The Red Herring Worksheet Pack

An exclusive Pickzox bonus companion for MysteryForge AI — plan fair-play misdirection like a pro.

How to use this pack

A red herring only works when it is fair: the reader must be able to look back and see why they were misled. Use one worksheet per suspect or misleading clue thread in your mystery.

Worksheet 1 — Suspect Motive Map

Fill one row per suspect. Every suspect needs a motive that looks guilty at first glance.

Suspect name: _____

Apparent motive (what makes them look guilty):

_____

Real motive (the truth behind the appearance):

_____

Scene where the apparent motive is revealed:

_____

Scene where the real motive is revealed:

_____

Worksheet 2 — Misleading Clue Log

Track each clue that points the wrong way. The 'fairness test' column is the key: write exactly how the clue is technically true.

Clue description: _____

What the reader is meant to conclude:

_____

What is actually true (fairness test):

_____

Chapter planted: Chapter resolved:

_____

Worksheet 3 — Reveal Timing Planner

Map when each herring appears and when it is cleared. A herring cleared too early wastes pages; one cleared too late feels like a cheat.

Herring #1 planted (chapter):

Herring #1 cleared (chapter):

Herring #2 planted (chapter):

Herring #2 cleared (chapter):

Herring #3 planted (chapter):

Herring #3 cleared (chapter):

The 10 Fair-Play Rules

- [ ] Every herring has a true explanation written down before drafting.
- [ ] No herring depends on the detective withholding information from the reader.
- [ ] Each suspect's apparent motive is shown, not just told.
- [ ] At least one clue genuinely points at the real culprit (buried, not absent).
- [ ] Herrings are cleared before the final reveal — never left dangling.
- [ ] The reveal recontextualizes herrings instead of dismissing them.
- [ ] No more than three major herrings per novel (more dilutes tension).
- [ ] Each herring connects to the theme, not just the plot.
- [ ] The detective is fooled by the same herrings as the reader.
- [ ] After the reveal, a reader can re-read and see every herring was fair.