



For Reasons Unknown

Michael Wood

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Two murders. Twenty years. Now the killer is back for more...

A darkly compelling debut crime novel. The start of a brilliant series, perfect for fans of Stuart MacBride, Val McDermid, and James Oswald.

DCI Matilda Darke has returned to work after a nine month absence. A shadow of her former self, she is tasked with re-opening a cold case: the terrifyingly brutal murders of Miranda and Stefan Harkness. The only witness was their eleven-year-old son, Jonathan, who was too deeply traumatized to speak a word.

Then a dead body is discovered, and the investigation leads back to Matilda's case. Suddenly the past and present converge, and it seems a killer may have come back for more...

For Reasons Unknown Details

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From Reader Review For Reasons Unknown for online ebook

Christine says

Wow, I have just stumbled upon another well-hidden little gem! Where have you been hiding, Mr. Wood? This novel adds to my growing pile of terrific debut thrillers and new authors to watch that I have been fortunate enough to discover over the last year. I just loved this book!

For Reasons Unknown is a compelling police procedural marinated with a very heavy dose of character development. The protagonist, DCI Matilda Darke, has been hit hard with a double whammy of a work disaster and a family tragedy several months previous. As the story opens, she is struggling mightily to regain her confidence and resume her career as head of the Murder Investigation Team. She is assigned a 20-year-old double murder cold case with which to ease back in, but the case takes some unanticipated turns, evolving into a very active situation. Jonathan Harkness, another major character, is the only witness to the double murder of his parents when he was 11 years old. He was rendered mute for 18 months by this trauma and has blocked out most of what happened. Mr. Wood does a great job getting us inside not only Matilda's head, but Jonathan's as well, giving us a great vantage points from which to observe the investigation play out. Matilda is also dealing with a hostile colleague, Ben Hales, who has been Acting DCI and head of the Murder unit while Matilda is working her way back; we also get his viewpoint of the situation as well as that of Maun Barrington, Jonathan's neighbor. Other characters to enjoy include Matilda's engaging best friend (Dr. Adele Kean), Matilda's likeable colleagues (especially DS Sian Mills and DC Rory Fleming), and Jonathan's boss (Stephen Egan).

As far as the plot goes, it provides a knock-your-socks-off page-turning experience with many unputdownable moments. Though I had an "intermittent inkling" of who the baddie was, I couldn't really piece it together and the many twists and turns occurring all the way through to the last chapter had me changing my mind multiple times. I hated the book to end!

Over the last year and a half I have discovered some wonderful newer thriller writers, most notably Angela Marsons, Cody McFadyen, Robert Bryndza, Stacy Green, Tom Bale, Owen Mullen and Matt Brolly. I am adding Michael Wood to this list. I liken him most to Ms. Marsons and Mr. Bryndza. If you like these writers, do yourself a favor and grab For Reasons Unknown. I was so impressed I just bought the newly released second book in the Matilda Darke series, Outside Looking In, and immediately put it on my "Top 5" shelf. Kudos, Mr. Wood, for a most auspicious debut novel!!

Joanne Robertson says

WOW!! I have just finished this book and wanted to get my thoughts written down as soon as possible. This is a fabulous book that, in a world full of crime books, really stands out. It is a police procedural that will stay in my mind for a lot longer than the norm. And I think the reason is that it just seems very "real" and "personal". This book had been recommended by several bloggers that I trust 100% so I knew it was one I needed to buy asap!

DCI Matilda Darke has been off work due to reasons that become clearer as the book progresses. She returns to a station where the covering DCI is unhappy with her reappearance and she is to have a phased return with reduced hours and shut away from the MIT to have a look at a particular cold case. That case turns out to be

the murder of a couple twenty years ago were the only witness was the couples 11 year old son. The demolition of the murder scene seems to spark off a series of events that are going to test Matilda to the extreme. Is she ready to be back?

This was a 5* read for me for many reasons. The setting of Sheffield was a great choice-the gritty northern city is obviously well known and loved by the author and added a darkness to the crime scenes. Mainly though, I loved the way the characters were so well described and layered that their personalities really shone through. I loved them all especially Matilda and her best friend Adele. I also loved Jonathan and the way he developed throughout-a crime book loving misfit working in a book shop, I found myself really rooting for a better life for him and the happiness he was convinced would never come his way. I also want to say I love any book where Tunnocks teacakes make several appearances!

This is one series where I am absolutely desperate to get my hands on Book 2 as I am really taken by Matilda and want to see where she goes from here. I also think there is more to come about the "kidnapping" case as my interest was certainly piqued by the snippets we received in this first book. I just hope I don't have too long to wait!! One of my top reads so far this year.

Noelle says

I saw this book mentioned by various blogger friends and on social media sites. It was getting a lot of positive feedback so I broke my book-buying ban and purchased a copy. Well that was one of the smartest things I have done in a while as this book was...well...phenomenal! I don't often say that...check my reviews...you'll see!

The characters in this book full of life. As I turned each page I really got a feel for Matilda, Jonathan, Stephen, Maun, and DCI Hales to name a few. But what I really enjoyed was the author only gave you enough to keep hold of you. As I read this book, it was like I was sucking in air and holding my breath as each chapter revealed a little bit more. And then came the twists. I think I was hyperventilating by that point as I had predicted some things, but they did not make sense until the author chucked in a little more information and this kept me hooked.

I am still surprised that this is a debut novel because it felt like the author had nailed the plot, the character development and the sequencing. All of the hooks were right on target. I actually stayed up until 3am when I had to get up for work at 5am because I just could not bear to put this book down. I just had to know what happened!

I often wonder when I read books, how much of the author is in the characters/pages. With this book, for some reason, I felt there was a lot of the author in this book...the only thing that was missing was Woody...and if you want to know who Woody is, check out Michael Wood's pictures on Twitter ! He is a cutie! Woody that is...though I guess Michael is easy on the eyes too! LOL ...Don't want to leave him out! This book was eery, thought provoking, full of suspense and really made me squeal with excitement at times. I feel like it is one of those books that you cannot and should not pass up reading ...Treat yourself to one of my favourite books of 2015. Definitely going in my top 10

Jean says

For Reasons Unknown by Michael Wood is one of those books that stays with you for a while. But bear with me while I get a couple things off my chest. Matilda Darke? Really? That was the second problem I had with this book. It's really a terrible name! The first problem I had was the title, *For Reasons Unknown*. Don't ask me why, but it just rubbed me the wrong way.

There. Done. Those were the only things I could find wrong with Michael Wood's powerful debut novel, and I'll admit, I'm nitpicking. Admittedly, Matilda Darke is a difficult name to forget. Acting DCI Ben Hales would like to forget her, as he's taken over her position as head of the Murder Unit while "Mat" has been away on leave following a case in which she failed to recover a kidnapped child (which, in my view, seems like an incredibly difficult task and one for which she should not have shouldered all the blame). Hales would like to keep the job permanently. Matilda is assigned to a 20-year-old cold case involving a double murder. The only witness was an eleven-year-old boy, Jonathan Harkness, who was in a state of shock when found and did not speak for 18 months following the brutal killing of his parents. He went to live with an aunt; his older brother Matthew, with whom he had nothing in common, went to live with friends.

The adult Jonathan is a loner, a quiet, reticent man who prefers the company of books rather than people. Now, as his childhood home is about to be destroyed, the spotlight is on him again. DCI Darke, herself a woman who has experienced a tragic loss, having recently lost her husband to cancer, sees Jonathan as a fragile person who must be handled carefully. This enrages Hales, who thinks that Darke has no business back on the job. When a case being handled by Hales leads back to Darke's case, the two detectives butt heads, setting tongues wagging in the investigation room and bringing down the wrath of their superior officer.

Pardon the pun, but much of this story is rather dark. Despite Matilda's brave attempts to convince herself that she is up to the task, she really questions her readiness for being back in the saddle. So do many others. But she strikes up a kinship with Jonathan Harkness, and her sensitivity and understanding of this strange man is quite impressive. As she struggles to battle her own demons, some of her guilt and insecurity come out sideways. This version of Matilda is quite difficult to like. I liked Jonathan – he seemed hopelessly melancholy and unable to see his own self-worth. I think mostly I felt sorry for him. In the end, I was awed by the author's portrayal of this troubled soul. Ben Hales had no redeeming qualities. On the plus side, I loved DS Sian Mills and Adele Kean, the pathologist who was Matilda's best friend. The latter was someone who was nurturing, but at the same time, wasn't afraid to tell her friend the truth, even when it hurt. Matilda Darke, when she is herself, is confident, capable, caring, and a very good detective.

The story kept me turning the pages from beginning to end. Not once was I tempted to skim or rush. There were times when I thought I had the answers – yes, I got a few things right, but I also got some things wrong. This wasn't what I would call a "fun" read, because I actually felt that it was quite sad, but I did like the plot, the characterization, and the surprises. I definitely plan to read the next Matilda Darke novel – now that she's starting to feel like a friend.

5 stars

Liz Barnsley says

Absolutely thoroughly enjoyed *For Reasons Unknown* – a fast paced and endlessly compelling crime thriller and (we hope) the first in a series featuring Matilda Darke (great name great character) a DCI who has

returned to work after a traumatic case and personal loss has seen her out of the picture for a while.

It's always interesting reading a new crime fiction novel when you read as many of them as I do – often they can be quite same old same old, then sometimes one comes along that grips you completely for reasons you can't quite put your finger on aptly in this case given it's title – and you know that you are going to want more. I want more.

All the elements of great crime fiction are in here – a puzzling and engaging mystery, a touch of emotional angst, characters with a past that speaks to who they are today- what Michael Wood has done particularly well here is give psychological and realistic depth to all of this, especially in relation to how he offsets one personality against the other.

Then you have a lovely twisty turny murder case, where some things are predictable and some things are most definitely not so, a great piece of storytelling that gives the old brain cells a work out and really will have you avidly turning the pages to find out what is what.

On top of that Matilda is a really really terrific main protagonist – her back story is utterly captivating and you absolutely get caught up in her struggle to return to some kind of normality. The relationship between her and the surviving child (now grown) of the cold case she is looking at is brilliantly drawn. As for Ben Hale, the man in charge in Matilda's absence, well – to say I was enthralled by his personality and what happens to him would be putting it mildly. Really well written to completely involve the reader.

Overall then a great read. One I achieved in one sitting, perfectly paced, entirely fluent throughout, a genuinely first rate first novel.

Bring on book two. I'll be waiting.

Highly Recommended.

Happy Reading Folks!

Paromjit says

Having read this series backward, I have now finished reading the first. This is a brilliant and quick read that lays down all the markers of a talented author that culminates in the superb *A Room Full of Killers*. Michael Wood creates complex and damaged characters that capture your imagination and your heart. DCI Matilda Darke is a shattered woman, a shadow of her self as she battles her demons, the Carl Meaghan case and her perceived failures in it, and an all encompassing grief for her dead husband that has broken her into pieces. Acting DCI Ben Hales is eaten up by resentment and jealousy, whose life implodes in the novel. Jonathan Harkness, a vulnerable man, who at 11 years old in 1994, was in the house where his parents were brutally slain which turned him mute for a considerable time, and this harrowing event has dogged his life ever since. What makes the story riveting is the relationships between the three characters, again showcasing the author's abilities.

The series is set in Sheffield amidst a police force having to live down the Hillsborough disaster, and the child sex grooming scandal. Matilda is returning to work after a 9 month break, still not really having recovered. To ease her in, her superior has her working on the impossible Harkness cold case where the

killer was never identified. The Harkness home is being demolished and the media spotlight has pushed the police into reopening the case. Matilda is less than happy to be assigned the case, but determinedly works it and finds herself developing a close and empathetic relationship with Jonathan. The case becomes increasingly even more high profile as a murdered victim turns out to be Jonathan's brother. Ben Hales's mental health becomes increasingly fragile as the investigation gathers pace. Matilda is forced to draw on her inner reserves and the help of her stalwart friend, Adele, to keep herself together in a battle that sees her closing in on the killer.

This is a wonderful series, atmospheric and fast paced. The narrative never ceases in keeping the reader riveted to the book. I cannot wait for the fourth book in the series, I have no doubt that it will continue the high standards achieved by the author. Highly recommended. Oddly enough, I liked the perspective that reading the series backward gave me!!

Jack Jordan says

For Reasons Unknown is an explosive debut novel that not only shocks, but pulls at one's heartstrings.

It's impossible not to fall for Matilda Darke, a broken woman who is being eaten away by grief and guilt after her husband's death and an unsolved case with a missing child at its core. We follow her as she returns to work and crumbles under the pressure, temporarily demoted and ostracised by her former team. When she is given a seemingly impossible cold case, new murders begin to emerge, which connect to her cold case, and give Darke the spark she needs to rise above her past mistakes and return to her former glory, with justice at the forefront of her mind.

For Reasons Unknown is a debut novel that you won't want to miss, and the beginning of a crime series that will be remembered for years to come.

Lisa says

WOW what a great start to a series it is very fast paced & had that touch of a thriller/ mystery to it, loved the characters all were flawed but likeable except one I will get to that later but this is such a terrific I cant say anything bad about it. This is my first book by Michael Wood & definitely wont be my last the premise never missed a beat & there wasn't any lowlight.

The story is about Jonathan Harkness who was 11 when he witnessed the brutal murder of his parents Stefan & Miranda everyone thought they were the happy family!! BUT now 20 years later Jonathan returns to his home town to see his childhood home demolished.

A body turns up & its up to Matilda Darke who is a member of the South Yorkshire decide to reopen the case & Darke is assigned to the case after a long sabbatical due to a previous case. Acting DCI Ben Hales isn't that happy at having Matilda back, he tries everyway possible to get in her way of finding the

perpetrator who did this awful thing.

Its not until Jonathans brother Matthew who turns up dead the heat really rises & Hales takes matters into his own hands, he was a despicable cantankerous man who had his own agenda, its not until Hales interviews Jonathan in the wee hours of the morning that Matilda's anger gets the better of her the case is hers & hales has nothing to do with it, Matilda is also fighting her demons & vodka is her best friend as her husband James passed away is seeing a Psychiatrist suffering depression, which I can relate to as I have it myself.

MY THOUGHTS

Like I said this is a wonderful start to a series & I loved every minute from the very first page to the last there was one almighty twist as well which threw me for a loop never saw that coming, I hated Acting DCI Hales but again he made the premise even more intriguing id recommend this for mystery thriller fans already have book 2 on my list.

Kendall says

For Reason's Unknown is a dark and engaging debut novel that you don't want to miss!

The novel starts out featuring DCI Matilda Darke who is returning from work after a traumatic loss in her personal life. Matilda is given a 20 year old cold case involving a double murder which she feels is impossible to solve, but slowly new murders begin to emerge which somehow connects to her cold case.

All of the elements of a great crime thriller are here= a gripping and engaging mystery, an awesome twist and unpredictable murder case coming to life as you read each chapter, and of course a plethora of characters that are dark and at times creepy.

One of the things that I really was impressed with was Wood's writing style. Ultimate depth in connecting the main character's past to present day life. Really diving deep into understanding how an individual that goes through such trauma/grief can affect them psychologically and mentally as time passes.

Now, there are some things that I did not like about this novel. I just was like merpppp and merpppp with the ending. Come on Woods.... that's all you could do for the ending? I was expecting a bang for my buck kind of ending and it just wasn't there for me. So, that left me a little disappointed which knocked my overall rating down from a 5 to a 4.5 (not bad lol)

Also, not really sure what the title "For Reasons Unknown" means? Anyone that has read this book can you explain what the title means?? Usually, I'm pretty good with this and can connect but I just was left a little confused on this.... hmmm

BUT, I did have to say THANK YOU Mr. Woods for not having the SAME storyline!!! Yay to this!!! (And what I mean by this is, main detective is usually always kidnapped etc by the killer and what a nice surprise this did NOT play out!!!).

So, I will definitely be looking forward to what Matilda Drake has in store next! :) Highly recommended if you want to pick up a new and addicting series!

Mary Beth *Traveling Sister* says

This was a fantastic start to this series and I am looking forward to reading book two of this series this month. This book just Wowed me, it surely met the Wow factor that I look for in my books. This author did a really great job.

A crime, mystery novel with a slight thriller twist, For Reasons Unknown takes you through the life of Jonathan who witnessed his parents death when he was eleven.

Twenty years later and his childhood home is being demolished. South Yorkshire Police decide to re-open the cold case and assign DCI Matilda Darke to it in order to ease her back into Police investigation after an enforced sabbatical. As the investigation begins, a dead body is found...

The fast paced story follows DCI Darke's attempts to get one step ahead of the killer to prevent further deaths - can she solve the case? Can she regain her confidence and credibility as Head of the Murder Investigation Team?

A dead body is discovered, and the investigation leads back to Matilda's case. Suddenly the past and present converge, and it seems a killer may have come back for more...

An absolute page turner, this book keeps you guessing till the end with a great twist. This book is just fantastic to all thriller and mystery fans!

Petra says

The first in a new British police procedural set in Sheffield, which follows DCI Matilda Darke returning to work after a nine months absence. Still in a fragile mental state, she is tasked with looking into a cold case from 20 years ago. But when a murdered body turns up, it soon becomes clear that the two cases are linked. This was an enjoyable story that held my attention throughout. Some developments were fairly predictable but it was interesting enough that you still wanted to discover the why and how. It also had some nice surprises that I didn't see coming. Well written without any unnecessary padding, it was a fast paced story that I easily finished within a day or so. I neither loved nor hated Matilda. It was more the characters she was working with, and especially the suspects, that made the book really engaging. Overall, a very good start to a new series, and I would certainly be willing to follow more of Matilda's cases in the future.

Thank you to the author and the publisher for providing me with a complimentary copy via NetGalley in exchange for an unbiased review.

Mary says

Dear reader,

If you're looking for a new female DCI to admire and while away a few hours with, one whose resilience in the face of many personal and work related factors must be admired, then let me introduce you to one Mildred Darke.

Returning to work, after a nine month period which saw her grieve for her husband, and now officially cleared of the whiff of scandal at a botched hostage situation, we are privy to a very anxious Mildred.

While she relishes the idea of doing the job she loves best, she experiences a severe crisis of confidence in her ability to practically take up the reins of her former life and regain her much valued and highly esteemed position as DCI.

Never far from an impending panic attack, and with her work related responsibilities severely curtailed, she now finds herself 'occupied' by a cold case some twenty years old.

Jonathan Harkness, an eleven year old boy, the only witness to the brutal slaying of his parents, struck mute for eighteen months after the horrific scenes he witnessed, has never spoken to the media about the exact circumstances of that fateful day.

With the initial focus on Jonathan's brother, Matthew as a missing person and no murder weapon, this perplexing case proved quite a challenge for not only the police two decades ago, but for Mildred too.

Adding to the complex reality her life has now become, is the great animosity that exists between the acting DCI, Ben Hales and herself.

Convinced that she can no longer perform her duties, and assured that he, himself is the best man for the job, Ben goes on a solo run when the latest murder victim in his caseload happens to be related to the Harkness case. Coincidence or is there some other Machiavellian force at hand?

What of Jonathan, a self imposed semi prisoner in his tunnel vision life of work, books, books and more books?

Is his isolated existence the only means for him to survive or is there more to the man than the mask he portrays to the public?

I must admit to loving this utterly compelling story. I really liked Mildred, yes, she tottered on the brink of anxiety, fear and a potentially dangerous reliance on the gin bottle to see her through, but the way the author chose to couch these elements of the story made it very realistic, and Mildred very human.

I admire Mildred!

Life has played her two successive jokers in the game of life, in quick succession, but with great perseverance and a healthy level of support in the guise of her long time friend, Adele Kean, we want her to gain the confidence she once had and see her gain full acceptance in her colleagues' hearts and minds.

I highly recommend this book to all lovers of a good mystery story. I thought the ending quite clever and hope to read more of Mildred and her team.

Andrea says

Where do I start, brilliant book couldn't put this book down had this book on my Kindle for a while but when I seen his third book in this series and wanted to read it, I started reading the first book this is the quickest book I've read as couldn't put it down. the characters are really engaging DCI Matilda Drake was back to work after loss of her husband she felt left out and drinking and finding it difficult as she was put on a case that was twenty years old. thinking she had no chance of solving it, There's a lot of twists and turns in this storyline which I kept thinking all different scenarios. Brilliant writing can't wait to read the second book and third. crime lovers won't be disappointed.

Debra says

4.5 stars

For Reasons Unknown, I did not know this series existed until I read Christine's review, and now I am hooked!!!! I'll be devouring the following books in this series as fast as I can get my hands on them!

DCI Matilda Darke has returned to work after a 9-month absence. She is disappointed to learn she will not be returning quite yet to her former position but will be re-opening a cold case. DCI Darke, is a complex and flawed woman. She is battling some demons and after some time away from her job, is attempting to get back to work. The cold case she is given is that of the Harkness family murders. Twenty years ago, Miranda and Stefan Harkness, were brutally murdered in their home. Their son, Jonathan, was home at the time, but too traumatized to speak. Now the home where the family lived is being demolished, the police have decided to look at his case one last time. DCI Darke's interest in the cold case has some characters in this book nervous.

Jonathan, the sole survivor from that murderous night, is now living alone and working in a bookstore. He has formed a friendship with his neighbor, Maun Barrington but otherwise he is quiet and keeps to himself. He is content to live a quiet life, but now that his former home has been demolished and his parent's murder case has been re-opened, he is finally forced to talk to officials about his past. Then a dead body is found - a body which may have ties to the Harkness murders. Aaaaah the plot thickens!

This book is full of interesting characters - some with secrets, some hidden agendas, etc. This is a police procedural with a female protagonist dealing with her own personal issues, a hostile co-worker, the investigation of a cold case all the while being prodded by her friend to get her act together. There are several twists, turns and revelations which kept me turning the pages. I loved that there was never a dull moment, which kept the pace up and me guessing as to what happened in the home that night. Who had motive? Who had it in for this family?

I also liked how certain "truths" about other minor characters came to life in this book. I always love putting on my super sleuth hat and trying to figure out whodunit.

Well written, captivating with complex characters, this book was a I-can't-put-this-book-down for me!

See more of my reviews at www.openbookpost.com

Kate~Bibliophile Book Club says

For Reasons Unknown by Michael Wood

I've had this book on my kindle for a few weeks, and I kept trying to get to it to no avail. Until this week. I had pretty much caught up on all my "read to review" books and I had been promising Michael over on Twitter that I would read and review For Reasons Unknown for ages so I started it Friday night!

About the book:

Two murders. Twenty years. Now the killer is back for more...

A darkly compelling debut crime novel. The start of a brilliant series, perfect for fans of Stuart MacBride, Val McDermid, and James Oswald.

DCI Matilda Darke has returned to work after a nine month absence. A shadow of her former self, she is tasked with re-opening a cold case: the terrifyingly brutal murders of Miranda and Stefan Harkness. The only witness was their eleven-year-old son, Jonathan, who was too deeply traumatized to speak a word. Then a dead body is discovered, and the investigation leads back to Matilda's case. Suddenly the past and present converge, and it seems a killer may have come back for more...

My thoughts:

Where to start?! First off, I loved this book. I read so many crime books that at times they all run into each other but every so often a book comes along with a story that stands out. For Reasons Unknown did just that.

DCI Darke (what a name by the way!) is back to work after some traumatic events in both her personal and professional life. Clearly not 100%, she is tasked with solving a cold case from twenty years ago. The double murder of Miranda and Stefan Harkness, whose murder was witnessed by their eleven year old son and in turn, rendered him mute.

Simultaneously, acting DCI Hales is investigating a murder in the city. Both past and present cases end up related so it becomes a race against time as it appears that the murderer may not be finished. While I saw this coming, I still enjoyed the way it was going.

I really enjoyed the pace of this story, and I found myself reading at every opportunity (including in the car even though it makes me sick!!! I had 6% left to read!!
