

Who is winning the infowar, Covid lessons for the next pandemic and ferry staff get a sinking feeling

If nothing else, Vladimir Putin's packed stadium rally in Moscow last week revealed there is no shortage of Russian people who believe the Kremlin's grotesquely doctored version of the "special operation" in Ukraine. But it's not just a matter of state propaganda in Russia: a wider battle for informational truth is under way, exemplified last week by a deepfake video in which Ukraine's leader Volodymyr Zelenskiy purportedly called on his own soldiers to surrender.

That the video was rapidly debunked by Ukraine highlighted what appears to be its success in combating Russia's disinformation weaponry. But, as Dan Milmo and Pjotr Sauer find, the matter of who is winning the infowars is not particularly clear. In our special report, Jon Ungeod-Thomas looks at the Russian disinformation outlets under sanction by the west, while Lorenzo Tondo and Mark Rice-Oxley speak to Ukrainians with family ties in Russia whose relationships have been shattered by a reality gap.

We also profile Tucker Carlson, the outraged and outrageous rightwing Fox News host whose conspiratorial takes on the war are much enjoyed by the Kremlin. And, in our feature section, Keith Gessen takes an authoritative, in-depth look at the long lead-up to a war that happened in plain sight, but which few saw coming.

Ukraine invasion Page 10 →

War in Ukraine has diverted attention away from the other great crisis of our times, but coronavirus is still very much with us. Countries are still tackling the pandemic in their own ways, as we find on page 23 with China's struggle to maintain its zero-Covid strategy. Others, such as the UK, hope a more laissez-faire approach can serve as a model for living with the virus. As the second anniversary of global lockdowns passes, Laura Spinney looks at how the lessons learned might be applied to the next pandemic.

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One might be forgiven for assuming that, in firing 800 workers on the spot via an online meeting and trying to replace them with cheaper contract staff, P&O Ferries had been victims of Kremlin deepfakery. But no - this was an actual restructuring plan carried out by an actual company. Amid outrage, Marina Hyde pulls no punches on our opinion pages.

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In Culture, we find out why the normally innovative singer Charli XCX has pivoted to pure manufactured pop on her final major-label album. And, amid a glut of real-life criminal cases dramatised for television, we ask if there are boundaries that such shows should not cross.

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On the cover "It strikes me that the easiest way to find out if your leader is a big fan of authoritarianism is to follow the trail of lies and disinformation needed to keep them in power," says San Francisco-based illustrator Brian Stauffer on the thinking behind his work for this week's cover. "Although the truth can be manipulated, access to social media and smartphone cameras makes for fewer shadows to hide in."



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