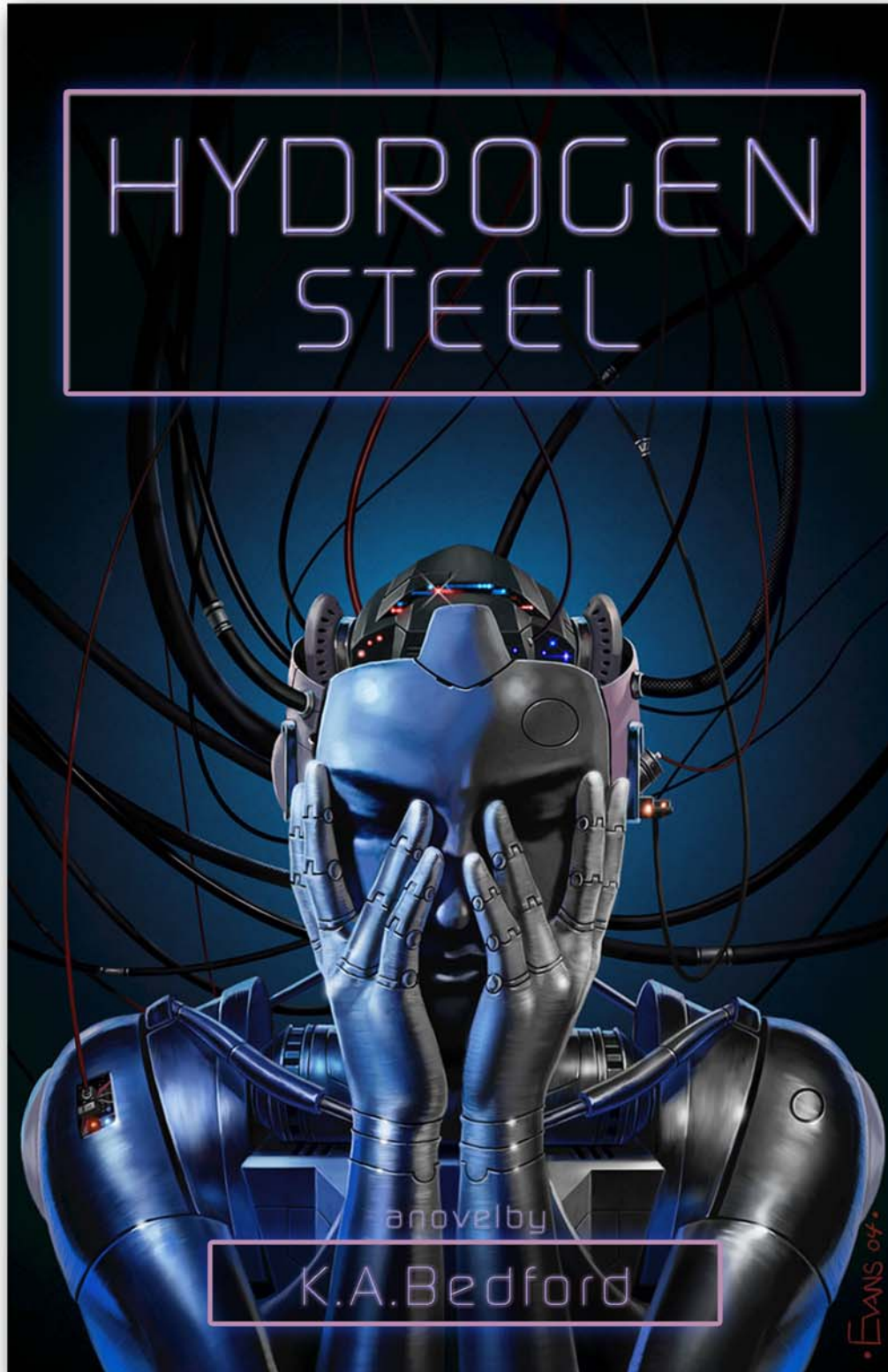


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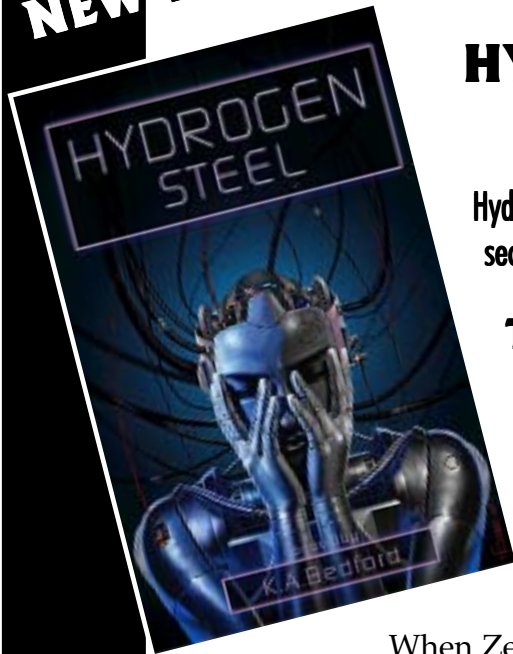


Hydrogen Steel by K. A. Bedford
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SCIENCE FICTION

NEW RELEASE

**HYDROGEN STEEL
ABOUT
THE NOVEL**



HYDROGEN STEEL

by K. A. Bedford

Hydrogen Steel is a tense and thrilling mystery within a mystery, a tale of secrets and truth, and a journey to the limits of existence – and beyond!

THE STORY:

Top homicide inspector Zette McGee lives a fairly normal life, until her dreams became a little more vivid than usual and she discovers a life changing secret about herself. A secret she will do anything to hide, even from her best friend, the elderly but very suave former secret agent Gideon Smith.

When Zette receives a desperate call from Kell Fallow, an android unjustly accused of murdering his wife and children, she realizes she has to help him – for he knows who, and what, she really is!

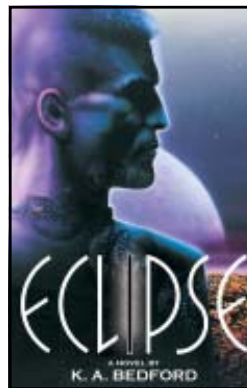
But before they meet, Fallow is brutally murdered and Zette is compelled to find out why, and ultimately how to protect her secret.

With a little help from her friend, Inspector Smith, the pair take a terrifying journey into the darkest reaches of human space - in the pursuit of the truth - a truth that's as ancient as time itself, a truth that's protected by the awesomely powerful firemind of an artificial consciousness - **Hydrogen Steel**.

Hydrogen Steel

*K.A. Bedford's
Books Include:*

*Orbital Burn
Eclipse
Hydrogen Steel*



HYDROGEN STEEL by K. A. Bedford

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BIOGRAPHY



K. A. Bedford

K. A. Bedford

K. A. Bedford was born in Fremantle, Australia in 1963. He attended both Curtin and Murdoch Universities 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. Hydrogen Steel is his third 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 Luckett, 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

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ISSUE #513 WEEK OF FEBRUARY 19, 2007

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- Day Watch
- The White Tiger

REVIEWS: BOOKS
February 22, 2007

Hydrogen Steel

A disposable detective searches for her own mysterious origins as a rogue artificial intelligence attempts to kill her

» Hydrogen Steel
» By K.A. Bedford
» Edge Publishing
» Trade paperback, March 2007
» 384 pages
» ISBN 978-1-894063-20-3
» MSRP: \$19.95



B

By Paul Di Filippo

K.A. BEDFORD, an Australian writer of recent vintage, is the author of two previous novels, *Orbital Burn* (2003) and *Eclipse* (2005), both still available from Edge Publishing. The latter won the Aurealis Award, Australia's equivalent of a Hugo, while the current book is a nominee again for that honor. All three, remarkably enough in this age of infinite serials, are stand-alones.

Hydrogen Steel features a fascinating backstory of galactic expansion by humanity. Some 150 years prior to the real-time of the narrative, Earth suddenly vanished, leaving the various distant interstellar colonies of mankind to scramble for new arrangements of survival and commerce and mutual support. In the subsequent decades, they did pretty well, building a flourishing set of disparate habitats on planets, satellites and artificial worldlets. Then, just 20 years in this scenario's past, another setback: Unseen aliens nicknamed the Silent shut down humanity's worldmaking abilities in punishment for an alien genocide. Ever since, our species has lived in doubt about when, where and how the next blow will fall.

Of course, it doesn't help that "freminds," or Planck-level-dwelling AIs, are also scheming to manipulate our race. And now our heroine has run afoul of one such disembodied intelligence, dubbed "Hydrogen Steel."

Suzette "Zette" McGee is a retired cop, a private eye with a difference. In a world where android "disposables" are regarded as semi-sentient subhumans, she has found herself to be a freak, an unprecedented fully-conscious android. Imagining she's unique, she has retreated from easy friendships with humanity, save for one with an old man named Gideon Smith, who helps her occasionally on cases.

Bedford's cosmos seems underpopulated. There're just not enough characters, walk-ons or supporting, to convey a sense of secularity ...

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But then Zette is contacted by another fully sentient android who needs her help. Someone's trying to frame the man for the murder of his wife. This simple domestic matter will spiral outward to cosmic levels, however, as Zette and Gideon find themselves racing across the galaxy, coming between mad fireminds, being trapped in hyperspace and under frozen seas and eventually becoming transformed beyond all resemblance to their old selves.

High-flying sci-fi concepts

If you were to cross David Brin's *Kin People* (2002) with John Varley's *Steel Beach* (1992) and toss in some elements of the postmodern space operas of Shane Dix and Sean Williams (Australians like Bedford, and no coincidence), and a soupçon of Damien Broderick's eschatological speculations (yes, Broderick's an Aussie as well), you'd have a fair approximation of the very pleasant fissions to be encountered in Bedford's third book.

Bedford amasses plenty of high-flown SF concepts. I particularly like his notion of turning whole planets into computers, and of course the exotic nature of the fireminds and their existence on zero-point energy. He also investigates intelligently Philip K. Dick's classic themes regarding what constitutes true humanity. He crafts likable characters and bumps them up against each other well. His overall plotting is quite deft, and he takes some brave narrative leaps, such as a major time disjunction after the book's big climax with *Hydrogen Steel*. So this book will go down easy and keep you absorbed. It's a reassuring model for the continuing progress of SF.

But despite these virtues, there are two areas where I have to fault this novel, both matters easily susceptible to modification in what I hope and expect will be a long, successful career for Bedford.

First is the familiar lament I've made before about other new authors. The ratio of information and action to sheer wordage in this book is unbalanced. Consider that the first 11 chapters—nearly a third of the book—must pass before Zette and Gideon reach the first stop on their quest, the world of New Norway. Getting marooned in hyperspace is all well and good—but for almost 40 pages? Take a look at any masterpiece of information-dense SF—from Gibson or Rucker, say—and gauge how fast stuff happens. Any sense of propulsion or headlong action is lost at the speeds Bedford employs. Although, granted, the climax happens laudably faster.

Second, Bedford's cosmos seems underpopulated. There's just not enough characters, walk-ons or supporting, to convey a sense of fecundity, not enough different cultures or venues or customs. Again, hold up this book to M. John Harrison's *Lights* (2002), or any book by Jack Vance, to get a sense of what I'm talking about.

Still, Bedford's press release for *Hydrogen Steel* in which he calls himself a "journeyman writer" who will always be seeking to perfect his craft, bodes well for improvements to an already impressive skill set.

Edge Publishing, a Canadian small press, does a fine job of distributing books in Canada, the United States and elsewhere. There's sometimes a chronological gap between various releases, but you can always visit their Web site for

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Hydrogen Steel by K.A. Bedford

A review by Victoria Strauss

Retired police Inspector Suzette McGee guards a terrible secret: she's not a real human being, but a disposable. Disposables are androids produced by cheap nanofacture to handle all the jobs that are too dirty, degrading, or brutal for human beings to deal with; they are tools, nothing more, without thoughts or consciousness, programmed for their tasks and recycled once they're no longer useful. Zette has no idea why she's different, or why whoever made her went to the trouble of implanting an entire lifetime's worth of false memories. She's tormented by the question of whether there might be others like her. Or is she unique?

Then she gets a desperate call from Kell Fallow, a man who claims he knows her secret... because he and she were nanofactured in the same lab. He, too, is a disposable programmed to believe he's human, who like Zette has "woken up" to the truth. Falsely accused of the murder of his wife, he's on the run from the law, stowed away in a cargo container on an interstellar transport bound for Zette's retirement habitat. He begs Zette to help him prove his innocence. Before she can agree, the line goes dead. Enlisting the help of her neighbor, Gideon Smith -- an elderly but very well-preserved gentleman with unusual skills and a murky past -- Zette rushes to the spaceport to meet the transport, but she's too late. An attempt to open Kell's cargo container causes it to blow up. Autopsy results reveal that the bomb was Kell himself: his body was implanted with a remote-triggered explosive device.

When Zette tries to return home, she finds her house engulfed in flames. As if that weren't bad enough, the video data collected by her HouseMind reveals that the arsonist is Zette herself -- or rather, a disposable created to look exactly like her and programmed to go berserk. Obviously someone doesn't want her looking into Kell Fallow's death. But Zette isn't easy to intimidate. Determined to discover what's going on, she sets off for the planet where Kell's wife was murdered, again with the assistance of the ever-helpful Gideon, who just happens to have a private ship that he's willing to put at Zette's disposal. It's a quest that will plunge Zette and Gideon into danger and adventure beyond their wildest dreams, uncovering the shocking truth of Zette's identity and exposing a pair of terrifying secrets -- one ancient and one modern, both guarded by a firemind of awesome power:

Hydrogen Steel. Hydrogen Steel is set in the same universe as K.A. Bedford's two previous novels, but at a somewhat later point. The reader doesn't need to be familiar with the earlier books in order to understand the context, but it would certainly add depth, since there's reference to the events of *Orbital Burn* and *Eclipse*, and a recurring character, the enigmatic firemind Otaru, plays a major role.

As always, Bedford spins a fast-paced, wildly imaginative tale, bouncing his heroes from luxurious orbital habitats to barren backwater planets, from the lonely depths of space to the bizarre alternate dimensions occupied by fireminds,

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exposing them along the way to a non-stop barrage of perils natural, artificial, and extremely alien. Mysteries unfold only to reveal others, some of which are resolved, such as the long-standing question of whether or not Earth was deliberately destroyed, and some of which are left open, such as the true intentions of the Silent, the aliens whose ships barricade human space. The gritty details are not spared -- for instance, Zette's and Gideon's weeks stuck on Gideon's stranded ship, with food and water recycled from their own waste products and space suits whose ability to deal with human excretions is steadily failing -- nor are the gory ones. Anchoring it all is the wry, no-nonsense first-person voice of the indomitable Zette, who faces danger and hardship with resolve and never loses her sense of humor, no matter how awful the circumstances. As always, Bedford mixes some serious issues with the adventure -- in this case, the uncomfortable moral and ethical questions posed by disposables, cheaply produced tech that looks and sounds human but is not engineered to have actual consciousness. Yet Zette is conscious, and

so is Kell Fallow. How many other disposables have also woken up, but are prevented by their programming from revealing it? Are the uses to which human beings put them slavery? Is their casual disposal, like worn-out tools, actually murder?

The ending is weaker than the rest of the book -- not because of any flaws in logic (most of the loose ends tie up very well), but because of the contrivance of a post-climax plot device that makes it possible for Zette to learn all about a lot of things, including one of the terrifying secrets guarded by the even more terrifying Hydrogen Steel, well after the fact. Bedford puts a smart spin on this (the secret, shocking to Zette who is just learning it, is old and boring news to everyone else, because they've had time to live with it), but it's not quite enough to offset a sense of letdown, as the high drama of Zette's and Gideon's quest is resolved by, essentially, an infodump. Caveats aside, Hydrogen Steel is a rousing good read that should satisfy Bedford's existing fans and win him many new ones.

Hydrogen Steel by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Diane C. Donovan, California Bookwatch



It's rare to see a genuine mystery embedded into the rich fabric of a science fiction setting, but HYDROGEN STEEL accomplishes both in the tale of a retired homicide inspector Zette, called out of retirement to help a former android accused of murder. Her attempts to save Kell will endanger her own closely-held secrets and leads to personal danger when Kell is killed and her home is destroyed. You won't find many more science fiction titles holding so much gripping mystery action and twists of plot, making HYDROGEN STEEL a top pick for both science fiction and mystery lending libraries

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Hydrogen Steel by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Tim Adamec, The Dragon Page

Zette McGee, former homicide detective, has quit her job to avoid exposing her secret. She lives in the Serendipity retirement habitat within the Sirius A system. The Earth has been mysteriously destroyed, brain/electronic interfacing (called "headware") is difficult to live without, nanotechnology rules the world, and many menial tasks are performed by "Disposables", android-like amalgamations of nanotechnology, headware and clones. Space travel is common but problematic, as the hypertubes used for traveling are disappearing.

Zette receives a call from a disposable named Kell Fallow. Disposables are supposedly restricted to their programming, but a fleeing Kell claims to have known McGee and is accused of killing his wife and children. McGee wants to help, but their meeting is subverted by an explosion: Kell was carrying a nanotech bomb that detonated early. As McGee and her best friend Gideon Smith, an charming and enigmatic old man, dig into the deepening mystery, spies, sabotage, infections, and other nastiness come out of the wood work to prevent McGee and Smith from learning whatever secret investigating Kell's murder would uncover.

Hydrogen Steel could have been (cue the cheesy SciFi Echo) "Detectives In Space" but, thankfully, it's not. The story meanders between a mystery and an espionage tale, nimbly dances on the edge of hard Science Fiction and throws in a

heavy philosophical element for good measure. McGee keeps the story moving when investigative prowess is needed and Smith fills the role of the wise old spy. Advanced technology is usually presented believably, excepting hypertubes — but originality of the explanation more than makes up for the lapse. The lack of highly detailed technical discussion helps rather than hinders the story, having things "just work" instead of spewing highly complex specifications as excuses. Technology and humanity collide, causing McGee and Smith both to question the line that divides the two.

My only real complaint with the story comes from the main character, McGee: it seems she always has to vomit and is only partially successful in stifling the impulse. While it doesn't happen every chapter, having regurgitation show in the top three of a reader's memory of a character is a first for me.

I would really recommend Hydrogen Steel to fans of the Science Fiction genre and, possibly, to readers looking for stories more realistic than they typical Star Wars book. Bedford has crafted a strong Science Fiction title filled with excellent dialogue, action at every turn, a compelling story, a dash of philosophy and somewhat surprising ending. And probably a few too many incidents of puking.

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Hydrogen Steel by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Amy J. Ransom, SFRA

Hydrogen Steel is a powerful machine intelligence willing to destroy anything that threatens the security of information it was programmed to protect: the truth about Earth's destruction. K. A. Bedford's Aurealis-nominated third novel, takes place in the same universe as his earlier works, *Orbital Burn* and *Eclipse* (the latter won Australia's award for Best SF Novel). Retired homicide inspector Zette McGee faces Hydrogen Steel as she investigates the death of an android whose self-consciousness she would normally consider anomalous, if she had not inadvertently discovered her own questionably human status. Androids commonly fill professions requiring limited, programmable skill sets; referred to as "disposables," they are not considered self-aware in a fully human sense. This hybrid detective novel takes place in a far future human-colonized, galactic space and contains some elements of hard SF. Its potential critical interest may lie in its contribution to robot/AI fiction. However, its very self-conscious speculation about the nature of humanity offers little beyond that found in Capek's *R. U. R.* Narrated in the first person by the (female) android police detective, the novel does alter the strategy of Dick's related text, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*. The novel interrogates the treatment of androids as things, a practice found, of course, in human slavery and engages, albeit in a minor way, the issue of postcolonial identity: not only is McGee's Australian "identity" a programmed fiction, she discovers entire rogue colonies of self-conscious disposables. Of interest to libraries specializing in Australian popular culture and "other" SFs.

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Hydrogen Steel by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Dru Pagliassotti, *The Harrow*

Former Winter City homicide cop Zette McGree has a dangerous secret that forced her into early retirement in the wealthy, comfortable community of Serendipity. But a desperate call from a stranger who claims to know her secret — to know her — plunges her into a deadly game of cat-and-mouse in which the very nature of reality is up for grabs.

From one planet to the next, McGee and her suave, former "trade diplomat" buddy Gideon Smith are pitted against enemy that can hack headware, disable ShipMinds, take over spaceport defenses, transform humans into nanohazards and bend the very fabric of spacetime itself — an enemy that will stop at absolutely nothing to protect its own secrets. Nothing.

Not even the total extermination of the human race.

Hydrogen Steel continues to describe the dark and forbidding universe of K. A. Bedford, briefly referencing events in his earlier novels, *Orbital Burn* and the award-winning *Eclipse*. But in *Hydrogen Steel*, Bedford has reached his stride, creating a novel that outshines his earlier two works with regard to characterization and sheer scope of plot. *Hydrogen Steel* returns to the hybrid science-fiction/crime novel style of *Orbital Burn* but darkens it with the sense of alien threat and powers beyond human comprehension that dominated *Eclipse*. The characters are stronger and more likeable than those in *Eclipse*, and the plot, which swiftly shifts from murder mystery to galactic conspiracy, answers some of the questions raised in the first two novels while suggesting more to come.

The only real weakness in *Hydrogen Steel* is its final chapter, a wrap-up that seems primarily a contemplation on how quickly humanity forgets tragedy and secondarily an apparent lead-in to a new novel, although Bedford's plans indicate that his next novel won't be part of this series.

All in all, it's not surprising that *Hydrogen Steel* is a finalist for Australia's Aurealis Award (*Eclipse* won it in 2006, and *Orbital Burn* was a finalist in 2004); don't be surprised if it ends up taking the award.

HYDROGEN STEEL by K. A. Bedford

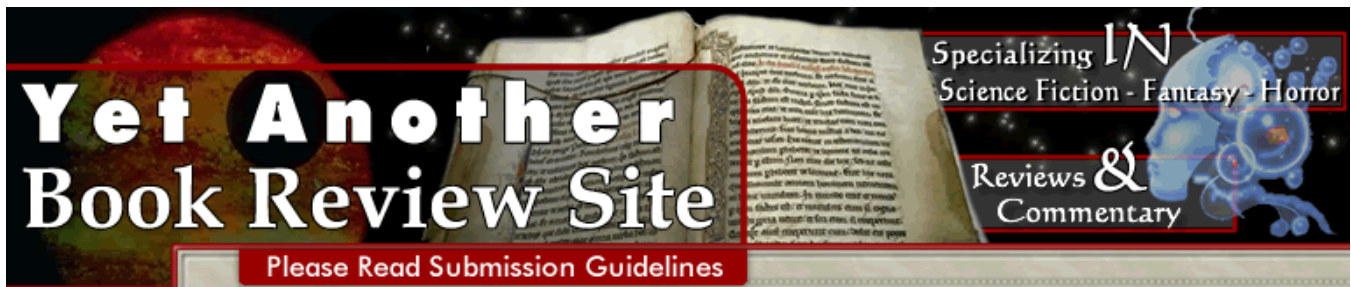
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Hydrogen Steel by K.A. Bedford **Reviewed by Ralph Briggs, yetanotherbookreview.com**

Discovering that you aren't human, but are in fact a sophisticated "disposable" (nickname for the servant, android class) was more than Zette McGee could cope with, so after resigning her job as a Lead Homicide Investigator on Ganymede she retired to the Serendipity habitat in the Sirius A system in an effort to keep her secret just that...secret.

But when another, similarly advanced disposable contacts her for help - specifically pointing out that they have met before, prior to their programming - Zette is both dismayed that her secret could get out and intrigued by this other "person's" dilemma; that of being accused of killing his wife and children...also sophisticated disposables. Just how many "others" are there like her out there anyway?

Using her police...experience? training? programming?...Zette and her resourceful fellow retiree, the elderly Gideon Smith, embark on an inter-planet adventure in search of answers...though what they find is a far bigger deal than they bargained for, and guarded by a homicidal, artificial intelligence.

Hydrogen Steel, is a fun, fast paced adventure. Most interesting to myself is the protagonist's pondering of her consciousness relative to that of her less sophisticated "cousins", the worker disposables...is she actually a hyped-up model or are they a suppressed version? The introspective, first person narrative employed by the author, proved both positive and negative, as being exposed to Zette's most inner ponderings was both illuminating and awfully repetitive in spots.

Overall Hydrogen Steel is good read and the cover art is one of the coolest I have yet to see.

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Hydrogen Steel by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Liz Grzyb, Ticonderoga Online

Hydrogen Steel is K. A. Bedford's third novel, published by the excellent folk at EDGE. It is set in the same universe as *Orbital Burn* and *Eclipse*, but is further into the future than the previous two novels.

Earth was destroyed long ago and is a mythical memory of almost religious proportions. Humanity is spread across the universe in various civilisations based on planets or whole systems.

Bedford is a master at creating likeable yet flawed protagonists, and he has excelled with ex-cop Zette McGee. She retired from detective work when she discovered a closely guarded secret: she was in fact, a 'disposable' – a flesh and blood android. Zette had made a pleasant life for herself in Serendipity until she is drawn into a conspiracy bigger than humanity. Her detective skills are tested to the limit as she tries to unravel the strands of mystery while evading increasingly intricate traps.

The pacing of *Hydrogen Steel* is great — we dive into a fast-moving adventure story with progressively more intense complications. Sometimes it seems that these complications should be too much for our intrepid heroine, but the mind-boggling efforts of modern medical technology enable the survival of the protagonist and thus the plot.

Reading the previous two Bedford novels would be helpful, but the reader doesn't need to have read the previous stories in order to enjoy *Hydrogen Steel*; the references to previous novels are few and serve to orient the familiar reader rather than being imperative to the plot. When comparing the novels, *Hydrogen Steel* is closer to *Orbital Burn* than *Eclipse*, being an adventuresome blend of noir and traditional space opera.

Hydrogen Steel is an enjoyable read, littered with powerfully godlike Fireminds (the *Hydrogen Steel* of the title), complex technologies, action and noir mystery. The characters are believable and sympathetic, the setting is intricately planned out and the ending is much more satisfying than the somewhat *deus ex machina* resolution style of the previous novels. It's not surprising that *Hydrogen*

Steel was nominated for the Aurealis Awards for 2006. If you liked *Orbital Burn* and *Eclipse*, don't delay in grabbing yourself a copy of *Hydrogen Steel*. If you haven't read any of K. A. Bedford's novels, now's a great time to start!

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Hydrogen Steel by K.A. Bedford

Reviewed by Edwina Harvey

Like several Australian authors in this genre, K.A. (Adrian) Bedford's three novels, published by Canadian speculative fiction publisher Edge Publishing, are selling very well overseas, and he is gaining a strong reader following there, so much so that he was doing autograph sessions at LaconIV, the 2006 Worldcon.

K.A. Bedford's three novels: *ORBITAL BURN*, *ECLIPSE* and *HYDROGEN STEEL* aren't your usual sort of trilogy. Set in the "medium to far future", these books are all "stand alone" novels sharing the same background, or universe, while telling three different stories. There's very little character overlap even though major characters in later novels may appear in the background of earlier novels.

Bedford says he can sympathise with readers who find one or two books in a trilogy or series, but then can't find all the volumes to complete the epic and may miss out on a vital part of the plot, or else an introduction and background to a vital character. The conscious model Bedford's working from is CJ Cherryh's *Merchanter* books where individual books tell individual stories which all fit into a larger storyline.

The first of the three, *Orbital Burn*, tells the story of a homeless, broke cybernetically enhanced dog and a dying defective android boy who hang around a spaceport. When the android boy disappears, the cybernetic dog hires a detective to find him. It's a quirky book pitch that immediately caught my imagination and had me wanting to read the book. Bedford explained that he'd been haunted by these two main characters

for ages before finally having a "eureka moment" late one night, when he got the idea to add a detective and put them into a mystery story. The book just clicked together and got written very quickly after that.

The second novel, *Eclipse*, described as a "psychological military thriller", is set on a starship patrolling unexplored space. It drew its inspiration from a string of media reports about abuse in military establishments. A *Star Trek* fan from an early age, Bedford admits it was watching an episode from the original *Star Trek* series that gave him his "eureka moment" that time. The story follows a junior officer on his first space assignment in the Royal Interstellar Services, (interesting to note there's a monarchy in Bedford's universe.), commanded by a captain showing signs of madness.

With the third book, the recently released *Hydrogen Steel*, Bedford returns to a mystery theme. *Hydrogen Steel* features a female detective, Zatte McGee, and her companion, a retired secret agent, trying to solve a murder that turns out to be part of something much larger. Bedford found he enjoyed writing these characters so much that he intends to return to them for future mysteries.

When I suggested there seemed to be a growing trend in combining science fiction and mysteries, Adrian noted there had been a readership of this type of SF for quite some time.

He obviously enjoys combining the two, and exploring his self-made universe isn't likely to stop at the first three published novels. There are more books planned in the future to satisfy his growing league of readers.

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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 Bedford's 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 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 on-line 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.

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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?

What would surprise most people to learn about you?

That I am entirely unsurprising.

If you could have any five people over for dinner, who would they be?

But I don't eat people, and in any case I'm sure five would be far too many. I'd be living on leftovers for months.

Please list some other characteristics that a typical reader of your book might have.

Interest in reasonably hard sf. Interest in the future, and how to get there from here. A pulse.

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