



**STRANGE TIMES**  
**ON**  
**ZZYZX ROAD**

An Interactive Story

**CARLO N. SAMSON**

# **Strange Times on Zzyzx Road**

## **(Free Preview Edition)**

**by**

**Carlo N. Samson**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

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## **Author's Note**

In this work of interactive fiction, the story progresses according to the choices the reader makes at certain points in the narrative. There are 13 possible endings, and the reader is encouraged to uncover all of them, in order to understand the nature of the unusual events on Zzyzx Road.

# Strange Times on Zzyzx Road

You are in the back seat of a Ford Escape that is cruising in the fast lane along Interstate 15 in California, going from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. Behind the wheel is your friend Scott; his girlfriend Mira sits in the passenger seat. The three of you have just graduated from high school, and are going to spend the weekend at the home of Mira's aunt and uncle, who live in a condo on The Strip.

Mira, who has been listening to music on her iPad, removes her headphones.

"It's coming up soon," she says.

"What is?" Scott asks.

Mira looks out the window. "Wait for it ... there! See?"

You catch a glimpse of a green road sign that reads:

Exit 239

Zzyzx Rd

1 MILE

Scott scoffs. "Zizz what? That's a joke sign, isn't it?"

"Uh, no, it's a real road, duh."

"Where's it lead to, then, Zzyzx City or something?"

"Don't know," Mira replies. "Every time we drive out to Vegas, I always point it out, and my dad always says to go look it up. Never got around to it, though."

You suggest that she might as well look it up right now. Mira taps on her iPad, frowns.

"No bars. I guess the signal's dropped," she says.

You try to access the Internet using your cell phone, but you don't have a signal, either.

"Whoa, there's the exit!" Scott says. He squeals the SUV across the highway, shoots between two cars, roars onto the exit ramp for Zzyzx Road.

"What the frick are you doing?" Mira yells.

The vehicle rolls onto a narrow paved road, comes to a stop at a stop sign. "You got me curious," Scott says. "Let's see what's out here."

Mira punches him in the shoulder. "Jerkweed! Get us back on the highway."

"How's about we drive for five minutes? We see nothing of interest, we turn back."

"No," Mira says. "Turn around right now."

Scott asks for your opinion. You're rather curious about it yourself, and vote to keep driving. Mira pouts.

[Continue](#)

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# The Road

The poorly-maintained road cuts through a dry, flat landscape. You pass a sign that says "Mojave National Preserve," but see nothing more than rocks and scrub. Even so, you take a few photos and some video.

"Time's up!" Mira says, looking at the dashboard clock.

"Ah, come on," Scott replies. "A couple minutes more."

Mira shakes her head. "There's literally nothing out here."

Just then, the Ford is buffeted by a huge gust of wind. A massive cloud of sand and dust rolls over the car, shutting out the sun.

"OMG!" Mira cries. "Turn around and let's get out of here!"

"Might be better to stop and wait it out," Scott says.

They turn to you for your opinion. What do you vote to do?

1) [Stop and wait](#)

2) [Turn around](#)

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## Stop and Wait

Dirt and pebbles pelt the car as the wind howls all around. Mira and Scott cling each other. The wind dies down a few minutes later, but a cloud of dust still hangs in the air.

Scott puts his face close to the window. "I think I see —"

He yells, flings himself back as a ghastly figure abruptly appears on the other side of the window. It's a man wearing a gas mask and black tactical gear. He taps the glass with the muzzle of a rifle, shouts something unintelligible.

Now other figures in similar garb — soldiers, of some sort — materialize out of the dust cloud. They surround the vehicle, weapons at the ready.

The strange man at the driver's side taps harder. Scott rolls down the window.

"How did you get past the perimeter?" the person yells through the mask.

"What perimeter's that?" Scott asks.

The man yanks open the door, drags Scott out. The others likewise extract you and Mira from the SUV, then line you up.

"Hands offa me!" Mira says. "Who the frick are you people, anyways?"

"I'm Major Culhane," the first man says. "And you three are trespassers."

Another man steps forward, brings out a small device like a security wand. He switches it on, and a thin blue laser-line scans over you. The man squints at the device's display, then pulls your cell phone out of your pants pocket.

He scans your friends in the same manner, relieving them of everything they carry on them. Mira protests, but is silenced by the sound of someone racking a shotgun.

Major Culhane examines Scott's wallet, studies his driver's license. "Well, I guess that explains it," he says. "All right, you three are coming with us. Get moving."

The air has cleared enough for you to see two black armored vehicles parked a short distance down the road. You get an icy feeling in your gut that if you go with these people, you'll never see your parents again.

What do you do?

1) [Abandon your friends and run away](#)

2) [Stay with your friends](#)

[Go Back](#) to the previous episode

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## Turn Around

Scott brings the Ford around and drives back toward the I-15. The wind screams like a banshee, and the dust cloud is as thick as a blanket of cotton.

"Can't see a damn thing," Scott says. He slows the car to 25 miles per hour.

BANG! A large rock bounces off the windshield, leaving a small crack.

"Scott, come on! Go faster!" Mira insists.

What do you advise Scott to do?

1) [Go faster](#)

2) [Continue to drive slow](#)

[Go Back](#) to the previous episode

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## **Abandon Your Friends**

The men escort you and your friends toward the waiting vehicles. Without warning, you kick out the knee of the man nearest you, then speed off away across the scrubland.

A gunshot echoes, but you keep running. You're gambling that these people aren't going to use lethal force on unarmed civilians.

A few minutes later, you slow down and catch your breath. You look back and see, off in the distance, the two vehicles racing away down the road.

A pang of guilt hits you, but you reason that you are now free to seek help.

### **End of Preview**

To find out what happens next, purchase the full story at the [Amazon Kindle Store](#). Thanks!

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## Stay With Your Friends

"Hey, we have rights!" Scott says as the soldiers march the three of you to the waiting vehicles.

"Not here, you don't," Major Culhane replies.

"This is abuse of power!" says Mira. "Kidnapping! Illegal seizure!"

"Put a seal on it, would ya?" the major retorts.

The soldiers slap handcuffs on the three of you and load you all into the back of one of the armored vehicles. Your heads are covered with black hoods that have a strange flowery smell.

"OMG, they're going to kill us!" Mira shrieks. She starts flailing around and kicking.

"Seven, six, five ..." Major Culhane says. By the time he gets to "one", you feel extremely drowsy. Mira has likewise stopped kicking. Your eyes close; things go dark and fuzzy.

### End of Preview

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## Go Faster

Scott puts the pedal down, speeds up to 40 miles per hour. The going gets rougher, but visibility remains nearly zero.

"You're not even on the road!" Mira says.

"Hey, gimme a break, would you?" Scott snaps.

Abruptly, the wind dies down. The dust cloud soon dissipates, and Scott is able to put the Ford back onto Zzyzx Road. He finds the highway entrance, and it's there that you come upon a strange sight: both sides of the highway, eastbound and westbound, are jam-packed with vehicles moving at a crawl, westward towards Los Angeles.

"Is there an accident or something?" Mira wonders.

"Evacuation, by the look of it," Scott says. "It's like everyone's leaving Las Vegas."

"Nicholas Cage!" Mira exclaims.

"I'm serious here," says Scott. "Something's wrong."

"Well, there goes the weekend," Mira says with a sigh.

"No choice, we gotta go with the flow." Scott tries to merge in with the traffic, but no one lets him in.

"Oh, for crap's sake!" Mira huffs. She reaches over and leans on the horn.

Scott pushes her back. "Are you on crack, or what?"

"You want in? That's how you let them know."

"Uh, guys?" you say, pointing out the windshield. A large, bald man in a pickup truck has gotten out and is coming over. He's got a baseball bat in his hand.

"What the hell you honking at me for? Huh?" the man yells. He smashes the bat into the Ford's left headlight.

### End of Preview

To find out what happens next, purchase the full story at the [Amazon Kindle Store](#). Thanks!

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## Continue to Drive Slow

You advise Scott to keep driving slow, so as not to risk a crash. Visibility remains near zero as the Ford travels over rough terrain.

The wind picks up, becomes a howling gale. Scott fights to keep control as the vehicle is rocked by powerful gusts. You glimpse flashes of lightning amid the roiling clouds of sands.

"This is nuts!" Mira says, bracing herself against the dashboard. At that moment, a massive blast of wind hits the Ford broadside. The vehicle tips over, rolls onto its side.

"Hang on to something!" Scott shouts.

You frantically scramble to put on your seat belt, but the Ford continues to roll, turning over three more times. You are thrown around like clothes in a dryer. Then — THUMP! The Ford ends up back on its wheels, the engine cutting out.

The wind dies down, ceases. You feel dizzy for a moment, but are otherwise unhurt. As you move out from under the luggage that got tossed around, you hear Mira frantically calling Scott's name.

"He's not waking up!" Mira says, alarmed. You lean into the front and see Scott lying limp in the driver's seat. A cut on his forehead oozes blood.

Mira shakes Scott, but gets no response. You put your fingers on his neck, find a steady pulse. He's alive, at least.

"What do we do?" asks Mira. Recalling some of your basic first-aid knowledge, you tell her to put pressure on Scott's head wound. She takes some fast-food napkins and presses them over the cut.

You take out your cell phone to call for help, but for some reason it keeps shutting down and rebooting. The same thing happens with Mira's and Scott's phones, and even Mira's iPad.

It's only now that you have a look out the windows. A strange shimmering fog hangs in the air, obscuring the view for more than a few feet.

"Scott, come on, wake up," Mira says, her voice breaking. You know her well enough to realize that she'll freak out if you don't get her mind on other things.

"Can you start the engine?" you ask. She reaches over to the keys, turns the starter. Nothing happens, not even so much as a clicking sound. It's possible that the ignition system was damaged, but given the possibility that Scott has suffered a brain injury, there's no time to try and diagnose the problem.

"One of us has to go for help," you say.

"I'm not leaving him," Mira firmly replies. You nod in understanding.

The next several minutes are spent in gathering supplies for a hike. You reason that if you head north, you'll eventually come to the I-15. Unfortunately, the fog is so thick that you can't figure out directions. There aren't any paper maps in the vehicle, since you all had relied on your phones for navigation. Then you get the idea to walk in an ever-widening spiral; that way you'll come to the highway, or at least Zzyzx Road.

You exit the car, taking your backpack. Among other things, it contains a couple bottles of water, some granola bars, road flares, and a flashlight.

"Hurry back," Mira says.

You light a couple of flares and set one in front of and behind the Ford, to give yourself reference points. Then you begin walking: twenty paces forward of the vehicle, turn right ninety degrees, walk twenty paces, turn right, walk thirty paces. You repeat this pattern, moving farther and farther from the car. You soon lose sight of the flares in the unnatural fog, which shouldn't even have formed, since the air is hot and dry.

A bubble of hope rises as you come across a dirt road — Zzyzx Road, no doubt. Unfortunately, you have no idea which direction leads to the highway. You can't remember which way the wind blew the car; knowing which side of the road you ended up on would tell you the way to go.

### **End of Preview**

To find out what happens next, purchase the full story at the [Amazon Kindle Store](#). Thanks!

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