

CZUBATRONIC Retro Chess System

Product Overview

CZUBATRONIC is a standalone retro-styled electronic chess system for playing, studying, analyzing, replaying, and saving chess games. It combines a graphical chessboard, UCI engine support, configurable play modes, position setup, PGN storage, replay navigation, engine analysis, selectable piece sets, move indicators, clocks, and engine telemetry.

The interface is designed as a 1980s professional electronic chess computer: a wood-textured board, dedicated status panels, move notation, engine output, and hardware-style controls.

Starting the Application

There are two different ways to run CZUBATRONIC. The Python command below is for developers running the source project. It is not required for customers who receive the packaged Windows executable.

Developer / Source Run

From the project directory with the virtual environment active:

```
python -m retro_chess_app.retro_app
```

The application opens with a system-check splash screen. Click the splash screen, press a key, or wait for it to dismiss automatically.

Customer / Installed Application

A PyInstaller one-folder build (CZUBATRONIC.exe plus `_internal\`) is installed by the official Inno Setup package. Customers do not need to install Python, create a virtual environment, install packages, configure engines, or run a Python command. Start the product from the Start menu or desktop shortcut.

Windows may show its normal download or SmartScreen warning for an unsigned installer. The installer also provides the current end-user manual, release notes, and proprietary beta license.

The build was a one-file executable until the first 0.9.1 builds. A one-file EXE runs as a bootloader parent plus the real application; when Inno Setup's "closing applications" step (the Windows Restart Manager) closed a running copy, the application exited but the bootloader survived without a window and kept CZUBATRONIC.exe locked, so every upgrade failed with `DeleteFile failed; code 5`. The one-folder build is a single process, starts faster and unpacks nothing into `%TEMP%`. `tools\rm_shutdown_check.ps1` reproduces the Restart Manager shutdown against a build and fails if any process survives; the installer additionally detects a still-running copy (visible or not) and offers to end it before installing.

Portable Edition

`build_release.ps1` also zips the same one-folder build with the documentation and the beta license as `CZUBATRONIC_2400_<version>Portable.zip` (archived under a build-time/commit-tagged name like the installer). It runs from any writable folder without installation or administrator rights. The marker file `CZUBATRONIC_PORTABLE.txt` beside `CZUBATRONIC.exe` switches `user_data_directory()` to `<program folder>\config`, so the remembered standard engine and the diagnostic log stay with the program; without the marker the installed-edition location `%LOCALAPPDATA%\CZUBATRONIC` is used.

Diagnostic Log

`diagnostic_log()` appends timestamped lines to `czubatronic.log` in `user_data_directory()`: application start with version, engine close, window destroy, main-loop end, and every exception raised inside a Tk callback (which a windowed EXE would otherwise swallow silently). The file is truncated when it exceeds 1 MB.

Engine Requirement for Distribution

The customer build bundles Pioneer, CAPA96, and Tacticon. CAPA96 must retain its `ENGOPEN.TXT` companion file beside `CAPA96.exe` because its opening data is loaded from the engine working directory. Tacticon is bundled as the self-contained `_internal\engine\tacticon\Tacticon.exe`. The `ENGINE` selector also lets a customer browse for another compatible local UCI engine. The engine itself must be available for engine moves, hints, and analysis; the Python runtime is not required.

Opening books are likewise engine-specific. If an engine supports an external book option, the customer can select the book through `BOOK`; otherwise the engine may use its own built-in book.

Playing Chess

Human vs Engine

Play against the active UCI chess engine. The engine moves automatically whenever it is the engine's turn.

The player can choose to play as White or Black from the `NEW` game dialog. When playing Black, the engine correctly makes the opening White move before the player's turn.

Human vs Human

Use the same board for two human players. Engine moves are disabled.

Engine vs Engine

`ENGINE MATCH` opens a compact setup dialog for independently selecting White and Black engines and one shared fixed-depth or time-per-move condition. Once started, the setup closes, the normal board and notation display the game, and a fixed left panel shows separate output streams for both engines. The match can be stopped without replacing the engine selected for normal play.

Legal Chess Rules

The chess model is provided by `python-chess` and supports standard legal chess behavior, including:

- Legal move validation
- Check and checkmate
- Stalemate
- Draw by insufficient material
- Draw by the 75-move rule
- Draw by repetition
- Castling
- En passant
- Pawn promotion
- Side-to-move tracking

Piece Movement

Click a piece to select it, then click a legal destination square. Pawn promotion opens a promotion dialog with choices for:

- Queen
- Rook
- Bishop
- Knight

Illegal moves are rejected and do not alter the game.

New Game Configuration

Press **NEW** or the **N** key to open the new-game configuration dialog.

The dialog allows the player to choose:

- Side: White or Black
- A calibrated Pioneer level or an explicit non-Pioneer search control
- Game clock

Starting a new game always restores the standard starting position with White to move. It also exits position setup and replay mode cleanly.

Pioneer Engine Levels

The following strength profiles are calibrated specifically for Pioneer:

Level	Search Depth	Displayed Strength
Novice	2	1168 ELO
Beginner	3	1389 ELO
Club	5	1617 ELO
Expert	6	1859 ELO
Club Champion	7	1978 ELO
Master	10	2160 ELO
Grandmaster	12	2452 ELO

Each Pioneer level also has a calibrated thinking-time range to give the engine a deliberate playing feel. These ELO figures and profile names must not be applied to CAPA96 or another external UCI engine.

External Engine Controls

For CAPA96, Tacticon, and every other non-Pioneer UCI engine, **NEW GAME** and **ENGINE SETTINGS** use explicit controls rather than uncalibrated Pioneer labels: **FIXED DEPTH** (1-30), **TIME PER MOVE** (0.1-600 seconds, entered in seconds with tenths; converted to milliseconds only at the engine boundary), or **GAME CLOCK**. Game-clock mode allocates engine search time from the selected clock, including the increment in **3 MIN + 2 SEC**. The status panel shows **CONTROL** rather than a Pioneer level or ELO.

Thinking-Time Model (Human vs Engine only)

The engine's real search takes whatever its control allows - a fraction of a second at fixed depth 6, the full budget under **TIME PER MOVE** or **GAME CLOCK**. In Human vs Engine mode the move is then shown no earlier than a

human-feeling thinking time computed by `RetroChessApp._human_think_time_ms`; engine matches, hints and analysis are never delayed, and `MOVE NOW` plays a pending move at once.

Step	Rule (constants in HUMAN_THINK)
Base window	Pioneer: the level's calibrated <code>think_min_ms-think_max_ms</code> ; other engines: 2.5-6.0 s, uniformly random
Forced move (one legal move)	x 0.15
Check with at most three replies	x 0.45
Recapture on the square just captured on	x 0.35
Book move or within the first 8 moves	x 0.35
Endgame (12 pieces or fewer)	x 0.8
Complex middlegame (35+ legal moves and 6+ captures)	x 1.4
Long think	8 % of moves, x 2.2
Limits	0.4 s minimum, 15 s maximum
Clock	never more than 60 % of the engine's time budget for the move - its movetime, or the clock's per-move budget when a clock runs with a fixed-depth control - so the engine cannot overspend its clock; the search time already used counts against the target

Time Modes

The available clock modes are:

- No Clock
- 30 seconds per move
- 15 seconds per move
- 3 minutes plus 2 seconds increment
- 5 minutes per game
- 15 minutes per game
- 30 minutes per game
- 40 moves / 120 minutes

The clock state is displayed in the computer-status panel when a timed mode is active.

The 15-second and 30-second per-move modes are advisory chess-computer test controls. Reaching zero does not end the game; the clock resets after the move. Whole-game controls retain normal time-forfeit behavior.

When a clock mode is active, the engine receives a UCI time budget and searches for the available time. Timed searches do not use a fixed depth. The fixed level depth profiles are used only by untimed (No Clock) games.

Position Setup

Press `SETUP` to edit the board position directly.

Setup mode supports:

- Dragging pieces on the board
- Removing pieces with the right mouse button
- Selecting a piece from the setup piece menu
- Placing pieces on empty squares
- Choosing White or Black to move
- Choosing whether the human plays White or Black
- Selecting calibrated Pioneer strength or explicit non-Pioneer depth/movetime/game-clock control
- Selecting the game clock
- Starting through the explicit `START PLAYING THIS POSITION` action
- Starting from the edited position
- Cancelling setup and restoring the previous position

When setup is committed, the position is validated, Human versus Engine mode is restored, move history is cleared, and the edited position becomes the new starting FEN for saving and analysis. If the engine owns the selected side to move, its search starts immediately. Positions without exactly one king for each side or otherwise invalid board state remain in setup for correction.

Move Notation and History

The move-history panel displays standard algebraic notation rather than raw coordinate notation.

Examples include:

```
1. e4 c5
2. Nf3 Nc6
3. Bb5 a6
4. O-O Be7
```

The notation includes chess-specific forms such as captures, checks, checkmate, castling, and promotion. Internal UCI history is retained for engine communication and opening recognition.

The computer-status panel can display:

- Current side to move
- Opening name
- Selected engine level
- Displayed engine strength
- Engine control for non-Pioneer engines, for example `CONTROL FIXED DEPTH 6` or `CONTROL 2.5S / MOVE`
- Search depth
- Search time
- Node count
- Nodes per second
- Evaluation
- Opening-book status

Saving Games

Press SAVE to save the current game as a standard Portable Game Notation file with a .pgn extension.

Saved games include:

- Move history
- Standard algebraic notation generated by the chess model
- Custom setup starting positions
- FEN headers when the game did not start from the standard position
- Main-line move structure compatible with chess software

A game created from position setup can therefore be saved and reopened without losing its custom starting position.

Opening Games

Press OPEN and select a .pgn file.

Opening a game restores:

- The saved starting position
- The complete board position at the end of the game
- UCI move history
- Algebraic move notation
- Last move information
- Move count
- Game status
- Custom FEN setup information

The opened game is ready for replay navigation, analysis, or saving again.

Game Replay

When a saved game is open, the move list becomes interactive.

Replay Controls

- Click any move in the move list to jump to that position.
- Press PREV to move one ply backward.
- Press NEXT to move one ply forward.
- Use the Left Arrow key to move backward.
- Use the Right Arrow key to move forward.

Replay starts from the saved starting FEN and reconstructs the board by applying the selected number of moves. The full game history remains intact while browsing.

During replay, the status bar shows the current position, for example:

REPLAY 12/38

Board interaction is disabled while viewing replay positions so the saved game cannot be accidentally modified.

Engine Analysis

Press ANALYZE to analyze the current board position with the active UCI engine.

Analysis:

- Uses the current position without making a move.
- Shows the engine's best move.
- Updates depth, evaluation, nodes, time, and principal variation data when supplied by the engine.
- Works on standard games, opened PGNs, and custom setup positions.

The HINT command also asks the engine for a best move, but presents it as a hint rather than a full analysis workflow.

MOVE NOW immediately requests an engine move when the current mode allows one.

External UCI Engines

The ENGINE button opens a file chooser for another local chess engine executable.

Any engine that correctly implements the UCI protocol can be selected. Before switching, CZUBATRONIC validates the engine by sending:

```
uci
isready
quit
```

The engine must return both `uciok` and `readyok`. Invalid or incompatible files are rejected without replacing the currently active engine.

After a successful switch:

- The new engine becomes active immediately.
- The previous engine is closed cleanly.
- The status bar identifies the selected engine.
- Analysis, hints, engine moves, telemetry, and engine-vs-engine mode use the new engine.

CAPA96 is the bundled standard engine loaded when CZUBATRONIC starts. Pioneer remains available as a selectable alternative with its calibrated level ladder.

Remembered Standard Engine

The ENGINE dialog shows the current standard engine and offers `Set as standard engine (remember for next launch)`. The choice is written to `%LOCALAPPDATA%\CZUBATRONIC\engine_config.json` (`{"standard_engine_path": "..."}).` At startup the remembered path is validated: a missing file or a failed UCI handshake produces a warning and a fallback to the bundled CAPA96, so the application always starts. `RESET STANDARD ENGINE TO CAPA96` deletes the configuration file.

Opening Books

Press BOOK to choose an external opening-book file for the active engine. The chooser accepts common book formats such as `.bin`, `.txt`, and `.book`.

Opening books are engine-specific in the UCI protocol. CZUBATRONIC reads the engine's advertised UCI options and configures the book only when the engine exposes a compatible string option such as `BookFile` or `OpeningBook`. If an engine advertises only a check option such as `OwnBook`, it is using an internal or built-in book and cannot accept an external filename through the standard UCI interface. In that case the engine's own book remains under its control.

Piece Sets

The PIECES selector currently provides:

- 2D CURRENT: the current CZUBATRONIC bitmap set
- 2D ORIGINAL: the original production 2D piece set copied from the production application
- 2D WOOD: modern wooden Staunton pieces
- 2D WOOD TRADITIONAL: traditional wooden pieces

Changing the piece set:

- Clears cached piece images.
- Redraws the board immediately.
- Preserves the current board position and game state.
- Scales pieces with the board and fullscreen window.

Move Indicators

The INDICATOR selector provides two visual modes.

LED Mode

- Selecting a piece lights a small bright-red LED at the lower-right of the selected square.
- After a move, LEDs appear on both the departure and destination squares.
- Completed-move LEDs disappear after three seconds.
- Engine moves also trigger the LED display.
- The LEDs are antialiased and cached at each board scale.

SQUARE Mode

Restores the traditional full-square move indication. The departure and destination squares receive the existing square highlight treatment instead of red LEDs.

Board Presentation

Board Flip

Press FLIP or the B key to reverse the board orientation. Flipping changes the visual orientation and coordinate labels without changing the actual chess position or side to move.

Responsive Scaling

The board automatically recalculates its square size when the window is resized or placed fullscreen. Pieces, LEDs, and procedural board textures scale with the live board dimensions.

Window Sizing and Display Scaling

The right-hand information panel is a fixed-size area: whatever does not fit is clipped, not scrolled. Since 0.9.1 the window therefore sizes itself from its content instead of a fixed 1100 x 680 pixels:

- At startup the application measures what the information panel needs (with the chess clock reserved even while hidden) and what the header row needs, opens the window at that size, and sets it as the minimum window size. Windows display scaling (for example 125 %) is covered automatically because the measurement uses the real font sizes. The height is capped at the screen height; on a Full HD screen at 125 % the panel needs slightly more

than is available and the engine-output area gives way, while the move history keeps its minimum.

- `MOVE HISTORY` is laid out before `ENGINE OUTPUT`, so engine output shrinks and collapses first when space is short.
- The title `CZUBATRONIC 2400`, the fascia marking, and the `SYSTEM STATUS` bezel are sized from the measured fonts; the status bezel holds a caption plus a two-line status.
- The control buttons are units (a button, or a label with its menu) in two logical groups that wrap into as many rows as the window width allows: four rows at the standard width, two when maximised. When the number of rows changes, the minimum window height follows.

`tools\retro_layout_probe.py` verifies all of this from the source tree, optionally with a simulated scaling factor (`--scale 1.25`) and forced window states (`--geometry 900x560, zoomed, unzoom`); it saves a screenshot and exits non-zero when anything is clipped.

Procedural Board Texture

The board uses lightweight cached procedural rendering rather than image texture files for the squares. It provides:

- Warm creamy light squares
- Soft reddish-walnut dark squares
- Subtle low-contrast tonal variation
- Four deterministic texture variants per square type
- No animation
- No JavaScript
- No external texture assets

Piece Rendering

The application supports high-quality scaling of the active piece set while preserving the original 2D set's canvas format separately from the normalized current set.

Application Schemes

The `SCHEME` selector provides four complete interface palettes:

- `WALNUT`: the original warm dedicated-computer finish
- `BLUE`: a cool blue electronic-instrument finish
- `GREEN`: a restrained green hardware finish
- `GRAPHITE`: dark neutral ABS-plastic gray with warm electronic displays

Changing scheme preserves the game, clock, selected pieces, and interaction state.

Branding

`assets\branding\dcs_chess_logo.png` (the DCS Chess wordmark, transparent PNG) is shown in the bottom-right corner of the control console, scaled to four text lines high so it follows display scaling. It is packed before the button rows, which wrap in the width left of it, so no control can ever sit on top of it.

Application Icon and Taskbar Identity

The application icon is a gold knight (from the bundled Chessmaster piece set) on a walnut square with a bronze rim. `tools\make_app_icon.py` renders it deterministically into `assets\icons\` as a multi-size `czubatronicon.ico` (16 to 256 pixels) for the executable and the installer, and as PNGs that the application passes to Tk at runtime so the window, the taskbar and every dialog show the same icon. The application also registers its own Windows

AppUserModelID at startup, so its taskbar button is never grouped with other Python windows when it is run from source.

Move Feedback and Controls

Audio Feedback

A simple system beep plays after a successfully executed human or engine move.

No beep is played when:

- A piece is merely selected
- An illegal move is attempted
- A hint is requested
- A position is analyzed
- The board is flipped

Available Controls

The controls sit in two logical groups (game controls, then engine and appearance settings) whose rows wrap to the window width, so every control is reachable at any window size.

- NEW: configure and start a new game
- OPEN: open a PGN game
- SAVE: save the current game as PGN
- SETUP: edit a position
- TAKEBACK: undo the latest move
- PREV: step backward during replay
- NEXT: step forward during replay
- FLIP: change board orientation
- HINT: request an engine move suggestion
- ANALYZE: evaluate the current position
- MOVE NOW: request an immediate engine move
- ENGINE: select another UCI engine
- ENGINE SETTINGS: choose explicit fixed-depth, engine-movetime, or game-clock behavior for non-Pioneer engines
- ENGINE MATCH: configure and run two independent UCI engines on the normal board
- BOOK: select a compatible external opening book
- ABOUT: open the About and Impressum section
- PIECES: select the active 2D piece set
- INDICATOR: select LED or square move indicators
- MODE: select Human vs Engine or Human vs Human

Keyboard Shortcuts

Key	Action
N	Open New Game configuration
T	Take back the latest move
H	Request a hint
F	Move the engine immediately
B	Flip the board
Left Arrow	Previous replay position
Right Arrow	Next replay position

About and Impressum

The ABOUT dialog includes:

DCS Analytics & Digital Consultancy Services
Business Divisions of Universe Connect KG

Sachsenkorso 23
15834 Rangsdorf

Tel: 0049 175 979 73 08
Email: info@digitalconsultancysolutions.com

TEAM

Arne Baillière – Creator of the CZUBATRONIC chess system
Thorsten Czub – Author of Capa 9.6 / CapaBlanca

It also presents the creator statement, complete engine history, full Thorsten Czub interview with portrait, Story of Capa article, supporter link, custom software services, copyright notice, beta license, warranty disclaimer, and distribution restrictions.

A Tribute to Computer Chess

CZUBATRONIC is a tribute to the chess programs of the 1980s and 1990s that gave so many players hours of fun. It is also a tribute to the programmers behind every generation of these machines and to the board-chess producers whose work made a lasting contribution to computer chess and computer history:

- Mephisto / Hegener + Glaser
- Fidelity Electronics
- Novag
- SciSys
- Saitek
- TASC
- CXG / Newcrest
- Applied Concepts / Chafitz
- Conchess
- Excalibur Electronics
- RadioShack / Tandy

- Milton Bradley
- Mattel Electronics
- Avalon Hill
- All board-chess producers and their programmers who helped advance the field

This tribute is part of the product's identity and is shown in the application's About section.

Supported File and Engine Formats

Piece Artwork Credits

The 2D WOOD piece set is based on **Staunton-Pieces** by James Clarke (clarkerubber):

<https://github.com/clarkerubber/Staunton-Pieces>

The artwork is distributed under the MIT License. The complete license text is included with the piece assets in the application distribution.

Games

- Portable Game Notation (.pgn)
- Standard FEN positions embedded in PGN for custom setup games

Engines

- Local executable files accepted by the file chooser
- Must support the Universal Chess Interface protocol
- Must respond to uciok and readyok

Versioning and Release Notes

The product version lives in one place, `retro_chess_app\version.py` (`__version__`, for example `0.9.1-beta`). The release pipeline `installer\build_release.ps1` derives everything from it through `tools\stamp_version.py`: the installer filename and `AppVersion`, the executable's file properties (`installer\version_info.txt`, rendered from `version_info.template.txt`), the footers of these PDF manuals, and the version line in the ABOUT dialog.

Release notes live in `docs\CZUBATRONIC_RELEASE_NOTES.md`, newest version first, one `## Version ...` section per version; the build renders them to PDF alongside the manuals and ships the PDF in the installer, the portable ZIP and `release\Documentation\`. The build refuses to run when that file has no section for the current version, so an installer can never ship with stale notes.

Scope and Limitations

- The current desktop app is implemented with Tkinter.
- The current piece selector provides four 2D sets; there is no true 3D renderer.
- PGN replay follows the main line of the opened game.
- Engine analysis depends on the active engine's UCI output and capabilities.

- Pioneer alone uses calibrated CZUBATRONIC level profiles. Other engines use explicit depth, engine-movetime, or game-clock controls; arbitrary UCI option editing is not currently exposed.

Beta License, Distribution, and Ownership

Every beta version is proprietary software supplied free of charge for personal, non-commercial use. The installer contains all runtime resources needed by the application but does not distribute proprietary source code. Resale, redistribution, repackaging, rebranding, sublicensing, hosting, mirroring, and commercial exploitation are prohibited without prior written permission. The complete CZUBATRONIC_BETA_LICENSE.txt is installed with the product.