

Arkell, K., 2012. *Arkell's Odyssey: The Autobiography of a Chess Grandmaster*. Exmouth: Keverel Chess Books.

Regular competitors at weekend congresses will, more often than not, see the name K. Arkell as top seed in the Open Section. More often than not, too, at the end of the weekend, Keith will take home the top prize. Indeed, I think that Keith is to weekend congresses what Germany is to international football. However well one plays, at the end of the game Keith/Germany is the winner.

A Keith Arkell game is rarely featured in any 'winning combination' sections of chess magazines. He doesn't play like that. Let's be honest, an Arkell win is a lot like many of our own wins; you know, the nice wins. A decent if unexciting opening, a bit of poking and prodding in the middlegame, and the point delivered sometime in the endgame. Yes, for me, Keith Arkell is a club player with the dial turned to eleven. That he plays like we do, just better, is what makes his games so interesting. We can follow them. They don't rely on memorising intensely complicated opening lines going well past the twentieth move. The game develops, the position improves, a concession forced, *voila!*

Arkell's Odyssey is not, however, a 'best games' collection, although there are seventy games (however, a tiny number are fragments) with some lightly annotated. I, for one, hope that one day we will see a 'best games' book of Keith's games. Sadler and Regan, in *Chess for Life*, that I reviewed a while ago demonstrated beyond any doubt that Keith's games contain much to instruct as well as entertain the club player. And, let's be clear: club players buy most of the chess books sold yet too many grandmasters seem to write books that can only be understood by other grandmasters. A Keith Arkell 'Best Games' collection would be a wonderful thing, but that is for another time in the, I hope, not too distant future.

Instead, *Arkell's Odyssey* is an autobiography that anchors itself on Keith's chess career. Over eighteen chapters, Keith provides little vignettes of his chess life wound up with his personal life which make up an overview of his life and career to date.

It is a very frank account that does not gloss over, or minimise, life's troubles. He gives an account of his relationship with Susan Arkell (née Walker now Lalic) which is brutally honest bordering on a painful read.

Keith is open, too, about his experience of mental health problems which, in Keith's case, manifested as panic attacks. If you have ever suffered such an attack then you will know that it is quite impossible to describe in spoken or written word just how frightening and debilitating these can be.

At the end of the book, I was left with the feeling that I understood Keith a little, had an overview of his life so far, and some appreciation of his approach to chess.

Arkell's Odyssey is, I think at only 123 pages, like a really good starter in a restaurant. Come on Keith, it is time, now, for you to deliver the meaty main course of that best games collection.