Praise for The Adventures of Mat Rufs:

Fiction Book of the Year
Corporate Live Wire

A thought-provoking adventurous journey. Highly imaginative. Thrilling. This book is certainly a treat!
— Excel Book Publishers

Insightful…Thought-provoking…Fascinating…The pace never drops…The modern clashes with the ancient…Characters' lives are intertwined… A surprise at every turn…The perfect entertainment!
— Corporate Live Wire

Mat Rufs loves to hop on a plane and travel to a destination—by himself and on the spur of the moment—to explore and immerse. This time he is lost in a Mexican cave, near the Volcán de Colima, and finds himself amid a heart-racing thriller with a historical twist and an international scope that will keep you up at night. Hop on and take a ride. This book is about travel, adventure, unexpected turns, ancient customs, intuitive decisions, pandemics, international business, the strength of love, and life as it happens.

The Existential Questions:

- How far will a sister go to find her brother?
- Do a parent and a child have an intuitive connection?
- Does modern medicine or shamanic art have the correct approach to health?
- Whom can you trust when you should not trust anyone?
- Who will be the hero to save the day?

I dedicate this book to my family, my children, and all the people I met along the way who inspired me to live my life to the fullest. The Author.

We are as human as we care to be, as adventurous as we dare, and as powerful as we believe.

This book is an original work of fiction. Many of the facts, including those about nature, history, and science in this book are real. Any opinions expressed are those of the characters and not of the publisher.

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This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance between fictional characters created by the author and actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Fiction Book of the Year

—*Corporate Live Wire*

THE Adventures Of Mat Rufs

A. Liachenko

A heart-racing thriller with a historical twist and an international scope

BOOK ONE

Mexican 'Jewel'

Chapter 1.

THE DARKNESS NEVER LIFTED as he was trying to push his way through the tight and ever-turning cave. Being in Mexico always excited him: the aromas of the rain forests, the warm breeze on his skin, the colorfully dressed smiley Mexicans offering tostadas and tamales. He was wondering, now, why he ever dared to go into the wilderness of the jungle on his own; why he could not control his curiosity and chose to descend into the cave; why sunbathing on the beaches or wandering the markets and chatting up the locals was not enough.

But it was too late. He was deep into the cave with no idea of how to come out. Only the darkness, some water to his ankles, and an occasional bat flying under the cave roof were his companions. He was exhausted.

Mat sat on a small stone that was protruding out of the water and considered whether it was better to continue forward, or to turn back and try to retrace his steps out of the cave. The truth was, he was not entirely sure which way was back and which was forward, even deeper into the darkness of the mountain. This was when he heard a muted yet high-pitched sound, very faint but unmistakably produced by a living being. Mat started towards the sound,

charged with new energy as he moved his feet through the water. At last, after several turns, he saw a creature with short greenish gold fur and a tail held low and close to the small skinny shaking body of what appeared to be a terrified young animal, looking almost like a dog.

“Xoloitzcuintle!” exclaimed Mat. It’s the famous Mexican Xolo dog, many of them are hairless, but some do have a coat, like this one, Mat knew. “What are you doing here Xolo?” asked Mat gently, thinking suddenly of the old legend that Xolo dogs guided people through the dangers of the afterlife towards heaven.

Mat shook his head to avoid these thoughts. He was not in the afterlife; he was very much *alive*. He pinched himself. The puppy looked sheepishly at Mat, backing another step towards the cave wall, but not having a lot of room; it was only standing on a small stone, surrounded by water.

Mat took off his green worn-out travel backpack. He found a small piece of cheese and offered it to the puppy. Xolo gratefully accepted and ate with much vigor. *He might have been here for some time, without food,* thought Mat, *but how did he get here?*

After the offering of cheese, Xolo perked up and appeared less scared of Mat. The puppy eventually allowed Mat to pick him up and pet him on the back. Mat realized that Xolo had a little collar with a small tag. The tag was designed in the colors of the Mexican flag, with a vertical green stripe on the left, a vertical red stripe on the right, and a wide white stripe

in the middle. Instead of the national coat of arms emblem found in the center of the official Mexican flag, the middle of the white stripe on Xolo's tag had an interesting sign, something like graffiti, or perhaps it was a map.

Curious, Mat forgot for a second about his hardships and that he just gotten lost inside a Mexican cave, as he tried to figure out the meaning of the mysterious drawing.

Chapter 2.

THE DRAWING ON XOLO'S TAG was made in a simple line art style, with a few lines charging across, two twin circles, and a zigzag connecting the outer dots. But deciphering the meaning of the line art, or any art at all, is a challenge worth noting.

The thing about line art is that lines are actually 'points in motion', and there are several types of lines you can draw. Contour lines, for example, are carefully drawn to define the edges of a shape or plane. Gesture lines are quick, rough lines that capture shapes, forms, and movement. There are five basic kinds of lines: curved, vertical, horizontal, zigzag, and diagonal; all made to create an illusion of texture and perspective. Line art is often used in the drawing of maps.

Mat remembered the art classes his sister took while she was in middle school. She used to be so excited, coming home with various products of her imagination: cute kitty cats, Christmas ornaments, their house drawn on a piece of green construction paper. Once, at home, she drew a boy she liked but would not take the drawing to school for the fear of ridicule from her friends. Mat smiled at the memory.

Emily was so far away now, back in their hometown, probably getting ready for dinner, or *what time was it*

anyway? He lost the sense of time being in this cave for so long. Mat sighed and looked again at the little puppy that was now clinging to him for warmth.

Mat decided that they must keep moving through the cave, it is better to take some steps than none at all. If they always took the right turn every time there was a choice of passages, they would have a good chance of finding a way out. Or they could always choose the left turn, so long as they are consistent with the direction. Also, they must leave some visible marks in an unfortunate event they come a full circle back to where they already passed. If this happened, they would try a different path—taking the second right (or left) tunnel, and then the third, and so on. If they don't follow a good system like this, they would keep moving in circles and lose strength.

Mat dug into his backpack and 'fished out' a piece of red napkin that he had left there from his breakfast. He tore a small piece off and placed it onto a small indent in the cave wall, securing it with a flat stone.

He pondered over the fact that the cave was not completely dark; a faint light was present, giving some way to see the cave and the passages. Mat tried to figure out which way the light was brighter, but it was not obvious. He shook his head, picked up the shivering Xolo into his arms, and charged into the tunnel on the right.

The path was rather rough, with lots of debris and stones under the water, Mat's hiking shoes were completely soaked

and heavy, but he kept them on to be safe from the sharp objects at the bottom of the cave. One step at a time, then one more, then one more again. Mat decided to count to 300 before they stopped to rest again. Xolo was very light, almost weightless, and he clung on so tight to Mat that it felt easy to carry him. Mat glanced affectionately at the puppy, touching his nose that felt cold and wet. *You are a healthy pup,* Mat thought, smiling. *We are going to make it.*

Funny how just a moment before meeting Xolo, Mat was feeling scared, hopeless, and almost desperate — blaming himself for carelessly getting into this cave and losing his way. But now, he was the strong one responsible for saving Xolo, which changed everything. Mat was here for a reason. Mat felt a surge of energy and stamina to carry on and find a way out, no matter what it took. And he was also going to discover why Xolo was left in the cave and what was the meaning of the mysterious drawing on Xolo's tag. *But one thing at a time.*