



## **The 500**

*Matthew Quirk*

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Mike Ford is a former con artist who's been plucked from his Harvard Law School classroom to be an associate at The Davies Group, Washington's most high-powered and well-respected strategic consulting firm. Their specialty: pulling strings and peddling influence for the five hundred most powerful people inside the Beltway, the men and women who really run Washington -- and by extension the country, and the world.

The namesake of the firm, Henry Davies, knows everyone who matters; more importantly, he knows their secrets. Davies' experience goes back 40 years -- he worked for Lyndon Johnson, jumped shipped to Nixon, then put out his own shingle as the Hill's most cut-throat and expensive fixer. Now he's looking for a protégé to tackle his most high-stakes deal yet, and Mike fits the bill.

Quickly pulled into a seductive, dangerous web of power and corruption, Mike struggles to find his way out. But how do you save your soul when you've made a deal with the devil?

## **The 500 Details**

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Author : Matthew Quirk

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## From Reader Review The 500 for online ebook

### Matt says

The 500 has frequently been compared to The Firm. I get it. The villains in both books are shadowy organizations whose all-seeing, all-reaching power require a taffy pull of your disbelief. Where they differ (as best as I recall...it's been 20 years since I read The Firm) is that Michael Ford (the protagonist and narrator of The 500) is no Mitch McDeere (The Firm's hero). Ford, in fact, barely resembles a human based on his motivations and mental faculties under duress. Throughout the book, Ford's repeated pursuit of danger makes no sense. There are several times when he could have just let a matter drop, hang out with his dream girl and enjoy his newfound wealth (Ford's family history is borrowed liberally from the McDeere clan, poverty prison, parental death). In fact, several times the author has Ford saying that he himself can't explain why he's doing something--oh, like walking into a surefire gunfight--that he doesn't need to and which even he doesn't know what outcome he wants to affect by intervening. This happens in the central plot pivot. Quirk, in fact, has the narrator explain that he doesn't know why he's approaching the house even as he's doing it: he has no idea what he hopes to accomplish and no idea if what he's doing will have any positive outcome but DOES know that he's putting himself in serious immediate and long-term danger (the from all-powerful shadow villain organization). The \*story\* requires that he gets passed some vital information in this encounter before the violent showdown. However Ford didn't \*know\* he was there to get this information. This alien motivation drives many of Ford's actions: he does things for no other (for any logical, human) reason except the plot requires it.

If this weren't enough, our hero gets repeatedly beaten, tortured, sliced, stabbed, and contorted and while these are happening, he maintains a narrative tone that can only be classified as "flip" (or, possibly "glib" if you were Mr. McDeere[film version]). On at least two occasions, he explains he took some pain killers before he went to the current encounter, you know, just in case his shoulder were to get ripped out of it's socket and his faace stepped on. Who doesn't? Michael Ford isn't Jason Bourne or his ilk--he's a 28-year old guy right out of Harvard Law. No Special Forces training, no Mr. Miyagi, no radioactive spiders. Just a guy.

Quirk chose a first-person narration framed in past tense. In terms of the story, I can't really find a reason for telling it in the past tense. Quirk's choice could potentiall provide a narrative distance that enables breezy asides and flip comment during moments of torture and duress. If that were Quirk's choice, then his oh-by-the-way manner of explaining that taking painkillers allow Ford to function after getting his wrist broken and skin flayed seem to kneecap this author's choice. Michael Ford does things humans do, but his decision-making process and pain threshold are alien.

All this said, it was a not altogether unpleasant read. Good narrative pace, some interesting back story details...this book's not without its pleasures.

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### Michelle Leonard says

This would have been a much better read if the "why" made more sense. It's like the main character had nothing better to do and just decided to get to involved in life threatening situations. Pretty decently paced and the plot moved along but after awhile I was just over him and the story. This is the 1st in a series; also a debut book for the author.

## Maddy says

PROTAGONIST: Mike Ford

SETTING: Washington, DC

RATING: 4.25

WHY: Mike Ford grew up in a family of grifters and was arrested when he was a teenager for a burglary gone wrong. His father is in prison accused of murder. Mike has done well at Harvard Law School but is drowning in debt from student loans and trying to pay off his late mother's medical bills. He umps at the opportunity to work for the Davies Group, an elite consulting organization that has as its clientele the movers and shakers of Washington, DC. Although Mike has gone straight, he soon finds that he is expected to be a con man once again to survive in the firm. When he sees the full extent of what they do, he wants to get out. How does he deal with the raw power of the firm's head partners as well as a Colombian drug lord who is out to kill him? There are a lot of implausible situations, but seeing how Mike and cohorts deal with the challenges is interesting.

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## Dark Star says

Engaging characters, fast-paced story.

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## Larry H says

Mike Ford has struggled for most of his life. After his father went to prison, he tried to support his mother, but found himself quickly drawn into the same criminal world that attracted both his father and his brother. A stint in the military helps point him in the right direction, and he is pursuing two degrees at Harvard Law School while working to pay off all of his debts. When he is tapped by a visiting lecturer to join The Davies Group, a high-powered lobbying and consulting firm in Washington, DC, it seems to be the answer to all of his problems.

But things are seldom what they seem. The Davies Group specializes in pulling strings for its clients by leaning on the most powerful people in Washington—all of whom owe something to the firm's founder, Henry Davies. Davies sees in Mike a kindred spirit, one willing to try and risk anything in order to succeed. And as Mike gets further embroiled in the firm's dealings, he realizes just how corruptible this type of power is—and how risky it is to try and make things right.

While this book is being billed as a Washington version of *The Firm*, I found this even better than that, because Mike Ford is a flawed character not above leaning on his past criminal life to do what he needs. While he struggles to decide whether to do what is right or what is easier, you can see just how tempting the wrong path is. Sure, this book isn't completely realistic by any means (at least I don't think so), but the plot and the action gripped me from the very first page, and I found myself racing through the book. Matthew Quirk knows how to tell a great story, and I hope a sequel is in the works. Looking for a great beach book? You've found it right here.

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## Dan says

Pass the popcorn, a book that would be better as a movie

Promo material for “The 500” says the novel is now under development as a major motion picture. I’m glad to read that. As written, I think the book would be better as a movie.

Tom Cruise would be a natural to play the part of Michael Ford, except Cruise is now too long in the tooth to play the twenty-something hero.

I see the book being better as a movie because all the fast action, coincidences that are too pat and dialogue that’s too glib would be more plausible, more pleasurable rushing at you on the big screen. Up there on the screen the story might take off. On the page, the narrative feels a little flat, the banter more often than not, tends toward the flip.

The narrative, a story about how Washington power brokers abuse power, too often felt manufactured rather than organic, forced instead of naturally unfolding, constructed by a formula only loosely connected to reality.

Michael Ford is a recent Harvard grad who didn’t have an easy life growing up. Now he’s been hired by the Davies Group, Washington’s most prestigious consulting firm, an enterprise operated more as a secret society, a shadow government run by the world’s most powerful and dangerous men. Soon Ford is ensnared by a past he can’t outrun, caught in circumstances as perilous as anyone could imagine and relentlessly pursued by people obsessively trying to control the future.

Ford tells his own story. It’s a story too full of too-fortunate coincidences for my taste: For example, it looks at one point that Ford is trapped in an office with no way to escape. But wait, as a kid he worked as a carpenter so he knows how and where to kick and punch his way through drywall.

Later he’s subjected to excruciating torture, enough to force anyone to give up the truth. But wait, just a couple hours ago he happened to take some powerful painkillers. The pain meds help him endure. And then later, it appears his pursuers have him cornered, this time for real. But wait, there’s a new Audi parked at the curb and as Ford suspects, the German automaker has taped a spare ignition key to the back page of the car’s owner’s manual. Off he drives. Neat.

A number of dead bodies end up lying around and when it serves the writer’s purposes the bodies stay dead. But if it’s more convenient, a body can and does come back to life.

All those quick escapes and neat reversals are fine for the movies, especially one that’s edited for quick cuts and limited attention spans. But readers usually are looking for more substance and nuance, a better reason to care about the characters and what happens to them. All that doesn’t mean it’s not a good read, exactly. It’s just that I hoped “The 500” would be better, a story with more depth, more of an emotional core and less occupied with being self-consciously clever.

At one point Michael says he felt that fatigue weighed down his body “like a dentist’s lead blanket.” That’s sort of how I felt sometimes while reading the novel.

[3.5 stars]

### **Steve Keefe says**

I read the sneak peek of this book and enjoyed it. I live in D.C. and suffered through 4 years as a biglaw associate, which contributed to my appreciation of the story. I loved the D.C. references, like the greasy paper bag at 5 Guys and places like Brasserie Beck.

I think the book nails the cut-throat culture that permeates D.C.'s "prestigious" consulting firms and law firms. I didn't mind that the story glamorizes the slog that is billable hour culture, because I personally don't want to read about the real-life workaholic drones who do 90 hours per week for 8-9 years to maybe make partner.

I thought the story started strong, and it grabbed and maintained my interest. The depiction of the D.C. social circuit, though highly cynical, seemed credible to me based on the footage I've seen of the people who live in this city. I liked the author's style in providing details about his characters and the places they go (e.g., the Metropolitan Club and that insane crack/whorehouse out in Maryland).

I definitely recommend the book. And if you read it, you'll see many of the reasons I give to people I know for why they should think twice before deciding to live and work in D.C.

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### **Gerald Sinstadt says**

I have managed to read books with unbelievable characters because the plot was acceptable. I have read books with preposterous plots that have still carried me along with some enjoyable characters. I have, very occasionally, overlooked cardboard characters pursuing a nonsense story line because of the quality of the writing.

Sadly, the first sixty pages of The 500 could not persuade me to continue by any criterion, so I didn't.

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### **Kelly Hager says**

Michael Ford is not doing well. His dad is in prison, his mom has died from cancer and he doesn't speak to his brother. Due to his mom's medical bills, he is also almost \$900,000 in debt (well, between the medical bills and the college tuition fees). He'd be willing to do just about anything to make that debt go away.

Enter The Davies Group. They're sort of a consulting firm in DC and they recruit Mike. They pay off his debt, get him a nice apartment and a huge salary. Best of all, Mike quickly falls for a coworker. Now his life is pretty close to perfect.

Unfortunately, just like everything else that's too good to be true, there are a lot of skeletons in The Davies Group's closet...

I devoured this book over the better part of a day. Life kept interfering, which is why it took me that long. (Advice: do not start this book unless you have several hours to devote to finishing it.) It's been compared to The Firm, and that's incredibly apt. Like early John Grisham, this is just an incredibly fun novel. It's very suspenseful, and one of the perfect summer reads this year. (I don't know about you, but when the weather turns hot, I want either a frothy novel or something that is incredibly suspenseful.)

Also, in an election year, political thrillers are almost mandatory, right?

This novel also reminded me of Rosemary's Baby. Obviously there's no satanic cults or devil-babies, but what the two novels do have in common is this huge sense of paranoia. When your enemy could be everywhere (or could have gotten to anyone), who do you trust? Who do you have to help you? And how can you even get help when you don't know if it's a trap?

The 500 is one of the most purely fun (but also thought-provoking and clever) novels I've read in a long time. I'm very excited to read whatever Matthew Quirk writes next. Highly recommended.

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### **Una Tiers says**

Former con man tries to become respectable. Sadly his character, and the other main characters, are one dimensional. The impossible situations he is able to escape from turn the plot into a mess.

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### **Jayne Giesler says**

I enjoy a good suspense so I decided to give it a go for my summer reading. Once I started, I could not put it down-carrying it with me everywhere-searching, creating and stealing moments to soak up another paragraph or two. The downside was those paragraphs always left me wanting more.

Written in first person, the reader experiences everything through the protagonist, a young attorney, Mike Ford; a very likeable character that has not been dealt an easy hand in life. Past familial relationships had him learning about living on the wrong side of the law. What he does have going for him is he is highly intelligent, very intuitive and a conviction to do what is right-even if you have to move in some grey areas to accomplish it.

The book has many twists and turns that keep you engrossed. I'm so looking forward to reading more work by this author.

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### **Mary says**

This is the definition of a beach book. The perfect book to read when all you want is to empty your mind so you can just relax. At first, The 500 reminded me of early John Grisham, especially The Firm and The Pelican Brief, but the pace is faster and the characters are more complex yet better understood.

Mike Ford is a con artist by blood and inclination. Yet, he wants nothing more than to live an honest life with the security that comes from making the right choices. He is running from his past, a childhood that taught him how to run a con and break just about any lock. Now with two degrees from Harvard, he is recruited by a powerful Washington consulting firm where he has to use every bit of his talent to stay alive and protect the people he loves.

The Washington intrigue and the con games are riveting. The twists and turns in the plot make this a hard book to put down. A fun summer read.

## Joe says

Set in DC? Always a promising sign. Legal thriller of lawyer fresh out of law school? Now we're cooking, but wait, something went way wrong.

The 500 was a prime example of the book jacket reading much better than the book. I hate leaving negative reviews. I'm proud of anyone who gets something published, but I never understood the criticism of clichés until I picked up this novel. The writing is high school at best, and I almost expected the author to pull out tired phrases like, "it was raining cats and dogs" or "thick as thieves." The characters felt stilted, and the first person narrative was jerky. His description of the woman he lusts was very adolescent. The dialogue was... Another reviewer called it "glib," and maybe that's as good a word as any.

Skip this one, and let's hope future efforts bring better returns. While the plot idea was a very good one, the writing was not good enough for me to want to finish it.

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## Chelsea says

I don't normally read action/political suspense books, but this one was really good. I was shocked multiple times throughout the story and was completely drawn in to the life of Michael Ford. The book starts at the end, just before the final con is played out and I like knowing that at some point in the book the obvious has to happen. I was on the edge of my seat during the harrowing escapes that Mike is forced into. I thought he was a very good main character, smart, funny, and most of all he kept my attention through logic, I even understood most of the political and theft references. I will most likely read whatever Matthew Quick writes in the future. I was told to read this book by a friend, and I am glad I did. I give it 4 stars.

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## Mike says

Hurray! I have found a new author worth following. The 500 is a great story which just gallops along while being on the whole plausible and believable. Mike Ford is a protagonist who is likable and can grow in future books. I can understand why this was nominated for so many awards.

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## Joe says

Being a Harvard grad is indeed impressive. Probably impressive enough to get a book publishing deal and have decent reviews. All that being said, someone stirs in the crowd and says, "the Emperor has no clothes!" But unlike the story where everyone said, you are right, reviewers opinions are not fact and are vastly different as I have so often noticed on Goodreads. This author can tell a story but his characters are hollow and lack any substance whatsoever. The plot is silly. It's like reading a movie like the transformers where things blow up, people run, lives are lost, loyalties are betrayed, and eventually hero and girl succeed . Nice if the journey was significant and the writer had sufficient tools. But fear not, the hero will return in a sequel and those of who who cannot understand how anyone could not like this book will be ready for the follow

up. Can you say Transformers 12?

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### **Katie Kenig says**

No one has an equal shot in life. Some kids have it particularly tough. When your dad loses his business and turns to the life of a con man to try to keep a roof over your family's head, only to wind up in prison when you're still young. When your older brother follows in his footsteps and winds up so heartless he's only interested in using his little brother for what he can get out of him. When your mom dies of cancer when you're still young, and you don't have insurance to get her proper care, and she still leaves behind such a mountain of hospital bills that it seems like you'll never be able to scale that mountain. When you're smart and determined enough to work your way through Harvard law as a bartender only to get rejected by potential employers because of your checkered past.

When you've got all of that hanging over your head, is it any wonder that when someone comes along and promises you the good life that you've always wanted, you'd jump at the chance? You wouldn't investigate too closely the job you'll be doing or the man you'll be working for, because the promises are so incredibly dear - the high class job that gets you respect, the home in the nice neighbourhood, the beautiful, intelligent, upper-class girlfriend, the chance to rebuild a relationship with your dad by getting him a wished-for parole after 16 years in prison. You wouldn't worry about what goes on behind the curtain, until it reaches that point where you just can't ignore it any more.

And when it gets to be too much for your newly minted morality and you cross that powerful boss of yours? You'd better get ready to fight, and run. You'd better be ready to not trust anyone in your life and you'd better be ready to lose everything you had, and more.

The 500 refers to the 500 most powerful people in Washington, D.C. - the men who wield the power that actually runs the country. The ones with the dirtiest secrets and the most to lose, who have the power to bury you if you cross them. This book takes you on a full-throttle action ride through navigating through those people, and trying to come out the other side alive.

Big recommend - a fast read and a fun, nicely-paced adventure to lose yourself in.

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### **Matthew Quirk says**

First off, I'm not the author. I have, however, received many compliments from total strangers about this book. Having finally found a copy, I figured I should read it.

It's a very good political action thriller. The protagonist is competent without being superhuman. The stakes are high, but believable. And the writing is spiced with humor- enough to relieve tension without being grossly comedic.

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### **Labijose says**

Empieza bastante bien, pero, a medida que progresa, se diluye como un azucarillo. El protagonista acaba siendo una especie de Jack Reacher que, en su afán por descabezar toda la corruptela política de Wasington,

(no hay ni un solo político, ni un solo juez, ni un solo policia que se salve) se enfrentará a su empresa, The Davies Group, fundada por un personaje que mueve todos los hilos a base de guardar todos los secretos inconfesables de los ya mencionados. De paso, y ya que está en ello, intentará recuperar el honor familiar de su padre, que se ha pasado media vida en la cárcel por un asesinato que no cometió. Mike Ford se enfrentará a todo ello prácticamente armado con una palanca de forzar puertas y candados, sin parar de recibir golpes, palizas y además las torturas de, ¡como no! el oportuno serbio descuartizador que no puede faltar en este tipo de relatos. Pero no os preocupéis, que la verdad siempre triunfa.

Escrita, pienso yo, para acabar como guión cinematográfico, se lleva dos estrellas porque creo que el autor, si deja de fantasear como con la presente novela, puede hacerlo bien. Tiene pasajes descriptivos muy buenos sobre Washington DC y su ambiente político, que salvan un poco el estropicio total. En cuanto a compararla con "The Firm", de John Grisham, prefiero no opinar, ya que el ataque de risa que me produce me impide hacerlo con la debida compostura.

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### **Mizuki says**

It's an amazing novel! Fast paced, cleverly plotted, realistically written, exciting and full with suspense, it also goes with a down-to-earth attitude!

I like how the main character being a young man who has a troubled family background and wanted to leave his humble beginning behind. I like the reason why the Boss of a widely influential company chooses the young man to be his sidekick instead of choosing the other equally talented young men. I like how the Boss teaches the young man to play the power game and how to control people. I like the description of how the rich and powerful people run business from behind the screen.

I also like the young man having his own theory about power and influence and how to trick the system, I like how this main character is not above using other people and getting his hands dirty; but eventually this guy holds onto his own values and moral despite of the promises of money, power and a stable, well respected life, which saves not only his loved ones, but also saves him from becoming a heartless asshole.

Suggestion: Try this one!

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