

Sawbones 194: The (Maybe) Real Dr. Frankenstein

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Clint: Sawbones is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[Intro music plays]

Justin: Hello everybody and welcome to Sawbones: A Marital Tour of Misguided Medicine. I'm your cohost Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: You hear that? Can you tell?

Sydnee: My name? Did I hear me talk?

Justin: No.

Sydnee: I definitely heard me talk.

Justin: The sound of you talking, it's being isolated. Obviously sounds completely different to you I'm sure, because of this new acoustic room that I had put in.

Sydnee: Right. All of these giant maroon panels that are lining the room of the basement.

Justin: You specifically mention the maroon. You're always on my case about maroon.

Sydnee: You love this color. I mean, maroon right. Like a really dark red.

Justin: Yeah. I guess maroon is probably accurate.

Sydnee: I think it's maroonish. It's like you're favorite color and it's so dark and you covered— I never thought someday I'll grow up and I'll have a house where I have a scary room in the basement that's enshrouded in maroon rectangles of soundless horror.

Justin: You probably also never thought you'd be married to podcast royalty.

Sydnee: That's true. I never once when I was younger thought I would be married to podcast royalty.

Justin: It would be prophetic of you. You— what, what, what's the problem with maroon?

Sydnee: Couldn't they at least be a different color?

Justin: Like what?

Sydnee: Like we're gonna have giant panels, couldn't they— I don't know, like Prussian Blue.

Justin: Well Syd, that's very specific. That's a very specific pull.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Of a color.

Sydnee: It is.

Justin: I've never heard you mention that as particular hue before?

Sydnee: I don't know that I've ever talked about Prussian Blue before to be fair.

Justin: So why Prussian Blue?

Sydnee: Well, aside from the fact that the more I think about it, the nicer I think it would look in here, I just didn't have a better transition into our topic this week.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, there you go.

Justin: So Prussian Blue it is.

Sydnee: So Prussian Blue. Do you know, do you know who helped come up with the color with the dye that is Prussian Blue?

Justin: Uh no.

Sydnee: Well, I'm gonna tell you about him. His name's Johann Konrad Dippel.

Justin: I know who created every other, but I don't know, I didn't know that one.

Sydnee: Do you?

Justin: That's a lot, you just complete—

Sydnee: What about cerulean?

Justin: You just [laughs] completely missed that.

Sydnee: Burnt sienna?

Justin: Uh that, that was all Crayola. They invented most colors. So, tell me about Dippel. It's an unfortunate name, but let's try to build on it.

Sydnee: Uh, it is an unfortunate name. Mr. Dippel, Dr. Dippel... Professor Dippel.

Justin: It's like terrifyingly close to Mr. Whippel, the guy that squeezes the toilet paper.

Sydnee: [laughs] I just keep accidentally calling him Mr. Nipple.

Justin: That's unfortunate as well.

Sydnee: Yeah. I'm gonna work on it.

Justin: Especially for a physician to make that sort of error. It's hugely problematic.

Sydnee: [laughs] And then from there I think about how Charlie calls nipples nibbles and then I wanna call him Mr. Nibble and that's a whole thing.

Justin: Yeah, and then he's adorable, that much closer to Mr. Noodle and then...

Sydnee: [laughs] So Mr. Nipple, Nibble, Noodle, Dippel was born—

Justin: Are you sure that's not it?

Sydnee: No. Born in 1673 in southwestern Germany near Darmstadt, which is very close or was— Darmstadt, it— he was born in a castle. That's what you need to know.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: And—

Justin: Fancy castle or what?

Sydnee: I mean, I think pretty fancy because it was called Castle Frankenstein.

Justin: Dun dun dunnn.

Sydnee: Would you put in some real sound effects or are you just gonna?

[thunder]

Sydnee: Do that?

Justin: Yeah, I made a crash noise.

Sydnee: So, he was born in Castle Frankenstein and because of this he was occasionally, these are maybe better names, he was occasionally known as Frake— Franckensteinensis?

Justin: Okay. Is that like a mean nickname that kids at school called him because he lived in Castle Frankenstein?

Sydnee: I guess it's like a, like, you get a tag on your name that has to do with like where you live. If that was true when I was growing up I would have been, like, Sydnee Moss creek.

Justin: Sydnee Moss creek sounds like a good old reporter with fists of steel and a nose for trouble.

Sydnee: [laughs] He also was sometimes known as Franckensteina-Strataemontanus.

Justin: That's like—

Sydnee: Is that better than Dippel?

Justin: No. That doesn't make any sense. I don't understand the cra— wild naming scheme you just come up with.

Sydnee: I didn't come up with it, I'm just telling you. Anyway, he studied a lot of stuff, Johann did. He was, I mean, sort of a— it wasn't the Renaissance, but I guess he was a Renaissance man.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: [laughs] He studied theology-

Justin: If you're a Renaissance man, the Renaissance man, during the Renaissance, that's nothing. You're just a man.

Sydnee: [laughs] Just a man. He studied theology largely. He also studied alchemy, he studied medicine. When he was sixteen, his dad shipped him off to the University of Giessen to study and where he—

Justin: Uh, Yale? Uh, Harvard? Uh—

Sydnee: [sarcastic laugh] It's probably like, Gee-sen or Guy-sen. I'm probably saying it completely wrong.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Yeah. But he, he decided to focus on theology. At this point in history, theology was a really kind of controversial area to go into. And that was part of why he was drawn to it, because Johann liked fighting.

Justin: Ah.

Sydnee: He liked drama.

Justin: Stirring up trouble.

Sydnee: Exactly. He wrote tons of different theological works, largely under the name Christianis Democratis. Of course, now that you've heard that you know exactly who I'm talking about.

Justin: That sounds like the made-up hero from a Bible movie I would have watched at church camp.

Sydnee: [laughs] So he wrote tons of different theological works and he had a lot of unpopular positions challenging a lot of the major church positions at the time. And throughout his career as a theologian he got into lots of arguments with lots of important people. This would result in him occasionally being banned from different places. Sometimes like cities, like Berlin or Strasburg or Wittenberg or the place where he went to university. Giessen.

Justin: Giessen.

Sydnee: Guy-sen.

Justin: Something fortunate. Gotta do the correspondence thing I guess.

Sydnee: Exactly [laughs]. Also sometimes from countries, like Sweden and Russia.

Justin: Man, a whole country.

Sydnee: Yeah, a whole country.

Justin: Russia's big too.

Sydnee: I don't know.

Justin: That's pretty bad if you're like— [laughs].

Sydnee: And this is the, this is—

Justin: You could accidentally go into Russia.

Sydnee: This is like the late 1600s, early 1700s. I don't think you could effectively be banned from all of Russia back then. Right? Like how would they even find you? Like they didn't have Find my Friends, you know.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: They would— you wouldn't be able to, like, find you by looking where you checked in on Facebook.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So, he also did a couple stints in jail as a result. He did seven years in prison for heresy.

Justin: Dang.

Sydnee: At one point. And there was also, I found one source that he did a second shorter stint of jail time. He was arrested for too closely resembling Charles the 12th of Sweden. I could not find— man I hope that's true. I don't know if it's true, but what a wild reason to get arrested. Right?

Justin: Yeah, absolutely.

Sydnee: You look too much like a king. It could be confusing for people.

Justin: "Please."

Sydnee: [laughs] "Please. I'm sorry. We're gonna have to put you in jail." I don't—

Justin: "Be considerate."

Sydnee: That may not, I couldn't, I couldn't confirm this point.

Justin: That sounds like something he probably made up.

Sydnee: I usually like to cross reference things and I couldn't confirm this for sure. And as I mentioned, in this time he also helped invent Prussian Blue, which, I mean, we all remember him for. But theology was not working out great for—

Justin: The pill too. Right? Isn't it the same thing?

Sydnee: Prussian Blue? No. No, he just, he accidentally helped invent a dye, like, the color Prussian Blue.

Justin: The dye? Okay, okay. Got it.

Sydnee: With another, with another dude. He— there's another dude who was like making something and he used one of Dippel's chemicals and— because he was also kind of an amateur chemist in addition to an alchemist.

Justin: Did you know it's also an antidote for heavy metal poisoning?

Sydnee: I didn't.

Justin: It's true.

Sydnee: Well, I've learned that.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: Yeah. Couldn't just let me have one.

Sydnee: I'm sorry.

Justin: That's fine.

Sydnee: No, I didn't. I didn't know that.

Justin: Just one thing, ever. It's been almost two hundred episodes, but just one. Nah. All right. You're the boss.

Sydnee: Just edit out where I said I did.

Justin: Yeah. I'll remember you did that.

Sydnee: Just to say, "I didn't know that."

Justin: I did one edit earlier when I put in scary sound effects. That's it. That's my tone and that's my cap.

Sydnee: So, theology was not going great for ol' Dippel because he was, you know, constantly getting in trouble and arrested and banned from places, and he was pretty broke. So, he thought, you know why not turn to medicine?

Justin: [snorts]

Sydnee: That seems reasonable to me.

Justin: They take all comers. Sure.

Sydnee: So, he studied medicine in Leiden and uh he— I'm sure he probably worked as a physician. I can't find a lot of records of him actually seeing patients. It almost seemed like he was more interested in, once he

learned about the human body and anatomy and chemistry and how he could use those principles and then his already present interest in alchemy, to do some sort of unusual experiments.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: So, he took all this knowledge that he had gained, and he retreated to Castle Frankenstein to do his experiments.

Justin: That sounds very sinister.

Sydnee: That's right. So, the first thing he did was invent Dippel's Oil.

Justin: Kind of a classic mistake to name the first thing you invent after yourself because it may not work.

Sydnee: [laughs] And then the second thing you just have to call, like, Dippel's Oil 2.

Justin: "It's back."

Sydnee: [laughs] The Sequel. So, there were a lot of alchemists at this point in history who were trying to create the Elixir of Life. It's kind of like everybody was looking for something that would make you live forever and then the Philosopher's Stone. Right? So they could turn lead into gold.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Those were the two things everybody's in search of. They— so he, he makes his own version of sort of an elixir of eternal life. He calls it Dippel's Oil. And basically, it was made of a bunch of ground up animal parts.

Justin: Ew. Nice try.

Sydnee: Kind of boiled and distilled down into an oil. So, mainly things like bones and hooves and hides. I found kind of a recipe. Now this was from— this recipe was actually recorded... it would have been about a hundred years later, so much later, but it was a recipe for Dippel's Oil, so it's based on his original recipe.

Justin: Hit me.

Sydnee: So, it was obtained from hartshorn distilled without addition, rectifying the oil either by a slow distillation and a retort etc., no bigger than is necessary and saving only the first portion that comes over or with water in a common still. Very fine and thin. Must be kept in an opaque vessel or in a drawer. [laughs] One, I'm assuming a well-sealed drawer.

Justin: Who's wanna— yeah. And who's gonna want to keep their elixir, their immortality elixir locked away in a drawer? I'm probably gonna need access to that daily.

Sydnee: [laughs] I'm just worried about seepage through the drawer.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: I mean you don't want to lose that stuff. Or a dark place. So, I mean, just anywhere I guess. As it is quickly discolored by light. It is anti-spasmodic, anodyne, meaning it'll kind of knock you out and make you sleepy. Hypnotic. And diaphoretic, make you sweat, and taken in doses from ten to thirty drops in water.

Justin: I doubt that—

Sydnee: Anywhere from two to four times a day.

Justin: Who, who would skimp on the dosage of their eternal life elixir? Who would try to cheap out there?

Sydnee: "It says ten to thirty. I'll just stick with the ten."

Justin: "Ah I'll just take ten." You're gonna— yeah, I mean like, you're either immortal or you're not.

Sydnee: Now, you also heard what it's made of, so how eager are you to ingest a lot of this?

Justin: That's fine. Yeah. Let's split the difference at twenty. [laughs]

Sydnee: This is also a time where you kind of buy stuff like that knowing it probably doesn't work [laughs]. Nothing works. None of this stuff works. So—

Justin: It probably won't keep me alive forever. It definitely is made of ground up animal parts, so like, you do have to kind of balance those two factors.

Sydnee: Uh, and he, and by the way the result was initially this kind of thin, yellowish, oily substance. Very pungent. It was described as pungent in smell and smokey in flavor [laughs].

Justin: So, mustard.

Sydnee: Hmm. Please don't ruin mustard for me.

Justin: Sorry.

Sydnee: I love mustard.

Justin: Sorry.

Sydnee: That aged into a thick, dark, smelly substance over time or I guess with more exposure to light and such. People love this stuff. Now I will say that Dippel on the front end made sure to lower your expectations and say, "I can't promise you that you will live forever with this." This was like his first go at this. Right?

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Like, "I'm not guaranteeing eternal life, but what I am telling you is you'll probably make it to 135."

Justin: A good solid age.

Sydnee: A good, solid hundred and thirty-five years old.

Justin: And hey, if it doesn't work, come back, get a full refund. If you don't live forever.

Sydnee: [laughs] Gosh that's the, that's the ticket, man. Sell elixir of life potions.

Justin: Mm-hm. Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: I mean that would be a very good— you are a real doctor. Right?

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Not like a pretend?

Sydnee: I'm just saying, if I wasn't really interested in helping people and I just wanted to make a lot of money—

Justin: And you just wanted to make some cash, of course.

Sydnee: Right. So, so he sold this again— of course, to make you live longer, but like anything else at the time if it's good for one thing, it's probably good for other things.

Justin: Or none—

Sydnee: Or all things. Or no things.

Justin: Or none of the things.

Sydnee: So, people tended to use it for everything. Of course fevers, any kind of cold symptoms you might have, nonspecific things like, "Oh, your nerves flaring up? Just take ten drops of some Dippel's Oil there."

Justin: It's Dippel's.

Sydnee: "Are you having a seizure? Dippel's Oil will fix that for you. Do you not want to get bitten by mosquitos? Just smother yourself in some Dippel's Oil."

Justin: Now that one I buy. I actually do buy that one. That one makes perfect sense to me.

Sydnee: That will probably repel everything.

Justin: Yeah. Yeah, you're rubbing a bunch of animal guts on you, like, for sure.

Sydnee: I found some specific recipes for some medications using Dippel's Oil. So, first was a liniment of Dippel's Oil.

Justin: Mm-hm.

Sydnee: So basically, a liniment, something you would apply topic— so on, externally. To your skin. Topically your externally, meaning you apply it outside.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: So, you— what you would want to do if you were making a liniment of Dippel's Oil is mix it with some almond oil and also some turpentine.

Justin: Eugh.

Sydnee: Preferably, I read, turpentine soap. So, I guess you'd get like a thicker, pastier kind of product.

Justin: Sure. Yeah.

Sydnee: Which would be good for a liniment. A good thing to kind of rub on your skin and then apply bandages over it.

Justin: Of course. Yeah.

Sydnee: Let it marinate you.

Justin: Work, yeah.

Sydnee: Exactly. And, and if you're going to make this, it's really good to put it on your stomach if you have worms in there.

Justin: O, right, because they'll smell that and they're like, "Let's get out of here. This guy's broken."

Sydnee: "Get out of here! Run for the anus."

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Taco Bell.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Run for the anus.

Sydnee: [laughs] There was also a tincture of Dippel's Oil. So, what you would do with this is take some Dippel's Oil again, mix it with some ether and then ingest.

Justin: Perfect.

Sydnee: And uh, you could use this a stimulus, so as a little pick me up. You know?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: You need a little pep in your step.

Justin: A little animal guts in your human guts.

Sydnee: [laughs] Or as an anti-spasmodic, meaning like, you have muscle spasms, if you have stomach spasms, if you—

Justin: This stuff sounds great to me.

Sydnee: Spasming, you just ether and Dippel's Oil.

Justin: I don't know why this cat's on this episode. He seems like a— it seems like a good oil.

Sydnee: There was also something just called mixture of Dippel's Oil. It sounds kind of— I mean that's like all these things are, right? But a mixture of Dippel's Oil, you just take Dippel's Oil and something called Hoffman's Anodyne, and you mix them together and you could use that for tetanus. That would definitely not work for that. Hoffman's Anodyne, by the way, because I had to go figure, okay well what is this weird thing. So, Hoffman's Anodyne is essentially just some ether and a lot of alcohol.

Justin: That will do it.

Sydnee: And it was—

Justin: That will get it done.

Sydnee: It was mainly used as a hypnotic. Meaning sleepy time. You know. Hoffman's Sleepy time Solution.

Justin: This will make all the tetanus will go away for a little while.

Sydnee: Yeah so, I mean, I guess if you took a mixture of Dippel's Oil you may forget you have tetanus?

Justin: So, what, what's wrong with this guy, Sydnee? I don't understand. He sounds like kind of a hero.

Sydnee: Well, let me, let me tell you more about the story of Mr. Dippel. Dr. Dippel, sorry. But first, why don't you follow me to the billing department.

Justin: Let's go.

[ad break]

Justin: So, what was next for Mr. Dippel?

Sydnee: Well the Dippel's Oil, just to kind of give you the end of that story. It actually, these recipes that I read you, like I mentioned they were from about a hundred years later. It persisted in kind of the medical pharmacopeia until like the 19th century.

Justin: Wow.

Sydnee: It was, it was really that long that people were still making and using Dippel's Oil as a sort of home remedy cure-all.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Until finally I saw some mentions in some, like, medical textbooks and pharmacopeias from the 1800s where people were like, this is probably not.

Justin: This is—

Sydnee: This is probably not really something.

Justin: This is nothing.

Sydnee: Don't, just don't.

Justin: We've tried it.

Sydnee: Here— I will tell you how to make it. I will definitely still give you a recipe for it, but you probably shouldn't.

Justin: Yeah, you're gonna waste your time.

Sydnee: There's probably better stuff now. So it did find a couple of other uses, specifically in agriculture. I found— I kept seeing it reference as a sheep dip. I did not know what a sheep dip was.

Justin: No.

Sydnee: I'm gonna be the first to admit.

Justin: Absolutely not.

Sydnee: It sounded horrifying to me. I don't want to eat a sheep dip. I'll stick with an artichoke dip please.

Justin: Yeah, a nice, a nice spin dip.

Sydnee: [laughs] A nice spin dip. No thank you sheep dip. But no, that's not what that means. It means that you're gonna dip the sheep in something.

Justin: Ah.

Sydnee: Yeah. Like a pesticide kind of bath.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: To like clean them off. I guess this is very controversial too because they have been known to use very terrible, harmful chemicals in sheep dips and various animal dips in the past, and there's been like government cover-ups and all kinds of crazy— I just learned about all this.

Justin: Yeah, sounds like humans. That tracks.

Sydnee: I didn't know about any of it. Anyway, sometimes they used Dippel's Oil as a sheep dip. I still found message boards where people were asking like, "Hey, you got a recipe for that Dippel's Oil so I can dip my horse in it?" [laughs]

Justin: Okay. Nobody's dipping horses. That's lunacy.

Sydnee: They're dipping horses.

Justin: They're dipping horses?

Sydnee: They're dipping them.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: I don't think you really dip them. I think you just like wash— I think, actually what I found was that it came in like a spray bottle and you would like spritz them.

Justin: Okay. That makes so much— you understand how that makes infinitely more sense than picking up a horse and dipping it in a vat of oil.

Sydnee: I'm just saying it's called a dip.

Justin: Fair. Okay.

Sydnee: I'm just saying that's what it's called. Anyway, I guess people are still trying to figure out how to do this and use this even today, even though I've read that it was banned, at least I think I think in the UK it was banned. So, don't do that?

Justin: Just don't.

Sydnee: Please. Yeah.

Justin: Don't do it.

Sydnee: But I guess it's persisted that long. I did find an interesting side note that it was used as a sort of chemical warfare agent in World War II.

Justin: Good medicine!

Sydnee: [laughs] Where—

Justin: Good job, Dippel.

Sydnee: It was—

Justin: [snorts]

Sydnee: It was dumped in wells to make water undrinkable so that the enemy would cut off their water supply.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But since it didn't kill people it didn't technically violate the Geneva Convention, so it was sort of chemical warfare.

Justin: Semi— yeah.

Sydnee: Similar.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's like really gross.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's really gross.

Justin: I don't thi— but I mean, like, it's still chemical warfare. Right?

Sydnee: Yeah, I mean, you can't drink water after that.

Justin: I don't know that that the Geneva Convention specifies fatality. Is that accurate?

Sydnee: Said because it's not lethal.

Justin: Oh.

Sydnee: That's what I've read.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: It's not a lethal substance.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Although, that, you know— they said it's not a lethal substance, but I've read multiple old annotations, like back from the 1700s and 1800s, where doctors would be very clear that if you took a table spoon of Dippel's Oil at a time, it could kill you.

Justin: Great. Good medicine, still.

Sydnee: So, I would, I would contradict that point.

Justin: Alright.

Sydnee: I also found a place currently online where you can still buy Dippel's oil. The price I saw was 2,500 US dollars a ton.

Justin: Hotchee-matchee.

Sydnee: If you want a ton of Dippel's Oil.

Justin: Yeah, literally.

Sydnee: I don't recommend it. How about just don't.

Justin: Just probably don't.

Sydnee: Just to kind of give you a little bit more insight, I think that was the best thing that Dr. Dippel probably did, but in addition to this he also had some darker pursuits.

Justin: Darker than making a medical poison.

Sydnee: Well he was trying to make elixir of eternal life.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: He also did search for the Philosopher's Stone of course.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: All the alchemists were doing it. It was a fad. Everybody was. So, a lot of alchemists were also doing experiments at the time to try to reanimate the dead and transfer the souls of one person into another, specifically like from a cadaver to a cadaver. That kind of thing.

Justin: Yes?

Sydnee: This was not unusual. There were many people engaged in these experiments and there were many people doing a lot of horrible things like grave robbing and desecrating corpses to do these terrible experiments. Dippel wrote about this stuff. He studied this stuff. He had a theory of how it could be done, specifically how you could transfer the soul of one person into another person. And we're talking bodies here.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: We're talking cadavers, so you'd have to go steal bodies to do it.

Justin: Right, a burner body, basically.

Sydnee: [laughs] You would have to go steal some bodies, but he had this whole description of how he thought it could be done through a funnel.

Justin: Oh. Yeah?

Sydnee: Uh-huh.

Justin: A funnel?

Sydnee: A funnel.

Justin: Dippel?

Sydnee: I don't have— I have no diagrams here. Man, I wish I did.

Justin: I imagine it looks like the freaking, uh, that machine from Princess Bride. Right?

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Just like strapped over his face and just jams the soul right in there.

Sydnee: So somehow with the funnel he wanted to transfer the soul from one body to another. All this being said, I have no proof that he actually did this stuff.

Justin: Wouldn't want to put this guy on blast. He may be listening.

Sydnee: No. He— [laughs]. Well, if the elixir worked I guess.

Justin: Yeah. That's true.

Sydnee: So, I don't think—

Justin: Thank you to Maximum Fun Donor—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: Johann Conrad Dippel.

Sydnee: So, I have no proof that he actually did these things. Of course, the rumors flew eventually, as we'll get into, about this guy but, I mean, he certainly wrote about it. He was certainly interested in it. Um, I just think if he had done it, he'd probably would have recorded his experiments and talked about what he found and stuff.

Justin: I'd tell. Yeah, he named the oil after himself. I think he'd let some people know.

Sydnee: Probably be pretty boastful.

Justin: That he kicked the whole death thing.

Sydnee: And this led to, because of all this writings about this and his interest in this, this led to really wild stories circulating about him, like, going out and digging up human bodies and then boiling those for different kinds of oils and then trying to animate them, and that one time he blew up a tower in his own castle accidentally in one of his experiments. This is not true.

Justin: And this guy's not definitely the inspiration for Frankenstein? You said he may be, like, this sounds pretty concrete.

Sydnee: I hadn't even— see, I told you that. Our listeners didn't know that yet.

Justin: No, you told, you said at the beginning.

Sydnee: Did I?

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Oh. I thought I haven't given that away yet.

Justin: No.

Sydnee: Maybe. No, it's still— I'll get to that.

Justin: I mean you— it would have been— all due respect, I know you love the Paul Harvey twist ending.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: You said he lived in a Castle Frankenstein. It would have been a pretty hard cover-up, honestly.

Sydnee: It's not quite as obvious as the Salisbury steak guy.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: So, he, he did do— like I said, he did do a lot of experiments on animals. I mean, in addition to you know, boiling them down into a weird oil that you don't want to drink. And so, in addition to that he dissected a lot of animals and from this he, what he said he learned, what he wrote and what he shared with other people was that through his dissections he was able to learn the secret to exorcising demons.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Now—

Justin: Just focus on the abs. That's the number one thing.

Sydnee: [laughs] I took biology. I have dissected a frog before. I don't ever remember learning that part.

Justin: About how to exorcise the demons?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Justin: Well, maybe you were absent that day?

Sydnee: I don't know. Maybe if I had taken the next anatomy class and gone to the fetal pig, maybe then I would have learned that.

Justin: Maybe.

Sydnee: I don't know. So as tales of this work, of his exorcising demon studies and his, you know, eternal life serum and his weird soul exchange funnel, as tales of this spread, some begin to theorize that in order to obtain this dark secret knowledge, he had sold his soul to the devil.

Justin: Did— is that true?

Sydnee: I mean, no, honey.

Justin: Oh, okay. Sorry.

Sydnee: No. But he did let that rumor carry.

Justin: Yeah you gotta let that one lie. Nobody's going to mess with you then.

Sydnee: Well not only that, but if somebody thinks that you have an elixir of life that you obtained by selling your soul to the devil, they're probably more likely to believe it works.

Justin: That's true. That's how good it is.

Sydnee: Yeah, so then they thought, "Well, he must know something."

Justin: Yeah. Something's up.

Sydnee: He didn't sell his soul to the devil for nothing.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: So, it actually helped him sell more Dippel's Oil and—

Justin: Perfect!

Sydnee: Other crazy potions and such. So, eventually because of all these rumors and his neighbors were getting upset and they didn't like this kind of creepy guy living in the neighborhood, he had to move to a different castle, which is just too bad. Castle Wittgenstein.

Justin: Not even nearly as cool.

Sydnee: As Frankenstein? Nope. And he continued to do, even— I mean, he became more reclusive and doing more strange experiments and writings and stuff and just living off his Dippel's Oil until his death, which is still shrouded in myth. Now, more than likely the truth is not really that, I don't know, unusual or mysterious. He most likely died from a stroke. In 1734 he was found in his castle. However, there were—

Justin: [snorts] I just want someone to say that about me some day. "He was found in his castle."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: I just want that to be part of my obit. I don't think it's asking so much.

Sydnee: However, stories spread that when he was found in his castle, he was blue. Specifically, Prussian Blue.

Justin: And that's how he invented it.

Sydnee: And [laughs] and so rumors begin to spread that he didn't have a stroke. No, what happened is that the Prussian Blue was all part of this secret elixir of life formula plan.

Justin: Mm.

Sydnee: And he was drinking it to keep him alive forever, but instead—

Justin: Ah, okay.

Sydnee: It poisoned him, and he died and turned blue.

Justin: That's not—

Sydnee: Or turned blue and died.

Justin: I understand why people would want that poetic parallelism there.

Sydnee: Right. There's no proof of this. I think he, I think he probably just had the stroke. He, as Justin has already alluded to, he is likely at least in part an inspiration for Frankenstein. Now this is much debated. There is no definitive proof. Mary Shelley never said, "Also, by the way [laughs] this is about that Dippel guy."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: "Just in case you wondered." But it is known that Mary Shelley visited the region around the castle, would have been near Castle Frankenstein. Certainly, would have known that it was there. It was a pretty famous castle and by the time she would have traveled to the area, the legend of this kind of mad scientist Dr. Dippel would have permeated all of the townsfolk.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: So, the idea that she would have said what castle was that or what's the story and heard about it is not, is not outlandish at all. She may well have. In addition, there's this account of her speaking with some local university students who went to the same university that he went to who would've known the whole history of the castle and known the history of this guy who made this oil. So, there's a lot of thought that maybe in part Dr. Dippel with his strange experiments with possibly reanimating the dead and searching for eternal life and—

Justin: Yeah, and it's called Frankenstein.

Sydnee: So on, and that it's Castle Frankenstein, may have been part of the inspiration for Frankenstein.

Justin: Oh.

Sydnee: It may just be that she said, "You know what, that Frankenstein, that would be a cool name."

Justin: It's a cool name.

Sydnee: "I should use it in my book."

Justin: That seems unlikely, considering all the other factors. That's where I'm at in this one.

Sydnee: I have found that, like, literary historians can get very angry arguing about this. At least on internet message boards.

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: I don't know if they do in real life, but in internet message boards it gets pretty heated over whether or not this is true.

Justin: They'll uh... they'll go fisticuffs on it if they remember their inhalers.

Sydnee: [laughs] I can't say much. I do medical history, so.

Justin: That's for bad boys. And ladies.

Sydnee: [laughs] So again I am not saying that this is definitive, because I also saw a suggestion that hey, maybe he was the inspiration for Faust.

Justin: Okay, now you're just guessing.

Sydnee: Right. So, I mean, all of this, all of this could just be theory and myth. Um, of course if he lived in Frankenstein Castle and he was kind of thought to be a mad scientist, there have to be ghost stories.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: It is said that if you want to see Dr. Dippel, just go to Frankenstein Castle anytime between Christmas and New Year's.

Justin: [snorts] Must have been when the tourism was really light.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: It's hard to attract people to the creepy castle during that time period.

Sydnee: Anytime between Christmas and New Year's, we have great rates on Dippel's Oil.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um...

Justin: I think we've all had trouble getting other people in the week between Christmas and New Year's.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Justin: This just happens to be a spectral fella.

Sydnee: But supposedly his spirit remains unsettled because it was never able to find the secret to eternal life.

Justin: Mysterious.

Sydnee: Mysterious. Don't, don't buy Dippel's Oil please. It does not—

Justin: Please don't dip your horses in it or drink it or anything.

Sydnee: No.

Justin: Um, folks that's gonna do it for us. Thank you so much for listening to our podcast. And thank you to The Taxpayers for the use of their song

"Medicines" as the intro and outro to our program. Thanks to Maximum Fun Network for having us on. There's a lot of great shows on there that you should go check totally out. Um... oh, we're gonna be doing a show this, as you're listening to this—

Sydnee: This weekend.

Justin: This weekend. It's, it's like in, in a couple of days, on Sunday. In Philadelphia. There's a very a few number of tickets left, they might be gone by the time you hear this, but if you want to go give it a shot bit.ly/sawbonesphilly. It's gonna be really fun. Also, I wanted to mention that we're going to the same venue, which is the Trocodero Theater, we're doing 2pm on Sunday, and The Flophouse, another Max Fun favorite is gonna be doing 8pm on Sunday as well. And also, uh, We Got This, another Maximum Fun family podcast is going to be doing a show in Philly a few days after that. So, try to get tickets for all of those. I'm certain you can just do a quick a google. I don't know the links for those, but the link for ours is bit.ly/sawbonesphilly. And I think that's gonna do it for us, Sydster.

Sydnee: Yep.

Justin: Thanks for educating me about Dippel.

Sydnee: No problem. Anytime.

Justin: But until next week, my name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: And as always, don't drill a hole in your head.

[theme music plays]

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Male Voice: How many times has this happened to you?

Other Male Voice: Aw man, if only I knew whether it was better to be too hot or too cold or who the best James Bond was, that girl would've gone out with me.

Male Voice: Now you can with We Got This with Mark and Hal, the podcast from maximumfun.org every Tuesday.

Other Male Voice: Hey, Louis. It's Joey, the best James Bond was Daniel Craig and it's better to be too cold than too hot. Thanks, We Got This with Mark and Hal. Only on maximumfun.org or wherever you get fine podcasts.