Missile Launch

Rick’s heart dropped as he heard the gurgling sound of the rocket engines. He was doomed. Sirens blared in ear-piercing tones as frazzled scientists watched in terror as the I.C.B.M. (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) was on the verge of bursting into flames. Rick gripped on the handles of the heat-resistant airlock with his palpitating palms, his heart almost in the fiery fumes itself. If the payload detonated, the entire research facility will be incinerated in a fireball; anywhere within fifty kilometers downwind would be practically unlivable for years from the radiation fallout.

Rick scanned the control panel. Red triangles encasing exclamation marks covered every inch of the screen. From what he could make out, the fires were spreading from the ignition chamber to the second stage. Rick struggled not to throw up his heart. The inferno behind the shielded windows channeled their immense energy into his bloodstream. Scientists screamed in terror as the fire consumed the first stage of the missile, forcing it to collide into the side of the launchpad.

Rick fumbled open the airlock, and a burst of scalding air whammed into his face. Brave researchers armed with hoses attempted to douse the flames, though it only made it worse. Fire licked the upper stages of the missile, painfully close to the detonator. Rick’s bones liquefied as he tried to scramble out of the area. However, his heart was slightly relocated as the hoses extinguished some of the flames higher up – this missile might just take off after all.

Clinging to hope, Rick took no notice of the blood-red warning lights on the wall which were blinding him, or the multilingual chants of ‘warning’ warbling from the speakers. Some of the researchers kept their sanity and pulled levers in unwavering hands. Rick had to help, and every brain cell of his agreed in complete unison. Pushing buttons, the water output from the nozzles increased and the fire was doused. Sighing in relief, Rick’s tongue was showered with the taste of victory. The sirens finally stopped their monotone chant of ‘Warning!’ and the ICBM achieved liftoff. The smoke of the exhaust filled the launchpad, the flames erupting from the nozzle shrinking away from Rick from second sun to dim star.