Hal Mangold

Terminal X

Series Pitch of the Month

CREDITS

DRAMASYSTEM WRITER/DESIGNER/PRODUCER
Robin D. Laws

SERIES PITCH AUTHOR
Hal Mangold

ILLUSTRATION
Rachel A. Kahn

LAYOUT
Cathriona Tobin

BASED ON A LAYOUT THEME BY
Christian Knutsson

PROOFREADER
Craig Hargreaves

Thanks to our Kickstarter backers, without whom this would not be possible.

Terminal X

—Hal Mangold

Nutshell

Most people just call it the Airport. But those in the know use its true name: Terminal X.

A fractious circle of modern sorcerers wage a subtle turf war within one of the world's busiest airports. Even as the lead characters fend off occult forces threatening to erode the source of their power, they strive to conceal it from the workaday world. Now the Veil concealing this mystic place thins, granting a select few from outside the esoteric sphere glimpses of the place's true nature.

Characters

Main characters fall into three possible categories. Stick to one, or mix and match.

The first is a main cast composed of those few airline personnel, airport staff, and regular travelers who have seen past the Veil into the airport's mystic side. They try to decipher its mysteries without attracting the attention of malevolent forces.

- A TSA Agent keeps seeing strange things on her X-ray screens.
- A janitor or custodian saw something he shouldn't have in the tunnels.
- A baggage handler opened the wrong bag.
- A bartender got the wrong customer drunk.
- A commuter flyer saw something weird during a late night layover.

The second group are active participants in the secret contest for power that goes on unnoticed every day in the airport, both between those who rule it, and those who would undermine their power.

- A Native American shaman who uses Terminal X for communion with his ancestors.
- A beginning adept, who has taken a menial job in the airport to be close to, and learn from, Terminal X.
- A secret agent of the enemy conspiracy called the Movers (see below), posing as a normal adept.

A third approach makes all the characters Gatekeepers, members of a cabal who have seized the airport, twisting it from its old purpose to one that serves them. They pursue their emotional goals while struggling to maintain Terminal X's stability, building their personal power bases, and protecting the dimensional nexus. Operating under cover identities as ordinary airport personnel, your character might seem on first glance to be a:

- nervous air traffic controller
- philosophical shoeshine man
- taciturn retail clerk
- smart alec IT worker
- bleary passenger (who never actually boards a plane)

Beneath these guises, characters' roles in the Gatekeepers might include:

- newly inducted junior adept learning the ropes
- aging leader clinging to power despite rapidly declining powers
- longtime factotum to the above, loyal to a fault
- the heir apparent
- sidelined former leader, with a few tricks still in pocket
- exiled black sheep brought back in time of need
- guilt-ridden enforcer
- former infiltrator, readjusting to a mere double identity after years spent infiltrating the Movers
- civilian loved one of a major figure, trying not to be dragged into the magical world

Setting

Since before its construction began in 1989, the monumental modern marvel known as Denver International Airport (DEN) has attracted controversy, mystery, and misfortune. A variety of delays, project failures and tragedies have befallen the facility throughout its existence. The airport opened in 1995, over two years and $2 billion over budget. The high-tech baggage system abjectly failed from the start, and was shut down in 2005 after a decade of ongoing malfunction. The artist of the airport's iconic anatomically correct blue metal horse statue "Mustang" was tragically killed in the final stages of its construction, bleeding to death in his studio while putting finishing touches on it.

The arrangement of runways vaguely recalls a swastika. The murals and inlays decorating its walls carry murky mystical implications. A Freemason's symbol adorns the dedication plaque. Conspiracy theories ranging from DEN being a future FEMA death camp, a secret bunker for the president, a hiding-in-plain-sight temple of Freemasonry—the list goes on.

The truth is far stranger than people suspect.

The construction of the Denver Airport was originally intended to be the linchpin of some sort of magical ritual. Its architectural focus perhaps suggests a conjuration of Masonic import. Its mysterious planners shrouded their presence well, working through shell corporations, shadowy lobbying groups, and heavily bribed or mystically suborned politicians.

The grand working never came to full fruition. Maybe a flaw in the overall construction of the ritual space doomed the project. Perhaps something terrible happened to the planners. Whatever the answer, the abortive ceremony resulted in a weird but functional airport, with a mystic resonance and power just waiting to be tapped into by anyone who could harness it.

Who were the architects of the grand ritual, and what happened to them?

What was the original purpose of the Denver Airport's ritualized construction?

The failed ritual weakened the fabric of reality in and around the airport. A group of people stepped in to harness this phenomenon. Known now only as the Gatekeepers, these adepts have secretly taken control of the airport, and shaped its power into something very different than whatever was originally intended.

Denver International Airport consists of four main buildings. Jeppeson Terminal serves as main entry point for the public, connected to a series of large parking garages. Jeppeson connects directly to Terminal A via a pedestrian bridge, as well as a train, with trains then connecting to Terminals B and C as well.

At the secret heart of the airport lies Terminal X, a dimensional nexus that allows those with the right mystic knowledge to travel in time, space, and even beyond our reality. For some this travel is physical, others project their essences into the void, with Terminal X as their anchor-point.

Terminal X is not the only place of its kind in the world. Other weakened spots in reality can be found scattered around the globe. But Terminal X has some special characteristics. Thanks to the Gatekeepers, Terminal X remains stable, safe, and secret. Assuming you're willing to pay the Gatekeeper's price, it proves itself as the hands-down best place for a mystic adept to step beyond.

Terminal X exists in the same space as the mundane airport, but off-synch from it and the rest of the material world. The everyday human traffic that passes through Denver International Airport may provide the crucial basis for the terminal's stability, but the average person never even notices it. At most, a very sensitive normal person might feel a particular tingle, catch something out of the corner of their eye, or simply have the feeling of being watched while passing through the airport in the course of normal travel.

Any knowledgeable mystic, and even a few upstart nouveau adepts, can easily step through the Veil and enter Terminal X. Staying there without the Gatekeeper's indulgence is, on the other hand, very very difficult.

Is Terminal X alive? And if so, is it sentient?

The Gatekeepers maintain an equilibrium of internal tension. As much as they might dislike one another, they need each other, too. Their

paranoia over control of Terminal X at least matches that of the world's espionage agencies.

Their mystically opposite rivals, the Movers, derive their power from travel—specifically, from violating the control others hold over a place. The place does not have to be mystically charged, but when it is, the benefit reaped from penetrating it increases tenfold. A Mover gains no bigger charge than by traveling through Terminal X.

More flights than ever come through Denver International Airport. Rumors of its strangeness now spread through the Internet. More and more of the curious to try to pierce the Veil protecting Terminal X from discovery by the wider world.

Are the creatures occasionally sighted in the basement good or evil? Are they Gatekeepers keeping out something evil, or imprisoning something good?

Themes

- **The Price of Order:** The Gatekeeper's control of the airport is dependent on the small amount of energy they harvest from each person flying into and out of the airport. Another cabal, the Travelers, find this morally offensive and seek to undermine the Gatekeepers. Once you learn the truth about the methods the Gatekeepers use to build power and maintain control, will you align themselves with them, or with the more free-spirited but chaotic Travelers?
- **Untrue Selves:** What happens when the quotidian lives of ordinary, ignorant airport employees start to look more appealing than the danger and uncertainties of mystic awareness? Is it tempting to disappear forever into the guise of a blank-faced kitchen drone or customer service representative?
- **Contents May Have Shifted During Flight:** The sudden demise of a top Gatekeeper leaves a power vacuum. Do you have what it takes to fill it?
- **Lost Baggage:** Characters find themselves suddenly free of the entrapping past. Without the history that was dragging you down, do you know what to do with yourselves?

- **Recharging Station:** The cast gets a breather, enabling everyone to regain lost resources. Can you take advantage of this rare moment of downtime?
- **Prohibited Items:** New objects of power enter the Terminal. Do you fear them, or desire them?
- **Important Safety Reminder:** An omen of doom forces the cast to reconsider its alliances.
- **Put Your Own Mask On Before Assisting Others:** Can the cast members look after their loved ones without first taking care of themselves?
- **Overbooked:** The Terminal fills up with sorcerers. How do you cope when you can't move your arm without jostling another magician?
- **On Standby:** A surprise development puts everyone's plans on hold.
- **Travel Insurance:** As danger escalates, can the cast minimize its risks—or is an offer of protection just a scam that will never pay off?
- **Valid Documents:** Cast members must prove who they really are. Do they even remember?
- **Anything to Declare?** Time for the cast confess some misdeeds, to one another— or risk punishment from the higher-ups.
- **Mile High Club:** Terminal X collects people who lust for power, but what happens when plain old ordinary lust confuses the picture?

Tightening the Screws

- A pilot strike at one of the airlines has cut the number of flights into one of the terminals drastically, weakening one of the Gatekeepers. This allows an opening for the other two to encroach on the weakened one's territory, but the subtle struggle for gate control disrupts the stability of Terminal X, and strange things are beginning to happen in the airport. Doors appear and vanish. Bags go missing, or end up…changed…by their transit through DEN.
- A particularly incompetent, if well-heeled, adept bollixes his attempt at astral

projection completely, annihilating his own soul. This wouldn't be a problem if something nasty from beyond our plan hadn't jumped right in. Whatever it is, it's homicidal, and at large in normal reality. Can it be stopped before it leaves the airport and escapes into the wider world?

- A huge storm traps hundreds of passengers in the confines of the airport. As the hours pass and the tempers begin to fray, the emotional resonance starts to cause fluctuations in the aura of Terminal X. Can order be maintained and the odd mystic happening be explained away to the stranded people, or will Terminal X's instability start to erode the Veil?
- Not even the Gatekeepers really believe the stories about the lizard aliens in the basement, but some maintenance workers have vanished down in the old baggage system tunnels, and strange noises have been heard in the depths of night. Is it just some piece of errant machinery making the strange sounds? It could be… but if one listens long enough, it sure sounds like some sort of strange chanting…
- One of the Gatekeepers has gone missing, and the careful balance of power and mutual respect that the rulers of Terminal X have maintained has been gravely shaken. With it, both the stability of Terminal X, and the strength of the Veil are threatened. Clues begin turning up that the missing Gatekeeper may not have been a victim of an outside force…the disappearance may be in inside job.