

3.3 MIDDLEMAN

By Muhammad Adib Surani

You reappear in the same spot, on what seems like Wednesday, laughing. The prank on the undergrad has definitely cheered you up somewhat. You wish you could have seen the look on that guy's face. Your coffee is all the way in tomorrow so you order another one. You're not quite sure how long it is since you slept last. It's hard to keep track of time when time is falling apart in such a way. You haven't felt this way since your honours year.

Suddenly, your coffee explodes in your hands. Everybody screams. A second gunshot smashes through the cake stand on the cafe counter. Nutella donuts explode over everything. You look up. It's the Terminator again! He walks towards you, slowly, menacingly.

You try to run but you slip in a puddle of nutella and fall. The Terminator stands over you and holds his gun in your face.

"You're not getting away this time," he says.

Suddenly, a grey DeLorean appears from nowhere and plows into the Terminator. He goes flying, over towards Old Arts.

A tall, white haired man climbs out of the DeLorean. A teenage boy follows him.

"Oh g-g-g-gee Rick," stammers the boy, "that w-was a close one."

"Obviously Mortyyyyy," slurs Rick, taking a swig from his flask, "it would hardly be a very effective surprise attack if I had attacked way in advance. Think about these things."

You look at the pair.

"Huh," you say, "I was sort of expecting you to be Doc Brown and Marty McFly from *Back To The Future*, not Rick and Morty from *Rick and Morty*."

"Well," says Rick, "we were kind of expecting to have a nice relaxing weekend, not for some idiot hack scientist from some hack Australian university to break time and space in a way that might ensure that the weekend will never arrive. So, I – I guess we don't all get what we expect all the time, do we?"

Rick hands you a sheet of paper.

"Here," he says, "here's your contrived plot device to introduce this particular puzzle. That is, if anyone's actually reading this overly laborious narrative."

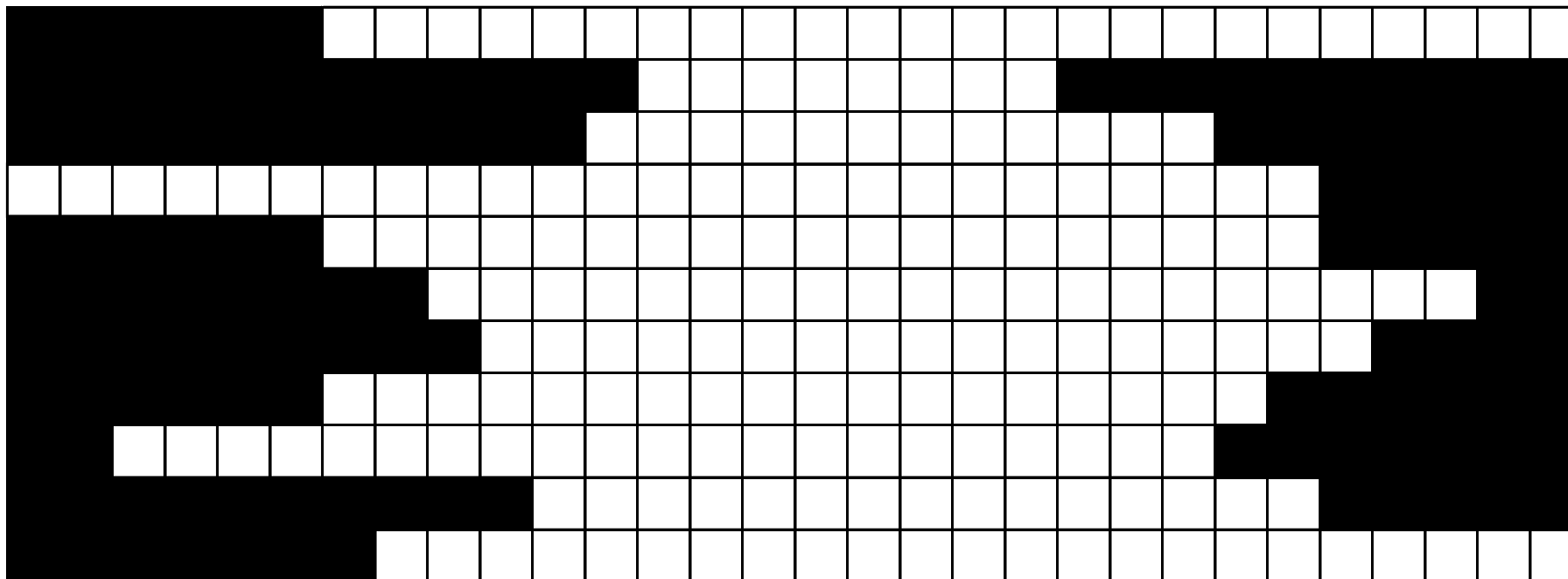
On the page is a grid and a list of words.

"C-come on Rick," stammers Morty, "I think you're being a little harsh."

The Device starts to shake.

"I'm about to time jump!" you say. "Do you have any clues for me or anything?"

"Eh," says Rick, "I'll tell you earlier. Like, right aboooooout..."



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