

FastLife Version 2.7 documentation

COLLABORATORS

	<i>TITLE :</i> FastLife Version 2.7 documentation		
<i>ACTION</i>	<i>NAME</i>	<i>DATE</i>	<i>SIGNATURE</i>
WRITTEN BY		March 15, 2022	

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Chapter 1

FastLife Version 2.7 documentation

1.1 FastLife Version 2.7 documentation

FastLife Program Documentation

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Version 2.7 16-Jan-1994

FastLife is an Amiga implementation of Conway's Game of Life.

FastLife may be freely distributed.

Amiga Software Release 2.04+ and LIBS:retools.library 38+ are required to run FastLife.

Quick Start

Credits

Features and Changes

The Game of Life

About FastLife

Starting FastLife

Using FastLife

Menus

Notes

File Format

Interesting Patterns

If You Have Trouble

FastLife and Pre-2.04 AmigaDOS

Tomas Rokicki's Life Program

Author

## 1.2 Quick Start

NOTE - Kickstart 2.04+ and LIBS:reqtools.library 38.961+ are required to run FastLife.

1. Double click on the FastLife Icon
2. Select "Cancel" in the screen mode requester
3. Select the "Control-Run" menu item

OR

1. Double-click on the FastLife Icon
2. Select "Cancel" in the screen mode requester
3. Select "Project-Open" menu item
4. Select "acorn.life" and press <return>
5. Click in the center of the screen
6. Select the "Control-Run" menu item

## 1.3 Credits

- o Intuition interface and integration by Ron Charlton
- o Blitter life routines by Tomas Rokicki
- o Requesters use ReqTools by Nico Francois

## 1.4 Features and Changes

Features

Changes from FastLife 2.2

## 1.5 Features

- o Full Intuition interface
  - o Any screen width and height (if you have enough memory)
  - o Screen mode and screen size requester
  - o Random Field Generation
  - o Torus mode (screen edge wraps around)
  - o Speed control
  - o Run for a specified number of generations
  - o Run to a specified generation
  - o Runs from Workbench and CLI under Kickstart 2.04+
  - o 150+ Life patterns in text file format
  - o 14 new "SpaceFiller" patterns
-

## 1.6 Changes from FastLife 2.2

FastLife uses new, blazingly fast Life routines written by Tomas Rokicki. FastLife can now update a 320 by 200 screen at up to 170 generations per second on a 25 MHz Amiga 3000, depending on what pattern is displayed. Your mileage may vary.

You can get Tomas' Life program, version 6.1, on Fred Fish disk 837. FastLife no longer has a CPU mode and BLITTER mode; it always uses Tomas' routines.

FastLife will generate a random field on request.

FastLife has a torus option that connects the top edge of the life universe to the bottom edge and the left edge to the right edge.

FastLife has AmigaGuide format documentation.

Miscellaneous corrections (that I hope no one has found a need for) have been made.

## 1.7 The Game of Life

In 1970 John Horton Conway, a mathematician at the University of Cambridge, invented the game of Life. It was introduced by Martin Gardner in his October 1970 Scientific American column. Conway's goal was to create a board "game" with simple rules that would exhibit complex behavior. The game is played on an infinite checkerboard. Each cell on the checkerboard, is either alive or dead (ON or OFF). Time moves in steps; each step marks the life of one generation.

Each cell's condition (ON or OFF) in the next generation is based on the life in it and its eight neighboring cells. A cell is represented by the asterisk (\*) below; its eight neighbors are numbered -

```
123
4*5
678
```

Three rules decide a cell's state in the next generation:

1. If there are 2 ON neighbors the cell stays ON or OFF
2. If there are 3 ON neighbors the cell is ON
3. 0, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 or 8 ON neighbors the cell is OFF

The analogy to real life is this: too many neighbors and the cell dies from overcrowding, too few neighbors and the cell dies from loneliness. Three cells results in trisexual mating.

The ON/OFF state is determined for all cells on the board before changing to the next generation.

FastLife uses one pixel on the screen to represent one cell on the board. The screen dimensions determine how many cells are available in

---

FastLife, so the board is not infinite, as defined by Conway.

An excellent reference for learning more about the history and philosophical implications of Life is

"The Recursive Universe" by William Poundstone,  
Contemporary Books, Chicago, 1985

The book consists of alternating chapters about Conway's game of Life and modern physics, and what the game of Life can reveal about the beginning of biological life and its replication.

## 1.8 About FastLife

I developed FastLife because I wanted to combine the speed of ←  
Tomas  
Rokicki's Life routines with an Intuition interface and access to many  
of the classic Life patterns.

The Life patterns supplied with FastLife are stored in a simple text  
file (see

File Format  
below). Although FastLife does not allow  
on-screen editing of Life patterns, you may use your favorite text  
editor to create text file patterns to load into FastLife.

Conway defined an infinite board for Life; FastLife limits itself to the  
size of a screen on your Amiga. Patterns that spread to the edge of the  
screen will be "eaten" away there, unless you have the

Torus  
option  
turned on, so you should be sure that you select a screen size that will  
contain the entire pattern you want to view. This corruption of the  
Life pattern at the edge of the screen is not detected by FastLife; you  
must observe for yourself when this happens.

The corruption occurs at the edge of the screen, which may not be the  
same as edge of what is visible to you, depending on whether you choose  
a screen size larger than the default for the screen mode.

## 1.9 Starting FastLife

You may start FastLife from either the Workbench or CLI (Shell).

WORKBENCH

SHELL or CLI

---



## 1.10 WORKBENCH

You may start FastLife from Workbench by double-clicking its icon. Several ToolTypes may be used. To set a ToolType click once on FastLife's icon and then press Right-Amiga-I. Click on New or an existing ToolType to edit. Enter for example,

```
ALIVECHAR=X
```

Finally, select Save. FastLife will then honor the ToolType. The supplied icon has parentheses around most of the ToolTypes. Remove the parentheses to use that ToolType.

The ToolTypes available are:

```
ALIVECHAR=x
```

```
FILEPAT=#?name.???
```

You must use uppercase for the text to the left of the equal sign for FastLife to recognize the ToolType.

Do not change the WINDOW= ToolType. It is used to display error messages under unusual circumstances.

The character that follows ALIVECHAR= indicates what character in Picture files represents an ON cell. All other characters in the pattern will indicate OFF cells.

The string that follows FILEPAT= determines what file names appear in the Open file requester. Amiga wildcards are supported. "?" (no quotes) in the string matches any one character. "#?" (no quotes) matches any number of characters. Upper/lowercase do not matter. Some examples:

```
#?.life      any name ending in ".life"
#??.???     any name that has a three-character extension
#?breeder#? any name that contains "breeder" anywhere in it
```

## 1.11 SHELL or CLI

You may start FastLife from a Shell or CLI by typing

```
1> FastLife      or
```

```
1> run FastLife
```

FastLife's template is ALIVECHAR/K,FILEPAT/K. Typing

```
1> FastLife ?
```

will display the template and wait for you to enter arguments.

To specify the Picture file character for ON pixels as the uppercase letter 'O' use

```
1> FastLife ALIVECHAR O
```

Finally,

```
1> FastLife FILEPAT #?.lif
```

will set the file requester pattern to "#?.lif" initially. You can change the settings for CALCMODE and FILEPAT after FastLife has started.

NOTE - The Life files supplied with FastLife all end in ".life". "#?.life" is FastLife's default pattern.

## 1.12 Using FastLife

Effects of Screen Mode & Size

Choosing a Screen Mode & Size

Run Life Run! See Life Run!

A Bug by Any Other Name

## 1.13 Effects of Screen Mode & Size

WARNING - The Amiga is capable of producing screen modes that will cause physical damage to certain types of monitors. See your Amiga documentation for further information. Do not select screen modes that your monitor does not support.

You may choose a screen width, height, and one of several screen modes for the FastLife screen. The screen mode determines the maximum number of pixels visible vertically and horizontally. Width and height determine the actual size of the screen, part of which may not be visible.

For instance, if you select a screen mode of NTSC:Lores, width of 600 and height of 512, then a life pattern up to 600 by 512 will fit on the screen. But you will only be able to see a 320 by 200 portion of the screen at once. Pushing the mouse pointer against the edge of the screen will cause the screen to scroll.

Another way of looking at this: The screen mode determines how big the pixels are, width and height determines how many there are.

You may select any screen width or height greater than 32 and smaller than about 16384. Screen sizes smaller than 320 by 200 may prevent displaying requesters and menus. You may want to remember the menu keyboard shortcuts, especially the ScreenSize shortcut, if you choose a small screen size.

---

Be sure to read

A Bug by Any Other Name  
below to learn how FastLife

updates your view of the Life universe.

## 1.14 Choosing a Screen Mode & Size

When you start Fastlife it will open a screen mode requester. Select a screen mode, height and width. You may click on a mode to select it, or double click to select and close the requester. NOTE - You must press either <Return> or <Tab> after changing the width or height. You may click a checkmark to select a default. Click "Ok" to create a screen as you've selected, or click "Cancel" to quit FastLife. You may use the right Amiga key with an underlined letter in the requester to select a button.

FastLife will exit if memory is insufficient for the selected screen size. If you can't get the screen size you want, try closing other screens, windows and projects/tools to free up memory. You may even want to reboot your Amiga in case memory has been fragmented by other programs.

## 1.15 Run Life Run! See Life Run!

After opening its screen, FastLife will display its name. You may ↔  
select

the menu item Control-Run and see FastLife run for over 3100 generations before the pattern becomes stable, or you may immediately select menu item Project-New or Project-Open to clear the screen (and open a file).

You can use the Left-Amiga-N and Left-Amiga-M key combinations to expose the FastLife screen or hide it behind the Workbench screen. You can also click in the small FastLife window on the Workbench to bring FastLife's screen to the front or use the Project-

Screen To Back  
menu

item.

## 1.16 A Bug by Any Other Name

A bug by any other name would smell... so I call it a feature.

FastLife does its Life calculations in a buffer, then transfers the result to your screen. The transfer takes a significant amount of time. When you have a screen that is near the default for a particular screen mode (e.g., 320x200 for LORES) FastLife updates the entire screen every generation. When you select a screen size that is very much larger than the default then FastLife gets lazy and only updates the visible part of

the screen. This helps FastLife run as fast as it can. A side effect of this might be considered a bug: FastLife only updates the "standard" part of the screen and not the overscan portion. So, in some cases you will see a small band at the right edge and the bottom edge of your view that is not being updated. Note that it is only your view that is not being updated entirely; FastLife always updates its entire buffer.

If you use one of the number keys '2' through '9' to slow FastLife, then it decides you are not in a hurry and it will update the entire screen every generation. If the static band at the edge of your view is a bother, press the '2' key. FastLife will then update the whole screen, and you lose a little speed.

## 1.17 Menus

FastLife has the following menus:

Project

New

Open...

Open Again

About

Screen To Back

Generation

Show

<G>

Zero

<Z>

Run For...

<F>

Stop At...

<H>

Screen Size

<E>

Priority

Lower

Normal

Higher

---

```
Quit
    <Q>

Control
    Once
        </>
    Speed
    Run
        <R>
-----
    Torus
        <T>
    Random
    Random Field
        <P>
-----
    Random Seed
    Set Seed...
    Set Count...
        <C>
```

The hierarchy follows:

```
Project
Control
```

## 1.18 Project

```
New
Open...
Open Again
About
Screen To Back
Generation
Screen Size
Priority
```

Quit

## 1.19 New

New clears the screen. Use it when you want to start with an empty screen.

## 1.20 Open...

Open allows you to load a new Life pattern from disk. The supplied Life file names end with ".life" (no quotes).

A ReqTools requester will display files that match the displayed pattern. Upper and lower case do not matter. Click on a name or enter one. Double click on a file name or select "Ok" to open it. The "get" button will re-read the directory. NOTE - Earlier versions of FastLife added ".life" to a file name if it was not supplied. FastLife no longer does.

The mouse pointer will change to a picture of a glider to indicate FastLife is waiting for a click. Click on the screen to indicate the position of the top-left corner of the pattern. FastLife can read four file types: Absolute, Relative, Picture, and RLE (denoted in the files with "#A", "#R", "#P" or "#E"). See File Format below. You can use the right mouse button to cancel picking a screen location.

FastLife will indicate if part of the Life pattern falls off the screen's edge.

NOTE - The Life files are separated into directories by screen size. Within the 320 by 200 directory the files are in sub-directories solely so floppy disk users won't have to wait for the file requester to load one hundred and fifty filenames when opening a file.

## 1.21 Open Again

Open Again opens the previous file again. You must again click to show where to load the pattern on the screen. You may want to select "New" before using "Open Again". The file name is not lost when "New" is selected.

## 1.22 About

---

About shows the current version number and date, along with credits to the authors.

## 1.23 Screen To Back

Screen To Back sends the FastLife screen behind other screens.

## 1.24 Generation

Show

Zero

Run For...

Stop At...

## 1.25 Show

Show shows the current generation number. The first generation is numbered zero.

## 1.26 Zero

Zero sets the generation number to zero.

## 1.27 Run For...

Run For opens a requester. You may select a number of generations to run. For example, if the current generation is 112, and you select 100, FastLife will run to generation 212 and stop. You may stop FastLife before the "Run For" limit is reached.

## 1.28 Stop At...

Stop At opens a requester. You may select the generation number to run to. You may stop FastLife before the "Stop At" limit is reached.

---

## 1.29 Screen Size

Screen Size opens a screen mode requester. NOTE - The current Life pattern on the screen will be lost when this menu item is selected. See

Choosing a Screen Mode & Size

.

## 1.30 Priority

Set FastLife's task priority.

Caveat: Task priorities on the Amiga range from -127 to +127. It might appear that increasing or decreasing Fastlife's priority by only one would have little effect. This is not true since the priority number only establishes an ORDER. The difference between the priorities matters not. If you select a Higher priority for FastLife it can prevent any program at a lower priority (such as zero) from running at all. Since most programs run at priority zero, FastLife with Higher Priority (1) can stall them completely. Conversely, if FastLife's priority is Lower (-1) other programs can stop FastLife completely. A complication to all this is the interaction of programs when they are waiting. A program with higher priority that is doing nothing can allow lower priority programs to run (as when a word processor is waiting for you to type something). Polite programs yield to lower priority programs as much as possible. If FastLife is running at its fastest (i.e., number key '1' selected) it will never yield to lower priority programs, thus stalling them completely. If you select a number key '2' through '9' FastLife will be waiting part of the time and will yield to other programs. If you select a Lower priority for FastLife and a higher priority program does no waiting (as when you "TYPE" a file in a CLI or Shell) FastLife will not respond to your commands. The cure for this is to cause the other program to wait (For instance, stop the mandelbrot generator, or send Break to the CLI or Shell, etc.).

Lower

Normal

Higher

## 1.31 Lower

Lower sets Fastlife's task priority to -1. AmigaOS will then allow most programs to run before FastLife since most programs run at priority zero.

---



## 1.32 Normal

Normal sets FastLife's priority to zero. Most programs run at priority zero.

## 1.33 Higher

Higher sets FastLife's priority to one. Most programs must wait on FastLife when its priority is one since programs typically run at priority zero.

## 1.34 Quit

Quit closes FastLife. The <Esc> key will also close FastLife.

## 1.35 Control

Once

Speed

Run

Torus

Random

## 1.36 Once

Once calculates one generation. You may want to use the Right-Amiga-/key combination to step FastLife one generation at a time.

## 1.37 Speed

Speed will display a brief description of how to slow FastLife. ←

Slowing

FastLife will allow you to see what is happening in more detail and will cause FastLife to update the entire screen.

Pressing one of the number keys '1' thru '9' will select fastest through slowest speed, respectively. '1' introduces no delay. Each higher numbered key slows FastLife more. '9' introduces about ten seconds of delay between each generation. Also see the caveat under

Priority

.

## 1.38 Run

Run is a toggle menu item. It causes the screen to update continuously or to stop. It will be checkmarked when FastLife is running.

## 1.39 Torus

Torus is a toggle menu item: Each time you select it you change the state of the torus option, either on or off. The screen edges wrap around when the torus option is on: the left edge of the screen touches the right edge, and the bottom edge of the screen touches the top.

Torus will be checkmarked when the torus option is on.

## 1.40 Random

Sometimes you may want FastLife to create a random field and see what develops.

Random has several sub-items that allow you to control how random pixels are set. You may control how many pixels are set. You may select a seed for the random number generator that picks which pixels to set, or you may ask the computer to select a seed based on the system time.

Random Field

Random Seed

Set Seed...

Set Count...

## 1.41 Random Field

Random Field sets pixels randomly on the screen.

Set Count...

lets you determine how many pixels will be set.

You may ask FastLife to select a Random Seed

.

You may select a seed with Set Seed...

Regardless of how you select the seed it will be used once. If you wish to regenerate a particular field you must use "Set Seed" again. You cannot (at least you probably cannot) recreate a particular field that you generated based on a "Random Seed".

## 1.42 Random Seed

Random Seed lets the computer select a seed randomly. The seed will be used when setting a Random Field. The computer will select one of  $2.8 \times 10^{14}$  seeds randomly based on the system time. You only get one use of a seed, so you cannot reproduce a field that you generated with "Random Seed".

Also see

Set Seed...

## 1.43 Set Seed...

Set Seed... lets you select one of 65535 seeds to be used when creating a Random Field. See also Random Seed.

## 1.44 Set Count...

Set Count lets you determine how many pixels will be set when creating a Random Field. The default is five thousand pixels. You can use "Random Field" several times in a row to set more pixels.

Because the pixels are selected randomly, fewer than you specify may be turned on since a pixel may be selected multiple times but can be turned on only once.

## 1.45 Notes

FastLife is VERY dependent on having FAST RAM available. It will run properly without FAST RAM, but, as you might guess, it will be much slower. A lifeform that can be updated at 82 generations per second with FAST RAM will slow to 34 generations per second without it. If you have FAST RAM and FastLife seems too slow, try running "avail flush" from the CLI. This is necessary because the Amiga will keep libraries in FAST RAM, even when no one has them open and provide CHIP RAM to requests until it runs low on CHIP RAM.

Selecting "Control-Once" or "Control-Run" will appear to do nothing if there is no Life pattern on the screen. Open a pattern file first. Also note that selecting speed key <9> may make it appear FastLife is stalled when it is not. Press the <1> key to run as fast as possible.

You may make multiple menu selections at one time. For example: Press and hold the right mouse button, point at "Project-New" and click the left mouse button; point at "Project-Open" and click the left mouse button. Release the right mouse button. This will clear the screen and bring up "Open" in one menu action. Multiple menu selections are explained in your Amiga software manual.

Often FastLife can calculate generations faster than the display rate of thirty (NTSC) or twenty-five (PAL) frames per second. You may see cases where gliders or other life forms appear to move without being updated properly. Don't worry, FastLife is calculating each generation correctly. Try pressing a number key, <2> through <9>, to slow FastLife and allow you to see all of the action.

FastLife uses a buffer and a screen to do its work. The buffer will be in FAST RAM if it is available; the screen memory must be CHIP RAM. The buffer and the screen each use approximately the same amount of memory:  $(\text{ScreenHeight} * \text{ScreenWidth} / 8)$  bytes.

## 1.46 File Format

FastLife's patterns are stored in files with names that end in ". ←  
life".

Many of the patterns were obtained with xlife version 2.0 for the X-Windows System, and retain a subset of the formats used there.

You can make your own Life patterns using your favorite text editor. Follow the format described below and save the file as plain text. Multitasking on the Amiga will allow you to switch back and forth between FastLife and your editor to speed your work.

Lines in the files that begin with "#C" are comment lines.

Picture File Format

Absolute File Format

---

Relative File Format

Run-Length Encoded File Format

## 1.47 Picture File Format

The Picture file format has a "#P" in a line before the pattern itself. Each line that follows represents a line of cells across the screen, with ALIVECHAR being an ON cell and any other character being an OFF cell. ALIVECHAR defaults to '\*'.

An example of a Picture file is

```
#P
** .
. **
. * .
```

## 1.48 Absolute File Format

The Absolute file format consists of pairs of absolute X-Y addresses of the cells to turn ON, one pair per line. The file may or may not have "#A" before the pattern.

## 1.49 Relative File Format

The Relative file must contain a line with "#R" before the pattern. Each following line has two numbers interpreted as an X-Y address relative to the position on the screen where you clicked. The upper left of the image will normally be placed where you click the mouse on the screen. Two integers may follow the "#R" to offset the image.

## 1.50 Run-Length Encoded File Format

The Run-Length Encoded (RLE) file format has a line beginning with "#E" before the pattern. It may also have a line of the form

```
x = <width>, y = <height>
```

to indicate the size of the life form. The pattern then follows. Here is an example pattern:

```
10ob5o3b5o$10bobol2b20
3b4o!
```

'o' indicates an On cell. 'b' indicates a Blank cell. '\$' indicates the end of the current line on the screen. A number before any of these

---

means to repeat it that number of times. '!' marks the end of the pattern. Whitespace in the pattern is ignored.

## 1.51 Interesting Patterns

Some patterns I find particularly interesting are:

```
Alu.life
BreederRLE.life (Use a SuperHiRes, 1280x350 screen)
bunnies.life
f2.life
glider1_2.life
glider2_2.life
gliderglidergun.life
oscillators.life
p24.life
p26.life
p55.life
rabbit.life
randomgun.life
round.life
switchengine.life
```

## 1.52 If You Have Trouble

Be sure you have a pattern on the screen before you RUN or it will appear that nothing is happening.

Be sure the file you are trying to open has #P, #R, #A or #E before the pattern, otherwise nothing will be displayed.

Press the <1> key to make FastLife run as fast as possible, or press the <2> key to avoid the static bottom and right edge. Note that dragging the screen down with the left-amiga key and LMB will confuse FastLife and the screen may not be updated correctly. Either don't drag the screen down, or if you do, press the <2> key so that the entire screen is updated.

Make sure you have FAST RAM available. FastLife runs much slower when it cannot get FAST RAM.

Close other screens, windows, projects and tools (or reboot) to free CHIP and FAST memory if you can't get the screen size you want.

Reboot to remove memory fragmentation.

## 1.53 FastLife and Pre-2.04 AmigaDOS

---

If you have an earlier release of AmigaDOS you can run an earlier version (1.1) of FastLife found on Fred Fish's Library disk number 608. It should run with AmigaDOS 1.2, 1.3 and 2.03 and will use the ARP library if it is available.

## 1.54 Tomas Rokicki's Life Program

Tomas Rokicki's Life program, version 6.1, can be found on Fred Fish's Library disk number 837. Tomas' 6.1 Life routines are responsible for FastLife's speed.

## 1.55 Author

Ron Charlton  
9002 Balcor Circle  
Knoxville, TN 37923 USA

(615)694-0800 evenings Eastern Time

Internet: charlton@cs.utk.edu  
charltr@euclid.eng.ornl.gov  
charltoncr@ornl.gov

Please send any comments, bug reports, suggestions, etc., to the author.

FastLife was developed with SAS/C version 6.50 and has been tested with Amiga Software Release 2.1. It should work with release 2.04 and later.