

Shellshock in Bucha, France gears up and packing to escape

If the Russian troop withdrawal from around Kyiv last week signalled a new phase of the war in Ukraine, it seemed that evidence of mass killings of civilians in Bucha might also herald a hardening of approach from the west. Daniel Boffey reports from a town where shellshocked residents emerged from basements to find streets filled with death and destruction.

Russia claimed the bodies in Bucha were the result of an inside job, amid briefings by western intelligence that Vladimir Putin was being misadvised by a small cabal of yes-men. Andrew Roth and Pjotr Sauer take us inside Putin's inner circle and profile the men of the *siloviki*.

Ukraine invasion [Page 12](#) →

France gears up for a presidential election this month that could have profound shockwaves for Europe. As polls showed the race tightening between the centrist president Emmanuel Macron and his far-right challenger Marine Le Pen, Kim Willsher meets the young followers of the incumbent who hope to get their man over the line. Then, Angelique Chrisafis profiles Le Pen, with some fearing that the far right's time in France may be about to come.

Spotlight [Page 21](#) →

What would you pack if your life was in danger and you had to run? That's the question we put to activists, journalists and people at threat from extreme climatic conditions, who reveal the contents of the escape bags they keep by the door.

In Culture, Simon Hattenstone takes a stroll through New York with the Booker-winning author Douglas Stuart, and we ask whether the curtain will fall on Will Smith's acting career in the light of his slap in the face to Chris Rock at the Oscars.

The bag by the door [Page 34](#) →
Culture [Page 51](#) →



On the cover Russia faces the toughest sanctions ever enacted against a superpower. Was it misinformation from a cadre of yes-men that led Vladimir Putin down this path? As this week's cover art illustrates, only a small circle of people are thought to have the Russian leader's ear. That is, of course, if he is listening to anyone at all.
Illustration: Guardian Design
Photograph: Brendan Smialowski/Getty Images



6-11 GLOBAL REPORT
Headlines from the last seven days

12-20 UKRAINE INVASION
12 Yes-men Who's who in Putin's loyal inner circle
16 Bucha Coming to terms with the carnage
18 Deportation Hundreds sent to 'filtration camps'
20 Patrick Wintour What should the west do next?

21-33 SPOTLIGHT
In-depth reporting and analysis
21 France Macron and Le Pen enter the final straight
24 Hungary Orbán lands a decisive victory
26 Eyewitness A new lake in the Australian desert
29 Uganda The taxi bike rider breaking taboos
30 Iceland Tourists urged to meet, not eat, whales
31 Estonia A refuge for mink
33 Canada Family tour world before children go blind

34-44 FEATURES
34 What's in the bags of those who may need to flee?
By Corinne Redfern
42 The history of boycotts
By Archie Bland

45-50 OPINION
45 Ed Vulliamy
The lessons of Bosnia
47 George Monbiot
UK has a history of lying
48 Pete Pattison
Paying the price in Qatar

51-59 CULTURE
TV, film, music, theatre, art, architecture & more
51 Books
Douglas Stuart on his follow-up to Shuggie Bain
55 Film
How might that slap hit Will Smith's career?
57 Books
Ali Smith's Covid tale

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