

Lakdawala, C., 2018. How Ulf Beats Black: Ulf Andersson's Bulletproof Strategic Repertoire for White. Alkmaar: New in Chess.

The ease with which some people can write evokes in me feelings of admiration and, yes alas, some jealousy. For I am not a quick or a natural writer. For anything more complex than a note for the milkman – young people ask a parent – I find I get caught up in doing the preparatory research, can never decide what to leave out, wonder about the structure and, finally, the exquisite horror of peering at the flashing cursor and having to start writing.

My friend and colleague, Professor Brigitte Nerlich, is quite the opposite. Or, at least, that is how it seems to me. She is such a prolific writer that I am sure she once had an idea for a paper in the shower that morning and was sending it to the journal by the end of the day. The chess equivalent of Professor Nerlich is Cyrus Lakdawala. He has published well over thirty books since 2012. A prolific output.

The subject of this review is a curious book. Part opening repertoire, part best games collection, part an exploration of the style of Ulf Andersson. Lakdawala sets up the book as such and suggests that the lines he discusses are suitable for cautious, strategic players, who like endgames and are content to win in 80 moves rather than 20. Not bad for the correspondence player, I thought and read on.

To meet the requirements of a repertoire book, Lakdawala standardises the opening moves as 1. Nf3 and 2. c4 although many of the games featured actually had a different move order. In common with most opening books these days, the repertoire is presented through 61 complete games. There is also a chapter at the end called 'What did Ulf play?' Most of these exercises are not opening problems but rather instructive, and beautiful, endgames.

What does Ulf (Lakdawala) include in his repertoire I can hear you all asking? Well, I doubt any of it will appeal to our esteemed Chair whose tactical flair is once more causing me difficulty (grr). But, if you fancy yourself as a strategic player, you might like some of the recommendations. An attraction for some 1.d4 players of the Nf3/c4 move order is that it avoids some black defences such as the Grunfeld. Here, the line is 1.Nf3, Nf6 2.c4, g6 3.Nc3, d5 4.cxd5, Nxd5 5.e4, Nxc3 and now 6.dxc3 offering the exchange of queens.

A similar queen exchange plan is used against the KID, with Lakdawala advocating the Exchange Variation. The main problem I have with this repertoire is that it requires you to play the Reti if black chooses 1. ... d5. If that is not your thing and, actually, Lakdawala himself notes that Ulf had a poor score against 2.c4, d4 then you might have to search elsewhere for alternatives.

Do I like this book? Yes, mostly, although Lakdawala's writing style can grate a bit. But, then, if you write as much as he does I guess a few shortcuts are inevitable. Presenting a player's repertoire is not a new idea but it is well done here. In particular it is lovely to play through the whole game not just look up the opening. It gives one a feel for planning the middle and endgames.

Give Ulf's 'dull' openings a go by all means but, I understand, the great man himself plays in a more combative style in correspondence games than in the OTB games presented in this book.