Dealing with the Anti-Sicilians has never been a trivial task for chess players and writers alike. One has to be ready for a wide spectrum, which varies from boring to surprisingly dangerous, and this diversity is extremely hard to cope with, especially if you are not armed with sound positional knowledge.

I believe that this book divulges as much of this positional knowledge as I am able to offer; while at the same time contributing to the development of opening theory. I tried to create a universal weapon, paying attention to both tactical and positional mechanisms, and I sincerely hope that this attempt has paid off, but this is ultimately for the reader to judge. An important consideration was to reduce White’s options and suggest lines that could be viable irrespective of the Sicilian system one plays as Black, and whenever possible I tried to make the repertoire choice work in this manner.

As the reader will notice, it is the 2.c3 and the 3.\textit{\textbf{b}}5(†) Sicilians that take a lot of the space in this book, and this is not surprising as they are both quite popular. The means I used to combat them adhered to the rule “one tool for many purposes”. In the first case, by suggesting a system based on \ldots e6, I complied with the needs of the move order 1.e4 c5 2.\textit{\textbf{f}}3 e6 3.c3.

In the latter case I chose a set-up including both \ldots c6 and \ldots d6 on moves 2 and 3 – making the line accessible to various types of Sicilian user. These systems require tactical mastery, and there is a slight disadvantage that one has to be aware of: sometimes castling is delayed, bringing whatever dangers this may incur. On the other hand, it is probably for this reason that they offer better winning chances than other set-ups, as Black aims for the best possible structure before resorting to safety. In this world, nothing comes for free.

One point to note is that I cover the Morra Gambit in Chapter 19, via the move order 2.\textit{\textbf{f}}3 g6 3.d4 cxd4 4.c3, rather than in the Various 2nd Moves section.

Of course, this book includes practically all Anti-Sicilians, and there are other dangerous systems to cope with. I am particularly happy with the results of my work in the system 1.e4 c5 2.\textit{\textbf{f}}3 c6 3.\textit{\textbf{c}}3. The Sveshnikov is a line a lot of people want to play as Black, and my suggestion of 3...e5 coincides with the choice of Sveshnikov himself. It has been postulated that this big hole on d5 is something that denies Black winning chances, but this is a rather simplistic assessment, as the reader will notice by going through Chapter 12.

I would like to thank my editors, and wish all my readers many creative achievements in battling the Anti-Sicilians.

Vassilios Kotronias
Athens, November 2015
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c3 Sicilian

Rare 5th Moves

Variation Index

1.e4 c5 2.c3 £f6 3.e5 £d5 4.£f3

4...£e6

A) 5.£c4

B) 5.£a3

C) 5.g3 £c6 6.£g2 d6 7.exd6 £xd6 8.0–0 0–0

C1) 9.£a3

C2) 9.d4 cxd4 10.£xd4 £xd4 11.£xd4 £c7 12.£d2 £d7

13.£e4 £e5

C21) 14.£d3

C22) 14.£c5!?
Chapter 6 – Rare 5th Moves

1.e4 c5 2.c3 ³f6 3.e5 ³d5 4.²f3

The most logical and flexible development, which maintains several options for White.

4...e6

This provides us with a universal system against c3 Sicilians. It is a solid move: supporting the d5-knight and preparing to castle quickly.

At this point there are several less popular alternatives worth mentioning. I will only make a brief report of what I consider essential, to arm readers sufficiently for their tournament games. This chapter will cover A) 5.c4, B) 5.³a3 and C) 5.g3.

5.d4 is covered in the next three chapters.

5.b4?! is an extravagant gambit which Black does best to accept. After 5...cxb4! 6.c4 ³c7! 7.d4 d6 8.exd6 ³xd6 9.³d3 ³c6 10.0–0 ³e7! White has no real compensation for the pawn.

After 5.²c4 I have analysed the move 5...³b6! in detail, concluding that Black has a good game. However, in an ...e6 based repertoire like the present one, it would be a waste of time and energy to devote space to it. The simple 5...d6 6.d4 cxd4 7.cxd4 is a direct transposition to our main line, featured in Chapters 8 and 9.

A) 5.c4

A time-consuming attempt to challenge control of d5.

5...³e7!

Seeking to contest control of the critical d4-square. The main line of my analysis continues as follows:

6.³c3 ³bc6 7.d4! cxd4 8.³xd4 ³xe5 9.³db5 ³f5?! 10.³f4! a6! 11.³xe5 axb5 12.³xb5 ³b4† 13.³c3 ³xc3† 14.³xc3 b5? 15.³f3

15...³d5?!
In my opinion, it is obvious that Black gets enough counterplay in return for the pawn here. He has superb piece activity and fast development.

16.cxb5
16.cxd5 0–0

16...d7 17.a4
17...d4 18.e4 a5† 19.d2 0–0 20.a4 d6= is a complete mess. The white king is stuck temporarily in the centre, while Black threatens to take on b5.

17...d4 18.e4 a5† 19.d2 0–0 20.a3 a8=]
20...e8 21.d3 h4 (21...e3 22.fxe3 dxe3 23.0–0 exd2 24.d6= is better for White)
22.e4 a7 23.b4 d8 24.d3 f5 25.f3= gives White a slight edge, so the other rook move should be trusted more.

21.b4
After 21.d3 the knight invasion 21...e3! looks strong. 22.fxe3 dxe3 23.0–0 exd2 24.d6 does not work anymore, in view of 24...fd8†. Black coordinates his defences excellently, by putting the bishop on e8 next while maintaining the strong pawn on d2.

21...b6!

The weakness of the c3-square and White’s stilted development gives Black excellent chances. For example:

22.e1 exd1 23.bxc1 d8 24.b1 h4!
25.g3 b7 26.e4 c1† 27.e2 xb5†!
28.axb5 xb5† 29.d3 e5† 30.e4
d4?? c3 would spoil White’s day somewhat.

B) 5.a3

Putting the knight on the rim may look strange, but the idea is to control d6 – or even challenge the d5-knight by means of c4-e3.

5...c6
5...d6 is another sound way to continue, but for the purposes of our repertoire I will rely upon the text.

6.c4
The only move to have any point.

After 6.b5 c7 7.xc6 xc6† Black is already threatening ...b5 and is slightly better.
Chapter 6 – Rare 5th Moves

6...\textit{\texttt{c7}}?

This move, covering d6 and intending ...b5, was the reason I decided to refrain from offering 5...d6. It leads to intriguing play, with excellent chances for Black.

6...b5 7.\textit{\texttt{e3}} 8.fxe3 \textit{\texttt{cx e3}} 9.d4 leads to a position where White's play on the kingside, based on the newly opened f-file, might cause Black serious concerns later on. The Ukrainian GM Vladimir Baklan is a specialist in this line as White.

7.d4

The obvious continuation. Black has no reason to worry after: 7.a4 \textit{\texttt{b6}}! 8.axb6 axb6 9.d4 \textit{\texttt{cx d4}} 10.\textit{\texttt{cx d4}} d6 11.\textit{\texttt{b5}} \textit{\texttt{d7}}= With comfortable equality.

7...\textit{\texttt{cx d4}} 8.\textit{\texttt{cx d4}} b5!

An incisive move, leaving Black with a pleasant position. The temporary weakness of the c2-square is an important factor that allows him to play in this fashion.

9.\textit{\texttt{e3}} \textit{\texttt{cb4}}! 10.\textit{\texttt{xd5}} \textit{\texttt{exd5}}! 11.\textit{\texttt{d3}} \textit{\texttt{xd3}}†

12.\textit{\texttt{xd3}}

12...\textit{\texttt{c4}}!

This move is the point of the whole operation. White has to either undouble our pawns or stay with his king in the centre.

13.\textit{\texttt{xc4}}

After 13.\textit{\texttt{ce3}} b4! 14.b3 \textit{\texttt{a6}}! 15.\textit{\texttt{h4}}! g6 16.f4 \textit{\texttt{e7}} 17.\textit{\texttt{f3}} d6 18.\textit{\texttt{d2}} \textit{\texttt{b8}} Black has successfully completed his development and is at least equal.

13...\textit{\texttt{cx d4}} 14.0–0 \textit{\texttt{b7}}

Black may even be slightly better at this stage.

15.\textit{\texttt{e1}} \textit{\texttt{e7}}

15...\textit{\texttt{c8}}!? \textit{\texttt{Nf}} looks like a good way to play for the full point.
The position was balanced, and the players soon agreed to a draw, in Bontempi – Jurcik, Stare Mesto 2010.

C) 5.g3

A natural move, which is mostly employed by players who hate too much theory. So, if you are playing one of them, please beware!

5...c6 6.g2 d6 7.exd6 cxd6 8.0–0 0–0

After liquidating the e5-pawn Black is certainly fine, but he shouldn't relax.

16.g5! 0–0 17.e4 xe4 18.xe4 d5 19.exd6 cxd6 20.f4 xf4 21.xf4 xfe8 22.f1

This slow move can be answered in two ways: retreating the d6-bishop to either c7 or e7. Needless to say that both treatments are okay, though I will give the latter move as my main line.

9...e7

9...b6 10.c4 c7 11.e1 (11.d3 b7 12.e2 h6 13.d2 d7 14.fe1 ad8= was also equal in Erenburg – Jakovenko, Oropesa del Mar 2001.) 11.b7 12.a4 d7 13.d4 cxd4 14.cxd4 ad8 15.g5 So far, this is Lupu – Florescu, Romania 1994.

15...f6!?N 16.d2 xfe8= Although objectively
equal, I would like Black’s position in actual play. The manoeuvre ...\( \mathcal{D}c6-e7-f5 \) is on the cards, while White is hard pressed to find a constructive plan.

10.d3

In case of 10.\( \mathcal{D}e1 \) (preventing ...e5, as 10.\( \mathcal{D}c2 \) e5 is quite okay for the second player), Black plays normal moves and gets a nice position: 10...b6 11.\( \mathcal{D}c2 \) \( \mathcal{b}7 \) 12.d4 cxd4 13.\( \mathcal{D}fxd4 \) \( \mathcal{D}xd4 \) 14.\( \mathcal{D}xd4 \) \( \mathcal{c}8 \) 15.\( \mathcal{W}e2 \) This was Deviatkin – B. Savchenko, St Petersburg 2009, when most accurate was:

15...\( \mathcal{f}6! \)N Putting the question to the knight on d4, with complete equality. It is possible to take this position a bit further: 16.\( \mathcal{d}d1 \) \( \mathcal{d}d7 \) 17.\( \mathcal{g}g4 \) \( \mathcal{f}d8 \) 18.\( \mathcal{g}g5 \) \( \mathcal{x}g5 \) 19.\( \mathcal{x}g5 \) h6 20.\( \mathcal{e}e5 \) \( \mathcal{f}6= \) After the exchange of lightsquared bishops, the white monarch becomes weaker, and this renders White’s pawn preponderance on the queenside unimportant; Black will always have counterplay by harassing His Majesty, one way or another.

10...b6 11.\( \mathcal{D}c4 \) \( \mathcal{b}7 \) 12.a4 \( \mathcal{w}c7 \)

Black’s position is harmonious, and his slightly superior pawn structure means that he can never be worse. The next step is to place the rooks on the central files.

13.\( \mathcal{W}e2! \)?

A friend pointed out to me that White can already play 13.a5 here, when I think one possible reply for Black is:

13...\( \mathcal{b}5 \)N 14.a6 \( \mathcal{c}8 \) 15.\( \mathcal{D}e3 \) \( \mathcal{f}6= \)

A complicated position has arisen, though it is not unfavourable for us.

When the pawn is on e6, defending the d5-knight, the following queen sally looks rather harmless: 13.\( \mathcal{b}b3 \) a6! To prevent a4-a5. 14.\( \mathcal{g}g5 \) \( \mathcal{a}b8 \) 15.\( \mathcal{f}f1 \) (15.\( \mathcal{x}e7 \) \( \mathcal{c}xe7 \)) 15...\( \mathcal{f}d8 \) 16.\( \mathcal{xe}7 \)
20...g5? 20...c6?! N 21.b3 a6!+, intending ...b5, seems to lead to an advantage for Black.

21.g4? 22.b3 g4 23.h4 e6 24.a5 h8 25.axb6 axb6 26.ee1 b5
Black was doing fine in Chopin – Bertrand, corr. 1994.

C2) 9.d4

10...cxd4 11.exd4 cxd4 12.d4

Obviously, White can only hope for an advantage by fighting for the centre.

9...cxd4 10.exd4

Weaker is 10.cxd4 b6 11.c3 e7+ when, if anything, Black is slightly better. I do not see how White can generate threats on either side of the board, while Black's firm control over d5 is a long-term asset.

10.d4 11.e4 c7 12.d2

This is the standard developing move in the position.

12.xd5 exd5 13.xd5?! (If I were White, I would have chosen 13.c3?? N+ with better hopes of weathering the storm.)
12...\textit{c}4 13.\textit{d}7 13...\textit{e}4

An important moment, with two possibilities for White: the older \textbf{C21} 14.\textit{d}d3 or the fashionable \textbf{C22} 14.\textit{c}5?!

\textbf{C21} 14.\textit{d}d3

14...\textit{a}6=

This natural move has been tested in a number of games.

14...\textit{a}d8 adheres to the rule of placing a rook opposite to the enemy queen. Efim Petrovic Geller used to tell me how important this rule is in chess, and I must admit that this and other teachings of his, no matter how simple they may appear now, significantly helped me to evolve as a player. After 14...\textit{a}d8 I analysed several possibilities for White, concluding that none of them offer the first player any chances for an advantage. What follows is a summary...
of my analysis, comprising what I consider the most important points for the readers:

**a)** 15.\( \text{g5?! g6} \) 16.\( \text{\&e1 \&c6} \) 17.\( \text{\&e2 \&g7} \)

**b)** 15.\( \text{\&f4 \&b6†} \) 16.\( \text{\&h1! (16.\&f5?! 16...\&b8! 17.c4! (17.\&c2 \&c6?) 17...\&c7!∞ leaves Black with a good game; he would like to place his bishop on c6 and knight on f5.}

**c)** I also analysed the move 15.\( \text{\&g5N} \) which, although untested, seemed logical to me. After 15...f6 16.\( \text{\&d2} \) 17.\( \text{\&g5 \&f6} \) 18.\( \text{\&fe1 (18.\&c2 \&d6?!)} 18...\( \text{\&c6} \) 19.\( \text{\&e2 \&xg2} \) 20.\( \text{\&xg2} \) (20.\( \text{\&xe6? \&c6} \) 21.\( \text{\&xd8 \&xd8†} \)) 20...\( \text{\&fe8} \) 21.\( \text{\&ad1 \&c6†} \) 22.\( \text{\&f3 (22.\&f3 \&c7∞)} \)

**d)** 15.\( \text{\&e1} \) is by far the main line. After 15...\( \text{\&c6} \) 16.\( \text{\&e2 (16.\&c2?! h6?!) 16...h6! 17.\&d2 \&f6 18.\&ad1} \) Black has a choice of routes to a draw:

22...\( \text{\&d5!} \) Black reaches comfortable equality. A nice tactical point is: 23.b3 (23.\( \text{\&c1} \) is answered by 23...\( \text{\&xd1} \) 24.\&xd1 \&a6! 25.\&h3 \&b6 26.\&f4 \&xf4 27.\&xf4 \&c6† 28.\&f3 \&e4= with balanced play.) 23...\( \text{\&xd2} \) 24.\&xc6 \&xc6 25.\&xd2 \&xc3=  

**C22)** 14.\( \text{\&c5?!} \)

White’s latest attempt, seeking to transfer play into an ending where he hopes his 3–2 queenside pawn majority might prove of significance.

14...\( \text{\&b8!} \)
Houdini also gives this move the seal of approval, so I will not analyse any others.

15.\textit{c}c4

The least committal in my opinion, but there are alternatives:

15.f4 creates weaknesses around the white king without gaining anything substantial in return. After 15...c7 16.h1 b6 17.d6 b5?! 18.xb8 axb8 19.c1 c6! I prefer Black, if only slightly. The idea is simply ...\textit{f}d8 followed by ...\textit{e}c7-f5, maximizing the activity of all the black pieces.

15.a3 c6! 16.c4N

16.f4 d6 17.xf6† xf6 18.xc6 bxc6 19.c3 b5† is slightly better for Black, at least in human chess.

16.d2 can be met by 16...\textit{b}6!, as in Van Dooren – Coenen, Maastricht 2015.

16...d6! 17.b3 c7 18.c3 \textit{ad}8†

The looming positional idea of ...\textit{a}4 gives Black a slight edge. For example:

19.xe1!

19.xc1?! a4 20.xab1 b6! is worse.

19...\textit{a}4 20.c2 b6 21.c1 c8 22.f4!

22.c5 \textit{a}6†

22...d4 23.d2 e5?!

23...xex5† 24.fxe3 xex2 25.xd2 xex4 26.xe4 c5 (26...d8 27.c2) 27.f3 \textit{d}8 28.c2 shouldn’t be worse for White.

24.xd4 xex4 25.xd4 cxd4 26.d3 \textit{d}8 27.b3 c5 28.xc5 bxc5 29.e1 xg2 30.xg2 a6 31.e2 g6†

Black has the nicer position, but with careful play White should eventually draw.

15...c6

This centralizing move looks best.

After 15...a6 16.c2 c7 17.c4 f6 18.xf6† xf6 19.f4 e5 20.c3 c6 I slightly prefer White, as I don’t like to have my pawn on e5.

With a balanced position. One way to continue would be:
19.\textit{\textbf{e}}\textsuperscript{3} \textit{\textbf{x}}\textsuperscript{g}2 20.\textit{\textbf{x}}\textsuperscript{g}2 \textit{\textbf{c}}\textsuperscript{6}\textsuperscript{†} 21.\textit{\textbf{f}}\textsuperscript{3} \textit{\textbf{c}}\textsuperscript{6}
22.\textit{\textbf{f}}\textsuperscript{d}1 \textit{\textbf{f}}\textsuperscript{d}8 23.\textit{\textbf{g}}\textsuperscript{1} a\textsuperscript{6}

A draw was agreed here in Garagulya – Ionov, Smolensk 2000, though a decent amount of play remains. I would take Black: he has the better minor piece, and White’s queenside pawn majority is idle for the time being.

**Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with less common 5th move tries for White after 1.e4 c5 2.c3 \textit{\textbf{f}}\textsuperscript{6} 3.e5 \textit{\textbf{d}}\textsuperscript{5} 4.\textit{\textbf{f}}\textsuperscript{3} e\textsuperscript{6}. The most dangerous of these is 5.g\textsuperscript{3}, where the first player hopes to take the game away from well-trodden theoretical paths. After the further continuation 5...\textit{\textbf{c}}\textsuperscript{6} 6.\textit{\textbf{g}}\textsuperscript{2} d\textsuperscript{6} 7.ex\textsuperscript{d}6 \textit{\textbf{x}}\textsuperscript{d}6 8.0–0 0–0 Black no longer has to worry about White’s central e-pawn, but he should still proceed with care. There are several positional ideas that Black should familiarize himself with, but the second player can look forward to a safe game with chances to play for more.