

Is Seeing Believing: Space Shuttle

[Shuttle Columbia, Explosion Photos](#)

An accompanying email claims these photos were taken by an Israeli intelligence satellite.

Read [why/how they're faked](#).

From: www.BoycottWatch.org

Description: Email hoax

Status: False

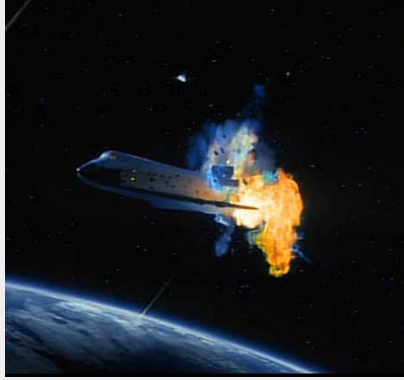
Circulating since: Feb 2003

Analysis: See [commentary](#)

Email example contributed by I. Moreno, 7 March 2003:

Subject: Columbia Photos
A friend of a friend forwarded the following:
"Got these from a friend of mine who is a retired
NASA space engineer.

Haven't seen anything like this on the news yet. "
These photos of the shuttle explosion are very graphic but are
outstanding in their clarity and detail. They were taken
(I was told) by an Israeli satellite and have not yet been
released by the U.S. Government. I thought you might want
to see them if they haven't been sent to you already.



photos found at www.BoycottWatch.org

Analysis

Contacted by email, the folks at NASA's [Earth Sciences and Image Analysis Lab](#) in Houston confirmed what some viewers of these "satellite photos" had already deduced: they're fake.

"There is some speculation here at the NASA Johnson Space Center," the message continued, "that those images have been taken from the movie '[Armageddon](#).'"

Which is precisely where they came from. They are individual frames of a computer-animated sequence occurring about four minutes into the 1998 science fiction film, when a space shuttle is destroyed by fragments of a comet during earth orbit high above the atmosphere.

It's amazing to think that after being bombarded with [news footage](#) of the Space Shuttle Columbia's fiery disintegration as it re-entered the atmosphere at 12,000 mph on February 1, trailing smoke and debris for hundreds of miles, anyone could believe a month later that these images depict the same event; but such is evidently the case, this being one of the most widely forwarded emails in early March.

Even if we hadn't been able to establish their fictitious origin, argues Rob Rosenberger of [Vmyths.com](#), the "photos" themselves are inherently unbelievable. "First," he writes, "they suggest we (or the Israelis) keep a satellite in extraordinarily low orbit, close enough to the shuttle to take high-res pictures of its reentry. We know this because the pictures show the shuttle in a head-on view, slightly from below, rather than from above. Remember, things burn up on reentry, and that's not a good place to put an orbiting satellite.

"Second, it suggests the NRO (National Reconnaissance Office) released photos in extraordinary wide-angle, 'movie-quality' detail, thereby giving our enemies a clue as to our best

resolution. The Hubble telescope can't possibly take such a wide-angle shot, for example. The existence of a wide-angle, movie-quality camera in orbit would shock the world.

“Third, the configuration of the blast in later pictures suggests the shuttle carries fuel in areas not previously known to carry fuel. A typical Hollywood cliché – when a fuel tank blows up, the entire vehicle blows up in unison, in place.”

As usual, we're left guessing as to the motivation of the unknown prankster who assembled the hoax, but judging from comments appended by enthusiastic forwarders – assuming they weren't just playing along – most were bowled over by the apparent technological feat of obtaining such clear, close-up photographs of a calamity heretofore seen only from a vast distance. “Quite hard to believe this; these are amazing!” wrote one person. “It's amazing that they were able to capture these photos,” wrote another. “These are some incredible pictures.” It's safe to assume morbid curiosity played a role, as well.