

“A Michigan Fireball” Transcript

Excerpt from a [January 19, 2018](#) episode of Science Friday.

IRA FLATOW: This is Science Friday. I’m Ira Flatow. Later in the hour, we’ll be talking about the unintended consequences of Silicon Valley creativity. Is this a modern Frankenstein story? We’ll talk about it.

But first, earlier this week, people in Michigan were treated to an unusual sight in the sky— a fireball. Why such a big deal? Joining me to talk about that, other selected short subjects in science, is Rachel Feltman, Science Editor at Popular Science. Welcome back.

RACHEL FELTMAN: Thanks for having me, Ira.

IRA FLATOW: Give us the fireball story.

RACHEL FELTMAN: Yeah. So we had a meteor over the skies in Michigan. And you know, rocks falling out of the sky is very common. And this was like a three foot six foot wide piece of meteor.

And the thing is that most of these fireballs happen where no one can see them. We don’t think about this, but most of the planet, people are just not on it—

IRA FLATOW: That’s true.

RACHEL FELTMAN: —most of the time.

IRA FLATOW: Three quarters covered in water.

RACHEL FELTMAN: Yeah. So it always seems like such a— so shocking when we see a fireball in the sky with no warning. But the truth is these are tiny rocks. We don’t have any reason to be worried about them. So they just come and go. It’s certainly a fantastic sight to see, though.

IRA FLATOW: And so the news media just picked up on this and ran with it.

RACHEL FELTMAN: And one thing that happened is that the National Weather Service in Detroit tweeted that it had caused a magnitude two earthquake, which was incorrect. It’s understandable where the confusion came from.

It had registered on seismographs like a magnitude two earthquake, though it did not—

IRA FLATOW: If you were close by.

RACHEL FELTMAN: Right. It did not cause an earthquake. And it didn’t even necessarily make the ground tremble with the force of that earthquake. Most of that vibration was probably still in the air.

It does look like some of the rock made it to Earth. There are people around Michigan who are finding little bits of meteorite. But, you know, nothing big enough hit the Earth hard enough to make it feel like there was an earthquake.

IRA FLATOW: But it was fun to look at.

RACHEL FELTMAN: Oh yeah.

IRA FLATOW: What happened?

RACHEL FELTMAN: Absolutely.

IRA FLATOW: It just streaked across the sky?

RACHEL FELTMAN: Mhm.

IRA FLATOW: Rachel. Thank you very much.

RACHEL FELTMAN: Yeah. Thanks.

IRA FLATOW: Rachel Feltman, Science Editor at Popular Science.

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