

Arts & Entertainment

The brawn and the brain behind the bomb

Director and writer Roland Joffe, the man behind the Academy Award-winning films *The Killing Fields* and *The Mission*, has brought to the screen his latest vision — the dawning of the nuclear age.

Fat Man and Little Boy chronicles the conception of the first atomic bomb during the Second World War and stars Paul Newman and Dwight Schultz as the key personnel behind the development.

Paul Newman plays Gen. Leslie R. Groves, the taskmaster and driving force behind the building of the world's first atomic bomb, who allowed nothing to get in his way.

"I think he lost his sense of balance," says Joffe on a recent visit to Toronto for his film.

"He wanted to fight this war. He wanted to be a hero — not for the praise, necessarily, but he wanted to do the winning thing. He wanted to win for America.

"I think he felt that if the bomb wasn't dropped, he would've wasted all his time. His judgment definitely was skewed."

If Groves was the brawn behind the bomb, then J. Robert Oppenheimer was definitely the brains.

Oppenheimer was the brilliant physicist that Groves selected to oversee the Manhattan Project's top secret \$2 billion experiment.

"He was very fragile and suffered from incredible self-doubt, which is why I think he was as driven as he was and almost didn't make it," realized Dwight Schultz, best known for his extensive theatre background and five-year stint on TV's *The A Team*.

Playing the intensely obsessive Oppen-



heimer, Schultz felt great sympathy for his character.

"I saw him as I think Roland did, too, as a victim of everything that happened in that period, not as the monster that so many people believe he was.

"And," adds Schultz, "I had a hard time justifying that prevalent opinion."

Joffe, who also co-authored the screenplay, did an extensive search of information for the film, but hit a dead end when it came to assistance from the U.S. government.

"We didn't get much help from the government at all, so we employed our own researcher for about three years, who did an immense amount of digging around."

And what they uncovered in top secret military documents is shocking.

"We discovered that in secret, they'd been injecting patients with plutonium to discover what effect it had. And these were patients who weren't aware of what was happening to them. They claimed they were getting ahold of people who were terminally ill. There's very little follow-up, so we can't work out what happened. Schultz recognizes that certain details un-

earthed couldn't be comprehended as happening in a civilized nation.

"There is so much in the movie and it's so fantastical. The people, their histories and what they did was just so complex that if you put it in fiction and gave it to someone, they would still reject it as being implausible."

In fact, one of the technical advisors who worked on the film, Dr. Robert Cornog, was actually one of the young engineers who worked on the bomb. Joffe relates that after Cornog saw the film, he said, "This is ab-

solutely accurate. This is what it felt like." And then he started to cry because all the memories came back.

In bringing this complex, intricate and moving real-life story to the screen, Joffe had a number of main objectives he set out with.

"We had to tell the story in a passionate, emotional way for people to understand what it was really about and what decisions were really being made — to be drawn in enough to think "What does this mean for us and our future?"



Paul Newman and Dwight Schultz star in Roland Joffe's *Fat Man and Little Boy*.

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