ciplines. Writers operate cameras and actors score films. One result is that Pittman has assembled what Boland calls "a crew of filmmakers." Among the crew are Michael Jones (cinematographer), and Paul Pope (assistant director).

"This happens in the rest of Canada sometimes, but in Newfoundland it's typical, not the exception," said Pittman. "It's not enough to just dismiss it by saying people are more friendly. They're not limited. The narrow categories of functioning are not appropriate here."

Finding Mary March has a brief winter shoot, then it's expected to appear at the Cannes Film Festival. It will be ready for release in Canadian cinemas in '88, and will be broadcast on CBC the following year.

Joan Sullivan •

Future *Power*

Two studios, of sorts, are being used to shoot **Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future**, a science fiction TV adventure series that premieres Sept. 19 across North America.

One is a former Toronto Transit Commission bus barn in the city's Parkdale district — 140,000 square feet of cavernous space where 10 sets evoke post-apocalyptic scenes of Earth, circa 2147 A.D. It's a place of dank caves, wind-swept deserts and futuristic spacecraft filled with banks of blinking instruments. Around the corner, between the props department and the studio offices, lie several scale models: a burnt-out city here, a scorched and twisted landscape over there.

But the other 'studio' may be even more arresting. It exists, in effect, only in another dimension — in a digital dimension of silicon chips and lightning-fast computer circuitry.

For this is a show that combines live-action footage with state-of-the-art computer animation that has a sophisticated, distinctly three-dimensional look. And it's the first project of its kind anywhere in the world, says producer Ian McDougall, president of Ventura Pictures.

We're on the cutting edge. It's certainly the first time anyone's done computer-imaging and live-action in this way. In terms of the technology, I don't think we could have done this show four years ago."

The 26 episodes now nearing completion tell the classic good-versus-evil story of dashing young Captain Power who, with the help of his friends Hawk, Tank and a couple of other likeminded associates, is leading a crusade to save the 22nd-century world from the dastardly clutches of Lord Dread. Lord Dread, you understand, is intent on destroying life on Earth, with the help of his robotic Dread Troopers and his handy 'digitizers' — weapons that capture their victims' minds and zap their contents into Dread's data banks. The evil lord also relies on two nasty henchmen named Blastarr and Soaron.

While Captain Power, Lord Dread and most of the other characters are played by flesh-and-blood actors (with the help of some fairly conventional special effects), Soaron and Blastarr are completely computer-animated, except for their voices.

The two characters are the products of ARCCA Animation, a new Toronto animation studio that specializes in computer-generated images. **Captain Power** is its first project.

The scene at ARCCA's offices is in marked contrast to the busy clutter at Ventura's live-action studio. Here, in an industrial suburb, several animators sit in a tidy, darkened room, perched in front of oversized computer monitors. In order to complete **Captain Power** on schedule, ARCCA is operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Animators Paul Griffin and Mark Mayerson explain the computer animation process.

"Initially, we take a drawing from the design department and devise a computer model," says Griffin. "Once we have a model built, it's animatable in umpteen-dozen ways."

Each body part of each character is a separate file in the computer program; using a combination of typed key commands and a computer mouse, the animators create character movement on their screens. One strength of computer animation is that the animators only need to set up three or four specific frames in, say, a 15-frame sequence. As long as the computer is given the right commands, the machine itself 'draws' all the in-between positions.

"It's a lot like traditional animation in some respects," says Mayerson (who, like most of ARCCA's artists, comes from a classical animation background). "We work from a storyboard, know how long the scene will last and sit down and work. The difference is that here we spend our time figuring out how to position the characters instead of doing the drawing itself."

Griffin points out that while computer animation lacks the fluidity and exaggeration of old-fashioned cartoons, it opens up whole new worlds to animators.

In the first stages of preparing a sequence for **Captain Power**, the animators use a "vector format" — a sort of moving sketch on the computer screen. Later a 'quick shade' version is prepared which depicts all the movement demanded by the sequence, but with the character just blocked out in rough colour. A video cassette of this version is taken downtown to the Ventura studio, where it is superimposed onto a video feed of the live-action during the shoot, to ensure the perspective is correct between animated and real characters. Eventually a final rendering of the animation is made, with details and full colouration. At this point a special animation effect is used to "reflect" the tone and colour of the live-action surroundings onto the metallic bodies of Blastarr and Soaron. The result is a remarkably realistic fusion of animation and live-action.

"The computers make an experienced animator's job easier," says ARCCA associate producer Steve Price. "They let him do things he couldn't do before — wouldn't even imagine doing before."

In keeping with **Captain Power**'s high-tech production values, Mattel is launching a Captain Power toyline that could radically alter children's passive relationship with the TV set. If some of the toys are pointed at the television, they will be activated at certain points during each broadcast by a specially emitted signal, enabling the kids to win and lose points in a form of glorified video game.

Despite the toys and the comic-book names of the characters, Ian McDougall is optimistic about attracting more than just young viewers: "In terms of the toys, yes, we're going for a young audience. But we definitely foresee a crossover audience of the kind of people who enjoy **Star Trek**, for instance. Our storylines are sophisticated. This isn't another Saturday morning cartoon."

For McDougall, who is best known for a stint at the Canadian Film Development Corp. and for co-producing the award-winning **Anne of Green Gables**, the show represents a major departure. But as he's quick to point out, **Captain Power and the Soldiers of the Future** is something of an adventure for everyone involved.

"It's new and exciting for all of us. Everybody's being stretched to the limit."

Christopher Harris •

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