



# Life First

*R.J. Crayton*

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*This is an alternate cover edition for ASIN B00DFNWX4.*

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In this future forged by survivors of pandemics that wiped out 80 percent of the world's population, life is valued above all else. The government of "Life First" requires the mentally ill to be sterilized, outlaws abortions and sentences to death those who refuse to donate an organ when told.

Determined not to give up her kidney, Kelsey enlists the help of her boyfriend Luke and a dodgy doctor to escape. The trio must disable the tracking chip in her arm for her to flee undetected. If they fail, Kelsey will be stripped of everything.

\* This is an Awesome Indies Approved book.

## Life First Details

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Author : R.J. Crayton

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Genre : Science Fiction, Dystopia, Young Adult

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# From Reader Review Life First for online ebook

## Isis says

I would like to thank author RJ Crayton and The Cover Contessa for granting me the chance to read this e-book in exchange for an honest review. Though I received the e-book for free that in no way influenced this review.

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I wasn't quite sure what to make of this book in the beginning, but within a few short pages I was hooked. Ms. Clayton has envisioned a horrifying future that comes in a pretty package. A future where the individual is less important than the society as a whole. In some strange way this society's reaction to the plague that decimated 80% of the global population makes sense. Or should I say made sense.

After the plague people had to band together if they wanted humanity to survive. After years of relearning much of the knowledge lost with the bulk of the world's population things are beginning to level off. Yet it is clear that the terror still lurks in the hearts of all who live in FoSS and follow the "Life First" mandate. This mandate may well have saved humanity from extinction, yet now the pendulum has swung too far in the wrong direction. If you are discovered to be a donor match you must automatically undergo surgery and give away your organ to the match, regardless of if you know them or not.

Kelsey grew up without her mother for most of her life, but she never really knew the truth behind her mother's death until she meets Dr. Grant. He turns out to be a throwback to the pre-plague era, believing in the Hippocratic Oath rather than Life First, because Life First doesn't abide by the whole "do no harm" ethic. He gives her a video her mother made minutes before dying - and it turns out her mother didn't need to die if only the doctor that Grant was working for had listened when Dr. Grant said he knew what was causing Kelsey's mother such distress, and how to fix it. Her mother's message really hit home for Kelsey, especially since her best friend Susan had been marked for a routine bone marrow transplant. Susan went in and she underwent the surgery like a good citizen, but she developed an infection that left her paralyzed from the waist down. This had the effect of really cooling Kelsey's jets on Life First, since they only cared that Susan was alive, but were totally unconcerned with her radical loss of quality of life.

Kelsey elects to escape to a free country where Life First isn't an issue. However she made this choice after being marked, which made her an automatic felon. And once she is caught while running she learns that had she stayed and submit she would have been disqualified because she was pregnant.

Kelsey has strong moral convictions and tries to stand by them in the face of overwhelming odds. She also tries to be strong for her loved ones, not wanting to cause them any further pain or public harm. Even though she occasionally loses her cool, she always manages to pull herself back together. Of course she has the help of her beloved, her wonderful father, and her Uncle Albert. Without them she simply doesn't know what she'd do.

This story arc is smooth and well written, pacing the characters and their development nicely. And the moral dilemmas being posed aren't given any pat answers, but rather put forth for the reader to think on, and hopefully come to their own terms with the choices, or lack thereof. I truly enjoyed having the duality of the story and the issues under consideration, for they complimented each other beautifully and gave this story an added dimension and depth that it, and I, most certainly benefited from.

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### **Richard Bunning says**

This is a very well written fiction story that adds interesting fuel to the debate between those that support the 'rights' of the individual and those that put the rights of community ahead of those of the individuals. Should the individual be expected to suffer, even to risk life, for a common good? Should we all, ultimately, be conscript soldiers of society?

The principle character is fascinating, complex, and totally credible. Whether she is actually a hero, a coward, or a genuine conscientious objector, each of us has to decide for ourselves. For me Kelsey was a mix of all three, just as most of us would probably be, depending on the degree and type of cultural indoctrination we had experienced.

The only flaw of the plot was for me the over close relationships of all the principle characters in Kelsey vs The State. This tightness helped drive the intensity of the drama, but it all proved to strain my buy in to its plausibility. Wouldn't the prosecution have ripped the defence case apart even more effectively than it did as a consequence of the degree of nepotism? I think so.

This is a really good read and an excellent affirmation of competence amongst independent writers. We should all be grateful that the fall of old-publishing through the rise of the net has allowed writers like Crayton to be heard.

PS- I really dislike the new cover. The generic, sultry beauty has no relationship to the story. I guess the change is a crass marketing ploy. The old hollow dice image was far more relevant and original.

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### **Darlene says**

Finally, a book that kept me interested! I don't know if any of you noticed what I book slump I've been in. If you read the blurb: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/2...>, you can see that it contains subject matter that makes us all worry about what extremes could bring about, and how on the other extreme of not allowing for fear of the extremes is also life threatening. (In my attempt to not give spoilers I am creating very bad sentences!) It is something in our current news that keeps everyone upset no matter which side of the fence you stand.

Here the young main character, Kelsey Reed, doesn't want to give up her kidney. It is the law that you must, in this dystopia, if someone needs your kidney, heck, you have two! you give it up. Otherwise, you are breaking the law and must go to prison and eventually give up all your donatable parts.

We follow this young woman as she learns more about herself and tries to escape her fate.

It is a quick moving story with deep morals to look at. I was so into it that as soon as I got paid I bought the next two books! I can't wait to continue the series!

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## **Melinda Brasher says**

This is one of those novels that uses a disturbing possible future to make us think critically about our present and ourselves.

After a pandemic kills the majority of the population, life has become sacred, something to be guarded at all costs. If someone needs an new organ, for example, the huge medical database finds whoever is the best match, and that citizen must give the organ. Kelsey, marked for a kidney transplant, decides that it should be her choice, so she tries to run away before the surgery.

This introduces a host of ethical questions: Is Kelsey right or wrong? Selfish or not? Is the well-being of society more important than the rights of the individual? Is the government justified? Is saving one life worth the risk to another? I love how Crayton doesn't hesitate to give good arguments for the others side—sometimes even better than the main character's—so we're never sure what to think.

I wish Kelsey had stuck to her position more, and made a stand, because these issues fade somewhat after the first part of the book. However, even her choice to back off is interesting. She doesn't try to change the world. She tries to save herself. And again I wonder: selfish or not?

The world-building is good. I like the offhand references to survival statistics classes that seem to be the norm for school children. There are also a few believability issues, but most derive from the what-ifs of a society like this, so they're up for debate.

Repetition and over-explanation at times slow the pace. The few errors or oddities in language and mechanics don't really interfere with enjoyment, as the book is well written overall.

In the middle, the narrative takes a turn. It becomes a legal drama with lots of talk and little action. Some people might not like this, but I did, and congratulate Crayton for going where the story would go, instead of bowing to the Hollywood-action-at-all-costs mantra. The courtrooms scenes are full of twisty logic, clever arguments, and verbal traps. Very engaging.

During this section, Kelsey doesn't really do much. She's just an observer, thinking and reacting but making few choices. Again, some readers might not like this, but it works here, and communicates the helplessness of not being in control.

The ending is satisfying while leaving some questions unanswered for the sequel, *Second Life*.

Though *Life First* isn't directly about a specific current issue, readers can draw many uncomfortable and

thought-provoking parallels. This is what good speculative fiction should do, and Life First accomplishes the task.

\*I was given a free copy in exchange for an honest review\*

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## **Joy says**

I got the recommendation for this book off of one of the blogs I read, and it sounded very interesting as the premise pushes the whole "pro-life" concept to a high degree. In the world where Kelsey Reed lives, every citizen is tagged with a biometric marker, and should someone else need help, that citizen is required to provide it whether that's a piece of skin for a graft, bone marrow to treat cancer, or a kidney to replace a failed one. Once you're eighteen, you're eligible to become a donor, whether you want to or not, because Life Comes First.

Kelsey, however, does not want to give up her kidney, let alone to some stranger several states away, and so she plans to run away and avoid the donation. The story follows her escape attempt, her time in prison, and her trial, before the final escape attempt which will determine if she lives or dies by the hand of the government.

Most of the story follows Kelsey's time in prison and the trial, where she is being tried to determine if she was temporarily deranged or if she's a complete psychotic who should be kept in jail until her organs are needed and harvested by the state, killing her in the process. This was the weakest point of the book, IMO - not the story or the descriptions, but the sheer amount of time spent in the novel that focused on the prison and the courtroom. It seems to me that more could've been done on either side of this section to further flesh out the world that Kelsey lived in, which would've been more interesting to me.

This is a fascinating book that's worth a read, even with the flaws, and I enjoyed it as much as one can enjoy such a subject. It's a topic that those who are "pro-baby / pro-life" should consider, since so many of them stop caring once the child is born, as this is one way a truly "pro-life" stance would be enacted.

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## **Faith (Geeky Zoo Girl) says**

Review also published on my blog [StudentSpyglass](#)

**Plot:** ★★★★★

**Characters:** ★★★

**Readability:** ★★★★★

**Overall:** ★★★★★

Following a horrific pandemic which killed 80% of the global population, Life First is set in a world where the government rigidly controls everything related to health. Everyone is DNA-typed at birth so that when someone needs a new [insert organ here], the best possible match can be found quickly, and the match has to provide the organ.

When Kelsey Reed is informed she needs to donate her kidney, she realises she doesn't like the idea of being forced into risking her life for a stranger. Determined not to give up her kidney, Kelsey attempts to escape with her boyfriend Luke, knowing that the likely penalty if caught is to be sent to prison with a sentence of death by organ donation (exactly what it sounds like).

Life First is a great concept, because it's not so hard to imagine. Hundreds of thousands of people sit on waiting lists for organ transplants, and it's becoming more and more common to hear encouragement to register as an organ donor. A spokesman for the Order of St John told the BBC in September of this year that around 3 people a day die due to a shortage of organs. As opt-out systems are increasingly discussed, it isn't too far a stretch to imagine the introduction of mandatory donation. This is particularly believable in the small remaining population in Life First, where life is valued above all else (even choice). In Life First, people don't die whilst waiting for an organ because organ donation is mandatory. However, whilst this means less deaths for those in need of an organ, it also means perfectly healthy individuals are forced to undergo surgery, risking their own health whether or not they want to.

Life First is a very dramatic read, and I couldn't put it down. The plot is full of twists and revelations: whilst this makes for a great, gripping read, it's worth noting this means it isn't at all light-hearted. There isn't really humour to balance out the tension, and so it can sometimes seem quite dark.

Kelsey is a really interesting character. Is she foolish for running, risking all her organs and death if she gets caught? Is she selfish to refuse to give up her kidney, when someone else could die without it? Or is she brave and justified in doing everything she can to make her own choice, rather than going meekly along with a procedure she's unhappy with? I'd say at times she manages to come across as a little bit of all of those, but in a believable three-dimensional way. In real life, things aren't black and white and the same can be said of the characters in Life First. Even the government isn't strictly 'evil' – although controlling and harsh and very anti-choice, it has good intentions behind that.

Recently, I've felt like a lot of the dystopian fiction I've been reading has followed a formula: the premise to draw you in + a seemingly average protagonist who later develops an incredible skill/talent/ability + a love triangle. Whilst I've loved a lot of these, Life First was great because it really stood out as not seeming to follow this formula. Kelsey is also an older, more grown-up character, and Life First is definitely more like new adult than young adult.

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## Nicole says

\*Received book in exchange for honest review\* (review also posted on Amazon)

Kelsey Reed lives in a world where a person can be marked for organ donation by law. If they refuse, they are labeled a sociopath and are sentenced to death by donating all of their organs whenever the need arises. Kelsey Reed has been marked and is to donate a kidney to a random person. The problem is that she vehemently is against it. Her best friend was marked and went through with a bone marrow donation and was paralyzed as a result of an infection that grew and her own mother died (although Kelsey doesn't find this info out until later in life) because of the Life First policy that the government has. So she runs. She runs with her boyfriend to try to escape the mandated donation and start a new life. But what happens when the fool proof plan suddenly isn't so fool proof??

I generally enjoyed this book and read through it fairly quick (to include hiding in my cube at work to read

more during work hours). At times I definitely found myself saying "it's just a kidney donation, seriously???" But then you think about what if you weren't asked, what if you had to do this or you died?? Suddenly it's very different. I thought this book moved at a good pace and definitely kept the action rolling. The court scenes I feel were very detailed and I enjoyed being in the court room during all of that. And I definitely had mixed feelings about Dr Grant but in the end I was satisfied. And I feel like the attitude of the guards at the holding cell were pretty accurate, especially with what Pig Face tried to do at lights out (although my knowledge mostly comes from tv shows on this fact). I definitely enjoyed this book and can't wait to see what the future has in store for Kelsey and Luke. And poor Susan!!! I can't imagine having my best friend save my life and then my whole life trying to go tit for tat to make it even, especially with what her role ended up being. Definitely looking forward to learning more about Susan.

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## **Al says**

I've had a good run of dystopian novels lately. Life First continues that trend. A dystopia is the opposite of a utopia and typically a dystopian novel will extrapolate a current social or political movement taken to an extreme. Crayton's extrapolated future struck me as different from most which, at the risk of getting too political, I'll explain.

Although the future extrapolated in a dystopian novel is typically thought to be a warning against continuing in a particular direction, many are nothing more than slippery slope arguments. The slippery slope argument often seems rational, but is usually a logical fallacy when used as a justification against taking the first step. (If you want to understand why, Google will uncover several good explanations.)

Life First was different for reasons I couldn't quite pinpoint until I finished the book and took time to reflect. The biggest reason is the slippery slope argument isn't there. Those who are arguing in real life to take the first steps (at least in the US) of limiting abortion with an eye to eradicating it completely are the same people who would object the loudest to the next steps, forcing someone to donate an "unneeded kidney" for example. Even if other events happened in between (a pandemic that wiped out 80% of the world's population, in this story) I'm not sure that those who are for the first steps would ever support the next steps. Yet, the logic to justify the first steps (the sanctity of life) seems to apply at least as much to the additional steps. For me, the "warning" wasn't needed, but did prompt some reflection and gave me new insights on the issue being explored, which is another kind of success.

But none of the subtext matters unless the story is good. This one was. I was drawn into Kelsey's plight and cared how it ended. It also prompted questions about how I would react if put in the same position and how far I'd be willing to go in defense of my position.

**\*\*Originally written for "Books and Pals" book blog. May have received a free review copy. \*\***

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## **chucklethescot says**

**\*I received a free copy of this book from the author through Making Connections in exchange for an honest review\***

Kelsey is young, healthy and happy until she is told that she must donate her kidney to a stranger. Scared that



the procedure could disable or kill her, Kelsey decides to run away, knowing that if she is caught she will go to prison and her organs will all be harvested until she is dead.

This book turned out to be nothing like what I was expecting-in a good way. It is a story that will get people talking because this society has very clear ideas about Life First-abortion is illegal,women are put at risk to try and save the baby,organ donation is compulsory and those who refuse are regarded as murderers and killed for their organs. It will get emotions running high depending on where you stand on these issues. I don't let my personal opinions affect me when I read a book and I didn't have any problem with the book or its content.

The characters are all well written and you can really feel for them as they face each emotional incident. I really liked Dr Grant, Susan and Kelsey's father as they all add real emotion and depth to the plot. It's easy for readers on one side of the divide to think Kelsey is selfish but when you get deep into her story it does challenge you to think what you would do with her history. The plot was really well worked with lots of twists and surprises that keep you hooked. I expected this to just be one of these on-the-run dramas but it was so much more than that. There was depth, drama, tension and action in this book that I didn't expect. The storytelling was done beautifully, and you can't help but care what happens to everyone involved.

I don't really have a negative on the book. I liked the way the author presented the story, the plot was good, the characters interesting and 'real', and a society that was different. Perhaps an epilogue would have been nice to tie up what happened to everyone but that's me being a bit picky. A good dystopian read for adult and NA/older YA to read.

One thing I would change: I hate each chapter having a title as it gives away the plot for that chapter. I found that frustrating.

If I could, this would be 3.5 out of 5.

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### **Randi Kerr says**

I read it in an evening! It wasn't my intention but I couldn't put it down. I have started typing so many sentences in this review that have all been deleted. Mandatory organ donation-- there's no real way to be opposed to it without sounding a little bit like a jerk, and there were moments where I wanted Kelsey to stop being so selfish. Until I came back to my senses. It's a book that will definitely have you arguing with yourself because it's so easy to see how horrible it would be to be forced to give up an organ or what a blessing it would be to know that you could have a kidney or bone marrow or blood if you needed it. Especially if the population is still rebuilding from a pandemic decades before. And through all of the head spinning debates, you get wonderful characters to fall in love with. It's beautiful. I'm starting Second Life today. Apparently I enjoy head spinning :D

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### **Julie says**

My review for this book will be posted soon!

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## **Erth says**

now i am hooked. This was such a great, easy and creative book. i was hooked after the first page.

The characters were easy to fall in love with and follow, along with the story. the author made the mental visions so easy and vivid of the surroundings and the characters actions felt so real.

i would highly recommend this author and this book.

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## **Tara says**

This book cost me an entire night's sleep!

I'm a mom of four (including an infant, an 8 year old with autism, and two teenagers), so my reading time is both limited and precious. So is my sleeping time. And this book cost me several hour's worth of sleep, because I just couldn't stop reading. I literally stayed up all night to finish reading it. That's pretty much the highest recommendation I can give a book.

I adore dystopian literature, both YA and adult – some of my favorite books include Lois Lowry's "The Giver" and George Orwell's "1984". I believe that fans of these books (or more recently, The Hunger Games) would greatly enjoy this book.

Life First is set in the future in the former United States of America. The exact year isn't specified, but we learn that 80% of the population was wiped out in a pandemic 100 years or so ago. The Federation of Surviving States (FoSS) has a government and laws that are loosely based on those of the US, but with changes that were made due to the drastically reduced population. One of the laws is that every healthy person must be registered in a database; if someone needs something you can provide in order to survive – like your blood, your bone marrow, or one of your kidneys, for example – then you are legally obligated to provide the necessary organ(s) and/or tissues (so long as you have an 80% or greater chance of living through the surgery). This is what the national slogan of "Life First" means.

Kelsey is a woman in her early 20s who has been "marked" to donate one of her kidneys to a stranger who needs one. Given certain experiences in her life, she is not a supporter of the Life First mandate, and makes plans to escape having to make the "donation." But in the FoSS, there are heavy consequences for fleeing a donation, and if she's caught she will be punished severely.

On the negative side (and I'm grasping here), there are some plot issues that might require a little suspension of disbelief. I can't go into details on those issues without giving away spoilers, but I will say that those issues are very minor, and well worth suspending disbelief for. There are also a couple of small editing errors (typos/spelling – things like using "it's" instead of "its" or "gate" instead of "gait").

This is a very fast-paced, quick read, yet some of the ethical questions it raises about pro-life versus pro-choice and to what lengths society should go to preserve life could be discussed long after the book is finished. I really enjoyed this book, and finished it in one sitting (or as close to "one sitting" as a mom is allowed to have); highly recommended!

**\*\*I received a complimentary copy of this ebook; however, all opinions expressed are completely my own.\*\***

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### **Amanda says**

A compelling read about an almost too real idea of a dystopian future. An interesting new take on the abortion and bodily autonomy debates with a flawed yet empathetic main character. I'm interested to see where the rest of the series goes.

Check out my full review. (Link will be live February 9, 2017).

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### **IslandRiverScribe says**

This story begins 100 years after a pandemic kills approximately 80% of the world's population and 50 years (two-and-a-half generations) after the government of what used to be most of the United States instituted the Life First mandate. To insure the survival of what little populace remained, the government required that all persons be DNA type-matched and a GPS chip with alarm nanos be placed in all persons. The idea was that if a person became ill or had an accident, the most likely donor of blood, tissue cells or an organ could be quickly located and a transplant made, insuring that the stricken lived as long a possible.

However, participation was not voluntary. If a person did not wish to comply with the mandatory "donation," he or she was declared a sociopath, imprisoned and was eventually "terminated" when someone genetically compatible needed a heart, a liver, a double lung or a double kidney transplant. Several "free states" had been formed prior to the enactment of Life First, namely Peoria (the original state of Florida), but now a person had to get there first and the GPS nanos made that virtually impossible.

Using this viewpoint of a dystopian society, we follow Kelsey Reed, the daughter of a prominent Senator, who has been "matched" and must give up a kidney. Her mother had died and her best friend had been maimed in botched up situations and Kelsey decides to flee. And, as the reader can expect, she gets caught. Game on.

This was the most psychologically terrifying novel that I have ever tried to read. With the current threat of bio-terror in our world and increasing government interference in our medical choices, the premise of this novel strikes more than uncomfortably close to home. This is the debate of "pro-choice" versus "right to life" taken to an all-new level. The idea that such a concept as Life First could actually become law after a terrorist attack feels actually more like a probability than a possibility.

And the reason it feels so strongly that way is due to the author's writing skill. Not only are the mechanics of the writing top-notch (grammar, punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, editing), the structure of the story flows logically. This may be a dystopian situation but the author creates a reality that cannot be denied and there is no deus ex machina to miraculously save the day.

However, that incredible skill to create a terrifying reality quickly became a negative in this reader's experience. There is not one page in this novel that contains a breath of fresh air or even a momentary chance to breath any air. There is not one genuine smile or even a small hint of laughter until the last 10 paragraphs

of the book. Page after page, the terror builds with no relief.

And page-by-page, the storyline caused my indignation, my anger and my distress to build. Even knowing that this was “just a story,” I couldn’t control my stress. I tried stopping every few chapters to rest my brain, but that didn’t work either. Then I took to scan-reading, then reading just the first and last pages of each chapter only. But even that provided no psychological relief.

I read prodigiously, especially mystery/thrillers from the likes of Child, Baldacci, Flynn, de Mille and Kellerman. I am used to graphic violence and terror, both in books and in my past career. But, in this instance, there was just too much tension and anger and stress written into every page.

I am not a young person and, most times I know when to pace myself or just out-right stop doing something that is hurting me. And this was one of those times. I stopped.

This is one of the very few books that I have not been able to read cover to cover, word for word. It is the author’s excellent skill in developing her premise that initiated that action but it is also the author’s choice to pace the conflict without even momentary relief that made the final decision for me.

I received a copy of this novel through the Goodreads Giveaway program. That fact did not, in any way, influence my opinion of the book.

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