

**Arkell, K., 2020. *Arkell's Endings*. London: Ginger GM Ltd.**

If you are inclined to attend a few weekend congresses - remember when they were a thing?- it is quite possible that you will have seen Keith Arkell in the Open section, usually winning first prize. It was at such a congress that I purchased Keith's first book, *Arkell's Odyssey*, his autobiography containing a fair few of Keith's games. Well, the Wizard of the Weekender is back with a new book and its focus is endgame play.

It is a truism that endgame play is not most players' strong point. This is certainly true in my own case and, while I can explain away my "wobbly" endgame technique in a club match, usually by reference to the punishing time limit, such an excuse is not available to me in correspondence play. No, the reality is that in correspondence play I, and probably many of you too, are quite likely to get found out as the plodding woodpushers we are.

So, when I saw that the "Ginger GM", Simon Williams, had published this book I hurried to place my order. I have not been disappointed for this is a great book which, with a modicum of study, will surely improve the endgame play of almost anyone.

"What's in it?" I hear you cry. Allow me to elaborate. The book contains 33 full games listed not by opening, as is common, but by ending. In addition, Simon Williams has added a 34th game, by way of balance, to showcase Keith's ability in sharper tactical play.

While the focus of the book is very much on the endgame, there are some fine pieces of advice for opening play too. For example, it is clear that in his choice of openings, Keith is not interested in participating in the latest theoretical debates, or even of trying to obtain a position that the engines would consider better. Rather he is concerned to obtain a position in which he is comfortable, where he knows what the plans are. In particular, he often chooses openings with the goal of obtaining the better pawn structure. In short, when choosing his openings he is, even then, thinking of the likely ending.

There are so many lessons to learn from this book but I shall share with you but one or my editor will, quite rightly, think me guilty of taking up too much of the limited space in our magazine.

The first one is "Arkell's hierarchy of pawns." As Keith says in his introduction, "Carry this philosophy to the board and you will rarely be stuck for a plan!"

The hierarchy of pawns is a simple way of thinking about the relative values of each pawn. Thus, according to Keith, the b-pawn is slightly less valuable than the c-pawn, and the c-pawn is slightly less valuable than the d-pawn. In addition, according to Keith, the same applies to the d and e-pawns, with the e-pawn being slightly more valuable. This might explain his choice of the Caro-Kann as his usual defence to 1. e4 as black often gets to exchange dxe4. According to Keith, the advantage of this exchange is that the black king becomes slightly more safe and the white d-pawn can become an object to attack.

These considerations also help explain Keith's fondness for the Carlsbad structure as white where white has the obvious plan of a minority attack. There are several games in this book with this structure and how he plays them is hugely instructive. The key lesson here is that provoking a weakness in the black q-side pawns is not enough to win, but moving over and trying to make another weakness in the king side will often leave black with too many problems to solve.

I recommend this book very much indeed. Playing through the games will help improve your play in the ending, as well as be able to think about how your choices in the opening create structures that persist in the endgame. Lastly, the games are annotated to give some idea of what Keith was thinking as the game was being played rather than chuck them into the

engine and cut and paste the silicon monster's verdict. Keith's approach makes the games far more entertaining and "human".

Should you wish to purchase a copy, I bought mine from Chess and Bridge where it is currently on sale for £17.99.