

It's **Not** Just a Game

A Comparison of Chess and Pokémon as Play, Strategy, and Art

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Abstract

Chess has been around since it was first prototyped in India, to which it spread across the Old World before being finalized in Europe and becoming one of, if not the most well-known game of all time. It has a simple ruleset that allows for near infinite possibilities for each game, and in recent times has grown even larger thanks to the online world.

Pokémon, on the other hand, was created in 1996 and first released as Red and Green versions for the Nintendo Game Boy, in which each version came with their own exclusive set of monsters to capture, trade, and battle with. The gameplay is not nearly as simple as Chess yet allows for enough complexity that often gives it a similar feel to the ancient board game.

Of course, while the games are very different, they are also synonymous with strategy and competition, and are arguably as relevant as one another, thus it may be wise to consider them examples of why video games should be considered an artform.

What's in a Game?

In order to understand the importance of games, we must first know what a "game" is. At first, the definition of "game" in this context is already known to the reader, but these definitions are not perfect. According to Wikipedia, "A game is a structured form of play, usually undertaken for entertainment or fun, and sometimes used as an educational tool..." and "...Key components of games are goals, rules, challenge, and interaction."

On top of that, "Games generally involve mental or physical stimulation, and often both," and this definition encompass a variety of games from physical sports like football, mental games like chess, and countless video games that rely on the player's physical and mental capabilities simultaneously in order to succeed. Even beyond the idea of challenging oneself, games provide a sense of self-expression, enjoyment and escapism that are enriched through artistic elements.

Chess: The Timeless Classic

Chess began its global marathon to become the most celebrated game in existence as a simpler game in India known as "Chaturanga". From there, the game would warp, change, and rebalance into the beloved over-the-board war game we all know and live. The game is set on a checkered 8x8 board with the pieces for each side set up as seen on the right, along with the setup for the infamous Queen's Gambit. The goal of Chess is to use the pieces to their strengths in order to attack the king as much as possible, and eventually trap the king in an inescapable position. The act of attacking the King is known as a check (from Persian "šāh", lit. "king"), and trapping the king is known as Checkmate (from Persian "šāh māt", lit. "king is frozen").

Despite the simple game, the sheer variety of strategies and potential games allowed an entire community of players who play in physical tournaments, as well as using websites like Chess.com, to flourish. Even through COVID-19, the popularity of Chess around the world has only steadily grown with the help of an influx of Twitch streamers who play the game online, as well as media such as the Netflix mini-series "The Queen's Gambit", named after the titular opening. Even today, powerful players like Magnus Carlsen and the late Bobby Fischer continue to show how Chess is a multi-generational masterpiece of a game.

Pokémon: Catching Lightning in a Bottle

Pokémon began life as a monster-collecting Role-playing game (RPG) on the Nintendo Game Boy, developed for years until its eventual release in 1996 as Pocket Monsters, and spread to the rest of the world starting in 1998. The idea of using Pokéballs in order to capture, trade, and even pit these monsters against each other came from a childhood hobby of series director Satoshi Tajiri where he would roam the outdoors in the hopes of catching bugs. He also states that especially in an urbanizing landscape, that a game built around exploring a land full of esoteric creatures to invoke the feeling of going outside and catching bugs.

Pokémon originally released in Red, Green, and Blue versions in order to encourage players to trade their Pokémon exclusive to these versions, though the ability to battle another player's team would spark one of the most well-known and complex competitive games even to this day. For example, each Pokémon had one or two types which had an influence on which moves could impact them, like Rock-Paper-Scissors. While some elements are easy to understand (like Water-type beating Fire-type), there are much more intricate interactions that can come from Pokémon battles, such as the variety of moves, abilities, stats, and even sheer luck at times.

Two Sides of the Same Coin

Chess and Pokémon still have their differences, especially in terms of genre, accessibility, and age. Chess is an ancient board game that can be played with any material and often uses the same board setup and the same 16 pieces with near identical rules between tournaments and games, save for some variations played in more niche settings. Pokémon, on the other hand, is a video game series that came out under 3 decades ago that's exclusive to select Nintendo consoles that usually has a different roster of Pokémon and new strategies between different games, and even games of the same generation have many different competitive subsections that are played concurrently.

However, what truly makes these games similar in their artistic appeal is how they breed new strategies and allow their players to create new relationships. Chess has a near universal appeal thanks to its simplistic design and easy to learn gameplay, and even for a game as old as Chess, new developments continue to unfold even today. To a similar effect, every Pokémon is designed in such a way that not only could one realistically befriend and travel the world with one, but also such that no matter who you are or what you like, you will find a favorite Pokémon. Not only do the games promote friendship between your partner Pokémon, but they also create ways for other players to interact and potentially bond over their mutual love for the game, much like Chess.

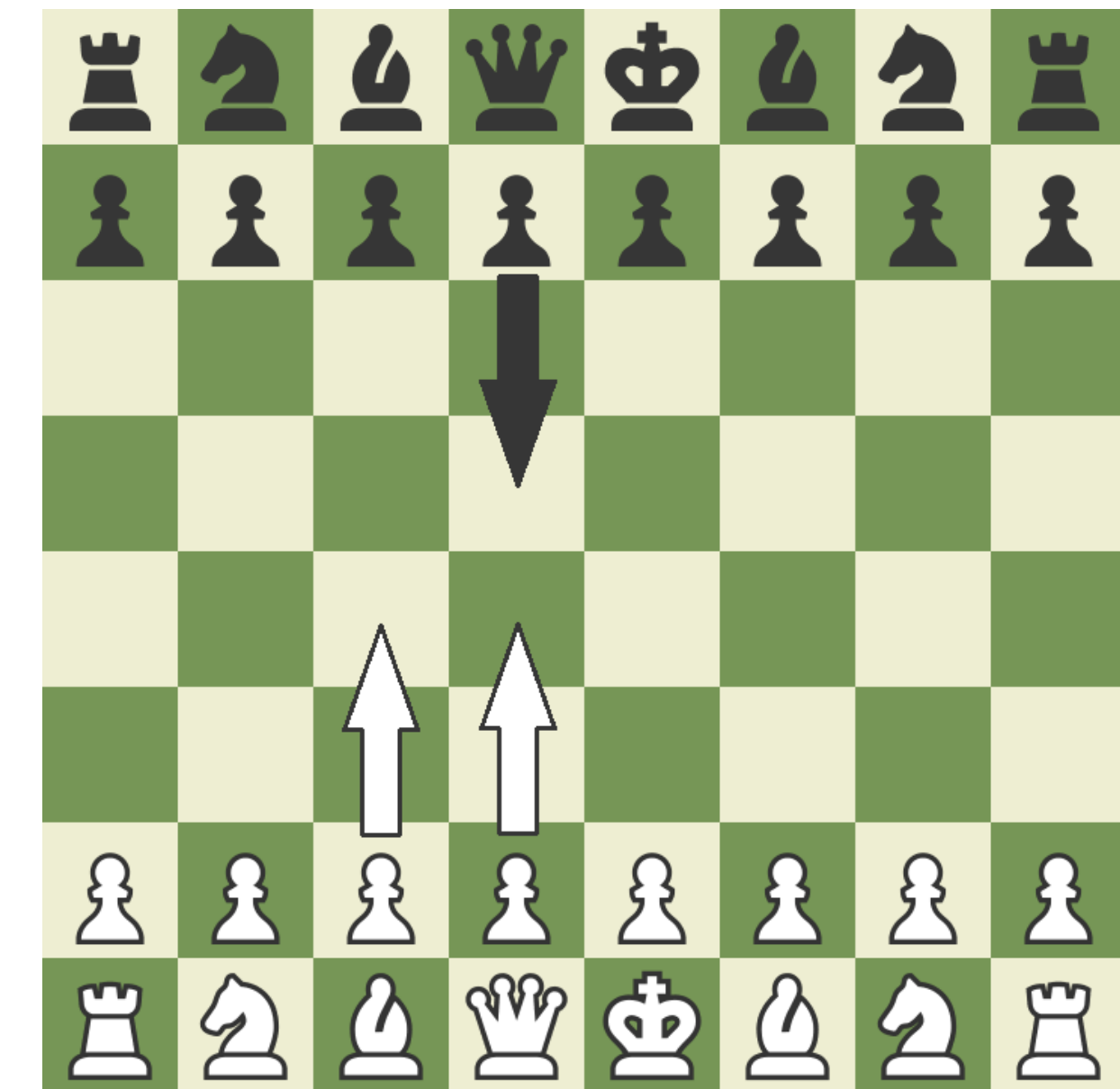
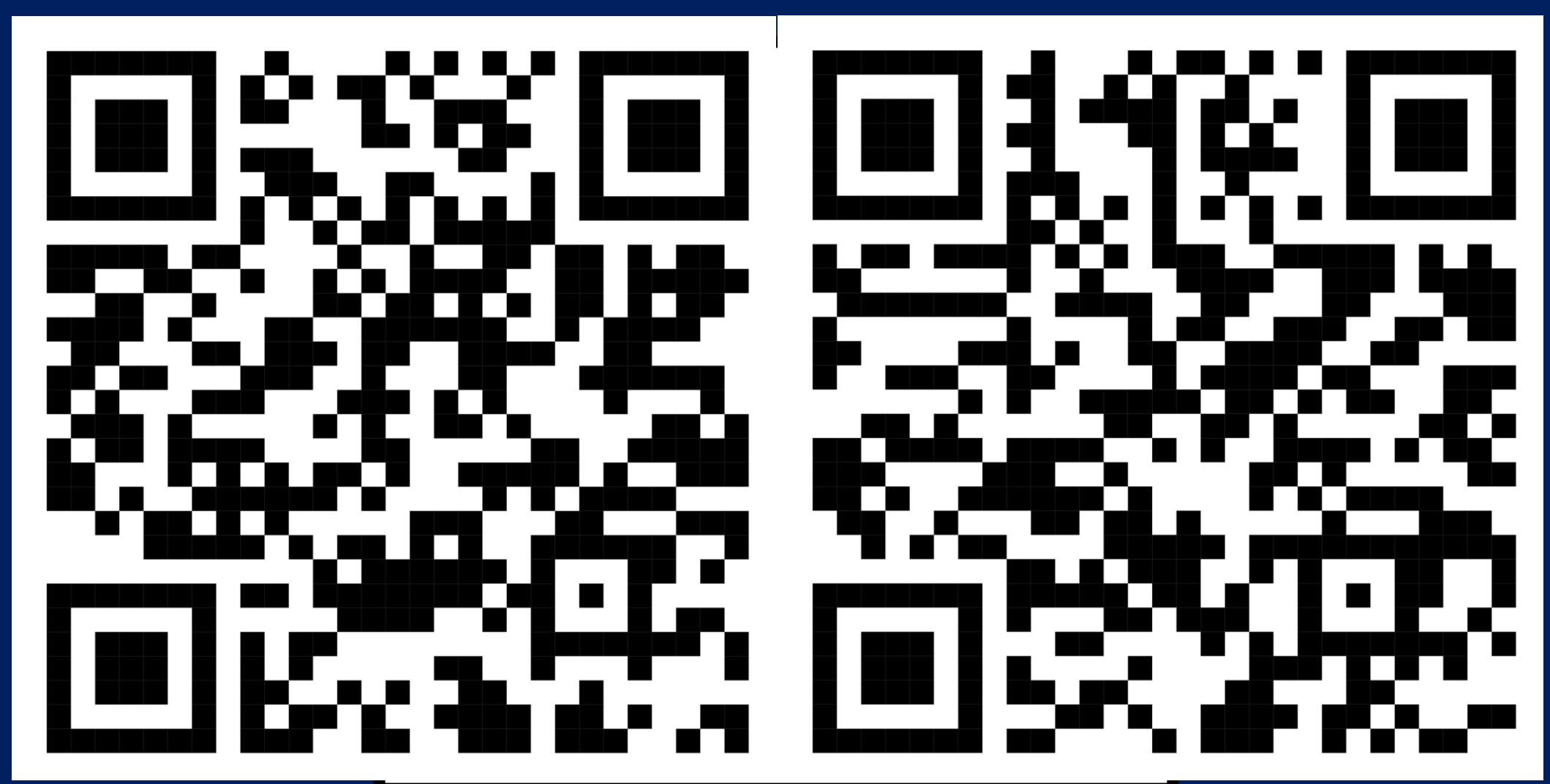
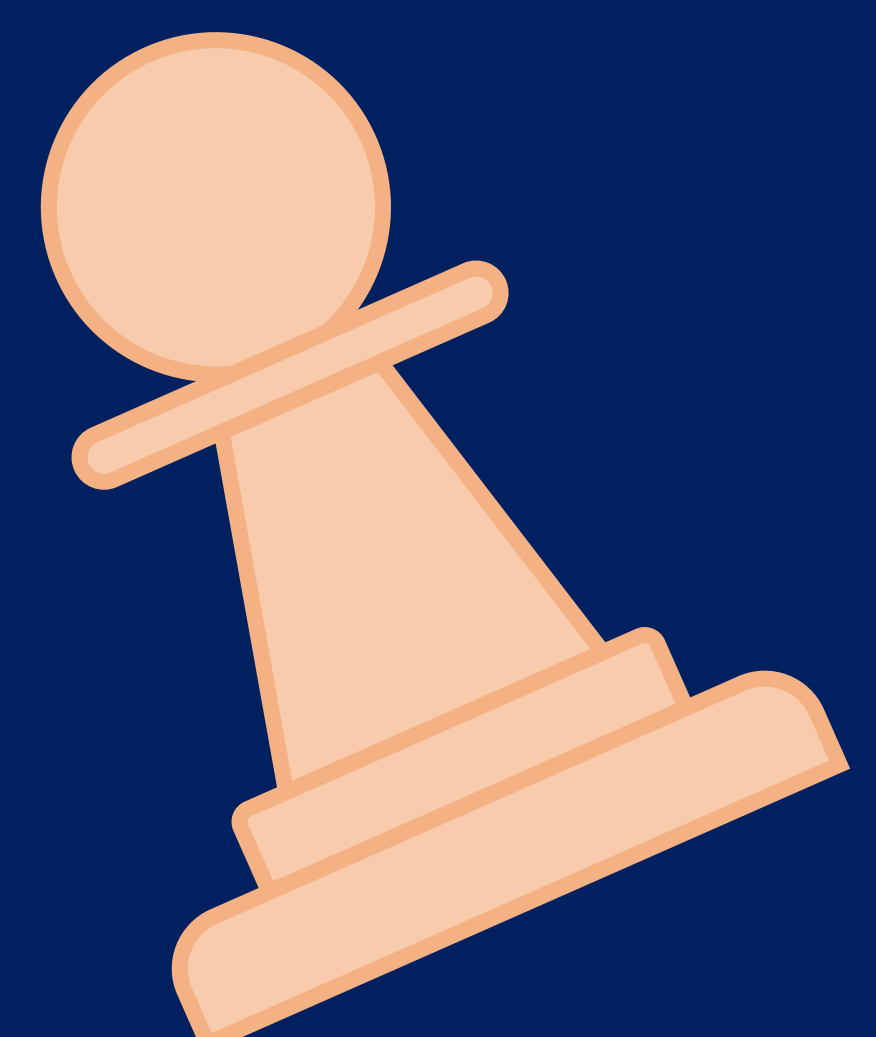
Only recently have people started to understand the impact that games as a whole can have on the world. If games like Chess and Pokémon can have such a worldwide effect on culture and community in ways similar to paintings, music, art, theater, and even sports, then it should be considered art just like the creations before it.

The board game of **Chess** and the monster-collection video game series of **Pokémon** are more similar than you think.

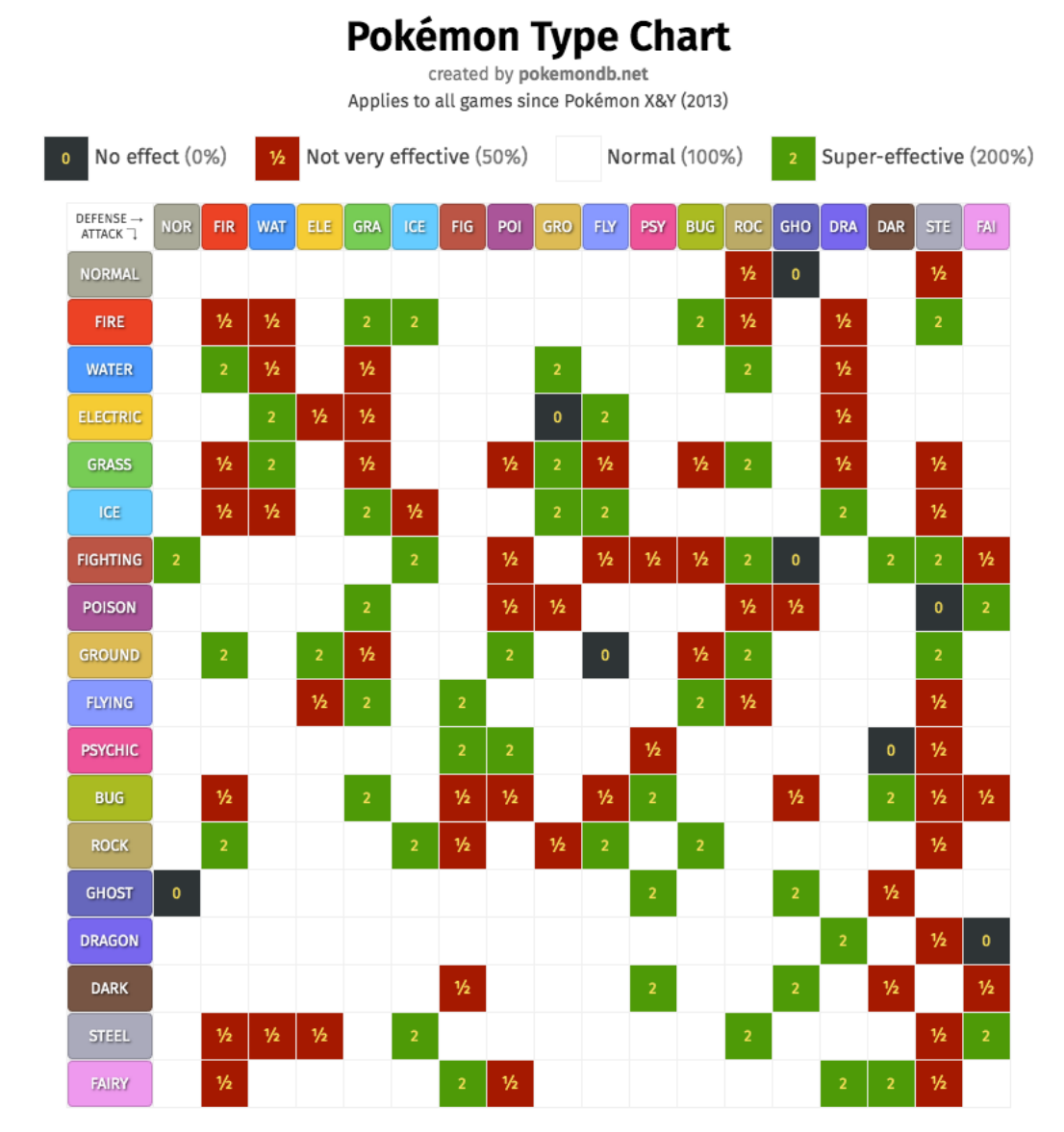
Both games breed **innovative strategies** within their respective games, have been played in **major tournaments** around the world, and to this day are **creating new friendships**.

Due to their influence on culture and entertainment, they are undeniable proof that **games should be considered an artform**.

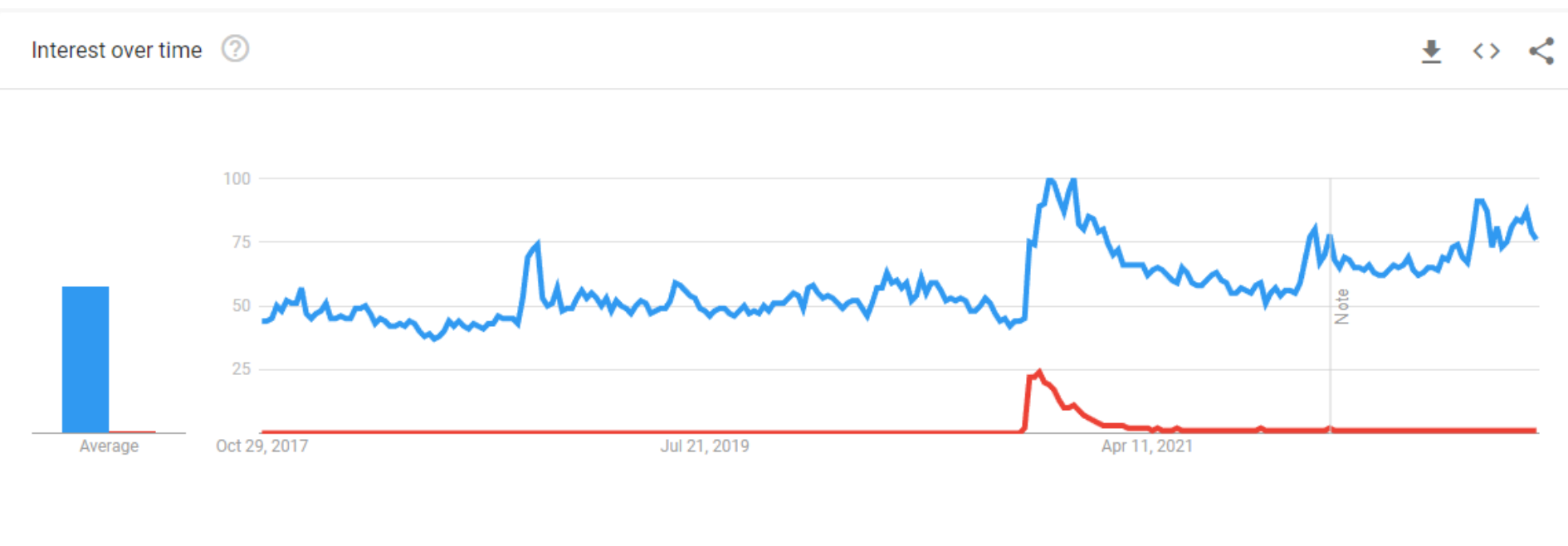
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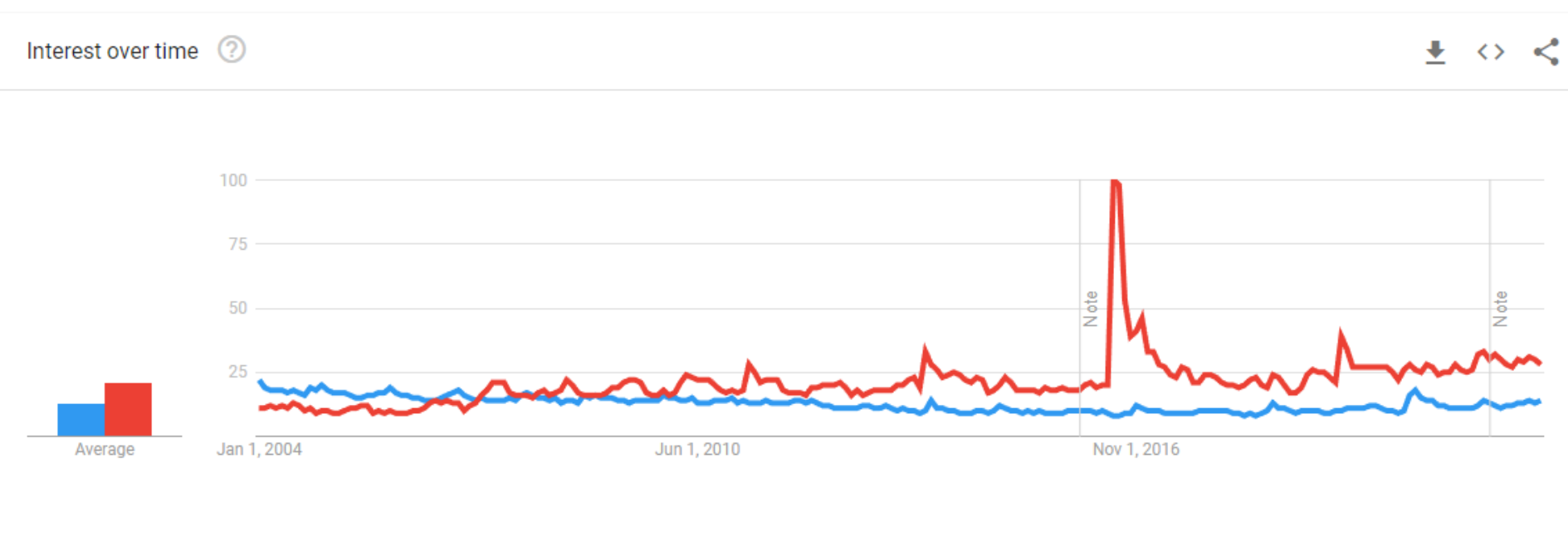
How a Chess Board is set up at the beginning of the game. In the Queen's Gambit, The White Queen's pawn moves first, then the Black Queen's pawn moves in retaliation. Only then will White be able to initiate the Queen's Gambit.



The current Pokémon type matchup chart, as of Pokémon X and Y (2013). Courtesy of pokemondb.net.



Google Trends data comparing "chess" in blue and "queen's gambit" in red



Google Trends data comparing "chess" in blue and "Pokémon" in red. The data around July 2016 is an anomaly due to the spread of mobile app "Pokémon GO".



Two Pokémon that share the same type and Base Stat Total can have completely different abilities, moves, and stat distributions. Salamence is closer to an offensive build as Dragonite is considered more balanced.