The following is an excerpt from the interview with Cory Daniells by Van Ikin and Marianne de Courtenay &#65533;WRITING ACROSS THE GENRES (An excerpt from) AN INTERVIEW WITH CORY DANIELLS questions by Marianne de Courtenay and Van Ikin VI: Your novel, The Last T'En, has sometimes been described as "muscular romance". The term is not derogatory, for it signifies the kind of new-breed contemporary romance story in which the lead female character is intelligent and strong-minded - but it does tend to lose sight of the fantasy element. In Australia, the Transworld edition had a beautiful cover which stressed the fantasy aspect, but the US Bantam edition had a traditional romance cover. How are you reacting to this? Actually the US edition, Broken Vows, has a very restrained cover for a book which is being marketed as a fantasy romance. There is no heaving cleavage. Who knows, maybe this will tell against it in sales. The Broken Vows cover captures the darker aspects of the book very nicely with view of a brooding castle while Imoshen and Tulkhan ride past in the foreground. Personally I love the Transworld cover. It was painted by Evert Ploeg whose portrait of Debora Mailman won the People's Choice in the Archibald Prize. I felt that Evert distilled the force of Imoshen's character in that one image. As for muscular romance - it's about time we had books where the women are more than window dressing. I used to own a book shop where I indulged in my terrible vice, reading to my heart's content. But I eventually became disillusioned. In most books the female characters were nothing more than prizes to be won by the men. Since then women have been portrayed differently in books and movies but I didn't want to write about a man with breasts. I wanted to encapsulate the female mind-set in a narrative where the woman was pro-active. The marketing of my book as fantasy romance in the US, and as a fantasy with a strong romantic theme in Australia, is interesting. Because the Australian edition is not targeted at the romance market many men have read it and enjoyed it. Yet, how many men would admit to reading a romance? MdeC: As a cross genre writer do you find opposition to what you do? That is, to crossing fantasy and romance, sf and romance. What are your thoughts on the subject? If there was opposition to a fantasy novel with a strong romantic theme from the more traditional writers at the world con they were too polite to say so to me. No, Seriously, there was no opposition from the publishing industry to a cross genre novel. In romance publishing there are many sub-genres - paranormal, intrigue, inspirational, futuristic and fantasy to name just a few. In The Last T'En (Broken Vows) the fantasy elements are much stronger than most of the fantasy romances on the shelves in the US. I received an email recently from a multi published fantasy/paranormal romance writer who bemoaned the fact that she would love to write a novel with the depth of world building that went into mine, but her editor wouldn't let her. Like me, she was a reader of SF and F from way back. All those novels I was writing in my early twenties were SF and Fantasy. I ventured into romance because it is a market which is always looking for new writers. To be frank I am a failed romance writer. Unless you've tried, you've no idea how difficult it is to write a contemporary romance. Mine kept wandering off into the personal development of the hero and heroine and whimsical background characters. I find the perceived restrictions of "genre" frustrating. Because a book contains a child narrator it is not necessarily a children's book. Think of To Kill a Mocking Bird and High Wind in Jamaica. Both of these had the absorption of a child's point of view but they reflected the peculiarities of a larger adult world. I find the marginalisation of young adult books particularly artificial. My son won't pick up a book labeled

young adult because at ten he was reading Lord of the Rings and grownup SF books. Yet he could miss good books because of this. My feeling is that good writing is good writing no matter what the genre. If I can write a book that grabs the reader from the moment they pick it up and they just have to keep reading to find out what happens than I've done what I set out to do. (Think I said something like this before). MdeC: Some writers likes to plot in detail before they begin to write. Does this work for you? Did you have a very clear idea of your characters or did they grow with the story? The Last T'En grew from my reading of Machiavelli's The Prince many years ago. I wanted to raise moral questions about power and explore the clash of Imoshen's and General Tulkhan's cultures. That makes it sound very dry but those were some of the underlying themes I developed in the trilogy. However I didn't plot it all out and say to myself "I am going to explore grand themes". I just wanted to write a damn good read. When Kate Forsyth and I were interviewed for a Sydney paper and I discovered our way of writing is very similar. I have a general feeling about where the story will go then I let the characters lead me. This means about two thirds of the way through the book I often feel overwhelmed. That is when I go back to the beginning and rewrite. This gives me a chance to tie in all the new threads that have emerged and by this time I know the characters much better. I can add layers to their interactions. Then when I get to the point where I jammed up I sail through it. The characters grow and change as people. This has been a fun part of doing the trilogy, pushing Imoshen and Tulkhan to their limits and seeing how they cope. It was scary launching into book three of the trilogy knowing I had to round off the story in that book. I'd already written book two before I submitted the first book so I knew where the story went up to that point. But before I could do the final rewrite on book two I had to finish book three so I could plant clues which would develop in the last book. I wanted to write something which had strong appeal, but I wanted to challenge the conventions. For instance in my first book I have a strong older female character who advises Imoshen when her Stronghold is first overtaken. If you think female characters have had it bad in the past, older female characters have had it worse. I deliberately empower this old woman and I was particularly pleased with her final scene. VI: Your desire to raise moral questions about power is sustained very strongly in the portrayal of Tulkhan and in Imoshen's changing reactions to him. At one point in the novel Imoshen reflects that she is beginning to understand the General - that is, to understand this man who is her enemy and who holds power over her. She sums him up as "an honourable man by his own standards and a statesman" - in short, she is very fair and reasonable about someone she would have every reason to despise. On reflection, the novel contains many scenes of this kind - scenes where characters rise above their natural prejudices, at least briefly. This seems to reflect an underlying optimism about humanity's potential for goodness, or at least for tolerance. Does this reflect your own view of the book, or is it taking things a bit far? Seriously, if I wasn't optimistic about life I wouldn't have had six children. In the T'En trilogy I explored the growth and development of the two main characters. I also tried to explore the social interactions and ramifications of the clash of two very different cultures. Because I write for children and I observe my own everyday I see them make great leaps of understanding in one breath, then react with emotional immaturity in the next, especially their early teens. When creating Imoshen and Tulkhan I gave them room to make mistakes. They are imperfect, flawed beings, trying desperately to achieve goals which aren't totally opposed to each other. But because of the differences in their cultures they must learn and grow before they can reach an understanding. Writing negative destructive things is easy. I tell my kids it is much

harder to create than to destroy. And to get up every day and do your best for your family, friends and yourself no matter how tired you are is life's really big challenge.</p>