Heart of Steel

 My experience with VEX began only two months ago, during a chilly Christmas at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. As usual, I was slumped on my couch rattling out line after line for the my new chess-playing computer program, desperately hoping that this one would finally challenge my masterful chess skills.

 There came a knock at my apartment door and upon opening it, I found an exquisitely wrapped package, probably from parents or something. I was about to throw it in the recycling with the rest of my dozen-or-so cards and presents when I saw it was addressed from programming professor, the only being that had bested me at chess. Expecting it to be some kind of practical joke, I was surprised to see it was a VEX Robotics starter kit.

 I held my breath and decided to open it. Unsurprisingly, the Lego-like aluminum parts and the simplistic microcontroller presented little challenges to my years of robotics experience, but my interest was sufficiently piqued when I discovered a listing for a local VEX competition online. A quick YouTube search showed me some pretty amazing VEX robots, ideas that even I probably wouldn’t have imagined. But the teams; those bantering VEX teams were what really struck me.

 I’m just about to enter my 3rd VEX competition and aiming for another first place, but this time with a team of people just as smart (or smarter) than me. VEX taught me what chess didn’t: two brains are better than one.