

It is eleven o'clock on a typically soggy Seattle evening. I wade through layers of metal and tortilla chips, stopping beside team to discuss their unique approaches to the robotics challenge. Our dozen teams are competitive yet united. We all share ideas, from the crazy Holonomic drive pioneered by my team, 10Q— fondly dubbed the 'Rebel Alliance,' due to our scrappy but powerful robots – to the deceptively simple yet elegant tank chassis – a trademark design of our friendly rivals, the 'Empire.'

Through VEX, we all live and breathe the same passion for technology and nerdy jokes. Since my initiation in ninth grade, I have learned the basics of PID programming, differentiated between a sprocket and a crummet, and discussed the merits of a 1:5 gear ratio. I have seen my passions flourish, and inspire my aspirations to become a technology entrepreneur: using real engineering solutions to help others. As I rejoin my team's huddle, we continue our work: designing, building, testing, tearing apart, and re-designing our robot. We democratically debate the placement of a single screw, referring briefly to Newton's Third Law and rotational inertia. I scribble calculations on a scrap of paper to support my argument that an extra 1/2 inch of metal would reduce the stress on our battery.

It is now midnight. I dim the school lights and unenviably shoo everyone out. We all methodically pack, our robot finished for the moment, but the gears in our minds constantly whirring, brainstorming new ideas.

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