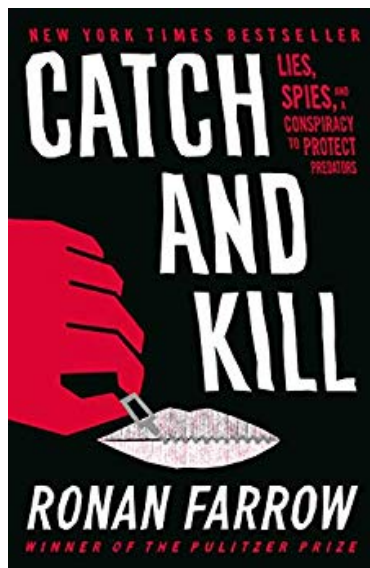


Catch and Kill Book Summary, by Ronan Farrow (archive)

by Allen Cheng

<https://www.allencheng.com/catch-and-kill-summary-ronan-farrow/>



Catch and Kill: Lies, Spies, and a Conspiracy to Catch Predators is journalist Ronan Farrow's memoir of his experiences uncovering one of Hollywood's biggest scandals—the decades of sexual abuse and assault by entertainment industry power broker Harvey Weinstein. Farrow overcame surveillance, intimidation, blackmail, and even the resistance of his employers at NBC to break this story. He and the women who came forward to share their experiences exposed how Weinstein was able to use his power, wealth, and influence to intimidate and silence his victims, and how the media and legal systems allowed him to operate with impunity for decades.

1-Page Summary of Catch and Kill

Catch and Kill: Lies, Spies, and a Conspiracy to Catch Predators is the story of how NBC reporter Ronan Farrow broke the story on mega-producer Harvey Weinstein's decades of sexual assault and abuse. Chasing down leads and talking to women who bravely came forward to share their stories, Farrow exposed to the public how **Weinstein used his power, wealth, and influence to intimidate and silence**

his victims, and how the media and legal systems allowed him to operate with impunity for decades.

Throughout his career, Weinstein had operated as a serial sexual predator. Since his rise as major power player in Hollywood in the late 1980s, he had only become more brazen in his crimes, and seemingly impervious to justice. As Farrow discovered through conversations with dozens of women who risked their careers, reputations, and even physical safety to come forward, Weinstein's abuse was systematic, routine, and disturbingly similar from victim to victim.

The women, most of them aspiring actresses or producers, all recounted the same elements of their encounters with Weinstein—promises from him to advance their careers and make them into stars; a “meeting” scheduled; the time and location of the “meeting” changed at the last minute from daytime in a hotel lobby to nighttime in a hotel suite or his private office; and the violent assault that would follow when they were alone with him. **The common threads running through each of these stories lent credibility to all of them. It was a pattern of practiced, rehearsed predation.**

But breaking this story proved far more difficult for Farrow than he could have possibly thought. Even in the earliest stages of his reporting, he quickly realized that his superiors at NBC were highly reluctant to run with his story: they treated the searing testimony from his sources with skepticism and gave Weinstein an extraordinary benefit of the doubt. To Farrow, it seemed like his own network was siding with Weinstein over one of its own reporters. As Farrow dug deeper into the story, he saw **just how far Weinstein's web of corruption and influence spread in the entertainment industry, the news media, and even the criminal justice system.**

As a major Hollywood film producer and distributor, Weinstein had the power to make and break the careers of the actresses upon whom he preyed, and **he used this economic clout in the entertainment industry to kill the careers of women who tried to come forward about his sexual abuse.** With his influence over the news networks and the tabloid press, Weinstein had been able to successfully bury any stories that might have hinted at his history of predation—and ruthlessly smear and vilify any women who dared try and tell their stories. Through his team of high-powered attorneys and his political contributions, he managed to shield himself from the criminal justice system, even when prosecutors were presented with clear and incontrovertible evidence of his vast crimes.

Collaboration with Tabloid Media

One of Weinstein's major sources of power was his alliances with the tabloid world, particularly American Media, Inc. (AMI), publishers of the *National Enquirer*. The magazine had a long and sordid history of protecting powerful men like Harvey Weinstein from negative press. They did this by blackmailing and threatening people (chiefly women) who accused such men of misconduct.

AMI would acquire the legal rights to the stories of former mistresses or employees who had accused such men of sexual impropriety or marital infidelity. They would then intimidate or bribe these accusers into signing away their rights to ever publicly discuss the accusations, in exchange for hush money, **through a contract known as a non-disclosure agreement (NDA).** If the accusers were reluctant to sign, AMI would threaten to humiliate them in the pages of the *National Enquirer* by running negative stories about them. They would be threatened with financially punitive legal action if they ever breathed a word of their story to anyone or even acknowledged the existence of the agreement. AMI would then

arrange to have the stories buried by refusing to publish them. **In the journalistic world, the practice was known as “catch and kill.” **

AMI had forged a close working relationship with Harvey Weinstein, a relationship that benefited both parties. Weinstein, of course, was able to use his connections with AMI to bury stories about his criminality and bully his accusers into silence. AMI, on the other hand, made a partner and ally out of one of the most powerful and well-connected people in Hollywood—and gained invaluable leverage over Weinstein, should the company ever need to use it.

When actress Rose McGowan claimed via Twitter that she had been raped by a Hollywood mogul in the 1990s (whom many in the film industry knew to be Weinstein), it prompted speculation among the general public about the identity of her rapist. AMI went into full attack mode as part of a preemptive defense of Weinstein, with the editor-in-chief of the *Enquirer* declaring to his staff, “I want dirt on that bitch.”

Open Secrets

Weinstein’s career as a violent sexual predator was an open secret in the entertainment industry. Farrow spoke to former Weinstein Company producers, executives, and assistants, all of whom claimed that it was standard practice for a pool of hush money to be set aside to pay off women to prevent them from going public with their accusations. Others attested that they had personally witnessed Weinstein inappropriately touching women throughout their time at the company. This was standard behavior on Weinstein’s part (down to the specific tactics and ruses he used to lure women into his hotel rooms or office) and knowledge of it was widespread throughout the company and the broader film industry.

The Weinstein Company was fully complicit in the criminal behavior of its boss, with his pattern of predation well known. It even had people on the company payroll with nominal jobs, but whose _real_ functions were to act as pimps for Weinstein, arranging liaisons between him and his unsuspecting victims, almost always with some sort of professional pretext used as a ruse. Many employees helped him procure victims and arrange his liaisons, knowing full well what their boss’ intentions were. **The abuse was systematic and routine—trusted assistants were even made to keep track of all the women Weinstein had assaulted. **

McGowan had told many people about what Weinstein had done to her, both at the time of the assault and in the years following. She had been met with skepticism, and with warnings not to make waves, lest she incur Weinstein’s retaliatory wrath. One attorney specializing in criminal law to whom she spoke even advised McGowan to drop the matter altogether, claiming that she wouldn’t be deemed a credible witness because she had appeared in sex scenes in some of her films.

Corruption of the Justice System

The story of model Ambra Battilana Gutierrez and her encounter with Weinstein in New York reveals the extent of his power and influence, even within the supposedly impartial criminal justice system. In 2015, Gutierrez caught Weinstein on tape admitting to having groped her on a previous occasion, as well as having committed similar acts in the past. When she confronted him about this, the audio recording

revealed a dismissive Weinstein declaring, “I’m used to that.” Gutierrez brought this recording to the police, who brought him in for questioning.

With this recording, it should have been an open-and-shut case for the Manhattan District Attorney’s office. But it wasn’t. When Gutierrez was questioned by the Sex Crimes Unit of the DA’s office, they seemed more interested in _her _personal sexual history and career as a lingerie model than they were about the incident with Weinstein.

****Two weeks later, the Manhattan DA (notably, a recipient of campaign money from Weinstein’s attorney) announced that he would _not _be bringing charges against Weinstein. ****

Espionage, Blackmail, and Intimidation

Perhaps most chillingly, **Weinstein had in his employ a network of professional spies, private investigators, and double agents.** These individuals, operating primarily through an Israeli private security firm called Black Cube, surveilled Weinstein’s victims and the journalists who tried to talk to them. These agents tapped Farrow’s phone and email (as well as those of his sources) and even adopted false identities as journalists, activists, or philanthropists, in an effort to uncover information, gather dirt, and derail the story.

****This intelligence and surveillance operation ****was able to tell Weinstein which sources were talking to which reporters and which news organizations were working on stories about him. Through his network of attorneys, PR flacks, agents, producers, and hired spies, Weinstein had, for decades, successfully strangled all attempts to bring his misconduct to light.

Weinstein engaged the services of Black Cube, an Israeli private security firm, to follow Farrow, track his cell phone, and look for any possible dirt that could be used to blackmail him or discredit his story. Farrow also received cryptic death threats through text messages to his personal phone. It was all part of the Weinstein strategy of intimidation, blackmail, and deception.

Black Cube also used double agents to infiltrate Farrow’s sources, forging friendships with these Weinstein victims by posing as journalists, activists, or philanthropists who were ostensibly interested in their experiences as survivors of sexual assault. One spy, using the alias Diana Filip, claimed to be a representative from a financial services company called Reuben Capital Partners (which did not exist). In this capacity, she targeted Rose McGowan and befriended the actress, telling McGowan that her firm was interested in honoring her for her advocacy work. Through this “friendship,” McGowan unwittingly revealed crucial information about her sexual assault and Farrow’s story to a hired agent of Weinstein.

Sabotage at NBC

Weinstein was also able to exert significant pressure at NBC, through his connections with Noah Oppenheim, president of NBC News; Phil Griffin, president of MSNBC; and Andy Lack, chairman of NBC News and MSNBC, all of whom had the power to kill Farrow’s story.

NBC proved to be extremely pliant in Weinstein's hands. Even when Farrow had secured, through one of his sources, an audio recording in which Weinstein admitted to groping this woman (and that he'd committed similar acts in the past), the network refused to run the story.

They demanded evidence well above and beyond the standard that would have typically been applied for such a news story, cast doubt on the credibility of Farrow's sources, and argued that Weinstein's misconduct was not even newsworthy. To Farrow, the network was applying a rigorous and unreasonable burden of proof for this story, while granting an extraordinary benefit of the doubt to Weinstein.

Farrow was ordered to halt the story several times at NBC, while it went for approval to the parent company, Comcast. This was highly unusual, especially for a story with as much solid evidence as Farrow's. Unbeknownst to Farrow, Phil Griffin, president of MSNBC, had personally promised Weinstein that the story would be killed. Farrow continued building the story, even without NBC's sanction. Eventually, Weinstein's machinations succeeded in getting Farrow fired from NBC.

Refusal to Capitulate

Undeterred, Farrow took his Weinstein reporting to the print magazine *The New Yorker*. Too many women had risked too much to come forward, and Farrow was unwilling to let NBC's cowardice and treachery bury a story that needed to be told. Unlike NBC, *The New Yorker* (and its editor, David Remnick) were fully supportive of Farrow's work and urged him to continue reporting. Indeed, they were shocked at NBC's refusal to run with what was obviously a bombshell piece. With the blessing of *The New Yorker*, Farrow continued to plug away at the story, interviewing key Weinstein victims like Mira Sorvino, Rosanna Arquette, and Asia Argento.

Shortly before the piece went to print, Farrow placed a call to the Weinstein Company for final comment. To his astonishment, he wound up speaking with Weinstein himself. The Hollywood kingpin was wildly emotional on the phone, combatively and furiously ranting at Farrow that there was nothing to any of the allegations, threatening to sue him and destroy his reputation, and mocking and sneering at him for having been fired by NBC. At one point, **Weinstein expressed his belief that a sexual encounter couldn't be rape if the woman had consensual sex with him on subsequent occasions**—an assertion wildly at odds with the true nature of how sexual abuse works, especially when it happens in the context of a workplace and a boss/subordinate relationship.

On October 10, 2017, Ronan Farrow's piece, ["From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein's Accusers Tell Their Stories,"](#) appeared in *The New Yorker*. He had broken open the dam on an ugly aspect of American life that extended to the highest levels of power.

In the wake of that reporting, NBC's refusal to air the story became more clear, as **NBC had its own litany of problems with sexual abuse.** Matt Lauer, co-host of the *Today* show and a major star for NBC, was revealed to have had a Weinstein-like record of sexual predation (and even violent rape) for years, despite dozens of complaints about him having been brought to the network over the years. Moreover, Weinstein had strongly hinted to the higher-ups at NBC that he *knew* about Lauer's misconduct and was prepared to blackmail the network over it.

In response to allegations of misconduct against one of its stars, NBC had simply done what the

_Enquirer _and Weinstein had done: bully women into silence and force them to sign NDAs. NBC refused to expose a predator like Weinstein, because they were compromised by Lauer and Weinstein's leverage over them.

Justice

In the end, Farrow and the women who came forward to tell their stories prevailed over the intimidation, fear, and corruption to expose both Weinstein's crimes and the enablers in the media and legal systems who had allowed him to evade justice for so long. **Farrow's bombshell reporting played a key role in starting the worldwide #MeToo movement**, shining a light on sexual abuse and exploitation by the powerful against the powerless, especially in the worlds of media, business, and politics.

The story of Weinstein's decades of abuse can tell us a lot. We can look at it as a negative and dispiriting story, one in which a handful of high-status men—Harvey Weinstein chief among them—used their power, wealth, and influence to commit sexual assaults with impunity over a period of decades. We can also see it as a tale about the corruption of key institutions of American society, like the free press and law enforcement, that are supposed to promote the public good. And indeed, **men like Weinstein, Trump, and Lauer do _not _operate in a vacuum: they are predators because they operate within a system and a culture which enables their predation.**

But we can also see it as an uplifting story, in which a handful of brave women staged an act of rebellion and defiance against a criminal patriarchy, with the help of a journalist, Ronan Farrow, who wanted to tell their stories. ***Catch and Kill is ultimately not a story of exploitation: it is one of courage. ***

Full Summary of Catch and Kill

Chapter 1: Rumors

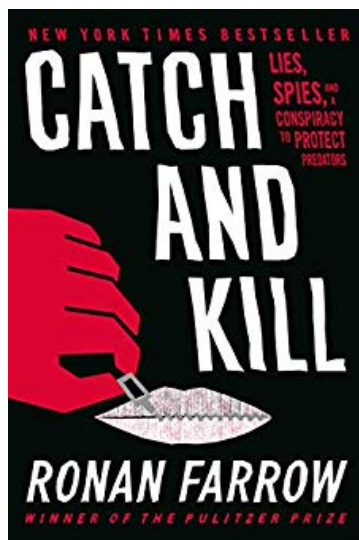
Shortform Introduction

_Catch and Kill: Lies, Spies and a Conspiracy to Catch Predators _is primarily about journalist Ronan Farrow's year-long journey to expose the story of Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein's decades of sexual abuse. As such, it is part journalistic account, part spy thriller, part detective story.

But the book touches on other figures and storylines as well, such as:

- the sexual harassment and abuse scandals of Donald Trump, including both the Karen McDougal and Stormy Daniels storiesan entire subplot involving a pair of Eastern European spies hired by Weinst...

---End of Preview---



Read the rest of the "Catch and Kill" summary at my new book summary product, [Shortform](#).

Here's what you'll find in the **full Catch and Kill** summary:

- Chapter 1: Rumors
- Chapter 2: Chasing Leads
- Exercise: Highlighting Exploitation
- Chapter 3: Assembling the Pieces
- Chapter 4: The Floodgates Open
- Exercise: Fighting Abuse
- Chapter 5: Fallout
- Exercise: Final Thoughts on Catch and Kill

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