Emergent Strategy via Meta-Evolutionary Cellular Automata: A Two-Tier Framework for Algorithmic Game Design

Carlo Perassi

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Abstract

This paper introduces a novel, two-tier computational framework that shifts the paradigm of game design from static, human-engineered mechanics to evolved, emergent physics. In Level 1 (The Toroidal Crucible), an automated evolutionary tournament is executed via massively parallel computing, pitting generalized multi-color Turing automata against one another. Winning rules are selected strictly via a biomass-driven fitness function over a finite set of computational bursts. In Level 2 (Evolved Chess), these highly resilient, evolved automata are repurposed as deterministic, state-driven pieces in a turn-based strategic game played on a 512×512 torus. We formalize the transition mechanics, faction-agnostic trail stigmergy, core cell overwrite vulnerabilities, and the definitive biomass scoring systems.

1 Introduction

Traditional board games typically rely on engineered complexity or simple emergent complexity. Chess represents the former: a game characterized by asymmetric, highly specific rules governing distinct pieces, operating within a static, immutable environment. Conversely, Go represents the epitome of pure emergent complexity: featuring minimal, homogeneous rules on an empty grid that yield an unfathomably vast game tree. We propose a radical synthesis that transcends both paradigms by introducing a **meta-evolutionary architecture**. Instead of designing the physics of the game, human intervention is restricted to designing the ecosystem within which the physics itself evolves.

2 Level 1: The Toroidal Crucible

The foundational tier operates as a zero-player genetic algorithm laboratory and a massive computational tournament.

2.1 Mathematical Formalism of the Agent

The agent operates as a generalized Multi-Color Langton's Ant. An individual agent ruleset is defined by a finite set of grid colors C and a deterministic transition function δ:

$$2 \leq |C| \leq 8 \tag{1}$$

$$\delta : C \to C \times D \tag{2}$$

The action space D represents a strict binary directional rotation:

$$D \in \{\text{Left}, \text{Right}\} \tag{3}$$

When an agent occupies a cell, it reads the color, rotates left or right, overwrites the cell with a new color, and steps forward. The transition allows for unconstrained mapping: rules can cause accretions onto a dominant color or distribute uniformly across the spectrum.

2.2 The Massive Tournament and Fitness Function

To determine the viable rulesets, Level 1 simulates interactions on a toroidal manifold using parallel computing infrastructure (e.g., RunPod clusters) to rapidly evaluate all permutations of the 2-to-8 color automata.

Rather than generic versatility, the tournament evaluates direct head-to-head combat between automata over a low number of *macro-turns* (e.g., 8 to 16 computational pulses). The winner is determined purely by **Biomass Superiority**: the automaton that successfully overwrites the opponent's core or claims the highest cell count within the turn limit.

3 Level 2: Evolved Chess

Level 2 transitions into a turn-based, two-player symmetric strategy game played on a massive 512×512 toroidal grid.

3.1 The Arsenal and The Fixed Pulse

Each player selects a customized arsenal of four distinct rulesets harvested from Level 1. Activating a piece triggers a massive computational burst. Upon activation, the piece executes its transition function δ for exactly $2^{14} = 16,384$ computational steps. This guarantees the piece breaks past local chaos and builds a major structural trail.

3.2 Faction-Agnostic Trail Stigmergy

When an active piece traverses a path, it acts with complete indifference to ownership. Because all pieces share compatible rule structures, any trail tile is read purely as an environmental variable.

3.3 Core Cell Overwrite and Permadeath

When an active piece completes its 16,384-step pulse, it instantly freezes. The final coordinate is its **Core Cell**. If an active piece's trajectory processes and overwrites the color of a frozen opponent's Core Cell, the frozen piece is permanently destroyed.

3.4 Match Termination and Victory Metrics

Matches are strictly limited to a maximum of 64 moves per player. Victory is determined by a strict evaluation hierarchy:

1. **Piece Differential (Simple Biomass):** The easiest metric to compute. The player with the highest number of surviving pieces remaining on the board wins.
2. **Spatial Biomass Dominance (Complex Biomass):** If the piece count is tied, or if the tournament explicitly calls for it, the engine executes a computationally expensive evaluation of the spatial footprint. Let $O(x, y) \in \{P_1, P_2, \emptyset\}$ be an ownership matrix tracking which player's automaton was the *last* to overwrite coordinate (x, y). The Biomass B for player P is formalized as:

$$B_P = \sum_{x=1}^{512} \sum_{y=1}^{512} \mathbb{I}(O(x, y) == P) \tag{4}$$

   The player with the highest total Biomass wins.

4 Conclusion

LifeChess proposes a game-design architecture in which strategic play is built on evolved cellular-automaton dynamics rather than hand-authored piece rules. The framework separates the search for viable automata from the later two-player game, preserving emergent substrate behavior while giving players a finite and readable strategic interface. Its value is exploratory: it offers a concrete route from artificial-life dynamics to playable algorithmic game design.