

Primordial Soup (aka Ursuppe)

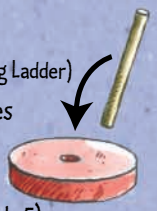
Doris Matthäus & Frank Nestel

A strategy game for 3 or 4 players 12 years and up
Duration: 2 hours

A. Contents

1 Game Board (the Primordial Soup, with a Compass and Scoring Ladder)

28 Amoebas in 4 different colors and 4 different shapes
(Before the first game you have to build the amoebas: Carefully hammer one stick in each amoeba)



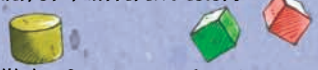
37 Biological Points (BP), small (worth 1) and large (worth 5)

25 Damage Point (DP) beads.



220 Foodstuff cubes, 55 each of 4 different colors

4 Score Markers (pawns).



33 Gene Cards, with capabilities for the amoebas. (3 Blank cards)

11 Environment Cards (each showing an ozone layer thickness and a current direction of drift, indicated in red)

2 Dice

4 Reference Booklets (detailing the game phases and Genes)

...and naturally these rules

B. Aim and idea of game

Each player controls a tribe of amoebas, at a time in the earth's history when there were no higher forms of life. At the start of the game the amoebas can feed, multiply and move in an uncoordinated fashion. By buying Genes, players can extend the capabilities of their amoebas, changing the way that the game's rules operate on them and so influencing the development of their tribe. Obviously it isn't always easy, but the more living amoebas you have, and the greater their capabilities, the greater the advance of evolution, which is the way to victory in this game.

C. Preparation

Note: words found in the Encyclopedia will be marked with an asterisk the first time they are mentioned.



The *Game Board should be laid out open in the center of the table.
Each player chooses a color and takes all the amoebas of that color, 1 reference booklet and 4 *Biological Points (BP) for himself. The big BPs count as 5.



Place two *Foodstuff cubes of each color in play, onto every space on the board. The remaining Foodstuff cubes should be placed somewhere handy. Foodstuff cubes and amoebas in colors that have not been chosen should be put away as they are not used in the game.

If there are only 3 players, only the *Gene Cards with a "3" on their bottom corner are used.



Shuffle the *Environment Cards, and place one, face up, on the *Compass in the center of the *Board. The rest of the Environment Cards are put face down.



Players then choose the order of play for the first round. Each player rolls two dice; the player who rolls highest, places his Score marker on any one of the four spaces marked 1 - 4 on the board. (With three players, one of the spaces marked 1 - 3.) Then the player who had the second highest roll chooses a space for himself and so on. Only one Score marker may be on each space at a time.



In *Ascending Order (i.e. starting with the player whose marker is in the "1" space), players place one of their amoebas onto an empty space on the board, and also give these amoebas one *Damage Point (DP).



If there are only three players, these amoebas don't receive a DP. Then in *Descending Order, players place a second amoeba onto an empty space on the board but those amoebas do not receive a DP. Players may use any of their amoebas, not necessarily the one marked #1. At the end of this setup, no space may contain more than one amoeba.

D. Course of Play

The game is divided into Rounds. Each round consists of **6 phases**, which are carried out in the order given.

PHASE 1: Movement and Feeding

Play in Ascending Order. The player whose turn it is must deal with each of his amoebas on the board in *Numerical Order (1-7).

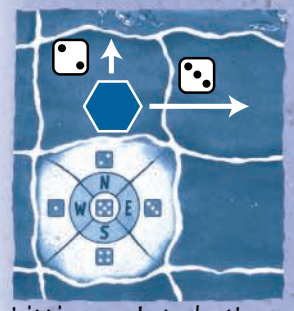
Each amoeba has one of two options:

a. the amoeba may allow itself to *Drift

The amoeba drifts one space in the direction shown on the Environment Card (indicated in red) face up on the Compass. If there is an obstacle (edge of board, Compass), the amoeba stays put. Other amoebas are not obstacles and more than one amoeba may share the same space.

b. the amoeba may *Move, using its own strength.

If the amoeba hasn't yet acquired any extra genes, this will take the form of uncoordinated movement. The player pays 1 Biological Point (BP) and rolls a die. The amoeba then moves one space in the *Direction shown by that die roll; (1=West, 2=North, etc.)



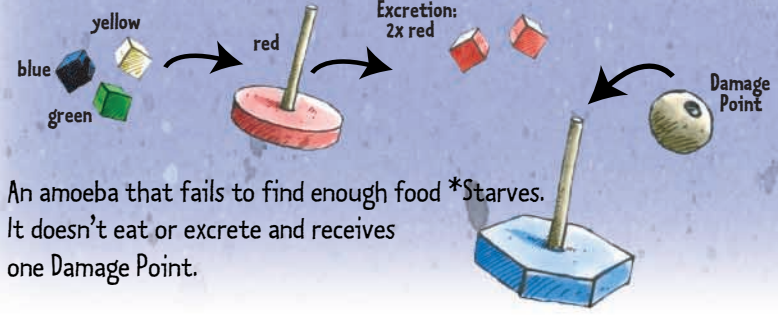
A roll of 5 means that the amoeba remains in place; a 6 gives the player a free choice of direction. If the movement would involve hitting an obstacle, the move is not carried out.

Each amoeba must either drift or move. Staying put is only possible with the appropriate die roll (a 5), if there is an obstacle, or if there is no drift (the middle of the Compass pictured on the current Environment Card is shaded red.)

Feeding

Once the amoeba has moved or drifted, it attempts to *Feed. An amoeba eats three Foodstuff cubes per turn, but never one of its own color. In a four player game it eats one cube of each of the other three colors. In a three player game, it eats one Foodstuff cube of one color and two of another color – the player decides which color is eaten once and which twice.

If an amoeba finds enough food, the food that it has eaten is replaced by two cubes of the amoeba's own color. In the course of the game this may lead to a *Shortage of Food on that space. (The cubes that are lacking are not replaced with another color.)



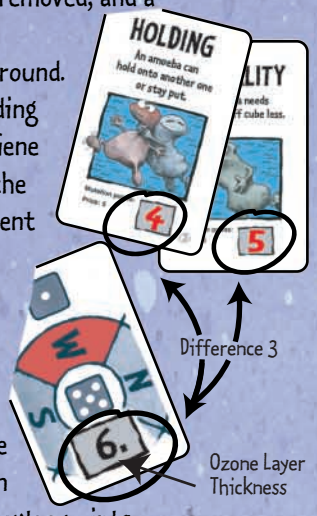
An amoeba that fails to find enough food *Starves. It doesn't eat or excrete and receives one Damage Point.

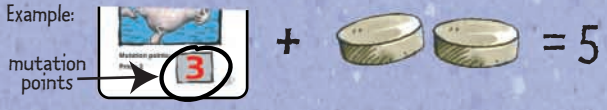
Once an amoeba has moved and eaten (or failed to), the next amoeba takes its turn. Once a player has dealt with all his amoebas on the board, the next player in Ascending Order takes his turn.

PHASE 2: Environment and Gene Defects

The old Environment Card on the Compass is removed, and a new one put on the Compass.

*Gene Defects do not occur during the first round. In subsequent rounds, each player, in Descending Order, adds all the *Mutation Points on his Gene Cards together. If the total is greater than the *Ozone Layer Thickness, as shown on the current Environment Card, then he must balance the difference. He can do this by giving up Genes and/or by paying Biological Points (BP). Genes which have been given up count as the number of Mutation Points on them; each BP counts as 1. If the only way to balance the difference is by giving up more points on Genes than is necessary, the player loses the extra points.





Genes returned to the pool can be bought again.

PHASE 3: New Genes

In Descending Order, each player can use BPs to buy new Genes. Each player in turn has one chance to buy the card or cards they want and can afford.

No player may possess a duplicate Gene.

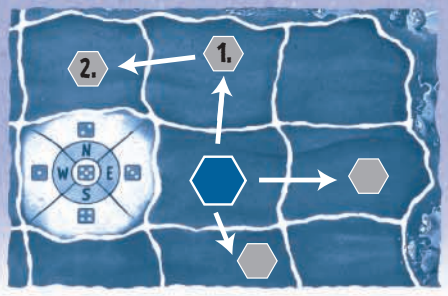
The Genes are described in detail in the reference booklets.

The rules on the Gene Cards override the standard rules.

A new Gene immediately applies for all amoebas of a player.

PHASE 4: Cell Division

Play in Descending Order. A player first gets **10 BPs.** Using these, plus any that they may have saved from earlier rounds, they may cause their amoebas to divide. At a price of **6 BPs** per amoeba, one or more new amoebas with no Damage Points may be placed on the board. New amoebas must be placed in a space that contains no amoeba of the same color but that borders (horizontally or vertically but not diagonally) a space which already contains an amoeba of the same color. This amoeba may be one that has just been placed on the board.



If a player has no amoebas left on the board, he may place one amoeba free in a space of his choice.
If a player only has one amoeba on the board, he may place a second anywhere on the board, but must still pay the normal cost.

PHASE 5: Deaths



Amoebas that have 2 or more Damage Points die a natural *Death. If an amoeba dies, it is removed from the board, and replaced by two Foodstuff cubes of each of the four (or three) colors in play.
Amoebas that have died may be used again by the player later in the game.

PHASE 6: Scoring

In Descending Order, the players' Score Markers are moved. The amount advanced is dependent on the number of live amoebas that the player has on the board and on how many Genes the player has.

ADVANCE TABLE

Amoebas	0 – 2	3	4	5	6	7
Spaces	0	1	2	4	5	6

Gene cards	0 – 2	3	4	5	6+
Spaces	0	1	2	3	4

Important: Advanced Genes (PERSISTENCE, MOVEMENT II, AGGRESSION, ARMOR) count as **two cards** on the advance table. The Gene RAY PROTECTION does **not count** towards advancing.
Spaces on the *Scoring Ladder that are already occupied are "leapfrogged", so that there is only ever one marker per space on the ladder.

example:
7 spaces



Game End? Winner?

If, after all markers have advanced, there are no markers in the dark *Finish Zone of the Scoring Ladder, the game enters another round, starting again with phase 1. If, however, one or more markers have reached the dark Finish Zone at the end of the Scoring Ladder, the game ends at this point.
Alternatively, the game ends after the Scoring phase in the round in which the last Environment Card is turned over.
The player whose marker is furthest along the Scoring Ladder wins the game.
You can shorten the game by declaring an earlier Finish Zone.



The Encyclopedia of Primordial Soup

The following is an alphabetical index of some key terms from the game.

Ascending Order, Descending Order: When the players are in an Ascending Order phase, the player whose marker is last on the Scoring Ladder (i.e. last place) plays first, then the next-to-last player, all the way up to the first place player, who goes last.
A phase played in Descending Order is played the other way around: the player who is in first place goes first and play continues down the line until the person in last place takes his turn last.

Biological Points: Biological Points (BPs) represent the measure of vitality of a tribe of amoebas. You use BPs to cause amoebas to divide or to buy Genes. You may also spend BPs to pay for the difference between your Mutation Points and the Ozone Layer Thickness.

Compass: The Compass in the center of the board converts a die roll into a specific direction of movement for the amoebas. Numbers 1 – 4 each give a specific direction, a 5 means that the amoeba fails to move, while a 6 means that the player has a free choice of direction. The Compass also shows the current *Direction of Drift.

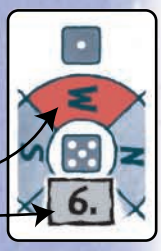
Damage, Damage Points: Each amoeba collects Damage Points (DP) if it cannot eat. A newborn amoeba has no Damage Points; an unmutated amoeba dies in the round that it collects a second Damage Point.

Death: The death of an amoeba during phase 5 is a Natural Death, whether it is caused by an accumulation of DPs (Damage) or through the action of the gene AGGRESSION. The amoeba is removed from the board and returned to its owner. It is replaced by two Foodstuff cubes of **EACH** color. Amoebas may also die a Violent Death. This takes place during phase 1 and is the result of the action of another amoeba that possesses the gene STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL. Here too, the amoeba is removed from the board, but it is only replaced by one cube of each color, since the attacking amoeba has already fed on its victim.

Direction: There are 4 basic directions in Primordial Soup: North, South, West and East. Amoebas may only move in one of these directions; they may never move diagonally. The four directions are printed on the Compass in the center of the board, numbered from 1 to 4. The number 5 forces an amoeba to stand still, while a 6 gives the player a free choice of direction.

Drift: The opposite of active movement. An amoeba that doesn't actively move in phase 1 may drift freely in the direction indicated by the red-shaded area on the Compass.

Environment Cards: There are 11 Environment Cards in the game. Each card shows two things, the Direction of Drift and the Ozone Layer Thickness.



Feeding: An amoeba without any special capability eats 3 Foodstuff cubes per turn, but never one of its own color. With 4 players, it eats one cube of each of the other 3 colors, with 3 players it eats 2 cubes of one color and one of the other, the player deciding which colors to eat. Once it has eaten, it excretes two cubes of its own color. An amoeba that can't find enough to eat, or not the right combination of colors, starves, ie, **eats nothing,** excretes nothing and gets a Damage Point.

Finish Zone: The final 10 spaces of the Scoring Ladder, printed in a darker color than the rest. The game ends at the end of the round in which one or more markers reach the Finish Zone.

Foodstuff cubes: These are the basis of the game. Each amoeba requires a sufficient amount of Foodstuff cubes to survive and excretes more Foodstuff cubes, which can be used by other amoeba. If an amoeba dies, it leaves behind the Foodstuff cubes from which it is made.

Game Board: The Board includes the following features.
The Primordial Soup, comprising 19 spaces. An island in the center, with a Compass on it, which shows the Direction of Drift during that round.
The island is out of bounds to amoebas. Around the edge of the board runs the Scoring Ladder.

Game End: The game ends after the Scoring phase (phase 6) in which one or more markers reaches the dark colored Finish Zone of the Scoring Ladder. Alternatively, the game ends after the Scoring phase of the round in which the last Environment Card is turned over. In either case, the player whose marker is furthest along the Scoring Ladder is the winner of the game.

Gene Defects: If the sum of the mutation points on the cards that a player possesses exceeds the Ozone Layer Thickness on the current Environment Card, then the player must pay the difference, either by giving up Genes, or by paying BPs.
Example: A player has the Genes STREAMLINE, DIVISION RATE, and SPEED.
The total Mutation Points is 4 + 3 + 5 = 12. If the Ozone Layer Thickness on the current Environment Card is 6, the player must pay the difference of 6 points. There are several ways that they could do this. They could give up 6 BPs, or they could return Speed (worth 3 points) and 3 BPs. Should the player not have any free BPs, they would have to give up two cards. The value of the two cards would be more than the 6 points they must give up, but that would be their bad luck as there is no cash back scheme in force here!

Gene, Gene Card: Each Gene gives all the owning player's amoebas an extra capability. For these amoebas, the normal rules are superceded by the rule on the Gene Card. The various capabilities are described in the reference booklets.
Each Gene has a price, payable in BPs, that a player must pay before they can take the card.
Each card also has a Mutation Point value.



If the sum of the Mutation Points on your Genes exceed the current Ozone Layer Thickness, a Gene Defect will occur (see Gene Defects).
No player may buy a second copy of a Gene they already possess.
Advanced Genes: To buy one of these Genes (indicated with a red title), you must give up a basic Gene as well as BPs (and the basic Gene must have been in your possession for at least one round). A player holding an Advanced Gene cannot buy the basic Gene that would be used to purchase it.
Example: In order to buy the Advanced Gene PERSISTENCE, a player must pay 4 BPs and give up the basic Gene SPEED. You cannot buy SPEED then buy PERSISTENCE in the same phase. Once a player has PERSISTENCE, they can no longer buy SPEED.

Movement: This is the opposite of Drifting. This uncoordinated movement costs 1 BP and is not always successful, since the direction of movement is determined by a die roll.

Numerical Order: A player's amoebas move, die, etc. in numerical order - deal with amoeba #1, then #2, all the way up to #7. Amoebas that aren't on the board do not count. When placing an amoeba on the board, a player may use any available amoeba regardless of its number.

Ozone Layer Thickness: The thicker the Ozone layer, the less chance of unwanted Gene Defects. The thickness of the layer changes from round to round, as indicated on the current Environment Card.

Scoring, Scoring Ladder: Each player has a Score Marker on the Scoring Ladder that runs around the edge of the board. Only one marker may be on any space at a time. The movement of markers up the Scoring Ladder is governed by the Advance Table. If at the end of a round there is a marker or markers in the dark Finish Zone of the Scoring Ladder, the game is over and the winner is the player furthest into this zone.

Shortage of Food: The total amount of Foodstuff cubes is limited. If there is an insufficient number of cubes off-board to replace, for example, a dead amoeba, then the cubes that are lacking are not replaced with another color, and the space does not then have as many cubes in it as would otherwise be the case.

Starve, Starvation: An amoeba that does not find enough Foodstuff cubes in phase 1 of a round, or that does not find the right combination, starves. It eats nothing, excretes nothing and gets one Damage Point.

And like every time a Thank You to all who helped:
Ottmar the perfectionist of aggression; Antje, Jens, Martin, KH, their early bootlegged version is probably the most beautiful edition of all times; Arndt and Friends; Heiko; our all purpose test team, both Holgers, Dagmar, Mattes, Klaus, Michael, Sabine and Ralf, Beate and Thomas, for them we drove the game all the way to Scotland; Uwe and Martin; Richard, Wof and the other of the Finckh clan; Hans and his testers in Munich; Jörg, Bernd, Ricarda and their friends; Aaron, Mark, Alan, Kurt and Frank who playtested Primordial Soup at the Gathering of Friends.

Apart from that, many people have helped putting the games into boxes: Günther, Bine - she took care that no one slowed down; Fabiola, Margarita and Astrid who only came over for boxing; Werner and Anneli, who finally were allowed to box for us.

With the first edition rules in German and English we got help from Volker, John and John.

After so many years and still being happy to explain, box and ship this game, seeing it programmed for fun and to teach students, still seeing new genes and variations being invented a big thank you to the global game community who spread this game to at least four of the five continents.



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For a FAQ and a list of Gene combinations go to www.zmangames.com.
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