



## **The Brief**

*Simon Michael*

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In the 60s London of gangsters, prejudice and terrifying gang wars, Barrister Charles Holborne spends his life dealing with the worst examples of violent criminality. After successfully winning a number of high profile cases, he is building a reputation among Soho's criminal classes as a man who gets the job done, a reputation that doesn't endear him to his establishment colleagues.

Yet Charles is not all he seems, and is battling both personal demons and his own past. When his philandering wife Henrietta is found with her throat slashed, Charles finds himself on the wrong side of the law and in serious trouble of the murderous kind. Arrested for her murder, can Charles discover the truth of her brutal slaying and escape the hangman's noose?

Based upon a real case and genuine court documents, *The Brief* is a compelling criminal drama, and an evocative slice of sleazy glamour from the Swinging Sixties. Simon Michael delivers an addictive read for any crime fan.

## **The Brief Details**

Date : Published September 28th 2015 by Urbane Publications Limited

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Author : Simon Michael

Format : Kindle Edition 369 pages

Genre : Fiction, Thriller, Legal Thriller

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## From Reader Review The Brief for online ebook

### Jill's Book Cafe says

4.5 stars

When I bought this book it was originally intended for my OH. I had heard good things about it, but the setting of gangland London in the 1960's epitomised by the Krays and the Richardsons was something that didn't appeal to me. Having read it, the OH suggested I read it as I would enjoy it – so I did. All I can say is, if like me, you had misgivings, cast them aside this is a cracking read. The gangland element is as much a background motif to add some context to the nature of the criminality and corruption that was prevalent at the time. It is as much an insight into the workings of Chambers and the criminal justice system as it is the criminals who inhabit it.

Our 'hero', the charismatic Charles Holborne is a barrister who has made his way in life, despite his background, rather than because of it. As an East End Jewish boy made good, his background with naturally acquired survival skills and boxing clubs meant he probably had more in common with some of his clients than his colleagues. It certainly meant he was more tolerated than accepted by many of his co-workers.

When Charles's wife is murdered, for reasons I suggest you discover yourself, he becomes the prime suspect. Given the at worst – corrupt, or at best – highly biased police investigation into his case, it's up to Charles via fair means or foul to uncover the truth.

I was hooked from the beginning and especially drawn to the internal politics that typified Chambers. As someone who had been addicted to the tv programmes 'This Life' and 'Silk' this was my thing (why did I not discover this earlier?). I loved the back-biting the infighting and the changing allegiances all overseen by the barristers' clerks who appear to wield the power. Added to this was the prevailing period prejudices of who you know and where you came from, mattering more than what you know and where you are now. The author's background as a barrister meant there was an authenticity to the dialogue and the court practices that were portrayed. The use of original court transcripts from real Old Bailey cases only served to add to the realism and authoritative portrayal of its 1960's setting

As we follow Charles in his professional and private life, we get to appreciate his abilities and his honesty and his innate sense of fairness, qualities that will result in his past coming back to haunt him. The problem is, there are several people who rightly or wrongly hold grievances against him. When his wife is murdered, the pace really ratchets up and I was praying for Charles to prove his innocence. Whether the final outcome proves to be the right one, I'm not saying, but I really recommend you read this for yourself to find out.

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### Miriam Smith says

Simon Michael's "The Brief" has been described as 'BritCrime at its best' and I would wholeheartedly agree, it's so impressive! It had me hooked from the very first page till the tense gripping end.

This is so much more than a legal thriller - intense, riveting, compelling and with plenty of action to keep you turning the pages . "The Brief" gives you a brilliant insight into the criminal justice system in the 1960's and the legal goings-on behind the scenes, with the frightening realisation that criminals could still hang for certain crimes committed back then. This wasn't some boring courtroom drama that dragged out but a very

exciting and intriguing thriller incorporating the courtroom through court transcripts and police documents which I found a very original and novel way of portraying the facts of the trial. I loved the ambience of the book - London during the swinging 60's, the clubs and pubs, the criminals and the gang wars.

The final part of the book was a race against time and had me holding my breath - I hate injustices in stories and I desperately wanted a favourable outcome, you'll need to read the book to find out if Charles finally escapes his false charge of murder!

The authors attention to detail using his own personal experience as a barrister for many years is second to none and stunningly authentic. There's no over the top legal jargon or complex terminology. The brilliant writing style was easy to follow and understand, a captivating plot that has you screaming for justice and a list of characters that are very believable even the corrupt police officers - there's just nothing not to like in this book. I loved Charles (who is quite the anti-hero) with his honourable morals and hardworking intentions whilst struggling to come to terms with his background and family rejection.

I've been told that the sequel "An Honest Man" is even better still and I really can't wait to read more about Charles Holborn and the 1960's!!

A huge 5 stars for "The Brief" and to the author Simon Michael and Urbane Publications.

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### **Wild says**

This is a marvellously taut thriller about a British barrister whose somewhat mundane life is suddenly thrown into chaos when he is accused of murdering his wife. The descriptions of the characters and locations of London and its suburbs in 1961 sets the tone for this unusual crime procedural turned murder mystery. I found it fascinating, and a thorough page-turner from start to finish.

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### **Harold Kasselman says**

This novel takes a wee bit to get revved up to speed, but about 40 % in, it finds its metal. Make sure you read beyond the initial chapters involving a rather ordinary armed robbery and unfamiliar terms. This is a very good story with some surprises and moments of suspense. It is early 1960's London and the reader gets an inside view of the justice system including the rivalries amongst Barristers and police bias. There is also a look into anti-Semitism and the lengths with which Charles must go to hide his religion to secure clients.

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### **Sarah says**

'm not usually a big fan of court room dramas but believe me the actual court side of it is only a smallish section and even then I was well and truly gripped by the questioning of Charles' client.

The story starts off with events leading up to Charles' first court case as well as the court case itself. After that things start to spiral out of control for poor Charles when he is set up for murdering his wife.

Things actually get quite tense as it's a race against time for Charles to prove his innocence before he is found and arrested, worst of all if he is found guilty, it is at a time when the death penalty is still around. Even though Charles knows he is in the wrong for going on the run, with a police sergeant in charge of the case who doesn't do things by the book, he really doesn't have any other choice.

The Brief was such an entertaining read. It starts off at a steady pace then picks up speed as it progresses. My heart was literally in my mouth many a time as Charles uncovers information leading him towards the person who has tried framing him and it certainly made for some edge of your seat reading. A highly enjoyable read that will appeal to all fans of crime thrillers.

My thanks to the author and Urbane Publications for a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **miss.mesmerized mesmerized says**

Charles Holborne has made his way from the despised Jewish boy to a recognized barrister in 1960s London. Not afraid of digging, he can solve tricky cases and made himself a name in the criminal classes. Yet, his private life is far from being this successful. His wife is unfaithful and he has to admit that a divorce is the only solution left. Not realizing that dark forces are against him, he suddenly finds himself the main suspect of his wife's murder and has to retreat to the underground from where he now has to fight for his right and name.

The novel starts at a slow pace, the characters are introduced thoroughly and their way of moving around described in detail. However, it is worth keeping on reading because with the murder of Holborne's wife, the story accelerates and it getting better from page to page. The way the protagonist has to act now to defend himself and to deliver the real culprits is very thrilling and full of suspense. There are some dead ends to who might be behind the whole complot and untangling the conspiracy is great to read.

What I appreciated most is the atmosphere of the time. Simon Michael manages to evoke the spirit of the 60s and thus provides a suitable set for the plot. His characters are designed authentically and the crime is solved completely without leaving any questions open or by providing surprises out of the blue. All in all, a convincing crime novel.

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This is so much more than a legal thriller - intense, riveting, compelling and with plenty of action to keep you turning the pages . "The Brief" gives you a brilliant insight into the criminal justice system in the 1960's and the legal goings-on behind the scenes, with the frightening realisation that criminals could still hang for certain crimes committed back then. This wasn't some boring courtroom drama that dragged out but a very exciting and intriguing thriller incorporating the courtroom through court transcripts and police documents which I found a very original and novel way of portraying the facts of the trial. I loved the ambience of the book - London during the swinging 60's, the clubs and pubs, the criminals and the gang wars.

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### **Nicki says**

Even though I'd read the second book first, so I knew the outcome of this book, this was still a real page turner. I enjoyed being transported to 1960s London with public phone boxes were on street corners, pubs were real drinking and meeting places and cafes were greasy spoons. Simon Michael weaves a great story with Charles Holborne, around real cases from the past, making me feel like I was there amongst the mess and sleaze. I can't wait for the next book in the series and definitely recommend this if you enjoy crime, historical fiction and legal thrillers.

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### **Samantha says**

As an American, I find the British legal system is an elaborate mystery all on its own. Here the author has offered a primer--with insider's lingo, a thorough understanding of procedure, and all bewigged and eccentric players in their places--in the form of a tense tale of 1960's crime and punishment and good old whodunit elaboration. But we certainly don't spend the whole book in the courtroom, as we get a taste of London's underbelly, middle class suburbia and an ethnic mix not often addressed in English fiction. I'd like to see more development of the female characters, but I suppose one could see the depictions here as keeping with the mid-Century setting. Overall, a good read, and I look forward to the author's next publication.

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### **Leah Moyse says**

I had anticipated when starting this book that it was going to include lengthy spells in the courtroom. I am glad that this wasn't the case. It was a gripping legal thriller that I whizzed through in a matter of hours, such was the pacing of the plot.

The setting of 60s London was excellently envisaged and provided an apt backdrop for the murkiness of this seedy tale. The author has a deft approach to plotting and even when I thought I had it all worked out and had the case closed there were still twists and turns to come and a red herring or two.

I am not sure there were that many characters to like, that wasn't a problem though as the whole set of them were strongly written and drew my mind back to what life could have been like in Chambers in 60s London. I did however eventually end up liking Charles.

Charles the central character first of all struck me as a bit of a naive buffoon but in actual fact he went on to prove that he was astute and resourceful and at the heart of everything unrepentant in his search for justice. He is a bit of a hero really. Even when up against prejudice and criminality he never gave up on his quest.

This book was gritty, gripping and utterly compelling. Highly recommended to those who enjoy legal thrillers and even those who don't usually. The author has put his years of legal experience and research to excellent use and is one hell of a story teller.

I was also excited to learn that there is to be a follow up released later year called *An Honest Man*, which I will be looking forward to reading.

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### **Sonya Alford says**

I was sent a copy of this book by the publisher in return for an honest review.

The story is set in 1960s London. In a city of gangsters, prejudice and terrifying gang wars, Barrister Charles Holborne seems to spend the majority of his time dealing with the worst examples of violent criminality. Having successfully won a number of high profile cases, Charles is building a reputation amongst Soho's criminal classes as a man who gets the job done. This unfortunately doesn't endear him to his establishment colleagues.

However, Charles isn't all he seems and is in fact battling personal demons and his past. When his philandering wife Henrietta is found dead with her throat slashed, Charles suddenly finds himself on the wrong side of the law and in serious trouble. Arrested for her murder, can he discover the truth and escape the hangman's noose?

I started reading '*The Brief*' late last Saturday night and from the very first page I was totally engrossed. It was literally a case of having to read one more chapter, followed by another one and another one. After two late nights and many more hours besides I have now finished this wonderful book and want to shout out how great it is.

I thought '*The Brief*' to be an extremely addictive read. Split into five parts it is fast-paced, gripping and very exciting. I love crime fiction and was most interested in learning more about the legal side of things. Simon Michael has himself had a career at the Bar and has drawn on his experiences to write this book which makes it all the more real. I really liked that court documents were included in the story. I read the Transcript of Evidence with great interest and at one point even felt as if I was in the court too.

There were certainly some very dodgy characters in the story and it was at times hard to know who to trust. I really liked Charles and hoped that he would get off his murder charge. He was stitched up good and proper and he soon knew what it was like to be on the other side.

'*The Brief*' will keep you up for hours. It will play on your mind and you'll be dying to know what happens next.

I am really looking forward to Simon Michael's new book, '*An Honest Man*', which is due out next month.

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### **Jackie Law says**

The *Brief*, by Simon Michael, brings to mind various vintage crime series that I have enjoyed watching on

TV over the years. It is set in 1960s London, a period when the roads in central London could be driven through with relative ease and public payphones were a necessary aid to communication. The workings of the courts of law, with barristers' chambers and their rarefied procedures, provide a fascinating backdrop at variance to the more common use of clever detective.

Charles Holborne, is an up and coming barrister willing to take on cases representing base criminals and lowlives, much to the chagrin of his well connected colleagues. He was raised a Jew in the East End of the city, another factor that sets him apart. His beautiful wife, Henrietta, is from a wealthy and titled family but has grown bored with her hard working husband who she married as an act of defiance to her philandering father. Now she too indulges in affairs.

The story opens with the release from prison of a career criminal with few scruples. He plans a heist which he believes will enable him to retire. When it all goes wrong, Charles is tasked with defending him and his accomplice. It is just another case for Charles, but creates a dangerous enemy.

Back at chambers there are rumblings of discontent. An older member is called to account for his treatment of a pretty, young clerk. Other members voice resentment that a Jew is enjoying increasing success with the financial benefits this brings, which they believe should be theirs. Henrietta has been openly flirting with more than one of her husband's colleagues. The choices she makes result in heated exchanges.

I have never understood anti-Semitism, how Jews appear to be so widely disliked by segments of society when their supposed crimes appear to be little more than nepotism and financial success. As these are also prevalent amongst society's most privileged I find their rancour hard to comprehend. Nevertheless, it exists and affects this story's protagonist. When Charles finds himself framed for murder it is hard to know which of his enemies, from which sphere of society, has taken action.

The police desire speedy convictions and some are willing to do whatever it takes to achieve their aims. When Charles realises that the crime he is accused of will not be properly investigated he determines to find out what has happened for himself. His methods may be risky but with the death penalty still a potential punishment he feels he has nothing to lose.

The tale is fast moving. The writing is polished and flows with ease. The author has taken real case notes and court documents as inspiration. The narrative from inside the courts are a fine addition to the tale.

The evocation of time and place are a reminder of how far we have progressed in just a few decades, and also of how certain attitudes have not changed. I am looking forward to reading more of Charles Holborne's exploits as the proposed series progresses.

I enjoyed this book and am happy to recommend it. An absorbing and entertaining read.

My copy of this book was provided gratis by the publisher, Urbane.

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### **BookwormDH says**

1960s London - gang wars, corrupt police, vice, and pornography - ex-boxer, Charles Holborne, has plenty of opportunities to build his reputation with the criminal classes as a barrister who delivers. But Charles, an East End boy made good, is not all he seems, and his past is snapping at his heels. When his philandering

wife has her throat slashed, Holborne finds himself on the wrong side of the law and on the run. Can he discover the truth of the brutal slaying and escape the hangman's noose?

Brilliant. This is a very well executed crime/thriller novel. Before reading this book I expected it to be concentrating on courtroom dramas. Yes, there is some involvement with this, but this book is much more than that.

The research is extensive and the author has delivered a stunning piece of writing with tremendous authenticity.

This is a pure gem and kept me turning the pages constantly. Brilliant characters, excellent plotting and overall an indulgent, absorbing and enjoyable read.

I couldn't give less than 5\* - This book deserves to be in the spotlight and I highly commend Simon Michael & Urbane Publications for this outstanding piece of work.

I'm very much looking forward to the continuation of this series with, *An Honest Man*, next on the agenda!

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### **Michelle Ryles says**

I picked up *The Brief* one Saturday afternoon, after the football results disappointed me yet again, and by Sunday morning I was into the final pages. This is a seriously good British crime novel and really stands out from the rest by including real court documents.

We are introduced to Plumber and Sands at the start; Sands has just got out of prison and Plumber was his getaway driver who was not caught. Sands has come up with a plan to rob Express Dairies in London and he needs Plumber to play a more active role this time. Armed with fake guns, the robbery takes a sinister turn when one of the guns turns out to be real. When the pair get caught, they come up with a story that there was a third man who fired the gun. Then one of them changes their story...

Charles Holborne is the barrister defending Plumber. His success is envied by his peers as he doesn't come from a privileged background and he has more enemies than he realises. Charles is unhappily married to Henrietta; Charles works long hours and even has a little flat in London for nights he works late and Henrietta becomes well known for having affairs. As the scene is set in advance of Henrietta's murder, the suspects have all been lined up nicely but the evidence has been planted to point at Charles. As Charles fights to clear his name he really finds out who his friends are.

Phew! I had to stop and take a breath after finishing *The Brief*. I felt like I was in the speed-reading olympics with my nose getting closer and closer to the page and my bottom perched precariously on the edge of my seat. I completely bought into the 1960's era with the mention of The Great Train Robbery and the run in with The Krays. The authentic police statements and court transcripts were just the icing on the cake - I felt like I was watching the drama unfold before my very eyes. Absolutely unputdownable; if you loved watching *Damages* and *The Good Wife* you will definitely enjoy reading *The Brief*. This is Britcrime at its very best.

So stop reading my review and go and buy this book right now! It is FANTASTIC!

I can't thank Matthew at Urbane Publications enough for sending me this brilliant book in exchange for an honest review. Thank you, Matthew!

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### **Thebooktrail says**

Visit the locations in the novel my The Brief Booktrail

This was a gem of a find for many reasons – the real court documents and police statements added to the already immersive detail and added to the unique premise of the criminal set up, I was hooked from page one. The novel was very immersive – not just in the bacon smells of the cafe or the old smell of the stone walls but the language, the attitudes and the fact that this was still a time where the death penalty cloud hung over everyone's head.

Although billed as a legal thriller, it's so much more – like a snapshot of 1960s London and a journey back into the past. London and the Legal community seen through the eyes of Charles – a jewish boy done good – was really well done and created a great deal of underlying intrigue and a danger of what could go wrong – Charles Holborne is a fascinating character that's for sure.

The book starts out slow but this is for a very good reason – by the time the bomb explodes, you'll be having palpitations from the building up of tension and will appreciate the feeling of a darn good read.

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