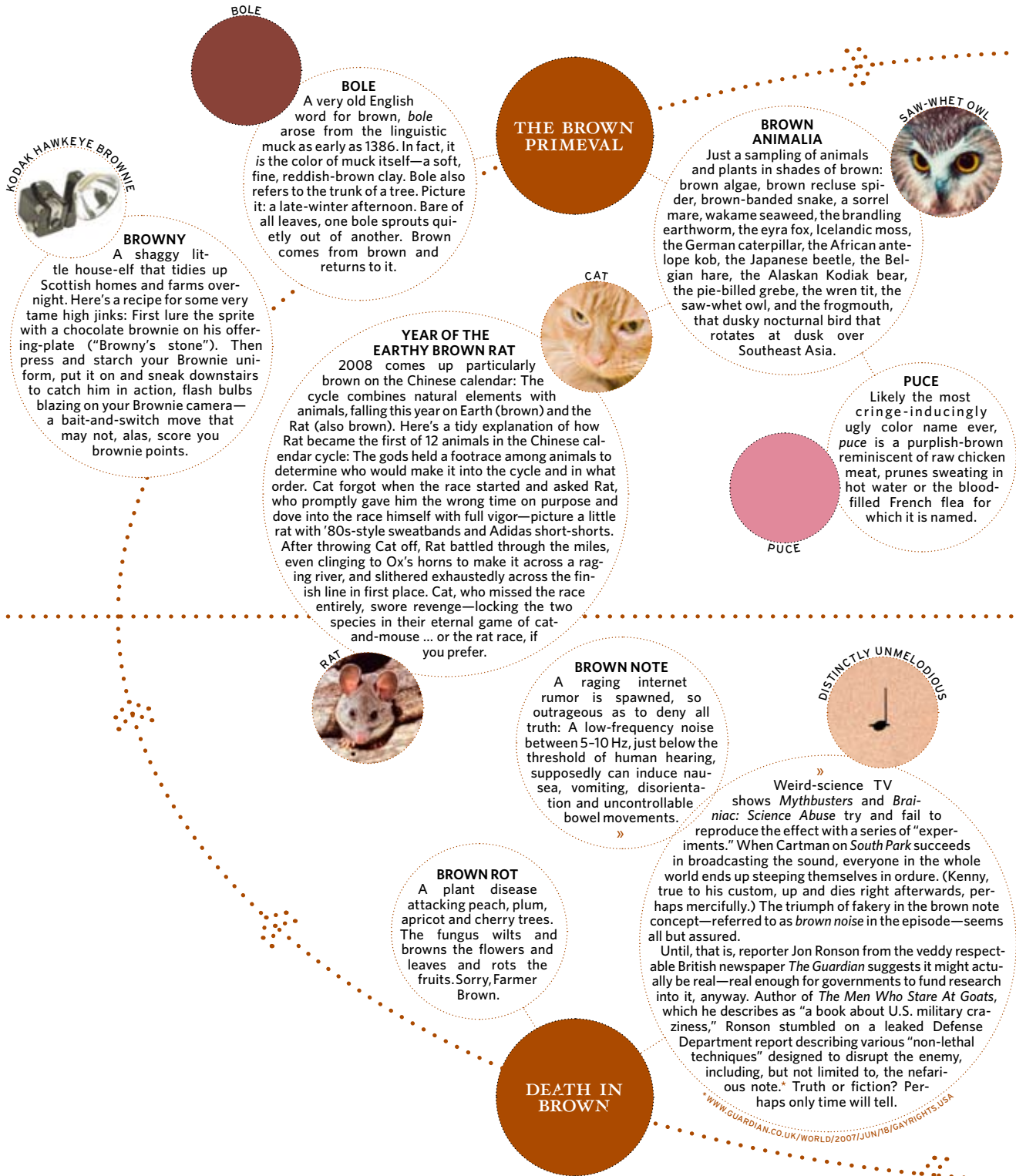


color is...

BY JUDE STEWART

What's Old Is Brown Again (& Oddly British)



BROWN STUDY

As you unpack your brown-bag lunch, a worker bee among millions, you might sigh and toss a brown (a copper penny, that is) to a beggar, sit down on a park bench and ponder your insignificance, momentarily immersed in a moody, pensive reverie—lost, as they say, in a *brown study*.

PENNY



BROWN, JONES & ROBINSON

Three bumbling archetypal Englishmen who travel together, as chronicled in the pages of *Punch* in the 1850s by cartoonist Richard Doyle. Brown, Jones and Robinson were supposed to epitomize how poorly middle-class English people behaved abroad: snobbish, provincial and in a thousand ways gauche.



RICHARD DOYLE

UBIQUITY

ALL TO ASTONISH THE BROWNS!

So ubiquitous is the name Brown among the English that *the Browns* in this expression refers to two polar opposites of society: the elegant upper crust and their country-bumpkin cousins.

Fable has it that Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife, surrounded herself with gaggles of Browns at court, country cousins who oohed at her flouncy dresses and were bewildered by all the silverware. The snootier members of her entourage delighted in shocking these simple souls with outré pronouncements, "all to astonish the Browns." Thus the phrase is an English-language equivalent of the more familiar French *épater la bourgeoisie*.

Flash-forward three centuries to the publication of John Ashton's poem, "All to Astonish the Browns," in which the frumpy Craggs try (and fail) to compete socially with their neighbor, the dashing Gentleman Brown. If you're struggling to keep up with the Joneses, Ashton has a little timeless advice: »

ANNE BOLEYN



»
*In this you'll
discover my moral,
A moral worth mitres
and crowns,
If you would save silver
and gold,
You must always
beware of the
Browns.*

BROWN SHIRTS

A curiously meek color spreads over Nazi ideological history: brown. The Nazi supporters donned brown shirts: left-over WWI uniforms for German troops headed to Africa. As many quipped »

STORM TROOPERS



» at the time, most *Brown Shirts* resembled barely singed beefsteaks in their politics: brown on the outside, but red (Communist) at their cores.

Brown spread over maps, denoting Nazi stronghold neighborhoods; to vote Nazi became known as *voting brown*. Nazi headquarters in Munich was located in the Brown House. Perhaps most creepily, Adolf Hitler chose to sleep under a big brown quilt emblazoned with a swastika, wearing matching brown pajamas and a brown silk dressing gown.

FOR LOVE OF FIREPOWER

Brown 'em with trusty Brown Bess: To *burnish* your weapon against rust actually means to make it brown—explaining innumerable references in medieval ballads to "brown blades" or "shining brown brand." A brownish stain of blood also speaks of experience: It mellows and seals a sword much the way a cook seasons a wok with repeated use.



MUSKET

This goes a ways toward explaining the British soldier's deep feeling for his musket, often nicknamed *Brown Bill* or *Brown Bess*. Of course, a giddy affection for Brown Bess does not quite excuse the faux pas of an overeager hunter who *browns*: firing indiscriminately at the darkest spot in a covey of birds, usually hitting none and scattering all.

DESTRUCTION

TO BE DONE BROWN

When you've been bamboozled and made a complete fool of, you've truly been *done brown*. Burnt! Roasted! Oh, my: your goose has definitely been cooked.

GOOSE

