

= First Strike (Stargate Atlantis) =

" First Strike " is the 60th episode and the third season finale of the science fiction television series Stargate Atlantis . The episode originally aired in Canada on February 5 , 2007 on The Movie Network , and subsequently aired March 14 on Sky One in the United Kingdom , and June 22 on the United States Sci Fi Channel . It was written by executive producer Martin Gero , and directed by Martin Wood . The episode is the first of a three @-@ parter , in which the new Earth ship Apollo arrives at Atlantis to conduct a preemptive strike against the Asurans before they can launch a fleet to attack Earth .

" First Strike " was a beginning to a new direction for the series . It aired alongside " Unending " , the series finale of Stargate SG @-@ 1 . At the time it was considered the best episode the producers have done , and featured one of the longest visual effects sequences in the series . The episode earned Stargate Atlantis the strongest ratings since the mid @-@ season hiatus , and was generally well received .

= = Plot = =

The newest Earth warship , Apollo , arrives at Atlantis . Its commander , Abe Ellis (Michael Beach) , informs the Expedition that recon missions have discovered the Asurans building ships on their homeworld , which the IOA believe will be used to attack Earth . As the ships are built from only conventional materials , Apollo has been assigned to destroy them in a preemptive strike , using the new " Horizon " weapons delivery system . Apollo successfully carries out the mission over the objections of Weir (Torri Higginson) , who feels her authority being increasingly sidelined .

Soon after Apollo returns to Atlantis , the Asurans retaliate by launching a Stargate satellite that fires an energy beam , disabling the Apollo before zeroing in on Atlantis . The beam will deplete the city 's shield in just under 30 hours , and with the satellite and its active Stargate over the city , the Expedition cannot evacuate using their own Stargate . McKay (David Hewlett) and Zelenka (David Nykl) submerge the city to mitigate the effect of the beam , but this only buys them nine more hours before the city is destroyed .

Realizing that the only way to save Atlantis is to move the city out of the satellite 's range , McKay and Sheppard (Joe Flanigan) decide to use their one Zero Point Module and the geothermal power station found in " Submersion " to power the stardrive . Lorne (Kavan Smith) and a squadron of F @-@ 302s are sent to temporarily block the beam using a large moon fragment , so that shield power can be redirected into the stardrive . However , the beam resumes as the city lifts off , briefly grazing the central tower before the shield can be restored . Weir is severely injured and is taken to the infirmary by Beckett 's replacement , Jennifer Keller (Jewel Staite) . Atlantis jumps into hyperspace , but the stardrive unexpectedly shuts down well before they reach their destination . McKay realizes that they are marooned in deep space , with only 24 hours before the shield runs out of power and the city 's occupants are exposed to space .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing and casting = = =

" First Strike " first surfaced on September 2006 . It was conceived after the completion of the mid @-@ season two @-@ parter , " The Return " , where writer Martin Gero wanted Atlantis leave the planet , but didn 't know how and why it would happen until the episode was written . Gero also wanted Atlantis damaged and drop out of hyperspace into deep space by the end , so the following episode " Adrift " would follow . The Stargate satellite was originally meant to be a moon @-@ sized satellite sent to destroy Lantea , but was dropped in favour for the Stargate satellite to destroy Atlantis , since a previous episode " Echoes " involved the saving of Lantea , and Brad Wright deemed its proposed destruction inappropriate . The scene where Weir thought her leadership

challenged was needed to be written , since there were several instances in past episodes where the military step in as leaders . The scene where Ronon Dex says he needs to learn more science was written to parallel Ronon 's appearance in only a few scenes . Gero also wrote the Fantastic Four into the scene , where Sheppard compared Teyla Emmagan to the Invisible Woman , paralleling the lack of Teyla 's appearance as well .

" First Strike " introduced Jewel Staite as Jennifer Keller . Staite was originally cast because the producers loved her appearance as Ellia , a Wraith adolescent in season two episode " Instinct " . Gero created the character to not take over Carson Beckett , but to fill in for him , and thought it endearing to have Keller uncomfortable in her new position . She was originally meant to be a Canadian character , but because fellow executive producer Paul Mullie thought there were already enough Canadian characters , she was turned into an American instead . The third season saw less of Mitch Pileggi as Colonel Caldwell , commander of the Daedalus , due to other commitments (including Day Break) . The writers didn 't want to kill him off , so they chose to introduce a new character instead , which was where the Apollo was introduced , as well as Abe Ellis , the ship 's commander . Gero added a list of actors that would be suitable to play him . When Michael Beach was suggested , the crew decided to go with him . However , Beach wasn 't familiar with the Stargate franchise , and was compelled to join the series by his mother , who was a fan . David Ogden Stiers again guest starred as Oberoth . Stiers actually drove from Los Angeles to Vancouver , though he was only wanted for one scene . A retired Colonel of the United States Air Force and his wife made cameo appearances .

= = = Filming = = =

The episode was filmed during the end of September / beginning of October , 2006 . One of the first scenes , where Keller talks to Weir was done on one long take . In the middle of the scene , the two entered an Atlantis transporter to another floor . The scene was filmed on the same floor , and during the time on the transporter , around 40 people quickly redecorated the hallway . The first scene Michael Beach appeared in was the conference at the beginning of the episode . Despite his lack of knowledge to the series , Beach still acted the scene in one take , where the writers were convinced at his acting style . Beach also asked several questions about the direction and characteristics of his character . Martin Wood noted that he asked " all the right questions . " The scene showing McKay and Zelenka below the horizon was filmed from above by Brad Wright 's request , though Gero and Wood wanted the scene shot horizontally . The one scene featuring Stiers as Oberoth was the conversation between him and Weir , which was filmed on the same large room , only Stiers and Torri Higginson had their back to each other around five to ten feet apart .

Three camera angles were used during Lorne 's scene in the F @-@ 302 . To save costs , one of the camera angles was operated by Kavan Smith himself , who held it on his lap . Elsewhere , the producers wanted to make the control chair rotate as Sheppard flies the city to make it different than any other actions involving the control chair . A stunt towards the end of the episode was used where Weir gets thrown after the beam grazes the tower . The stunt was not originally approved by the producers . A stuntwoman doubled Higginson as Weir during the sequence . The scene was rehearsed several times before filming the actual sequence . During the actual sequence , the stuntwoman wore a plastic mask to prevent the flying glass from injuring her face .

= = = Visual effects = = =

The episode 's visual effects were produced by Rainmaker Digital Effects . Gero wrote the scene involving the minute long sequence where the Horizon weapon fires from the Apollo to the Asuran homeworld . He made contact with Mark Savelle to see if it could be done ; Savelle was up to the challenge . The sequence was costly , since the visual effects team had to make a 3D world that would last a minute long to ensure that the sequence followed Gero 's script . The sequences where Atlantis takes off from the bottom of the ocean were stock footage from " Rising " , with the shield and beam added on . Another reason to keep the scenes was because the writers liked the scene to

be reused . Another visual effect was used to switch Keller 's flag patch from Canadian to American , since the decision to have Keller an American character was made after filming .

= = Reception = =

" First Strike " earned a household rating of 1 @. @ 5 , representing just below 2 million viewers ; 1 @. @ 1 million from the 25 @- @ 54 demographic , and 986 @, @ 000 from the 18 @- @ 49 demographic . It was the strongest rating for the series since the 1 @. @ 6 rating from " The Return , Part 1 " . This placed Stargate Atlantis the Sci Fi Channel 's second most viewed series , losing only to Stargate SG @- @ 1 's final episode " Unending " , which achieved a household rating of 1 @. @ 7 , representing 2 @. @ 2 million viewers ; and was placed fifth for Cable television for the day it aired . " First Strike " was also given a syndication rating of 0 @. @ 6 . It also received a fan rating of 9 @. @ 29 out of 10 , and a GateWorld rating of 3 out of 4 stars . The episode was considered the biggest the producers have done for series at the time . According to Joe Flanigan (John Sheppard) , the episode would start a new direction for Atlantis .

Jason Van Horn of IGN rated the episode an " impressive " 8 @. @ 2 out of a possible 10 , where the episode was praised for its visual effects and tension after the cliffhanger , which he thought would make the wait for its conclusion in the fourth season " even harder to handle , " though surprised to see Beckett 's replacement , Jennifer Keller introduced in this episode , which in Horn 's thought would please the fans of Firefly . Critical Myth rated the episode 9 out of 10 . It was noted for Weir 's struggle to maintain her leadership , which was covered earlier in the series since the introduction of Colonel Caldwell , though the topic should have been covered earlier in the season . Ian Calcutt of HDTV UK noted the although the episode had many parallels with the SG @- @ 1 finale , " First Strike " made a " cracking " finale for the third season of Stargate Atlantis . Brett Love of TV Squad considered the episode a classic season finale , and liked the introductions of Keller and Ellis to the storyline , as well as stating the return of the Asurans as a welcoming one . Brigit Cherry of Total Sci @- @ Fi rated the episode 9 / 10 , commented that though the premise seems simple , the plot was fast @- @ moving and efficient , and appreciated the episode 's visual effects , stating that Atlantis is an " exceptionally strong Stargate brand in its own right . "