

BOOKS

A Law Partner, and Life Is Still Miserable

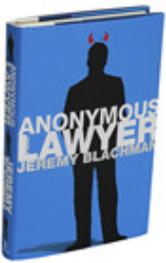
By Cameron Stracher

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Anonymous Lawyer

By Jeremy Blachman

Henry Holt, 276 pages, \$25



It's summertime at Anonymous Law Firm in Los Angeles, and the living isn't easy. Not if you're a summer associate with a nickname like "The Suck-Up," "The Guy With The Bad Haircut," "The Girl Who Dresses Like A Slut," "Ditzy," "Drinky" and "Oops." But our narrator, the hiring partner at this fictional law firm -- who is himself called Anonymous -- is too busy with other troubles to concern himself much with the interns beyond assigning nicknames to them. He's angling for the managing partner's job while contending with the intrigues of his rival, "The Jerk." Plus, someone keeps swiping his secretary's candy and his stapler. And then there is his real headache: trying to conceal his secret identity as a blogger who chronicles his unhappy life at the firm -- blog entries that are the basis for this novel.

Jeremy Blachman is a very funny writer, as he demonstrated when he launched a blog called Anonymous Lawyer in 2004, even though he was then just a law student with no legal experience other than his own stint as a summer associate. Posing as an epically miserable partner, he posted a continuing account of his law-office life that soon sparked a raging online debate about who this lawyer was and where he worked. Soon enough, a book publisher came calling. The result is "Anonymous Lawyer," printed on old-media paper but maintaining Mr. Blachman's online persona and presenting a new batch of withering depictions of life in the legal trenches.

When a female associate gives birth, she sends an email to the firm apologizing "for the inconvenience" and letting her colleagues know that she expects to return to work the next day. "I will, of course, be checking my BlackBerry throughout the day, so feel free to let me know if you need anything." Since email can indeed be checked throughout the day, no matter where the recipient is, Anonymous devises a tactic for humiliating the lawyer he calls "The One Who Loves His Kids" when Anonymous sees him leaving early on a Friday: Anonymous puts a Post-it note on the man's computer, listing the date and time, and saying: "Check in as soon as you get this. I have some important work for you to take home tonight. Hope it won't be much trouble. Thx."

In the service of his novel, Mr. Blachman sprinkles the emails of other characters among his blog entries, including those from Anonymous Niece, who is aware of her uncle's nameless pursuit and encourages him to keep on posting. Attorneys in Anonymous's online audience also chime in ("Every partner at every firm is scum," says one lawyer,

denouncing Anonymous and law partners in general. "You lie to us to trap us in this indentured servitude ... I hope you rot in the hell you've helped create").

While all this can be diverting and is occasionally hilarious, "Anonymous Lawyer" is a novel, not a blog, and as such it has larger storytelling ambitions, however choppy the narrative might be. But the narrator never exposes enough of himself to make the reader care about what happens as he scrambles after his firm's golden ring.

A bigger problem with Mr. Blachman's lawyerly conceit, though -- and this has been true since its inception -- is that no partner as ruthless as Anonymous would *ever* jeopardize his hard-won position by blogging about it. Anonymous, whether in blog or book form, is entertaining without having the bite of authenticity. It is somehow not surprising to learn that, in his real life, Mr. Blachman has graduated from Harvard Law School but is not pursuing a legal career.

Mr. Stracher is the publisher of the New York Law School Law Review and the author of "Double Billing: A Young Lawyer's Tale of Greed, Sex, Lies and the Pursuit of a Swivel Chair."

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