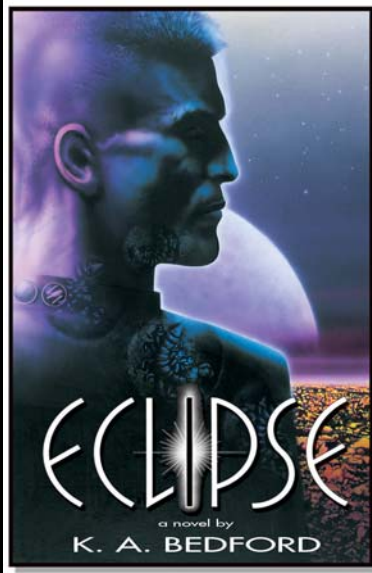


**NEW RELEASE**

**ECLIPSE  
ABOUT THE  
NOVEL**

**Eclipse is a taut psychological thriller set in the claustrophobic confines of a starship where nothing is as terrifyingly alien as humanity itself.**



## **ECLIPSE**

by K. A. Bedford

Watching HMS Eclipse through the geosynch spaceport window, Officer James Dunne, a newly minted graduate of the Royal Interstellar Service Academy, thinks his first assignment will be routine . . . an easy going excursion on an aging deep-space cruiser, heading into the Dark, on a mission to explore the farthest reaches of known space.

James had always wanted to be a part of the romantic final frontier. Now, he thought, his lifelong dream was about to come true.

In fact, he was about to begin the greatest challenge, and worst nightmare, of his already-too-short service career!

Although repeatedly warned "not to rock the boat", it soon becomes obvious that it is too late for the young Officer!

He is drafted into the First Contact Team where he realizes two things: (1) that his contribution to the Interstellar Space Service might easily turn out to be that of a 'replaceable warm body' and (2) that disrespecting junior officers, like Dunne himself, often suffer 'unfortunate' and sometimes fatal 'accidents' out in the Dark.

Dunne's survival will depend on his ability to separate power from perversion while enduring the corruption and control of others.

**"You'll be scared, brutalized, treated like scum,  
given lousy work to do and caught up in the  
schemes of others, but ... Gosh!  
You'll be an officer in the Royal Interstellar Service!"**

(Based loosely on an old Royal Australian Navy recruiting campaign)

**ECLIPSE**

**ECLIPSE** by K. A. Bedford

EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing / March 2006 (USA)

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**EDGE**

BIOGRAPHY



## K. A. Bedford

K. A. Bedford was born in Fremantle, Australia in 1963. He attended Murdoch University in Perth and studied Writing, Theatre, and Philosophy, prior to his becoming actively involved in the Australian SF community. He lives with his wife, Michelle, in the suburbs of Perth, Australia. Eclipse is his second novel.

"I take my writing very seriously indeed and see myself as a journeyman writer, more craftsman than artist. I expect to continue learning my craft for the rest of my life, writing continues to be a struggle for me, in more ways than one, and I see that as a good thing.

I have instructed my wife that if I ever pronounce that I have mastered writing, she is to hit me hard with a squid. I now live in fear of the squid."

### Praise for K. A. Bedford's previous work

"I have to say I ... think K. A. Bedford a writer easily capable of taking his place with better-known contemporary sf authors like Alister Reynolds, Ken McLeod, and Paul McAuley."

- David Mead, New York Review of Science Fiction

"As with all literature, it's the questions that matter and in SF they are often the big ones. These are perhaps the biggest questions of all. What is life? What is intelligence? Is there a God? Is there such a thing as soul, or a personality? Are they different? Of what do they consist? Can you manufacture emotions?" - Dave Lockett, author and reviewer for The West Australian newspaper

"Background, characters, and plot are all so well crafted that the matter of plausibility pops up only after the book is finished." - Frieda Murray, Booklist review

K. A. Bedford

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EDGE

BOOK REVIEW

## Eclipse captures humanity's darkness

**You'll be scared, brutalized, treated like scum, given lousy work to do and caught up in the schemes of others, but ...gosh! You'll be an officer in the Royal Interstellar Service!** (based loosely on an old Royal Australian Navy recruiting campaign).

Eclipse is Australian writer K. A. Bedford's second science fiction novel, published by Alberta's own EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing of Calgary.

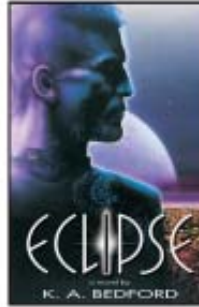
Eclipse follows newbie officer James Dunne, a fresh graduate of the Royal Interstellar Service Academy, to his first posting on the HMS Eclipse, an aging deep-space vessel.

Dunne's past nags at his subconscious - nasty things were inflicted upon him by the Academy's instructors. This appears to leave Dunne with a sense of self-doubt and pain that he's dedicated to hiding. Early on, Dunne meets Sorcha, a vibrant young officer who obviously did better in

the Academy than Dunne yet was posted to the same routine, dead-end assignment as he.

Before too long, Dunne is thrust into a position on the First Contact Team, where it appears his fate will be similar to a red-shirted ensign on every episode of the original series of Star Trek. Death. It's up to Dunne to figure out how to survive even though he's being set up for an 'unfortunate accident' in the depths of the Dark.

"Eclipse is a novel that explores the idea of what happens to men and women when they leave the rules of civilization behind and venture out into the darkness of unexplored space, bringing with them all their fears, traumas, anxieties, fears and hatreds," explained Bedford. "The book explores themes of power, abuse,



friendship, ethics, and, terrible revenge."

Although it took the first four chapters to start feeling something for the characters in this book, by chapter five the dread of being the man in the lowest compartment of a five-level outhouse was palatable.

Much of what Dunne feels we can relate to - being powerless in a larger struggle wherein you're literally the lowest rung on a very tall ladder.

Even though Eclipse is set in a distant future of interstellar space ships and deep-space exploration, it rings true of today's issues of power-tripping middle management and the worst of human nature.

What struck me as out-of-place in this futuristic voyage was the patriarchal structure of the ship and the still-pres-

ent inequalities of the starship crew. Women of this future still are not treated as equals. Instead they must fight to be taken seriously as officers and not just sexual objects.

Dunne gets stuck in his predicament of becoming "Ensign Deadman" because he "rocked the boat" trying to keep Sorcha from being sexually harassed by a superior officer. In fact, it almost seems as though the women's movement has regressed backwards into this dark, neo-so pleasant future.

Eclipse is touted as a psychological thriller set in the confines of a starship where nothing is as terrifyingly alien as humanity itself. It's an interesting look at a future not so different from our present. It's a place where technology and man's quest for knowledge have evolved while his cruellest intentions and hatred haven't changed at all.

Eclipse is available at Indigo/Chapters and Independents, or on [www.edgewebsite.com](http://www.edgewebsite.com)



- Kelly@starnews.ca

### Australian wins Aurealis Award

**AWARDS** - Australian author K. A. Bedford has won the coveted Australian Aurealis Award for best science fiction novel of 2006.

Bedford is published in Canada by Calgary's Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing.

The Aurealis judges said that "Eclipse by K. A. Bedford comes across as a standard starfleet space adventure until the extraordinarily well-drawn and far from stereotypical characters take over."

Eclipse, soon to be followed by *Hydrogen Sowl*, is Bedford's second science fiction novel. His first, *Orbital Burn*, was nominated for the Aurealis award in 2004.



Courtesy, Edge Publishing  
Australian science fiction writer K.A. Bedford.

ECLIPSE by K. A. Bedford  
Reviewed by R. F. Briggs

Newly graduated from the Royal Interstellar Service Academy, Officer James Dunne, probably believes he has left the hazings, dehumanizing actions, ritual torment and abuse of authority, behind him. After all, isn't that what military training is all about...breaking the human spirit? Now as a newly minted officer, surely there is room for individuality and improvisation?

But quickly upon placement aboard the HMS Eclipse (a deep space exploration ship), Dunne comes to learn that, what he endured as an officer in training, is merely an icebreaker for what happens in real life. Faced with an incompetent, half insane Captain, an Executive Officer who lends new meaning to the word "brutal" and a system that indulges both and compounds everything with its own intrigues and machinations, Dunne's life quickly becomes a living hell, as his own sanity and in fact, his very life, become tenuous commodities...outside his means to control.

This is a relentless story, pounding the reader into sensory shock as we witness the never ending plight of our poor protagonist. But, author Bedford deserves maximum kudos for not stopping there. He also imbues Officer Dunne, with a realistically sympathetic personality and history, that when confronted by the afore-hinted at atrocities, reacts in ways that the reader can't help but empathize with. Throw in a some unrealized love aspirations...that are beautifully underplayed, and ECLIPSE, becomes one of the best SF stories I have read in a long while.

As much as the "adventures" of the Dunne character must be an amalgam of various Naval stories the author uncovered in his research, I can't help but shake my head at the levels to which mankind can sink to, especially in protecting, promoting and perpetuating military institutions.

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EDGE

## Eclipse by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Victoria Strauss

"This time tomorrow," thinks James Dunne, newly-minted graduate of the Royal Interstellar Service Academy, "I'll be an officer serving aboard a starship, charting unexplored space!" It's his life dream, untarnished despite the horrors of his Academy years -- an ordeal of rote learning, ritual hazing, and unremitting brutality that would give Pat Conroy nightmares. But the Academy is behind Dunne now, along with the tragedies of his family life and his nagging sense of his own inferiority. The rest of his life can begin.

Things don't quite work out that way. Assigned to Her Majesty's Starship Eclipse, Dunne quickly discovers that a junior officer isn't much better off than a lowly cadet -- beatings and all. Ferguson, the quite possibly psychotic Executive Officer, detests him on sight; the captain, Rudyard, is a bit more cordial, but Dunne can't help noticing that he's completely mad. Once again, Dunne finds himself at the bottom of the heap, given the crappiest jobs and the most undesirable assignments, in constant physical peril from superiors who think he needs to be taught a lesson. His only allies are fellow Academy graduate Sorchia Riley, who, as a woman in a man's service, has her own battles to fight; and Janning, third in command, who treats Dunne with kindness and even respect.

Then, at the edge of unexplored space, an apparently derelict alien vessel is discovered.

Dunne is assigned to the exploration team -- not in recognition of his abilities, but because he's disposable. Inside the vessel, the team finds mysterious orb-shaped objects, an inexplicable drive system, and clumps of centipede-like aliens -- mostly dead, though there are a few survivors. The survivors are brought on board -- a first contact situation that triggers a chain of violent events that will change not just Dunne's life, but the lives of everyone in human-inhabited space. For the alien vessel is the harbinger of something much, much stranger... a reality as far superior to humanity as humanity believes it is superior to the insects the aliens resemble.

If you've spotted echoes of Heinlein -- starship troopers, alien bugs -- and C.S. Forester -- mad captains and savage mistreatment of junior officers -- you're half-correct. K.A. Bedford turns these references on their heads, presenting a Royal Interstellar Service whose entrenched cruelties and every-man-for-himself survival ethic are the opposite of Heinlein's paen to male bonding, and a universe in which, unlike Horatio Hornblower, the good guy's superior intelligence and moral fiber not only doesn't win out in the end, but proves to be a serious liability. The sadistic officers, the incompetent commanders, the xenophobic rank and file, the violence and the treachery and the sleazy politicking, all add up to a deeply misanthropic portrayal of the dark side of human nature, totally unaltered by the wonders of high technology and the realities

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of an interplanetary society. Human beings, Bedford seems to be saying -- wherever they go, there they are.

Furthering this theme, the author presents a far future civilization that, comprising planets rather than countries and spanning light years rather than oceans, more or less reproduces the nasty real-world politics of right now. We got some glimpses of this in Bedford's previous novel, *Orbital Burn*, which is set in the same universe, though several decades earlier; in *Eclipse*, we're given the whole picture: the populous Asiatic Cooperative Metasphere, a scientific and economic juggernaut that threatens galactic domination; the nationalistic Unity Europa, deeply concerned with preserving its European bloodlines; the religious enclaves, where Muslims and Jews and Hindus and Christians live without interference from other faiths, but still can't refrain from internal strife; the many splinter groups clinging to old ethnic identities and the hostilities that go with them. Dunne's own Home System Community, with its virtual monarch and backwater planets, resembles a slightly shabby Commonwealth. Every one of these

cultural entities is haunted by the memory of Earth, which, more than a century ago, simply vanished into thin air. Dodgy science? Alien aggression? An act of God? No one's sure. But rather than reaching for solidarity in that catastrophic loss, post-Earth humanity is as much at odds as ever -- and, despite its new fear of alien incursion, just as arrogantly certain of its central importance to the universe. A rude awakening is in order.

Bedford is still finding his novelistic feet. The writing is occasionally rough, and the pace drags in the early chapters, with extended infodumps that, while thematically essential for what comes later, could have been more artfully incorporated. But these stylistic and structural issues are outweighed by the interesting themes, the pitch-black take on life in the interstellar service, and the unexpected turnings of the plot, which never quite goes where you think it will and builds to a challenging conclusion. *Eclipse* is an intelligent novel that will leave readers with much to think about.

Victoria Strauss is a novelist, and a lifelong reader of fantasy and science fiction.

---

## BOOKENDS

by Bryn Evans

*"Eclipse was slow to start, but ... Bedford has a fascinating way with building stories; his pacing is different, and that's good. By the time you realize you're hooked on the story, you're having to tell your family to go ahead without you; you just have one more paragraph/chapter to go." - Jill Hayes, Bookchick*

### It's better than you think

#### Local publisher's latest crop of sci-fi is a cut above

".... Finally, probably the best of the three is Australian author Bedford's *Eclipse*, a dark, brutal sci-fi tale that alternately recalls *Platoon*, *Lord of the Flies* and the aforementioned *Dick*. The novel follows the exploits of James Dunne, newly graduated from the brutal Royal Interstellar Service Academy, whose first flight into space turns out to be a violent nightmare. Dunne's battles with corruption read like a space-age memoir, offering enough vulgarity and blood-spray to satisfy more than just sci-fi fans".

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# Eclipse by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Terry Baker

On Her Majesty's Starship Eclipse you need know only one rule. Don't rock the boat. It could cost you your life. If you over-turn the boat, be very afraid; aboard Eclipse, there are consequences a great deal worse than death.

Eclipse is set in a future where humans have ventured in to space, bringing with them all the socio-political woes that have dogged them forever. One day Earth was utterly destroyed by means unknown. If anyone has even a clue to what may have happened they aren't talking. Kestrel, and then its orbital habitat, also disappeared from the universe with no explanation forty years after Earth's catastrophe.

Enter James Dunne, middle child, victim of all that means, thrust evermore into the shadow of his older brother, Colin, after he committed suicide. Then his mom left. Then there was the Academy.

Spacecraft Services Officer James Dunne is 21 when he joins the crew of the Eclipse after graduation. He's more than ready to leave the Royal Interstellar Service Academy and its cruel traditions. He wants to live "The Dream" and leave the nightmare of his past behind.

It looked like it might work out that way, too. Before he's even on board, he meets SSO1 Sorcha Riley. She'd been out of his league at the Academy but now, traveling up the Ganymede Stalk to begin life on the Eclipse, they're getting on well.

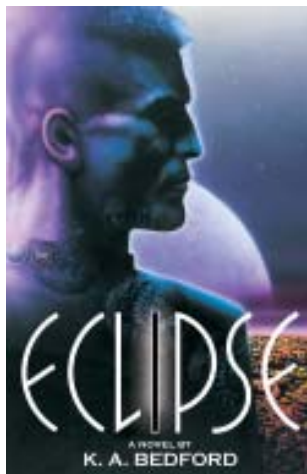
There was much SSO1 James Dunne would learn on his mission into the black. Some of it is sure to reverberate through human space forever. Very, very little would be pleasant.

He couldn't know meeting Sorcha would be the best thing in his life. He couldn't know meeting Sorcha would be the beginning of a nightmare beyond imagining. He couldn't know the Academy was a petting zoo compared to the bestial reality of shipboard life for an SSO1 who makes an enemy his first day on board.

James is barely aboard the Eclipse when he finds himself coming to Sorcha's defense. He rocked the boat. He didn't even know there was a boat, but he spent time in the infirmary nonetheless. It wouldn't be the last time Executive Officer Ron Ferguson would discipline James.

Soon, James knew he was all but alone in a whole heck of grief he'd never out-manuever short of dying.

When he thought it couldn't get worse it did. They came upon the ship, the one that shouldn't have been there because it was not a human ship. Humans believed they were alone in the universe.



They put him on the survey crew; sent him into the depths of an utterly alien environment. The claustrophobic corridors were bad enough without the personal horrors James found himself reliving while exploring the mysterious vessel. He found them: aliens; big, creepy, bug-like aliens. They were dead except for the four only almost dead. His life was going to get even worse when the survivors were removed to the Eclipse. It would be Captain Rudyard's demons that would ultimately change everything.

James and Sorcha never have a chance; even had they not made a critical error on day one they'd have stumbled over a different tripwire soon enough. They have only each other to keep themselves sane and barely manage that. They meet when they can, send messages to and fro

and even fall in love for all the good it does either of them. I promise there is no happily-ever-after for anyone on Eclipse.

Eclipse has a relentless pace and as many nasty people as I've encountered in a novel in a while. No cliché cardboard bad guys, but individuals, shaped into their own hells by an incredibly cruel and corrupt system. Bedford gives us enough back-story to flesh them out while still keeping the focus on how incredibly dangerous they are; on how vulnerable James is every second of every day. Even the good guys are a sickly shade of grey, morally compromised by their own need to survive on Eclipse. They do what they can to help James but they too are at risk if Ferguson were to find out.

What kept Eclipse from being truly outstanding were lapses in final, polishing touches. There were sentences that seemed too wordy and spots where I'd have handled the dialogue differently. Background information crept in when I'd rather not have been pulled out of the immediate action. All were things which made me want to tighten the writing and refine the pace until the words became invisible, leaving every detail focused on James' ever worsening predicament aboard Eclipse. James is the story. He's what Bedford wanted me to care about and I did, but little stuff kept popping me out of the intensity of the story and it was frustrating.

Eclipse works in all the ways that matter. It kept me turning pages way past bedtime. It has an edge of barely contained terror throughout; it has love, (sort of); it has mysterious, very alien aliens. It has a big picture that gets bigger as the story ends. It left me eager for more. Eclipse convinced me that K.A. Bedford is an author to keep an eye on.

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# Eclipse by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Dave Lockett

Many more years ago than I care to think, I found Robert Heinlein's "Space Cadet" in the school library. It was a Boy's Own story, no doubt, but my fourteen-year-old self loved it immoderately.

What was "Space Cadet" about? It was about space exploration and research run on military lines, with officers, marines, salutes and ceremonial. It was about the military itself, its uses and abuses. It was specifically about the training of officer cadets, and it was idealized. Routine bastardization, brain-numbing bull, rote, drill and pointless ritual were relegated to the background. Heinlein, having passed through the experience himself, was honest enough to admit that all those things existed, but in his novel the result was a corps of competent, principled, dedicated officers who were ladies and gentlemen besides. Well, maybe.

K Adrian Bedford has a far more jaundiced view. Why would the task of charting the untenanted stars be given to the military? There's nobody to fight. The actors are by definition on their own, with no higher command to refer to. The requirements of military life are unquestioning obedience, subordination, routine and the display of behavior that would in other circumstances be clearly insane. These would surely spell disaster in a task that requires cautious technical competence unfazed by authority, and above all an ability to think outside the box.

Anyway, in this book the disaster has already happened. Earth was destroyed, a hundred and fifty years before the novel opens. One fine day it simply disappeared, with all its inhabitants. Nobody knows how.

The apparent result is that the whole species - now consisting of the descendents of the few million humans who were off-planet at the time - has gone crazy. Rabid xenophobia rules. Well, it would.

And so a ship reminiscent of the Caine or the Pequod sets off into the unknown to perform a task for which its occupants are palpably ill-suited. The captain is psychotic, the Executive Officer is a monster, and the others have been reduced to ethical pulp. The scientists are at permanent odds with each other, the higher command has not told them what's afoot, and the motto of the entire service is "don't rock the boat."

Into this impending catastrophe comes the hapless James Dunne, who has just passed through a brutal training. He hopes, ludicrously, that things will get better now that he's actually an officer. He spends the rest of the novel watching them get steadily worse. Dr Johnson remarked of eighteenth-century shipboard life that it was like being in prison, except for the chance of being drowned. Explosive decompression is messier, but nothing else has changed. The spacegoing regime is as brutal, the violence as frequent, and the sexual predation as commonplace as in jails everywhere.

Dunne learns that he has no recourse. In another novel the oppressed might rise up against their oppressors, or at least subvert them, but there is no Mr Roberts here. Dunne tries, and is easily defeated at every turn. Between bouts of scrubbing decks with a toothbrush and being raped, he conducts a sort of romance, mostly by a form of email. She dies, of course, another victim casually snuffed out. Dunne's only response is to endure, and even this is willy-nilly. He's not even allowed to kill himself.

In the end, the aliens reveal themselves. They provide a whole new Universe. Such acts are the prerogative of gods. We know nothing more about them than that.

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The mastery of the projected technologies is dazzling, far more so than in most military space opera, and it is not there simply for display. These technologies have consequences. The vocabulary associated with them is credible and vital. Setting and complication are real strengths for this writer, and the pacing and action keep the reader fully occupied.

At the end, though, I found myself dissatisfied with Dunne, and with the resolution. He spends most of the novel in a series of desperate agonies that never come to anything. He says at the end that he has grown, but I can't see any evidence for it. His last act in the novel is to express regret that his own species is not to be extinguished. He simply accepts what he is told by the aliens, just as he accepted instruction at the Academy. And essentially what he is told is that the god, having descended from the machine, has resolved everything.



*"I just finished reading eclipse (finally manage to wrest it from Shaun) and just wanted to say how much i loved it. Very scarily close to how the military works don't you think? You really grabbed me emotionally which is a hard thing to do. Nothing more dramatic than a tortured character being tortured more! Poor bastard! Need more K.A. Bedford books to read now..." - Nikki Jones*



*"Reading Eclipse was my great pleasure! It truly is one of those books that is hard to put down, it's been a long time since I've devoured a book like this. Seat belts should come standard with every copy." - Charlie Stuart*

### March's Bestsellers



- 1...**Through Soft Air**, by Lee Battersby
- 2...**Never Seen by Waking Eyes**, by Stephen Dedman
- 3...**Aggressive Retail Therapy**, by Grant Watson
- 4...**Eclipse**, by K. A. Bedford
- 5...**Burning Water**, by Mercedes Lackey
- 6...**Micah**, by Laurel K. Hamilton
- 7...**Shadow Box**, edited by Shane Jiraiya Cummings & Angela Challis
- 8...**Hal Spacejock: Second Course**, by Simon Haynes
- 9...**The Black Gryphon**, by Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon
- 10...**Magic's Pawn**, by Mercedes Lackey

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Reviewed by Samantha Cosier

Eclipse is KA Bedford's second novel and was awarded the 2005 Aurealis Award for Best Australian Science Fiction Novel. The action takes place in the same universe as *Orbital Burn*, Bedford's first novel, although many years into the future.

Eclipse is the name of the starship to which our hero, James Dunne, finds himself assigned. He is part of a mission to explore space for more planets for the human race to inhabit; along the way, an abandoned alien ship is discovered.

Dunne is an example of Bedford's brilliant characterization, beginning the novel with a somewhat romanticized view of his role in the Interstellar Space Service. As disaster strikes Dunne begins to lose some his naivete, adding a touch of realism to the novel. No one can admire a character who comes through each trial still happily wearing rose-colored glasses.

This is ultimately a pacy thriller, but Bedford also manages to bring to the fore some interesting themes, such as the equality of the sexes and the corruption that often comes with power. Bedford could quite easily lure readers of mass-market psychological thrillers and give them a page-turner with a difference. This is a credit to the field of Australian science-fiction writing and a more than satisfying read.

## Eclipse

**Reviewed by Douglas Lentes,  
Editor in Chief - Paper Dragon Ink**

I was privileged with getting an advance copy of *Eclipse* a new novel by K.A. Bedford from Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing. This was my first encounter with the work of Mr. Bedford so I was not sure what to expect but I encountered a heady mix of *Neon Genesis* and *A Few Good Men*. The writing was top notch and while not event driven his emphasis on characterization allowed one to become wrapped up in the head of the main character, James Ferguson, and drives the reader to turn page after page.

The story line focuses on James' first tour of duty in the Interstellar service academy. He encounters greed, perversion and dishonorable conduct all while trying to maintain his personal ethics in a system that seems to have no need for it. This conflict is heightened when his ship encounters the first alien craft in recorded history. This event not only throws his personal life in question but sends shockwave through a space faring society already fractured to the breaking point.

Certainly not one of the usual science fiction yarns *Eclipse* blends an entertaining mix of grounded science theory and a disturbing vision of what the future might hold for society.

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*"Just finished "Eclipse" ... and the ending "Blew Me Away!" I enjoy science fiction but would not call myself a true-blue sci-fi buff. However, with stories like this that could change. Surprisingly, once I began the book found it difficult to put down. All the elements of a extremely good novel .... romance, intrigue, betrayal, revenge, and shock! Definitely thought provoking. My compliments to the chef (KA Bedford) and to the publishers." - Ken Kanton*

## Eclipse by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Liz Grzyb

Eclipse is K. A. Bedford's second novel, published by EDGE. It's already been awarded an Aurealis Award for Best Novel, even though it was only recently released in Australia. It's set in the same universe as *Orbital Burn*, Bedford's first novel, although significantly further in the future. I was looking forward to reading *Eclipse*, having enjoyed *Orbital Burn*, and I was not disappointed.

*Eclipse* is the name of the starship where most of the action takes place. After surviving the Academy, James Dunne, the protagonist, is posted to the *Eclipse*. The ship is setting off to the edges of explored space, ostensibly to trawl for habitable planets to expand the humans' grip on the universe. Instead, they come across a seemingly abandoned alien ship. The ship itself, a state-of-the-art vessel when originally designed, is totally eclipsed in the novel, by the bigger, better, faster ships being manufactured. It is also overshadowed by the otherness of the aliens they encounter and the vastness of unexplored space.

This appeal of this novel, similar to *Orbital Burn*, is mainly in the characters. The world is similar to ours in some ways, significantly different in others, but the characters are completely believable. Dunne is sympathetic and idealistic without being too much of a goody-two-shoes. He doesn't fall into the trap of some protagonists, travelling unscathed through horrific experiences, but instead he realistically loses some of his idealism in the process.

The antagonist, Ferguson, is utterly, utterly repugnant. He is a slimy, corrupt, perverted

individual who takes great pleasure in tormenting our hero. He is the embodiment of the Interstellar Space Service, personifying the shady side of the Service, while still hiding behind the rules and his dress uniform.

The main female character, Sorcha, is a believable character for here and now, but her personality and Dunne's relationship with her seems somewhat out of place in Bedford's world. We are carefully informed during the exposition that equality between the sexes is an absolute joke; women are tolerated "as long as they didn't get in the way". However, Sorcha is a rebel with a penchant for activism, behavior that seems implausible in the society we find her in. Dunne reveals that he is intimidated by her, another idea that doesn't sit well with the totally patriarchal society Bedford has created.

The other character who does not quite crystallize is Admiral Caroline Greaves. As with Sorcha, she is too independent to survive in the society she lives in. It is also suspect that she could have risen to the position of Admiral and have the influence she wields while being an agitator, albeit one working behind the scenes.

The plot is intriguing, covering themes such as aliens, the social positions of men and women, power, corruption, leadership and rape. There are some disturbing scenes and the allusions to male and female rape enough to make me flinch. The biggest flaw in the plot is the *deus ex machina* ending, however it follows the trend from *Orbital Burn*, so is relatively consistent within the universe.

*Eclipse* is an Australian SF novel that is well-worth a read.

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EDGE

## Reviews by readers - on amazon.com

### Eclipse of the Soul

Eclipse is K. A. Bedford's second published SF novel, following *Orbital Burn* (2004). Though set in the same universe as the earlier novel it shares none of the characters or story-line (aside from a couple of references to the "Kestrel event") with that work and can be enjoyed without having read the previous book.

Eclipse opens about forty years after the events described in *Orbital Burn* and 150 years after the Earth was mysteriously destroyed by forces unknown. Humanity is spread across the remaining planets and moons of the sol system as well as nearby stars. James Dunne, 21, a newly minted graduate of the Royal Interstellar Service, is about to take up his first duty on the starship *Eclipse*. He meets an attractive female graduate while waiting to board and soon finds himself plunged into an environment of steadily increasing horror, institutionalized bastardry, intraservice rivalry and corruption, and is faced with the threat of a new war. He also becomes involved in humanity's first contact with an alien race. Dunne has to deal with a deeply disturbed and vengeful captain and a psychotic and sadistic executive officer who is out to break his spirit at any cost. Meanwhile the reader gradually finds out details of Dunne's family history and gains insight into why he joined the service and why he feels compelled to stick it out while his world collapses around him, and his future looks increasingly bleak.

The story comes with several interesting SF ideas, such as injectable computer "headware" for command, control, communication (and hacking) aboard ship and cheap biologically engineered "disposable" humans of limited capabilities--used when a robot is not enough, and a real human is

too much, for the job at hand. Then there's the "virtual queen" who seems to engender as much, or as little, loyalty in her subjects as any flesh and blood royal.

Eclipse starts out like a fairly typical Heinlein-inspired "military SF" story but it soon veers off into altogether darker, more interesting and dramatic, territory. Set almost entirely aboard the starship *Eclipse* the story appears to leave some loose threads hanging around towards the end (I got the impression there's much more to Dunne's father's disappearance/death, his mother's remarriage and his brother's tragedy than we find out in this story) and I can't help wondering if Dunne's story will be continued in the future. At the end of *Eclipse* I was left uncertain if the weakly godlike aliens were the same ones that appear in *Orbital Burn*. Either way the story arc feels unfinished. We can but hope.

Eclipse is an accomplished and engrossing tale that plays on the darker side of military service and human nature. It won the Aurealis award for the best Australian SF novel of 2005.  
- Reader Rabbit

### SF for the rest of us...

I'm not really a science fiction fan. Ray Bradbury is my only must-read in the category. KA Bedford, however, manages to pull out some of Bradbury's fair dust and give us a book that speaks to the deepest, darkest parts of humanity. The technology is important, but it's only one factor in the incredible evolution of the main character.

If you've never read SF before, this is the perfect book on which to cut your teeth.  
- T. Fenniak

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## Worth a look

James Dunne dreamed of space ships since he was a child. Now, after suffering years of abuse at the Academy, under the guise of training, he's finally an officer who's just been assigned to the ECLIPSE, an exploration vessel. He's sure that things will be different now that he's graduated - no more hazing, no more abuse heaped on him by upper classmen. He quickly finds out that he's wrong.

When he and Sorcha, another new arrival, devise a way to protect her from the ship's executive officer's advances, he makes himself an enemy. When complaining to the wrong person can get you thrown out an airlock, what can you do except suffer and take it? When he's assigned to a "first contact" team because he's expendable, he begins to learn just how corrupt the service is.

This was a very interesting story. The tech was different than what I usually see-very creative but, at times, the detailed explanations of the science did drag on, forcing me to skim a little.

There was flash-forward stuck in there that really wasn't appropriate and really yanked me out of the flow, but it was over quickly. It did confuse me a little, since the character was thinking about his father at the time. I wasn't sure if the letters were written by the father, or the character. It wasn't clear until the end of the book. Personally, I'd have left them out completely. They were distracting and really unnecessary.

Still, it was a good read -very intense in parts, violent in others-and had me staying way too late in the evening when I had to get up early for work the next morning...I couldn't just put it down to finish tomorrow. ECLIPSE, by K.A. Bedford....worth a look. - Lisa Ramaglia, scribesworld.com

## Better than Star Trek!

'Eclipse' won Australia's top SF award, the Aurealis Award for 2005, with this novel, his second. His first novel, 'Orbital Burn' was a finalist for the same award in 2004.

I am not well read in the science fiction genre, but I know good books and this is one of them. I really enjoyed reading this book, and look forward to more stories from the same universe that KA Bedford has created in his first two books.

Others have summarized the plot, so I won't speak about that, but I will say that I like my novels with real-life grit and characters that I can believe really exist. Eclipse has that gritty feel, while still taking you on an invigorating journey through the stars. (A++) - river selkie

## Sophomore jinx? Not here, folks.

It is a widely held belief in many kinds of artistic endeavors that a second effort is often a let-down, especially when the first is notable. Well, K.A. Bedford's "Orbital Burn" was notable, and I was pleased to discover that this second effort of his is even better.

Others above me here have given a nice synopsis of the story, so I'll just say that you should be careful if you have a heart condition; this book is a pulse-pounder that's guaranteed to raise your heart rate. Killer cover, killer story ... what more could you ask for? - Charles Stuart

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## Absorbing and tense read

Being a big reader of mostly SF, I keep 10-15 unread books at any given time and when I finish one, I flip through all of them to see which grabs me then. One recent evening after finishing Glasshouse, I opened Eclipse and it really grabbed me so I read it nonstop until finished later in the night. It is this good and tense. While I enjoyed Orbital Burn too, this book put Mr. Bedford on my buy on publication list, so I eagerly wait his new novel. The synopsis of the book gives a good description of the story which is pretty much independent of the earlier book, though set in the same universe, but the strength of the book is in the 4 main characters (the junior officers, the exec and the captain), their personalities and interaction. Of all the characters, the captain and some of his life trajectory as recounted (read the book to see how) struck me as so well done that you could really image him and his torments. Very, very good. - Liviu C. Suci

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The logo for EDGE Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing, featuring the word "EDGE" in a stylized, blocky font with a double outline effect.

**Interview Questions and Answers**



**Just who is K. A. Bedford?**  
 K. A. Bedford would like to know this, too. It's a question that's bothered him for many years now, ever since he first began to suspect he might not really be a hairy, suburban author of science fiction yarns, but in fact some kind of robot, and all this <waves airily around at world> might be just an illusion. [ed note: of course this is just one theme explored in Bedfords books.]

**Where do your inspirations come from?**  
 Bugged if I know. Sorry. I know I can't say things like "buggered". <shakes head> Really, I have no idea where they come from. They just turn up. Like uninvited house guests, or long lost relatives who show up wanting to borrow money.

The difference is, the ideas that turn up sometimes can be turned into pretty decent stories.

**What is the focus of your work?**  
 Applying backside to chair on a daily basis for either two hours or at least 1000 words, whichever comes first. I used to do more than that, but then I got old and feeble.

**What is this novel about?**  
 Eclipse is a novel that explores the idea of what happens to men and women when they leave the rules of civilisation behind and venture out into the darkness of unexplored space, bringing with them all their fears, traumas, anxieties, feuds and hatreds. The book explores themes of power, abuse, friendship, ethics, and, in the final pages, terrible revenge. Told from the point of view of Spacecraft Services Officer Level 1, James Dunne, fresh from the horrors of the Academy, and on his first space duty rotation, the book charts the fall not only of Dunne's career, but of the corrupt Royal Interstellar Service and the Home System Community it serves.

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**What book are you reading, and where is your favorite place to read?**

I'm not reading anything just at the moment. I used to read a lot at night, before going to sleep, but for some time now that's when my headaches are at their worst, so I've skipped reading. I miss it. Reading, like writing, is good for the soul. During the day I'm usually busy just reading news and commentary online and then writing. I'm looking forward to finishing my current writing project so I can spend some time just reading again.

**What qualities do you value most professionally?**

Discipline, being able to finish what you start, professionalism.

**What are you still determined to learn to do?**

Everything I do can be done much better, and I've seen this in other people's books. Comparing your work to that of others is the pathway to madness, I know, but it's true. I can do much better. I'd love to do good short stories, but I haven't a clue in the world how to do them, not really. When I was a kid, while I wrote hundreds of short stories, I wasn't interested in the form. All I wanted to do was write novels. The short stories that I wrote back then I saw only as like "fingering exercises" to work up to books. When I learned the basics about writing books, I didn't look back. Now I'm ready for whatever the next step might be. I'm looking for it, but it's a bit hard to spot.

**If you were a member of a tribe, what would be your special role in it, and why?**

I'd be the quiet, watchful doofus who doesn't lead, doesn't do anything particularly notable, doesn't seek attention, but who thinks about things a lot. Also, if folks paid me enough, I might be an exotic dancer.

**Describe one recurring dream you have.**

I grew up during the Cold War, so I had recurring nightmares involving nuclear war. I really did. Then the Cold War finished, and I thought things would improve. <mocking laughter in background> Since 9/11 I have 9/11-related nightmares involving buildings collapsing all around me or on top of me. Sure is fun to be in my head, eh?

**What would you save from your home if it were burning?**

Michelle, pets, flash drive with my writing backed up on it, in that order.

**What question has never been answered for you?**

Right, ask the former philosophy student a question like this. There are a great many such questions. Too many to deal with in such a limited space. The existence or not of aliens; of God; of immortal souls in the traditional sense. Why do guys who use public toilets almost never flush the damn things?

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