



# CURTAINUP

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## The Common Air

[Paulanne Simmons](#)

“Heroes are people who don’t know they’re in danger” –The Dealer

In Alex Lyras and Robert McCaskill's entertaining and insightful *The Common Air*, six interconnected characters, all involved in a major JFK airport delay, prove that we all do indeed live in the same world, subject to the same foibles of humankind.

The six characters are an Iraqi cab driver (The Immigrant), who dreams of starting his own reality show; a gay art gallery owner (The Dealer), who has fallen in love with Greek cave art; a womanizing lawyer (The Champion) of doubtful professional ethics; a DJ named PJ (The Spinner), who has been accused of stealing another performer's work; a soon-to-be divorced professor (The Signifier) returning to Texas from a vacation with his young son, who is addicted to Grand Theft Auto, and an Iraqi-American (The American), who had been a catering contractor working for the US government in Baghdad.

Each character tells his story to the character next in the lineup. Thus the cab driver takes the gallery owner to the airport, the gallery owner tells his story of an abandoned lover to the lawyer, the lawyer counsels the music producer how to get out of his mess, and the music producer discusses his problem with the professor, who takes respectful notice of the returning contractor. In the last scene the Iraqi-American confesses to the very same cab driver who had taken the art gallery owner to the airport.

The characters are dressed appropriately (the DJ in a leather vest, the professor in a cowboy hat and boots). Lyras executes wardrobe changes backstage while video signs and an unseen announcer reveal the status of the delay.



With the help of Lyras and McCaskill's evocative words and McCaskill's deft direction, Lyras creates a separate and totally convincing reality for each of his characters. Each has his own narrative and his own style in delivering it. The narratives depict what happens when their psyches come up against circumstances that are both random and created self-induced.

Airports, train stations and highway rest stops, the perfect places for chance meetings, have all been used many times as a setting where people pour out their hearts and try to get rid of their psychic baggage. But seldom is this done so well and with such simple elegance as in *The Common Air*.

Lyras's performance is remarkably fluid. It is a compelling tour de force that never lets up or lets the audience down. McCaskill builds scenes upon scene with implacable intensity. The ending is unpredictable yet thoroughly satisfying, and in retrospect, perhaps inevitable. *The Common Air* is the perfect example of what happens when two creative talents work together and let their imagination take flight.