

## Chess at Bryant Park

Perhaps as a result of watching too many TED talks of meaningful experiences obtained from having seemingly random and spontaneous interactions with strangers, I decided to venture and interact with strangers. It started with smiling at a girl recording a video of her surroundings in front of the NYPL while disguising myself as a member of the audience for the pianist playing on the public piano. I wanted to be the cute photogenic guy beaming with confidence and energy. She smiled back at me, but I immediately looked away, and left soon after my self-awareness slowly settled in to torture me.

My second attempt was at Bryant park. I started by walking around, looking for friendly faces. Some candidates included a cute and friendly looking old lady, some dudes chilling and staring into the distance, a guy who looked like he was an entrepreneur, who was planning what looked like marketing plans on paper. I recalled that Paul McCartney used to talk to old ladies as a young man, so I slowly walked towards the old lady, curious about what wisdom she had. But then I saw the chess area out of the corner of my eye, and decided to make my way there.

The whole place could easily be mistaken for heaven. Youth and innocence played chess against grey hair and wisdom, this was the essence of New York. There were no differences to put aside in the first place, but differences in looks and personalities were nonetheless more than common. My opponent was a 74 years old man who looked like he had nothing better to do than try to seem smart to strangers in Bryant park. At first delighted by his overestimation of my skills, I quickly realized I was going to disappoint the man when I counted the number of games I played in my life. Eventually, our conversation broke into a series of "I'm sorry, I'm not really good" from me, and "Why would you even do that?" from him. Why did it suddenly feel really hot and stuffy?