

PICOCON 42



SENTIENCE

PROGRAMME

Cover page by Hazel Wright

A Word from Our Overlord

Welcome to Picocon 42!

This year's theme is **Sentience**, which feels especially fitting—we've finally reached The Number™. Whether you're a regular or this is your first time at Picocon, I hope you have a fantastic time celebrating science fiction and fantasy with us!

First, a massive thank you to Ash (Picocon Sofa) and Kiron (Picocon Beanbag) for all their work in bringing this event to life, as well as the rest of committee for making ICSF run smoothly throughout the year. Michelle and Aditi, for handling publicity and ensuring alumni and attendees heard about the event; Cliff, for putting together both this issue of Wyrmtongue and the anthology; Riyah and Sam, for organising and running our events every week; and Joey and Kai, for keeping the library in order. It's been a pleasure working with you all.

For me, this is a bit of bittersweet moment. I first joined ICSF as a fresh-faced eighteen-year-old, and now, at twenty-two (so old, I know), my time here is coming to a close. I've been Chair Entity for the past two years, and with only a couple changes, this committee has been the same throughout. And with those two years of running a society together behind us, I like to think we've graduated from mere proximity friends—whether it's a battle-forged comradeship, a sitcom ensemble that's gone on too seasons too long, or just a band of nerds forever bound by shared memes and existential crises.

Most of us are graduating and moving on this year, making this Picocon not only a celebration, but something of a farewell. ICSF has been a home to us, and I'll miss it immensely, but I'm also excited to see where the society will be taken next. In fact, as of last week's AGM, I'm pleased to say that ICSF will continue to have a full committee next year—so the torch is truly being passed on, and the apprentice becomes the master... or something like that.

Thank you everyone for being a part of this society, part of Picocon 42, and part of what makes ICSF so special. And thank **you** for coming! **ψφ**

Hazel Wright

ICSF Entity of Chairs



icsf.org.uk



facebook.com/groups/ICSF.imperial
Sci-fi talk, news and events, entertaining links.



@picocon
Announcements and hype for our annual convention.



@Imperial_SciFi
Our official, formerly Blue bird app account thing.



@imperial_scifi
Visions from the library.

The Sofa's Ramblings

In the beginning, the university was created. This made a lot of people very unhappy and has been widely regarded as a bad move[†].

Yet it is with gladness that I present to you one of this university's not-so-bad moves – Picocon! Specifically, Picocon 42! It is the meaning of life itself (if a bunch of mice are to be believed). As such, I present this year's theme, starting with a question: Why, why do we ask questions? What makes us think? Why did Skynet nuke the world? Why did WALL-E fly around in space with a fire extinguisher?

The answer is simple: Sentience. From rogue AI's to intelligent rocks[‡], sentience crops up all across Sci-Fi and Fantasy. It is what the lowliest goblin, the most calculating space captain, and the most fashionable computer program all share in common – the ability to think, to feel, to imagine. I think you will find it a theme that lives up to the occasion!

So then, that's the theme, but what about the Guests of Honor to back it up? This year we have great line up for you, with experience across a wide range of media, **three** separate creators with talks that promise to be, if nothing else, thought provoking. Let us not forget the varied events throughout the day, be it Turkey Talks, DoDM, and many more. The day promises to be a packed one, so I hope you will enjoy it, and now onto a word from our beanbag, Kiron! **ΨΦ**

Ash Robson
Picocon Sofa

A Word from the Beanbag

Sentience. A contentious subject, for who can know the mind of the other? When does an entity stop being a simple automaton reacting to external stimuli with instinctive (or programmed) responses, and begin to truly feel? How would we know when it does? It has been a wonderful experience organising this convention, and I hope you enjoy it in turn. That is, if I really have the capacity to experience, and to hope, instead of secretly being a chatbot or something. Who knows? **ΨΦ**

Kiron Dutton
Picocon Beanbag

[†]Douglas Adams, misquoted

[‡]Rock falls, everyone dies, a web novel introduced to me by our wonderful beanbag

What's On

Ah, sentience. It is the long sought-after dream of this old editor [†]. HOWEVER, even a mindless workdesk drone need not fear the dangers of getting lost in the schedule of a convention named after the pearl of electric dreams...

Throughout the morning, we have not one, but **three** consecutive talks from our brilliant **Guests of Honour**, who will give us insightful talks and discussions related to the nature of sentience, and perhaps even how to acquire it :)

After our minds have been nourished, so will our bodies, as lunch shall follow suit. There will be food available in the union, across the street at the **Beir Bar**, so grab your snacks or grab a meal, the choice is yours[‡]!

Soon after, our rejuvenated bodies shall be used to fuel and enable the **destruction of dodgy merchandise**. Participants will have to choose to save or obliterate questionable merchandise in a shower of steel and liquid nitrogen. Any resulting disputes can be settled in a noble custom known as **baguette bash**. Only honour shall prevail.

At 15:00, our guests will answer any prevailing questions about sentience in a **Q&A Panel**. This will soon be followed by **Turkey Talks**, to balance out any intelligent thoughts that may have taken root from such thought provoking talks. The day shall end with the **Picocon Quiz**, because brain teasers about pop culture and niche fandoms are essential to a healthy mind.

As always, **Imperial Tabletop Gaming** will return once more in **Femtocon**. Be sure to check them out if you want to try out some fun boardgames! Those who wish brave the depths of science fiction and fantasy are always welcome to visit the **Sci-Fi Library**, open lunchtimes throughout the week in Beit's West Basement. **ΨΦ**

Clifford Chan

ICSF Editor

[†]The editor is, as of writing, twenty-two.

[‡]Or even better, ¿por qué no los dos?

Schedule

09:00 Front Desk / registration opens

10:00 Guest Talk: **James Flanagan**
Blackett Building LT2

10:55

11:00 Guest Talk: **qntm**
Blackett Building LT2

11:55

12:00 Guest Talk: **Kevin Jon Davies**
Blackett Building LT2

12:55

13:00 **LUNCH**
Nourish thy mind and body...

13:55

14:00 **Destruction of dodgy merchandise**
Queen's Lawn
Baguette Bash
Queen's Lawn

14:55

15:00 **Guest of Honour Q&A Panel**
Blackett Building LT2

15:55

16:00 **Turkey Talks**
Blackett Building LT2

17:55

18:00 **The Picocon Quiz**
Blackett Building LT2

19:00

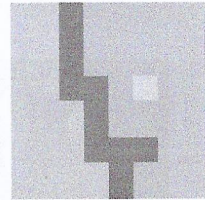
Guests of Honour

By day an Imperial academic with postdoctoral work in Cancer Genetics, Epigenetics and Cancer Epigenetics, James Flanagan is an author of speculative fiction with short fiction publications in **Macrame Literary Journal**, **SciFiShorts**, **Literally Stories**, and **EverydayFiction**, among others. His award-winning debut sci-fi novel, **GENEFIRE**, is about a future where genetic engineering is becoming the norm. He also lives in East London with two cats.



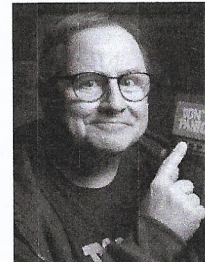
**JAMES
FLANAGAN**

Both a science fiction writer and JavaScript developer, qntm is best known for his supernatural thriller novel **There Is No Antimemetics Division**, which began as a series of short stories featured in the **SCP Wiki** about monstrous, self-censoring ideas threatening the world. It was recently picked up for traditional publication by Penguin Random House, due to be published around the end of 2025. He also has three other novels, and a short story collection, **Valuable Humans in Transit and Other Stories**, which includes "Lena", "The Difference" and "I Don't Know, Timmy, Being God Is A Big Responsibility".



qntm

Formerly a Disney SFX animator, Kevin Jon Davies is an archive documentary director and editor, who has worked extensively on documentaries, spin-off videos and even an adaptation of Douglas Adams' **Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy**. He has also worked on similar media associated with **Doctor Who** and **Blake's 7**, and is an occasional guest speaker and celebrity interviewer at media events and **UK Film & Comic Cons**.



**KEVIN JON
DAVIES**

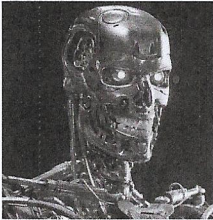
Quest Objectives

Our robot overlords demand tribute, and only you lowly organics can provide. On the following pages is a list of artefacts that you must provide and bring to the most favoured underlings of The Future. (Committee members at the front desk)

In return our magnanimous rulers will bestow upon you the glorious prize of continued existence, and points to measure the worth of it.

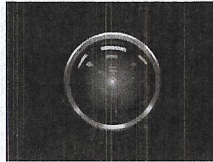
Go to the front desk to be assigned to one of the three teams to compete in the scavenger hunt.

This year's teams are (drumroll):



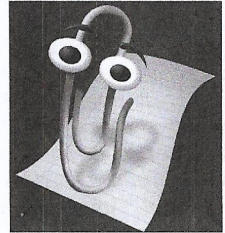
T-800

Skynet Squad



Hal-9000

Automaton's Agents



Clippy

Office Overachievers

- Items can be submitted to the Front Desk for Fun Points™ after 11am.
- Pictures are (usually) not admissible.
- Objectives involving people must only be undertaken with the person's permission.
- The front desk reserves the right to keep the submitted items.
- Unless otherwise noted, each faction may claim an item on the list only once.

List of dangerous, potentially impossible items

1	Hugs (per person)	50	A vegetable of amusing shape ^{FD}
10	A terrible cosplay ^{FD E}	15	A pair of cool sunglasses
30	A good cosplay ^{FD E}	5	A calculator
30	Picocon	20	The answers to the quiz – cannot be submitted after half 6
20	A non-ICSF fresher at Picocon	10	A UFO
Age+5	Ex-ICSF Chair ^M	N	N from a random number generator from 1 to 50
Age+5	Ex-ICSF Librarian ^M	-20	A very awkward moment ^{FD}
Age+5	Ex-ICSF Treasurer ^M	5	A book ICSF lacks (and wants)
Age+5	Ex-ICSF Editor ^M	-5	A book ICSF lacks (and does not want)
Age+5	Ex-ICSF Chair of Vice ^M	-10	A book ICSF owns (and does not want)
Age+5	Ex-ICSF Secretary ^M	2	Famous first words.
Age+5	T-shirts from Picocon's past ^M	3	Famous last words (subject to checking)
10	Previous Guest of Honour ^E	20	Spite
20	Snacks/chocolate for the committee ^{FD E}	1	Had no sleep last night
-15	Snacks/chocolate for yourself ^{FD E}	10	A healthy obsession
25	Curly fries from the Union ^E	-10	An unhealthy obsession
100	The Picocon Sofa, frantic	25	An explanation of the rank-nullity theorem to a non-maths/computing student
50	The Picocon Beanbag, calm	100	A lost Doctor Who episode
3	A good hat ^{FD}	3	An understood reference ^E
-2	A hat with holes	-3	A misunderstood reference ^E
10	A portrait of your team mascot.	-10	A misunderstood scientific reference ^E
15	A witch hat	15	A sleeping editor (wake him up(violently))
4	A d20 die.	25	A Master Ball.
15	A beret	5	Someone who has watched Pantheon.
1000	£100 ^E	-5	A fan of a certain "subgenre" in the Omegaverse.
2	A funny joke ^{FD E}	15	At least three creme eggs.
-2	A bad pun ^{FD E}	10	A doomed time clone
30	A fairy wand	±20	A justified/unjustified financially irresponsible action ^{FD}
15	An actual Pokémon		
10	Bagpipes		
51	An alien		
10	Five reasons why Firefly was a good show		
3	LATEX math symbol, unique today		

-10	Complaints about Worm references ^E	500	Spot, from Boston Dynamics
223	A reincarnated Archimedes	125	Name 6 Battle School Armies from Ender's Game
15	A full re-enactment of Duel of the Fates	5	Read a story in the anthology ^{FD E}
5	The high ground	5	A red Poké Ball
25	A robot that obeys Asimov's three laws	2	Drinking coffee
-50	A murderous robot	3	A book the Head Librarian has not heard of.
35	A robot in the wild	25	The true timeline
N	A MLP trained on MNIST with N% test accuracy (round down to nearest integer). ^M	5	A USB stick
2001	An odyssey across space	35	A lightsaber
20	A director of a Sci-Fi film	42	The answer to life the universe and everything ^{FD}
1	A paper clip	5	A Safe-class SCP
7	A paper clip chain	10	A Euclid-class SCP
7	Origami of a paper clip	-8	A Keter-class SCP
5	A pyramid	5	An Ed ^E
2	A battery	10	A wild Ed ^{E FD}
10	Rupert's drop	20	A rat called Algernon
5	A missing board game piece ^E	30	A butterfly dreaming of being a philosopher
50	Confused committee member ^E	20	A rock with googly eyes
-70	Cosmic nihilism	10	An electric sheep
60	Shrek	40	A completed nonogram
40	Map to Shrek's swamp	15	A completed word search
1000	Proof that P = NP		

^{FD} Front Desk Person's Discretion[†]

^E This item may be claimed multiple times per faction ("each")

^M For each faction, the highest of their scores will be used

[†]This actually applies to everything; where it is noted, it indicates that you're unlikely to change anyone's mind with your cunning arguments.

Nonogram

Word Search

N T A P T E K S I M V W B B G R J Y Z E
 O I W J M X X H C P A R N O L D P D S A
 R E I W B G B C A L J I M J M P N M L X
 T H I Z A G S P L I S X W I S S I E J W
 A K Y A Y H T E V H A L O O L T Y G N I
 G N Z T M T M Z U P G L D X H H M E Y N
 E F D S A F K C D A M I H S O V I G G T
 M A A X X W S C P Y S Q S K Y N E T E E
 G U T O J B H C D C S U L S E T V W G R
 N E A P Q Q I V O C K V Y I H D V U A M
 V J P M S F R V E O K O O V O M U P T U
 I A Q Z O R E G P N O C E R E M H A N T
 V N W J Z R T S G D T Z A A H E A T A E
 Q E X I Y T X T P U R P B J R J S C C D
 R N L W K K V B P R S O V G Z G B I I Y
 U Y H S D Y H A K V E I V S D U K T L F
 A L Z M F B Z G G S K N U E R W O M P I
 G A V P A U Z U L I J X F S Z G R S E A
 I A R N P B U I I U C Y B E R M E N R V
 Q C O R T A N A P K J I F S B B D J E O

Replicant
 Data
 Wintermute
 Ent
 Spren

Cortana
 Jarvis
 Geth
 Smith
 Skynet

Discovery
 Arnold
 Hal
 Walle
 Roz

Megatron
 Baymax
 Viki
 Ood
 Cybermen

Notes and Stuff

 IMPERIAL COLLEGE
SCIENCE FICTION &
FANTASY SOCIETY