

AUTHOR MEDIA KIT – The Star Chamber of Stanford

Book Descriptions

BOOK DESCRIPTION 1: 271 words

The Court of Star Chamber was a secretive tribunal in early modern England that was responsible for dispensing the King’s justice. Unhindered by ordinary due process, it could mete out any punishment short of death, including whipping and mutilation. Although abolished by Parliament in 1641, the star chamber lives on today as a symbol for unchecked inquisitorial power in all its many forms.

In this academic memoir, Stanford Law graduate and academic refugee Rony Guldmann recounts his own trial before a star chamber of the mind at his alma mater. On the eve of his expected departure for a white-shoe law firm, Guldmann is offered a fellowship to stay on at the law school and continue his student research on conservatives’ cultural oppression by the liberal elites. He accepts the invitation and the project metastasizes into an all-consuming obsession, leading Guldmann to break with the consensus social reality and clash headlong with his academic milieu. The powers that be crack down, and he soon finds himself gaslighted by a liberal conspiracy seeking retribution for his transgressions against the ideologies of the professional-managerial class.

What began as an academic thesis now bleeds into the real world as Guldmann is thrust before an invisible tribunal where the rules go unannounced and the proceedings go unpublished. Formerly a standout student and rising young scholar, Guldmann now is reduced to a mere conspiracy theorist, left powerless to blow the whistle on his subterranean oppression and vindicate his sanity. Yet this fall from grace becomes an existential awakening and philosophical journey, allowing him to survive his gaslighting and finally expose the perpetrators. An all-American tribute to the renegade and underdog, *The Star Chamber of Stanford* affirms the resilience of the sovereign mind in the face of elite domination.

BOOK DESCRIPTION 2: 172 words – 970/1,158 characters/no spaces

This academic memoir recounts academic refugee Rony Guldmann's time as a Stanford Law fellow researching conservatives' cultural oppression by the liberal elites. The project metastasizes into an all-consuming obsession, leading Guldmann to break with the consensus social reality and clash headlong with his academic milieu. The powers that be crack down, and he soon finds himself gaslighted by a liberal conspiracy seeking retribution for his transgressions against the ideologies of the professional-managerial class.

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BOOK DESCRIPTION 3: 69 words -- 349/419 characters

This academic memoir recounts the fall from grace of Stanford Law graduate and former academic fellow Rony Guldmann. Once a standout student and rising young scholar, Guldmann is reduced to a mere conspiracy theorist as he finds himself gaslighted by the academic elites. In the process, he attains a new enlightenment about the nature of his milieu and with this the means to expose the powers that be.

BOOK DESCRIPTION 4: 48 words – 267/318 characters

This academic memoir recounts the fall from grace of Stanford Law graduate and former academic fellow Rony Guldmann. Gaslighted and reduced to a conspiracy theorist after transgressing ambient academic mores, he attains a new enlightenment about his condition and with this the means to expose the powers that be.

BOOK DESCRIPTION 5: 12 words

A memoir about academia, gaslighting, and a young scholar's fall from grace.

Questions and Answers

Q: What's with the footnotes and bibliography? You don't usually see those in memoirs.

A: *The Star Chamber of Stanford* is an academic memoir in the dual sense that it both recounts an academic experience and supplies academic commentary to illuminate that experience. As the memoir explains, this is “the story of a term paper that came to life, the paper that was written *for* Stanford before the force of its own inner logic made it become *about* Stanford.”

Still, the academic citation is pretty light compared to conventional scholarly fare, so readers shouldn't be deterred. True eggheads can turn to the works in progress available on my website, which take a deep dive into the memoir's big ideas. They can also have a look at my published *Two Orientations Toward Human Nature*. But you don't need these to understand the memoir. All that's required is an open mind.

Q: What do you mean by “gaslighting”?

A: Gaslighting is a specific form of psychological manipulation that targets its victims' confidence in their very sanity. The term derives from a 1938 play, *Gaslight*, and its 1944 film adaptation, starring Ingrid Bergmann and Charles Boyer (spoiler alert). Set in Victorian London, the movie tells of a Janus-faced husband who schemes to convince his trusting young wife that she's losing her mind, so he can have her committed, seize her property, and recover lost jewels hidden somewhere in the home. By stealthily dislocating various chattels and then disclaiming responsibility for this, he persuades her that she's succumbing to unconscious kleptomania. Unbeknown to her, he spends his evenings rummaging for the lost jewels in the attic. When he ignites the attic gaslight, the other gaslights in the house dim, which the wife notices but cannot explain. The mystery initially drives her further into self-doubt but eventually becomes the husband's undoing.

Clinically speaking, gaslighting doesn't usually involve this level of premeditation, and the manipulation is typically verbal rather than environmental. The term has also seeped into political discourse, where it suggests a ploy to distract the public from self-evident facts, though its meaning is often diluted to signify run-of-the-mill intellectual dishonesty. The gaslighting in the memoir is more akin to what takes place in the movie than to this more elastic political usage, except that it's a great deal more intellectualized, as befits the setting. Some will call my allegations convoluted. I say that “convoluted” is what to expect when gaslighted by some of the country's leading minds. That's why I can't give you a quick and dirty rundown of what the hell I'm talking about and am reduced to making cryptic pronouncements. It simply defies familiar categories of human behavior, so you'll have to read the book.

Q: No offense, but could you be deluded about the gaslighting? You're holding yourself out as a sane actor who was gaslighted into a simulacrum of insanity, but might you be an insane one who just imagined being gaslighted?

A: No offense taken. It's a fair question. I ask only that people hear me out before trying to answer it. That's what the memoir is for. It's a rigorous defense of my sanity. Ultimately, it's for readers to judge whether yours truly is a crackpot or a lone crusader for truth. All I can do is make my strongest argument. If you're convinced, great. If not, that's fine too. Readers have my permission to treat the book as literary fiction.

Q: So you admit you're a conspiracy theorist?

A: Yes. I'm alleging a conspiracy to gaslight on the basis of circumstantial evidence and inference rather than direct observation, so that makes me a conspiracy theorist. The memoir is a carefully argued highbrow conspiracy theory for inquiring minds, and I wear my tinfoil hat with pride. This doesn't mean I endorse every conspiracy theory out there, of course. I do not believe the moon landings were faked or that the World Bank has been infiltrated by an alien race of reptilian shapeshifters ushering in the reign of the Antichrist.

Conspiracy theorists get a bad rap. But no matter the stereotypes we're not all the same, and our theories deserve to be judged on their own merits. Yes, my account of events is stranger than fiction, but I think it holds up on close reflection. Plausible deniability is a thing, and extraordinary things are known to happen in the world from time to time. Did everything take place *exactly* as I've conjectured? Maybe not. Is my theory largely true as to the big picture? I think so. But, as I said, readers will judge for themselves. That's the fun of the book. At the very least, I hope to upend settled prejudices about conspiracy theorists and what we have to contribute.

Q: Are you also a troll?

A: An agitator perhaps, but not a troll. Some of my methods may be trollesque, as I do have an impish streak, but my ends are serious.

Q: Aren't you exploiting your former association with Stanford to raise your own profile?

A: I suppose so. But people wouldn't be taking on all that student debt to attend Stanford if not to grow their symbolic capital through that association. Sure, mine is an unusual way of going about this. But Stanford is committed to diversity, so it shouldn't begrudge such transgressive undertakings. This kind of book isn't without precedent, by the way. William F. Buckley went after his alma mater in *God and Man at Yale*. John Leboutillier went after his in *Harvard Hates America*. Now it's Stanford's turn in the spotlight. That's just an occupational hazard of being a preeminent university, and it's a testament to Stanford's intellectual vibrancy that my saga should have unfolded there and nowhere else. Academia is a dog-eat-dog world and I'm punching up here, doing my bit to hold the elites to account, so please spare me the crocodile tears.

Q: I don't bother with conservative screeds, so why should I read this?

A: I do follow conservatives in turning the language of the Left against the Left, and especially the academic elites. But as the memoir clarifies, I'm simply taking liberalism to its logical conclusion, not defending conservatism as an overarching worldview. It's a mainstay of left-liberal thought that subtle forms of white, male, or heterosexual privilege blind us to pervasive subterranean inequalities, which dominant ideologies then disguise as the natural order. I'm bringing this critical spirit to bear on the ideologies of academia and the professional-managerial class. By exposing the gaslighting, I expose those ideologies.

Q: Is this a revenge memoir?

A: Let's hope, since success is the best revenge. Vengeance in moderation is a virtue, so long as it's reasonably proportioned to its causes. Readers can judge for themselves whether I've hit that golden mean. My personal motives aside, I stress that the memoir speaks to perennial questions that are much bigger than just me. Viewed through a narrow lens, my experience was utterly *sui generis*. But understood philosophically, it distilled forces that are structural to academia, and the key events in the memoir only make sense as manifestations of these ubiquitous forces. So the memoir is about much more than the particular actors involved. It's a critical theory of academia where the personal is the political.

Q: Why are you only now going public with this, a decade after the alleged gaslighting? Some people are going to wonder why you took so long to come out of the woodwork. Doesn't this harm your credibility?

A: I play a long game. As you'll appreciate once you get through the book, making my case was always going to be a challenge. Sure, my argument is pretty cogent now. But don't underestimate what it took to get it there. Additionally, I wanted to have the two companion volumes I mentioned available to interested readers, at least as advanced drafts. These alone were several dissertations' worth of writing. Pile my day job on top of it all and I just couldn't have been ready any sooner to break my silence.

So the long delay shouldn't raise eyebrows. I'm actually glad the memoir is only now being released. Tell someone ten years ago that you had been gaslighted and they might have no clue what you were talking about. Today we're a lot more conscious of gaslighting. People understand that it's a problem and are willing to listen to survivors.

Q: Are you claiming victimhood?

A: Philosophically speaking, I'm a victim of the times. Interpersonally speaking, I'm both a victim and a victimizer, as we all are. The memoir eschews facile black-and-white moral judgments, so don't expect straightforward answers to such questions. Elites will do what elites will do, so there's no point in moral diatribe.

Q: Why the jester on the cover? Is he supposed to symbolize you?

A: Yes. The medieval jester or fool was a versatile entertainer whose wide skill set included dancing, juggling, acrobatics, singing, and magic tricks. He was also a comedian responsible for mocking his audience at court. His lowly status there gave him special license to openly ridicule and abuse kings and nobles without retribution, since none could claim to take him seriously. This empowered him to voice frank criticisms and unpopular insights that the high and mighty dared not utter. So the fool was really a sage who spoke truth to power from behind a veil of madness and imbecility. *The Star Chamber of Stanford* channels the spirit and power of the jester.

Biographies

Short Bio

Rony Guldmann is a New York attorney who has fought the good fight against the twin scourges of product mislabeling and unsolicited commercial texting. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Indiana University and his J.D. from Stanford Law School. He is the author of *Two Orientations Toward Human Nature*, published by Routledge. Learn more at ronyguldmann.com.

Longer Bio

Rony Guldmann is a New York attorney who has fought the good fight against the twin scourges of product mislabeling and unsolicited commercial texting, setting his crosshairs on purveyors of fraudulent manuka honey, diluted olive oil, and deceptively oversized food packaging, among other villains. He received his B.A. in philosophy from the University of Michigan, his Ph.D. in the same from Indiana University, and his J.D. from Stanford Law School, where he was the James C. Gaither Fellow after graduation. In a former life before the tribulations of *The Star Chamber*, Rony taught philosophy at Iona College, Hofstra University, and Fordham University in an attempt to enlighten easily distracted young minds about human nature, ethics, and other lofty matters. He is the author of *Two Orientations Toward Human Nature*, published by Routledge and hailed in the *Review of Metaphysics* as a doing “an impressive job of pulling together a considerable range of historical and contemporary reflection into a well-crafted, synthetically-rich, and engaging tour of human nature.” He lives in Astoria, Queens. Learn more at ronyguldmann.com.