



Source: David Cloud, 'Bush steps up Iraq security plans', *New York Times*, Reuters in *Sydney Morning Herald* online, 23/10/06.

Tags: [security](#), [dystopia](#), [travel](#)

Writer/s: Sarah Miller

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

At 6.00 a.m. the airport is already crowded; the entire city trying to escape itself. Everywhere, there are harried parents and squalling babies, hyperactive toddlers, over-helpful youngsters and sulky adolescents. Parents struggle with prams, suitcases, kids. Holiday-makers with backpacks and oversized totes threaten to annihilate the inattentive, while plastic bags stuffed with last minute bits and pieces, leak their contents over the swirling blue carpet. In business class, corporate travellers nattily attired in navy, grey or black with crisp shirts and neatly knotted ties, queue with carry-on luggage and mobile communication devices. Loudspeakers squawk and crackle, issuing instructions and announcing arrivals and departures. At security, cattle class merges with business class. By the time passengers have removed belts, shoes, watches, small change and jewellery, unpacked laptops, cameras and mobiles, handed over walking sticks and strollers, and set off the metal detector for the third time, tempers are starting to fray. Losing your temper, being a smartypants, or even just tightening your lips is foolish. It means that you will be selected and swabbed for traces of more than 80 different types of explosives. It's a well-known fact that terrorists are cranky bastards. You might even say that they're on a short fuse!

So when the fat dude in the Hawaiian shirt and totally huge shorts has a meltdown in front of me, well I should have been prepared. Instead, I was thinking about whether I had time to pick up a newspaper and coffee. Sadly, despite having received innumerable warnings, from our esteemed leader, at the consulate, through television advertising, letterbox drops and the quite obvious airport security measures, I was neither alert nor alarmed. And for these sins of omission, I am being punished. Everything has gone berserk. My heart is pounding. This is IT! The fat guy's screaming blue murder, his face is turning puce, and the contents of his footy-bag are all over the conveyor belt. Uniformed guards carrying batons, guns and walkie-talkies come running from all directions. They wrestle him to the ground, face down with his arms pulled back and cuffed behind him. The crowd holds its breath. It's just like TV. Even the kids are momentarily stunned into silence. We all wait for a sign to be told what to do. It's that moment—like the eye of the storm...Eventually a man in uniform steps forward, hands held out, palms up. 'It's okay folks', he says, 'everything's under control'. The fat man is taken away—no struggle. He looks stunned. The queue surges forward.

Twenty minutes later, I'm upstairs clutching my coffee. I'm still in shock. Who was that guy? What was he fighting for? Still, our small alarm has had one positive outcome: everywhere people are talking together. Children are playing quietly under the beneficent eyes of corporate leaders. Parents are checking out rate changes and

chuckling about the healthy economy. Smartly dressed airport staff swing by in sharp-yet-sassy uniforms. Retailers smile and offer bonus gifts—'just sign here'—while smartly dressed men with white shiny teeth spruik the advantages of credit cards and mobile phones—'and just sign here'. You can buy designer fashion and lingerie, perfumes and cosmetics, sporting gear and office works, gourmet delicacies and fine wines. Everything is calm. People are happy as they line up to collect their Krispy Kreme donuts.

I think maybe I should just give myself over to the moment. My plane is delayed so I take a brisk constitutional around the airport passing by each and every departure lounge. Setting off at a steady pace, shoulders back and arms swinging, breathing deeply in and out, I duck and weave, moving in and around the crowd. I pride myself on keeping in step, on never losing the beat, on moving to the rhythm inside my head. I feel good now—relaxed and comfortable—I could almost burst into song.

The lighting is subdued. The carpet beneath my feet is comfortable. The walls are a muted shade of palest grey. Everything is calm and everyone is moving at an even pace. Then as I approach Gate 9, there's some kind of disturbance. A young woman throws herself sobbing onto the floor. Everyone flinches away. She's screaming and crying now, but I can't understand what she's saying—something about flying—but that's not an accurate quote. Security guards come running with capicum spray, reducing her shrieks to muffled cries, then whimpers. They shroud her in a blanket and take her away. We all watch in silence. A man in uniform steps forward. 'Nothing to be alarmed about folks', he says, 'everything's under control'.

I look around for the monitor announcing departure and arrival times. There's nothing nearby so I head out again, looking for someone or something to confirm when and where I should be. I can't seem to find anyone official. People loom into view then diminish, moving out of my way as I speed up until I'm running faster and faster through the airport. Shops are starting to close; the floor is littered with the remnants of lolly wrappers and newspapers, and everything looks grimy. I swing round and head back to the security checkpoint. The next thing I know, I'm on the ground, weeping in pain, gulping for breath, and surrounded by armed guards. I hear a man's footsteps just by my head, and then I hear him say, 'Nothing to be alarmed about folks; everything's under control.'

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Sarah Miller.*