



COLUMNISTS

*Over the
Horizons*

Stefan Bucker

A Knight on the Edge: Part Two

In [Part One](#), we discussed Vadim Zviagintsev's games with 1 e4 c5 2 Na3. This article collects the experiences of other grandmasters who have adopted the unusual knight move in his footsteps. Plus, we'll meet the true pioneer of the opening: **Sven-Åke Kronberg** from **Sweden**, who introduced 2 Na3 many years before Zviagintsev and his GM colleagues.

Recently, in a reader's letter to [Kaissiber](#), Hydra's programmer, Chrilly Donninger, wrote that Hydra's opening book only considers games of humans with 2600 Elo or above. Well, in the nine 2 Na3 games meeting these requirements, White has scored an impressive 64 percent.





A Knight on the Edge © by Zygmunt Nasiolkowski, Lüdenscheid

Vladimir Malakhov (2691) – Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu (2695)

Sarajevo, May 2006 (XXXVI Bosnia GM tournament)

Sicilian Defense [B20]

1 e4 c5 2 Na3!



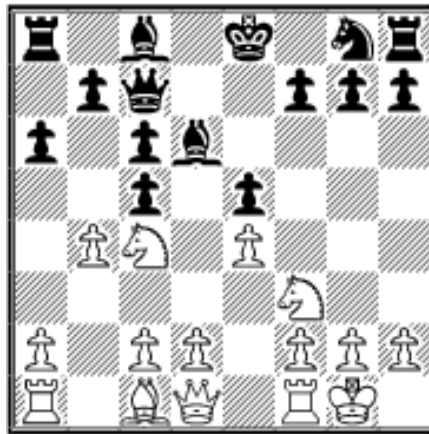
While talking about Nb1-a3, we should not forget the American master **Robert T. Durkin**, who pioneered 1 Na3!? in the second half of the 1950s. Unfortunately, there is no example for 1 Na3 c5 in his highly entertaining pamphlet *Knightmare -1. A New Chess Opening* [\[1\]](#), but he does inform us that 1...c5 was the fourth best reply to 1 Na3 (after e5, d5 and Nf6). We can only speculate about his reaction

to 1 Na3 c5. Either 2 e4 or 2 e3, I'd guess.

2...d6

Last [month](#) we looked at 2...Nc6 3 Bb5!; for example, 3...g6 4 c3 Bg7. Here Zviagintsev preferred to postpone the development of his king's knight: 5 d3 Nf6 6 f4 0-0 7 Nf3 (1-0, 58) Zviagintsev – Ponomarev, Sochi 2006 (see [Part One](#)). This set-up seems preferable to the more static 5 Nf3 e5 6 0-0, reaching the game (by transposition of moves) Kupreichik (2437) – Trifonov (2347), Minsk 2005 (Byelorussian Championship): 6...Nge7 7 Nc4 d5 8 Nxe5 dxe4 9 Nxf7?! (9 Re1! f6 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Ba4 exf3 12 Bxc6+ Bd7 13 Bxf3 Rc8 14 d4, unclear) 9...Kxf7 10 Ng5+ Kf8 11 d3 Ne5? (11...exd3 12 Qb3 c4! 13 Qxc4 Qd5 -/+) 12 f4 Nf7? (12...Nxd3 13 f5 gxf5 14 Qh5 Ng6 15 Nxe4 unclear) 13 Bc4 Nh6 14 Nxe4 Bf5 15 Nxc5 Qd6 16 d4? (16 Be3 +/-) 16...b6 17 Nd3 Bxd4+! (=, 95).

Another important game was 3...Qc7 4 Nf3 g6 (1-0, 37) Zviagintsev – Khalifman, Moscow 2005. While this dynamic treatment may be objectively better, the following example can be useful – if only as a warning: 4...e5 5 0-0 a6? (5...Be7! is more precise, to counter 6 c3 a6 7 Bxc6 dxc6 8 Nc4 with the tactical trick 8...Be6! 9 Nxe5? f6 10 Nd3 Bc4 -/+ etc.) 6 Bxc6 dxc6. By a transposition of moves, this is McShane – Mic. Richter, German Bundesliga 2005: 7 Nc4 Bd6 (perhaps 7...b5 8 Nxe5 f6 9 Nd3, although the sacrifice isn't quite as good as the similar idea in the last note) 8 b4!



8...cxb4 9 d4 exd4 10 Qxd4 Be7 11 e5 (he could win the exchange: 11 Bb2 Nf6 12 Nb6 Rb8 13 Qe5!) 11...c5 12 Qf4 Be6 13 Rd1 Bxc4 14 Qxc4 Qc6 15 Qg4 Nh6 16 Bxh6 gxh6 and now, instead of 17 Qg7? (=, 79), the direct attack 17 Nh4! Bxh4 18 Rd6 +- wins.

3 c3 Nf6 4 g3 g6

4...Nxe4? 5 Qa4+ loses on the spot.

4...Nc6 5 Bg2 d5 6 exd5 Nxd5 7 Nf3 Bg4 8 h3 Bxf3 9 Bxf3 e6 10 d3 Be7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Qe2 Qd7 13 Bd2 Rad8 14 Rad1 Rfe8 15 Bg2 a6 16 Nc2 b5 17 a3 Bf6 18 h4 Qc7 19 Be4 a5 20 Ne3 b4 21 Rc1 bxc3 22 bxc3 a4 23 Rc2? (23 Qh5! g6 24 Qd1 +/-) 23...Be7 24 Nc4 Bf8? (24...Rb8 =) 25 Rb1 +/- (1-0, 88) Sasikiran (2692) – Cheparinov (2635), Turin 2006 (Olympiad).

5 Bg2 Bg7 6 Ne2 0-0 7 0-0 e5 8 d4 exd4

This is not a new position; however, the earlier examples all began with

1 d4 Nf6 2 g3 g6:

(a) 8...Qe7 9 dxc5 dxc5 10 Bg5 h6 11 Bd2 Rd8 12 Qc1 Kh7 13 Nc4 b5 14 Ne3 Bb7 15 f3 Nc6 16 Rd1 a6 17 Qc2 Rd6 18 Be1 (½–½, 47) Minich – Kolman, Slovakia 2000.

(b) 8...Nc6 9 Nc2 b6 (9...Qe7 10 dxc5 dxc5 11 Ne3 Rd8 12 Nd5 (0•1, 35) Schuettig – Hein, Germany 1999; 9...Nd7 10 f4 cxd4 11 cxd4 exd4 12 Nexd4 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 Qb6 14 Be3 (0•1, 39) Pancras – Pannekoek, Vlissingen 1999) 10 f4 Bb7 11 d5 Ne7 12 fxe5 dxe5 13 Bg5 Ne8 14 g4 f6 15 Bh4 Nd6 =+ (0•1, 48) Macura – Ryc, Brno 1974.

9 cxd4 Nc6 10 d5 Nb4 11 Nc2 Nxc2 12 Qxc2 Re8 13 Nc3 a6 14 a4

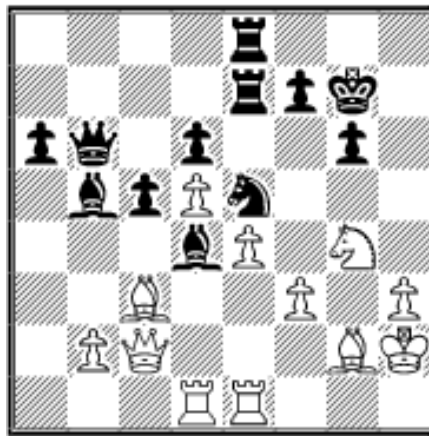


A position known from the Modern Benoni; although the outcome is the same, the line looks completely different. The knights exchange on e5, instead of c2, and it is White's king's knight that has to leave the board: 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nc3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0•0 9 0•0 Re8 10 Nd2 a6 11 a4 Nbd7 12 Nc4 Ne5 13 Nxe5 Rxe5 14 Qc2 Re8 15 e4 (see diagram above):

(a) 15...Rb8 16 Rb1 Nd7 17 Bd2 c4 18 Ne2 Nc5 19 Qxc4 (1•0, 41), Goldin – Pavlovic, Vrnjacka Banja 1998.

(b) 15...b6 16 f4 Ra7 17 Bd2 Ng4 18 h3 Bd4+ 19 Kh1 Nf2+ 20 Kh2 (1•0, 39) Suarez Navas – Minaya, Havana 1966.

14...Bd7 15 a5 Ng4 16 Bd2 b5 17 axb6 Qxb6 18 Nd1 Bb5 19 Re1 Bd4 20 Bc3 Ra7 21 h3 Nf6 22 Ne3 h5 23 Kh2 Rae7 24 f3 Nd7 25 g4 (25 b3 f5) 25...hxg4 26 Nxg4 Kg7 27 Rad1 Ne5? (27...Rh8 28 f4 f6 =)



28 Rxd4! Nxd4+

28...cxd4 29 Qf2 Qd8 30 Bxd4 f6 31 Qh4 Rf8 32 f4 Nxd4+ 33 Qxd4 +/-.

29 hxd4 cxd4 30 Qf2 f6 31 Bxd4 Qc7 32 g5 Kg8 33 gxf6 Rh7+ 34 Kg1 g5 35 Be3 Bd7 36 Qg3?

36 Bxd4! Kf7 37 Rc1 with excellent winning chances.

36...Kf7 37 Bxd4 (37 Qxd4? Rg8) 37...Reh8 38 f4 Qb6+ 39 Qe3

39 Qf2? Rh1+! etc.

39...Qxb2 40 Re2 Qb1+ 41 Re1 Qc2 42 Qe2 Qc5+ 43 Qe3 Qc2 44 Qe2 1/2-1/2

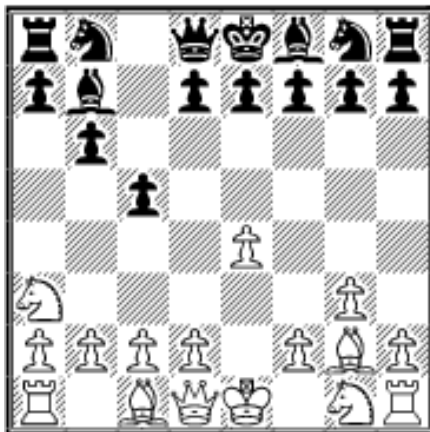
In the next game, we will look at several second move alternatives for Black.

Vladimir Malakhov (2691) – Krishnan Sasikiran (2692) Sarajevo, May 2006
Sicilian Defense [B20]

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 a6

Black prepares Nc6, but first avoids White's intended Bb5. Further alternatives:

(a) 2...b6 was suggested by Sakaev in his online annotation [\[12\]](#) and was later called "the most challenging response" by Rowson [\[8\]](#). The bishop b7 will attack White's pawn on e4, but I fail to see the challenge. The main line is: 3 g3 Bb7 4 Bg2

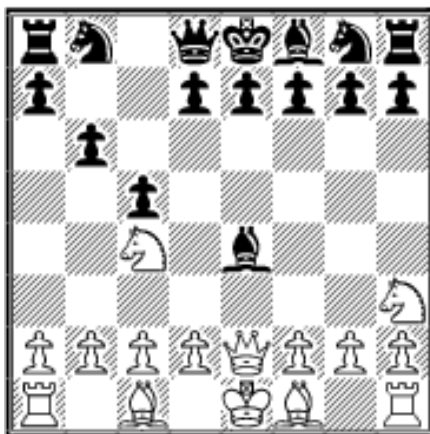


(a1) 4...g6 5 Ne2 Bg7 6 c3 Nf6 7 d3 0-0 8 0-0 d6 9 e5 Bxg2 10 exf6 Bxf1 11 fxg7 Kxg7 12 Qxf1 Nc6 13 Qh3 Re8 14 Qh6+ Kg8 15 Nc4 Ne5 16 Nxe5 dxe5 17 Qe3 Qd6 18 d4 exd4 19 cxd4 cxd4 20 Qxd4 Qxd4 21 Nxd4 Red8 22 Be3 Rac8 23 f4 Rc4 24 Rd1 f6 25 Rd2 Kf7 26 Kf1 a6 27 Ke2 b5 28 b3 Rcc8 29 Bf2 Rd5 30 a3 e5 31 fxe5 Rxe5+ 32 Kd1 Rc3 33 Rc2 Rxc2 34 Kxc2 h5 35 Kd3 g5 36 Nc6 Rd5+ 37 Ke2 f5 38 Be3 Kf6 39 Nb4 Rd6 40 Nd3 h4 41 b4 Rc6 42 Nc5 Rd6 43 Bf4 Rd4 44 Be3 Rd6 45 Bf4 Rd4 46 Ke3 Rc4 47 Nxa6 Rc3+ 48 Kd4 Rxa3 49 Nc7 Rb3 50 Bd6 h3 51 Nd5+ Ke6 52 Bc7 f4 53 Bb8 f3 54 Ba7 f2 ½-½, Malakhov – Shipov, Moscow 2006 (Superblitz tournament).

(a2) 4...f5 5 d3 Nf6 (“unclear”, Rowson [8]) 6 Qe2 (6 Nh3! fxe4 7 0-0 e5 8 Ng5 +=) 6...e6 7 Nh3 g6 (7...Be7 Shipov [11]) 8 0-0 Bg7 9 Nc4 0-0 10 Bg5 h6? (10...fxe4 11 dxe4 Qc7 12 Bf4 Qc6 Shipov [11]) 11 Bxf6 Bxf6 12 Nf4 Kh7 13 Nxc6! Rg8 14 Nd6 Bxb2 15 Nxb7 Qf6 16 Rab1 Rxc6 17 exf5 exf5 18 Nxc5 Nc6 19 Nxd7 Qg7 20 Bxc6 Rxc6 21 Qf3 Rac8 22 Qxf5+ Kh8 23 Rxb2 Qxb2 24 Ne5 R6c7 25 Re1! Qc3 26 Re4 Rg8 27 Rh4 Rh7 28 Qf6+ 1-0, Morozovich – Savchenko, Moscow Blitz Championship 2005.

(a3) 4...d5!? 5 d3 (better 5 exd5 e6 6 Nf3 exd5 7 d4) 5...dxe4 6 Bxe4 Bxe4 7 dxe4 Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Nc6 9 c3 Nf6 10 f3 0-0-0+ 11 Kc2 e6 12 Ne2 Ne5 13 Rf1 Be7 14 Bf4 Nfd7 15 Rad1 a6 16 h3 h5 17 Bxe5 Nxe5 18 f4 Nc6 19 Nc4 Kc7 20 Ne3 Rxd1 21 Rxd1 h4 22 g4 g5 23 f5 Ne5 (0-1, 40), Malakhov – Grachev, Moscow 2006 (Superblitz Tournament)

If 3 g3 is too simple for you, try 3 Ne2 Bb7 4 Ng3 h5 5 Nxh5 Bxe4 (so far Rowson [8]) 6 d4! += or 3 Qg4 Nf6 4 Qh4 (the improved 2 Qh5 Sicilian); or the slightly unusual 3 Nc4 Bb7 4 Nh3 Bxe4 5 Qe2



5...d5 6 Ne5 Nd7 7 d3 Bf5 8 Nxf7 Kxf7 9 g4 Bg6 10 Ng5+ Ke8 11 Ne6 Qc8 12 Bg2 +=.

(b) 2...Nf6, a kind of Alekhine’s Defense. 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nf3 (4 d4 cxd4 5 Qxd4 e6 [13]) 4...Nc6 5 Bb5, Jeroen Bosch [13]. Or perhaps White might play 5 b3, where the maneuver Na3-c4 is a typical motif. If 3 d3 Nc6 (d5) 4 c3 d6 5 Be2 g6 6 f4, we have reached the old game S.

R. Wolf – Von Döry, Vienna 1928. Of course, none of these lines is a refutation of 2...Nf6, but there is enough play – for both sides.

3 c3

There is nothing wrong with this move, or with 3 Nf3 d6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6 6 Bd3 g6 7 0-0 Bg7 8 Re1 0-0, as analyzed by Shipov [11]. But my personal favorite would be 3 g3, to direct the game into the channels of a Closed Sicilian.

3...Nc6 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Qe2 d6 6 g3 Bg4 7 h3 Bh5 8 Bg2 e6 9 0-0 Be7 10 d3 Nd7 11 Nc2 Rc8 12 g4 Bg6 13 Nd2 e5

Almost forced, as White threatened f2-f4.

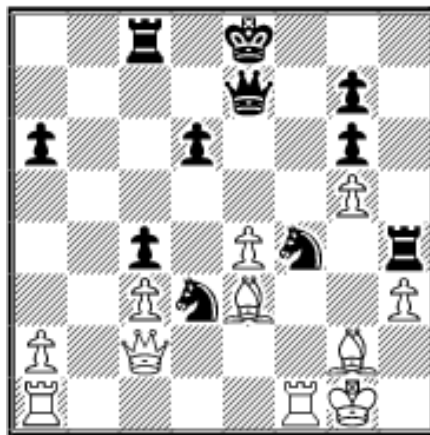
14 Ne3 Nf8 15 Nd5 b5 16 f4 exf4 17 Nxf4 Ne6 18 Nf3 b4!?

After the quieter 18...Nxf4 19 Bxf4 0-0 20 Rfd1, the position is about equal.

19 Nd5 h5 20 Nxe7 Qxe7 21 g5 h4!

Thanks to Black's courageous play, he soon gets the upper hand.

22 Qf2 bxc3 23 bxc3 Ne5 24 Nxh4 Nxd3 25 Nxg6 fxg6 26 Qe2 c4 27 Be3 Rh4 28 Qc2 Nef4



29 Bxf4?

The wrong way, Black now keeps his rook h4. To exchange a pair of rooks, White had to play 29 Rxf4! Rxf4 (if 29...Nxf4? 30 Rf1! Nxg2 31 Qa4+ Qd7? 32 Rf8+, or 30...Ne6 31 e5!, or finally 30...Qxg5 31 Rxf4! Rxf4 32 Qd2 etc.) 30 Bxf4 Nxf4 31 Qa4+ Kf8 32 Qxa6 =.

29...Nxf4 30 Qa4+ Qd7 31 Qxd7+ Kxd7 32 Rab1 Rc5—+ 33 Kf2

The ending is clearly lost for White: 33 Rb7+ Ke6 34 Rf2 Rxc5 35 Kf1 Nxc3 36 Bxc3+ Rxc3 37 Rff7 d5 —+.

The game continued: **33...Nxg2 34 Kxg2 Rxc5+ 35 Kh2 Rxe4 36 Rf2 Re3 37 Rb6 a5 38 Rb7+ Kc6 39 Rfb2 Re2+ 40 Rxe2 Kxb7 41 Re7+ Kc6 42 Rxc7 Kd5 43 h4 Rg4 44 Kh3 Rg1 45 Kh2 Rc1 46 Rxc6 Rxc3**

**47 Rg5+ Kd4 48 Rg4+ Kc5 49 h5 Rf3 50 h6 Rf8 51 h7 Rh8 52 Rg7
c3 53 Kg2 Kd4 54 Rc7 d5 55 Kf2 Kd3 0-1**

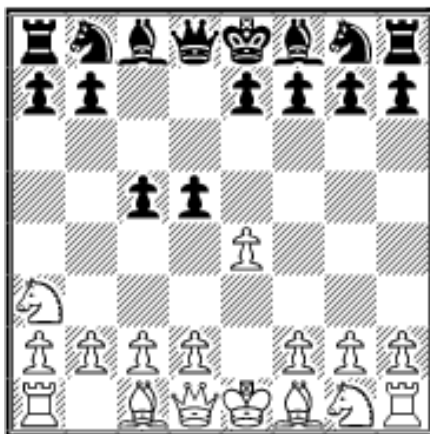


Sven-Åke Kronberg (Sweden) invented 1 e4 c5 2 Na3.

2 Na3 was played two decades prior to Vadim Zviagintsev's use of it. This first game with 2 Na3, as far as I know, was won by the strong correspondence player **Sven-Åke Kronberg** (ICCF 2475), who lives in Helsingborg, Sweden.

Sven-Åke Kronberg (Sweden) – Santiago Bonay Toscas (Spain)
16th Correspondence World Championship 1985 (Semi Final 3)
Sicilian Defense [B20]

1 e4 c5 2 Na3 d5

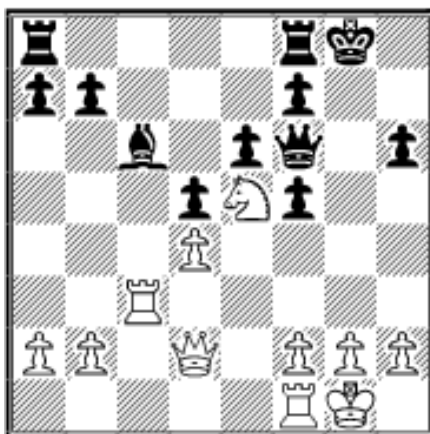


This is hardly a refutation of White's second move, since the knight will get a nice square on c4. Nevertheless, the direct 2...d5 could become popular, as an attempt to avoid all these positional subtleties that we have seen.

Last month's [column](#) discussed 2...e6 3 c3 (Zviagintsev – Dreev). Here 3 Qe2 seems worse, but for historical reasons it deserves a look:

(a) 3...d6 4 Nc4 Nc6 5 c3 Nf6 6 a4 Be7 7 f4 d5 8 exd5 exd5 9 Ne5 0-0 10 Ngf3 Bg4 (Black had strong alternatives in 10...Na5 and 10...Ng4) 11 Qf2 Qc7 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 g3 Bd6 14 h3 Rae8+ 15 Be2 Bxf3 16 Qxf3 c4 17 0-0 Ne4 18 Kg2 f5 19 d3 cxd3 20 Qxd3 +/- . Later White won on time, Kronberg – José Garcia, 11th Corr. Olympiad 1987, Sweden – Nicaragua. This was Sven-Åke Kronberg's second game with "his" variation.

(b) 3...Nc6 4 Nf3 g6 5 c3 Nge7 transposes to another attractive game by Vadim Zviagintsev: 6 d4 cxd4 7 Nb5 d6 8 Nbx d4 Bg7 9 Be3 Nxd4 10 cxd4 d5 11 e5 Nf5 12 Bg5 Qb6 13 Qd2 Bd7 14 Rc1 h6 15 Bf6 Bxf6 16 exf6 Qd8 17 Ne5 Bc6 18 Bd3 Qxf6 19 Bxf5 gxf5 20 0-0 0-0 21 Rc3!



21...Kh7 22 Rh3 Qg7 23 Kh1 Rg8 24 g4 Raf8 25 Rg1 f6 26 Nf3 f4 27 Qxf4 e5 (=, 46) Zviagintsev (2664) – Rublevsky (2665), Poikovsky 2006. 28 Qc1! +- Bd7 29 Rh4 followed by Rg3, or 28...Be8 29 g5 h5 30 Rhg3 +-.

3 exd5

3 Nf3!? comes into consideration, 3...dxe4 4 Ne5 or 4 Ng5 – either the

Fajarowicz or the Budapest Gambit with an extra tempo (Na3).

3...Qxd5 4 Nc4

Malcolm Pein [\[6\]](#) continues 4 Nb5 Qd7 5 Nf3 Nc6. He states that 2...d5 "would justify Na3 to an extent but looks well playable."

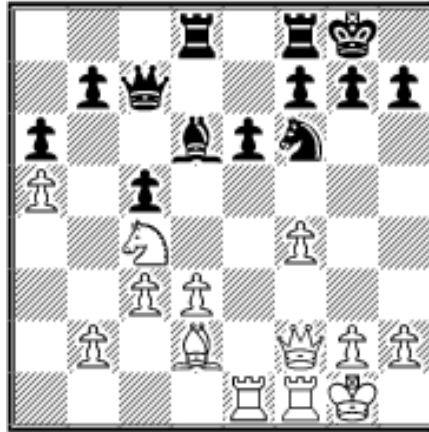
Jeroen Bosch [\[13\]](#) favors 4 Nf3, "and with Nb5 and Bc4 in the air as tempo-gainers White has a decent future ahead of him." After 4 Nf3, Black could reply Bg4. Kronberg's flexible text move avoids the pin. I

can't say which of these three alternatives is best.

4...Nf6 5 Ne3 Qd8 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Bb5 Bd7 8 c3 e6 9 0-0 Qb6 10 Qe2 Be7 11 Nc4 Qc7 12 a4 a6 13 Bxc6 Bxc6 14 Nfe5 Bd5 15 a5 Bxc4 16 Nxc4

White has established a firm grip on the square b6, but more is needed to win the game.

16...Nd5 17 d3 0-0 18 f4 Rad8 19 Bd2 Bd6 20 Qf2 Nf6 21 Rae1



21...Be7?

A serious error. After 21...Rfe8, Black's position has no weaknesses.

22 f5! += Bd6? (22...Qd7) 23 Qh4 +/- Rde8

23...exf5 24 Bg5 Be7 25 Re3 Rfe8 26 Rh3! with a strong attack; for example, 26...h6 27 Bxh6 Ng4 28 Bf4 +/-.

24 Re3 exf5 25 Rh3 Re2

25...Re6 26 Rxf5 Rfe8 27 Rxf6 gxf6 28 Nb6 Qc6 29 c4 +/-.

26 Bg5 Qc6 27 Rff3 Rfe8 28 Bxf6 Re1+

28...h6 29 Nxd6 Qxd6 30 Rhg3 +/-.

29 Rf1 Rxf1+ 30 Kxf1 gxf6 31 Qxh7+ Kf8 32 Nxd6 1-0

Correction

In [Part One](#), in my analysis of Zviagintsev – Ponomarev, Sochi 2006, I liked 29 Nxb5! (instead of 29 cxb5) Nxc4 30 Bb7 Rc5 31 a4 a6 32 Bxa6 Rc6 33 Rf3!, saying this was probably a win for White, but Alexander Motylev [\[15\]](#) gave a drawing line: 31...e4 32 Bxe4 a6 33 Nd4 Nd2 34 Rf4 Nxe4 35 Rxe4 Rxc3 =.

Sources:

- [1] R. T. Durkin: *Knightmare-I. A New Chess Opening*, n. d., (USA 1960?)
- [2] G. Welling: *Ein kleiner Seitensprung*, in: *Kaissiber 5* (1998), pp. 17-26.
- [3] T. Krabbé: [Defending Humanity's Honor](#).

- [4] A. Khalifman: *Opening for White according to Anand 1. e4*, vol. 3, Sofia 2004.
- [5] A. Khalifman: *Opening for White according to Anand 1. e4*, vol. 5, Sofia 2005.
- [6] M. Pein: column in: *Daily Telegraph*, December 22, 2005; [Internet source](#).
- [7] Z. Franco: [Internet source](#).
- [8] J. Rowson: [commented games](#), December 2005.
- [9] L. Day: commented game in *Toronto Star*, December 2005.
- [10] L. Kavalek: *Washington Post*, December 26, 2005.
- [11] S. Shipov: [Internet source](#) (2005, 2006)
- [12] K. Sakaev: [Internet source](#).
- [13] J. Bosch: *SOS: Zviagintsev's Sicilian Surprise*, in *New in Chess Magazine* 3/2006, pp. 82-85.
- [14] G. Sosonko: *Zviagintsev's Knight*, in *New in Chess Yearbook* 78, Alkmaar 2006.
- [15] A. Motylev: commented game in *Europe Echecs* 6/2006, p. 22f.
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