50p sparklers. But if you like art deco (which I do), this is bound to be a favourite. The original ship in Alex Raymond's 1934 strip was a little more sober, perhaps to distinguish it from the outlandish, fin-bestrewn styling of Mongo's various kingdoms. Director Mike Nichols took the same approach in his cult 1980 remake of the serial, where ex-NASA scientist Zarkov's vessel is rather more toned-down than its 1930s forebear.

There doesn't seem to be a huge amount available in terms of replicas and kits. There's a nice resin model from Herb Deeks; a desk-model occasionally available on eBay; and for CGI buffs, a mesh for Google Sketchup. If you're curious about the original space-adventurer, you can watch (or download) *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* (1941) quite legally via the Internet Archive.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

72: The Hunter-Gratzner - *Pitch Black* (2000) |

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The opening of David Twohy's tense sci-fi thriller, where marooned astronauts find themselves fighting a very nasty indigenous breed on a hostile planet, begins with a truly exciting crash sequence that's really nailed home by the lack of score. The cargo spacecraft Hunter-Gratzner makes performs a dazzling reversal of Apollo-era dynamics, shedding entire sections of its fuselage and propulsion systems in order to become light enough to survive a headlong crash through the planet's atmosphere. The side-panelling is torn off as the doomed ship cruises at terrifying speed over the planet's surface, ready to meet an even worse fate.

The ship itself is in the long-and-narrow class arguably invented (for the movies at least) with the Discovery in *2001: A Space Odyssey,* with substantial boosters at the back, navigation module in the vanguard and a series of modular and very commercial-looking cargo sections, which ultimately threaten to become ballast during the chaotic descent, even though there are people in them...

The model itself was designed by Matthew Gratzner and built by himself and working partner Ian Hunter for Hunter/Gratzner Industries Inc (now New Deal Studios. The nine-foot miniature weighed approximately 270 pounds, with a steel structure and largely custom-moulded detailing. The internal steel spine was modular, to allow for the separation of sections required in the script.

For the atmospheric entry, UV paint was applied to sections of the model to provide animators with a hook for the atmospheric drag on the craft. To simulate violent turbulence in one particular shot, the photographing DP was shaken by two technicians with live power tools! The main miniature was created at 1/36th scale, with larger-scale sections for particular shots, such as the deployment of the air-brakes.

Check out the link directly below for much more background on the Hunter-Gratzner, in our lengthy chat about the model with model-maker Ian Hunter himself. In the full-length interview, you can also find out why the ship was named after its real-life creators at the last moment!

"...The spaceship itself needed to change into something that could be taken apart into pieces, so that you could start at the back and work your way forward to get to the point where she could be potentially jettisoning the cargo, which was human beings. From then the ship changed somewhat in shape and we came up with this concept of sort of a space-tug that carried containers.

"...Matthew [*Gratzner*] actually did the final design. But we followed the same trend, which was a long ship with an engine in the back, a control-section in the front and then containers along the way. The thought was that the containers could be jettisoned and that the engine could be jettisoned and incrementally cut off the ship, leading to just the 'survival' section, which is the control pod at the front.

"We were reading at the time about this space-plane, which uses internal-combustion wedged-shaped engines, so we came up with these engine shapes that were more reminiscent of what the space-plane was supposed to have. So this was lifting and stealing from real technology and trying to stick it on to something that felt very utilitarian. Like you said, it's got scrape marks on it, and the containers themselves are painted different colours so they look like they're from different manufacturers and different brands that have been strung together to be run through space.

"For us, creatively, it was one of the more satisfying jobs, because it was something we were really invested in; we were not being handed drawings or handed sketches from somebody, but actually investing our time into it..."

Click here for the full-length exclusive interview with Ian Hunter

As this page at a Rhianna Griffiths fan-site proves, you can go and enjoy what's left of the on-set version of the Hunter-Gratzner, as the remnant prop now a tourist attraction out in the Arizona location. For tons of background on the movie, visit the ultimate *Pitch Black* fan site here. As for replicas and toys, how about the ship in Lego? As for the original model, it still sits proudly in the offices of New Deal...

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

71: Saucer - *The Thing* (1982) |

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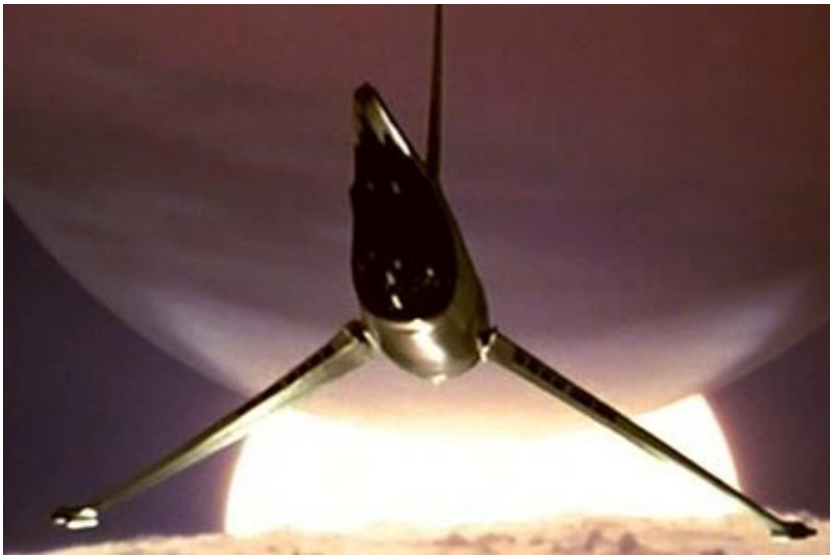
I've had to be careful about including too many 'saucer ships' in this list. It's an awfully basic design that needs a wrinkle or two to stand out from a rather crowded field of spaceship-design. But modelmaker Susan Turner produced a quite extraordinary miniature (from blueprints by production designer John Lloyd) for John Carpenter's classic chiller, and one that deserved more than the two shots it got at the start of the film (the other views of the 'excavated' saucer were combinations of minimal props and matte painting by Albert Whitlock).

The saucer is made of ABS plastic to resist the 144 grain-of-wheat lights shuttered inside the chassis (to prevent 'hotspots'). The circulating light pattern is variable both in speed and intensity so as to give John Dykstra's Apogee FX house free reign to shoot at any FPS needed. The saucer is trimmed in etched brass for detail and the top dome rendered in hammered brass with an internal light. There's no 'blind side' to the model, as it pitches and yaws enough to display all its aspects in the opening shot of the descent towards the Earth's atmosphere. Panel detail was applied with masking and airbrush, and the final model was shot in 4 passes - one for detail, 2 for light and one for a silhouette matte against which to drop in the stars behind. There are 'hero' ships in regular TV shows that don't have this kind of flexibility or painstaking detail.

The model itself remains with Susan Turner, though the John Lloyd blueprints were obtained by one fervent collector from visual effects masters Dennis and Robert Skotak (who lost the bid to design the ship), and you can check them out here. In the meantime, true *Thing* fans aren't being put off, and one even created a beautifully detailed diorama of the spaceship stuck in the ice, complete with McReady and company looking on from the ridge!

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

70: Patrol Ship - *Saturn 3* (1980)|



The patrol that checks up on shadowlocked Tethys towards the climax of Stanley Donen's disastrously unsuccessful space-thriller is as derivative of the colonial vipers in 70s *Galactica* and the Orion in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (both featured later in the list) as the film itself is of *Alien*. Yet the Orion drew on NASA's tentative space-shuttle plans just as the vipers drew (heavily!) on *Star Wars'* X-Wing (and went on, it seems, to inform the look of the snow-speeders in *The Empire Strikes Back*). So let's not be throwing stones. This is an extraordinarily elegant-looking ship, combining the long lines of an ocean clipper with the sensibility of the jet-age. Visual effects supervisor Colin Chilvers had variable results in a punishing stint on the movie, but pulled together this design and execution very nicely. Oddly enough, this vessel deserves the name 'Y-wing' far more than the one in *Star Wars*. Toys? Models? The producers *wished* anyone had been that interested. **Info:** Fictional Life | IMDB |

69: Uncle Martin's Spaceship - *My Favorite Martian* (US TV, 1963-65)|

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I'm entirely indebted to JH Harrison's excellent research for information on this ship.

Based on the design of an e-type Jaguar, this unnamed vessel had to be small enough to fit in a garage but still convince as alien technology. The solution is sleek, shimmery and rather sexier than the show it was in; if 007 had to go into space again (I'm really not recommending that he does), this is the kind of style that's requisite, and it wouldn't look bad underwater either. Art Director James Hulsey retained the e-type's characteristic vent, and later remodelled the unsophisticated hatch-release mechanism into an elegant split of windowed gull-doors. The prop was originally made as silver-painted wood, but later recast in fibre-glass with a steel framework. In the shooting of a later episode, part of the steel structure snapped away and almost killed the actor inside. MFM expert J.H. Harrison notes that though the design incorporates three exits for landing legs, they are never actually depicted in the show (something we'll be coming across later with the Narcissus from *Alien*). The full-size prop was sold at a car auction in LA in 1985 and several times thereafter. It was last known to be in the possession of a memorabilia collector in the early nineties.

Modeller Brent Gair made a 25" replica of the spaceship, and there was even a very basic commercial kit on the market in the 1960s (click here to see how basic).

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

68: Garbage Scow - Quark (US TV , 1978)|



I've got a bit of a soft spot for this very bizarre-looking and Roddenberry-esque interstellar garbage truck. What most people seem to remember of Quark are the Barnstable twins; perhaps that's not unreasonable - the show was cancelled for a reason! But I can't help liking the rather muted sixties pastel green and unintuitive arrangement of shapes on the United Galaxies Sanitation Patrol Cruiser. The Roddenberry connection is no surprise, since the show did direct parodies of several specific *Star Trek* episodes.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

67: Whale probe - *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986) |

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On the surface, this shouldn't be in anyone's list of top spaceships, because it's basically just a pitted metal cylinder. But the elegance kicks in when the probe opens up and reveals the glowing suspended transmitter which wreaks havoc with the Earth's atmosphere whilst trying to communicate with the now-extinct whales. At the end of the movie we're provided with one of the most beautiful and inspiring VFX sights since *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as the whales our heroes have brought back to the 23rd century line themselves up, heads-down, for a chat with the probe - which assumes the same position, revealing a kinship with the whales.

On a recent 'special edition' DVD of *Voyage Home*, model-shop supervisor Jeff Mann explains the difficulty the probe posed for Industrial Light And Magic:

"There was some difficulty early on with the probe. Trying to get that to have some scale was difficult. It was big and shiny and it had blue-spill problems. We did some tests early on as to texture, and what we had to do to give it the kind of scale that the Star Wars ships have."

Mann goes on to reveal that three different probes were built: a small one for long shots, approximately two feet in length; an intermediary and a hero version. *"We took a piece of irrigation pipe. It was probably two and a half feet in diameter." The assembly was mounted on a motion rig at ILM, and also allowed for a certain amount of rotation of the miniature. visual effects supervisor Ken Ralston had the model repainted black after initial test shots were made, which added to the logistics of providing effective scale for the probe."*

Not surprisingly, the design of the whale probe has proved too paltry a challenge for CGI enthusiasts, and too simple a shape for toy and model manufacturers, but you can buy the probe as an add-on in Second Life, complete with hauntingly authentic sound effects.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

66: Icarus II - *Sunshine* (2007)|



The central spaceship of Danny Boyle's SF chiller redefines the concept of 'unbalanced' in spacecraft design, as the vast majority of its bulk is taken up with a vanguard of enormous, almost continental heat-shield, in order to protect the craft from the murderous rays of the dying sun that its crew is hoping to revive. The design's sheer commitment to space - this ship ain't landing *anywhere*, *ever* - makes the Icarus II a unique design amongst screen space-vessels, and the finishing and detail are quite exquisite. It's only a shame that the early commitment to rotating gravitised sections was abandoned early on in the conceptual process (see entries here on *2010* and *Mission To Mars* for rather more committed concepts).

At this site a little background information emerges on production designer Mark Tildesley's brief for the Icarus:

"Mark is a genuine creative person and, like me, loves photography books which was a great language for us to work through," Boyle explained in one interview, later revealing that the Icarus II was to convey *"the sense of it being an organic, living thing that could break down and would need*

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to be fixed".

Tildesley himself commented: *"We wanted to make the ship very real and believable for the audience so they would buy into the mission."*

And if this rather engaging SF film hadn't suddenly turned into a confusing horror-slasher half-way through, that would have been an easy sale.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

65: The TARDIS - *Doctor Who* (UK TV, 1963-???)|



It's got more angles than a card shark, it's in a shocking state and I'm not 100% sure that it's even a spaceship - but it's certainly made an impact on the culture. Metropolitan Police surveyor Gilbert Mackenzie Trench designed the classic police box in 1929 after visiting Birmingham and approving of an early police-box scheme running in that city (you can find out more about the pre-*Who* history of the box here). But it was BBC staff writer Anthony Coburn who added the innovation of a chameleon time-machine to C. E. Webber's script for *An Unearthly Child*, the first adventure of the Doctor in 1963. We know that it's a time machine, but quite how the TARDIS moves through space has been differently interpreted over the 30 seasons of the show's (often interrupted) run. Early episodes simply depicted the box dematerialising in one place and materialising in another, which placed minimum strain on a limited special-effects budget and suggested a space-folding capacity similar to that of the guild navigators in *Dune*. Later episodes didn't shy away from showing the TARDIS as an actual space-vehicle, irrespective of its capacity to travel through time, and in David Tennant's reign, the TARDIS has even taken part in a motorway chase!

The TARDIS interior has been refitted many times, but designer Richard Hudolin (Battlestar Galactica/Caprica) created the most radical 'steampunk' vision of the interior for the 1996 *Doctor Who* movie with Paul McGann - the Verne-esque stylings are delightfully retro and were to become a big influence on new *Who*...

"I didn't know anything about the show when they called me. It was retro-tech but it involved all kinds of different...it was like taking Jules Verne and putting your own stamp on it. The [*TARDIS interior*] was just a whole collection of different architectural styles. I'd ask myself how the Doctor would do it, and I'd have a ballroom with a piano, or over there a library with those big rolling ladders, and over there like a Roman archway or a gateway to somewhere else...so again it was one of those situations where there was something that already existed and the people that I was working with said 'We don't want to go back to that - we want to get far away from that; what do you think you can do?'. And so I started coming up with these concepts and they just all loved them. The further I went, the more they liked it!"

Click here for the exclusive full-length interview.

The 'chameleon circuit' that disguises the Doctor's means of transport didn't get the original London police-box entirely right; in the version on which the TARDIS is based, the doors open out, not in. You can find out much more about the history of the on-set 'practical' TARDIS here. And some full-size fibre-class reconstructions here.

Why is this not higher in the list? Much as I love *Doctor Who* and the TARDIS, it's not really much of a looker, is it?

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

64: Fireball XL5 - *Fireball XL5* (UK TV, 1963) |

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Gerry Anderson's first committed sci-fi TV series boasted a spaceship full of wonderful lines, shapes and invention. The separation of 'Fireball Junior' from the main craft was an elegant idea destined to be delightfully re-implemented for the Skydiver sub/air vessel in Anderson's *UFO* TV series in 1969-70; but the luscious lines of XL5 are pure Dan Dare (and about as near as any of us will ever get to a recreation of that Brit comic classic, since Blightey didn't have the money to do anything with Martin Bower's superb models for the proposed TV show/film in the 1980s). Legendary visual effects wizard Derek Meddings, later to work on *The Empire Strikes Back* as well as most of the 007 outings of the 1970s, used some surprisingly 'BBC' techniques' to generate the shape of the craft, which was drawn from household liquids bottles stuck together, painted and decorated with 'nurnies' (parts sequestered from model kits) and 'dirtied down' to give the impression of usage.

In terms of marketing, Gerry Anderson remains George Lucas's direct predecessor, and this is a widely diffused design both in the toy and model marketplace and in the sphere of 3D hobbyists. Though XL5 is no longer available with a three-stage lolly, you can get it die-cast and as a hard-vinyl candy toy. There are some excellent CGI recreations/imagining of XL5 scenarios at this site, an unusual paper-model recreation here, and you can even fly Fireball XL5 in Microsoft Flight Simulator 98. What's harder to find is a model-kit; Airfix produced an injection-moulded kit as a promotional item in 1964, obtainable only as a mail-away gift for a brand of ice-cream, and this model was later used as the basis for a now-discontinued resin and white-metal replica from Comet miniatures- who subsequently output a metal kit of the XL5 and a resin kit of the charming 'Fireball Junior' head-section. There's advice at tvcentury21.com about how to use the same model-kits that Meddings did when dressing the original, to faithfully recreate your own XL5, along with a list of the key kits involved. CGI enthusiasts looking for a shortcut or unimpressed with open-source versions can buy a mesh of the ship at Turbosquid.

"Having the head separate from the main body was a very simple decision to make; I always tried, with all my shows, to make them as believable as possible, and having seen the way that Fireball XL5 was launched...if one took one's imagination now to a planet where they were going to land, how were they going to find a piece of flat ground where a rocket that weighs God-knows-what could land safely without sinking into the sand, or mud or whatever? So that was the key to having a 'Fireball 2' that could land and leave the mothership in orbit. It was all based on, common sense and the knowledge we had at the time."

Gerry Anderson has more to say on XL5 in our exclusive interview

Info: Fictional Life | The Models Of Fireball XL5 | IMDB | Amazon|

63: The Lewis & Clark - *Event Horizon* (1997) |



Whatever your opinion on Paul W. Anderson's 'ghost story in space', it can't be denied that there are some fantastic space vessels on display, courtesy of production designer Joseph Bennett (who we spoke to about it, see below). We'll get onto the Event Horizon ship itself a little later, but

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the relative pygmy-vessel Lewis & Clark has some very nice lines of its own, and it's just a shame that we never really get a great look at it in the movie itself. Vehicles like the Nostromo tug use jutting struts off-set for a casual air, but the Lewis & Clark is standing very much to attention, focused forward. Are these promontories weapons or sensors. For a 'NASA'-style vehicle, it looks armed to the teeth! It's still clearly unsuitable for heavy atmospheres, but (as Bennett explains) is capable of landing in light atmospheres. The venerable Richard Yuricich shot the miniatures for Mass Illusions at Pinewood, England .

"We wanted to create two very different aesthetics [between the Lewis & Clark and the Event Horizon]. The Lewis And Clark was the type of NASA-aesthetic that you know...a working spacecraft that goes from place to place like an oil-rig helicopter. It's got the classic space shuttle-based design, very workaday. That was enjoyable doing, because you had to make an environment that works for that. "We did have a scene which eventually got cut from the script due to money and time and the need to keep the movie to ninety minutes. It was a rescue sequence set on an oil-drilling asteroid. They had to go and rescue a guy that was trapped there. It was really nice, but in the end it was something like a twenty-minute sequence, and the need was felt to get into the meat of the film. "We had to do *Event Horizon* quite quickly. Paul Anderson is a brilliant director and we all just went for it, really. "

Full-length interview with Joseph Bennett coming soon!

Though I've not been able to find any model-kit presence for the Lewis & Clark, you can still board the ship itself in the Doom 3 mod, and gamer fans of the movie could do a lot worse than check out Dead Space. More CGI enthusiasts have concentrated on the Event Horizon itself than this smaller ship, possibly due to the difficulty in finding reference images or schematics. If you have a Lewis & Clark mesh, get in touch and I'll include it here. In the meantime, there was a games miniature produced, which is listed here (direct photo of it here).

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

62: Space-junk trawler - *UFO* (UK TV, 1970)|



Should I apologise for including a spaceship here that may have slipped the minds even of *UFO* fans? No way. For anyone who loves the NASA aesthetic, this is a pin-up ship. There's pretty much no hope of ever finding out who designed it, since it seems to have been cobbled together from spare parts in Derek Meddings' workshop. The function of this ship, which has the pre-titles sequence of the episode *Conflict* to itself, is to locate and destroy old and unused space-debris that may interfere with Earth space missions. The sheer imbalance of the craft is delightful, with a solar panel array on one side and some kind of communications dish on the other. It looks like it was built in orbit from the smallest possible requisite number of parts, and it's just as cool as hell.

No kits, no models. A shame, as it would be a good source for kit-bashing by itself!

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

61: Planet Express - *Futurama* (US TV, 1999-2003+) |

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Though series creator Matt Groening consulted with esteemed futurist Syd Mead on the design of our hapless heroes' spacecraft, it's not one that the artist included when chatting with us about his spaceship designs for this article. Anyone who remembers the sheer quality of tin 'space-age' toys can't fail to be beguiled by the gorgeous curves of this vehicle. Even the tonality of the greens is pure late-50s, early-60s. The Planet Express was just *made* for kids to 'whoosh' around the room! It's been noted that, like a great many of Groening's best-loved characters, the Express has a pronounced overbite, and this is just one of the little features that provides a sexy spin on a classic design motif in spaceships.

There's a beautiful Skyhook models kit available of the ship, and Moore Collectibles also have a lovely replica to offer. In the hobbyist world there's a nice Lego version, a purchasable CGI model, another in Max, and Mr. Ronsfield, a German CGI enthusiast, has also paid tribute to the craft.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

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Top 75 spaceships in movies and TV part 2

Originally published at https://web.archive.org/web/20130218114706/http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/287096/top_75_spaceships_in_movies_and_tv_part_2.html

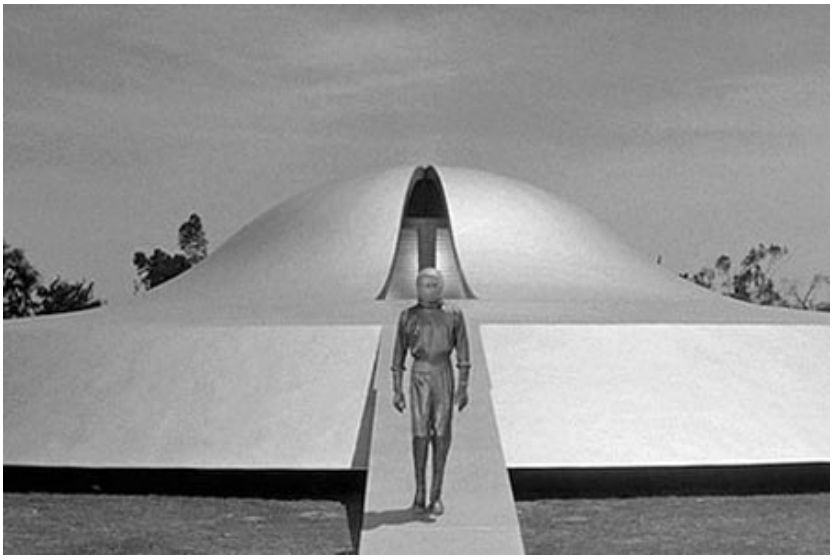
60: Andorian Kumari class warship - *Star Trek: Enterprise* (US TV, 2001-05)|



We're obviously going to be hearing a great deal about *Star Trek* and its vast TV and cinematic branches in this list - there's no franchise anywhere that has contributed more fictional spaceships to the culture. Yet the prematurely-ended *Enterprise* (US TV, 2001-2003) is particularly well-represented here, since production designers Herman F. Zimmerman and Doug Drexler seem to have made a real effort to break away from the standard shapes of *Trek*, or at least do something more exciting with them. The fuselage has a beautiful forward motion which is followed through with avian wing design and an 'armed-to-the-teeth' aesthetic in the form of the end and interstitial pods on the wings themselves.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

59: Klaatu's ship - *The Day The Earth Stood Still* (1951)|



It didn't seem reasonable to me to over-fill this list with saucers; at the end of the day, it's an elegant but very basic design, and it's no coincidence that car hubcaps were used in some of the most famous UFO hoaxes of the 40s and 50s. However the spacecraft in which Michael Rennie makes his descent to Earth in Robert Wise's classic SF thriller has some beautiful innovations, and honours its art deco roots by the complementary design of the robot sentinel Gort.

The on-set spacecraft was constructed as a 100-foot wide three-quarter set, a section of which could rotate to provide the illusion that the fabric of the craft had simply slid open like mercury. In order to provide a 'seamless split', putty was inserted and painted at the join between the two sections, providing an apparently magical division through which a silver ramp was pushed for Rennie to disembark. The eight-foot model used in the optical effects was created by Fred Sersen, L.B. Abbott, Emil Kosa and Ray Kellogg, and can still be seen proudly sitting next to a *Return Of The Jedi* speeder bike at the museum of the American Film Institute in Orlando, Florida. The miniature was used both in optical composites, and as a hanging-miniature on location, wherein it was positioned close to a camera pointing at the cordoned-off Washington crowd set. This was necessary for certain angles, as the full-size set necessarily lacked a rear section, due to the need for the moving 'slice' to rotate round when the doors opened.

Gort himself has proved a cult toy and maquette over the years, rather overshadowing the spacecraft itself, but at least one person has mocked up it up in a diorama.

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Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

58: Space Cruiser Yamato - *Star Blazers/Spaceship Yamato* (1974-80)|



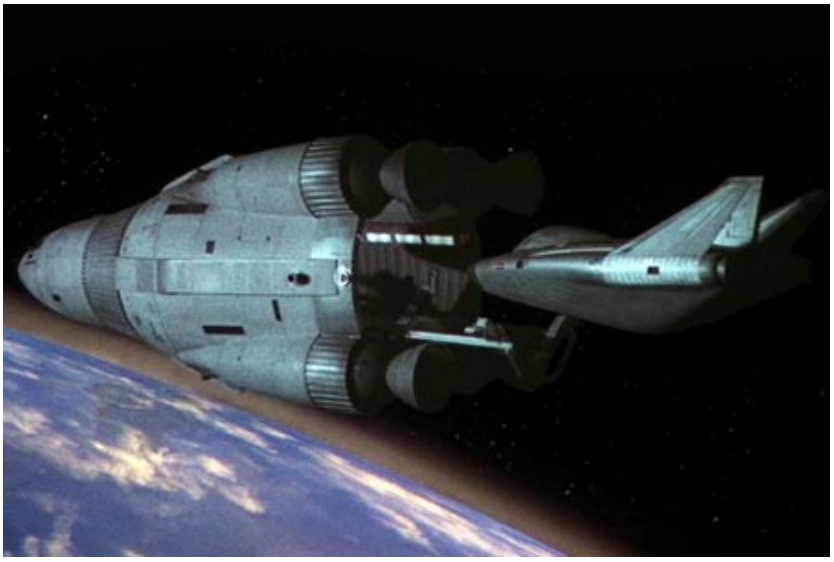
All right, the Yamato appears to be a conventional 20th-century marine destroyer lightly adapted to space travel, and that fact constitutes both what's wrong and right about the appeal of the ship. The original 1970s Japanese anime series *Space Battleship Yamato* arrived in the west as the dubbed *Starblazers* or *Space Cruiser Yamato*, and went on to have a huge influence on the anime that would follow it.

The appeal of the ship itself lies both in those long, knife-life curves and the jutting sections of raw technology that stick out of it in selected areas, making it agreeable for pretty much the same reasons as its ocean-going counterpart. Where a rudder might be, a slightly smaller mirroring occurs of the bridge-section above. It's absolutely *armed to the teeth* too.

You can get a rather nice injection kit (Japanese site), and the EDF Drawing board, dedicated to the show in its various forms, has some good blueprints and instructions to make a Yamato-style cruiser.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

57: Eurosec rocket - *Doppelgänger* (aka *Journey To The Far Side Of The Sun*, 1969) |



The spacecraft in Gerry Anderson's first (and to date only) dedicated cinematic outing has so many components and stages that it's difficult to know what to concentrate on. The Phoenix is the most familiar, Apollo-like multi-stage launch design, most of which is jettisoned leaving Earth's atmosphere. The module that remains is beautifully ergonomic without losing too much NASA-ness, whilst atmospheric daughter-craft the Dove is just a beautiful fusion of JPL gloss with classic lines designed to smooth out a drop from orbit. Of course the Derek Meddings miniatures are flawless as well as beautifully designed, with the Dove a particularly elegant and convincingly-engineered craft. The one thing that slightly spoils the conceit is narrative rather than ergonomic: having needed Apollo-level separation to depart 'Earth 1' in *Doppelganger*, the Dove is somehow able to just lift off like a Harrier and zoom into the stratosphere when departing Earth 2!

Derek Meddings launched more payloads than Houston in his many years in visual effects, and the ascent of the Phoenix in *Doppelganger* was not rivalled until Meddings own work on *Moonraker* in 1979, many years before CGI came on the scene.

"The Eurosec rocket design was totally Derek Meddings'. We were making stuff where all the vehicles were miniature, and in this particular case Derek - in his own words - wanted to 'shoot it against God's sky'. The rocket was about six feet high, and the shots were absolutely spectacular. Even today I think it's amazing, and I think that was Derek doing absolutely his best work."

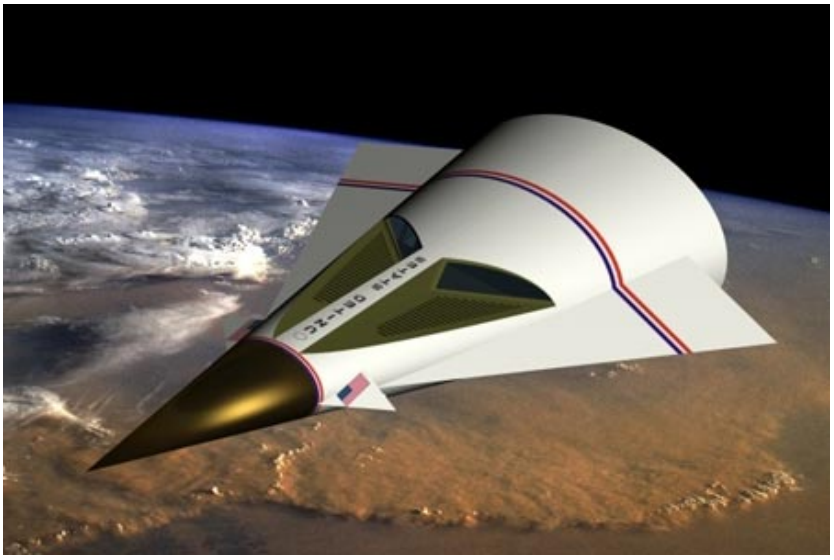
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Click here for the full-length, exclusive interview with Gerry Anderson.

The Eurosec rocket doesn't seem ever to have been made available in model form. The movie was part of a move towards adult sc-fi by Gerry Anderson, as signalled by the darker tones of *UFO* (UK TV 1970), so we'll just have to enjoy what was shot. You can find out more about the vehicles here.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

56: Icarus - *Planet Of The Apes*(1968) |



Designed by Bill Creber, the Icarus is the spaceship that bought sole surviving astronaut Charlton Heston back to Earth (as it transpired) to face up to his new simian rulers. The ship is a delightful combination of classic retro-styling (check out the 'Flash Gordon' fins) and pure-white NASA sensibility. The wing styling suggests that the vehicle was intended as a free-landing space-shuttle breed of ship, and that its ignominious landing in water, though the preferred method for NASA missions at the time, is not what it was designed for.

In an interview with Sci-Fi And Fantasy Models magazine, Bill Creber spoke of the design and execution of the Icarus:

"We wanted something that wasn't just a capsule. So as I looked around, I noticed this sort of 'paraglider' idea, and that seemed a bit more futuristic. We hit on our initial design and just carried it through to completion. We did a couple of sketches of how it would look floating...we didn't spend a lot of time designing it. There wasn't much time to get it thought out. We just tried to emulate what NASA was doing back then...I think it was Constantine Moros - a Russian model builder - who built the original spaceship maquette. It was about 12" tall, half-inch to the foot."

There's a detailed description of the state of the 'practical' Icarus in the 1970s here, which recounts just how solidly built the location prop was. At one point it may have been intended to actually drop the mock-up into Lake Powell, where the 'crash' sequence was filmed, and hence the prop is described as boasting "two layers of one sixteenth sheet steel for skin", rather than the more usual plywood and sealing-wax arrangement.

The spacecraft in *Apes* is never actually named in the movie or the script; the rather poetic moniker was applied later by fan Larry Evans. Cloudster.com has just about everything you could ever want to know about both the practical and miniature Icarus, in the form of a scanned article from sci-fi and fantasy models, noting also certain inconsistencies in detail between the full-sized and miniature versions. There's even more detail on the ship at an ancillary article on that site. Phil Broad has modelled the Icarus in CGI too.

Wilco models produced an Icarus kit in 2004, and notable sci-fi modeller Mateen Greenway created an Icarus mesh too (direct image here). Here's another replica by Alberto Lopez.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB | TV Icarus |

55: Alien spacecraft - *Flight Of The Navigator* (1986)|

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Director Randall Kleiser and his visual-effects wiz brother Jeff provided a memorable mirrored spaceship for Disney's tale of a kid who is taken forward in time by a well-meaning but rather mischievous automated alien spaceship. The shape-shifting craft proves once again that silver and art deco go together just beautifully, and the entire dynamic seems linked in with the chrome age of the 1950s. It's really a stunning design, originated from production designer Bill Creber.

Wavefront technologies, destined for an important role in the transition to CGI effects, provided part of the early software, but specialised reflection-mapping programs were also created by Jeff Kleiser and Omnibus Computer Animation. The effect of the 'melting steps' was created by stop-motion replacement models, but everything else to do with the VFX version of the ship was way out on the cutting edge, providing Hollywood with its first 'photo-real' spaceships in the wake of the pioneering work done on *The Last Starfighter* a short time earlier.

"The design of the spaceship came from the production designer, Bill Creber, and since the ship in the story could change shape from a bulbous slow speed shape to a sleek high speed shape, Bill designed two models that we used to digitize the two shapes, and then reorder the polygons so both shapes had identical topology. Then we could interpolate from one to the other and effect the shape shifting for the film. The idea of shape shifting also arose back at Digital Effects when Randal was visiting our studio and we showed him examples of objects interpolating from one shape into another.

"Omnibus was using Wavefront Technologies software as their animation package running on a VAX, and we were able to digitize moving video resolution images from videotape that had been transferred from the background film plates in which the spaceship was to be seen. These images were then mapped frame by frame onto the animated spaceship scanned onto 35mm film and composited optically over the film background plates. To render the spaceship and get it onto film (along with a matte for the optical printing department), they had their own rendering software running on a prototype “supercomputer” called the Foonly F-1, which had formerly been used by Information International, Inc to drive their film recorders. The Foonly had very little disk space, so we had to render on the fly and send the data directly to the film recorder as it was being computed. That meant we had no way of reshooting a scene other than re-rendering it from scratch each time. Coupled with the fact that the Foonly would randomly crash five or six times a day, we had a very shaky and spooky production pipeline. As we approached the deadline for the movie, we wanted to give ourselves more of a chance of completion, so Bob Hoffman went down to UC San Diego and ported the rendering software onto a Cray XMP (or something like that) at the San Diego Supercomputer Centre. This gave us a second rendering pipeline that turned out to be critical in completing on time..."

Click here for the full and exclusive interview with Jeff Kleiser.

You can still see the full-size on-set version of the spaceship at the MGM backlot at Walt Disney World in Florida. The design doesn't seem to have hit the hobbyist world much, though there's a *FotN* painting here, and Anish Kapoor's Cloud Gate structure at AT&T Plaza at Millennium Park, Chicago, is strangely familiar...

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

54: Pod - *Planet Of The Apes* (2001)|

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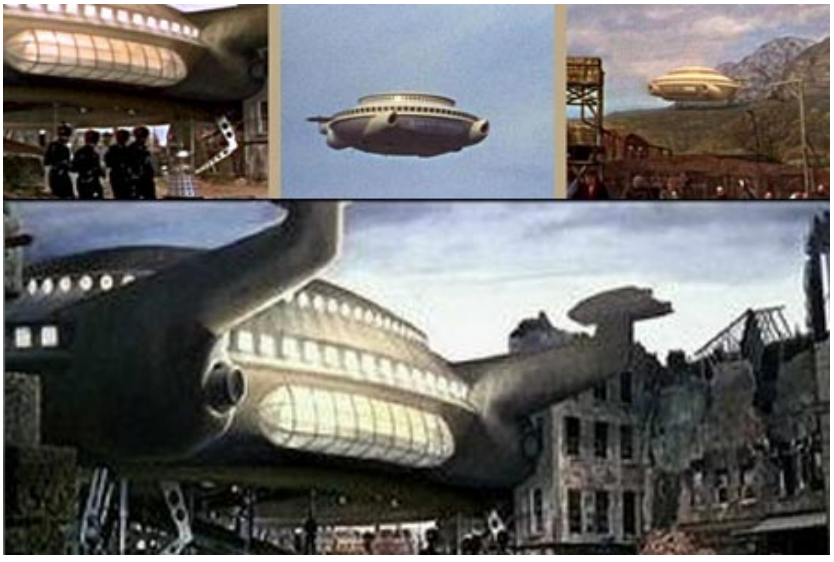


We'll not let the awfulness of the surrounding movie detract from the lush lines of this petite and elegant little spacecraft in Tim Burton's disastrous re-take on the 1968 classic. Production designer Rick Heinrichs pre-empts the Macintosh/*WALL-E* obsession with white and pure, clean surfaces and lines in this engaging shape that shares a little DNA with the classiest early work of Ron Cobb. It's about as unfit for the purpose as could be, with an enormous unshielded visor that couldn't possibly stand up to atmospheric re-entry, and barely any room for a single occupant, never mind the considerable engines that it would need to break orbit. This design is basically a surface-only runabout that's been seconded into space-work, but it is beautifully trimmed with some NASA-esque details that make you wonder if it actually *could* take off...

The lack of success of the movie kept this design largely away from the hobbyist community, but the shape proved far too tempting for toy manufacturers to resist.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

53: Dalek saucer - *Daleks: Invasion Earth 2150* (1966) |



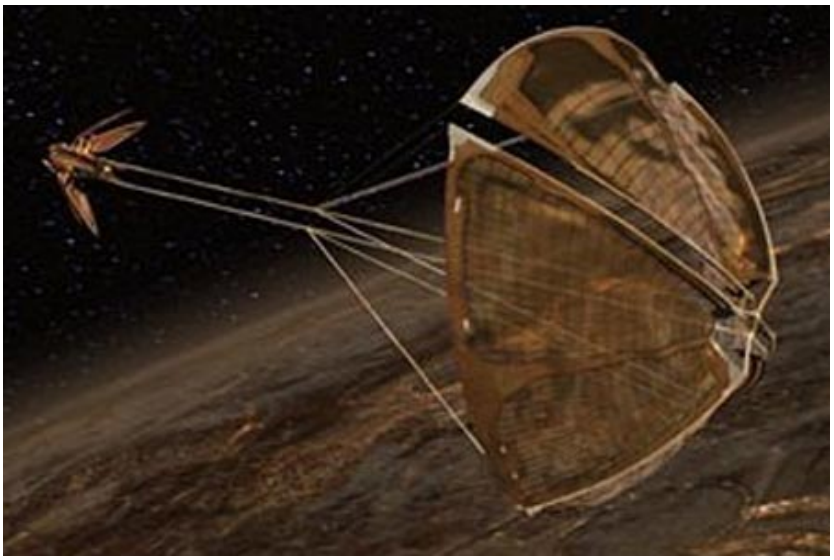
Only a British design sensibility could have come up with the uniquely homely alien invasion craft of this second cinematic *Doctor Who* outing with Peter Cushing in the central role. Just look at those rounded-off edges and frosted glass panelling - wouldn't that look at home in the Great Exhibition of 1851? Can't you just see yourself pouring a nice hot cup of tea out of it? Or splitting it open and toasting a crumpet in it on some grey morning in Skegness? It's gorgeously hideous, as if the metallic nasties had run out of money for space vessels in 1949 and were making do and mending.

Find out more about the Dalek saucer and its descendents at this Doctor Who site. Meantime, there are publicity stills from *2150* here. Illustrator Daryl Joyce has depicted the 2150 saucer, with a particularly nice example here. It's a terrible shame, but the lack of success of this movie seems to have led to an utter absence of this 'knitting ship' in any shape or form, and a search on the hobbyist communities yields nothing either.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

52: Geonosis Solar Sailor - *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (2002) |

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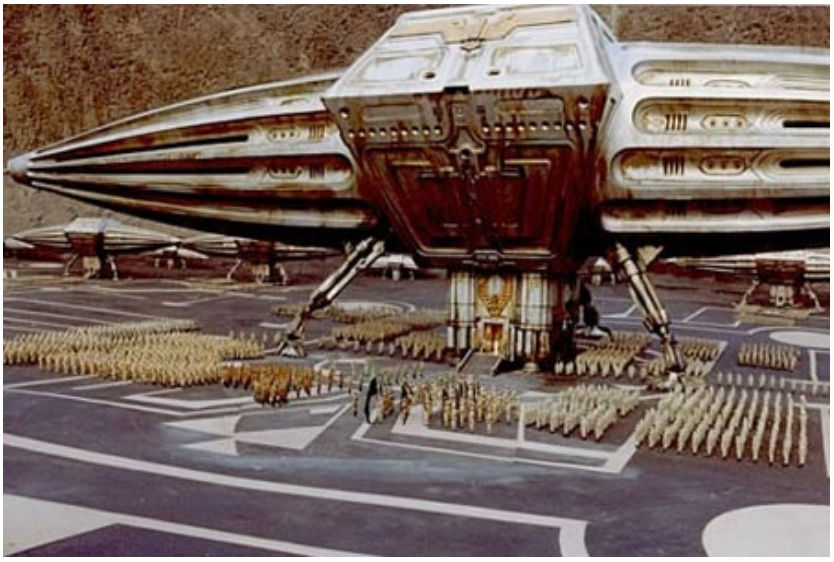
The idea of sailing between planets on the 'solar winds' has usually been relegated to the covers of SF novels, as perhaps too esoteric a notion to include in expensive sci-fi movies. But having systematically trawled through every spaceship design conceit available (and invented others on the way), Lucasfilm finally decided to give the concept a cinematic airing in *Attack Of The Clones*. Count Dooku's Punworcca 116-class interstellar sloop initially seems little more substantial than one of the droid fighters seen elsewhere in the prequel trilogy, until (in a rather 007-like flourish), it triples its size at the flick of a button, unfurling a gorgeous reflective sail/parachute design to help the evil count speed away from his noble pursuers.

Production designer Gavin Bocquet was unable to chat to us about the vehicle due to legal considerations with Lucasfilm, but full credit to him and his amazing team of concept artists for making space travel elegant again!

It's a no-brainer that the core section of the ship is available in Lego (though that's hardly the ideal medium to express the elegance of the design). You can find out more regarding the concept for the ship in this article with Cross Sections author and compiler Curtis Saxon at force.net.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

51: Guild transporter - *Dune* (1984) |



I was happy to chat a little with sci-fi and fantasy illustrator Chris Foss for this list, though not about *Dune*, as the hugely influential work he did on Jodorowsky's lost version of the Frank Herbert epic in the mid-70s never officially had any influence on the David Lynch version. But this is utter nonsense if one only looks at the spice-mining vehicles during the 'worm-attack' sequence; those spherical wheels are pure Foss, as is the highly Egyptian influence of the Atreides transports that ferry the doomed clan to the interdimensional 'mothership' early in the film. That's not to the discredit of production designer Anthony Masters, who created quite an impression by taking a fairly aerodynamic *Flash Gordon*-style ship and turning it on its side until it seemed impossible that it would fly.

The scene of the fleet of transports queuing up into the heighliner for the journey to Arrakis remains spell-binding and incredibly graceful, with a sense of the exotic and of immense scale. Master model-maker Emilio Ruiz del Río was behind most of *Dune*'s impressive miniatures, and the superb duneinfo.com has a fantastic insight and great behind-the-scenes photos of the master at work on the enormous miniature used as a 'hanging miniature' in the reception sequence.

Del Rio discusses the shot at the site: *"The scale model was to complete a wide shot of the arrival of the Duke Leto Atreides and his family, in a spaceship. For this scene the door of the ship with its stairs was constructed in parking lot of the studio; when the door opens the travellers exit. In addition a portion of ground in front of the stairs was made, where there are the people that welcome them. The scale model included all the rest of the ship, joining with the portion of the ship-door, and in addition the rest to floor that joins with the real floor at the foot of the stairs, where there*

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are several rows of 7 centimetres high troops in formation. Behind they appeared other ten ships, those that have come giving escort to the Duke Leto, and at the bottom, the steep strong wall is already seen that it protects to them of the desert. "The construction of this ship was quite complicated...

"The dolls were of latex. Once we decided the scale of the set, the size was calculated so to have them match with the set. One in clay was modelled, from which a mold took control of stucco and it filled up of latex. As there were lots of dolls, enough molds were prepared to reproduce them in bulk. The scale model caught people's attention, and they christen my system of scale models 'Emiliós miniature', and they still call them that today."

The use of the huge models as hanging miniatures during the official reception on Arrakis ranks as one of the best employments ever of this venerable technique. In March of 2009 several of the original shooting miniatures from the film were sold on eBay, including the beautifully industrial aerial tram, the Foss-esque spice harvester and a medium-size miniature of the Guild transporter (click here for pics, and scroll down a bit). Well, *Dune* proved no *Star Wars*, and the Revell kit of the Atreides transport was not to be (picture of the mocked-up model box during prototyping).

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

50: Klingon Deuterium Tanker - *Enterprise* (US TV, 2001-2005)|



Production designer John Eaves, no stranger to the *Star Trek* universe, managed to inject some new excitement into the already thrilling basic configuration of Klingon vessels for the endlessly innovative *Star Trek Enterprise*. There's an industrial griminess and sense of motorway-wear on this charming yet menacing ship, which wears its cargo rather dangerously on the outside (though knowing the Klingons, it'd be even more dangerous to make their volatile loads hard to jettison in an emergency). The sense of a 'forward station' that emerges in (chronologically) later Klingon craft is scarified here for a superior sense of aerodynamics.

There's a PDF of the basic layout of the tanker here, whilst you can find out a bit more about the ship's fictional Captain Korok here, and the taxonomy of Klingon spaceship design here. The Bird Of Prey originated in *Star Trek III* (which we'll meet again later) has proved to have the edge over the D5 tanker in terms of being an attractive modelling proposition, though.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

49: Thunderbird 3 - *Thunderbirds* (1965)|



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Alan Tracey, despite having one of the most exciting-looking Thunderbirds, was unfortunately relegated to the role of 'designated-driver', getting to fly usually only whenever lonely brother John needed some supplies up in the space-outpost of Thunderbird 5. Thus this enormously exciting and dynamic-looking craft is effectively nothing more than a space-shuttle; but that doesn't detract from its colour, sleek lines or the sheer dynamism of its launches. Additionally it had one of the most comfortable automated-entries of any Gerry Anderson series: how many of us might not occasionally fancy getting all the way to work without ever getting off our sofas?

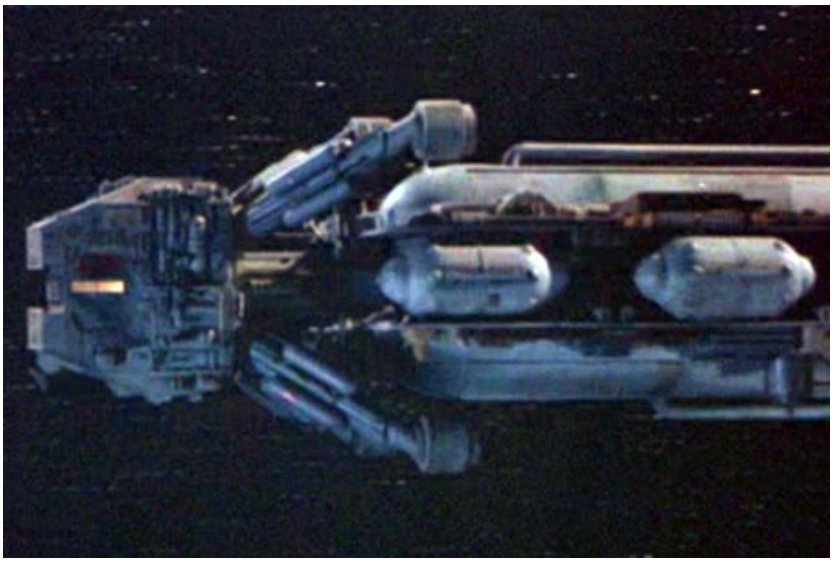
"Thunderbird 3 was conventional science-thinking inasmuch as it took off vertically. And of course it took off from a silo, which was apparently next to a nice-looking little house. I can't prove this, because Derek Meddings is no longer with us. but I think in those days he probably would have designed a rocket as we know today, with a pointed nose-cone and engines at the base, but he then wanted to make it look different to all the other space-ships in the world, so he added the vertical wings. That was not science-fiction so much as making it an attractive vehicle."

Click here for the full-length, exclusive interview with Gerry Anderson.

Thunderbird 3 was produced as a moderately flimsy plastic toy in the late sixties, and due to the fragile nature of its side-struts, it was prone to damage. Rocket enthusiast Darren J. Longhorn actually got his own Thunderbird 3 into the air, and a spectacularly faithful build it is too (you can download the specs of his project as a Rocksim file). You can see various hobbyist CGI recreations of the big orange bird here (scroll down a bit), and Mateen Greenway has of course put his skills to a CGI recreation too. Particularly cool is a diorama of the Tracey rocket in situ in the launch silo, though the product itself seems unavailable. Granada Ventures (who own copyright on all Gerry Anderson TV shows) seem to have taken many of the free meshes down quite aggressively, but they're probably still in orbit somewhere...

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

48: Space Cowboy's ship - *Battle Beyond The Stars* (1980)|



For a film absolutely chock full of spaceships of wildly varying designs, there aren't that many memorable ones in *Battle Beyond The Stars*. 'Nell' is memorable of course, but only because it may be the only spaceship in movie history with breasts. The rest are generally creative off-cuts from the general SF aesthetic surrounding *Star Wars* in the period. George Peppard's ride is a bit different, however. Like Slave 1 from the *Star Wars* universe (of which more later), Space Cowboy's 'trucker'-style vessel upends itself to land, which is rather neat. It also tones down the fantastic stylings of the other craft to show a spaceship with some kind of grounding in space-flight as we know it. It has a blocky front that conveys the trucker idea without going absurdly over-representative, as with Dennis Hopper's ride in *Space Truckers* (though Peppard isn't carrying anything as hilarious as the 'square pigs' in that movie).

As for the provenance of the spaceship design, it's hard to say - the film has no production designers listed, though it does have two 'art directors' in the form of Charles Breen and bigwig-to-be James Cameron (check waaay towards the end of this list to see in what esteem I hold this man as a spaceship creator). For a film this ambitious, even the legendary (for Roger Corman) ground-breaking $2 million budget wasn't going to go far, so in the absence of better information, I'm going to be chalking this rather tasty design up to Mr. Cameron, who seems to have acted as de facto production designer and special effects wiz on the movie.

I have never come across any toys. models or hobbyist projects to do with *BBtS*, and would be glad to hear of any regarding Space Cowboy's ship.

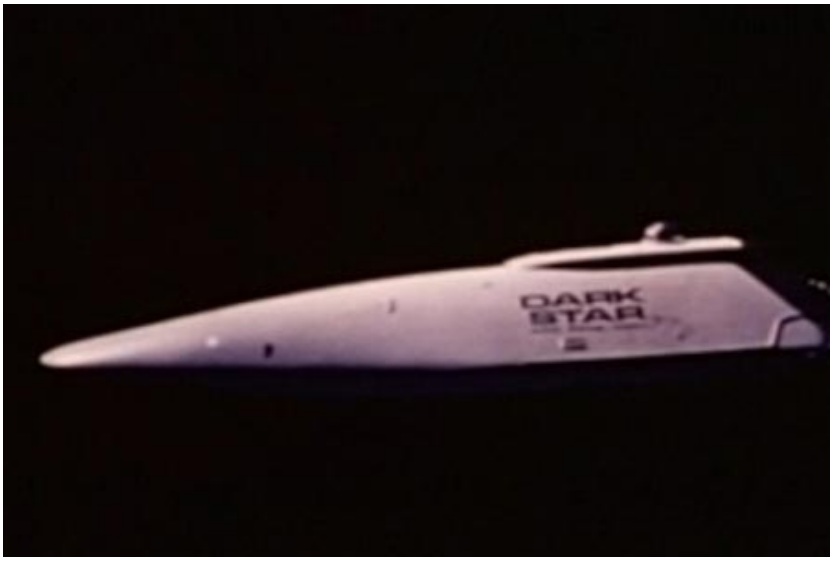
Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

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Top 75 spaceships in movies and TV part 3

Originally published at http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/287101/top_75_spaceships_in_movies_and_tv_part_3.html

47: Dark Star - *Dark Star* (1974) |



Conceptual designer Ron Cobb - then an official artist for NASA as well as a satirical comic artist - famously sketched out the design for the titular craft of the John Carpenter/Dan O'Bannon cult SF movie on a Pancake House napkin. There's something rather *Star Trek*-like about the Dark Star, but it's also informed by the NASA-ised detail of Kubrick's *2001*. The connection with 1960s ST:TOS is strengthened by the vast white expanse of hull, smooth an aerodynamic curves - and also by the generational remove of the source footage in the opticals, which seem rather similar in quality to many of those in old *Trek*.

There's something very exciting about the Ron Cobb sensibility - his technical imagination is grounded in available technology yet just far enough ahead that you feel you can expect his designs in the showrooms within ten years, and the Dark Star falls nicely into the aesthetics at the end of the Apollo age. Greg Jein created the model from later designs by Cobb, though information about the miniature seems hard to come by. Most of the visual effects of the ship moving between solar systems were created by Dan O'Bannon with rostrum animation.

There's a desktop miniature of the craft on display here. If you want to make a paper model of the craft, just print this jpeg out and follow the instructions! Modeller Ward Shrake has attempted the very challenging curves of the ship. In the commercial world, Stargazer Models' resin Dark Star kit is tantalising but currently unavailable.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

46: Shuttle - *Outland* (1981)|



Peter Hyams' tale of corruption on a Jupiter mining colony was both enjoyed and criticised for exactly the same reason - it's basically *High Noon* in space. But if it's insubstantial in the canon of sci-fi movies, the sky-high production values make *Outland* a work of continuing interest, both in the area of set design and miniature work. The only spaceship in the movie is the brutish shuttle that ferries Sean Connery's putative assassins to the remote Io outpost where a contract has been put out on his life.

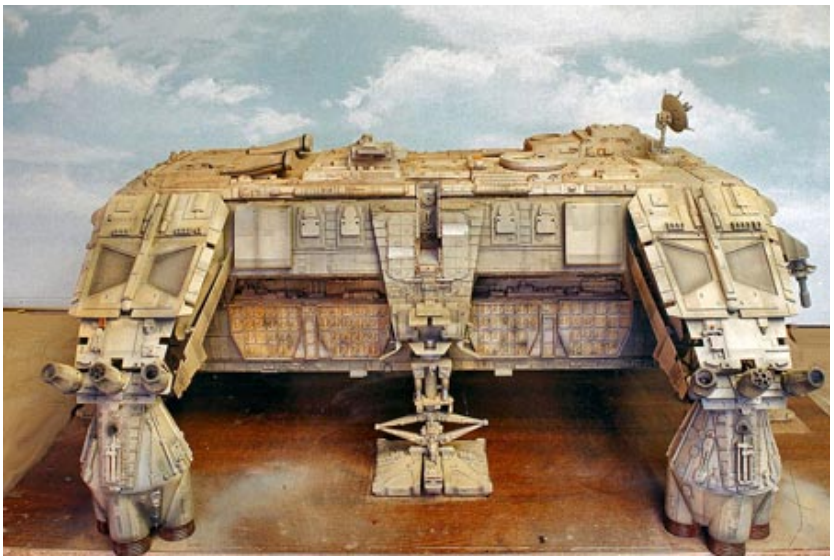
The design of the shuttle is a hideous exercise in reductionism. It needs a means of propulsion, space for a payload and something to land on a surface with - and that is absolutely all it has. The shuttle is a flying brick, and if you're flying on it, you're definitely flying 'freight'. The miniature's

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introduction is dark and sinister, which - though very effective - is a bit of a shame, since it's awfully hard to see the wonderful abutment of shapes and the wealth of detail applied by master modelmaker Martin Bower.

Bower provides extensive details and photos about the shuttle at his site. The model contains a lot of brass-etched detail as well as selective kit-bashing, and took four months to build. The powerful landing jets were provided by liquid nitrogen, which kept freezing the vents, and had to be cleared out after each take. The basis of the model is a Perspex box with brass overhangs, and the landing legs are detailed with several layers of parts from the Airfix H.M.S. Belfast model kit. The exit vents for the landing sequence had to be made out of brass, as the liquid nitrogen used would have shattered plastic or lighter materials.

EXCLUSIVE: *Martin Bower has provided these full-size pictures of the Outland shuttle*.





Check out Martin's page for loads more background on the model. Philip Harrison (*Outland* production designer) and Malcolm Middleton (art director) are the likeliest sources for the ship-concept and blueprints supplied to Bower, but this information seems to have been lost to posterity. This design never had a chance in the modelling community, as the ship itself is too shrouded in darkness in the film to form a clear impression of its design.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

45: Starbug - *Red Dwarf* (UK TV, 1988-?) |

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Designer Mel Bibby's cut-size spaceship seemed a refreshing change after the industrial grimness of the Dwarf itself. For one thing, its green finish is just practical enough to give the miniature scale, while also endowing the craft with some of the fun of a toy. This is an arse-heavy comic spaceship without a threatening bone in its metal body, kind of like a fat dog/lizard that wants to play, but also having a bit of fun with a 50s/60s conception of spacecraft. The four landing legs seem permanently in evidence, as if to accentuate the canine aspect, and if it really is a bug, it's a Disney bug.

The original motion-control model is beautifully worked, though later versions tended towards CGI.

You can get Starbug die-cast, as a kit from Comet Models, a laser-etched block, and as an electronic playset, amongst various other forms.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

44: Serenity - *Firefly* (US TV, 2003) |



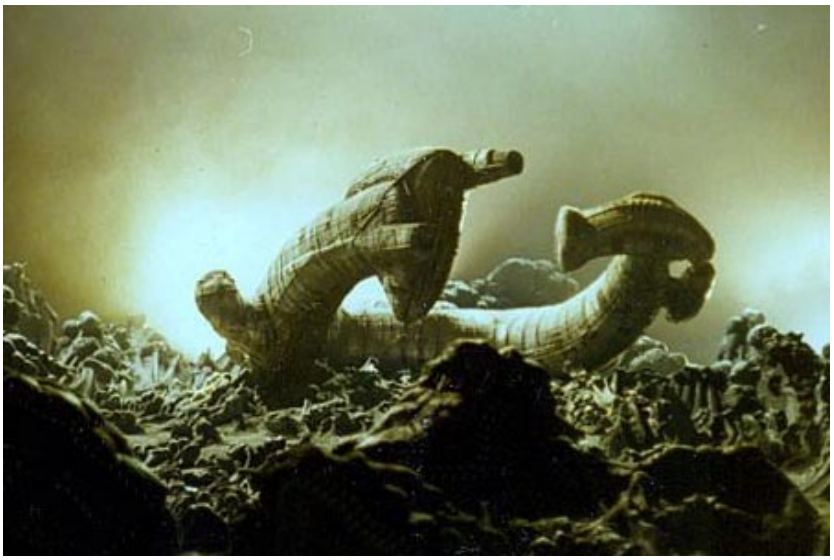
The eponymous craft of Joss Whedon's short-lived space-western is more clearly than most a collaboration. Whedon worked with visual effects supervisor Loni Peristere and production designer Carey Meyer to come up with the 'Firefly'-class serenity vessel, which was brought to life at Zoic studios. Though many screen sci-fi vessels have played with adjustable rotating thrusters, Serenity gets better value out of them than most, making impressive 180-degree by swinging round the thrusters against each other. That said, the ship has a cobbled-together and non-cohesive look suggestive of quite a few points of input. But, being a spaceship, it's none the worst for that.

Quantum Mechanix produce a pretty nice set of blueprints, whilst Monsters In Motion sell a mounted 6" ornament. Chris Doyle has rendered the Serenity in Lego, and Andrew Privett has made a superb Maya recreation of the vessel. If you want to see even more commitment to this oddball craft, check out the Firefly Ship Works.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

43: Alien derelict - *Alien* (1979) |

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The original Dan O'Bannon/Ron Shusett script had featured two locales for the crew of the Nostromo to explore: first a derelict spaceship whose occupants had been decimated by the xenomorphs, and later a pyramid-style structure in which the deadly eggs are located. This created a number of problems, not least one of budget, since Giger was slated to be creating both designs. But a Giger spaceship and a Giger temple would have created confusion as to the origin of the xenomorphs; why would this stranded spaceship, a spiritual predecessor to the doomed Nostromo, share culture with the pyramid containing the aliens? The original 'temple environment' in which the eggs are found suggests genuine civilisation - a second alien race? Combining the locales saved money and skirted around these issues (even if it gave rise to further plotting problems). Excellent analysis of the derelict and its inhabitants are to be found at the Alien Explorations blog, which also chronicles the development of the Giger derelict. In one entry, Ridley Scott is quoted on the design of the alien derelict:

"I took the drawing of the space ship off a section of one of Giger's paintings, 'cause we couldn't work out what the hell the spaceship was going to look like, and so I was staring at his book, the Necronomicon, and he'd drawn something up that almost looked like a musical instrument, so I kind of drew around that, and said "what about this, it looks like a giant croissant, but actually it worked, like a boomerang."

Nothing quite like the derelict has ever been seen in space vehicle design; it's like a broken hip-bone, with detailing more like scarring than panelling. It presents an unconscious figure of two legs stuck in the air , which lead to the three distinctively vaginal openings into the ship (and if you check out this pic at Alien model-maker Martin Bower's site, you'll notice that there are at least five more such disturbing openings on the left aspect of the craft).

In *Starlog*, September 1979, Giger said: *"Time was very short; time and money; too short to make everything good. Peter Voysey built the derelict and we worked very closely together. He was one who could understand my...my visual language. I am happy with the derelict...it was filmed very dark. It's more imposing to backlight the object. It seems more sinister...the ship is made of plasticine and polystyrene over metal arms."*

According to Martin Bower's site, the derelict model was sculpted in polystyrene and sat 10 feet in width, adorned with over 100 pounds of plasticine detailing applied by modeller Peter Voysey. The alien landscape on which the model stood is said by Bower to have contained large, rotting cow-bones, causing a considerable smell! A full-size section of the three openings into the ship was built by the Shepperton art department. The most significant pre-production painting of the derelict has actually been lost, and H.R. Giger would like the help of anyone who might know where it is.

I'm afraid my non-existent French can give me no insight into this recreation of the derelict, but the pics provide a rare aspect of the craft. There's also a spectacularly heavy-looking brass desktop sculpture available in what I can only assume is a very limited edition. Australian company Scale Solutions also produced a kit of the derelict, and you can see a great build of it in progress at this Flicker page.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

42: NSEA Protector - *Galaxy Quest* (1999)|

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Production designer Linda DeScenna and concept artist Wayne D. Barlowe have had to tread a fine line between parody and lawsuits in this ersatz Enterprise clone, in Dean Parisot's increasingly popular and slightly barbed love-letter to the cast of *Star Trek*. In the decal markings for the ship, NTE-3120, the first three letters are known to stand for 'Not The Enterprise'!

The Protector seems to have combined the saucer shape of the Enterprise front section with the nacelles and blown up the central section to something resembling a galaxy-class luxury cruiser. It's a nice little mover, even when inexpertly handled.

A 1/1400 scale resin kit is available from Frontier Models, another from Starcrafts, and you can get the Protector for Poser too. Modeller Magic have some great behind-the-scenes shots of the model in greenscreen-land at ILM. According to *Galaxy Quest* fan site Questarian, the Protector was also available in foam rubber and as a hanging mobile in various PR items created for the film's release. Those looking for more exact blueprints from which to model should check out the prop blueprints at Questarian (who in fact have really gone to town in attempting to recreate their favourite ship). **Info:** Fictional Life | IMDB |

Starship Odyssey - *Ulysses 31* (1981)|



As well as boasting one of the best opening titles of any kids' cartoon, this sci-fi update of Homer's *Odyssey* also features a rather spectacular spaceship design in the form of the eponymous vehicle. The best guess I have as to the creative force behind the Odyssey is artistic consultant René Borg (though art directors Morishige Suzuki and Shinji Itoh are also very much in the frame), but I stand to be corrected on that. The ship resembles nothing so much as a flat eye-shape moving forward, which is apposite to the premise of the show. Only the jutting cannons affixed to the front give the design any forward movement, and in general it follows the same blatant disregard for aerodynamic convention as the guild transports in David Lynch's *Dune* (1984). HL Product sell a spectacular desktop model of the ship, and the design has also attracted the attention of CGI hobbyists. **Info:** Fictional Life | IMDB |

40: Event Horizon - *Event Horizon* (1997)|

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Paul W. Anderson's SF chiller seems to divide viewers between lovers and haters, but it's hard to deny the great design work behind the 'haunted house in space'. The Event Horizon has the aspect of a space station more than a spaceship, and the smaller Lewis & Clark makes a lengthy and impressive pass of the ship in much the same way that the Palomino checks out the Cygnus at the start of Disney's *The Black Hole*. The side wings, though it's hard to imagine what end they serve on a spaceship so patently intended never to make planetfall, are aggressive and hunched in the style of *Alien Resurrection*'s Betty, while the forward nose section is narrow and confined and claustrophobic-looking. This vehicle really is Dracula's castle in space, and it still makes a hell of an impression, as it were.

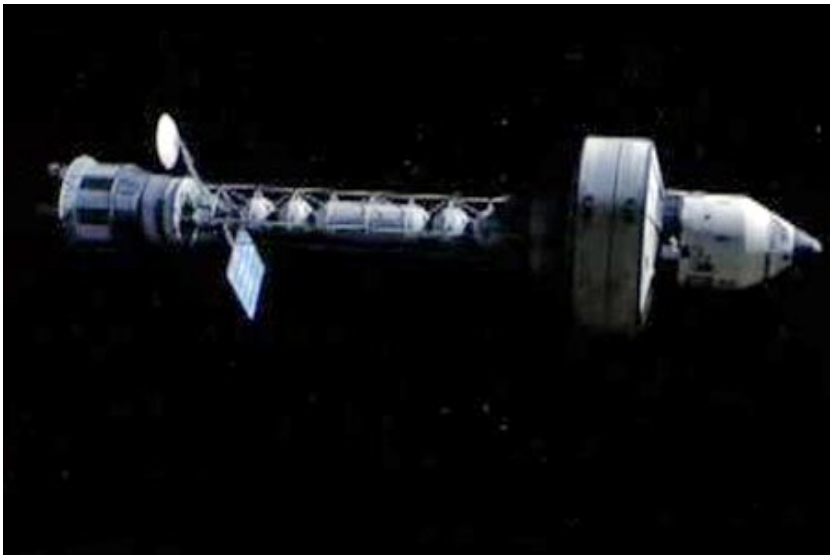
"[*Event Horizon*] is a ghost-story in space, so it had to be spooky, and it needed an atmosphere that was beyond a normal spaceship; it needed to be a haunted house, really. The idea was that it had this kind of fusion-core reactor, and we mixed with that this kind of gothic, Notre Dame kind of high gothic sensibility. So it's quite S&M, it's quite spikey...the whole thing had this feeling of some kind of giant insect, like a human fly or one of these spindly, scary wasps."

The full-length interview will be up soon.

You can find more background info on the Event Horizon here. You can walk around it in a great Doom mod. The very talented Andrew Privett has a nice CGI version of the ship (more on that here); an dhere's a tabletop miniature.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

39: Mars Recovery - *Mission To Mars* (2000)|



Production designer Ed Verreux achieved arguably the most convincing and meticulous space vessel since Kubrick for Brian De Palma's race to the red planet. The rotating section providing a gravitised environment is normally a VFX shortcut to stop directors spending half the movie's budget shooting scenes on NASA's 'vomit comet' plane (which can simulate zero-G environments for short periods), but when we actually enter the ship and see the sheer amount of work that has gone into backing up this design concept, it's a jaw-dropping spectacle.

Metropolis interviewed Verreux in 2004, and discussed the design concepts for the movie:

"When I got the job--this movie was for Disney--I did a lot of research. I went to see Louis Friedman at the Planetary Society--he used to be an associate of Carl Sagan's--and I went to a couple of NASA Web sites. There were several ideas about going to Mars. One of the problems is it's at least six months to go to Mars, roughly. And we don't know what people will act like or what zero G will do to them, so we did a lot of research on this. "Originally, the idea was that there would be two parts of the ship. But that was with the first director, Gore Verbinski, who left halfway through the project. So they brought in Brian De Palma, and Brian really wanted to have this big wheel. And I said OK, but Tony Masters did that in 2001. He said, "I don't care, I want the wheel." So we ended up making it. "[The wheel] is supposed to be a big gravitational habitat. It was also based on

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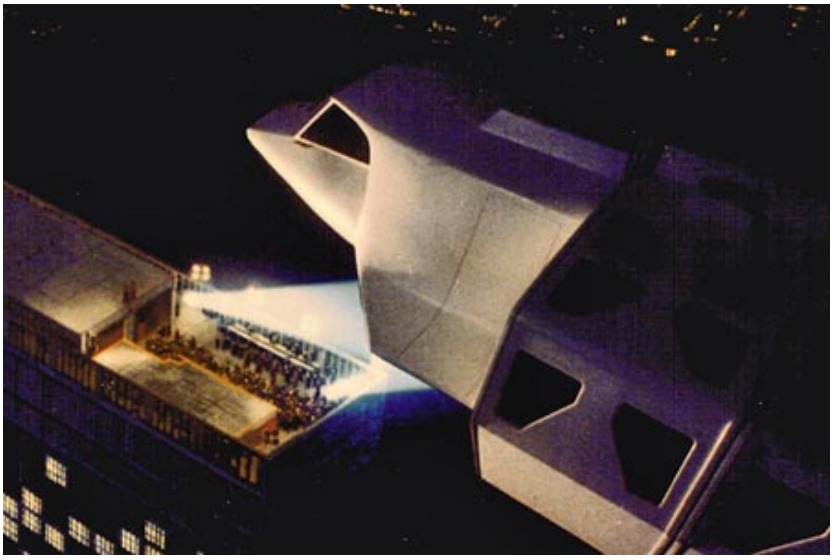
some NASA designs that exist. I used some artistic license, but I was basically trying to stay within sort of a known, NASA-esque look, and say, "OK, maybe in 10-15 years, if they actually did something like this, what would it look like?"

G-Force director Hoyt Yeatman, then visual effects supervisor, deserves credit also for the excellent miniature work on *Mission To Mars*, as do conceptual designers Syd Mead and Richard Mahon.

The wonderful craft in *Mission To Mars* doesn't seem to have made any impression with modellers, who are not that keen to relive a movie that is beautiful, but widely-thought (unfairly, in my opinion) to be a bit dull.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

38: Shuttle - '*V*' (1983)|



Rather like *Space:1999's* Eagle Transporter (more on that later), this wonderful 1983 mini-series features a genus of craft that are clearly derived from one popular set of design rules. The common denominator is an elegant white sheen finish, generous allocation of window space (smoked, as with the Eagles, in order to avoid the expensive problem of showing the pilots inside during VFX shots), rounded edges and running-boards that can only have the most rudimentary effect as wings. The fighters are rather exciting, but it's the wider-bodied transports that really display some art deco splendour.

The miniatures are reported to have been modelled by veteran VFX miniature wizard Greg Jein, whilst Chuck Davis's original production sketches of the shuttle and derivated designs are available [PDF] at the site of 'V' creator Kenneth J. Johnson.

"Chuck Davis, production designer, crafted the ships over a weekend. The ships were segmented so we could piece them together into different vehicles. The smallest was the fighter and the longest (65 feet) was the tanker. Here are some photos... "



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"...and the used car lot..."

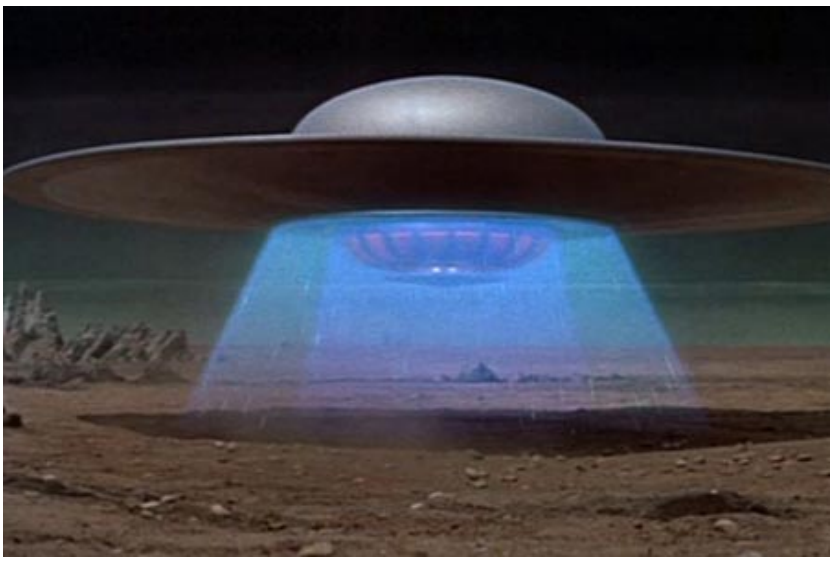


Click here to read our full-length interview with Kenneth J. Johnson

The best example of a toy based on these designs is actually in the original mini-series itself, when the son of Mike Donovan is seen playing with a toy 'visitor' shuttle during the evil lizards' deceptive charm offensive on Earth. Action figures were made for the show, and one set featured a Visitor fighter, but Kenneth Johnson's series is, unfortunately, the very hardest to Google of any sci-fi franchise, and I'd welcome any additional information on toys or models from the show. Small Artworks have produced excellent replicas made (and improved) from moulds for the original series miniatures. A1/72 scale Visitors' Transport was manufactured as a basic garage kit in the 1990s.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

37: United Planets Cruiser C-57D - *Forbidden Planet* (1956) |



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In the end it's the hidden tricks that a cinematic saucer has up its sleeve that make the difference, and the C-57D has some doozies. In basic flight, it's a pretty vanilla 'saucer-ship'; some of the elegantly orchestrated shots of the ship approaching Altair admittedly prefigure the 'cosmic ballet' created by Kubrick and Trumbull for *2001: A Space Odyssey*, but it's only when the C-57D comes to land on Altair that our jaws truly begin to drop: a central column descends from the undercarriage whilst the ship hovers on a spectacular suspensor beam. Once the landing-column is down and the ship secure, two elegant walkways cut out of the ship towards the surface. A tremendous amount of thought and imagination has gone into these concepts, and the sequence still holds up today.

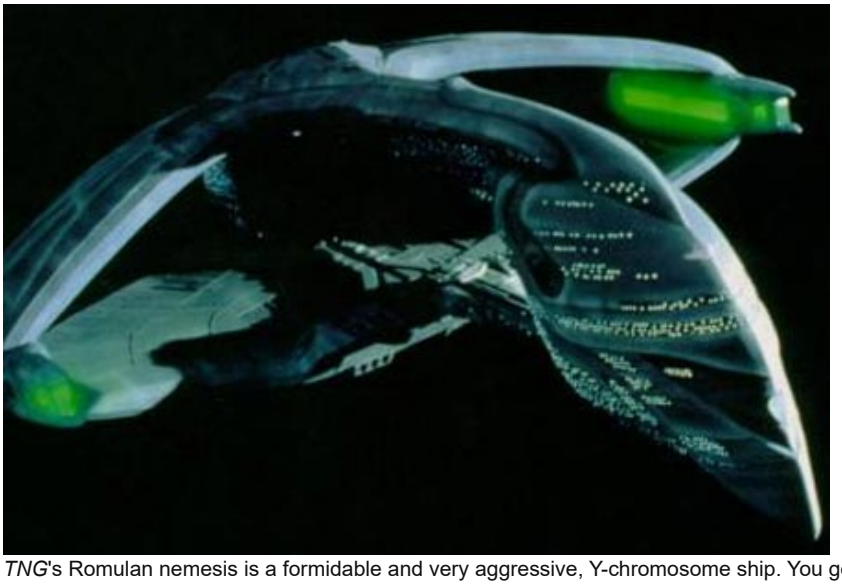
Three miniatures were made of the C-57D, at 22, 44 and 88 inches, the latter model weighing 300 pounds, and the entire budget for the three models a substantial (in 1955) $20,000. The original hero miniature was sold at auction by MGM in 1970, and was thereafter believed lost. However it turned up in auction again in recent years, which happy event revealed many details of the miniature's construction. The model is made of wood, fibreglass and steel, with an landing column that extends out from the body of the ship on servo-mechanisms, along with the two exit ramps. The one part of the ship that had not survived the years was the Perspex top dome, which was recreated for auction from blueprints. The model sold for over $74,000 to an unnamed collector in late 2008.

In the extras on 2008's special DVD release, John Landis said of the C-57D: *"That flying saucer was the best spaceship, really, until 2001. It was an incredibly clear and crisp and sharp and indelible image."*

There's a heavy-duty resin kit available from Skyhook, a nice C-57D diorama at Frontier Models, and Polar Lights also produced a fine model kit of the C-57D in 2001 (due for re-issue in August of 2009), of which there's a really great build walkthrough here. In the CGI hobbyist world, there's a nice effort over at 3dVia. You can even buy the blueprints for the ship.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

36. Romulan Warbird (Deridex class) - *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (US TV, 1987) |



TNG's Romulan nemesis is a formidable and very aggressive, Y-chromosome ship. You get the impression, in fact, of something very avian, with the huge and sharp head so far forward that it seems it can see through 360 degrees. The impression of a visored face at the helm conveys a sense of the Roman, errr, Romulan empire very well, and, well, you just feel plain *dominated* even looking at the damn thing. Andrew Probert designed the Deridex as a swansong for his *TNG* contributions, and it was built by Greg Jein. Memory Alpha has the interesting tale of how a kit-bash of the Deridex was sold back to the producers of *Enterprise* for recreation in CGI as a Mazarite warship.

AMT do a seriously villainous Star Trek adversary set featuring the Warbird, the Ferengi Marauder and the Klingon Bird of Prey. Check out Starship Modellers for a nice build of the Deridex.

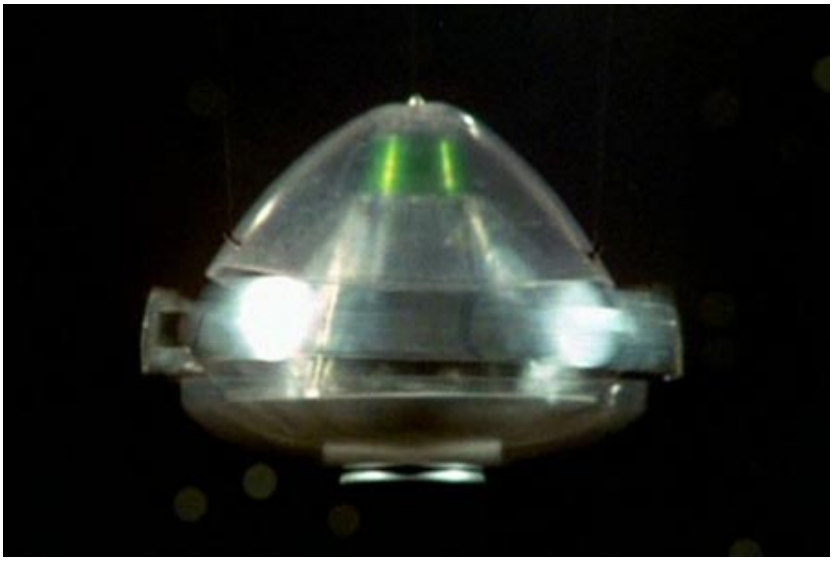
Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

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Top 75 spaceships in movies and TV part 4

Originally published at http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/14627/top-75-spaceships-in-movies-and-tv-part-4

35: Alien craft - *UFO* (UK TV, 1970)|



Gerry Anderson's dark sci-fi series featured an race of stealthy aliens secretly plundering Earth for human organs to sustain their own dying physiognomies. They were creepy and mysterious, the more so for the enigmatic spinning spacecraft in which they made their secret journies Earthward.

The models used were of metal and plastic with internal motors to supply the rotating movement. Keeping the centre of gravity was a difficult task, and any variation was fatal to the illusion, even when shooting at a high FPS. The Derek Meddings design actually provides little more space for a single occupant than a Gemini-era capsule. Sixteen skewed arches are attached to the central capsule, each finishing in a shield motif. The exterior section of the ship (at the very least) spins at a high velocity, giving the impression of greater volume, as does the semi-transparent dome that sits on top of the assembly.

The most distinctive aspect of the craft is not visual, but rather the shimmering sound of the vehicle in flight (check out this page to hear some MP3s of the sound).

Amazing science do a nice model kit of the UFO. SHED models also did a 114mm vacuum-formed kit of the craft in 1989. Product Enterprises released a 4-inch model of the craft. Hobbyist Andy Marrs has done some work on a CGI UFO, which is listed along with many other hobbyist renderings at ufoseries.com. The website sfdaydreams has a fairly extensive array of CGI imaginings of UFO-based scenarios.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

34: Mothership - *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* (1978)|



So long as we can avoid asking the question ' How does a spacecraft the size of France sneak up on a CIA operation in the middle of the desert?', there's a wealth of detail to appreciate in this model at the highly inspiring climax of Spielberg's SF classic.

1970s spaceship king Ralph McQuarrie is the conceptual designer responsible for this innovative take on flying saucer iconography, and legendary effects master Douglas Trumbull the genius who developed a system of (somewhat toxic) fine oil-burners and epic motion-control passes in order to capture the enormous ship's movement realistically. In the DVD extras documentary *The Making Of Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*,

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Trumbull amusingly notes that the spaceship, once it has made its spectacular flip on its axis, was designed to resemble a 'large descending breast' - mother Earth indeed!

Esteemed model-maker Greg Jein created and embellished the mothership, which took 18 months to complete and contains over 60 feet of coiled fibre-optics attached to source neon tubes within the miniature. One comment claims that when 'active', the highly illuminated model draws the same power as a New York subway car! Many of the cylindrical protuberances are reported to be oil-drums from the WWII modelling world, while other eagle-eyed miniature enthusiasts claim to notice R2-D2, a US mailbox, a small cemetery plot, a submarine and a Volkswagen bus attached to the ship.

The miniature is sixty-three inches long and weighs 400 pounds. It was constructed in wood, metal and plastic, and is currently viewable at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy annex of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Virginia. Unfortunately, it seems that the mothership would have been a bit of a dangerous toy, what with all those sharp protuberances, and there seems little impact made on the modelling world.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

33: Anakin's starfighter - *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith* (2005)|



This ship is as confused as Anakin himself! It's a beautiful, mixed-up dream of all the fighters that preceded it in the other five *Star Wars* films. There's the split-vanguard division of the speeder bikes in *Return Of The Jedi*, the cockpit-window geometry and solar panels of the TIE fighters, the R2-mounting of X-Wings and Y-Wings, the cocky angles of the snowspeeders in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and at the centre, the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon. To boot, the large blister gives us a clear view of the pilot and an exciting sense of the exact scale of the ship. The only thing that bumps this wonderful craft down the list is that in itself it's a wonderful hybrid, but of far more original ideas and antecedents.

In all truth only *Sith* concept design supervisors Erik Tiemens and Ryan Church can really tell us who put this design together, but we can certainly enjoy its smooth and genial blend of other influences, and a production sketch on Church's site would indicate that he may be the originator (link is here, but the sketch is hidden in a Flash slide-show deal, so you'll have to click about to find it).

Being a very cool *Star Wars* ship, it's naturally available pretty much any which way you might like it. There's a toy, a Revell kit, an EasyKit kit (!), and there's also a great run-down of various replicas available here. Sci-Fi 3D have a downloadable Lightwave model too.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

32: Leonov - *2010* (1985)|



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Peter Hyams decision to film a sequel to the Kubrick SF classic was an open invitation to geek derision, no matter what the result - notwithstanding that the source book was an eminently respected sequel by *2001: A Space Odyssey* co-writer Arthur C. Clarke. The decision to recast William Sylvester's gentle scientist Heywood Floyd as hard-talking, hard-boiled Roy Scheider combined with a pre-glasnost sense of cold war hostility to alter the tone of scientific co-operation in the novel. With the excision of the novel's doomed Chinese mission to Europa, not even the return of principals Keir Dullea (Bowman in *2001*)and Douglas Rain (voice of HAL) could bring critical or box-office acclaim. As usual, this is no reflection on the production design, and designer Albert Brenner worked closely with conceptual artist Syd Mead on determining the logic of the ship, which features a rotating, gravity-generating carousel housed by a zero-gravity fuselage.

In Vincent LoBrutto's *By Design*, Brenner talks Leonov from the inside out:

"I thought 'We have a great opportunity here in designing this spacecraft, because in space you're weightless. You can move laterally, vertically, you can move in all kinds of directions'. I would say 'Oh, here's a terrific idea. Let's put in a fire pole, so if you want to get from one level or section of the spacecraft to another, you can simply float out by grabbing the pole and going hand over hand'. But what happened was you were moving from one box to another box, like going from the living room to the kitchen. It got so complicated I couldn't figure a way out...we had the entire flight deck put on gimbals so we could rotate it..."

"The script had the Leonov already to ‘go’ which then prompted the somewhat reluctant U.S. Space whatever to cooperate for the trip to Jupiter and Io and the crippled Discovery. I envisioned the Leonov as visually clumsy ‘inside-out’ design, with the vessel as a pressure vessel with all the feeds, conduits and manifolding on the outside of the shell. This would facilitate EVA maintenance and trouble location. The bridge at the front end was a flat, faceted affair in keeping with the general parameter of flat panel construction. (NASA now has curved pressure portals in pre-production) I deliberately made the ship look sort of ‘clumsy’ as a comment on Russian design, and the idea that it had been built in orbit.

"Originally I had the bridge as an off-shoot of the linear axis with the docking port as an extension of the linear axis to allow people in the bridge to observe direct sight line to the docking port. Peter [Hyams, 2010 Director] wanted to simplify the look, which in retrospect was a judicious move. The rotating dual cabin section was a deliberate effort to produce minimal centrifugal ‘gravity’ to avoid floating everything on set, an expensive process. (The movie was made before elaborate computer-generated effects came along) The only scene where stuff was ‘floated’ was the pen scene where Roy Scheider had to place the pen prop exactly into the thread loop.

"It took several takes before he did this without obviously ‘lining up’ the prop in the live shot. "Originally (and according to the first script) I designed an elaborate folding ablation shield mounted on the front of the ship. The technical advisor from JPL said ‘you wouldn’t carry all the weight and go into the orbiting slow-down front end first...you’d turn the ship around and use the onboard engines to de-orbit. And so I had to retrofit the ship design with the shells that would contain the carbon fiber baloots that soaked up the heat of re entry into the Jovian atmosphere for braking. "I designed the interior bridge, the navigation table set, the small personal cabins, the control area from which the lander down to Europa was monitored, the lander itself, the bridge that connected the Leonov to the Discovery (with its trolley fixture), the hand-held thruster and the one-man EVA pod that vanished when it approached the surface of the monolith. Working with Peter Hyams was a pleasure. I got along very well with the production designer and all in all enjoyed the process very much."

Click here to read Syd's exclusive insights to us about his movie spaceships

Leonov is deliciously ugly in a way only SF geeks can perhaps appreciate, and I do wonder if the speed at which the gimbal section rotates wouldn't splatter the inhabitants all over the inner hull. But the aero-braking section of the movie captures all the tension of Clarke's original, and shows how un-aerodynamic usable solutions can be in the physics of space travel. The novelty of the rotating section adds grace to an intentionally graceless, utilitarian design and makes Leonov a most memorable vessel in the history of sci-fi film.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

31: Delta-7 Aethersprite-class light interceptor - *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* (2002) |



Obi-Wan Kenobi's interstellar runabout seems like a shrunken stardestroyer with a big blister. Big deal. Until you see how it gets from planet to planet: by hooking itself into a ring-shaped hyperdrive module (known, I hear, as a Syluire-31 Hyperspace Docking Ring), and elegantly unhooking at the other end. Any Gerry Anderson fan is bound to love the ingenuity and elegance of this craft.

The only problem I have with the sheer diversity of craft-types in the *Star Wars* universe is that it makes sense in any society at any given time that the most efficient and useful technologies should dominate. There might be a big difference between a tractor and a Maserati, but they both derive from the same principles, both have four wheels in roughly the same place and both are powered by an internal combustion engine. There

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probably aren't more than a handful of basic vehicle types on this planet, and if another planet came and showed us a better technology, we would doubtless imitate that. Why then are there so many different vehicle types in the *Star Wars* universe?

Well, the answer's obvious - just for fun; and this design is more fun than a box of Ewoks.

If you want to see what Lego is really capable of in starship modelling, check out this Lego Aethersprite - it's a beauty! Finemolds also have a very nice model kit available.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

30: Colonial Shuttle - *Battlestar Galactica* (US TV, 1978)|



I absolutely love this ship. It seems to have a perpetual frown going; it's a very *serious* ship. One of the appealing aspects of the craft is the sharp contrast between its unrefined hull and its absurdly 'luxury-liner' viewing portholes - it's like fitting a ferry with a jazz bar! It's amazing how such a blocky ship can have so much refinement and class

Professional model-maker Ed Miarecki restored the original 1970s model to its former glory in 1998, whilst Richard Hudolin and company, I'm happy to say. recognised the intrinsic worth of the original design and stuck fairly close to it for new *Galactica*.

You can download a really cool paper version of the shuttle, complete with colour textures, from Martin Sanger's site (if you don't speak German, just hit the 'Free download' button; the instructions in the zip file are visual). There's a nice game-piece miniature at spaceship brainiac, and some idea about what the various parts do at this site. Neither is the elegance of the design lost on CGI enthusiasts.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

29: Sulaco - *Aliens* (1986) |



Bristling with lethal antennae and looking like it could cut through a planet, the Marine transport Sulaco is naked military technology in James Cameron's action-packed sequel to *Alien*. It's basically a pulse-rifle with a hyperdrive bolted on. Just one look at it and you *know* there aren't gonna be any Jacuzzis on board.

"The Nostromo was a masterpiece of design in the ‘new’ genre of rocket ships that didn’t look like they could ‘go fast.’ It was, in fact, a lumbering commercial inter-whatever facility. I was one of twelve judges for that year’s Miss Universe competition in Florida. By that time I’d done Star Trek TMP (the V’ger entity), Blade Runner (all the vehicles, street set proposals, various artefacts and post –production matte preliminaries) and TRON. (all of the transport vehicles except the ‘butterfly’ ship at the end of the film, designed my Moebius.) I read the script FedExed to me by Jim and on

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the way back to Los Angeles on the plane sketched my visual interpretation of the script saying...'a forest of antennae comes into frame followed by the mass of the Sulaco.'

"So, I drew a 'forest of antennae' on the front end of a massive 'ball-shaped' mass. I drove up to (then) Jim's and Gale Ann Hurd's (Jim's wife at the time and also the line-producer) house on Mulholland Drive and Cameron saw my sketches. I paraphrase...

"'Syd? I'm going to have the Sulaco move past the camera and a sphere will require pulling focus. Here's sorta how it should be' and he drew a quick sketch of a flat kind of thing, sort of like a huge, flat submarine. I went back to my studio and produced the final design in the next two days. The Sulaco, in my mind, was again basically a commercial freighter with a military contingent onboard to confront the alien threat. I designed the overall exterior of the ship with its row of loading doors down the side replete with a gantry that supported a traveling loading crane, the power plant at the rear end and two HUGE gun-like fixtures on each side that could be for defense, whatever. It combined a utilitarian, functional look with an overlay of surface detail articulation and a suggestion of being a well-armed ship. Inside, I designed the drop bay for the drop ship, the assault de-orbital craft which contained the assault vehicle and started on two other design jobs."

Click here to read Syd's exclusive insights to us about his movie spaceships

Miniatures technical supervisor Pat McClung talked about the Sulaco model in the *Alien* Quadrilogy special edition:

"The Sulaco was about six feet long and it was only built just to be seen on one side. The back we never finished because Jim [Cameron] said we only ever had one angle that you're going to see. So that was shipped off to Brian Johnson's company, and they did the motion-control shots on it and the optical compositing."

The Sulaco has had a healthy life both for CGI hobbyists and model/replica collectors and builders. even though it has pretty much no free-standing capacity. Small Art Works built a custom-made Sulaco for a Korean client; the Halcyon Sulaco is very popular, and many 3D hobbyists have released their own Sulaco meshes for colleagues and friends to download.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

28: EVA pod - *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) |



Graceful, multi-functional, but frankly also pretty damn frightening, this NASA-consulted EVA vehicle is both rigidly grounded in the practicalities of moving in zero gravity and zero atmosphere, and also formidably attractive! The only criticism I might make of the design is that in certain parts Kubrick seems to have favoured a whitewash over what NASA would have left as bare metal. But the EVA pod is truly a classic design.

4th Axis offer what looks to be a slightly rough version of the pod in the form of a quick-assembly ornament; Scott Alexander's polyurethane resin kit is a fair bit nearer the mark in terms of fidelity to both the design and finish of the original model. Collect-Aire also offer a crudely-finished resin kit. There are plenty of pod meshes available; this was one of the very first projects the amateur CGI community set their sights on. But if you're a CG modeller really wanting a major *2001*-gasm, check out this little collection...

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

27: GR-75 medium transport - *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)| RETURN TO INDEX

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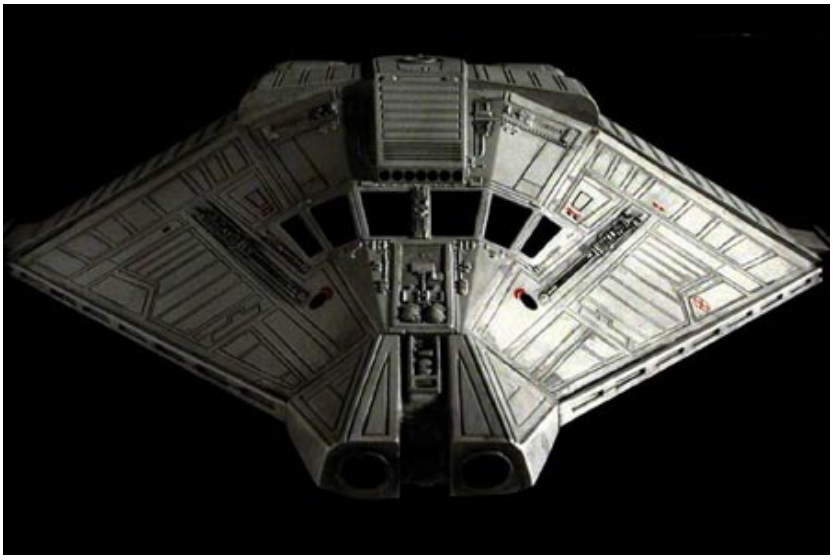


The extraordinarily beautiful rebel transport from Irvin Kirshner's 'dark' *Star Wars* film has an insectile beauty, with a large protective chassis concealing a mass of technology on the undercarriage. Its forward motion is elegant and almost aquatic. Though this lightly-armed transport vessel first appeared in *Empire*, it was retro-inserted into Mos Eisley in George Lucas's 1997 re-release of the original *Star Wars*. Whether the ship is accountable to *Empire* production designer Norman Reynolds, conceptual artist Ralph McQuarrie or any of the legions of ILM design wizes, I'm not able to determine, but it's certainly a ship to be proud of.

As with all ships *Star Wars*, the GR-75 is well-represented both in the commercial and amateur replica community. Here's a great paper version and another fine effort in balsa; however the curves of the GR-75 prove a bit of a challenge for Lego minimalists. MPC/ERTL released a nice GR-75 in a grab-bag rebel base kit in 1992, and there's a good guide on a standard kit rebuild of the GR75 here (scroll down past the Falcon). Sean Kennedy and André Müller also have a very nice CGI recreation of the ship available in four formats over at Sci-FI 3D.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

26: Narcissus - *Alien* (1979) |



Many hands worked on *Alien*'s other human spaceship. The escape pod which flees the exploding Nostromo (with one more passenger than intended) has often been criticised for only carrying three when a full ship's complement is seven, but it's an extraordinarily beautiful craft. The hard edges of cut plastic and kit-bashed finish are hard relief against the agreeable moulded curves of the thrusters. Since it apparently hasn't been exposed to any grime or grit since factory testing, it's *2001*-white, which gives it a rather 'model'-y look in the final 'ejection' scene, which was filmed with the rear of the craft facing the studio floor and technicians pouring milky water through the highly-lit thrusters to give the impression of blast vents, when slow-motion was applied.

Both Ron Cobb and Chris Foss produced numerous designs for the Narcissus throughout 1978, but Cobb's eventual creation seems to have won the day.

"I designed a ship around the studio set, which was a foreshortened section of the back,& vaguely followed Ron Cobb's painting of it also from the back. So I made up the shape of the craft & built it from sketches I did. I bet you didn't know I originally thought it should have an undercarriage! If you go to my website martinbowersmodelworld.com you will see *Alien* listed with Narcissus as a separate section. I've attached a few photos of it finished for you though..."

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Halcyon do a very nice model kit of the Narcissus, which ship has come to be associated both with *Alien* and sequel *Aliens*, which also features the craft briefly in the opening sequence.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

25: Colonial Viper - *Battlestar Galactica* (US TV 1978) |

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It's hard to cast a vote for either the Ralph McQuarrie original in the 1978 US TV series (and the European theatrical release) of Battlestar Galactica and the 2003 re-imagining by production designer Richard Hudolin. Perhaps Hudolin himself can explain best...

"We reinvented everything. Even the Mk.II we actually did some modifications on. We got rid of the Egyptian references and stuff like that. We just kind of elongated it a little more and made it a little more slick. Then there's the mark 9 viper, which is something that never got made. Bryan Singer was going to do *Battlestar Galactica* at one point. They actually set up and had an art department and started building, and they stopped when he decided he was going to take off and do something else. The mark 9 original drawing was left over from all of that, which we inherited. Now we didn't have any money to build it, so we started building it over the course of time, and ultimately we wound up with a finished mark 9. So that was a kind of inherited thing. As we had extra money we'd build a part of it to shoot over or around, and then we'd continue building and building and building. It took almost two or three years to build that thing, because it was never really budgeted. We could have built it in a month if we had to, but we never had the money [laughs]."

Click here for the full interview with Richard, exclusive to Den Of Geek.

For practical reasons, the smallest and least-detailed of the VFX Viper models in the original series was the one most frequently seen, since it was less unwieldy than the 'hero' version.

The most disappointing aspect of the original Viper was the fact that the visor was conveniently smoked during the (endlessly re-used) visual effects shots. This didn't match the on-set prop and prevented the viewer 'getting into' the opticals as much, but it meant that the shots were completely re-usable (as any figure could be inside them) and also avoided issues of having convincing humans piloting the model ships. To be fair, the X-Wing shots in Star Wars used the same tactic.

And of course, there's more than a little of the *Star Wars* X-Wing in the Colonial Viper, but with the same man designing both ships, it's hard to point the finger too much. You can see thumbnails of McQuarrie's original *Galactica* concept sketches (including the viper) over at this site, but the originals seem jealously guarded. Later on we'll be meeting the ship that McQuarrie first proposed as the design of the Viper - the Thunder Fighter from *Buck Rogers In The 25th Century*!

For detailed information on the models and full-size set props of the Viper from both old and new Galactica, check out The Ultimate Battlestar Galactica Viper Link.

There were various models and toys available of the Viper in the late 70s. Revell still do a 'classic Galactica' Viper, and Monogram's old Viper kit has can be enhanced with some nice cockpit detail from Millennia Models, who also supply a landing gear add-on for the Revell version. Snake Ship Inc provides a 'new' Galactica Viper that's very special indeed.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

24: The Rodger Young - *Starship Troopers* (1997) |

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The battle cruisers in Paul Verhoeven's under-rated sci-fi slugfest are straight from the covers of pulp sci-fi. Brash, fun and unfettered by NASA consultants, the Rodger Young is a thundering war horse with some serious firepower and heft. The models were created by the Thunderstone team at Sony, including model-maker George Willis (see interview below), and the sizes of the models varied from 6 inches to eighteen feet (check out this excellent page at starshipmodeller.com for more background info on the Rodger Young & Co.). The miniatures took a year and a half to create. Unusually, due to limitations in the availability of computer compositing, it was decided to make multiple models to represent the entire fleet rather than run multiple passes on the same models.

George Willis takes up the story with us:

"At the time they were making all these big-budget action films, and there weren't enough computers in the world to do the animation. There were computers that hadn't been made yet that had been bought *in advance* to be working on these films...the *Starship Troopers* art department came to the model shop with a bunch of storyboards and said 'Which of these shots could you do in some way *other* than computer effects?'. They were budgeted out. Just the rendering time that was required to do these shots was a *huge* obstacle. With the amount of computers they had and the ones they were able to get, there was no way they were going to be able to finish *Starship Troopers* in time for the release date...

"There were three main versions. There was one that was eighteen feet long, and then there were two that were nine feet long. The eighteen-foot version was actually built where it would come apart in two sections for the destruction sequence. There's a designer's rendition somewhere of how the damage would spread once the nuclear bug-juice hit the Rodger Young and started eating it away...

"...it really has the look of a battleship. It's very heavy and lumbering...When you look at the Rodger Young, you think that it's this big, heavy indestructible battle-cruiser. It *hangs* there..."

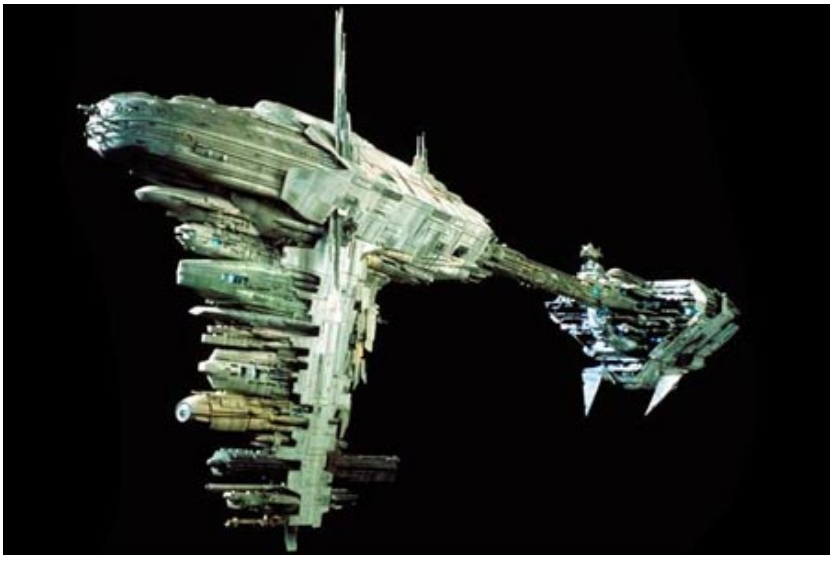
Click here for the full length, exclusive interview with George Willis about the 'Rodger Young'

Check out this page for pictures of George's work on the 'destructive split' sequence that closes the Rodger Young's military career. If you want to see how the Rodger Young measures up to other starship goliaths, check out the amazing merzo.net.

Federation models had a nice, low-part kit, but it doesn't seem to be available right now; Frontier Models have a rather nice 19-inch resin model hobby kit available, and there's another kit from Hoto Models. here's a hobbyist 3D mesh, and thanks to the efforts of CG enthusiast Digitawn, you can even see the Rodger Young landing on a planet.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

23: EF76 Nebulon-B escort frigate - *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983) |



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There is no air in space. And you have to love ships like the EF76 that ignore the non-existent problem of wind resistance. This vessel looks like it was carved roughly out of igneous rock. The massive engines resemble those of the Jupiter-Mission (*2001: A Space Odyssey*), and that dynamic continues with a threadbare midriff section leading to what appears to be a scullery full of alert knives, upended. The dynamics of the EF76 are unexpected and very distinctive even in the eclectic *Star Wars* universe. It can't turn on a sixpence, but it cruises with as much class as anything else in the rebel fleet - and more than most.

Thank then production designer Norman Reynolds and the art department at ILM, for this remarkable and memorable craft.

Richard Baker appears to be getting together 1/650th and 1/1300th scale versions of the EF76, and you can check on that project here. Lego is not to be left out of the fun, naturally (and in fact the blocky nature of the medium is particularly suitable to this design). Scale solutions also do a Nebulon frigate kit. Of course CGI modellers have taken on the frigate too, and there's a card kit to be had as well.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

22: Cylon Raider - *Battlestar Galactica* (US TV 1978)|



I must make a clear distinction here between the original predatory shape of the Glen Larson raiders and the pointier versions in the Ron Moore re-imagining. The original design of the raiders was, in my opinion, worth sticking to far more closely in new *Galactica*. Designer Richard Hudolin explains the logic of the change...

EXCLUSIVE: Production designer Richard Hudolin on the Cylon Raider re-design for new *Galactica:*

"Our mandate was to create something new and totally different and do pretty much whatever we want, and Bonnie Hammer, who was the chief over at Sci-Fi and the overall boss, really wanted to go for something totally different. So when you're given a blank slate like that and you look at what they did in the past, you kind of look at that and jump off from there. Now visual effects had a lot to do with the design of the exterior of that ship, because we worked very closely together, and seeing how the exterior only existed in Gary Hutzel's world in the visual effects, he had more to do with the design of that than I did."

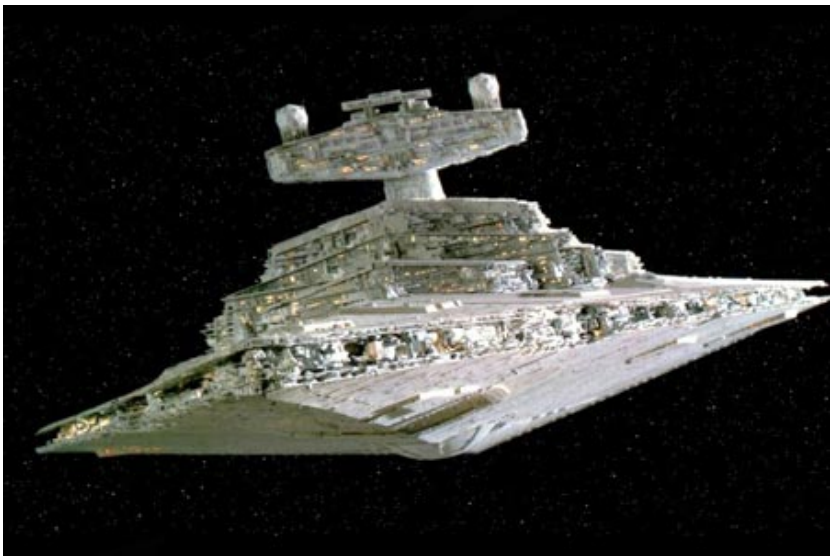
The original Ralph McQuarrie-designed Raiders seemed heavier and more predatory, and when they span around on a manoeuvre, they were just about as beautiful as any TV spaceship ever devised. Sorry, but the 'lobster claw' of new *Galactica* doesn't compare (though you can get it as a 3D model via Google, if the original version doesn't grab you).

There's a nice re-design of the original Raider here. Lego? A no brainer. There's a kit by Revell and you can learn how to light it here (hope you have better luck than I did when I was twelve).

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

21: Death's Head, Imperator-class Star Destroyer - *Star Wars* (1977) |

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The opening shot of *A New Hope* was a landmark both in movies and sci-fi movies, as a spaceship apparently the size of a continent thundered overhead in pursuit of the Corellian diplomatic ship. In fact, we had seen something like this before, but not at this speed; the leisurely pass of Jupiter Mission at the beginning of the second half of 2001: A Space Odyssey ran at a different speed and to different effect. Here there was thunder, both in the sound effects and the stirring chords of John Williams' classic score. We had never seen anything like it.

The Star Destroyer has the rough aspect of a naval destroyer, with a high conning tower looming imposingly over the bulk of the vessel below. It cuts through space with an incredibly threatening aspect. Ironically, at 91-centimeters, the Star Destroyer model was actually smaller in the real world than the blockade runner miniature that it was chasing. A new Death's Head miniature was made for *The Empire Strikes Back*, measuring 259 centimetres.

Can you get a Star Destroyer in Lego? Absolutely. You can get a Lego star destroyer kit that will yield a model *weighing 18 pounds!* A delightfully obsessive news photographer from Ohio has proved himself a legendary custom and scratch-builder of Star Wars spaceship models, and is undertaking a 48-inch Star Destroyer - a project he first attempted in 1981. On the CGI front, here's a pretty great classic star destroyer at moddb.com; and here's a legendary Death's Head mesh from Fractal Sponge in pretty much any format you might want.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

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Top 75 spaceships in movies and TV part 5

Originally published at http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/14628/top-75-spaceships-in-movies-and-tv-part-5

20: BTL Y-wing starfighter - *Star Wars* (1977)|



It may not be the luckiest ship in the rebel fleet (and it fares little better in the real world) but the Y-Wing is certainly a looker. If it were a woman, it would be wearing a smart hat and Daisy Duke hotpants - it seems to have dispensed with a great deal of essential chassis and protection. What is the point, in terms of aiding propulsion, of the skeletal tubes that run off of the boosters? They can neither direct rocket exhaust nor provide stabilisation in an atmosphere.

For a vehicle with so squat an aspect, it seems rather unfair that it gets hit so much in the *Star Wars* movies. The Y-Wing is as 'low on the ground' as a drag racer, and seems built to go forward at great speed rather than manoeuvre easily. According to this site, the early Colin Cantwell designs featured a large dome section that would have proved problematic during blue-screen motion-control work.

Lego is very kind to the design of the Y-Wing, whilst the 1983 Kenner Y-Wing sacrifices accuracy for robustness (check out the original wood template for the 1983 RotJ release here). One collector has managed to bag one of the original pyrotechnic Y-Wings for his collection (hey, weren't they *all* pyrotechnic..?). Here's a nice die-cast promotional Y-Wing on a stand. Revell produced an EasyKit of the BTL starfighter as well. Obviously the Y-Wing is also available as a CGI model, in this case a version by the legendary Don Showater, converted by Mateen Greenway. Al Meerow also produced a well-respected mesh of the craft.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

19: The Liberator - *Blake's 7* (UK TV, 1978-81) |



Terry Nation's 1977 space-opera was a cross between *Star Trek* and *Robin Hood*, featuring a small band of rebels fighting the oppressive federation in a powerful spacecraft that they stumbled across when they were in a jam. There's certainly an Enterprise aesthetic in the craft, which was designed by BBC design supremo Roger Murray-Leach. Snap off one of those three extended arms, stick a saucer on it and you're there. Nonetheless, it's a cool ship with beautiful forward motion (even with the BBC's limited ability to move it) and the curious addition of a pulsating green orb (originally oval, until that was costed!) at the back in place of conventional booster rockets.

The core ship was built by Space Models in Feltham, and turned over to Martin Bower for finishing (you can read all about Martin's work both on the liberator and other Blake's 7 models at his site). BBC SFX guru Ian Scoones actually did design work on a different version of the Liberator, not

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knowing that the Murray-Leach design had been greenlit, and commented to a magazine in the 1980s "You can tell a set designer has designed it rather than somebody into spaceships!". But sometimes you need that different point-of-view, and the craft certainly has elegance and grace, in spite of its great mass.

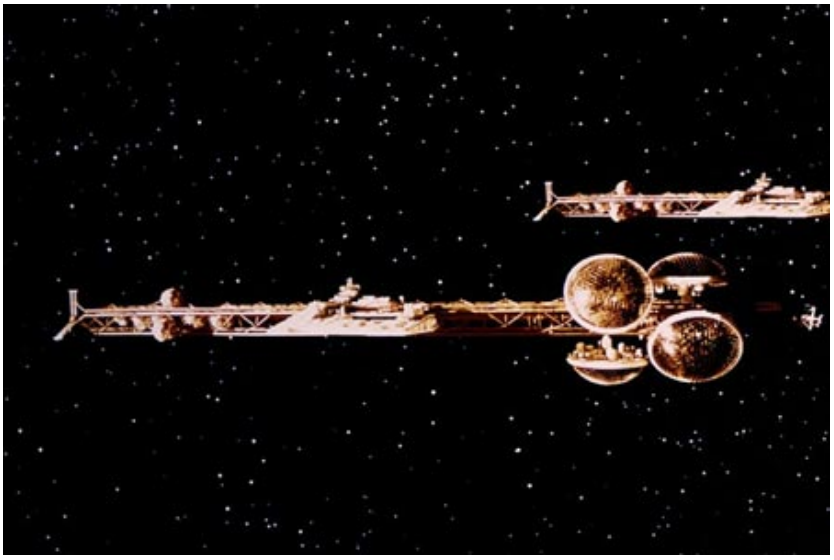
Bower ended up detailing the ship in only four days with pencil, biro, kit parts and plasticard. Unfortunately he was recalled to duplicate all this detail on a smaller version of the ship, when the SFX unit began to realise that the brass-based model was too heavy to be flown on wires! A 20-inch version was subsequently made for longer shots. When the 'hero' version of the Liberator was called into use, it was frequently suspended on a pole, and sometimes this can be seen in shots, depending on the screen contrast when you're watching it. The model would occasionally fall off the pole as well, as shown in blooper reels on British TV in the early 1980s.

If you want to know more about the history of the ship, check out this excellent article, to which I'm indebted for much of the information here.

There's a Lego Liberator so impressive, it must head up this closing section on Liberator hobbyists! Corgi produced a small die-cast toy of the craft in the late 1970s (also available as a limited edition with yellow trim), and Comet output a model-kit in 1990. If collecting the Corgi die-cast, watch out for the slightly-different re-issue that accompanied the DVD release of Blake's 7 in the early noughties, because they're not as collectable. Scale Model Technologies also produced a resin kit, and Titan Find a model-kit.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

18: Valley Forge - *Silent Running* (1971)|



This ship is truly beloved by fans of true sci-fi movies, mainly because Doug Trumbull's tale of space-ecology is such a treasure. The Valley Forge is one of three ships in the movie that have been chosen to preserve the last of Earth's forestry (Earth presumably uses machines to regulate its atmosphere now, but it's admittedly hard to see the value of sending forests into space at all, never mind far out into the solar system; but I digress...).

The model itself was 26 feet long and took six months to build from custom moulds and 800 bashed kits. The impressive dome-jettison sequences reflected Trumbull's interest in sticking to the NASA aesthetic. The dome couplings were 10 inches in diameter and used mica and compressed air to get that sparkly separation so familiar from the Apollo footage. The sequence where the Valley Forge rides through Saturn's rings was one that Trumbull had not been able to create earlier in his capacity as optical effects supervisor on Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Doug Trumbull stored the model for some years, but what survived of it was eventually dispersed to various collectors. One resides in the Science Fiction Museum and Hall of Fame in Seattle. Another was auctioned in 2008. The Valley Forge also turned up towards the end of the 1970s as stock footage to pad out the ragtag fleet in the original Galactica, and is listed with honour among the other spaceships in the fleet.

Since the Valley Forge holds such a fond place in the heart of SF geeks, it has prospered in the hobbyist community. Check out this excellent page, which rounds up various real-world and CGI models of the vessel by disparate hobbyists. Steve Robson's scratch-built Forge is a great effort; Mike Aucott is another who has risen to the considerable challenge of modelling the difficult domes that are the crowning glory of the model; here's a German Lego Valley Forge; scroll down this page to find a downloadable 3D Valley Forge; and here's a resin kit of this classic spaceship.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

17: Nostromo - *Alien* (1979) |

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I should mention, in case there's any doubt, that this entry in the list is strictly about the tug-craft in Alien, not the gothic refinery that it's towing - that's a whole other story in itself...

There's a bit of a 'missing link' in the evolution and progression of fantastic conceptual sketches output at Shepperton during 1978 by Ron Cobb, Chris Foss and the art department of *Alien*. Though the Nostromo's trademark 'limp-wrist' front boosters turned up in various Ron Cobb drawings (as three of the pictures on this page at John Eaves' website demonstrate), and though the huge boosters that are such a trademark of Chris Foss gradually did begin to emerge, there is practically no conceptual sketch that more than vaguely resembles the final design. The very closest is this one...



It's not all that close to the final look, nor is it known if Cobb was working up a production sketch from a rough physical mock-up, or whether this is straight out of the artist's head. So where did the actual shape of the Nostromo come from, if six months of furious sketching did not produce it under the watchful eye of Dan O'Bannon? I had a chat with Chris Foss about it a few weeks ago, and was surprised at what he had to say...

"[*Alien producer*] Walter Hill was very busy smashing cars up for one of his 'streets' films. He couldn't be arsed - much too busy! He walked in after months of work and just said 'Yep, roomful of spaceships' and just walked out again. So I'd produced design after design after design, and it got nearer production time, so I was hired and taken over to England to do some more designs. "Finally what happened was that the bloke who had to make the [*Nostromo*] model completely lost his rag, scooped up a load of paper...they had a room full of smashed-up bits of helicopter and all-sorts, and he just bodged something together. So the actual spaceship in the film hadn't anything to do with all the days, weeks, *months* of work that we'd all done. It's as simple as that... [*Ridley Scott*] just couldn't be arsed about the spaceship and all that crap. So the poor sod who had to build it said 'Right, fuck that', got himself a whole load of paper, and bodged something together from the bits and pieces of a wrecked helicopter.

"...I was happily beavering away on my designs, and Dan, of course, was practically standing over me - he's probably talked about it!...urging this that and the other, and it all came to nought. [*laughs*] Many of the designs that I did were actually produced in other films and in other books. So the cover of *21st Century Foss* started as a spaceship on *Dune*, and then ended up as a putative Nostromo design at Dan's behest. They decided they didn't want it. Then, in the end, I used it in another book and it made the cover of *21st-century Foss*...

"Well, you know the big [Nostromo] I designed with the bulbous balls and things...? That did make it into model form, and there's a huge model of it - whether it's been cut up or not, I don't know. Believe it or not, it's from a Malibu advert. You had a spaceship building and pulling this planet, which, of course, was in the shape of a Malibu bottle. So they lovingly built my Nostromo for this ad. This was at the end of the seventies, early eighties, and for a long time it was in the foyer of a company called Gray Advertising...!

Click here for the full length, exclusive interview with Chris Foss

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Sometimes the web turns up a genuine treasure for the Alien fan, and the web-documentary *Alien Makers* about the visual effects work of *Alien* is created by the men who did it! *Alien Makers* is half an hour of sheer gold for fans, and a sure candidate for inclusion in a future special disc release of the original movie. It also starts out with a superb CGI recreation of the Nostromo heading through deep space, probably done on a $1000 Mac and about as good as anything that Ridley Scott could have hoped for from Brian Johnson's workshop.

The Nostromo is a classic - so utterly replete with detail that it's positively *dripping* antennae, and yet at the same time brutish, ugly and industrial. Whereas Kubrick would have made the detachment from the umbilicus graceful and elegant, Scott makes it jarring and raw. The one shot that demonstrates more than any the sheer volume of the craft is a close-up on the landing leg as it crushes a rock during the dangerous landing. This is no place for amateurs, no ship for tourists - the Nostromo is strictly about bringing home the bacon, and not in any great comfort either.

As I write, the excellent Eagle Transporter forum is having a few gremlins, but they have a superb post (when the site is working) of behind-the-scenes photos from *Alien* model-maker Phil Rae. Alien Experience has a link to the piece, so let's hope it's up again soon. For one thing, it's one of the few places I've seen the 'yellow Nostromo' that's so obviously inspired by the Chris Foss palette (grim old Ridley Scott had it painted grey) outside of one out-take on the *Alien* quadrilogy special edition extras. For more background on the special effects department of Alien, check out this link.

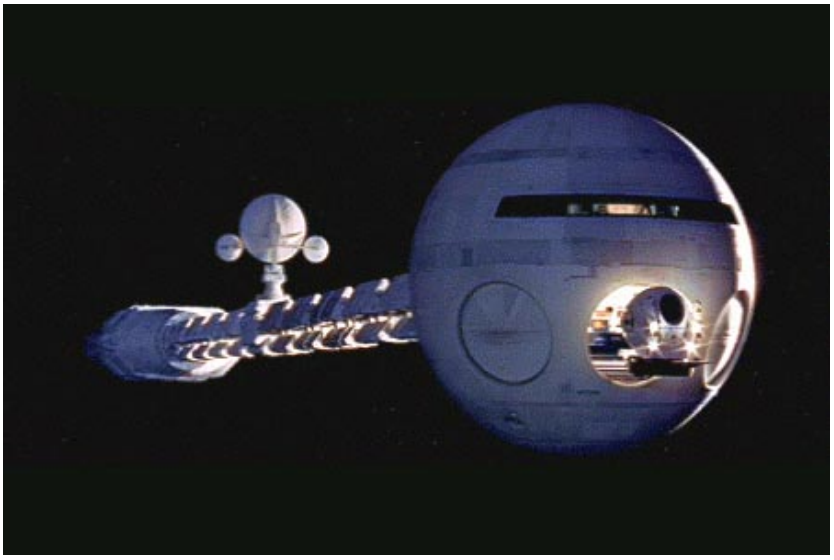
What happened to the ship? Check out The Nostromo: A Restoration Project to not only hear the good news (including how make-up wizard Greg Nicotero brought the Nostromo in from decades out in the rain, before the Prop Store acquired it and began restoration) but find out every last technical detail you might ever desire about the ship, right down to the types of wood included in its manufacture!

It took some time for the craft to hit the modelling and CGI enthusiast world, but it made it in the end. Here's a blister-packed miniature from Starforce (via Brainiac); genius modelmakers Smaller Artworks did a superb recreation of the Nostromo as a custom commission for a client; here's a great build of an early nineties resin kit and an unassembled Halcyon Nostromo (want to see it assembled? No problem). Konami also produced a Nostromo diorama as part of its Alien Trading figures series.

There are numerous 3D Nostromos floating about on the web, many of which are not adequately optimised to load easily (it's a pretty complicated ship), but here's one via Google Sketchup; another in 3DS format; and some blueprints in the works (scroll down a bit).

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

16: Discovery - *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) |



Kubrick's sci-fi masterpiece brought movie SF into the NASA age, with full consultation between Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke and the most forward-thinking minds at NASA. It was this determination for verisimilitude that gave birth to the kit-bashing era of spacecraft, leaving behind the shiny and aerodynamic movie spaceships of the previous three decades. Function's triumph over form created a whole new aesthetic for screen space-vessels, where unwieldiness and unpanelled technology became the new beauty of space travel.

The central spaceship in 2001, Jupiter mission combines this pragmatism with an amazing sense of theatricality. The crew are just about as far away from the rocket assembly as they could be (something the Apollo 13 crew would have appreciated) in the spherical master module at the front, and the impressive communications disk sits on a mere strand of technology that spans an almost absurd distance between the two sections; with no gravity to create stress, these are non-issues.

The Discovery is graceful and elegant, yet endlessly sinister and unforgiving. In terms of finish, the 11-foot model generated by special photographic effects supervisor Con Pederson boasts a wealth of detail, both taken from available model kits and custom made. Where there are *Star Trek*-like vast expanses of panelling, these have been carefully detailed to suggest access-panels and assembly points. The ship is flawless.

There is an amount of rotoscope and rostrum work in *2001*, but the initial 'hero pass' of the Discovery at the start of part II of the movie was a two take, 'in-camera' affair: in the first pass, the model itself was unlit, providing a matt for a fixed starfield behind, with a second take on the lit model itself. The need for extreme depth of field meant a huge amount of lighting and a very slow pass, with the camera shutter stopped down and adequate time on each frame to register the miniature.

In a 1998 interview with VFX, *2001* Special Photographic Effects Supervisor Con Pederson spoke about the design of the Discovery.

"Since it was logistically very difficult to do an effects film in Hollywood, Doug and I left for Britain. At that time they had in England what was called Eady Plan, which was sort of a subsidy for the British film industry. Under that plan it was permitted only to have 15 or 20% foreign labor. For the

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next two and a half years, from mid '65 to March of '68, there was only a handful of Americans working on the film. In our case it was Doug (special photographic effects supervisor) and myself, and Harry Lange (production design), who was coming from what was going to become NASA, the place where I was stationed in the Army; the Redstone Ballistic Missile Agency in Alabama. He was one of their main designers. So he and Anthony Masters, the art director, did most of the work in designing the craft and the look of the film."

You can see a small picture of an early, and fairly different iteration of the Discovery here.

In the hobbyist world, there's a scratch built discovery to be seen here, while resin kit versions were produced by Comet, Timeslip Creations, and Lunar Models. Jeffery Wright has a version of the Discovery available, a version for Poser, and you can find Matthew Parker's CG Discovery at the 2001 3D Model Archive.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

15: Tantive IV (Rebel blockade runner) - *Star Wars* (1977)|



Basically a hammer being hurled through space by an absurd embarrassment of booster rockets, the Tantive IV, or rebel blockade runner, is the first spaceship we see in *Star Wars*, and it's a dream of a ride. The vehicle type is a 'Corellian Corvette' (it even *sounds* sexy) in the extended *Star Wars* universe, and I think one of the reasons the ship appeals so much to modellers is that they can imagine how easy it is to get the rough shape of the front section (two yoghurt pots).

The Tantive is pretty much what the early Millennium Falcon was intended to be, but when a vehicle turned up in Space:1999 resembling the craft, the Falcon's designed changed and the original design assigned to the Corellian ship, and the cylindrical cockpit altered to the far more effective hammerhead configuration. The production model sat at 194cm, a fair bit larger than the star destroyer pursuing it. According to starwars.com, the model contains a nude pin-up for the crew in the cockpit, though this would never have resolved to become visible during shooting.

You can see right inside this vessel in the very exciting *Star Wars: The Incredible Cross Sections* by David West Reynolds, who describes the least laboursome part of the project at starwars.com. When asked his favourite *Star Wars* spaceship, Reynolds said:

"The Blockade Runner!...I probably spent about 200 hours looking at the laserdisc of the Blockade Runner scene...Every chip of paint on the Blockade Runner, every scar, is just perfect. I was so happy about the interior because I didn't have to accommodate anything but the film. The film ruled this mock-up!"

The Tantive IV is available in Lego, of course, and also available as a download in Lightwave 5 and Maya formats at Sci-Fi 3D. There's another mesh project here as well.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

14: The Betty - *Alien Resurrection* (1997) |

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Possibly one of the most under-rated spaceship designs ever, the Betty is the Millennium Falcon of *Alien Resurrection*, so old that even cloned throwback Sigourney Weaver can only remember seeing one as a kid. Weather beaten, ugly and patched together, it's charm as a spaceship that ignores aerodynamic principle is admittedly a bit undermined when it actually does descend into the Earth's atmosphere at the end of the movie (though the even uglier Nostromo could perform planetfalls as well), but who cares? The Betty is tough, with the hunched shoulders of a mean contender in American football and so much attitude that it hurts.

I was lucky enough to have a chat with two of the people who created the Betty - Matthew Gratzner, miniature supervisor on the show, and assistant art director Bill Boes, who formed the essential shape of the craft:

Bill Boes: "I don't know if I can take full credit for the design of the Betty, but I was working for the production designer Nigel Phelps, and I was the assistant art director. So I definitely took my directions from him. But I realised the design, I guess you could say, from some of his sketches. I built a conceptual model of it...[Nigel Phelps' kids] had some toys around the house, and I guess [for the Betty's 'arms'] he just glued two things together, a Shogun model and, I think, a sports car, and he gave that to me. From there I helped to massage it into the final look...

"I think we were trying to do something really different and really manoeuvrable, because the script indicated what the ship needed to do...[The Betty] definitely looked like a lobster at a certain point. We were definitely trying to make it very strange, and Nigel wanted to make sure that it looked like the original *Alien*, both the interior and the exterior. [*The cockpit section*] was a definite throw-back to the first *Alien*. If you remember the cockpit from the first film, we definitely looked at that...we wanted to make the rest of it a hodge-podge of pieces, to give the impression that it was definitely something that the inhabitants of the ship were constantly working on..."

Matthew Gratzner: "We came on the show relatively early. The Betty was still being designed at that point. But what [*Boes*] ended up doing was he sculpted the bulk of it out of blue foam. It was a relatively small maquette, only about seven or eight inches long...He'd used anime model robot bits The engine pods are very obviously like the fore-arms from a Japanese robot. So that's what he used for the maquette and that's what we sort of replicated. There were a lot of 'found' parts that he'd used, which we didn't replicate to the letter.

"...But that was what gave it the shape. And then there was a gentleman by the name of Jim Martin, who's a concept artist and art director as well, and he did two blue-line pencil sketches...It was a mustard-yellow colour with brown, rectilinear...almost zebra stripes. And then it was aged. But what happened was that the director of photography was constantly concerned about the sheen on the model...There was a guy by the name of Rick Fichter, who did *Alien 3*, too. But he got so nuts about the sheen on [*the Betty*], he had our painter going back with black mortar tint. It's something you mix into mortar to tint it for grout. This black mortar tint was so heavily caked on that you lost almost all the colour and all the paintwork. If you look at pictures carefully, you can kind of see that there was this zebra-stripe motif on it.

"I brought in a gentleman who worked with us for some time named Eric Brown, who is an illustrator and model-maker, and he did all the blue-printing. And then we kind of filled in all the blanks. Any place that needed detail we would do. We'd find all the pieces, kept the production in the loop with the refining of the miniature itself. "...There were two scales of the Betty that were built. Everything was built for the Betty and the docking bay in 1/32nd scale. The docking bay was about eighteen and a half feet across, and maybe about seven feet tall. The Betty itself was probably about five and a half feet by five or so feet long, and that had a series of stepper motors inside, and chain drives that would drive the engines up and down. It also had stepper motors which would rotate the engine pod, and then another one in the tail, that would raise and lower it. In dock, it sort of 'relaxes'.

"For the close-ups of the coupling arms coming up and grabbing the sides, which are two giant magnetic things, we built an over sized piece at 1/16th scale. It was only a section of the side of the ship, with the cargo bay and a part of one of the arms. That was built as a high speed miniature - that was on our mover and would move up into frame. Then we had the coupling arm sort of grappling against it; that was all puppeteered. We had a sort of electro-magnet in it so that when it came close to the side of the ship, it would kind of grab it. It was kind of cool - just a very simple cable-puppeted thing."

If you're interested in some behind-the-scenes photos of the Betty's cockpit, you can find some here. In the hobbyist community, Frontier Models do a Betty kit, you can find some plans here, a CG project of the ship here, another here, and a good set of behind the scenes photos here.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

13: Moonbase Interceptor - *UFO* (UK TV, 1970)|

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Derek Meddings' second-in-command Mike Trim is generally credited with the creation of the base-shape of the one-shot missile carriers that launched from SHADO Moonbase whenever the aliens tried to sneak past. At Mike's site you can catch a look at the original designs, along with the many others he contributed to Gerry Anderson output and to sci-fi in general. The interceptor is completely unique as a design, despite sharing some DNA with standard 20th-century fighter planes (in the form of a moulded cockpit on an aerodynamic fuselage), there's no other vehicle around that adopts its front-heavy aspect, or its 'bee-like' method of warfare (one missile launch, and it's defenceless). Interceptors take off in threes from standard-issue Gerry Anderson hydraulic ramps, boast a single booster rocket (with lateral attitude adjustors) and ski-like landing pads, all topped off with an exciting but arguably redundant spoiler above the engine housing.

"Mike Trim worked with us - he was part of the crew. He designed stuff that at a later date I found out that he had designed, rather than Derek [*Meddings*]. We were working at such a pace at that time; we were turning in one picture a week - even though we had two puppet units and three special-effects units working simultaneously, it was still a race against time, and we were all madly busy. So some of the detail of who designed what, I missed. And of course some things, when they were originally designed, were not going to be featured that much. There was a description [*of the interceptor*] in the first script, and as the series began to form, we began to assume that the interceptor was to be a very important space-craft, and we looked to improving it."

Click here for the full-length, exclusive interview with Gerry Anderson. Interview with Mike Trim coming soon!

The interceptor's best-known presence in the replicas market comes in the form of the Dinky Toy version. The original colour scheme (basically 'space'-grey) was considered too sedate for the toy, which was given a lurid green finish that would have made it a bit of a sitting duck against the lunar landscape. The front projectile actually launched, though the 'safe' foam-rubber tip was rather prone to fall away from the missile. The Musayita Interceptor is an alternative that's rather more faithful to the original look of the craft. The Konami interceptor is also highly recommended. Robin and Pauline day have enjoyed recreating the interceptor in various renders at Space City. You can get the craft for Google Sketchup, whilst Geoff Saul and Don Showalter created an absolutely beautiful CGI interceptor (and there's another by Andy Marrs). At least one of the original series models survived the alien onslaught, and was displayed in 2000 at a Century 21 Gerry Anderson convention. Chris Potter also took some nice pics of the original model at a later display.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

12: Tie Fighter - *Star Wars* (1977) |



Colin Cantwell's design for the Empire's short-range fighters is one of the most distinctive visual motifs of *Star Wars*. In a decade newly (perhaps foolishly) obsessed with the possibilities of solar power, it seemed at the cutting edge to make that source of energy a part of the craft's design. The shape and dynamic of the craft has pretty much no forebear in any terrestrial technology with the possible exception of marine exploration - it's

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truly an 'alien' aesthetic, despite the use of solar panels and the cloister-like windows with their primitive support struts. As with the UFOs in Gerry Anderson's *UFO*, the craft have a distinctive and impressive flying noise, created by Ben Burtt from recordings of vehicles skidding on a wet motorway, mixed in with the braying of an elephant.

The design was modified even in the first film, with the extended lines of Darth Vader's fighter (does this man buy *nothing* off the shelf?), and the basic Twin Ion Engine configuration threads a multitude of imperial and republic vehicles throughout the six films in the *Star Wars* saga. But nothing beats the original. This is technology designed to show 1977 audiences that they were in big trouble, as opposed to the noble and classic shapes of the rebellion's X-Wing, which might have fitted in unnoticed to the Battle Of Britain. My only complaint is that I can't really 'see' a TIE fighter landing on those abutting solar panels, and it appears to have no landing gear of any other kind. Are they customarily docked from the beautifully detailed central sphere, as in the stand for the Finemolds model of it? I was sorry to see Vader's modified craft become more popular than the original, which happened more because of the plot of Star Wars, in my opinion, than the merits of the redesign. If you're looking for something even sexier than the TIE fighter, only the TIE interceptor comes close.

In 2008 one of the 18-inch miniatures from *A New Hope* was auctioned off for $350,000, a sure testament to the impact of the design not only on SF culture but on movie culture.

In merchandising, the ship has proved a firm favourite, and has been flyable in many a game and flight simulator. Icon Authentic Replicas made a nice replica of the original shooting model, and the TIE has even been turned into a pretty decent and practical ariel and a very cool PC mod. CGI enthusiasts are fond of the craft, and many hobbyist versions are available (this one in 3 different levels of detail, for 3D Studio/Max).

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

11: X-Wing - *Star Wars* (1977)|



I almost hesitate to put this above the Colonial Viper in the list. The reason? The extremely spindly nature of the appendages. Any model-making fans of my age will remember well the relative difficulty in getting all the pointy bits to point forward in the AMT kit (as well as that kit's almost unique propensity to disappoint with warped or mis-formed sections), and in battle this seems a bit of a liability. By comparison the Viper is compact and self-contained. Also, any engineer will tell you that the machine with the fewest moving parts will be the most reliable. Ever seen a sundial go in for repair? Therefore the 'un-locking' configuration of the X-Wings seems a risky procedure in the throes of battle. Also, what are 'S-Foils'?

But no matter. This is a massively exciting ship that commands its space and additionally has a beautiful section of panel detail at the rear, as well as a thrusting shape.

Our interview with Star Wars visual effects supervisor John Dykstra goes into the shooting of the ship a little. The famous conceptual art sketches by Ralph McQuarrie can be seen in no great detail at his site. Colin Cantwell and Joe Johnston of ILM worked up the McQuarrie concepts into miniatures, which were built around a hollow core containing servo-mechanisms for the 'S-foil unlocking' action. The model also contained fans to cool its extensive internal lights.

Models, toys and CGI replicas? Forget it. It's endless. Some wonderful lunatics built a 21-foot X-Wing designed to actually fly, for example (though unfortunately the TIE fighters got it), and for $1200, US customers can buy EFX Collectibles' replica, signed by Mark Hamill and scanned from the original model (link is here, but you'll have to click around because - booo!- the site layout allows no direct link). You can see the cute prototype for the Kenner X-Wing fighter at this site. And if you think you can't get the X-Wing in Lego, you must be smoking death sticks. For more details on the extensive merchandising of the X-Wing, check this link.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

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Top 75 spaceships in movies and TV part 6

Originally published at http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/14629/top-75-spaceships-in-movies-and-tv-part-6

10: Slave 1 - *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)|



There must be some street-lamps in America with designs very unfamiliar to me, given how many people have commented that bounty hunter Boba Fett's bizarre spaceship looks like a street-lamp. In *Star Wars: The Annotated Screenplays* by Laurent Bouzereau, Slave 1 designer Nilo Rodis-Jamero sets the record straight:

"Joe Johnston showed me some of the ideas he has for Boba Fett, and I remember asking myself what his spaceship would look like. I remember seeing a radar dish and stopping to sketch it very quickly to see if I could get something out of it. The original design I had was round, but when you looked at it from the side, it became elliptical. For some reason, when I drew it, George thought it was elliptical, so that's what it became. When we were building the ship at ILM, somebody looked at street lamps and pointed out that they looked like Boba's ship. So everyone began to think that was where I got the idea for the design."

Not me. I thought he dreamed it up while he was ironing. Can't you see yourself getting a nice crisp collar-seam out of Slave 1? Despite their many flaws, one of the great pleasures of the *Star Wars* prequels was the very welcome return of this popular ship, which, in my opinion, almost entirely accounts for the popularity of Boba Fett (and, paradoxically later, his dad Jango) himself. I mean, the Fetts aren't exactly chock full of personality or even attitude, but they have rocket packs and a ship that looks like evil personified (and when 'standing up', like a character in its own right). I'm surprised Vader didn't just mind-choke Fett on the spot when he turned up looking for the Han Solo bounty in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and nick his ride.

'Sinister' doesn't remotely cover the cowled and slightly art-deco aspect of Slave 1, nor is 'cool' adequate to describe the way the vehicle plays with orientation and moves through space in cruciform glory.

It should be mentioned that Lorne Peterson worked on the original Slave 1 miniature alongside Nilo Rodis-Jamero. Regarding toys, models and CG, Slave 1 is predictably well-represented, to the point where you can even get the ship as a transformer. Here's a Starship Modeller build of the AMT/ERTL kit, and a look at the Revell SnapTite kit. Since there were (wisely) so few changes between the ships in the original Star Wars films and the prequels that followed, the Jango Fett edition from Fine Molds and others is arguably a bit redundant. CG-wise, SWMA and Marv Mays have a nice Slave 1 in 3DS here. And you can find a downloadable Slave 1 for Bridge Commander here; there seems to be a bit of effort going into a new German Slave 1 as well.

Info: Fictional Life | More fictional Life | IMDB |

9: Gunstar - *The Last Starfighter* (1984) |

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Trust futurist Ron Cobb's amazing design sensibility to find itself in the vanguard of CGI spaceships; the eponymous vessel of Nick Castle's SF Disney outing became the first of its type to reach the big screen. As with the previously ground-breaking *Tron* a couple of years earlier, the film's plot uses a video-game premise to bridge the visual gap between the photo-real and the more stylised renderings of the spacecraft and battles, and the conceit sells the concept.

The ship itself is a dream - more armed than Kali, with a sexy cylindrical fuselage tapering off into a forward-moving cockpit. The Gunstar is also one of only a handful of ships in this list that take off vertically. The cowling on the rear hull, the insouciant curves of the thrusters and the patina of high-engineering makes the design compelling. It's also very rear-heavy, which practical design concept (the rear is where the space-consuming boosters and fuel are likely to be) adds to the sense of practicality.

Digital Productions created twenty-seven minutes of CGI footage for the movie, rendering out the ray-traced scenes on a Cray X-MP supercomputer. Every frame of CGI in the movie had an average of 250,000 polygons, and was rendered at 3000x5000 pixels in 36-bit colour. You know what? I could handle a remake of this. Lucky, since I'm going to be getting one anyway. I would love to see the Gunstar done justice with current VFX technology.

But the most appealing form to have this ship in is arguably that in which it has never existed - the real world. Frontier models have a beautiful mounted hobby resin kit available. Here's a superb Lego Gunstar. Unsatisfied with another kit version, Randy Cooper scratch-built a Gunstar and sold it to Monsters In Motion (scroll down a bit). As for CG hobbyists, it's not inappropriate that there be a basic mesh of the ship available. But if you're looking for class CG work on the design, check out this project, with appropriate procedural textures.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

8: Vulcan warp sled 'Surak' - *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979)|



The Surak shares that '70s flares' look that the nacelles of the re-fitted Enterprise display in *ST:TMP*, but it works very nicely. This ship is a model (literally) of Vulcan austerity - it's basically just two warp nacelles welded onto a short-range shuttle.

What's the appeal then? The shuttle section *isn't welded*; the sequence where the central section of the Surak breaks away and then flips round through 360 degrees to dock with the Enterprise is so jaw-droppingly graceful that even Kubrick must have been nodding in approval. I can't figure out to this day what kind of armature and model combination made that manoeuvre possible or even remotely filmable - I just know it's one of the coolest things I have ever seen a screen spaceship do.

Those of us who are fans of the ship and want to know more about it have lucked out about as much as we could hope for: *Star Trek* and *Phase II* designer Andrew Probert has provided a full behind-the-scenes look at the concept, development and execution of the Surak at his site.

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"In order for this new shuttle to catch up to the Enterprise, Gene Roddenberry explained that it needed (logically) large warp engines. Since the Enterprise we were developing featured a brand new warp engine design, I thought these engines should look like the original versions from the television series. I soon began to wonder just how this shuttle would be able to hard-dock to the Enterprise, so the engines were moved forward, allowing a clear space around the 'docking ring'. The rear-mounted docking ring was a continuation of Gene's Travel Pod docking scenario. Designs continued until I hit on the idea of the "Personnel Pod" separating from the 'Light Speed Unit' mount in order to better maneuver into a docking approach.

"Building on the 2-in-1 concept, I began to refine the shapes and also advanced my warp engine concept to a new level. I incorporated the impulse engines into the back of the warp engines and then, wanting to suggest a Vulcan design influence, changed the engines' cross-section to the shape of the ceremonial gong that was seen on Vulcan in the original series episode: 'Amok Time'."

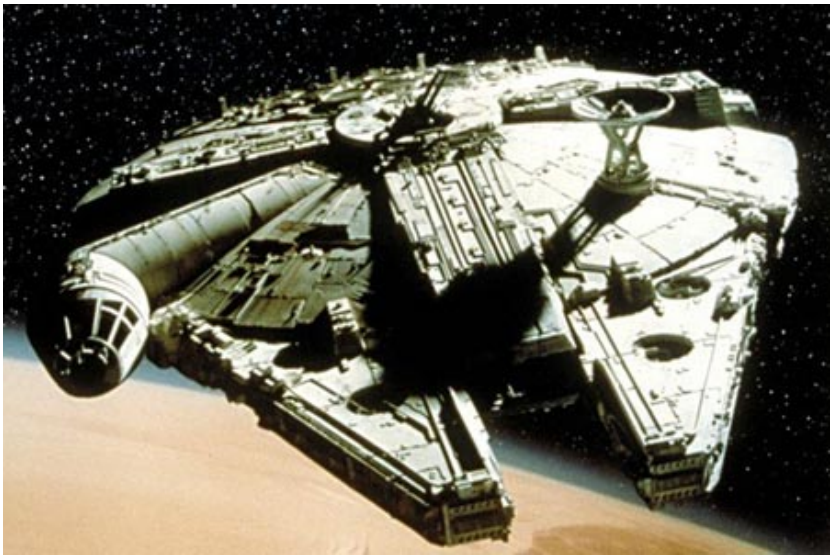
There's far more than the above detail at Andrew's site, with tons of photos and early concept sketches, and I really recommend a click on that link.

AMT produced a very nice Surak, which I well remember building (though you can see a far better build here), and which keeps its lines in the face of quite a structural challenge. There's also a new 10-inch model coming out in late December of 2009, and it looks very cool indeed.

CG modeller TallGuy has turned in a first-class Surak warp sled at this thread.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

7: Millennium Falcon - *Star Wars* (1977)|



I know I shall be Bantha fodder for not putting this at number one, but these are the breaks. Of all the ships in this list that have tried to bring a new wrinkle to the 'saucer' aesthetic, none have been more successful in movie history than the Falcon. Within the canon of *Star Wars*, the ship is unique and uniquely loved, and it's no different in the real world. The bisected forward section give the Falcon a real sense of forward movement, and putting the cockpit, itself a beautiful design, on the side of the ship is a lovely NASA touch, as is the off-set communications dish. George Lucas describes the visual dynamic of the ship as 'a hamburger with an olive on the side'. Like the original Cylon Raiders, the ship is a joy to behold when it's performing an ambitious manoeuvre, such as the about-face for Cloud City in *The Empire Strikes Back* or the acrobatic loop-de-loop into the asteroid cave earlier in the movie.

The sheer amount of detailing on the ship would ordinarily be absurd, but this baby has spent far more time in the custom-shops of its various owners than it ever did in the factory, and whoever designed it probably wouldn't even recognise their creation by the time of Han Solo. The Falcon shares the lateral 'nurney-strips' of the Star Destroyer, but its stroke of design genius is the placement of defensive gunner positions in a central column throughout the ship, and this section has perpendicular artificial gravity too.

It's often not clear in the *Star Wars* movies exactly what the Falcon's boosters look like. We mostly get to see the 'mouth' from the side, and a rear view only when the boosters are blindingly ablaze. In the Revell model kit I built in the early eighties, the boosters were represented with a bent strip of white Perspex-like plastic - very effective when illuminated from behind, but problematic when the model was in repose.

This is simply one of the most marketed SF toys ever, and among the most popular designs in the considerable field of Star Wars merchandising. It would be a Quixotic task to list the various replicas, kits, scratch-builds and other representations of the Falcon here, and in any case starwars.com has done a pretty good job on the matter itself (I would only draw your attention to these nickel-sized Falcons as a departure from the usual work). The site also has a fantastic full-length article about the creation and shooting of the impressive on-set Falcon for *Star Wars*.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

6: Thunder fighter - *Buck Rogers In The Twenty-Fifth Century* (USTV, 1979)|

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Well, here it is - the craft that was supposed to be helping the ragtag fleet keep the Cylons at bay in the original *Battlestar Galactica*, but found itself instead in a world of bad disco-dancing, tight spandex and endless corridors. *Buck Rogers*, like *Galactica*, was a Glen A. Larson production, and the concept sketches that had been turned down for that show were available property for this one. The Thunder Fighter is slim and unbelievably sleek and sexy, and it moves and manoeuvres with incredible charm in the series (and, like *Galactica*, the European cinematic release - boy, Larson had a formula going there for a while, didn't he..?).

This is an incredibly aggressive design that, in my opinion, had no small influence on the snow-speeders of *The Empire Strikes Back* the following year. The two fixed forward gun-turrets use a recessed and counter-sunk styling familiar to us from Vietnam war footage, and they're absolutely *huge*. The fins are highly stylised and the whole thing seems like it would be as happy underwater as in space (the producers never went that far, probably just through lack of time). Also of note are the bell shaped rear-thrusters and the aerodynamic cockpit visor. Here was a design that was waaaay cooler than the show it was in.

You can see a photo of the original wooden mould from which the production miniatures of the Thunder Fighter were struck here. Cloudster.com has a gallery of great photos of the recovered full-size Thunder Fighter on-set prop, and loads of background about it. And there are some nice video loops of the fighter in action at conceptships.

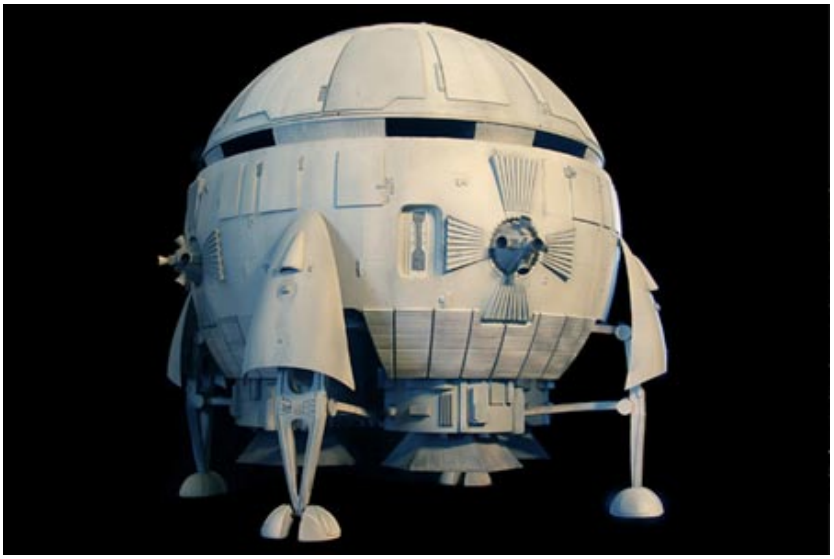
Scroll down a bit on this page to see the box for the late 70s Mego toy; you can find some pics of the Monogram Starfighter model kit at this page (I remember it well!); and here's an all-in-one Thunder Fighter complete with Buck!

The 4-inch Dinky Toy of the starfighter had a lot of problems, even by Dinky's standards. Added to the company's reliable tendency to screw up the original colour schemes in favour of garish colours, for some reasons the side-fins folded back into the body in their 1979 release (scroll down to the last quarter of the page). Though I was also disappointed as a kid to note that the impressive forward cannons had been 'neutered' by a safety bar, I had to concede even then that the original design could have had someone's eye out...

In the CG hobbyist arena there's a Thunder Fighter at Turbosquid; a nice render of a Thunder Fighter leaving the atmosphere; and a phaseworld game conversion.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

5: Aries 1B Earth-Moon shuttle - *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) |



Much as I love this design (from the same team that generated the Discovery - see earlier entry on that), it's actually the interior full-size set that sold me on the model. Seeing William Sylvester sequester this enormous spacecraft on his top secret mission and sit in the vast circular set

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among rows of empty passenger seats, I felt the reality of the ship sink into me, and even the jaw-dropping 'rotating hostess' didn't impress me that much.

To a large extent the Aries-1B resembles a severely truncated Discovery, comprised primarily of a spherical body with a pilot viewport slit cut into the front fuselage - a design conceit invented for 2001. The rear boosters are idle as we join the flight, having already made their one big burn to gather acceleration towards the moon, and we get a sense that the ship is coasting, *gliding*...

But the sequence that really sells the Aries B and seals the deal is the extraordinary landing at Tycho base. Though I can't see the practical aspect of having a dome split into six 'star destroyers' instead of just sliding to one side, the Tycho extendible landing platform itself is beautifully industrial. The deployment of the Aries' landing legs as it approaches the base is a beautiful piece of miniature engineering (and you can find out more about the landing gear at this page).

Captain Cardboard did a great model kit of the Aries 1B for a while, though ironically it's been out of production since 2001. Starship Modeller have taken a good look back at the kit. They also previewed the Stargazer Aries 1B kit (though I must say that it looks a little rough around the edges). There is a new Atomic City version of the Aries which even has a beautifully detailed interior, and it looks to be the best representation of the craft ever.

Maurice Biolo provides a 288-texture CGI model for Bryce, Lightwave and 3D Studio Max at the 2001 3D Modelling Archive, and illustrator Simon Atkinson has prepared many drawings of the craft in *2001: A Space Odyssey* for commercial projects, including the Aries 1B.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

4: U.S.S. Enterprise - *Star Trek* (US TV, 1966-69)|



Like the Millennium Falcon, the Enterprise offers a genuine innovation on the 'saucer-ship' that was becoming so repetitive in spacecraft design. The naval motif that threads starfleet emerges in the rough configuration of the vessel, which seems to have a 'keel' of sorts, as if it was made to be submerged from the 'neck' down.

The story of how Matt Jefferies' design was okayed by Gene Roddenberry while he was looking at the ship upside-down has become part of *Trek* lore, and the lines of the Reliant from *Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan*, itself a beautiful ship, give us some idea of how that intended dynamic would have worked out. The Enterprise was first mocked up by the Howard Anderson company in 1964 as a proof-of-concept piece, with a subsequent 11-foot miniature being made by Richard Datin, Vern Sion and Mel Keys for the Volmer Jensen model shop. The ship was modified a couple of times throughout the original three-year run of the show, but not so distinctively as to stop the producers mixing, matching and re-using the various footage at will.

Since *TOS*, the ship has evolved and 'prevolved' endlessly, from the Andrew Probert *Phase II* refit (ultimately destined for 1979's *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*) to the atavistic ship of the short-lived (and somewhat under-rated) *Enterprise* TV series in 2003 and the 'alternate reality' Enterprise of J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek*. For a while I preferred the Probert refit, and Doug Trumbull certainly made it look gorgeous, but a recent re-acquaintance with the remastered *Star Trek TOS* has restored my love for the original!

The Enterprise is majestic rather than imposing, and it's an endlessly interesting thing to look at; there may be no other spaceship in the history of screen spaceships that has so many interesting angles to offer. It corners like a twenty-ton tanker, but that's not its strength - this is a cruise ship built to the highest specifications in the galaxy. I have been, and always shall be, its fan...

Key-rings, model-kits, flying kits, die casts, resin moulds, mouse mats...at this stage in the list, it is going to become increasingly pointless for me to indicate merchandising and hobbyist pursuits. These projects have been fun to hunt out for the more obscure ships, but, - as with rats - you're probably never more than ten feet away from a version of the Enterprise in some or other form. Brief mentions, then, of the legendary AMT kit, a true modellers' classic, which you can see a lovely build guide for here. There are also some great behind-the-scenes photos of the 11-foot model during the rough motion-control work of the original series available here. And a reminder that, as when I was a kid, you can still launch the Enterprise into space yourself...

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

3: Klingon Bird of Prey - *Star Trek III: The Search For Spock* (1984) |

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The Klingon configuration for starships is perhaps consciously the reverse of the federation's, with the warp nacelles tucked under the main body of their craft. Like constellation-class federation cruisers, Klingon vessels up until *Search For Spock* would have looked pretty silly trying to do any serious manoeuvres, like oil-tankers attempting a three-point turn. The Bird Of Prey changed all that...

The wings now pointed aggressively forward and descended like an eagle's when going in for 'the kill'; *STIII* provides a truly blood-curdling and spectacular introduction to the ship, as captain Kruge destroys the unwitting merchant vessel containing his faithful and beloved spy Valkris (could he not have beamed her aboard and said no more about her snooping at the Genesis information? Oh well, I'm not a Klingon and I guess I wouldn't understand) and flies through the scattered debris of his 'kill'. It's one of the best moments in any of the *Star Trek* movies.

The Romulan vessel from the *TOS* episode *Balance Of Terror* is the basis for this formidable Klingon war-machine, and an early draft of *Search For Spock* suggested that Kruge (Christopher Lloyd) and company had stolen this new and terrifying weapon from the Romulans. Director Leonard Nimoy conceived of the predatory aspect of the ship, demonstrating the stance of the Bird Of Prey's wings to ILM. Though the final script for Search omitted the Romulan connection, the avian marquetry and decal detailing remained on the miniature as a testament to its origins, even through later versions seen in *Star Trek V*, *Star Trek VI* and *The Next Generation*.

Nilo Rodis and David Carson realised Nimoy's vision of a radical new look for the classic Klingon 'sumo' stance (check out this picture of a muscleman which informed the creative process on the ship), with Bill George outputting a prototype production miniature. Regarding the Bird's aggressive green colour scheme, *Star Trek* movie producer Harve Bennett commented: *"They had a lot of fun designing that one! And I think the color selection – a kind of serpentine kind of green – went on to help us, not only there but later. We utilized it in Star Trek IV, because it is so dramatic a look."* Of course the Bird Of Prey went on to have huge influence in *Star Trek* canon, both in the movies and on TV.

Ex Astris Scientia calls into question various issues regarding the size of the Bird Of Prey relative to its own various iterations, the Enterprise...and whales!

AMT/ERTL produced a legendarily great kit of the Bird Of Prey, and there's another by GRP. Lego's not to be left out of the fun as usual, and neither is origami. You can get a Bird Of Prey pin; a CGI Bird Of Prey; another from Sketchup; and a really cool transparent desktop miniature from Science Fiction Miniature models.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

2: Eagle transporter - *Space: 1999* (UK TV, 1975-77) |



Could this be the spaceship of my dreams? It certainly was in the 1970s. Designer and visual effects supervisor Brian Johnson has re-used the notion of an interchangeable midriff section from Thunderbird 2, but combined it with a gloriously balanced combination of NASA-clunkiness with

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the kind of elegance on display in the hardware of *2001: A Space Odyssey* - another movie credit for Brian Johnson. Note the attitude adjustors, which are practically identical to those used on the lunar module during the Apollo missions, and later on in the history of space-flight. The boxiness of the landing legs and tubular spine suggest a vehicle carried up in sections from Earth, whilst the enormous bells of the booster rockets at the rear seem set to give the fleetest alien craft a run for its money.

There were 4 versions and scales of the Eagle, at 44", 22", 11" and 5 1/2", equating to 1/24th, 1/48th, 1/96th & 1/192nd scale respectively. Designed by Johnson, most of the Eagles were built by Arthur 'Wag' Johnson, though Derek Freeborn associates are also credited with the final 44" version for season two of *Space:1999*. Many variants on the strong core design were displayed in the series, and the basic model itself could change appearance simply by picking up a new centre-section for extra functionality. These facts and many more can be pored over at the ultimate resource for fans of the Eagle, over at eagletransporter.com, which has expanded to cover other TV and movie franchises since opening, and whose forums are the first port of call for Gerry Anderson modelling enthusiasts and fans.

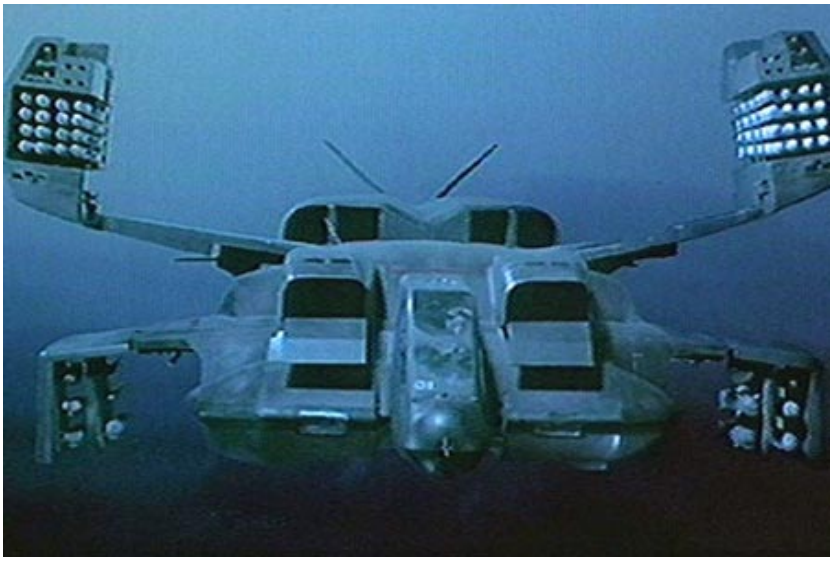
"The Eagle was designed by Brian Johnson I talked to Brian and told him how I saw it, and he went off and he came back with something utterly, utterly different, inasmuch as it didn't look like either a rocket, or a vehicle or a car or anything. Because it was designed to move around in space, it didn't have to be aerodynamic, and therefore there was no point in carrying all the extra weight of a fuselage. But that was very much his idea, and I didn't contribute to that at all. As a toy, it certainly did sell very very well indeed."

Click here for the full-length, exclusive interview with Gerry Anderson.

Gerry isn't kidding - the Eagle was a phenomenon as a plaything in the 1970s, available as a very popular Airfix kit (and proving a pretty good resource for new spaceships too), as well as a robust and uncompromised Dinky toy. The prodigious Small Artworks in Canada have of course created a superb Eagle, complete with illuminated cockpit. The Eagle was a very early project for the CGI modelling community, and there are many versions out there in all kinds of format, from .OBJ to .3DS. You can download an Eagle add-on for the Orbiter Space Flight Simulator here, and there's a nice mesh on display at eagletransporter.com. James Murphy's classic Eagle mesh for 3D Studio Max and Lightwave is downloadable here, and if you scroll down a bit on this page, you'll see just how many modellers share my love of this classic spacecraft.

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |

1: Dropship - *Aliens* (1986) |



Anyone who loves making as well as enjoying spaceship models must reserve a special place in their heart for this design, as it is barely able to hide its roots as a cobbled-together Apache AH-64 helicopter combined with sections of cowling from various British war-planes (the proper name for the dropship is actually the UD-4L "Cheyenne" dropship, keeping that residual native-American connection). The genesis of the drop-ship ran a peculiar tandem with that of *Alien*'s Nostromo, in that highly talented artists (in this case including Syd Mead) were outputting fantastic concept designs without quite hitting on what the director wanted, and the final design was kit-bashed from raw materials, jettisoning most of what went before. The radically different Syd Mead dropships were a visual match for the superb APC vehicle that made it to *Aliens* virtually unaltered, but lacked the tactile connection with 20th-century warfare that Cameron was working so hard to establish in the live-action production.

"Here's what happened. The production moved to Pinewood pretty early in process. The drop ship was first designed as a full-sized prop piece inside my drop ship bay set (using every inch of Pinewood's largest sound stage) and the model was made to look like it. The drop ship prop only had to be photographed from the left side as the shot looked down the length of the set. The assault tractor was a dressed 747 towing tractor with the lead removed. I also was asked to start designing the look of the off-world installation; pressure exterior doors and some of the interior laboratory sets that had originally been started by Ron Cobb. That never happened. I also designed a start on the hospital room where Sigourney Weaver's character was being revived. That never happened either."

Click here to read Syd's exclusive insights to us about his movie spaceships

Anyone who has ever hacked up or kit-bashed regular model-kit editions has made the *Aliens* dropship or something very similar, and wondered what it would look like if Hollywood were to put it in a movie. *Aliens* actually showed us. And it was cooler even than our wildest dreams.

The dropship is bad-ass Vietnam firepower years before the fall of Saigon; it's Thunderbird 2 with attitude; hell, with those extending missile launchers, it's even part Transformer. The decoration is a wonderfully familiar military green painstakingly adorned with all those decals that mean 'war' to the 20th-century mind; Ron Cobb laments slightly, in the *Aliens* quadrilogy documentary extras, that his Bug Stompers/'We Endanger Species' logo/decal never gets a resolvable close-up in the movie, the same fate as his occasionally hilarious 'industrial warning signs' in *Alien*.

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Never mind, Ron - we know it's there. The back-up dropship which Bishop must crawl through a sewer to summon is apparently called 'Smart Ass', and its contrasting motto is *We aim by P.F.M*. [Pure Fucking Magic].

Where possible James Cameron shot the dropship 'in camera', though naturally the shots of it in space are motion control, including this jaw-dropping descent from the Sulaco. Check out *The Power Of Real Tech* documentary on the Aliens quadrilogy to see some great out-takes of visual effects supervisors the Skotak brothers trying to get the miniature dropship to land in the rain on the miniature set of LV426 - they're using models, strings and wind machines, so quite why it doesn't all look like *Thunderbirds* is a testament to the ingenuity and determination of Cameron, Skotak and all concerned with the 'practical' visual effects. VFX cameraman Harry Oakes recalls some of his exploits with the 1/6th-scale dropship in this interview at aliensarchive.com. Oakes reveals in this interview that the famous rear-projected dropship crash was based on a similar VFX crash in Gerry Anderson's *Journey To The Far Side Of The Sun* (which Oakes worked on). VFX camera operator Michael Anderson was also interviewed about the dropship.

Fantastic Plastic do a dropship kit. Halcyon have unfortunately discontinued their model kit of the craft. Aoshima do a 1/72 scale die-cast 13-inch Dropship, which - if you scroll down a bit - you can see at this site. There's a superb dropship cutaway from Acme Creations here, and some great diagrams here; a Lego dropship; a scratch-built dropship here, and another here. And if you don't believe that anything as ferocious as the Cheyenne could ever be cute, think again. In the CG sphere, here's the dropship for Max; and for Sketchup; and finally...a real-life dropship?

Info: Fictional Life | IMDB |