

ChessBase Cafe

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Past and Future Features

Every piece of software has too few features for some people and too many for others. Most people might just want to write a letter in Word and don't use 95% of the features. ChessBase software is in the same situation. It has dozens of features, a few of them barely documented.

If you one are of the majority of people who consider instruction manuals a dire insult to your intelligence, you have to make sure you spend some time poking around the menus and making extensive use of the online help. That's a term that harkens back to the Mesozoic pre-internet age and actually means the help files that are included inside the program.

In most places in Fritz there is a Help button you can click to get an explanation of the features of wherever you happen to find yourself. On the main screens you can just press F1 to launch the help file. From there you can navigate using the index or the search. About half the questions I receive each month can be answered by using the online help or by checking the ChessCafe.com [ChessBase FAQ](#). Many other problems are solved by making sure you have the latest free online upgrade. Log-in to Playchess.com and Query Upgrade under the help menu.

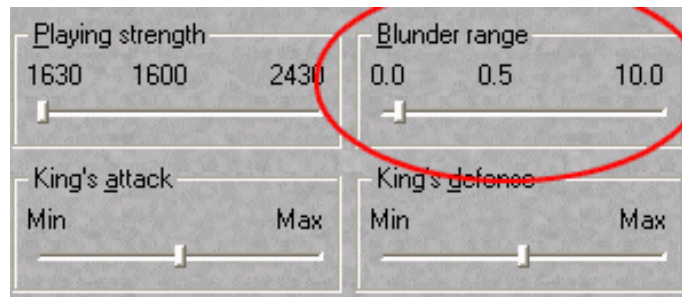
This month we're going to take quick looks at a few of the lesser-known or poorly understood Fritz features. After that, something even more important, a call for your suggestions for new and/or improved features; this is your chance to share your brilliant ideas to make Fritz better.

1) Fritz the Quitter. There's not much point in having a training partner that doesn't put up a fight. Fritz is set to resign when things are totally hopeless, but this isn't very helpful when you are practicing your technique. One of the built-in training options (Tools – Training) is the endgame. You pick a position from list and then play it out against Fritz. For example, if you want to learn how to mate with bishop and knight, doing it repeatedly against a machine is a good way to practice.

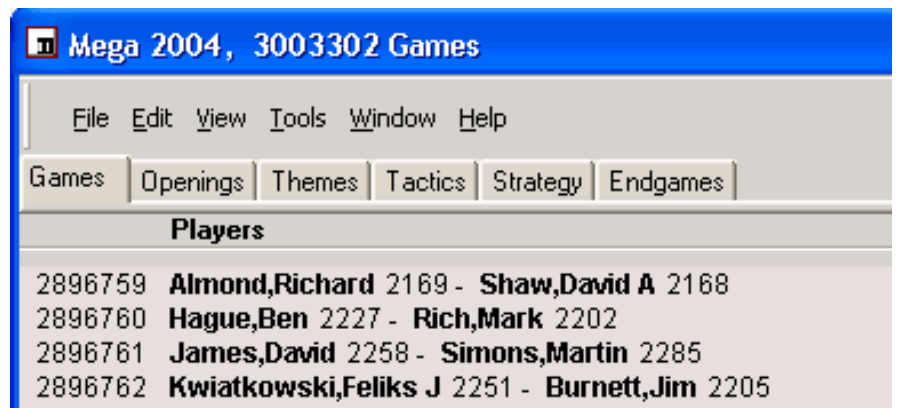
But sometimes Fritz will resign, apparently having more confidence in your technique than you do. You can prevent this by going to Tools – Options and the Clocks+Notation tab. Don't ask me why it's here, but this is where you can tell Fritz never to resign. That way you'll improve your technique and also have the satisfaction of delivering mate.

2) Fritz the Patzer. Putting the resign setting at “never” is also a good idea if you are playing against the “handicap and fun” levels. (Game – Levels) Most of these settings play abominably; worse than a beginner in how they randomly throw away material. To cap it off, Fritz will often give up a few pieces and promptly resign!

No matter which handicap level you pick (patzer, reckless, little brother, etc.) you should lower the “blunder range” to something less than 1.0. Anything higher and it can look more like checkers than chess with Fritz thinking it has to capture everything, defended or not.



3) Check the Tabs. These aren't exactly hidden features, but several windows make use of many tabs with useful information. The board window defaults to the notation tab, and you also have the cute-but-useless “score sheet” and the handy “openings book” tabs. For some quick opening training you can leave the view on the opening book and use it as a cheat sheet as you play. It will show you the most common moves as well as the one the Fritz book has been told is the best. I like to combine this with the opening training feature so I can see all the variations as I go. You can call it cheating, but only you and your computer will know. You can switch back to the notation tab at any time when you are done peeking at the opening book.



The other handy tabs are on the database screen. (File – Open – Database or F12) Along with the Games list, you have Openings, Themes, Tactics, Strategy, and Endgames. Unless you have the Mega or Big database, these tabs should be empty, offering four buttons. (Select Key, Install Empty Key, Install Big Key, Install Small Key) You should install the Big Key for each tab. This sorts the games into very convenient theme subdirectories you can browse. (It can take awhile to install a key.)

You can even do this with databases of your own games, which is very cool. Want to see all the games in which you played the old Bxh7+ Kxh7 Ng5+ sacrifice? How about all your rook vs. minor piece endgames? No problem, just install the Big Key for each of the tabs. This is really a powerful tool, pre-sorting all the games into hundreds of categories automatically. You could create them all manually one by one using the search mask, but this would take weeks instead of minutes.

So now, over to you! What do you consider the weakest parts of Fritz 8? What killer features would you like to see added? Personally, I'd like to see a sophisticated opening analysis and recommendation feature. It could go over a database of my games and point out the opening alternatives, especially improvements. The ChessBase 9 (and 8) "find novelty" and dossier functions don't really do this. Go wild, dream big, you could end up with a feature named for you!

All the ChessBase software described by Mig in this column, as well as many more ChessBase programs, are available in the [ChessCafe Online Catalog](#).

Mig wants your questions!! Send it along and perhaps it will be answered in an upcoming column. Please include your name and country of residence. [Yes, I have a question for Mig!](#)

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