



## The Gadget

By Paul Zindel

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**The Gadget** By Paul Zindel

An Army ambulance sped by. No siren, only a dome on its roof flashing red. It halted in front of the high-security Tech Area, where several men wearing silver coveralls and carrying glistening instruments rushed out. Dr. Orr and Oppenheimer walked quickly toward a rolling gurney that held a man half wrapped in an aluminum body bag. The man was shaking.

Something bad had happened. Very bad. For a moment Stephen believed he was back in London. He was on the roof again, and there were bombs falling...

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## The Gadget By Paul Zindel Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

It's 1945, and 13-year-old Stephen has just reached the gates of the top secret military base in Los Alamos, New Mexico. He has come to join his father, a famous physicist who is working on a covert project for the Allies. Though his father is forbidden to discuss the project in any detail, Stephen can tell by his haunted eyes and shaking hands how worried he and the other scientists are. After a few weeks, Stephen finds that he cannot control his insatiable curiosity. Enlisting the help of his new friend Tilanov, Stephen devises a plan to discover the true nature of "the gadget." But when he finally learns what it is, he also realizes another startling truth--that he has trusted the wrong person with the information and not only his life, but the lives of all Americans, could be in terrible danger.

The greatest strength of *The Gadget* is how Paul Zindel communicates, in clear and simple prose, how terribly uncertain many of those "in the know" were about dropping the atom bomb, and the idea that no one--not even top scientists--could really predict what the outcome would be. By combining this disconcerting notion with a rapid-fire plot and an Everyman teen protagonist, young adult veteran author Zindel has created a historical fiction that reads like a thrilling action-adventure pulp novel, except, (and this is the best part)--it's all true. Curious readers will also find a World War II chronology, bibliography, and short bios of prominent figures involved in the making of the atom bomb. (Ages 11 to 14) --Jennifer Hubert

#### From Publishers Weekly

Zindel maintains the page-turning immediacy of his recent novels (*The Doom Stone*; *Reef of Death*) while examining a serious piece of WWII history: the making of the atomic bomb. Through the eyes of 13-year-old Stephen, the son of one of the scientists working in Los Alamos, N.Mex., Zindel reveals the moral dilemmas lurking behind a veil of secrecy. Stephen's father works side by side with Robert Oppenheimer and other renowned physicists. Stephen gets wind of the danger involved in their covert experiments after one of the scientists is hospitalized; the victim, Dr. Soifer, piques Stephen's curiosity and alerts him to the potential disasters that could result from the "Gadget." Stephen befriends Tilanov, whose father also works on the base, and they set out together to find answers about the mysterious project, an investigation that leads to danger and disillusionment. In Stephen, Zindel combines a canny mix of innocence and intelligence, and thus allows readers to examine carefully a complex set of questions about moral and political issues and responsibilities. The novel challenges idealized views of patriotism and unconditional trust. Readers will come away from this story with much food for thought, and can go on to further reading thanks to the book's comprehensive list of historical events and descriptions of figures who played a key role in constructing these first bombs. Ages 11-up.

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#### From School Library Journal

Gr 6-9-A suspenseful and fast-paced read. In 1944, 13-year-old Stephen is living in London amid the constant threat of German air raids that have already taken the life of his favorite cousin and soul mate. Fearing for his safety, Stephen's mother sends him by boat, then train, to join his father, an American physicist, in Los Alamos, NM. The boy's new home is on "Bathtub Row" of "Site Y," a tightly secured military base surrounded by high fences and attentive guards. Anxious to be united with his father, he is disappointed to find the man distracted and tired from working on a project he is unwilling to discuss. The

mystery enveloping the base piques Stephen's curiosity and he accidentally ends up in the hospital room of a dying man who warns him about "the gadget." He is befriended by an older boy and, in a dramatic climax, they secretly follow the scientists off base and witness a horrific explosion, the first atomic bomb test on July 16, 1945, in the Jornada del Muerto Desert. In an epiphany, Stephen realizes the magnitude of this event and through his eyes, so do readers. Zindel's attention to historical accuracy is evident throughout. Unfortunately, Stephen's story is not as carefully crafted. Special circumstances and conveniences allow him to always be in the right place at the right time and a few incidents strain credibility. Overall, though, this book is an exciting introduction to the time period.-Vicki Reutter, Cazenovia High School, NY

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**Darla Kemp:**

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