

Sawbones 590: Little People Hallucinations

Published August 18th, 2026

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Intro (Clint McElroy): 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!

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

Justin: Hello, everybody! And welcome to Sawbones, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your co-host, Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: How are you doing, Syd? How's it going?

Sydnee: I'm fine, Justin. Thanks for asking.

Justin: We didn't really have, like, a topic to start this off with. I did want to mention, here—I have a segue for you.

Sydnee: Okay?

Justin: What do you think about this? You know, Syd, even though the year of Fungalore has passed, it's never out of season to talk about mushrooms.

Sydnee: That's true.

Justin: Is that good?

Sydnee: Yes, that's true. And we've done a whole episode on mushrooms, but this is—this we didn't cover.

Justin: I didn't think we had mush-room for more.

Sydnee: Oh? My dad would love that joke.

Justin: I bet he would.

Sydnee: Yeah, save that and tell him—

Justin: I will.

Sydnee: Tell him that later.

Justin: I will.

Sydnee: Actually, can you put it in a Facebook reel? Because then he'll just find it.

Justin: Yeah. [laughs] That's the best way to get a hold of Tommy, you just upload a Facebook reel of whatever you need him to know, and then he'll...

Sydnee: He'll find it and he'll send it to me.

Justin: Send it to Sydnee.

Sydnee: So if you want—so if you want me to see it—

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Put it in a Facebook reel. My dad will find it and he'll send it to me in Facebook Messenger.

Justin: It's a perfect system.

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Like a carrier pigeon.

Sydnee: Justin, I was inspired by a creator on TikTok.

Justin: Okay. I mean—

Sydnee: That you enjoy.

Justin: I find—can I just say that, like, that's a daily occurrence for me, Sydnee. I find so many creators on there so inspiring. [chuckles]

Sydnee: No, but one that you enjoy.

Justin: Yeah, Jason Pargin, formerly he wrote under the name David Wong. He wrote books like *John Dies at the End* and other similar great books.

Sydnee: So he did a TikTok about a mushroom. And then I also got an email from one of our listeners, Carrie, about this mushroom. So thank you, Carrie. You may have seen the same TikTok I did. And it is a mushroom that makes you see little people. And I just had to know more.

Justin: Yeah. This seems made up, or like the setup of a joke. Like, seems—tell— "Once upon a time, there was a mushroom that could make you see little folks. And then around the stew, got the cook thinking—" Like it's.. it doesn't really seem like a thing that would exist.

Sydnee: It also feels like just right for conspiracy, like kind of fantastical thinking. Like, it's not that the mushroom makes you see. You're not hallucinating, you're peeking through the veil. You know what I mean? It feels like the kind of thing that would... it's a mushroom that allows you to see what's already there.

Justin: What if *Gulliver's*—

Sydnee: I don't believe this. I'm just saying I can see where this would be—lead to fantastical ideas.

Justin: What if *Gulliver's Travels* is not like a fantastic flight of fancy, but is rather a sort of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*-esque sort of, like, drug journal of a descent into, like, mushroom fueled depravity?

Sydnee: Well, it's good that you reference *Gulliver's Travels*, because in a lot of the articles, as I was reading—

Justin: Because I'm 80,000 years old.

Sydnee: [chuckles] Well, no, it's where the title—so, a lot of the articles I was reading about the mushroom, and then about specifically this type of hallucination, it is—it has as been referred to as the Lilliputian mushroom, or these hallucinations as Lilliputian hallucinations.

Justin: Right.

Sydnee: Which of course is a reference to Gulliver's Travels.

Justin: Yes, the—

Sydnee: Where—

Justin: Famous Jack Black film, Gulliver's Travels. [chuckles] As featured on the series Survivor.

Sydnee: [chuckles] The Lilliputians, if you haven't read it, or if you haven't seen that movie, don't—I haven't either. I've never read it and I've never seen that.

Justin: I don't think anybody has. I wouldn't—I don't think Jack Black saw it. I would be surprised if he saw it.

Sydnee: But maybe you've read the book. I don't know.

Justin: Was that a real movie? It doesn't feel very released, does it?

Sydnee: No, I feel like I—

Justin: It's like it wasn't real.

Sydnee: I've seen it in my head, like the Lilliputians, the little people from Lilliput that are, like, throwing ropes over him and tying him down.

Justin: That is a classic scene, yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: But that is what your brain would generate if you're like, "Hey, is there a Jack Black Gulliver's Travels?!"

Sydnee: That's true. If you haven't read it—

Justin: [laughs]

Sydnee: ...and you haven't seen it, all you need to know is that the Lilliputians are tiny people. That's it. That's the reference. So, a Lilliputian hallucination, therefore, is a hallucination where you're seeing tiny people.

It's a little more in depth than that, but in this context what we're talking about is a specific type of hallucination. You eat this mushroom, you see tiny people. Why is this specifically interesting? Because the idea that a mushroom makes you hallucinate is not groundbreaking. We know that. We know that.

Justin: This is—this is known. Psy... is it a...

Sydnee: Psilocybin.

Justin: Psilocybin!

Sydnee: Yes.

Justin: Oh, you didn't even give me a chance.

Sydnee: Oh, I'm sorry.

Justin: To pull it out impressively.

Sydnee: Do you want us to—

Justin: No, at this point, I think it would be humiliating. But thank you.
[chuckles]

Sydnee: The thing about hallucinations, what's interesting about this mushroom and specifically Lilliputian hallucinations, is that usually a hallucination is different for each individual. And then if it's substance-induced, would also, you'd expect it to be different for every trip.

So, if I took your standard sort of hallucinogenic substance like LSD, the experience I would have right now would be different than the experience you might have right now. And then if we did it again tomorrow, we would both expect to have different experiences from today. Do you know what I'm saying? Like, it's not like every time you do LSD, you see the same—

Justin: Sure, it's—

Sydnee: ...psychedelic image or whatever.

Justin: From my understanding, and I have not used LSD or—

Sydnee: Me neither.

Justin: But I, you know, with, like, mushrooms and stuff, I think it's like a refraction, sort of, of your environment, and also whatever is in your, like, subconscious, or in your mind. It's a combination of those two things. That's why it seems so strange, this idea that there would be, like, one lever in your brain that's like, "Little people." [chuckles]

Sydnee: It's also—it's also a lot of the time, if we see patterns of hallucinations that aren't substance induced—so, like, in individuals who have psychiatric conditions that cause hallucinations outside of substances.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: We do see that there are common hallucinations. But it's usually because of society and culture. It's where you are and when you exist in the world.

So for example, in the US, it is not common right now for an individual with hallucinations to have some sort of, you know, Christian-based theme to

their hallucinations, right?

Justin: And isn't that a shame? Thank you for saying it—

Sydnee: Like angels, demons, Jesus—

Justin: Sydnee—

Sydnee: Et cetera.

Justin: Whatever happened to Christian hallucinations? [chuckles]

Sydnee: Well, it's a prominent cultural force.

Justin: This country was built—

Sydnee: So—

Justin: ...on Christian hallucinations!

Sydnee: It's also not surprising that we see a lot of patients right now who have hallucinations that are very conspiratorial in nature. The idea of, like, government controlled by other beings or deep state, or that paranoia and that the police are watching. And, like, you can see where that fits into the kind of cultural milieu we live in at this moment.

Justin: Of course.

Sydnee: And so, again, if you see, like, repeated patterns in hallucinations, you don't think, "Oh, it's because they're true." You think, "Oh, it's because they exist in this time and place."

Again, what's interesting about these Lilliputian hallucinations specifically in regard to this mushroom that we're going to get into, are that they seem to kind of break that role a little bit.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I want to talk first about this specific type of hallucination, just because it's interesting and it's rare. It's not a particularly common hallucination to have, just across the board. For all the reasons that people might have a hallucination, seeing little people is not particularly common.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: And I will say that it's not just necessarily humans, although in these cases, we're going to talk a lot about seeing tiny humans. You might see, like, tiny animals or tiny, like, fantastical creatures.

Justin: Ooh?

Sydnee: Yeah, like it—

Justin: That's nice.

Sydnee: Like they might—I mean, like, in some of the hallucinations that they describe, like, the little humans are riding tiny horses. [chuckles] So, I mean, there can be animals and—

Justin: That sounds—that sounds awesome!

Sydnee: [chuckles] They are—obviously, it is not—you're not asleep. That's a criteria for them. If you're seeing this in your dreams—

Justin: I mean, if you're—hey, folks.

Sydnee: That's a dream.

Justin: If you're eating mushrooms in your sleep, you need to see a physician ASAP. [chuckles]

Sydnee: And the original—the original description of this, which holds true more or less, we'll go through this today, is from 1909. There was a French psychiatrist, Raoul Leeroy, who described what these hallucinations are like, from his own experience.

I'm not sure what induced them. I couldn't find that. I'm sure it's out there somewhere. I didn't want to spend all day trying to find, like, what did Dr. Leeroy do to get hallucinations, or Leroy. It's probably Leroy. He's French.

Justin: It's probably Leroy.

Sydnee: Probably Leroy. But I'm from West Virginia, so he's Dr. Leeroy. Dr. Leeroy said that what's interesting is you've got—they're usually visual, just visual. You see the little people. Sometimes you'll hear them, less common, but sometimes they'll talk to you. And when they do talk to you, he noted that they will have, like, little voices, like Lilliputian voices.

Justin: [in a high-pitched voice] "[unintelligible] the mushrooms."

Sydnee: [in a high-pitched voice] "I'm dancing on your table."

Justin: [chuckles]

Sydnee: And he was the one who called them Lilliputian hallucinations in reference to—

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Gulliver's Travels, of course. He reports that there's a lot of these little people. Like, it's unusual for you to just see one or two. It's usually, like, a whole bunch of them. And they're interacting with the real world. That's a—that's a unique feature.

Justin: Love that.

Sydnee: And that can be true for other hallucinations. It's not—I don't—I don't mean to say it's unique just to this. But there are hallucinations that are more, like, cinematic, we call them. Like you're watching a projection on the wall of something, like two dimensional.

Justin: But this is like they're really in there.

Sydnee: Yes, they are interacting with the world around you. You're

watching them, like, in this—in this instance where let's say you ate the mushrooms. They're dancing across your table or marching in lines, they're interacting with the silverware, they're crawling under the tablecloth. They might be on you.

Justin: *Ah!*

Sydnee: They could climb onto your body.

Justin: I wouldn't like that as much. But up until that point, I was really delighted imagining this.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: I've got to get some of these mushrooms.

Sydnee: They don't usually interact with you much. Like, you can't talk to them.

Justin: Oh. Okay, well...

Sydnee: You get to see them. And they might even climb on you.

Justin: Okay, that's pretty good!

Sydnee: Very rarely do they, like, flip into super large people. There's every—

Justin: Say—

Sydnee: They can become giant—

Justin: Say it again, because I interrupted you, and I think it's so important for everybody to hear this.

Sydnee: Very rarely—

Justin: Rarely.

Sydnee: ...do they switch into super large people.

Justin: But they do! What you're saying, the fact that you're saying it—

Sydnee: It's like—

Justin: ...means at some—at some—some—every once in a while, these little guys will just, like... absolutely hulk out and get giant?

Sydnee: And become giant.

Justin: Cool! But very rarely!

Sydnee: It's, like, 1%. It's, like, very rare.

Justin: Cool, so that makes it—

Sydnee: The vast majority of the time—

Justin: ...extra scary if it happens.

Sydnee: ...they just, yeah, they just stay tiny.

Justin: Good, good, good. Do they look like me? Are they a bunch of little Justins or are they different people?

Sydnee: No, they're—I mean, it's interesting because a lot of the time they're... they're described as, I mean, kind of—like, from the descriptions I was reading, I was picturing, like, David the Gnome. Remember David the Gnome?

Justin: Yes.

Sydnee: Okay. Like, cheerful—

Justin: [sings] "Trolls and witches, and fairy kings! Birds that talk and fish that sing! And if your heart is true—" Come on, Sydnee.

Sydnee and Justin: [sings] "Then you will find it too."

Justin: [sings] "In every wish and dream and—

Sydnee and Justin: [sings] "...happy home, you will find the kingdom of the gnomes!"

Justin: Love the show.

Sydnee: Yes, me too.

Justin: Tom Bosley.

Sydnee: That was a great show.

Justin: Not Tom Bosley. Tom... it was Tom Bosley, yeah.

Sydnee: So, I am not saying that any—none of the descriptions I read did they say they look like David the Gnome. That was just as I was reading those descriptions, that's what I pictured, was a bunch of little gnomes running around.

And they're like, they're friendly and they're colorful. They're all dressed in, like, colorful outfits. And they're sort of, like, running around, like, cheery. Sometimes they're described as almost, like... like luminous beings, like these little, like, glowing or—

Justin: Luminous beans?!

Sydnee: ...shiny or—

Justin: Wait, did you say—

Sydnee: ...sparkly things—

Justin: Did you say—

Sydnee: Like beings.

Justin: Ah.

Sydnee: Not beans. Beings.

Justin: That would be cool. Glowing beans.

Sydnee: [chuckles] In the literature, there have been about 226 case reports since 1909. So, not... Again, and that doesn't mean those are the only 226 times it's ever happened. Certainly it's happened outside of that. But the point is we don't—we don't know a lot about it. I do want to take a moment, because Dr. Leroy, probably, not Leeroy, who described these initially from his own—whatever experience he had with them.

I think it's really interesting. So, he was a French psychiatrist, he was the head of the Neuropsychiatric Center. It was after World War I, so he was treating a lot of casualties from World War I. And he was a teacher to a young resident, André Breton, who would go on to found the Surrealist movement. He left medicine and became an artist and founded—

Justin: Huh.

Sydnee: ...surrealism. Yeah. And André Breton actually drew a portrait of him. I kept finding, as I was trying to search up more about Dr. Leroy, I kept finding this one portrait that exists of him.

And he describes him—because I wanted to know more about this guy, this—I love this idea of this French psychiatrist who was like, "I want to know—understand these hallucinations better, so I'm going to do a psychedelic and have them, and then write about it."

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: I find that fascinating. And in this, the artist describes him in this portrait as, quote, "A strange figure with his blue hair in old crew cut, his clear azure eyes, his cube-like head, his hollow nasolabial pleats, his withered blouse. He is gentle, very clever, blasphemous with elegance and

reads La Croix."

Justin: I'm assuming that that just means he reads, like, the cans.

Sydnee: He reads the cans.

Justin: "Well, dang. I love the little stories they put on here." [chuckles]

Sydnee: So, he—in his original description, he talks about all the reasons you might have these hallucinations. Obviously, intoxication is one of them. He says, like, opiates don't do it, but there are a lot of other substances out there that will.

Justin: Wink.

Sydnee: [laughs] Illness can cause it, like fever, and he lists lots of different illnesses that might lead to a delirious state where you could have this. Alcohol withdrawal was a common thing. So, like, there's lots of different hallucinations we think of. I think everybody always, like, stereotypically thinks it's a pink elephant.

You might also see tiny people in alcohol withdrawal. There were a couple of cases related to, like, somebody who fell down the stairs and hit their head, and had, like, a brain bleed, and then saw little people. Somebody with kidney disease, fasting, delirium, dementia.

Justin: So there's a—

Sydnee: There's a lot of reasons!

Justin: You're saying there's a lot of bad reasons you'd see little people.

Sydnee: In—yes.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: [chuckles] He talks about how—

Justin: So it's not necessarily good. If you see little people, it's not—you shouldn't necessarily be excited and think that you got some drugs. Like you —

Sydnee: No.

Justin: It might be bad.

Sydnee: No, it could be bad. And he—

Justin: Okay. [laughs]

Sydnee: He talks about how in his mind, like, why is this happening. It's, again, related to, like, cultural factors. Across a lot of different cultures and throughout time, fairy tales and stories of little people, whether they be gnomes, elves, sprites, fairies, you know, that is not an uncommon story that we tell children.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And so that idea is implanted in our psyche already. And so it's not weird to think that among the different hallucinations you might have would be little people.

Justin: You could also make the argument that, like... everybody's people. That's the one thing that you can say pretty authoritatively, everybody's people. And so, everybody would hallucinate people. That makes sense. And then you have three options at that point. Too big. Scary. Regular size. Boring. Why even hallucinate it? Really, the only o—

Sydnee: To imagine little people.

Justin: I mean, might as well. Really the only sane—it's the only sane choice. [chuckles]

Sydnee: And like I said, in 2021, there was a study that—like a review that looked back at Leeroy's work from 1909, and then all descriptions of these hallucinations since then, by Jan Dirk Blom. It was published in Neuroscience

and Biobehavioral Reviews.

And basically, what he found was like, it's pretty... this is—like what he said in 1909 holds up. The only thing that was disputed is that Leroy felt that they were usually pleasant, that most of the time people who reported these hallucinations were like, "And it was kind of nice."

Justin: "I liked it."

Sydnee: "They seem like affable little guys."

Justin: "I gotta get some more of these mushrooms. I think I fell in love with one of them."

Sydnee: "It was pretty cute, but—"

Justin: "I proposed."

Sydnee: He said that—I mean, in the—looking at all of the data, only 36% said that they enjoyed it. [chuckles] The rest were not necessarily pleased. And there was a higher proportion that were pretty freaked out by the little people.

Justin: That sounds like—I'm sorry! That just sounds like people who need to adjust their worldview. These are control freaks that can't handle little people running around, and they should just be happy that they get to experience it and not get all freaked out about these little people. Like, calm down.

Sydnee: And again, this is something that we don't understand well yet. In 97% of the cases, they were grounded in the reality around them. So they're interacting with the real world around them, which is, like, a higher-level hallucination.

This is an interesting thing that the brain is doing. Because that's what the question is with this hallucination. What's happening inside the brain to cause it? So, he kind of goes on to—like, we have some studies that show that the early visual cortex is involved. But obviously there's some higher

processes that we're not quite understanding. Like, why is there constancy of size? How can the brain keep them that size? And all of them are that size.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And it—I mean, so it's—there's more happening than we understand. And why is it important to understand? Well, one, there's a lot of different things that can cause it. He lists all the different conditions and intoxication syndromes that can cause it. There's many, many, many. But also, in 38% of the cases that he evaluated, full recovery didn't happen, and 8% died. So—

Justin: From?

Sydnee: Well, from whatever was... Obviously, there's complications. It was a variety of syndromes.

Justin: You should have—I feel like throughout this episode, you probably should have been saying to me, like, "Hold on, Justin. It's not as fun as it sounds." Because you really let me get, I feel like, carried away.

Sydnee: I'm going to get into the—

Justin: And now I know there's an 8% chance that if I see these little—

Sydnee: No.

Justin: ...sons of guns, I'm going to die.

Sydnee: No, this is across all cases of Lilliputian hallucinations, from all causes.

Justin: Sure.

Sydnee: Not mushrooms.

Justin: I wasn't being picky about why I had it, but I understand what

you're saying. Like, as long as I'm safe about it, then I can get the little people to visit in a safe, fun, controlled environment. But there's just—I'm just saying this, like, it's not necessarily always a good thing.

Sydnee: What—no, it is not always a good thing.

Justin: I see "brain tumor" written on your sheet, Sydnee!

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: You could have given me a heads up that maybe it's not always—you know!

Sydnee: I think if—

Justin: David the Gnome!

Sydnee: We're about—

Justin: We sung the theme song together! And you didn't think once to be like, " Well, hold on one second there, Hoops."

Sydnee: We're about to talk about the fun mushrooms now.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: But I just wanted to—like, in that context, it's really—this is an area of science that we don't fully understand yet. And what is happening in the brain has not completely been elucidated. And so the more we understand these hallucinations by—from whatever cause, the more opportunities for medical advancement.

Justin: All right.

Sydnee: So, we're going to talk about the mushrooms that give you these Lilliputian hallucinations. But first, we have to go to the Billing Department.

Justin: Let's go!

[ad break]

Justin: All right, Syd. I'm ready for your elucidation on hallucinations.

Sydnee: So, the reason we understand what we do right now is in large part thanks to Colin Domnauer, who is a PhD student at the University of Utah, who is currently doing this investigative work.

Justin: Nice!

Sydnee: This is in—we—this is, like, hot off the presses.

Justin: Colin, get at us.

Sydnee: Colin, I assume, is a mushroom fan. He seems enthusiastic about these mushrooms.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: He starts the story back in 1934. There were some—and he has researched, specifically, he's been studying this mushroom that we're going to talk about.

There were some visitors to Papua New Guinea who talked about some of the locals were eating a mushroom that caused, quote, "mushroom madness." And specifically, they talked about how they were all seeing little people. Nobody knew what the mushroom was. Nobody knew how it was happening. Nobody understood it. By the '60s, because we were really interested in psychedelics in the '60s—

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: People went and tried to find, like, what is this mushroom? What is in it? Tried to find the psychoactive compound, confirm this is the mushroom that makes you see little people, and this is what's in it that does that. And nobody could figure it out!

Justin: Ugh.

Sydnee: Yeah. We were not—

Justin: What a t—what a tease.

Sydnee: And what adds to the—what's complex about this is, so this is happening in Papua New Guinea, and then in Yunnan, China. Which, by the way, I learned this, 40% of the world's edible fungi are in this part of China.

Justin: Hmm.

Sydnee: So, if you like mushrooms, I would go there.

Justin: 100% of the show's inedible fun-guy is right here.

[both chuckle]

Sydnee: I saw some really, in Colin's articles that he's published, some beautiful pictures of, like, the open air markets where they sell all these varieties of mushrooms. If I liked mushrooms more, I bet it would be very exciting, but I'm just sort of like a... like, I'm okay. I can—I can eat a mushroom.

Justin: I can't hang with those things, man. Can't get into it. I really can't. I can't do it.

Sydnee: I think, I think here in—and I don't know if this is true in all the US, but here in this part of the US, our experiences with mushrooms are largely those sort of mushy, sliced white things that come on pizza sometimes.

Justin: Yes. Bad.

Sydnee: And there are better mushrooms, is what I'm saying. There are much better mushrooms than those.

Justin: I'm certain there are! I remember—you know what? I will say this.

When we used to sometimes get mushrooms in, like, meal kits or whatever, some of those you could crisp up, that's okay.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: It's all right.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, I mean, they're—and I would bet if you went to one of these open-air markets and ate some of these different mushrooms, I bet you'd find one you like. I mean, statistically.

Okay. So, it wasn't until some mycologists—because as of, like, 2014, we still didn't know. We knew that there was a mushroom there that supposedly, because we hear these reports from this part of China, there's a mushroom there where if you don't cook it enough, you're going to see little people.

And everybody's talking about this. "Yeah, that's that mushroom that you gotta cook it thoroughly. Because if you don't cook it thoroughly, it'll make you see little people when you eat it."

And it is not, I should say, it is not a hallucinogenic. Like, it is not a mushroom that you eat for hallucination. Because there are, like, across cultures, there are people who are intentionally interacting with psychedelics all the time, right?

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: In this country and every other. It is important to note, in none of these cultures that we're talking about are people intentionally going and eating this mushroom to hallucinate. They're eating it to eat it, because it's yummy.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: But if you don't cook it enough, an unfortunate side effect is that you can have specifically these hallucinations. And they're describing—

Justin: Well, what's with the judgment? An unfortunate side effect, Sydnee? What if you were trying to... What if you were trying to see little people?

Sydnee: If you wanted to see the little people?

Justin: Yeah! Yeah! Yeah, Sydnee. I've been saying that the whole episode! Are you kidding me?

Sydnee: I'm gonna—I'm gonna tell you. I was gonna wait till the end of the show.

Justin: Okay, I'll wait, I'll—I'll—I'll—I'll wait.

Sydnee: To tell you why you should not try this.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Okay? I will—

Justin: Like let's—

Sydnee: I'll go ahead and preface with don't try this.

Justin: Okay, fine.

Sydnee: But I'll wait till the end of the show to tell you why, in my opinion, you should not. So, there were some mycologists who went to the markets there, purchased some of these mushrooms that the locals said like, "Yeah, be careful. If you don't—if you don't cook those, you will see little people." And that's what they—that was consistent. It wasn't "You will see things." It was "Those mushrooms will make you see little people." [chuckles]

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Specifically. So, they did some DNA sequencing, and it was a brand new species. And so, it's only been within the last decade, really, that we even know what this mushroom is. *Lanmaoa asiatica*, if you're interested, is the mushroom that we're going to talk about.

It is actually really related to the porcini mushroom, which I've also learned is Utah's official state mushroom. So, now we know that. I don't know that we have a state mushroom in West Virginia.

Justin: I don't—I don't know that either. I'll look it up.

Sydnee: It is not closely related to any of the common hallucinogenic mushrooms we have on record so far. So, that's an interesting thing. Like, we know they're hallucinogenic mushrooms, we know the substances that make that happen. But that's not what this is. This is something different.

And again, when Colin went back and looked at, like, people in this province who have been hospitalized because of these hallucinations—because I mean, people go out, they eat at a restaurant, and then all of a sudden they're seeing little people. They're probably going to go seek medical help, right?

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Like, they're not expecting to hallucinate. Because again, you're eating the mushroom just to eat it because it's good. You're not eating it to see things.

Justin: It doesn't appear we have an official mushroom.

Sydnee: Oh, that's unfortunate. But hey, that leaves the space wide open for us to declare one.

Justin: I mean, anything to keep our state legislators busy. Honestly, if that would occupy some of their time, it would be better than what they're doing at the moment. [chuckles]

Sydnee: They couldn't make the pepperoni roll our official state food. I don't think they're going to bother to find an official—

Justin: Yeah, mushroom.

Sydnee: ...state mushroom. Anyway, so, Colin went back to hospital records to look at—like, because people are eating this mushroom, they're becoming distressed by these hallucinations, they're going and seeking medical care. And 96% of them are saying the same thing. "We're seeing little people."

It's a consistent hallucination from this mushroom across different individuals. And they're not necessarily thinking that. Because in a lot of times they didn't realize they were eating something, and they didn't realize this was the mushroom. Like... they're just seeing little people.

Because that's the other thing. If you're eating a mushroom that people say, "Now be careful, it might make you see little people." We've implanted that idea in your head.

Justin: Oh, okay, yeah.

Sydnee: So then of course you're going to hallucinate that. So it's really important that we try to figure out, did everybody expect to see little people when they ate this mushroom or not?

There are references going back to, like, the third century where they talk about in China a, quote, "flesh spirit mushroom," that if you consume it raw allows you to, quote, "see a little person." But I don't know. I mean, so yes, we knew, but we didn't know it was this mushroom. So we don't—

Justin: Mm-hmm?

Sydnee: I mean, at this point, we don't necessarily assume that all these individuals, these 96% of individuals in this part of China who ate this mushroom that was undercooked and then saw little people, expected to see little people ahead of time. Because again, they're not eating it for hallucinogenic purposes.

Justin: We've got to get to these people before they know about the fun little people, and then just hear about it after the fact.

Sydnee: Right.

Justin: Because once they know, it, like, biases the sample.

Sydnee: Well, and this is part of why if you're—if you've listened so far, I'm ruining you as a test subject. We would be terrible test subjects. If we ate this mushroom, we would be expecting to see little people now. So, we can never know if it would work on us.

Justin: I can't believe I—I didn't come to this show expecting to lose something.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: And now it's just taken away from me, like, just like that. [snaps]

Sydnee: And then Colin discovered something else, as he documents.

"Surprisingly, I became aware of yet another independent report of the exact same phenomenon, a mushroom that caused Lilliputian hallucinations, but this time from an entirely different region of the world."

So he went to the Philippines, and there were some indigenous communities there that said they had a mushroom that they called Sedesdem. There's different names. It's Nanda, in Papua New Guinea. It's Jian Shou Qing in Yunnan. So, it's different throughout the world. But they said, "This mushroom makes us see little people, specifically. There's a mushroom here."

Justin: Hmm.

Sydnee: So, in 2024, he went to the Philippines, gathered up some of these mushrooms that make you see little people, took them back to Utah, sequenced their DNA, and found that it is the same freaking mushroom—

Justin: Oh?

Sydnee: ...in the Philippines. So this—

Justin: That's wild!

Sydnee: Yeah! This mushroom grows in multiple places in the world. So far, they haven't—

Justin: It's almost like a—that's, like, a different kind of study, right? Is that like... like, because you're talking about studying a populace rather than individual people, right? Is that like... It's, like, a different kind of research, right? Is there a different kind of data?

Sydnee: Well, I mean, what he's doing is he's—these are comple—these are two different cultures.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Who wouldn't necessarily have the knowledge, like, ahead of time. I mean, because again, everybody who listens to this podcast is going to know this mushroom might cause you to see little people, and so I've biased the sample. In this case—

Justin: God, Colin's going to really struggle to find people at this point, I mean, if it's—if all the Sawbones listeners are out.

Sydnee: What you'd have to do is find people who, I mean—who ideally wouldn't even know they're eating a mushroom. But the ethics of that are pretty dicey. [chuckles]

Justin: Oh, I'd be furious. Oh, I'd be furious. What? *Ugh!*

Sydnee: If you—if you—I mean, if you really—

Justin: What's this?

Sydnee: Just to—I'm not—please don't do this.

Justin: It'd be like Bingo, the time they [crosstalk].

Sydnee: You won't get IRB approval. Don't do this. But if you had two

samples, and nobody knew about this mushroom, and you gave them mushroom soup, and one of them had the mushroom in it that was undercooked and the other one had the mushroom in it that was completely cooked, and then you just asked them what happened.

But I mean, again, you're exposing people to a psychedelic substance that we still don't know what it is, and also you didn't tell them. So I don't... I... ethically, I have problems with this.

Justin: Not worth it. Because then at some point you gotta be like, "So, seeing any little... stuff?"

Sydnee: "So, what's happening?"

Justin: [chuckles] Anything—

Sydnee: "How are you doing over there?"

Justin: "How are you doing?!" [laughs]

Sydnee: "How are you doing?" I mean—

Justin: "How was the pasta?!"

Sydnee: You could design a—

Justin: "Did you like it?!"

Sydnee: You could design it where you tell them you're going to be—you are going to be potentially, like, ingesting an intoxicating substance. Like, you could—I don't know.

Justin: This is a tricky study. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Anyway, it's a tricky study. I'm sure there's a way to do it that would be ethically coherent and where the participants are appropriately told what's going on.

But at the same time, we still don't—this is the big thing. We have revealed, and he talks about this, there are no traces of any known psychoactive compounds in these mushrooms. We don't know what is making people hallucinate in these mushrooms.

In other mushrooms that we—like, we talked about psilocybin. We know in a lot of cases, like, oh, well, it's—this is the compound that's in there that makes you hallucinate. Because then we can take it out and give it to you in a pill or whatever, yeah.

But in this case, we don't know what it is. We're still studying that. But Colin's on the case. His research is ongoing. He's giving this mushroom to mice. [chuckles]

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: To see what happens.

Justin: Do they see little mice or little people?

Sydnee: I don't know. I don't know—

Justin: That'd be wild.

Sydnee: Now, their behavior does change. So, something's happening, but I don't know how we figure out if they're seeing little mice. That would be difficult. But we know it's doing something. Like, we know that this has a psychoactive compound in it of some kind.

Justin: If it was me, I'd be really scared. So maybe we should just see if they look really scared. Because if I saw a bunch of little mice, I'd flip.

Sydnee: Yeah, that would be really—see? And now you've implanted that idea. You should never eat this mushroom.

Justin: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: He's mapping the evolutionary history of the mushroom, creating a

global database of the species, because they exist different places in the world. He's found relatives in North America that we don't know are psychoactive, but it's not very commonly eaten. So it's possible that it is and we just don't eat it enough for anybody to have said like, "Hey, I think that mushroom made me see little people."

So, there are mushrooms like this all over the world. And why—this is the point I was getting at with some of my earlier bumper stuff. Why is this so important? Well, I would say from a very, I don't know, philosophical sense, we have described less than 5% of the world's fungi. There's so much out there we don't know.

Justin: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And I just think knowledge for the sake of knowledge is still important. So, there's so much we don't know, and Colin is adding brand new things to our understanding of the world.

Justin: You're saying I shouldn't waste time with the little person mushroom. I should get out there and start eating other mushrooms, and helping out—

Sydnee: No, I—

Justin: ...our knowledge.

Sydnee: Please do not go out and randomly eat mushrooms you find, please. I mean, I'm not saying, like, at the grocery store. [chuckles] Certainly those—

Justin: I am.

Sydnee: [chuckles] Those mushrooms—

Justin: Trust me. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Those mushrooms should be fine. I'm saying don't go—like, I could go out onto our—into the woods around our house right now and find a

bunch of different mushrooms. I would not eat any of them. And I do some foraging. I still won't trust myself to identify mushrooms. I'm not that good at it. And some of them will kill you. So, please don't just go randomly eat mushrooms.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: My point is that scientists studying mushrooms and telling us more about fungi in general, it's just an area we don't know a lot about, so there's always room for more discovery. And then the other purpose of this, when these hallucinations occur outside of this weird mushroom, they don't always resolve, and sometimes can be, you know, quite devastating to the individual.

So, the more we understand what's in this mushroom that causes these hallucinations, the more we might understand what it's doing in the brain, what parts of the brain it's interacting with. And then from there, maybe we can develop a new medication specifically for these kinds of hallucinations. You know, not just Lilliputian, but these sort of, like, 3D reality grounded hallucinations that come from the visual cortex.

Like, maybe we make a whole new medication that will help patients with conditions that cause hallucinations forever, you know? So, I mean, it's hard to tell where the research will lead. At the end of this, I promise to tell you why I think you shouldn't do this.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: Okay, Justin. Let's say you ate a bowl of mushroom soup that contained an undercooked version of this mushroom today.

Justin: Okay.

Sydnee: How long do you think the hallucinations of the little people might continue?

Justin: For at least an hour, maybe. Maybe 15... 15 minutes to an hour.

Sydnee: Would you believe me if I said they might go on a week?

Justin: No.

Sydnee: They might go on a week.

Justin: Really? That would be annoying, I think.

Sydnee: And they may come and go. It may be that you think they're gone, and then they come back. I'm not saying they're intractable, that if you eat this mushroom, you'll hallucinate forever. But...

Justin: I'd get into some sort of Mouse Hunt scenario. I'd be chasing 'em around the kitchen with a broom.

Sydnee: They do go on longer than you would think.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: People, as I said, while Dr. Leroy found them very pleasurable, there are plenty of individuals who find them very upsetting. They're very distressing. And so—

Justin: Control freaks.

Sydnee: And I don't know about you, but I don't have a week to spend chasing, you know, little people around the house that I hallucinated, or trying to interact with them. I don't—I don't have a week like that.

So, my advice would be, let's not. We don't know what's in it yet. I don't know, maybe someday we'll know what's in it. And like you said, we'll synthesize it into a pill and then we'll say like, hey, you can take this much, and you'll just feel good for a few hours. But we're not there right now. So, if you do find these mushrooms, cook them fully.

Whatever your—I read that in some of the restaurants, they'll give them to you in, like, a hot pot. And they'll say, "Don't touch this for, like, the next—" They'll put a timer down. "Don't touch this for this many minutes, because

those mushrooms are in there. And when the timer goes off, the mushrooms will be safe to eat, but don't eat it before then."

So, like, follow advice like that. Please don't eat these mushrooms raw. I don't think it's a good idea. We don't—we don't know enough about it yet.

Justin: Yeah.

Sydnee: Don't be like Dr. Leroy. Be like Colin. Colin, as far as I know, has not tried to experience the hallucinations for himself. At least that he's told us.

Justin: We are doing a lot of assuming there. Maybe Colin just didn't write it down.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Justin: Hey, thank you so much for listening to our podcast. If you want a Sawbones sticker with our new logo, you can go to mcelroymerch.com, and you can pick one up, or maybe more than one, if you want. Thank you to The Taxpayers for the use of their song "Medicines" as the intro and outro of our program. And thank you so much to you for listening and being here. Thanks to Jason for—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Justin: ...indirectly suggesting the episode.

Sydnee: And Carrie for echoing that.

Justin: Yeah. And that's going to do it for us, until next time. My name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

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

["Medicines" by The Taxpayers plays]

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