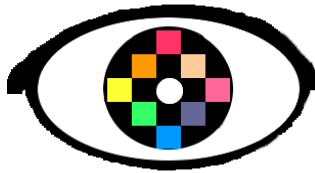


Anteform

A retro weird detective story
for PICO-8



Case File
as prepared by Feneric

COMPANY CONFIDENTIAL

Background

For your convenience I've collected what information we have in advance of your trip to Anteform Valley. There isn't much; as it often happens you're going to have to figure out a lot once you get boots on the ground. Your past successes in less-than-ideal situations like this were a big reason you were chosen for this assignment.

The Client

Sally Franklin is a lifelong resident of Anteform Valley. She contacted our agency after her long term boyfriend Steve Johanson disappeared while supposedly running a short errand. She lives in the main village there and she should be one of the first ones you try to contact.

She's a close friend of the mayor of Anteform Valley, Bess Whitley, who apparently went to college with the Boss. Bess and the Boss. So yeah, no extra pressure.

The Missing People

Steve Johanson moved to Anteform Valley four years ago to take a job at their local radio station KLLR. According to Sally, he met her shortly after

moving in and they hit it off almost immediately. She claims they weren't fighting and that he was in positive spirits – she claims she'd know if he were planning on taking off and she vehemently rejects the idea that he committed suicide.

We just got word that Steve isn't the only missing person in Anteforn Valley, just the first. Since then a young woman named Mary Wainwright has also mysteriously vanished. We don't know much about her yet, just that she also lived in the village and was off hiking somewhere and didn't come back. Obviously the two of them arranging a joint disappearance isn't out of the question. It's something for you to follow up on.

Other Noteworthy Locals

I've already mentioned Mayor Bess Whitley. She lives in the village with her husband Fred and daughter Anne. She is well aware of your imminent arrival, so you ought to touch base with her after you finally get there. She theoretically will have spoken with the other locals there to help prepare things for you. I can only imagine in a place that small the news will travel pretty quickly.

The only cop in the valley is a man by the name of Bruce Main. (No, that really is his name, and yes, he probably got teased a bit as a kid.) I spoke











with him briefly on the phone. He seems nice enough; he knows he's over his head with this missing persons case and he's planning on just leaving things to you and says you shouldn't have any worries about your investigation "stepping on his toes". He mostly seems to deal with issues like lost pets, kids occasionally playing music too loudly, and rarely a drunk at the local bar. As far as I can tell, the only serious criminal to ever enter Anteform Valley was that FBI's most wanted list entry of a few years back: Arnold "Greybeard" Gregorio. Remember his escape by parachute? Anteform Valley was where he landed and was later caught. This was before Bruce's time and was handled by the FBI, anyway.


Joseph Patel, a.k.a. DJ Jazzy Joe, runs the radio station in addition to being its primary on-air personality and the closest thing Anteform Valley has to either a news reporter or a meteorologist. He is also Steve's boss. He shares Sally's concern, offering the opinion that Steve "isn't the kind of guy to miss a day of work, let alone without calling in".

Anteform Valley

The valley is nestled in a mountainous area and has a large lake in the middle. While it is mostly verdant due to the lake and runoff water, it's

otherwise surrounded by fairly arid land. There are no roads in or out.

Anteform Valley terrain is mixed. Traveling through the plains  is easy, low scrub  and desert  harder, dense forests  harder still, and hills , foothills  and small mountains  yet more difficult. Each takes progressively more time to cross. Larger mountains  are impassible. Crossing bodies of water  cannot be done on foot; it will require some sort of boat. Swamps  are neither fully land nor fully water and while they can be crossed they can have a detrimental impact to the health of the crosser.

There are a few natural hazards, and it is possible that Steve and/or Mary ran into some. The mountainous area surrounding the valley is scenic, but a bad fall can be crippling even in the prettiest environment. There are a few mines  and natural caves, too, and getting lost in one without light would be bad.

Outside the populated areas there are lots of coyote, wild cats, rattlesnakes, scorpions, and who-knows-what-else. I'm told people going fishing normally take clubs with them because the "catfish can take off an arm if you're not careful". The stories about a lake monster seem to be made up to encourage tourism.

The People of the Valley

People in there are largely cut off from civilization. They grow most of their own food, have their own little shops, and even have a one-room schoolhouse for their kids. Most of the townies live either in the main village or clustered around the radio station a short distance away. There are fewer than a hundred of them. 🏠

Part of their economy is based on tourism. They take in a small number of tourists who come for activities including things like hiking, swimming, rock-climbing, camping, fishing, and hunting. According to the mayor there are at least half a dozen such tourists in the valley right now, vacationing on the lake or in the mountains in one of a handful of small cabins. 🏠

More significant though is that there are two unusual population centers in the valley: a monastery and a research facility. The people living in each don't mix much with either the townies or tourists or each other. I've not yet been able to find out much about either of these places.

The monastery seems to be the biggest site dedicated to a particular fringe branch of Christianity. Some number of both monks and nuns live on site, and "student learners" from

hundreds of miles away make pilgrimages to it in order to study under some of them. While they're self-sufficient and tend not to hang out with the townies, the overall relationship seems friendly enough and the monastery even provides some limited medical facilities open to all. 🏠

The research facility seems to get by on private grants. They don't seem to have any affiliations with any public universities and don't seem to have taken any government money. Without either of these there's not been much of a paper trail for me to track in the time we've had. Basically we don't know where they get their money, who's presently on staff there, or even what they're researching. 🏠

As you can well imagine, in the minds of some of the townies this makes three groups of "outsiders" who serve as logical targets of blame: the tourists, the monks, and the scientists.

Preparations

With the time we've had to prepare, there was no way I could possibly get you all of the permits you'd require to bring any kind of weapons along with you. Still, you're in an environment with hunting, fishing, and camping, and I'm sure you'll be able to use things like knives, clubs, and axes effectively as weapons assuming you can't score

yourself a gun somewhere. Likewise a heavy jacket can provide you some protection from hand weapons without making yourself look too conspicuous.

You've of course got a lot more field experience than me, but I'd recommend trying to outfit yourself with some kind of weapon and defensive clothing as soon as possible. Even just a hunting dagger and cloth jacket are better than fists and bare arms if you happen to get attacked by some kind of wild cat, although as you know strength, dexterity, and experience level have just as much of an impact on one's combat effectiveness.

Your special training will likely come in handy, too, although any of these actions will require concentration, and that's always a limited resource, especially when being attacked.

Taking the time to *aim* will enable you to leverage your intelligence to better target an enemy's vital area and increase damage a little.

Your field medical training will enable you to *cure* poisoning or illness and perform *first aid* to heal some injuries. *First aid* is limited in scope, and if you are seriously hurt you ought to go to a medical facility for a *medic*.

I've arranged for you to get dropped off by the regular supply helicopter. Once a week it brings

the mail plus various goods and tourists in and out of Anteform Valley as needed. Once it drops you off, you'll be on your own for the week.

Final Words

Be careful with this one. I know that's a stupid thing to say. Like you're going to deliberately be reckless, right? I'm saying it anyway because I want to stress that something about this case bothers me.

Maybe it's just the setting straight out of a B-horror movie. I mean really, a remote valley cut off from civilization complete with its own weird abbey and mysterious institute, what could ever go wrong there? Maybe it's earnestness of the locals Sally, Bess, Bruce, and Joe. Frankly, I find myself believing them when they tell me that something isn't right, and that Steve and Mary are both in real trouble someplace (or worse). Maybe it's that if Steve and Mary really are hiding somewhere, there aren't too many places where they could pull it off without being seen. Maybe it's just a gut feeling.

Whatever it is, I strongly advise you to stick close to the more populated areas until you think you've got a handle on it. Talk to people, look at things, search what you can. I know you can pull it off and make Anteform Valley safe again.

Controls

Anteform is built on top of the Minima Engine for PICO-8, and mostly shares the same controls. (If you like one, you're apt to like the other and your finger memory will work.) Both games make use of virtually all the standard controls available in the PICO-8 environment. [Minima](#) was built as an homage to the 8-bit Ultima games as played on the Commodore 128, and its control scheme was heavily influenced by them. Whereas the old-school Ultimas used most of the keys on the keyboard for dedicated commands starting with the respective letter like *(a)ttack*, *(c)ast*, *(e)nter*, *(k)limb*, *(d)escend*, *(b)oard*, etc., in the PICO-8 environment only a handful of keys are supported so our commands are a little more contrived and we need to batch them together.

Still other commands are provided through the game menu.

Anteform Keyboard Commands

Use the cursor keys for movement.

a: attack

c: concentration action (aim, cure, first aid)

d: dialog, talk, buy

e: enter, board, mount, climb, descend

p: pause, bring up game menu

f: flashlight on; force chest

s: sit & wait

w: wearing & wielding

x: examine, look (repeat to search)

The PocketC.H.I.P. (unless an external utility like the keyconfig command has been used to change it) has an unusual default key mapping, and for it the commands are the following:

Anteform PocketC.H.I.P. Commands

Use the cursor keys for movement.

/: attack

0: concentration action (aim, cure, etc.)

left shift: dialog, talk, buy

z: enter, board, mount, climb, descend

enter: pause, bring up game menu

fn: flashlight on; force chest

tab: sit & wait

right ctrl: wearing & wielding

-: examine, look (repeat to search)

For commands with options (like casting or buying) use the first character of the desired item

from the list, or anything else to cancel. To make this a little bit more clear, when a first character is needed it will be shown in a larger font than the following characters. For the PocketC.H.I.P. these first letter keys will also have been changed to match the above listing.

The game menu provides the ability to save and load games in addition to an in-game command reference. Note that due to PICO-8 restrictions saving is not absolute; character statistics and general wandering creature locations will be saved, but creatures will restore to full strength, and communities will restore to their original conditions after saving and reloading.

Copyright Notice

Although Anteform is further removed from Ultima than Minima, has different themes and settings and different music, I'll make generally the same copyright notice here as with Minima to be safe.

No ownership or copyright is claimed over anything related to Ultima. This is a fan creation that derived a little bit of inspiration from the original wonderful 8-bit creations of Richard Garriot (a.k.a. Lord British) as ported to the Commodore 128 with the help of folks like Chuck Bueche (a.k.a. Chuckles) and David Shapiro

(a.k.a. Dr. Cat) along with music by Ken Arnold. I believe that as of this writing all of the Ultima games and associated trademarks are owned by Electronic Arts, and I make no adverse claims here otherwise.

PICO-8 is likewise a product of Lexaloffle, and is the tool used to build Anteform. I also explicitly make no ownership or copyright claims over it or its name or logo.

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This Case File for Anteform Valley was originally written in August of 2019. This version was written for version 1.0 of the game.