**Gate 47**

Arthur Wilson had no idea where he was.

The signs were in a curvy foreign language and the models in the perfume ads could have been Asian, or Middle Eastern, or even Mediterranean. All he knew for certain was that it was the middle of the night, because the world outside the transfer terminal was black ink.

He had half an hour to meander his way along the concourse to Gate 47, where his connecting flight was to depart. A few other ghostly passengers were shambling to their gates or standing dormant on the travelators, each looking about as awake as he felt. A dreamlike melody burbled faintly in the background.

At what felt like mile five of his shuffling journey Arthur came across the toilets. His churning stomach reminded him that he shouldn’t have braved the grey scrambled eggs and beef they had served him in economy.

He made it into the cubicle just in time, his groans of relief echoing off the tiled walls. A twinge in his stomach signalled a second onslaught and Arthur settled in for the long haul.

A flush from the cubicle next to his was followed by the clip of business shoes leaving the toilets. Then it was just Arthur, the smell of perfumed urinal cakes and that faint, soporific music.

Arthur woke with a start to a distorted announcement. He missed what was said but sensed the insistent tone. A glance at his watch told him his flight was to depart in five minutes.

There was a vending machine outside the toilets. Arthur didn’t really have the time but he couldn’t risk another airline meal. He bought all the chips, muesli bars and tubs of fruit that remained then ran toward the departure hall, the food packets a rustling bulk under his jacket. Arthur was in such a myopic rush that he didn’t notice how deserted and silent the airport had become.

He made it to Gate 47 with less than a minute to spare, but pulled up short at what he saw.

It was empty. Not a soul in sight.

A mechanical whirr made him turn. Trundling past was a functional-looking robot on tank tracks. It was making its way toward a discarded suitcase whose lid was flopped open to reveal a mass of circuits, wires, springs and loose nails.

Arthur was too dazed to fully comprehend, but his thudding heart screamed danger.

He almost jumped out of his skin when a hostile male voice boomed from somewhere nearby. He couldn’t understand the throaty foreign accent and found himself fleeing back down the concourse, running full speed to nowhere in particular.

Like apparitions a squad of men in black melted into view, automatic weapons raised.

Arthur went to lift his hands in surrender, but the chips and muesli bars and tubs of fruit had become dislodged, and he instinctively jerked his hands to his jacket to prevent them from falling out.

The quiet airline concourse erupted in gunfire.