

FADE IN:

INT. ARNOLD THOMPSON'S OFFICE - DAY - 1986

THOMPSON, 52, sits at his desk looking over paperwork. The telephone RINGS. He pushes a button on an intercom.

THOMPSON

Thompson.

V.O.

It's been postponed until tomorrow morning. A cold front is bearing down on Florida. Are you concerned?

THOMPSON

You bet. Yes, I am, very. What's the latest weather report?

V.O.

Down to 22 degrees at 6 am.

THOMPSON

Damn. This is very serious. Untested situations. I'm going to set up a teleconference with the SRB project manager. Thanks for calling.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

Thompson, TWENTY MEN, and SIX WOMEN sit at a very long table. A large microphone lies on the center of the table.

ENGINEER 1

On a prior mission, hot gasses blew by an O'ring at 53 degrees. Blackened grease was found on the joint. Make no mistake about it. It was black-just like coal. Jet black.

ENGINEER 2

According to the latest reports, we're predicting that the seals would go below freezing, 29 degrees.

ENGINEERING VP

Until the temperature reaches 53 degrees, I don't want to fly.

PROJECT MANAGER (O.S.)
Quantify your claim. Prove it.

ENGINEER 3
Rubber O'rings lose their resiliency at low temperatures and might fail to provide an adequate seal against hot gasses from the burning fuel.

PROJECT MANAGER (O.S.)
Cold gas tests indicate the O'rings will work at 30 degrees. Quantify your claim.

ENGINEER 4
We know the expected temperature is away from the goodness in the current data base.

PROJECT MANAGER (O.S.)
Prove it will fail.

THOMPSON
We can't prove it will fail, but the risk is higher than we should take. The colder the weather, the greater chance of failure.

PROJECT MANAGER (O.S.)
My God, when do you people want me to launch, next April? Would your VP for the space program be willing to launch.

VP
Not over the recommendation of my engineers.

PROJECT MANAGER (O.S.)
I'm appalled at your recommendation, but I'm not going to launch over your objection. I've spent some time looking over all the data, and frankly, I find the data inconclusive.

GENERAL MANAGER

Excuse us for a few minutes. I'm the General Manager here, and I would like an off-line caucus to reevaluate the data. Thank you.

The general manager pushes the mute button.

GENERAL MANAGER

We have to make a management decision. Bob, take off that engineering hat and put on your management hat. Am I the only one who wants to fly? Do any of my senior executives here recommend stopping the launch?
 (He looks at his three executives)
 Good. The teacher flies tomorrow.

INT. CHALLENGER-CREW'S CABIN - DAY

FRANCIS 'DICK' SCOBEE, 46, and MICHAEL SMITH, 40, sit in front of the controls, gages, indicator lights and three computer screens. Directly behind and between them is JUDITH 'J.R.' RESNIK, 36. To her right, back to the wall, is ELLISON ONIZUKA, 39.

The THREE OTHER ASTRONAUTS sit in the middeck area, below them. All the astronauts wear life vests and air tight helmets.

DICK

Welcome to space, guys. Two minutes downstairs. Hey NASA, ya gotta watch running down there?

MIKE

(Looking out the cockpit window)
 Okay. There goes the lox arm.

ELLISON

Doesn't is suppose to go the other way?

MIKE

(laughing)
 God, I hope not, Ellison.

JUDY
Got your harnesses locked?

MIKE
What for?

JUDY
Ooh kaaaay.

MIKE
Dick's thinking of something.

DICK
Un huh...One minute downstairs.

MIKE
Alarm looks good.

DICK
Okay.

MIKE
Ullage pressures are up. Right
helium tank is just a little bit
low.

DICK
It was yesterday, too. Thirty
seconds downstairs.

MIKE
Remember the red button when you
make a roll call.

DICK
I won't do that. Thanks a lot.

A loud BLAST.

DICK
There they go, guys.

JUDY
All right.

DICK
Three at a hundred.

JUDY
Aaalll riiight.

DICK
Here we go.

Another loud BLAST. Everything inside the cabin shakes.

MIKE
Go you mother.

JUDY
It's fuckin' hot.

DICK
Ooohhkaaay.

MIKE
Looks like we've got a lotta
wind today.

DICK
Yeah. It's a little hard to see
out of my window.

EXT. CHALLENGER

The Challenger rises. A long cloud of white and black smoke trailing it. A flame appears on the right side.

INT. CHALLENGER

MIKE
Feel that motha go. Woooohooo.

DICK
Reading four eight six.

MIKE
Yep, that's what I've got, too.

DICK
Roger, go at throttle up.

A loud EXPLOSION.

MIKE'S P.O.V.

A brilliant orange flame burns outside the cockpit window.

MIKE
(STUNNED)
UH OH!

EXT. CREW'S CABIN

The crew's cabin breaks away from the rockets. It starts falling to earth.

INT. CREW'S CABIN

The astronauts are pinned down in their seats.

Dick Scobee appears to be sleeping.

Judy opens her eyes wide and turns her head towards Ellison.

Ellison returns a half smile.

JUDY
I'm scared.

ELLISON
Me too.

MIKE
My heart must be racing for
a reason.

JUDY
Give me your hands.

Mike reaches his right hand behind his seat. Judy grabs it with her left hand and reaches out her right to Ellison. He takes it and gives Judy a big smile. She smiles back. Tears flow down her cheeks.

MIKE
I never did lock my harnesses,
Judy.

JUDY
I warned ya.

EXT. CREW'S CABIN

The cabin approaches the ocean at a speed greater than 200 miles per hour. It hits the ocean and disintegrates on impact. A large cloud of ruddy brown smoke hangs over the ocean as objects splash nearby.

FADE OUT

THE END