

WHO KILLED SANTA CLAUS?



A Murder Mystery Pack
by
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Customer Taster

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Who Killed Santa Claus?

A Murder Mystery

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Lord Barnett Prime is head of the Prime Dynasty, once a proud family and founders of PRIME superstores. But because of his dissolute ways and gambling habits, Barnett has run the company into the ground and had to put it into receivership. All members of the Prime family lost considerable amounts of money and were forced from their homes into sharing Barnett's palatial home, Prime Place. Barnett became a tyrannical master, lording it over his family, particularly at Christmas when he took great delight in humiliating them all. Finally, one of them had had enough! Enter DCI Sherbert Holmes to solve the dastardly deed.

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About the pack

The full pack should provide everything you need to stage your own Murder Mystery.

It is intended for use at a three-course sit down meal where the principle characters will act out a set of events to the assembled guests.

Please remember from the outset that this pack is intended for an **improvised performance**, although there are set lines for some characters.

Your cast must use the information provided to develop their characters, their backstories, and improvise the action when and where the situation arises.

They must stay in character from the moment the guests arrive until the plot is complete and the murderer is revealed.

This means that your performers are less constrained and restricted; they can react and interact with each other and the guests at will and have a lot of fun!

The pack includes:

- **A plot overview.** [*Extract here.*]
- **General staging notes** on how to plan your murder mystery event. [*Extract here.*]
- **Character overviews** including **motive** and **opportunity** to murder the victim. [*Extract here.*]
- **Questions** to be asked by DCI Holmes and **responses** for each character. [*Extract here.*]
- **Denouement** by DCI Holmes.
- Brief Production Notes, including a basic props list.
- Separate '**Whodunnit**' **sheets** for guests to complete are also included with this pack.

Suggested timetable

7.00 pm	Guests arrive and are greeted by family members at the door.
7.15 pm	Introductory scene in which Barnett gives presents to his family.
7:20 pm	Cast mingle with guests.
7:50 pm	Death occurs in full view of guests.
7:55 pm	First course served, cast circulate round tables.
8:20 pm	Main course served, arrival of DCI Sherbert Holmes.
8.45 pm	Interrogation by Holmes.
9:05 pm	Questions asked by guests.
9.20 pm	Cast leave, guests complete 'Whodunnit' forms, dessert served.
9.45 pm	Cast return, denouement.
10.00 pm	End.

Plot Overview

Family members and staff present at party:

Lord Barnett Prime: Patriarch of the Prime dynasty.
Lady Isobel Prime: Lord Prime's wife.
Alexander Prime: Lord Prime's eldest son.
Deidre Prime: Alexander's wife.
Merrie Prime: Lord Prime's daughter.
Delia Cummings: Merrie's partner.
Jeramia Prime: Lord Prime's youngest son.
Simons: Family Butler.
Honey: Lord Prime's maid.

Also in attendance:

DCI Sherbert Holmes
Master of Ceremonies

Lord Barnett Prime is the son of Lord Augustus Prime, who in turn was the son of Oberon Prime. Oberon founded the Prime store chain, having started life as a barrow boy in the East End of London, and expanded it to open several grocery shops in the London area. His son Augustus took over on Oberon's death and expanded the company into the supermarket simply called PRIME. So successful was he that Prime stores grew rapidly and Augustus made a huge fortune. Furthermore, he was knighted for his service to industry.

He had just one son, Barnett, whom he idolised, pandered to and generally spoiled rotten. Barnett turned out to be a weak, dissolute and quite brainless man. He married Isobel Kingsley, whose father, Lord Kingsley, thought the match would bring some much-needed cash into the Kingsley coffers. Barnett and Isobel produced three children: Alexander, Merrie and Jeremia.

After Augustus' death, Prime stores was taken over by Barnett, who proceeded to run it into the ground to such an extent that by 2002 it went into liquidation. Shareholders lost fortunes, including the members of the Prime family, all of whom had major stakes in the company. Such was the extent of their loss that they had to sell their homes and most of their worldly goods. Barnett, however, managed to stash away a considerable fortune (gained by nefarious dealings and hidden in several Swiss bank accounts) and survived the catastrophe almost unscathed except for his good name... something he didn't really give a damn about.

In an apparent gesture of goodwill, Barnett offered to house the entire family on his Flintshire castle estate, Prime Place, a considerable property of some five thousand acres including a castle and several crofters cottages. They gratefully accepted - not that they had much choice - and moved into the estate, occupying the cottages and, in Alexander's case, the three-bedroomed gatehouse.

Not long afterward, Barnett sacked his entire estate staff, except his butler and maid, and told his family that they must now work the estate for him in return for his generosity in giving them rent-free accommodation. He did allow Merrie Prime to continue to work at the local hospital as a pharmacist, as long as she provided him with free medication when he needed it.

He made their lives an absolute misery, constantly reminding them that they were there under his sufferance and he could kick them out at any time if they did not toe the line. He instituted the family Christmas party tradition, whereby the whole family gathered in the castle's great hall on Christmas Day dressed in some sort of Christmas outfit, with Barnett himself playing Santa Claus. He would dole out humiliating presents to each member of the family and spend the rest of the evening further humiliating them by making them play stupid games and telling them how useless they all were.

Barnett, however, suffers from several ailments; very recently he has been diagnosed with Alzheimers, although it is at a very early stage. He discovered that there are trials taking place of low level nicotine patches thought to stave off the effects of dementia and, against his doctor's advice, he has joined the trial and is using the patches. He has severe gout in his right foot, which he keeps heavily bandaged and which pains him enormously, as well as a weak heart and high blood pressure caused by years of heavy smoking and little exercise. His medicines are kept in the main house in a locked cabinet for which only Isobel, Simons and Alexander have a key. His doctor warned him that if he did not stop smoking, he would die in the very near future, so he has given up cigarettes and taken up the new craze of vaping. A vaper hangs from his lips most of the time!

This Christmas, however, somebody has had enough...

General Staging Notes

Casting/Rehearsal

You should hold as many rehearsals as required according to the experience of your cast.

Your chosen performers should each be issued with a copy of this entire pack.

The first rehearsal should concentrate on reading through this pack and getting a feel for how the event is structured and the role that each character has to play in the plot.

Before the second rehearsal, the performers should further prepare their backstories using the basic character analysis sheets as a base. At the second rehearsal, these should be read out by each performer in character.

As it is impossible to rehearse the whole event without that all-important audience to react to, you should concentrate on cementing motives and relationships within the group. These can be rehearsed by the performers, more to prove they can improvise and keep up a convincing performance than word for word content!

DCI Holmes can use a notepad from which to read the set questions and denouements.

Facilities required for the performers

The performers need a separate private room for their use. They will use this prior to the event to get changed and prepared and will use the room during the event where they can exchange notes and discuss any change of tactics. The murder victims will also use this room once deceased!

It would be sensible to check the facilities before the event to make sure sufficient space is available to stage the “Interrogation” by DCI Holmes.

Recommended event format

The evening works best if structured round a sit-down meal. If the event is being staged in a hotel, this may be a formal, served, multi-course meal, but if the event is staged in a hall or private venue, you could lay on a simpler meal or even a table buffet. Ideally, there should be a table-free area in which cast and guests can mix during pre-dinner drinks, before sitting down to the meal in an area set aside for that purpose. If this is not possible, guests can be shown to their tables immediately.

Character Overview [*Extracts*]

Lord Barnett Prime

Patriarch of the family. A nasty man, he's filthy rich but, like Scrooge, hoards his money and keeps the family members poor. Abuses all of them both mentally and, in the case of his wife and children, physically.

Barnett has been diagnosed with the onset of Alzheimer's and, through his many contacts, has been accepted onto a medical trial of low dosage nicotine patches thought to have a beneficial effect on Alzheimers. He has gout brought on through excessive drinking and is on medication for it (Diclofenac) which should not be mixed with alcohol. He also has high blood pressure, for which he takes Amlopodine and Ramapril. He is an addicted vaper, using brands with the highest nicotine content. He gave up cigarettes some two years ago on the advice of his doctor and took up vaping, despite medical advice not to because there is still some nicotine in vaping which could bring on a heart attack. Barnett laughed at the idea and continued anyway just as he continued to drink alcohol despite his gout and the Diclofenac.

He is having an affair with his maid Honey, to whom he has promised a considerable sum of money in his will.

He should be abusive in the extreme throughout the pre-drinks session both to his family and to the guests. He should appear dressed as a grotesque Santa Claus, right foot heavily bandaged and therefore using a walking stick, helped by Simons the butler. Should anyone knock his foot, his outrage should be extreme!

Victim.

Lady Isobel Prime

Barnett's wife. Under his thumb but can hold her own against him because of her influential family. Former socialite, daughter of Lord Kingsley and Lady Margery Kingsley. Isobel was used as a pawn by her parents who, despite their titles, owed a considerable amount of cash to Barnett. Barnett agreed to wipe out the debt, provided Isobel was given to him in marriage.

She has never loved her husband and indeed finds him quite repulsive. He treated her abominably from the beginning of her married life, demanding sex whenever he wanted it and not caring what she wanted. Isobel has type two diabetes for which she needs insulin injections. Her insulin and the syringes are kept in the same cupboard as Barnett's medicines.

She's having an ongoing affair with Simons the butler, whom she loves dearly. Barnett is unaware of this affair.

Motive

(...)

Opportunity

(...)

Narrative Arc

Please note that non-guilty parties *must* tell the truth, although they do not have to volunteer information if not asked for it.

Guests (the audience!) are regarded as friends/acquaintances of Lord Barnett.

At one end of the room, eight chairs should be set out in a semi-circle.

Meet and Greet

As guests arrive, Honey and Simons serve them drinks at the entrance point. The MC gives an introduction:

MC: Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. Lord Barnett Prime welcomes you to his annual Christmas bash and hopes that you will enjoy the party. The first forty-five minutes or so will be devoted to socialising with the family. They will give information that may or may not be relevant to future proceedings. Please feel free to ask them anything you like but do remember that any guilty party can and will lie as they please, whereas all innocent parties *must* tell the truth. The key is to *listen* and *observe*. Thank you.

Characters enter, after a pause between them, as follows:

Deidre Prime with Alexander Prime
Jeramia Prime with Isobel Prime
Merrie Prime and Delia Cummings

The family will identify themselves and their relationship to Lord Barnett. It is vitally important that the cast assume their identities immediately and stay strictly in character throughout.

The characters should then chat to guests and disseminate information (or, in the case of the guilty, misinformation). After around ten minutes, Barnett should arrive in a wheelchair done up as a sleigh with his right foot heavily bandaged and pushed by Simons. Barnett is vaping on entry and should be carrying a bag containing wrapped presents as follows:

A flowerpot and packet of seeds for Alexander
A cricketer's 'box' for Deirdre
An empty drug prescription sheet for Jeramia
A grotesque mask for Merrie
A packet of fruit-flavoured condoms for Honey
A poster of a semi-naked man for Delia
A CD of Jeeves and Wooster for Simons
An ice cube tray for Isobel

Barnett is full of Christmas bonhomie, shouting out "Merry Christmas" and throwing out sweets to the guests. He should be pushed to the centre of the room where he will declare that he has presents for the family. He hands out presents in the following order (each being given to him by Simons) with a caustic remark. Each family member is made to come to him in order to receive the present and is made to open it in front of him, with him giving the following comments:

Barnett:

Alexander, a flower pot and seeds to try and grow yourself some balls.

Deirdre, a cricketer's box to put your balls in, as you are clearly the man in your family.

Jeramia, a prescription sheet so you can try and get your daily kick from the NHS. I'm not paying for your disgusting habit any longer.

Merrie, a mask to improve that god-awful face of yours, if indeed that is possible.

Honey, a packet of fruit flavoured condoms, she particularly likes strawberry.

Delia, a large poster picture of [*a semi naked he-man - your choice!*] to remind you what women are for.

Simons, a CD of Jeeves and Wooster so that you can see just what an arrogant prick you are.

Last but not least, for my dear wife Isobel, an ice cube tray, as she has been a lamppost-shaped iceberg in bed ever since our wedding day.

Barnett: One other small thing. As you all know, my will states that all my title, this mansion and a goodly proportion of my money will go to my eldest son Alexander, with the remainder equally shared out amongst all my children on the occasion of my death. I have, however, now decided that my family are a bunch of useless idiots so first thing in the morning I intend to change my will accordingly. From tomorrow all my worldly goods will go to the 4H charity... the Hyde Heath Hamsters Home, with the exception of ten thousand pounds for Simons who is useless but occasionally helpful and one hundred thousand pounds to Honey for services rendered above and beyond the call of duty. Now then, on with the party!

The family are shocked and a general melee ensues.

Barnett must complain bitterly and to all and sundry about his gout, high blood pressure and heart condition, telling people he has to take medicines for each and that he is trialling nicotine patches for his Alzheimers.

During the next 20 minutes, the following actions must take place in the following order:

- 1) Barnett throws his vape away, shouting that that particular brand is crap.
- 2) Alexander knocks Barnett's gouty foot. He screams and calls for his medicine. Merrie leaves the room and returns with a bottle of medicine marked DIPLOFENIC written in biro on a stuck-on label, giving Barnett a spoonful then leaving the bottle in a conspicuous place for the guests to see
- 3) Deidre must take Alexander aside and talk to him animatedly. She hands him a small bottle and he must then leave the room immediately.
- 4) Barnett must shout at Merrie to bring him a drink. She leaves and returns with a glass of sherry. Barnett is seen to be the only person drinking sherry.
- 5) Alexander returns.
- 6) Barnett shouts for his vape.
- 7) Isobel shouts at Simons to get Barnett's vape.
- 8) Simons leaves the room.
- 9) Jeramia leaves the room and returns with a plate of sausage rolls, one of which he gives to Barnett, who eats it.
- 10) Simons returns with a new vape, which he gives to Barnett, who starts to smoke it.
- 11) Barnett shouts out for mince pies. Delia leaves the room and returns with a single mince pie, which she gives to Barnett, who eats it.

The party should continue for another ten minutes or so, then Barnett should cough, splutter, hold his chest and collapse unconscious. The family should gather around him, then Alexander should explain to the guests that his father has been taken ill and the family will be taking him from the room. He is then wheeled off to a side room out of sight, followed by the whole cast.

First Course Served

(After food is served, cast return and circulate amongst the tables. They reiterate all the previous clues and (mis) information whilst expressing sorrow at the incident and all stating quite clearly that it had nothing to do with them. Police sirens sound in the background as the course draws to a close. When the food is finished and plates are being cleared, Detective Chief Inspector Sherbert Holmes enters. Holmes calls for quiet and then speaks as follows...)

Holmes: Ladies and Gentlemen, please remain calm and maintain your composure. We've been called to an incident at this address and it will be necessary for you all to remain here until further notice. My team and I will start investigations immediately. Family members and staff, please come with me.

(Family and staff follow Holmes from the room.)

Main Course Served

(The main course is served here, during which DCI Holmes is seen to come and go between the main hall and back room receiving information. Once the course is served, Holmes returns and makes the following announcement.)

Holmes: Ladies and gentlemen, I regret to have to inform you that Lord Barnett Prime has died. It would seem that Lord Prime has ingested a substance that interfered with the other medication he was taking and caused a massive and fatal heart attack. I further believe that this unknown substance was deliberately given to him at some time during the last forty or so minutes. I am now therefore treating this as a murder investigation and this room is now a crime scene. Nobody is to leave other than for natural reasons without my permission. I suspect the perpetrator is among the family and staff and would now ask that they return for questioning.

(Family and servants come to the front and sit in the semi-circle of chairs previously prepared.)

Holmes: Mr Alexander Prime, please step forward.

[There follows a series of scripted questions with improvised answers based on the character briefs.]

Just Desserts

MC: Ladies and Gentlemen, whilst the dessert is served, please complete your Whodunnit forms.

(Once complete, Whodunnit forms are collected by the MC. After this, Holmes leads the dishevelled suspects back.)

Holmes: I have completed my examination of the suspects and the evidence, and I believe that my team and I have discovered the method used to murder Lord Prime....

[Holmes completes the scripted denouement, going through means and motives, finally revealing whodunnit. Handcuffs ensue.]

(After a few seconds all return for a bow. At this point, MC will announce the winner of the competition - the team whose Whodunnit sheet answer was closest to the truth.)