



First Strike: Keepers of the Universe: Book 1

Angela Haas

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The universe's safety is at risk in the gripping science fiction novel First Strike, which features an exciting array of extraterrestrial entities.

About sacrifices made for others, Angela Haas's science fiction novel *First Strike* jets among planets, galactic intrigues, and varying lifeforms across the stars.

Stella is an unparalleled trauma surgeon in New York City. But on the night when she loses her first patient, she is also abducted by aliens, and she is taken into space. There, she meets Elliott, a fellow abductee. Aboard the star ship, Stella learns her true identity: she is a Keeper of Health, one of the fabled Keepers of the Universe.

In the story that follows, Stella—assisted by a team of aliens, robots, and warriors—works to find other Keepers. They face a selfish scientist, Kandi, and her partners, the Zuldari, who hope to enact a malevolent master plan. All while questioning her innate healing abilities and powers, Stella also has to contend with Ryder, a decorated soldier who's half-robot; he works as a mercenary, and was charged with kidnapping Stella in order to save his own family.

About the discovery of one's true self and calling, this tale of self-sacrifice is consistent and clear. On Earth, Stella is driven by her desire to help her patients; in space, everyone who is injured is also party to her care. Ryder, too, is driven by a desire to protect others, including his siblings; Kandi's violent, soul-crushing orders put him in a bind. And the Keepers of the Universe themselves strive for peace and unity across the galaxy, assisted by Stella's team, whose members work to defend peace-loving beings and planets by reuniting the Keepers.

In this diverse universe, human beings mingle with robots that can be transformed, as well as humanoid reptiles and birds and other alien creatures; the mix is colorful, and the book's numerous planets and scenes are ably fleshed out. Stella, Ryder, and Kandi have the best detailed backstories, while the book's secondary characters are driven by clear present day incentives and hinted-at, mysterious pasts. A romance is initiated between Stella and Ryder, too, though its excitement is rushed through, particularly considering the less savory elements of their initial connection. Further, Kandi is a somewhat of a caricature as a bold Southern bombshell who's often out of place in outer space. Her repetitive uses of "honey," "baby," and "sugar" are excessive. Still, the text strikes an easy balance between its prose and its dialogue, engaging attention throughout.

Featuring a bevy of extraterrestrial entities, and with the universe's safety hanging in the balance, the inclusive science fiction novel *First Strike* is about embracing one's true self—and helping others.

ALEX DAILEY (May 4, 2022)

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