Fiction

UNIT 6

F. 6 Virtually True

by Paul Stewart

1. Before reading the story, attempt the following working in groups of four or five.

a. Do you play computer games? How many hours do you spend playing games on the computer as compared to outdoor games?

b. Make a list of your favourite games. Have a class discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of computer games.

c. Look in your dictionaries / computer to find synonyms for the word 'virtual'

d. Look at the K.W.L. chart given below. Based on the infomation you have gathered till now, complete the K and W columns. You may work with your partner. After reading the story complete the third column.

	K-What I Know	W--What I want to know	L-What I learnt
Virtual Reality			
Virtual Environment			
3-D/ three-dimensional			
Simulation games			
Computer simulations			
Interactive psycho- drive games			
Teleporting			

Now read the story.

1 Sebastian Shultz. It isn't a name you come across every day. But there it was, large and clear, at the top of the newspaper article in front of me.

2 The reader of the newspaper was a big woman. I couldn't see her face, but I could hear her **wheezy**[1] breath.

3 *MIRACLE RECOVERY, the headline said. Sebastian Shultz, a 14 year-old schoolboy from South London, awoke yesterday from a* ***coma***[2] *that doctors feared might last forever.*

4 It couldn't be the Sebastian Shultz I'd met. I leant forward to read the rest of the article.

5 Six weeks ago, Sebastian Shultz was badly injured in a motorway accident. His condition, on arrival at the General Hospital, was described as critical though stable. Despite doctors' hopes, the boy did not regain consciousness. His parents were informed that their son was in a coma.

6 At a press conference, Mrs Shultz said, "The doctors were doing all they could, but in our hearts we knew we needed a miracle."

7 Now that miracle has happened ...

8 At that moment, the woman's hand moved. I suddenly saw the photograph that went with the story, and gasped. The boy in the picture was Sebastian. There was no doubt. "But how?" I muttered.

9 Sebastian Shultz, the boy I'd got to know so well recently, had apparently been in a coma for all that time. I felt nervous and shivery. It didn't make any sense at all.

10 I stared out of the train window, and ran through the events in my head.

11 It all started a month ago. Dad and I had spent the entire Saturday afternoon at the Computer Fair.

12 Dad's **nutty**[3] about computers. He's got a Pentium **150 Mhz**[4] processor, with 256 of RAM, a 1.2 Gb hard disk drive and 16 speed **CD ROM**[5] , complete with speakers, printer, modem and scanner. It can do anything. Paint, play music, create displays; even when my homework's rubbish, it looks fantastic.

13 Best of all are the games. Tornado, MeBabash, Black Belt, Kyrene's Kastle -I've played them all. With the screen so big, and the volume up loud, it almost feels as if you're inside the games, battling it out with the Z or Bs, Twisters, or whatever.

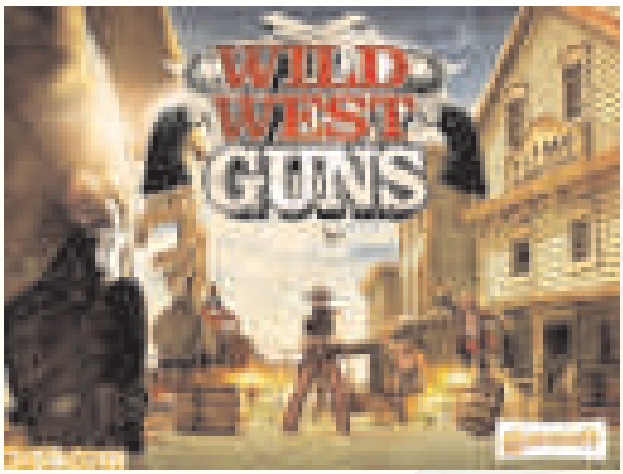
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1 **wheezy -** to breathe with an audible whistling sound, with difficutly
2 **coma -** a prolonged state of deep unconsciousness
3 **nutty -** crazy about; has a passion for
4 **Mhz -** megahertz - one million hertz (the unit of frequency equal to one cycle per second)
5 **CD ROM -** Random-Access Memory compact disk with Read-Only Memory

14 Technology was advancing every day, and Dad couldn't resist any of the new gadgets or **gizmos**[6] that came on the market. That was why we went to the Computer Fair. We came away with a virtual reality visor and glove, and a handful of the latest interactive **psycho-drive**[7] games. They're terrific. Not only do the visor and glove change what you see, but better than that, you can control the action by what you are thinking. Well, cool!

15 When we got them, I remember some of them were not new.

16 Anyway, back at home, I launched myself off into the first of the games. It was called Wildwest.



18 That's what I like about computers. The more futuristic they get, the better you can understand the past. I wasn't standing in the converted loft-the Powerbase as Dad calls it-anymore. I was really there, striding down the dusty track through the centre of town. There was a sheriff's badge pinned to my shirt.

20 As I burst in through the swing doors of the saloon, everyone went silent and glared at me. I strode over to the bar. **'Sarsaparilla!'**[8] I said and a glass of fizzy red stuff came sliding along the bar towards me. As I took a sip, I heard a loud crash. I spun round. There, silhouetted in the doorway, was Black-Eyed Jed, the fastest gun in the west. 'This town ain't big enough for the both of us, Sheriff Dawson,' he drawled, and fingered his guns lightly. 'Outside. Just you and me.'

19 I can remember grinning. This was really cool!

20 I finished my drink and slammed the glass down on the bar. Jed had already left the saloon. All eyes were on me again. I wondered what sort of score I was notching up.

21 All at once, something strange happened. Up to that point the game had been pretty much as I expected. But when the second sheriff appeared through the back door, shouting and waving his arms about, I realized that the game was more complicated.

22 'Don't go out!' the second sheriff shouted.

23 'And who are you?' I asked.

24 He wasn't like the other characters in the saloon. For a start, he was about my age, and though he looked like a computer image, he somehow didn't move like one.

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6 **gizmos -** gadgets, especially mechanical or electrical devices

7 **pscho-drive -** driven by mental power

8 **sarsaparilla -** a carbonated drink flavoured with sarsaparilla root.

25 'There's no time to explain,' he shouted. 'Just follow me.'

26 I did what I was told. We raced down a corridor, and through a door. We ran past some men and out through another door.

27 'Come ON!' shouted the other sheriff.

28 We went on through another door, and another,-and ended up back in the saloon.

29 'NO!' screamed the second sheriff. Then he ran to the back of the saloon and dived through the window. By the time I climbed out after him, he was already sitting on a horse. 'Jump up!' he cried.

30 He kicked the horse, and we sped off in a cloud of dust.

31 'Who are you?' I asked again.

32 But the second sheriff didn't answer. He'd seen the posse of men on horseback speeding after us. 'Keep your head down,' he said.

33 At that moment, the sound of a gunshot echoed round the air. The second sheriff groaned, and slumped back against me. Ahead of me, in bright neon lights came a message.

GAME OVER.

34 As I slipped off the visor, the empty desert disappeared and I found myself back in the Powerbase. I took off the glove and headphones. I glanced at the score on the screen. 21,095. Then I noticed the printer had come on. I picked up the piece of paper from the tray.

35 At the top was a picture of the second sheriff. This time though, he was wearing jeans and a sweatshirt. Printed over the bottom was a message. ***I'M STUCK. PLEASE HELP TO RETRIEVE ME. TRY 'DRAGONQUEST'.*** Sebastian Shultz.

36 I wanted to go straight into the game he'd suggested, but it was already half an hour after lights out.

37 Next morning I was up and back on the computer, and was soon walking through the massive studded doors of the dragon's castle lair.

38 The aim of the game was simple. I had to rescue the fair princess Aurora from the wicked dragon, and collect the wicked creature's treasure along the way. I'd already got loads by the time I reached the Princess, who'd been imprisoned at the top of a tall tower. She was a young woman with long golden plaits.

39 'My hero!' she squealed. 'Take me away from all this.' Behind me I could hear the dragon roaring. 'Rescue me now,' the princess said urgently.

40 'Never mind her,' came a voice, and a second knight appeared from the wardrobe. 'It's me who needs rescuing!'



41 'Sebastian?' I said.

42 The second knight nodded. 'Quick,' he said, 'while there's still time.' And with a pair of scissors he chopped off the princess's two long plaits. Then he tied them together, fixed one end round the bedpost and threw the other end out of the window.

43 'NOW!' he screamed, as he leapt for the window and down the hair rope.

4 4

At that moment the dragon appeared. I gasped, and leapt too.

45 As I lowered myself down I felt the dragon's fiery breath.

46 Across the moonlit battlements, we ran down a spiral staircase and through a secret passage on the other side of a tapestry. And the whole time I could hear and feel and even smell the evil dragon following in close pursuit.

47 'The dungeons,' Sir Sebastian cried out. 'They're our only hope.'

48 We went down the cold stone steps, swords drawn. Suddenly, the dragon appeared at the end of the corridor. Before we even had time to turn around, the dragon was upon us.

49 I swung my sword. But it was no good. The dragon was only interested in Sebastian, and there was nothing I could do to prevent it getting him.

GAME OVER

50 This time, the message in the printer said: BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME. PLEASE DON'T GIVE UP, MICHAEL. OTHERWISE I'LL HAVE TO STAY IN HERE FOR EVER. TRY 'JAILBREAK'. I THINK IT MIGHT JUST WORK! CHEERS, SEB.

51 I didn't even bother to read the rules of Jailbreak before going in. I knew that my task would be to rescue the boy. And sure enough, my cell mate was prisoner 02478: Shultz.

52 'I've got to get out of here,' Sebastian sighed. 'Are you going to help?'

53 'Of course,' I said. 'Have you got a plan?'

54 Stupid question. With the help of a **skeleton swipe-card**[9], we were soon out of the cell and racing down corridors. Sirens wailed, guard dogs howled, heavy boots came tramping. Behind us, steel-barred doors slammed shut. We dodged the guards, we fled the dogs, we made it to a staircase and pounded upwards.

9 **Skeleton swipe-card -** a plastic card on which data has been stored magnetically and that can be read by an electronic reading device.

55 On the roof, Sebastian looked round, and glanced at his watch nervously. 'It should be here by now.'

56 'What?' I said.

57 'That!' said Sebastian and pointed.

58 'A helicopter!' I exclaimed.

59 'That was my idea!' said Sebastian excitedly. 'If only it would go a bit faster ... '

60 At that moment, the door behind us burst open. Twelve guards with vicious dogs were standing there. The next instant the dogs were hurtling towards us, all bared teeth and dripping jowls. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Sebastian take a step backwards.

61 'NOOOOOO!' I screamed.

62 But it was too late. The boy had slipped and was tumbling back through the air, down to the concrete below.

GAME OVER.

63 As I removed my visor I looked in the printer tray. This time it was empty. I felt really bad. I'd failed Sebastian; I'd failed the game. It was only later, when the scenes began to fade in my memory, that it occurred to me that Sebastian Shultz was the game.

64 Strangely, although I went back to Wildwest, Dragonquest and Jailbreak after that, I never met up with Sebastian again.

65 Then, yesterday, I heard from Sebastian. In the printer tray, was a sheet of paper.

66 CAN WE HAVE ONE LAST TRY? it said. I THINK THE HELICOPTER WAS THE RIGHT IDEA. THERE'S GOT TO BE SOME KIND OF AN ACCIDENT ... GO INTO 'WARZONE'. IF THIS DOESN'T WORK I WON'T BOTHER YOU AGAIN. CHEERS, SEB.

67 I couldn't tell which war zone we were in. It was a city somewhere. The tall buildings were windowless and **riddled**[10] with holes. Machine gun fire raked the sky. Walls tumbled. Bombs exploded. All I knew was that Sebastian and I had to make it to that helicopter in one piece.

68 We ran across a no-man's-land of rubble and smoke, dodging **sniper fire**[11]. At the far end we went through a door in a wall. The helicopter was on the ground, waiting for our arrival.

69 We started to run, but the tank fire sent us scuttling back to the wall.

70 'A jeep,' Sebastian shouted to me, and nodded at a vehicle parked by the road.

71 He jumped in, turned the ignition key and revved the engine. 'Jump in!'

10 **riddled -** making a large number of small holes in something.

11 **sniper fire -** gunshots fired by somebody in a concealed position.

72 I climbed into the passenger seat and we were off.

73 A tank was hurtling after us. Suddenly, Sebastian slammed on the brakes and sent the jeep skidding into a spin. I leapt clear, and jumped into the helicopter.

74 The helicopter started to go upwards. I looked around. Sebastian wasn't there.

75 'Wait!' I shouted at the pilot.

76 I looked back. The jeep had stopped, but Sebastian hadn't got out.

77 'COME ON!' I yelled. But Sebastian was sitting as if his body had been turned to stone.

78 The tank crashed into the jeep. Sebastian was thrown into the air.

79 Round and round he tumbled, closer to the helicopter. He landed with a thud, just below the hatch. I pulled him up. As he sat down beside me, the helicopter soared into the sky.

80 I'd done it! I'd rescued Sebastian at last! Before I had a chance to say anything to him though, the helicopter flew into thick cloud. It turned everything blinding white. I couldn't see a thing-until 'GAME OVER' flashed up.

81 When I removed the visor, the screen was flashing a score of 40,000,000.

82 I'd hit the jackpot. I'd finally cracked the game.

83 At least, that was what I thought then. Now I knew that Sebastian Shultz, the boy from the game, really did exist. I'd seen the proof in the newspaper.

84 But how? I wondered as I got off the train.

85 At home I checked the Net. I wanted to learn more about the MIRACLE RECOVERY story.

86 I found what I was looking for quickly enough. Apparently, at the time of the accident, Sebastian was using his laptop to play one of the same psycho-drive games that I've got.

87 My heart pounded furiously. What if, because Sebastian had been plugged into the computer when he banged his head in the accident, the computer had saved his memory in its own. And then what if the weird versions of the games 1'd been drawn into had all been attempts to retrieve that memory?

88 After all, Dad always says about the computer's memory-'It can never forget, Michael. Nothing ever gets lost.'

89 But, even if it was possible that Sebastian's memory had been stored on disk, how had it ended up on my computer? Scrolling down the article I found a possible explanation.

90 Answering a reporter's question as to what the family was going to do next, Mr Shultz said that they were off to stock up on some games. 'It was while we were in the hospital, someone stole the lot. I don't know what happened to them.'

91 I said quietly. 'They ended up at the Computer Fair. And we bought them.'

92 I left the Net and checked my e-mail. There was one from Sebastian.

93 With trembling fingers I clicked in, and read the message.

94 DEAR MICHAEL, it said. THANK YOU! I'M NOT SURE HOW IT HAPPENED, BUT THANKS. YOU SAVED MY LIFE. LET'S MEET UP SOON. CHEERS, SEB. P.S. KEEP THE GAMES. YOU'VE EARNED THEM.

95 I shook my head. A real message from the real Sebastian Shultz. We both knew that by reliving the accident, something wonderful had happened. But then again, now that there are two advanced intelligences on earth, who can say what is and what isn't possible.

96 What I know is this. Everything that I've described is true - Virtually!

Exercises

1. According to the newspaper, what had happened to Sebastian Shultz?
2. 'Dad's nutty about computers.' What evidence is there to support this statement?
3. In what way did the second game seem very real?
4. The last game has tanks, jeeps, helicopters, guns and headings would you put this and the other games under?
5. What was Michael's theory about how Sebastian had entered the games?

B. Reference to context

Read these lines from the story, then answer the questions.

1. 'That was my idea' said Sebastian excitedly.' If only it would go a big faster.

1 Where was Sebastian when he spoke these word?

2. What was his idea, and what was he referring to ?
3. Was the idea a good one, and did it eventually succeed? How?

Writer: Paul Stewart (born june,1955) is a writer of children's books, best known for the best selling 'The Edge Chronicles, The Free Lance novels' and The Far Flung Adventure Series which are written in collaboration with the illustrator Chris Riddel. Paul Stewart lives in the British seaside city of Brighton with his wife and children.

3. Answer the following questions briefly.

(a) Why did the news of the 'miracle recovery' shock Michael?

(b) Michael's meeting with Sebastian Shultz had been a chance meeting. Where had it taken place and how?

(c) What kind of computers fascinated Michael and his dad? Why?

(d) Describe the first place where Michael was virtually transported.

(e) What help did Sebastian Shultz ask Michael for? How did he convey this message?

(f) Why did Michael fail in rescuing Sebastian Shultz the first time?

(g) The second attempt to rescue Sebastian Shultz too was disastrous. Give reasons.

(h) Narrate the accident that injured Sebastian Shultz.

(i) How had Sebastian Shultz entered the games?

(j) How was Sebastian Shultz's memory stored on Michael's disk? Did Michael discover that?

4. Sebastian Shultz had a close brush with death. After he recovers, he returns to school and narrates his experience to his classmates. As Sebastian Shultz, narrate your experience.

5. Continue the story.

Will Michael and Sebastian Shultz meet in real life? Will they be friends? Will they try to re-enter the virtual world together? You may use the following hints:

- How the accident occurred
- Transfer of memory
- Meeting with Michael
- Appeals for help
- Rescue and recovery

6. Put the following sentences in a sequential order to complete the story.

(a) Sebastian Shultz was badly injured in a motorway accident and went into a coma.

(b) Sebastian's memory was saved in the computer when he banged his head on it during the accident.

(c) When Michael played the game, he entered Sebastian's memory.

(d) Michael bought the latest psycho-drive games from the computer fair.

(e) Sebastian Shultz was the second sheriff in the 'Dragonquest'

(f) Michael pulled Sebastian into the helicopter and the screen flashed a score of 40,000,000.

(g) Sebastian requested Michael to try 'Jailbreak'.

(h) Sebastian failed to save the boy who fell through the air.

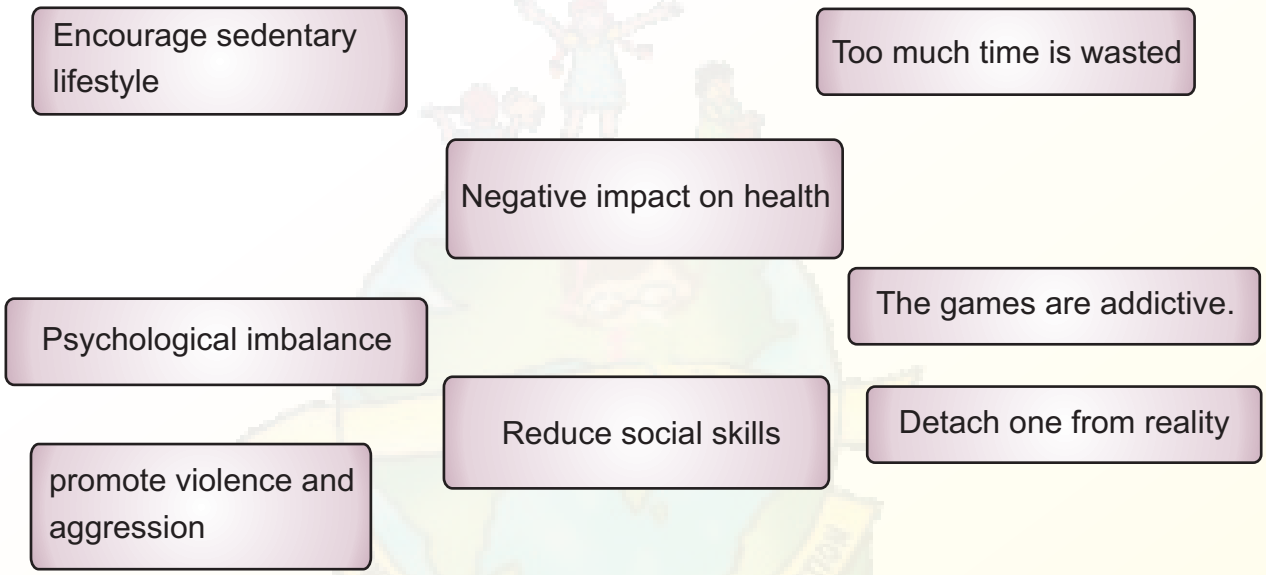
(i) Sebastian thought the helicopter was the right idea and they should go into the 'Warzone'.

(j) The games were stolen from Shultz's house.

(k) Sebastian thanks Michael for saving his life and asks him to keep the games.

Writing

7. Do you think it is a true story? Could it happen to you one day? Here are some opinions about computer games in general.



8. Do you think these opinions are biased? Write an article entitled *'Virtual games are a reality.'*

9. In groups of four, design a new computer game.

Decide on the

- setting
- Plot
- Characters
- Objectives

Listening

10. Listen carefully to a text on 'Tour of Body' and answer the questions that are given below.

On the basis of your listening to the passage complete the following statements by choosing the answers from the given options:

(1) The Cave Automatic Virtual Environment' is

(a) a modern surgical procedure

(b) a three - dimensional virtual reality room

(c) an accurate projection of the eye and the brain

(d) a technique for developing anatomical pictures

(2) Projected image on the four walls of a room enables researchers to

(a) carry out micro surgery

(b) understand the functioning of the brain

(c) virtually get inside the molecular structure of cells and parts of human body

(d) reconstruct damaged parts of human body

(3) The 'CAVE' is a boon to surgeons because

(a) they can treat diseases located in unreachable parts of the human body

(b) it has made x-ray and MRI unnecessary

(c) it helps them avoid surgical procedures in most cases

(d) it enables surgeons to use very small surgical instruments

(4) For the CAVE to develop a virtual environment it is essential

(a) to apply mathematical formulae

(b) to project three - dimensional images on the walls

(c) to obtain two - dimensional MRI data first

(d) to understand the nature of the diseased cells and parts

(5) Once inside a three - dimensional representation of an anatomical structure, surgeons can

(a) 'move' through and 'peel away' its layers

(b) shrink themselves and travel inside the body parts

(c) convert the data into a flat picture for detailed study

(d) locate the diseased parts of the body quickly

(6) Dr. Szilard Kiss used CAVE to

(a) travel inside the eye of his patient

(b) identify the scar tissue growing over the retina

(c) go inside the layers of the retina

(d) isolate the ridge of the scar tissue

CBSE
GROW - AS YOU GROW