


**ZOO**   
**DETECTIVE**  
**A Murder Mystery**  
**By Barry Wood**



*Published by Lazy Bee Scripts*

**Customer Taster**

# **Zoo Detective**

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## About The Pack

'Zoo Detective' is a Murder Mystery farce designed to be played by 10 actors (5F, 4M and 1 Either).

### *Structure*

This murder mystery pack contains:

- **Organiser's Overview** (*extract here*)
- **Full Script** (*extract here*)
- **Character Description and Accusation Sheet** (for the audience to complete)
- **Quiz Sheet** (for the audience to complete)
- **Quiz Sheet with Answers and Tie-Breaker** (for the Commentator)

### *Organiser's Overview Contents*

- Introduction
- Event Guide (for putting on a murder mystery evening)
- Timing
- Character Overviews
- Plot Overview
- Production Notes
  - Set
  - Lighting
  - Sound Effects
  - Props
  - Costume

## Synopsis

After the unexplained deaths of several animals, Hamilton Zoo's head of security, Ian Collingham, decides to investigate. Inspired by the only detective he can think of that wears glasses, he attempts to solve the biggest case of his career.

## Event Guide

It is suggested that this murder mystery is performed with the audience having a catered-for meal. This doesn't have to be anything fancy – a ploughman's would work well, for example. Although it might be worth checking beforehand if any actual ploughmen will be attending; they'd probably be sick of the sight of cheese, pickle and pâté. Alternatively, the audience could bring their own picnic.

A Master of Ceremonies is not needed, as the Commentator within the script will instruct the audience as to what is happening, and when.

Audience interrogation of the actors is not required, as all the evidence is within the script. Of course, this does rely on the actors knowing their lines well. If something unfortunate should happen to the prompt (more about this later), then the evening could become even more of a farce than intended.

If serving food, the audience will obviously be sitting around tables, with extra room set aside for the parking of ploughs. Although it is suggested that the ploughmen leave their oxen outside. Each table could comprise a team that can discuss the evidence and clues delivered by the actors from the script.

On second thoughts, maybe ploughmen shouldn't be allowed to attend at all. With their fussiness regarding the food and their farm equipment taking up space that could be used for extra tables, they're probably more trouble than they're worth.

Accusation and quiz sheets can be placed on each table before the start of the performance. Alternatively, they could be incorporated into a show programme. It is suggested that pens and paper also be provided for each table. Within the script, the Commentator will instruct the audience when to complete the sheets. For a smaller audience, rather than giving the table an accusation sheet, they could work individually and have one each.

A prize could be given for the table or individual who gives the explanation closest to that delivered in the final scene. As Jelly Babies are mentioned several times throughout the script, the prize could simply be several boxes of these. Other things such as chimpanzees and boa constrictors are also mentioned several times, but would probably not make suitable prizes.

A separate prize for the quiz winners can also be given. This could be an envelope containing a National Lottery scratchcard where the top prize is £250,000. This would enable the slightly misleading announcement by the Commentator that "for those of you who enter the quiz, you'll be in with a chance of winning two hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

The organiser will need to decide who will read and mark the answer sheets. This could be carried out by the Commentator, who has just over 20 minutes while the final scene is being performed. When the winners are announced, there may also be an opportunity to read out any of the audience's particularly amusing or ridiculous theories regarding the murders.

## Timing

- Act 1 – allow 55 to 60 minutes.
- Interval – suggested 40 minutes.
- Act 2, Scenes 1 and 2 – allow 15 to 20 minutes.
- Break – 10 minutes to fill in accusation sheets and complete quiz.
- Act 2, Scene 3 (the denouement) – allow 20 to 25 minutes.
- Quiz answers, followed by prize-giving for solution and quiz – allow 10 to 15 minutes.

If doors open 20 minutes before the start of proceedings for the audience to get seated, get drinks, etc., the whole evening should last about 3 hours.

## Character Overviews

There are five female and four male roles, plus the role of Commentator, which isn't gender-specific.

**Commentator** – Male or female. This character's lines can be read from a script. Ideal for any actor who does not like learning lines (probably most). They appear in front of curtain to introduce the show and before the final scene. The Commentator also speaks briefly at the beginning of many of the other scenes. These short comments could be made side stage, or as a recording, like the commentary in a documentary.

**Ian Collingham** – Bespectacled head of security at Hamilton Zoo, aged 30-60. Frustrated detective. Takes himself a little too seriously. Going through an acrimonious divorce and has a soft spot for Sheila.

**Miriam Hamilton** – Managing director of Hamilton Zoo, aged 40+. Mother of Matt. Speaks with quite a posh accent. Determined to keep the zoo running, but is she willing to kill for it?

**Kate** – Apprentice zookeeper, aged 18-30. Has a troubled past but wants to put that behind her. Loves her job and is eager to learn, but desperate to move from the aviaries to the ape house. She once kicked a llama, but nobody's perfect.

**Carl** – Zoo volunteer, aged 60+. Started helping out at the zoo after his wife Vicky died. Vicky loved the zoo animals but, being a kleptomaniac, regularly tried to steal the smaller creatures. Carl is hiding something, but unlike his wife, it's not a terrapin down his bra.

**Sheila** – Head of finance at the zoo, aged 50+. Has a minor problem with alcohol, and used to run a business catering for people with a bizarre fetish. Secretly in love with Ian. Has a good heart, but not so big in the brains department.

**Matt Hamilton** – Zookeeper and Miriam's son, aged 18-30. Grumpy, with a sense of entitlement. Not particularly fond of animals, and likes Kate even less.

**Peter Wren** – The zoo's director of conservation, aged 30-60. Highly intelligent, middle-aged bore with a gambling problem.

**Martha Leakey** – Gift shop sales assistant, age 40+. There are rumours that Martha used to be an international assassin but had to take the job in a gift shop when she got shot in the eye. This could explain why one of her eyes is a bit twitchy. Loves Jelly Babies, but not so keen on people.

**Lottie Baker** – The zoo's resident vet, aged 25-55. Intelligent and caring, but wondering whether to euthanise her sick mother. Lottie loves Coca-Cola and likes to quote their advertising slogans whenever possible.

## **Plot Overview**

Zoo Detective is set in the present and takes place in the staffroom of Hamilton Zoo. Miriam, worried that the zoo set up by her father is struggling financially, has decided to make some redundancies. Head of security Ian becomes suspicious about the disappearance of an aardvark and the demise of a boa constrictor. After further deaths, Ian holds a staff meeting and explains his theory that there's a serial killer at large, murdering animals. He then interrogates the suspects but his investigation fails dramatically.

At this point it's time for the audience to deliberate on the proceedings and complete the accusation sheets, then the play continues with the final scene.

## **Production Notes**

### ***Set***

The set is the staffroom of Hamilton Zoo. All the action occurs on this one set. The only exceptions to this are when the Commentator comes on in front of curtain, or for the mini-scenes which take place either in front of curtain or with the character(s) sitting on a couple of chairs in front of the set with a spotlight on them.

Two large rectangular tables with four chairs each are required: one stage right and one stage left, with a gap between the two. Upstage, along the back and maybe off-centre, is a longer table or countertop with a microwave and kettle on it, plus other kitchenware – a mug tree with mugs, pots for tea and coffee, etc. Under the table/countertop is a small fridge and bin. There could be a large potted plant in one corner and a whiteboard or flipchart on the back wall, with zoo-related comments on it.

# Zoo Detective

[Extract from the script]

## Act 1

### Prologue

(Commentator enters in front of curtain.)

**Commentator:** (Reading from a script.) Good evening, everyone and welcome to [*drama group*]'s latest production, our murder mystery – Zoo Detective. I would normally say sit back, relax, and enjoy the show, but I'm afraid you can't relax – because there's a killer on the loose. And it's your job to work out who that is. And in case anyone's worried, I'd just like to point out that, although the play is set in a zoo, there are no wild animals in tonight's performance. We won't be making the same mistake as [*rival drama group*] did when they put on Zoo Detective last year. **(Beat.)** You may have heard what happened; a polar bear escaped from the dressing room and ate Frank, the prompt. It was horrendous; not only did Frank die horribly, but without his help, everyone forgot their lines and the audience couldn't work out who the killer was. Although in the eyes of Frank's wife, the polar bear was pretty guilty.

On each table, you'll find a brief description of all the characters, an accusation form, and a quiz sheet. We'll ask you to complete these before the final scene, when the identity of the murderer or murderers will be revealed. Then at the very end of the performance, we'll hand out prizes after announcing which table came the closest to solving the mystery.

And for those who enter the quiz, you'll be in with a chance of winning two hundred and fifty thousand pounds – seriously.

Ladies and gentlemen, don't relax, but sit back and enjoy – Zoo Detective.

### Scene 1

(This is the first of several 'mini-scenes', in which one or two characters speak directly to the audience, like a documentary. They can be either in front of the curtains or sitting on chairs in front of the set. If the latter, then a spotlight on them, with the set behind in darkness.)

(Miriam and Sheila sit facing the audience.)

**Miriam:** (To audience.) Hamilton Zoo was set up by my father, Norman, in the sixties. He was a truly inspirational man, a lifelong wildlife enthusiast and keen naturalist. Sadly, he died just a few months after the zoo opened its doors to the public in 1972.

**Sheila:** What actually happened to him? I'd heard it was some sort of accident.

**Miriam:** It was awful, Sheila. He was mucking out the dingoes when Dave, the alpha male, attacked him. Poor Dad didn't stand a chance.

**Sheila:** (Tentatively.) Was he naked at the time?

**Miriam:** My dad?

**Sheila:** Yes. Presumably that would have made him easier prey.

**Miriam:** Why would he have been naked?

**Sheila:** You said he was a keen naturalist.

(Pause.)

**Miriam:** (Suddenly realising.) A naturalist is a person who has an in-depth knowledge of plants and animals. You're thinking of naturalist. My dad didn't wander about naked.

**Sheila:** Oh, I'm sorry – I always get those two mixed up.

**Miriam:** (To audience.) Anyway, after my father died, everyone thought we'd have to sell the zoo. My mother was not business-minded and she had two young children to raise. But knowing what it meant to my dad, somehow, with the help of family and friends, she managed to turn Hamilton Zoo into a huge success. **(Beat.)** In recent years, though, the zoo's been struggling; costs are increasing but attendance is down.

**Sheila:** I blame David Attenborough.

**Miriam:** Not this again.

**Sheila:** If he didn't produce such incredible wildlife programmes, more people would be visiting us; I'm convinced of it. I mean, why bother coming to see animals in cages and small enclosures...

**Miriam:** They're not small.

**Sheila:** Why bother when they can stay at home and watch on their fifty-inch ultra-HD TVs, newly hatched iguanas literally running for their lives across a beach, as snakes pour out of cracks in the rocks to chase them down. How can we compete with that?

**Miriam:** We're not competing with that. We offer a different animal experience.

**Sheila:** Bloody David Attenborough – he's got a lot to answer for.

**Miriam:** If anything, programmes like that would be more likely to encourage people to visit zoos. We're just going to have to be more creative in order to attract people.

**Sheila:** (**Thinking.**) What about special visitor days? Like (**careful to pronounce it properly**) a naturalist's day.

**Miriam:** You mean naturalist, Sheila?

**Sheila:** No. Hear me out. We could have a day dedicated to naked visitors.

**Miriam:** Surely that wouldn't be very popular?

**Sheila:** Why not? You've heard of nudist beaches and nudist camps?

**Miriam:** Yes. But you don't get nudist zoos.

**Sheila:** Exactly. There's a gap in the market.

**Miriam:** I'm not convinced. And anyway, how many days a year would it be warm enough to wander around naked? This is North Yorkshire.

**Sheila:** They could wear coats.

## Scene 2

(The staffroom of Hamilton Zoo. There are two sets of tables and chairs. Along the back is a longer table, with a microwave, kettle, mug tree, pots for tea and coffee, etc. Under the table is a small fridge and bin. There is a whiteboard on the back wall, with zoo-related comments on it. Sheila, Matt and Kate are sitting around a table. Kate and Matt look at their mobile phones intermittently. Sheila has a mug of coffee and holds an envelope with a list of names on it.)

**Commentator:** (**Voice only.**) It's early morning in the zoo staffroom and Sheila is making a collection for Martha, the first of Miriam's redundancy casualties.

**Matt:** (**To Sheila.**) So how much am I supposed to put in?

**Sheila:** It's up to you. Don't feel you have to put anything in if you don't want to.

**Matt:** (**Rummaging through pocket.**) Who's it for again?

**Sheila:** Martha. Martha Leakey. She works in the gift shop.

**Matt:** Oh, Freaky Leakey.

**Sheila:** That's not very nice, Matt.

**Matt:** Sorry, but she scares me.

**Kate:** I don't like to agree with Matt, on anything, but he's got a point – Martha is a bit strange.

**Sheila:** She's not *that* bad. And it isn't her fault that she's... (**thinking**) different. She was involved in some sort of car accident years ago and was in a coma for a while. I don't think she's been the same since.

**Matt:** She gives me the creeps.

(**Sheila shakes her head disapprovingly.**)

**Kate:** Well, I'd heard from Stuart that she used to be an assassin for Mossad, the Israeli Secret Service.

**Matt:** You what?

**Sheila:** Stuart Chase? Who used to look after the penguins?

**Kate:** Yes. Apparently, Martha was in Berlin trying to prevent some stolen Russian plutonium being sold to a rogue agent when her cover was blown and she was shot in the eye.

**Matt:** You're kidding?

**Kate:** That's what Stuart said. And he reckoned that because the bullet got lodged in her brain, she no longer had the mental or physical capabilities necessary for international espionage.



**Sheila:** So she ended up working in a zoo gift shop?

**Kate:** It was inevitable, I suppose.

**Matt:** What? And you believed him?

**Kate:** **(Laughing.)** Don't be stupid.

**Sheila:** Although that could explain why one of Martha's eyes is a bit twitchy; especially when she's stressed.

**Kate:** Oh come on, Sheila. Being shot in the eye would cause more than a bit of twitchiness. Stuart used to make up ridiculous stories about everyone he worked with.

**Sheila:** I'm not sure *all* of his anecdotes were made up.

**Kate:** I hope they were, for your sake.

**Sheila:** What do you mean?

**Kate:** **(Chuckling to herself.)** I'm not sure I should say.

**Sheila:** You're going to have to, now.

**Kate:** All right. Stuart once told me that before you trained as an accountant, you ran an adult baby fetish nursery, where your clients dressed as babies and paid you to change their nappies.

**Matt:** Eurgh!

**(Shocked that she's been found out, Sheila laughs hysterically to cover it up.)**

**Sheila:** Good old Stuart. He was a card, wasn't he?

**Matt:** I wonder what happened to him?

**Sheila:** I think he retired. Wanted to spend more time on his allotment or something. He used to grow beautiful turnips. Ian probably knows what he's up to; they were good friends.

**Kate:** I'd heard rumours that he'd enrolled on a controversial programme of robotic body enhancement experiments in Beijing. And next year, with the help of his bio-engineered limbs, he's representing China in the World's Strongest Man competition.

**(They all nod and mutter agreement.)**

**Sheila:** Sounds more likely. **(Pause.)** Anyway, getting back to Martha's collection, I just thought if everyone put in a pound or two, we could buy her a nice leaving present.

**Matt:** **(Pulling coins from pocket.)** I've only got thirty pence on me.

**Sheila:** That's okay. **(Opening the envelope for Matt to put the coins in.)** Every little helps.

**(Matt drops the coins in the envelope.)**

**Kate:** **(Mockingly.)** Thirty pence?

**Matt:** **(To Kate.)** So how much did *you* put in?

**Kate:** A hundred pounds.

**Matt:** No, you didn't.

**Kate:** Yes, I did – didn't I, Sheila?

**Sheila:** No, you didn't.

**Kate:** **(To Sheila.)** You were supposed to agree with me.

**Sheila:** Matt's not going to believe you put a hundred pounds in, you should have aimed lower. If you'd said twenty, you probably would have gotten away with it.

**Matt:** So how much *did* you put in?

**Kate:** Twenty.

**Matt:** No, you didn't.

**Kate:** All right, two, I put two pounds in. But it's a lot more than thirty pence.

**Sheila:** Hush now, children.

**Matt:** Why is Freaky Leakey leaving?

**Kate:** Basically, your mum made her redundant.

**Matt:** **(Embarrassed.)** Oh right.

**Sheila:** **(Admonishingly.)** Katie.

**Matt:** It's not easy running a zoo, you know? And because less people are visiting, the gift shop takings are down.

**Kate:** I was just answering your question.

**Matt:** If she's to keep the place open, and everyone else working here employed, sacrifices have to be made.

**(Martha enters, and everyone stops talking to look at her. She stares back, her right eye twitching. Sheila hides the envelope in her lap. Martha speaks slowly and is usually grinning weirdly.)**

**Martha:** Who's being sacrificed?

**Sheila:** What? Sacrifice? No, no, no – fish slice. Yes, Matt's erm, taken up metalwork and he's making a fish slice. Isn't that right, Matt?

**Matt:** Yep, I just love slicing up them fish.

**Martha:** Right.

**(Awkward pause.)**

**Matt:** **(Getting up.)** I need to get back to the monkeys. We've got a new arrival today.

**Kate:** You mean apes. Chimpanzees are not monkeys, they're apes.

**Matt:** **(Annoyed.)** I know, I'm just saying it to wind you up.

**(Kate shakes her head, irritated. Matt shrugs and exits.)**

**Martha:** **(To Kate.)** That boy doesn't like you. I can sense these things.

**Kate:** The feeling's mutual.

**Martha:** A little birdie told me he blames you for his girlfriend dumping him.

**Kate:** What? Who did you hear that from?

**Martha:** A budgie... or it might have been a finch... it was a green birdie.

**Kate:** I don't know what you're talking about.

**(Martha sits down, opens a packet of Jelly Babies, and starts laying them face down on the table, in a line.)**

**Sheila:** So how are you doing, Martha? Can't be easy for you, leaving, after working here for so long. It won't be the same without you, you know.

**(Martha continues with her Jelly Babies task.)**

**Sheila:** What plans do you have when you leave? Have you been looking for another job?

**Martha:** I have my fingers in some pies.

**Sheila:** Terrific. That's good; good that you have other pies to put your fingers into.

**Martha:** I'm quite enjoying my last week here, you know.

**Sheila:** Good for you.

**Martha:** I've been ordering lots of stock to arrive after I've left.

**Sheila:** I'm glad you're keeping busy.

**Martha:** **(Grinning.)** It's amazing what you can get on eBay. I've ordered a dozen umbrella stands made from elephants' feet.

**Sheila:** **(Disapprovingly.)** Why would you do that?

**Martha:** **(Grinning weirdly, right eye twitching.)** Why not?

**(Miriam and Lottie enter. Lottie carries a can of Coca-Cola.)**

**Miriam:** Morning, team.

**Kate:** Morning.

**(Seeing Martha, Miriam is suddenly embarrassed about her choice of words.)**

**Miriam:** Martha.

**(Martha remains silent.)**

**Kate:** Oh, Lottie, thanks for helping me out with that assignment. I got an A.

**(Miriam goes upstage and switches the kettle on.)**

**Lottie:** Congratulations. You're cruising through this course. You'll have your level three diploma in no time. What's the topic for your next essay?

**Kate:** Conservation and collection planning. So Peter's offered to help me with that one.

**Lottie:** That is his area of expertise. But be careful he doesn't take over and write it for you. You know what he's like.

**Kate:** Yes. I think my tutor would suspect it wasn't my work if he did; instead of five thousand words, it would be five thousand pages.

**Lottie:** He does go on, bless him.

**Kate:** **(Gets up.)** I'd better get back to the aviary; I'm supposed to be giving a tour this afternoon.

**Lottie:** In that case, I'll steal your seat. **(Sits down.)**

**... [Continued in the full Murder Mystery Pack.]**