

Could That Flu Bug Be a Bioweapon?

Legal expert Lori Andrews' fictional thrillers explore cutting-edge questions about genetics

By Stuart Luman

Lori Andrews, a Chicago-Kent College of Law professor and internationally known bioethicist, has helped draft legislation to end the patenting of DNA, chaired the ethics panel overseeing the Human Genome Project, and testified before Congress, numerous federal agencies, and foreign governments. But she's found the best way to communicate the issues raised by new reproductive technologies, genetics, and biotechnology is through pulp fiction.

The 55-year-old legal scholar is about to publish her third medical thriller featuring Armed Forces Institute of Pathology geneticist Alexandra Blake. Between the covers, Andrews can explore the ethical implications of biotechnology in ways that amicus briefs to the U.S. Supreme Court can't. "It has been a really wonderful way to deal with these policy issues outside the stodgy field of law and think about alternatives," she says.

PLOT IDEAS

In her next novel, *Immunity*, to be released in September, Dr. Blake breaks a patient out of a secure quarantine facility and has to figure out whether a newly discovered disease is a bio-warfare agent or merely an emerging natural bug. The Chicago native and



Mystery writer Andrews also argues civil suits over control of people's genes

Yale Law School grad has a contract for seven more Alexandra Blake novels, which have been translated and sold in Germany, Japan, and the Netherlands.

Andrews' plots come out of her work both at Chicago-Kent, where she has taught for the past 15 years and is director of the Institute for Science, Law & Technology, and in the courts, on behalf of plaintiffs suing companies and universities for control of their individual tissue samples and genes. In 1980, she was the sole lawyer

at an academic conference on reproductive technology in Germany. She re-members thinking at the time

that any issues would be resolved in two years. "But at every turn, whether it's cloning or stem cell research, something else comes up," she says.

Thanks to TV appearances on *Oprah* and *Good Morning America*, as well as her many articles and books, cases come to her. For instance, she won a settlement for a family who sued a hospital in 2000 after it patented the gene that causes Canavan disease, a fatal genetic disorder found in children of East European Jewish descent. The family's objection: They had donated their DNA, underwritten the

hospital's research, and wanted to offer a cheap test for the disease. The hospital wouldn't let them. "What I'm trying to do in my work is prevent researchers and corporations from running roughshod over people's rights and beliefs," she says.

Such work helps explain why the law profession's *ABA Journal* listed her in January as a Newsmaker of the Year. "She's a national pioneer in the field of reproductive

technology and ethics," says Harold Krent, Chicago-Kent College of Law dean and Andrews' boss. "It's great for the school to have someone who has helped define her entire field."

Continuing to straddle her roles as high-brow scholar and low-brow mystery writer, Andrews organized a conference on Who Owns Your Body? in 2007 with Michael Crichton, the Harvard-trained M.D. and best-selling novelist, to discuss issues brought up in their work. Andrews also has consulted with the Chicago Historical Society on the ethical implications of sampling DNA from what is believed to be Abraham Lincoln's blood found on the cloak his wife wore the night he was shot. Andrews' work truly is the stuff of novels. **| BW |**

The detective heroine, military pathologist Alexandra Blake, will be back in Andrews' third novel, *Immunity*, due out in September