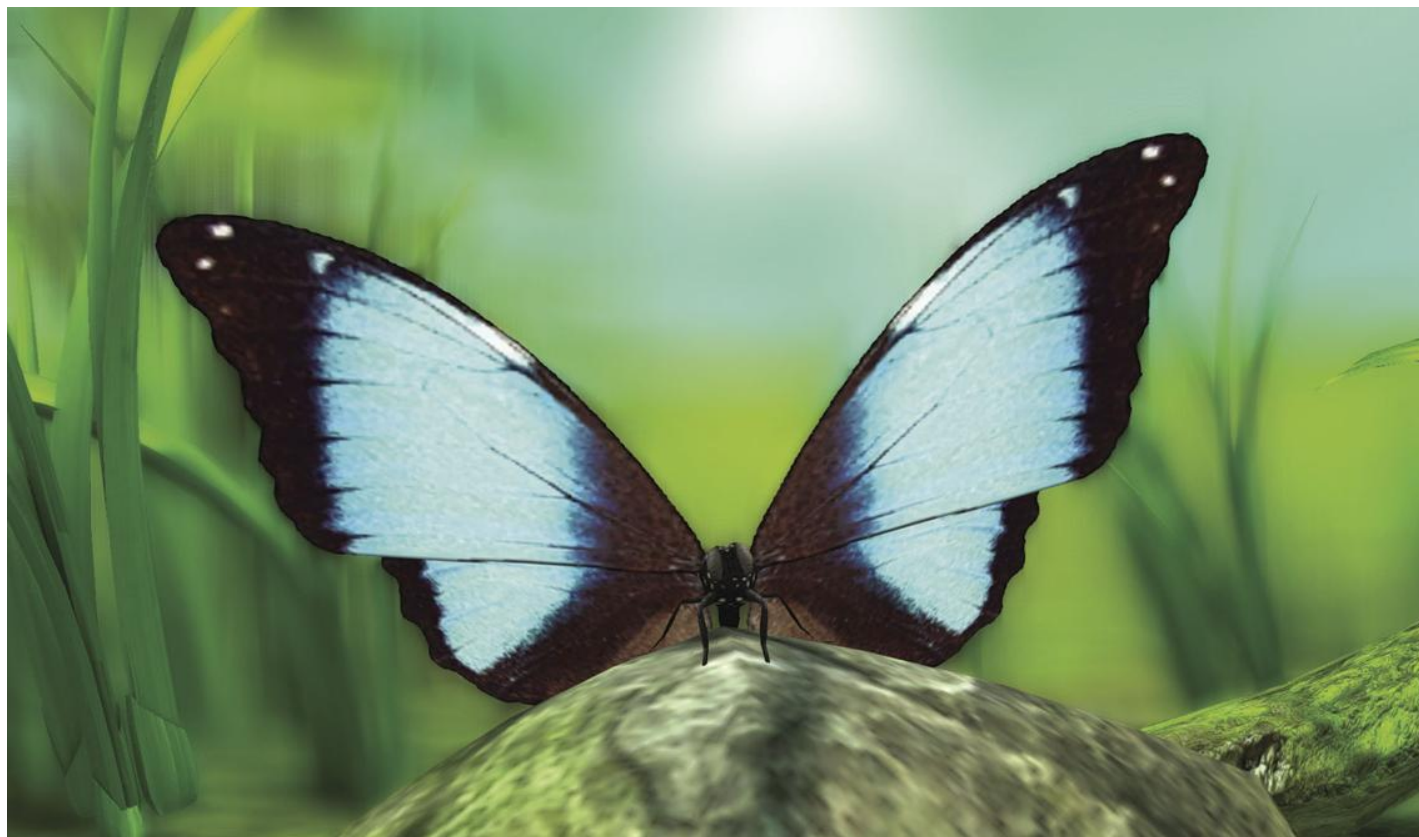


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Colorado team's video game project a fantastical photo safari

Colorado team's game a fantastical virtual safari

BY ANTHONY SETTIPANI SPECIAL TO THE CHIEFTAIN AUG 19, 2015



'Shutterbug' from Idol Minds

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Colorado-based video game studio Idol Minds decided to try a different angle for its newest title: Instead of the usual guns, swords and spaceships, why not have butterflies, fairies and photography? That's the premise of their newest game, "Shutterbug," which is designed to transport players to richly-designed virtual environments -- and shrink them to the size of ladybug paparazzi. "This is a macro-photography environment," said Jeff Litchford, vice president of production at Idol Minds. "We're taking you down a size, showing you all these beautiful, lush environments at the macro level." Litchford considered the game a spiritual sequel to "Pokémon Snap," another photo-centric game released in 1999 for the Nintendo 64 console. But for this game, players will explore the real world, traveling through places such as the base of the Alps or a Mexican rainforest. While

there, they can take pictures of the small, colorful creatures the team has designed. "If you're an entomologist, you'll recognize the butterflies," said Litchford. "The frogs and the turtles are all based on how they are in real life, but then we also wanted to add a bit of a fantastical element to the game." This "fantastical element," Litchford explained, took the form of fairies, woodland sprites and, for lucky players, a very rare faerie dragon. The Westminster-based company, headquartered just across the street from the Butterfly Pavilion, decided to take the game there in mid-July for some of the patrons to try out. "They brought it to our public event and festival," said Katherine Harris, the Butterfly Pavilion's marketing coordinator. The venue was celebrating its 20th birthday when the Idol Minds team brought in their game. Harris said it was a pretty big hit. Harris estimated about 1,300 people came through the pavilion. "I think people really enjoyed it; the booth seemed pretty busy throughout the day," she said. Litchford said that because the game's premise is too far afield to appeal to the studio's traditional backers, he started a Kickstarter.com campaign to raise the \$400,000 needed to meet all of the team's stretch goals. "We've seen a lot of positive response so far," he said. "We're also trying to get involved with a bunch of photography blogs and websites, and they've been very enthusiastic." One of the major improvements the team hopes to add with the money from the crowdfunding campaign is a feature that will allow players to actually capture and breed the subjects they photograph. Litchford explained: "Say I've found a morpho butterfly. If I find just one more morpho butterfly, I can start to breed them. Ten to fourteen hours later, I can have a little offspring, and I can start to collect them. So we'll have a whole series of morpho butterflies, and it's all about trying to breed them together to get the whole collection." And, Idol Minds said, those who pledge \$25 or more will be allowed to submit a design for a variant of one of the game's creatures. "Shutterbug" is planned for Windows and Mac release in 2016. If the Kickstarter campaign exceeds its \$400,000 goal, versions could be added for iOS and Android devices and the Oculus Rift virtual reality device. Idol Minds Studio was founded in 1997 in Boulder. Since then, it's worked on games in collaboration with companies like Sony, Capcom and DeNA. Some of the studio's most recent titles include "Ratchet and Clank Collection," "Qube Kingdom" and "Tales of Honor: The Secret Fleet." anthonysettapani2016@u.northwestern.edu