



hese are dark days. How dark? Authors practically need night-vision goggles to write, but several novelists are exploding the darkness, blasting back, lasers set on devastating intelligence and stunning humor.

Zeitgeist surfer Douglas Coupland downloads his brain into JPod (Bloomsbury), set in an amoral video-game-design company. The always provocative V.F. contributing editor A. M. Homes promises This Book Will Save Your Life (Viking). In Persuasion Nation (Riverhead) the scarily smart George Saunders focuses his piercing satirical vision on our proud country. The deeply warped Gary Shteyngart creates Absurdistan (Random House). And Daniel Handler, in his new (Lemony Snicket-free) novel, Adverbs (Ecco), engages in wordplay so dazzling it's like watching someone juggle torches-yes, it's that entertaining.

Also in fiery bloom: Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi (with help from Azadeh Mogveni) has a view of Iran Awakening (Random House).

British cartoonist Gerald Scarfe in his Hampstead studio, 1964; inset, Scarfe's 2005 illustration of Tony Blair.

COMIC VISION

Veteran war reporter turned novelist Scott Anderson checks into Moonlight Hotel (Doubleday). The Jewish, much-married, arrogant, deathobsessed hero of Philip Roth's Everyman (Houghton Mifflin) is every man the author's ever been. Terri Jentz returns to

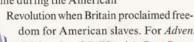
ELISSA SCHAPPELL

the Oregon town where 15 years earlier she and her roommate were attacked by an ax-wielding maniac, only to find in this Strange Piece

of Paradise (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) that the town is as changed by that night as the girls are. The Center for Constitutional Rights publishes the Articles of Impeachment Against George W. Bush. Simon Schama's Rough Crossings (Ecco) captures the little-recalled

time during the American





dom for American slaves. For Adventures of a Hollywood Secretary (University of California), Cari Beauchamp edited the letters of a nice Italian girl from Jersey who played gal Friday to Sam Goldwyn. For 45 glorious years, claws-out British caricaturist Gerald Scarfe has been Drawing Blood (Little, Brown UK). Charles D'Ambrosio is back with The Dead Fish Museum (Knopf), an unforgettable collection of intense and soulful stories. The public slaying of a family member sets off tremors in Susan Richards Shreve's thrilling novel A Student of Living Things (Viking). V.F. contributing editor Betsey Osborne illuminates The Natural History of Uncas Metcalfe (St. Martin's). Nathaniel Philbrick's Mayflower (Viking) reveals the Pilgrims' dark side. Pamela Hanson shoots Boys (Assouline) being boys. Taschen books celebrates surf photographer LeRoy Grannis. The first-ever crossing of North America was, as Paul Schneider maps out, a Brutal Journey (John Macrae). Playwright Wendy Wasserstein's posthumous debut novel showcases all her comic gifts, and unforgettable Elements of Style (Knopf). Kelly Killoren Bensimon stuffs The Bikini Book (Assouline) with wild fun. Style so rivetingly hideous it could only be evidence of evil appears in Peter York's Dictator Style (Chronicle); witness: Tito's stuffed cheetah and Idi Amin's shag carpeting. Now, that is soul-killingly tacky.

