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## Emerging Voices

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# Emerging Voices

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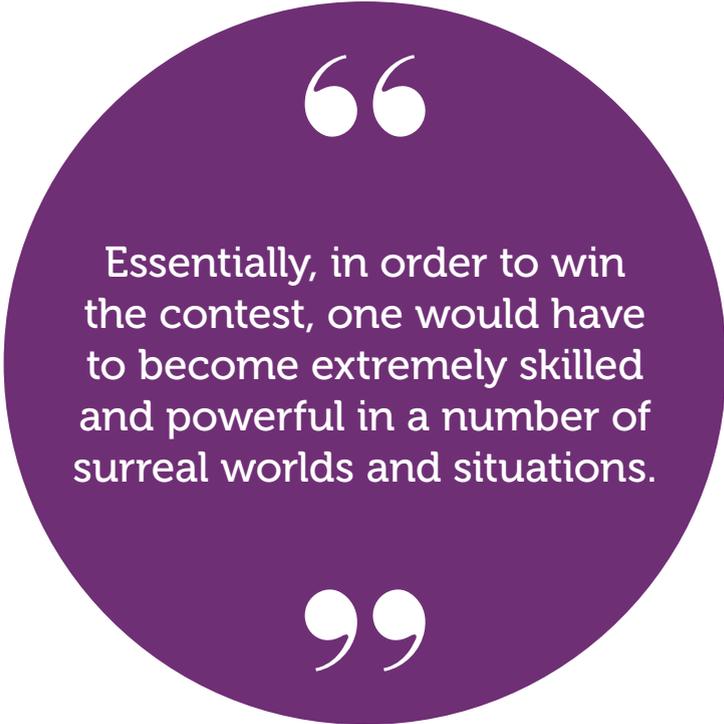
*The staff of the Lehigh Review has once again collaborated with the Office of First-Year Experience to compile a selection of outstanding first-year writing samples for the "Emerging Voices" section of the journal. In the summer of 2015, incoming Lehigh students were given the option to choose one of two summer reading books. The first was *The Most Human Human: What Artificial Intelligence Teaches Us About Being Alive* in which author Brian Christian attempts to prove his humanity and distinguish himself from a computer during the annual Turing test competition. The second was *Ready Player One*, a novel by Ernest Cline telling the story of teenager Wade Watts and his quest for a better life by solving the puzzles embedded in OASIS, a massive virtual universe. The first-year students were asked to think and write critically about the book they chose and answer one of two prompts. The first was to describe which aspects of their childhood they would include if they were to design their own OASIS virtual universe and how this has shaped them into who they are today. The second was to determine what differentiates us from machines and if increases in technology are making us less human. We are proud to showcase the responses written by an exceptional group of students who remind us that excellence at Lehigh begins in the first year.*

## Emmett Brown

If I were to make a contest similar to the one James Halliday made, it would be situated around all the different things I imagined to occupy myself with as a kid: orbital star bases around the moon, fighting aliens, deep under-ocean cities, alternate realities with floating mountains, and zombies. LOTS of zombies. Many different types, too. Viral zombies, cursed zombies, fungal zombies, parasitic zombies, mutated zombies, robots infected with computer viruses so they behave like zombies, lots of zombies. If a world wouldn't be populated by zombies it would be populated with aliens or monsters. Quite frankly, my game would NOT be suited for children. It would be a network of many post-apocalyptic worlds, haunted or cursed areas, and surreal warzones. The reason I would make the game like this is because these kinds of worlds and scenarios are what I imagined in my free time all the way from preschool to, well, today.

I would not only incorporate these worlds, but I would also incorporate a number of things that I enjoyed either watching on TV, reading in a book, or playing in a videogame. Some examples would be *Pokémon*, *Naruto*, *Harry Potter*, and *Pokémon Explorers of Time*. I would also hide away some places within the worlds I create, such as my house, my school, and some other places that are important to me, such as both my grandmas' houses, my grandpa's cabin, and the church in which my Boy Scout troop held meetings, all just to spice up the game for people who realized the pattern.

As for the contest itself, I would make it nearly impossible to complete. In order to progress, one would have to go into the most difficult places or have to fight the most powerful creatures in order to win. Not only that, but I would make it so that each world has its own set of specific items one could take to it. If someone got a beamsword in one of the medieval worlds, they could only take it to other similar worlds. If you are the most powerful person on a zombie island world and had all the most powerful items for that world, for any other you would have to restart from the beginning, except for a few other zombie worlds. Essentially, in order to win the contest, one would have to become extremely skilled and powerful in a number of surreal worlds and situations. Also, some of the most important pieces to winning the contest would be stowed away in a replica of my house or



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the church that was mentioned in the above paragraph. They would have to search and research to find the specific places where they can progress. It would be extremely hard to win.

All these aspects that I would incorporate into the game made me who I am by, mainly, expanding my imagination. Without imagining all these worlds, I would be bored all the time, and, therefore, I would probably be a boring person. I animate as a hobby, and, with no creativity, that would be hard to do. The best ideas have a base supporting them; they are more innovation than invention. The fact that I expanded my mind by being exposed to these types of media and then take it and turn it into something of my own creation expands my mind to be much more creative than it would have been without these things.

## Jack Harrington

It was clear from the story, *Ready Player One*, that James Halliday was obsessed with expressing his own interests with the world. If I were to create a game like the OASIS, I would have taken a different approach. I have always

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been interested in theatre, mostly musical theatre. My favorite composers/writers are Stephen Sondheim, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Jason Robert Brown. I've also performed in several productions involving those three geniuses. If I were to create a game, the passwords or keys would be composed of those initials, ALW, JRB, and SS. My favorite of Jason Robert Brown's musicals is the show *13*. Fortunately, I was able to perform in two separate productions of *13*, playing roles of Richie and Archie. Archie is a character that has a degenerative neuromuscular disorder. In the game, I would create a weapon that uses the crutches Archie uses to continue through. The number 13 is also very important to me and my family. Both my sister and father were born on the 13th of March and June. I was born on the 12th of November so I'm seen as a day early because my due date was November 13th. Also, my grandmother lived in a house with the house number of 1313, which is also where my mother grew up. In the game, because I also like *Deal or No Deal*, I would create a scenario where the player would have to choose a numbered case to earn a key or something else valuable. Obviously that case number would be 13.

Obviously, Halliday's favorite things were spread throughout the OASIS in various different forms. I would incorporate my favorite book/movie, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. If anyone has ever seen or heard of the movie, they would know the main character is played by Jack Nicholson. I would have to incorporate his lines and his character throughout the game because his portrayal of McMurphy is absolutely astounding. Another link to Jack Nicholson is his portrayal of Jack in *The Shining*. His famous line "Heeeeere's Johnny" will certainly be a password or key in my game. *The Shining* isn't just for Jack Nicholson's recognition, it is of course for the writer's recognition as well. Stephen King is my favorite author of all time. My game would have to consist of lines or titles from all my favorite Stephen King novels. My favorite ones are *Misery*, *It*, *Stand by Me*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Mist*, and, of course, *The Shining*. Each of those novels or short stories would be added to my game in any form I could think of while creating it. Lastly, I would create hints and quests based on my favorite musicians. Billy Joel and the Eagles make up my classic rock favorites, and so I would include their titles of songs, lines, and even the actual music in the game. I would also include my favorite 90s musicians, like Bowling For Soup. (Stacy's Mom would be a boss or a character in the game.) Among the millions of things I would put into the game, the ones I just listed are among the most important.

### Paige Pagan

What makes a human in fact human? Is it our diverse ways of expressing our emotions, our ability to reason or remember certain things, or our nature to make mistakes? Is there really a certain trait that identifies a human? Homo sapiens are known for being the most intelligent and complex creatures, creatures capable of doing many things others cannot. However, with the advancement of artificial intelligence, humans have gained easier ways of completing tasks. We live in a technological era where computers can complete tasks for us. I am even guilty of relying on modern technology. For example, to get to places we have never been before, we turn to our global positioning system, or ask Siri to search the answer to our most pressing questions. When we get lonely, we may even turn to a chat bot for conversation. Although humans consistently turn to machines for assistance, artificial intelligence will never have the capability of making a human any less human. This is because we are

the ones who produce these machines, and, without a networking database, the machines are nothing. The value of a human life, in comparison, is invaluable. Even though there may be a thin line between human and artificial intelligence, it is of great significance. Humans are distinguished from machines by suffering, which brings about many other layers of experiences. Through human suffering, we get the ability to feel emotions, to reason but still make mistakes, and to be creative and spontaneous in determining goals for ourselves. Human suffering is the essence of what makes a human really human. Unfortunately, artificial intelligence cannot recall a past in which suffering has shaped them into what they've become; in fact, humans shape them into what they will be.

Humans experience sadness, happiness, heartbreak, turmoil, surprise, doubt, and more. Humans tend to allow their emotions to dictate their future and actions. This ability to experience all different types of emotions is a unique factor that differentiates humans from machines. Even the Turing test analyzes responses for emotions as a hint to portray who is the human and who is a computer. Computers tend to be emotionless and single-minded.

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Humans more openly show their emotions, particularly through gestures. In conversation, humans show anger by pounding their fists on tables or show surprise by shooting up their hands to their face to hide their shock. Machines do not portray emotions or gestures. What are they supposed to do to show anger, explode? I don't think so. Although machines can intend stand-offish behavior by reacting with a quick remark, machines still cannot relate the way humans can. Brian Christian won the Most Human Human Award because of the emotion he showed. He barely allowed the judge to answer back in a conversation, clearly showing his enthusiasm and bursting emotion. Machines have generic and “low-entropy” conversations, whereas humans go the extra mile and have “high-entropy” conversations filled with feelings. Computers are able to mimic humans as far as we design them to, but machines cannot develop their own emotions or an ability to feel. These things are gifts that humans obtain. Humans generally think before they speak or take action, except for the select few that have sudden outbursts they cannot control, or chemical imbalances. Humans can be characterized as “thinkers” with a curious nature. However, we still make mistakes. Machines are not programmed to make mistakes; they are meant to be perfect items that can carry out any procedure you set them to complete. Humans are invaluable and unique while machines are simply replaceable.

### David Pochapin

If I were to create a contest that is similar to the contest created by James Halliday in the book *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline, it would consist of two separate tasks. The first task would be very similar to the second task Wade had to complete in Halliday's contest. In the same way Wade had to go through the entire movie of *Wargames* to complete his task, I would make the first task of my contest to walk through the entirety of my favorite film, *Glory Road*. *Glory Road*, directed by James Gartner, is an amazing movie that combines my favorite sport of basketball with racial injustices of the 1960s. The movie is about the Texas Western College basketball program in 1966 and how it dealt with the repercussions of being the first college basketball team to start five black basketball players. This movie is not only thrilling, but it also taught me how to handle adversity. In the movie, many people were sending death threats to the basketball team to try to make a point that black men do not belong

in college basketball. The basketball players did not allow these distractions to derail them from what really mattered and that was winning a national championship. In life, there are always things happening that distract me from what really matters. Whenever I feel like my mind is preoccupied, I think back to *Glory Road* and how the team persevered to accomplish their goal even when their lives were in danger. It is a skill I believe everyone should learn and the movie *Glory Road* teaches it in a beautiful and touching matter.

The final task of my contest would involve going to the apartment I grew up in and my favorite restaurants in the neighborhood. I was born and raised in midtown on the east side of New York City. I live on the 6th floor of my building, and my room overlooks my two favorite restaurants. When I think about my past and the memories I made when I was a child, I think back to my apartment and the restaurants I spent most of my free time in. I celebrated my first birthday eating mac and cheese at Madison Diner. Then when I was seven years old, I ate sushi for the first time at Tenzan Sushi, and, from that day on, sushi has been my favorite food. Finally, I have always viewed my home and my bedroom as my happy place.

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Food has always been a huge part of my life. When I think back on my favorite memories, I always remember the food I was eating for the event. In the same way, when I think back on the bright moments of my childhood, I think about my two favorite restaurants where I spent many nights eating. My whole experience of living in my fantastic apartment, while walking one block over to eat at my favorite restaurants, made my childhood and the person I am today.

### Sean Spooner

Throughout the course of history, especially the past few centuries, humanity has had incredible advances in the fields of science and technology. These new and innovative technologies have vastly increased the number of things we can do and access as a species. Many people believe that we are becoming less human because of this, thinking that we are becoming more dependent on inanimate technology in order to do things that we are incapable of doing. However, I believe that we are becoming more human as a species, as it shows how versatile we are, and how intelligent we truly are.

As humans, we consider ourselves to be superior to all other species due to our superior intellect. However, we have our own limitations as a species. For example, our sense of sight can only detect the tiny breadth of electromagnetic radiation that visible light comprises. Dogs have far superior senses of smell than us, cats can see clearly at night, and bats are able to use echolocation in order to “see.” Clearly, we are not entirely superior in every way to the other species that inhabit our planet. However, we are able to overcome these obstacles using our intellect, which is why we consider ourselves to be human. I believe that the intelligence of a species is directly proportional to their advances in science. Despite the limitations of our senses, we have developed microscopes to see objects that are just microns in diameter, and have created telescopes to see deep into the cosmos. This ability to overcome these limitations of our bodies is what makes us intrinsically human. Over the past millennium, humans have made incredible advances in all of the fields of science. We have begun to understand the universe at the microscopic level with our knowledge of atoms, and extend to the universal scale with the understanding of stellar evolution. It is truly incredible that humans have been able to develop

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strongly supported theories about the evolution of stars, as their lifetimes range from hundreds of millions, to trillions of years. Despite this, using technology that we developed, we have been able to develop theories and support them using the technology we develop. We are able to run simulations with our high-powered computers and then compare this data to that which we collect with our telescopes. Without this level of technology, it would be impossible to understand these processes that occur on a time scale far greater than the geological time scale, let alone see many of these objects that are light years away. This is just one example of how humanity's incredible technological advancements have allowed us to overcome overwhelming odds in order to further comprehend how the universe works. Our ability to obtain this knowledge makes us more human, as it shows how intelligent we really are as a species.

We are differentiated from the machines that we use because they are only able to do their functions because we enabled them to do so. These machines can be programmed to do different jobs, but we have to tell them what to do by developing code. Even though these machines that we fashion are able to surpass our abilities

in many areas, such as chess skill, as Brian Christian explained in *The Most Human Human*, they are unable to teach themselves at the same level that humans are. We create them to do specific jobs, but since we can add more and more power to the system, they are able to do many processes at levels that humans could only dream of, such as the simulations of the universe that they are able to create. This differentiation helps us to make advancements, especially in the fields of science, but also in everyday life. This differentiation shows how powerful the intellect of the human species is, as we are able to manufacture inanimate objects that can do tasks at incredible levels for our own benefits.

We are becoming more human as a species due to our technological advancements, as it shows how intellectual we truly are. We have created objects that are able to surpass our own abilities in specific areas so that we can make improvements in our own lives, as well as drive science forward.