



COLUMNISTS

*ChessBase
Cafe*

Steve Lopez



3D Characters in Fritz

Three-dimensional boards have been a part of the *Fritz* software since the mid-1990s, but a relatively recent addition has been that of 3D animated characters. In this month's column we'll take a look at a pair of virtual opponents and provide information on their basic settings.

The first of these two animated characters is The Turk, based on written descriptions and period artwork of the actual nineteenth century chessplaying "automaton" of the same name:



The second virtual opponent is called Mia, a female robot. The original Mia somewhat resembled the robot from Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*, but the current version's appearance has been softened somewhat for a "friendlier" look (as seen below):

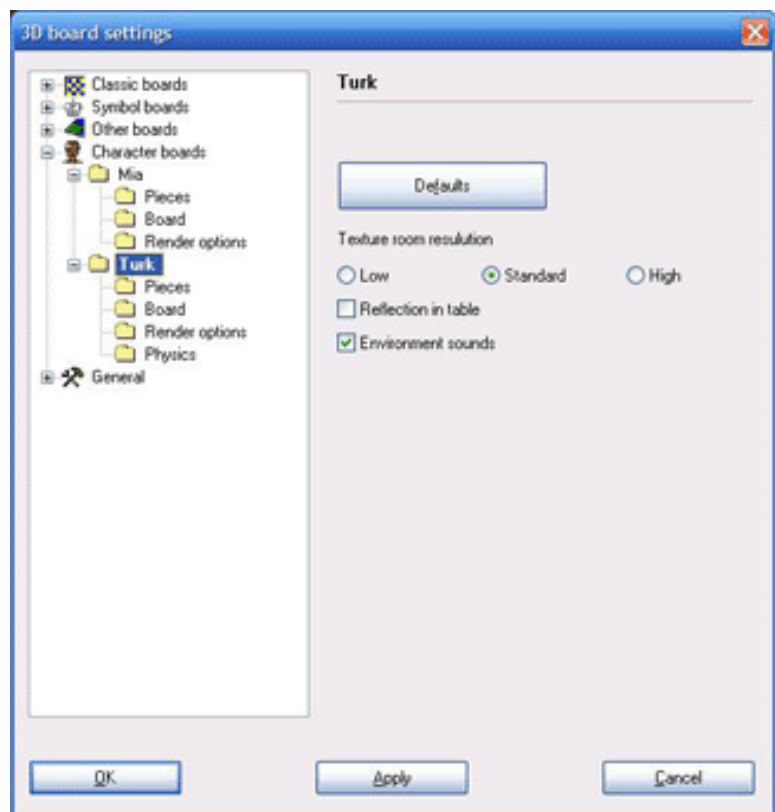


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To access either of these two 3D opponents, launch *Fritz*, go to the “View” menu and select “3D.” After your normal 2D board is replaced by a 3D board (the default will be one of the “regular” 3D boards instead of a character board), click the “Settings” button at the bottom of the 3D chessboard display to access the following dialogue:



Click the “plus” sign next to “Character boards” to expand the view; the names of both characters will be displayed. Click on the name of the character you wish to play against, and then click the “OK” button. The Turk has been selected in the above illustration.

Note that your computer really ought to have a 3D graphics card, a fast processor, and a large amount of RAM if you intend to play against either of these two animated characters. It should also be noted, though, that there are several settings that can make the load on your computer's system less intensive. We'll examine these next.

In the above illustration we see the basic settings for The Turk. If you find that the program runs a bit slowly (or jerkily), you can make a few adjustments in this part of the dialogue. The obvious first choice for an adjustment in the event of poor graphics/speed performance is to lower the texture resolution for The Turk's room surroundings. Unselecting "Reflection in table" will also speed things up a bit, as will deselecting "Environment sounds" (such as the mechanical sounds that The Turk makes as it moves a piece).

Selecting "Pieces" under The Turk's name in this dialogue provides you with a dialogue allowing you to "point" the knights' heads in various directions in order to make them more easily distinguishable from the other pieces. Twin sliders let you adjust White's and Black's knights separately, while selecting the check box for "Mirror" causes a player's knight to face in the opposite direction from its twin.

"Board" settings include another "texture" setting, this time for the appearance of the board itself. Lowering this setting can provide some help in case the program stutters or balks on the higher setting. Two sliders allow you to broaden or narrow the "camera's" field of view, as well as speed up or slow down The Turk's animation speed.

"Render" options include four adjustments for the use of shadows in the 3D display, and a toggle for turning on and off the light reflections on the pieces (making the pieces shiny or dull). Eliminating shadows and piece reflectivity is another way to lighten the load on your computer in case the 3D animations act jittery. There are also adjustments for the brightness of the ambient light in the virtual "room" (which only apply when the high-end shadowing options are selected), as well as some alternative color options.

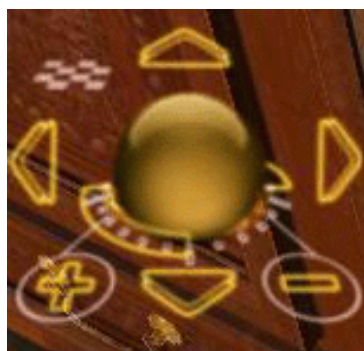
"Physics" affects how the pieces on The Turk's board behave; pieces can be knocked around (and reset) just as on a real chessboard. You can turn these physics effects on or off and adjust how severely they'll affect the pieces. Higher settings will cause pieces to be knocked helter-skelter when a move is made, although the software will reset them at the end of a move.

"Mia," the female robot, has her own suite of adjustments as well. In addition to the same general settings regarding texture resolution and environment sounds as we mentioned for The Turk, Mia also has a toggle that turns her voice responses on and off. Mia will speak during a game. If you find her too chatty or distracting, you can easily turn off her voice in the initial dialogue displayed when you select her name.

Mia's "Pieces" settings also allow for the positioning of knights (as described above for The Turk), but also includes an option for changing the color of both the white and black pieces (an option missing for The Turk, as the "look" of his display strives for historical accuracy as far as it can be determined).

The "Board" options for Mia are exactly as described for The Turk above, while her "Render" options eliminate The Turk's shadowing settings, while retaining all others possessed by The Turk.

Both animated characters share a special control located in the lower left-hand corner of their 3D displays:



This is a very easy control to use and is a considerable improvement over the 3D control panel from older *Fritz* versions. The “track ball” in the display’s center allows you to pivot the camera/view angle around the display’s current center point. Just click on the ball, hold down the mouse button, and move the track ball to pivot the camera around the center point. The four arrow buttons allow you to shift the display’s center point itself to the left or right, as well as up or down. Thus you can use the arrow buttons to change the center point of the display, and then use the track ball to pivot 360 degrees around that point.

The display also has “plus” and “minus” buttons to zoom the camera in and out. The small chessboard to the upper left of the track ball is a shortcut; clicking on it causes the camera to center on the chessboard at a preset distance without changing the camera angle you’ve already selected with the arrow keys and/or track ball.

Occasionally you’ll discover that one of your animated opponents is slow to move its hand or arm away from the chessboard after a move is completed, which will obscure part of the board. You’ll find yet another *Fritz* feature useful in such an event. Go to the “Window” menu at the top of the screen, select “Panels,” and then “Control Board 2D.” You’ll see a new pane appear on your screen (usually defaulting to a location between your Clock pane and the Notation pane):



This control board serves a dual purpose. In case the board is obscured momentarily by an animated character’s hand or arm (usually on slower systems or those with less-powerful graphics cards), you can refer to the 2D Control Board to see the locations of the chess pieces. Additionally, you can also make moves using the 2D pieces on the Control Board if you wish, and the 3D board’s position will follow along.

The animated characters available in *Fritz*’ 3D view provides a fun way to play against a virtual opponent. Instead of the empty chair that you see in the “Fritz Room” virtual view, you get to see someone (albeit a mechanical entity) sitting across from you and providing you with the illusion of a three-dimensional robotic opponent.

Until next month, have fun!

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

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