

## **Arkell's Musings**

Tim Wall interviews **Grandmaster Keith Arkell**, author of the critically-acclaimed new book and video course *Arkell's Endings* about the tournaments he is playing during the pandemic, what he would be doing if he wasn't a professional chess player, and which openings to play against him if you want to avoid an ending.

*TW: Are you currently in lockdown, or are you able to play chess events where you are?*

**Keith Arkell:** In mid-September, I travelled via Prague to Pardubice with my friend Anuurai Sainbayar for a tournament. Ironically, Prague had been the last place we had flown back from before the first UK lockdown in March. We then went on to Budapest, where we are enjoying two full-length tournaments a month.

*TW: How has Arkell's Endings book and video course been received? Like many readers of the ECF Newsletter, I'm enjoying the videos and prefer the personal touch of learning that way. Which did you like doing better – the book or the videos?*

**Keith Arkell:** I heard that we had a rather good first month in book sales from Chess & Bridge. And recently Simon Williams informed me that the video has sold sufficiently well that any further sales will see royalties flowing my way! I guess that the good reviews I've been lucky enough to receive haven't harmed these sales.

I find it hard to compare which I preferred to do. Each was a pleasure in its own way, but each seemed daunting at times. In terms of the timescale, the book took four years to write, whereas the video course took about 13 hours, and with no retakes.

*TW: You are renowned for being a very active practical player, usually playing a lot of tournaments in any given year. Assuming we ever come out of this pandemic, will the experience of making Arkell's Endings encourage you to write more books and/or record more videos? Do you have any more projects in the works?*

**Keith Arkell:** I put a monumental effort into writing my first book *Arkell's Odyssey* which was well received but which was – and is – very hard to get hold of. In conjunction with Simon Williams' GingerGM and Chess & Bridge, there is a plan in place to add a few chapters, covering, for example, my Senior performances, and to improve the quality of the photos, and then re-release the book, including electronic versions.

I am also in the process of co-writing a book with Joel Sneed (who co-wrote successful books with GM Boris Gulko). This will be in the form of transcripts between teacher and student on 50 of my Caro-Kann games. And after that, I may shock the chess world with the third book of the Trilogy which began with *Odyssey* and *Endings*: *Arkell's Combinations*!

*TW: Can you see big chess tournaments returning anytime soon, and if they don't – what will professional chess players do instead?*

**Keith Arkell:** You have to go out there and find tournaments! There is no shortage of them here in Budapest.

*TW: As the winner of many tournaments, how do you motivate yourself for each new event? It might seem like a strange question, but what is your goal when you sit down at the chessboard?*

**Keith Arkell:** Unless I am playing in an event which I am motivated to try to score well in for career reasons, I simply enjoy playing chess, and hope to play games I'm satisfied with.

*TW: You are well known as someone who likes to socialise at tournaments and makes new friends very easily among players of all levels. What is the right balance between socialising and preparation, and have you found the happy medium?*

**Keith Arkell:** This is quite easy to answer. I rarely ever prepare for games, whereas I can get tempted to socialise a little too much! For me, the ideal is maximising the amount of energy I play with by neither preparing for games nor drinking too much alcohol during events, or getting too little sleep. I can get easily led astray, though!

*TW: If you were not a professional chess player, what would you like to do instead?*

**Keith Arkell:** I've changed my answer to this question in recent times. In the past, I might have said 'scientist' or something with numbers like working out rail timetables, but now I would like the idea of being a psychiatrist or psychologist/psychotherapist.

*TW: You have enjoyed some great successes in recent years, including winning the European Seniors Championship and being runner-up in the World Seniors Championship in 2014. Some players aren't able to maintain their chess strength as well as they get older. What advice would you give more mature players who feel that their chess powers are waning?*

**Keith Arkell:** I would say firstly buy the book *Chess for Life* by Matthew Sadler and Natasha Regan, which deals excellently with this very issue. I think you should aim for positions which rely more on understanding and experience and less on the need to burn up a lot of energy analysing complex positions. Perhaps Viktor Korchnoi would have disagreed with this, though!

*TW: Which is your favourite country to visit for chess?*

**Keith Arkell:** I always have a great time playing chess in Ireland.

*TW: If you had to be locked down with one other chess player on a desert island, who would you choose?*

**Keith Arkell:** From my closest friends (who are nearly all chess players) I'd choose the one who was least likely to want to talk about chess all the time, and whose sense of humour most closely matched my own.

*TW: Which opening should we be playing against you to win quickly – and avoid playing an ending?*

**Keith Arkell:** Maybe with Black the Queen's Gambit Accepted or the Benoni. With White, 1. e4 because there are shaky lines in all of my main defences.

*TW: What would you say to promising young players today who are considering whether to pursue chess as either a profession or a serious hobby?*

**Keith Arkell:** I'd say, 'Good luck!' And: "I hope you enjoy the game sufficiently, because from a cold economic perspective there are many easier ways for a bright person to earn money."

*TW: And finally, what is your top tip for club players to improve their game?*

**Keith Arkell:** Instead of obsessing over the latest opening theory, try to understand the game. Listen to what strong players have to say about various types of positions.

**Arkell's Endings** can be ordered [as a book from Chess & Bridge](#) and as a [video course from GingerGM](#).