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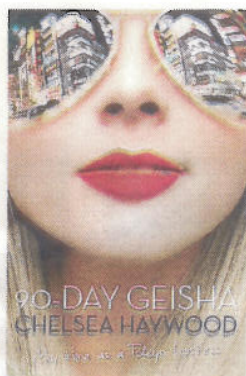
90-DAY GEISHA: MY TIME AS A TOKYO HOSTESS

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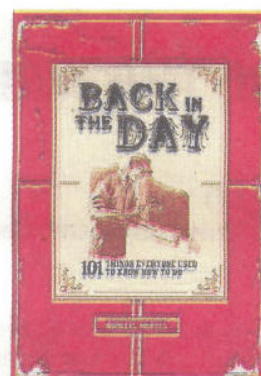
COVER NOTES Lucy Sussex

**AMENABLE WOMEN**Mavis Cheek
Faber, \$32.95

Amenable Women is a slyboots of a novel, in the best sense. The cover suggests yet another Tudor historical novel, but the story of parallel lives sets it apart. Flora is the plain widow of a dashing egomaniac; Anne, properly Anna of Cleves, was the famously "plain" fourth wife of King Henry VIII. Of all his wives, she escaped a dire end, with a generous divorce settlement and the respect of her royal stepchildren. Clearly, she had brains — something already noted in some dramatisations. That Flora's husband, in an unfinished local history, dismissed Anna as much as he did his wife, is the impetus for this story. In a decorous revenge, Flora sets out to finish the history and rehabilitate Anna. Her hope is to rehabilitate herself, though her obstacles are less formidable. The book toys with magical realism, as when Flora interrogates Anna's glorious Holbein portrait, perhaps not with complete success. The real gems of this novel are the wry observations, which elicit a smile several times a page. And the sense of character, as people manoeuvre and manipulate so vividly they almost step off the page. At the end, Flora is her own mistress, her house and income to herself, as was the case with Anna of Cleves.

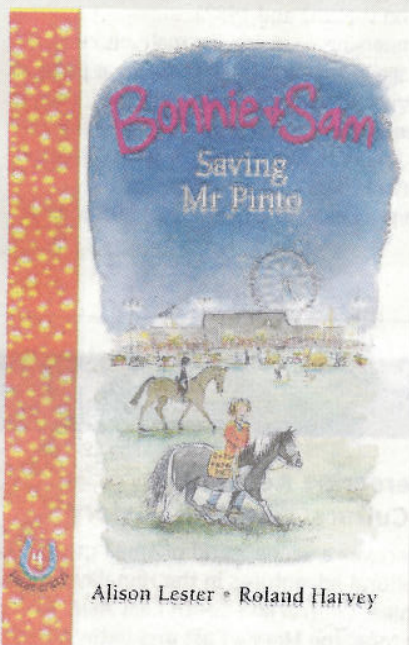
**90-DAY GEISHA: MY TIME AS A TOKYO HOSTESS**Chelsea Haywood
Ebury, \$34.95

Chelsea Haywood was a former model, world traveller and young wife. The world was at her feet — and then she decided to write a book. The impetus was meeting women whose life as Tokyo hostesses involved lots of money and apparently no prostitution. So Haywood decided to travel to Japan, be a hostess, and write about it. By her own account it is a true story, with only the names changed. What she reveals is an institution derived from the geisha, but with the need for English conversation. Hence the need for pretty, foreign girls with whom Japanese businessmen can drink and chat. That a culture pays for semi-innocent company says much about relations between the sexes. A crushing loneliness is revealed, medicated with drink. Even though she has a husband, Haywood is drawn to several of her clients, but becomes ultimately ambivalent about them, and about Japan. Sobering stuff.

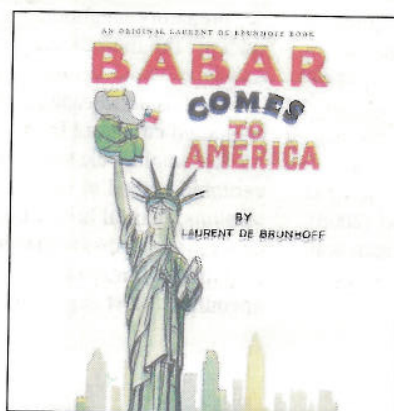
**BACK IN THE DAY: 101 THINGS EVERYONE USED TO KNOW HOW TO DO**Michael Powell
New Holland, \$16.95

The flood of 101 books will no doubt continue until there are 101 books, and nothing left to list. This example is about lost skills, some of them rather arcane. Very few of us would now embalm a body, Egyptian-style, or shoe a horse. However, even flat-dwellers can feel the need for a herb garden, or to know how to look after leather boots properly. And if civilisation really collapses again, after peak oil or any similar disaster, then we will need these skills. A disclaimer at the beginning says that the book is for entertainment purposes only and, indeed, nobody would dynamite a well without professional advice. *Back in the Day* is attractively designed, though with sometimes rudimentary illustrations. And if you would prefer not to Google sonnet writing, or how to polish silver, then this book will suit you perfectly.

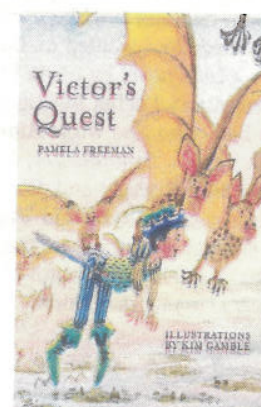
UNDER AGE Frances Atkinson

**BONNIE & SAM: SAVING MR PINTO**Alison Lester; ill. Roland Harvey
Allen & Unwin, \$12.95

This title is the fourth in the *Bonnie & Sam* series of books, which feature self-confessed "horse-crazy" best friends Bonnie and Sam. Both are occupants of the quaint-sounding Currawong Creek (in a non-specified part of country Australia), a town also populated by dogs with unlikely names such as Burl Ives and Pants, "short for Smartie Pants because she thought she knew everything". In this storyline, the girls are off to the Royal Show — perfect timing as our own Royal Melbourne Show began last weekend — where one will compete in the Royal Show Junior Girl Rider, and a friend in a competition known as the Garryowen. There's a bit of drama too, of course, but it's mostly happy days and happy endings, although the whole thing is nowhere near as "Tally ho and jolly hockey sticks!" as the "for horse-mad younger readers" billing implies. As usual, Roland Harvey's illustrations are spot-on.

**BABAR COMES TO AMERICA**Laurent de Brunhoff
Thames & Hudson, \$24.95

He's charming, smart, inquisitive, worldly and big — he's Babar, King of the Elephants. First published in 1965, this book records Babar's trip to the U.S. of A and kicks off with a press conference at Dulles International Airport where Babar shows off his English: "I am very happy to come to your great country, the country of Washington, of Mark Twain, of Danny Kaye . . ." Yes, it's dated and no doubt some references will need explaining, but it's all part of the charm. Shamelessly pro-American (check out the product placements), Babar and his family take in every cliché North America can offer, from Disneyland to a spot of overeating that prompts a trip to the "drugstore". A priceless book for the retro-obsessed or just a charming picture book for the young.

**VICTOR'S QUEST**Pamela Freeman; ill. Kim Gamble
Walker Books, \$12.95

The Queen is suffering from palpitations so it's time for her son, Prince Victor, to accept his royal responsibilities and embark on quest to find a princess and prove he's a worthy ruler. With his loyal steed, a chestnut mare named Quince, he enters the scary forest of Nevermore where Victor encounters the ridiculously named A Very Large and Ferocious Orange Bat of the Dark Forest of Nevermore. A battle to the death is supposed to ensue but, not surprisingly, Victor's not really much of a swordsman; in fact, in some circles, he's considered a little slow-witted. Despite some setbacks, which includes an attack by some large and nasty chickens, he manages to meet the sweet Valerian and gain some self-confidence, too. Ripper title for eager readers.