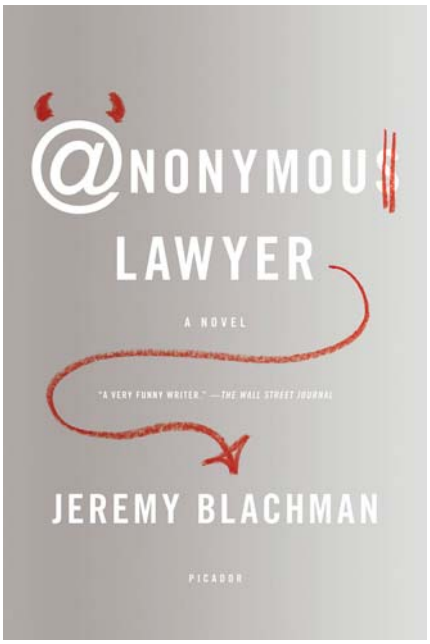
READING GROUP GUIDE

Anonymous Lawyer
A Novel



By Jeremy Blachman

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About this Guide

Dear Picador Marketing Team,

In response to your request that I create a "Reading Group Guide" for Anonymous Lawyer, I respectfully decline. Haven't we given the readers enough help already? Aren't the pages in the right order? Didn't we spellcheck? Enough is enough.

You insist that there are readers who would benefit from a series of discussion questions about the book, as if the text itself is not sufficient to provide weeks of debate. Should we include a pronunciation guide as well, in case anyone needs help with the bigger words? Maybe some pictures for any readers who can't read? How about a cracker, wedged in between pages 134 and 135, in case someone gets hungry halfway through?

It's like the time we decided at the firm to give the associates chairs in their offices. Until then, we made them stand, and it all worked out pretty well. No one could complain that his chair was less comfortable than someone else's, we didn't have to deal with having to replace broken ones, and there were no idiots wheeling down the hall to the copy machine because they're too fat and lazy to stand up and walk. But give someone a chair, and they start to get greedy. First they wanted an associate bathroom, so they wouldn't have to hold it until they got home. Then they wanted elevator privileges. It's only thirty-six floors. Ridiculous. Who do they think is paying their salaries?

My concern is that if we give the readers discussion questions, they're going to want even more. They're going to want answers. They're going to want a message board where they can discuss the book (http://www.anonymouslawfirm.com). They're going to want daily blog posts with content completely unique from what's in the book:

(http://anonymouslawyer.blogspot.com). They're going to want to be able to e-mail the author and actually get a reply (jeremy.blachman@gmail.com). Obviously this is impossible.

But I'm a flexible person. I understand you have standard practices that you must enforce for your lesser works of fiction, the inferior manuscripts that are so inaccessible to readers that they need their hands held as they walk through the pages. And I don't want to seem like my book is better than those vanity projects (Paul Auster? Who's he?), even though we all know that it is. So, out of the kindness of my heart, I've put together a list of questions. I think I've presented a compelling case here for why they're dangerous. Share them at your own risk, but don't come crying to me when your readers ask you to pick up their dry cleaning.

About the Book

He's a hiring partner at one of the world's largest law firms. Brilliant yet ruthless, he has little patience for associates who leave the office before midnight or steal candy from the bowl on his secretary's desk. He hates holidays and paralegals. And he's just started a weblog to tell the world about what life is really like at the top of his profession.

Meet *Anonymous Lawyer*. The summer's about to start, and he's got a new crop of interns. But he's also got a few things bothering him: The Jerk, his bitter rival, is determined to beat him out for the chairman's job. And Anonymous Wife is spending his money as fast as he can make it. And there's that secret e-mail he's writing, which is just a perverse bit of fun until he gets an email from someone inside the firm who knows he's its author.

Written in the form of a blog, Jeremy Blachman's tale of a lawyer who lives a lie and posts the truth is "a fast, furious and funny read "(*Tampa Tribune*).

"Stocked with up-to-the-minute references, and exposing, as it does, our culture's mania to win at all costs, *Anonymous Lawyer* has pierced the heart of a moment in our social history."

—*New York Post* (four stars)

"A fast, furious, and funny read."

—*Tampa Tribune*

"Blachman skewers his profession with slash-and-burn ferocity. . . . Laugh 'til it hurts."

—*Rocky Mountain News*

"Jeremy Blachman is a very funny writer."

—*The Wall Street Journal*

"A fast and funny read about life in a human shark tank . . . It takes skill to weave plot and character into a breezy and blog-like style, and Jeremy Blachman pulls it off."

—*The Charlotte Observer*

About the Author

Jeremy Blachman is not a hiring partner at a major law firm, but he is the author of a popular blog called *Anonymous Lawyer*. He is a recent graduate of Harvard Law School and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Discussion Questions

1. Is Anonymous Lawyer really just a bastard, or is there some shred of humanity still buried deep inside? And if his soul has not completely been vanquished yet, how many more years at the firm until it is?

2. Is Anonymous Lawyer a good person who's been turned evil by the law firm, or is that just an excuse and he'd be this way even if he was working thirty hours a week building houses for the poor and didn't marry such a moron?

3. Okay, maybe that's harsh. Is Anonymous Wife really a moron, or is that just the way Anonymous Lawyer sees her? Actually, this implies a broader question. Most of what we read in the book is solely from Anonymous Lawyer's perspective. Can we really trust that the way he's describing people on the blog is really how they are? Or is his perspective so clouded by his own bias that these might not be realistic portrayals at all – of his wife, his kids, his colleagues, and The Jerk?

4. Why does Anonymous Lawyer blog? Does blogging keep him human? Is the connection that blogging provides – the link to the outside world, the ability to share and commiserate with others – something that can keep someone sane in a crazy workplace?

5. Is Anonymous Lawyer secretly trying to get caught? Is the blog a form of self-sabotage that he's hoping people will find and then he'll get fired and finally be saved from this world? Because, really, would a hiring partner at a law firm put all of this on the Internet? Does A.L. not understand that anyone can read this and that he can never truly be completely anonymous? Or does he end up feeling like it's worth the risk because of the rewards it brings him?

6. What about Anonymous Niece? On the road to moral depravity like her uncle, or will she be able to save herself? Do you believe that she really wants to go into public interest? What's going to prevent her from taking the lucrative law firm job? What does her future hold? And if there was a sequel all about her, would you buy it? In hardcover?

7. The Suck-Up and The Musician are archetypes of two types of young lawyers – the ones who are striving to make partner and will do whatever it takes, and the ones who don't really know if the law firm life is for them, but don't know what else to do. Students spend most of law school – from the very start of the first year – being lured by big firms, with promises of big money, good food, lavish summer programs, and good training. Yet most associates find the work boring, the hours long, and the lifestyle pretty empty and unrewarding. I know The Musician inspires more sympathy and good feeling than The Suck-Up. But at least The Suck-Up is trying and is actually at the firm for a reason. Isn't The Musician just too scared and risk-averse to follow his passions? Why is he there? What does it say about legal education that people like The Musician end up at these places instead of using their law degrees to help the world in some more direct and satisfying way? Or why does someone like him even go to law school in the first place at all?

8. There's some ambiguity at the end of the novel – has Anonymous Lawyer been fired? Has The Jerk taken over the blog? Did A.L. somehow figure out a way to make chairman? Or is

he lying to his readers, fudging things to paint a certain picture, afraid to tell the truth? (Remember the volleyball post?)

9. After reading this book, would you ever encourage someone to go to law school? To work at a big firm? How realistic do you think this portrayal is? If people are this unhappy, how can it be worth it, even with $160K starting salaries? And even though this book is pretty critical of law firm culture, the lifestyle isn't unique to the law – it's endemic in a lot of the jobs that graduates of top schools end up taking. Are we as a society wasting the potential of smart and creative young people by channeling them into jobs like these? But is there something that makes law firms particularly awful, as compared with investment banking or management consulting? A number of law students actually sent resumes to Anonymous Lawyer hoping to be considered for a job at his firm. Isn't that crazy? Why would someone want to work for him?

10. What's next for Anonymous Lawyer? If in fact he's been fired, where does he go from here? He probably has enough money for early retirement, but is he really going to want to sit around the house all day? What can someone like this – beaten down after 18 years in a high-pressure environment – do after it's all over? To some degree, won't he miss the lifestyle? Won't he miss being in charge and having a set of underlings below him that he can order around? Or will he move to the country and write novels? Should he divorce his wife? Stop worrying about his daughter's eating habits? Spend more time with his son? Or just kill himself, since he has nothing worth living for without his job?

11. Okay, maybe that last one goes too far. Don't say I should kill myself. These are just discussion questions. I'm awful sometimes, I know. I treat my associates like slaves. I have the self-awareness to realize that I can occasionally be difficult to deal with. But I'm still human. And knowing that a few million people are discussing whether or not I should kill myself is possibly a bit too much to bear. Okay, a few dozen. But it still hurts. If you do distribute these questions – and, again, you shouldn't – I have only one request. A memo from each and every reader, by morning. There's a price to pay for everything.

Respectfully,
Anonymous Lawyer

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