SH-sf Fanthology 2

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The Martian Who Hated People
by Edward Ludwig

(from Inside #7, January, 1955, copyright 1955 by Inside. Editor Ron Smith's introduction said: "We asked Ed to do us a story around our title and Sure he said -- but he went us one better and gave us three for the price of one. Here is his MARTIAN WHO HATED PEOPLE -- three stories written as he thinks three well known authors would have written them -- Bradbury, Lovecraft and Doyle, respectively!")

The house waited ninety thousand years.

It lay in the blue Martian sand like the black, hollow shell of a gigantic beetle. It was a silent fortress against time, the raven sheen of its exterior unmarred by the kaleidoscopic sweep of seasons, its blue-white windows reflecting only defiance of the hot, ceaseless wind and the eternal scraping of sand.

For ninety thousand years no sound had echoed through its hollow chambers, and yet it was not an empty shell. In its depths, a Force waited like poison liquid in a capped jug, patient, oblivious to time, waiting, waiting...

The rocket appeared in the twilight sky.

The rocket belched flame, dived, slowed, grumbled, came to rest at the edge of a dry Martian canal. Presently there was a movement of booted feet through soft sand. Voices sounded in the still cool air.

"God, Captain, it _is_ a house. I knew it. Just think. Mars is, or was, inhabited!"

The footsteps quickened.

"Careful, men," said the Captain. "We're liable to find anything here."

The Force in the house stirred. The liquid in the capped jug began to move as if stirred by a teasing finger. Strange eyes were peering through its sand-coated windows. Strange hands were exploring its black walls, manipulating its doors. The liquid swelled and swirled, ready to pop out of the bottle.

"Hey, Captain! Here's a door! Ready?"

"Yeah. But take it easy."

Slowly, slowly.

An opening of the door. A moment of silence. Then, cautious footsteps. A series of surprised, almost reverent whistles.

The Force, too, was ready. Faster and faster the liquid swirled.

"It's uninhabited," mused the Captain. "The Martians must have left it a thousand years ago, maybe fifty thousand for all we know."

The tension slackened. The five earthmen became as wide-eyed children, scrambling through the dark rooms, marveling at the delicate statuary and crystal pillars, their hands like silver knitting needles darting from one miracle to another.

One of the men paused, scowling. "Captain, there's something here.... Something we can't see."

"Nonsense, Black. The house is empty."

"No it -- it's something in the air. Like something left behind. Something unfriendly, something that hates our guts."

The Captain laughed.

But another said, "I feel it, too. It's something old and evil that's been waiting for a long time."

"I'm sure of it," said Black. "It sounds silly, but one time at home, in Indiana, I went into an old empty house. A man had died there, an evil man. And long after he died, I felt something in the air, a kind of echo of his evil. Just by being there, I knew that he hated people, and his hatred was still there."

"A spiritual residue?" someone asked.

"Yes. Something like that."

"Ridiculous," said the Captain. "But maybe we'd better leave anyway. I do feel a bit dizzy. The stale air, I suppose."

A warmth had crept into the house. There was an odor suggestive of burning sulphur and fiery brimstone.

The Captain blinked.

"Black!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing? Put that gun away!"

Black's eyes were like cold slivers of obsidian. He pointed the gun at the Captain's chest.

"Black!"

A shot rang out.

Black fell.

The Captain turned. "Hollis! You shot him! You shot Black!"

"Had to, Captain." The words were as cold as tips of icicles. "Had to before he shot you."

The Captain swayed. A gidiiness seized him, just for an instant. Then his mind cleared.

A hatred was in him. He was old and alone, and only the heartbeat of hatred had sustained him for these many centuries. He hated the destroying winds of time and he hated the blazing suns and the muddy-green planets and he hated all the creatures that crawled or flew or walked thereon. Now, for a brief moment in the candle-flame of existence he would know vengeance. This was the moment for which he had been waiting.

The being that had been the Captain tightened his grip about the trigger of his gun.

There was a shot, and soon another and another. And at last a great silence descended upon the black-walled house and all movement died.

The warmth vanished from the air, like liquid returning to a jug, and the house settled back in the blue Martian sand again to wait, wait, wait...

My coming to Innsmouth had been a mistake. I had included the little known seaport on my summer itinerary primarily in the hope of discovering certain architectural and antiquarian oddities which might perchance be worthy of interpretation in a monograph I was then preparing. My eager expectations had been irrevocably crushed upon my first glimpse of the small, fog-shrouded town.

True -- there were a score or more of large square Georgian houses dating, I judged, from the time of the town's founding in

1643; and yet the tangle of sagging, decaying gambrel roofs and the dark, crumbling chimney-pots only created within me a sense of extreme depression. The aura of wormy decay, coupled with the obnoxious, omnipresent odor of fish and lobsters, gave rise to a suggestion of intense and inescapable malignancy.

Neverthleless, the hour being late, I decided to remain overnight in a decrepit, cupolo-crowned hotel proclaimed to be the Gilman House, intending to take the morning stage to Arkham. There, in the shabby lobby, it was my misfortune to engage the aged proprietor in conversation.

He was an odd looking man with a long, narrow, bulging head, quite bald, and with watery, fish-like eyes. He moved with a peculiar shambling motion, and his curiously short fingers possessed an almost batrachian roughness.

He was at first reluctant to talk, but even his ordinarily objectionable presence was preferable to the damp silence of my second-story room. I procured a bottle of wine from my valise, and after our sampling it, the man's tongue became considerably freer.

He rambled on for some moments, discussing in his whiny voice the various aspects of the countryside and the dearth of possibilities for employment save in the town's small fishing industry.

It was then that I recalled certain items pertaining to Innsmouth that I had chanced upon while rummaging in the library of Miskatonic University during my graduate study.

"Wasn't there some incident here a few years ago?" I asked. "An activity of some sort out at Devil's Reef?"

By this time he had consumed a considerable quantity of wine, and in hushed tones he whispered an utterly improbable tale concerning a number of gently bred families of the region -- the Marshes, the Gilmans, and the Eliots. I had heard of the volume to which he occasionally referred -- a work called the Nekronomikon -- but the tale was so incredibly fantastic that it seemed a product of a deranged mind. The tale, together with the hot alcoholic breath that he persisted in exhaling into my face, sickened me. I began to leave.

"You don't believe?" He hiccoughed. "Take a look in the church at the end of Washington Street, the one with the fallen steeple. Tonight, yes sir, tonight --"

He stopped abruptly as if realizing the extent of his revelation. An inexplicable fear grew in his unblinking, staring eyes. His lips clammed shut, and I knew that our conversation was concluded.

Still reluctant to brave the moldy, fishy dampness of my room, I strode out into the cool night. In the darkness the air of malignancy about the town had intensified, and the crumbling silent shapes about me seemed like watching monsters of fabulous grotesqueness. Presently I found myself before a church built in a clumsy Gothic fashion. Could this be the place to which the proprietor had so passionately and perhaps inadvertently referred?

Although the place was in darkness, the murmur of many voices drifted to me from the doorway.

I listened intently.

"Nyarlathotep...N'gah-Kthum...Ia-R'lyeh!...Cthulhu fhtgan! Ia! Ia!"

An insidious revulsion crept upon me, and yet at the same moment I was seized with an overwhelming compulsion to enter. The aged boards of the entrance creaked beneath my feet. I felt like an unholy intruder, an unwelcome participant in some phantasmagoric abomination, yet I continued forward as if hypnotized by the weird chorus. Soon I beheld a sea of narrow, fish-shaped heads silhouetted against the blackness, moving from side to side in rhythm with the ominous chant.

Abruptly the Thing appeared. Out of the blackness, as if from a caldron of flame, it burst into existence, a trans-cosmic horror, a monstrous profanation of all things holy. From its loathsome body came an aura of indescribable hatred -- a hatred so intense it seemed that even its worshipers must burn and wither beneath its flaming fury.

I fled, screaming, my feet clattering over the wet cobblestone streets. Back to my hotel room I fled as if in a nightmare, locking my door, then lying half-hysterical on my bed until dawn forced its sickly gray light through my window.

What was the abomination I beheld that ill-fated night in Innsmouth? A creature surely not of this world. A creature from another planet? From Mars perhaps? And was I observed by the curiously misshapen worshipers? Will they search for me? Will they seek my death in order to insure the continued secrecy of their unmentionable rites?

The aura of hatred still burns in my memory like the unquenchable fire of Hell, and my dreams are kaleidoscopes of loathesomeness and horror....

For the third time this day, Surly Homes seized the neat morocco case from the corner of the mantelpiece. His long nervous fingers extracted the hypodermic syringe, filled it with the colorless liquid from a small bottle, and rolled back his shirtcuff.

"Cocaine again?" I asked a bit sarcastically. "Or morphine?"

"Cocaine," he replied nonchalantly, "A seven-per-cent solution. But none of your harangues, Watchson. My mind craves stimulus. Life without exhilaration is unbearable. If intellectual stagnation must be the inevitable compatriot of physical well-being, then I must prepare to meet my doom graciously."

I made no further attempt to dissuade the tall, ascetic figure. The week had been singularly uneventful, and a chilling pea-soup fog had

blanketed the city continually. Homes had paced our rooms at 221 Baker Street like a caged animal, pausing only to scrape his violin fitfully or to stretch out lazily on the sofa in a state of utmost depression, and then to bound for the hypodermic needle.

The needle was now poised over his scarred, dotted forearm when

a knock came at the door. I opened it and beheld the portly figure of our landlady, Mrs. Hudson.

"A letter for Mr. Homes," she said. "It came by the last post."

Listlessly, Homes stepped forward and took the letter. His languid eyes studied its message. Then his eyebrows lifted, and he murmured, "Remarkable, Watchson. Most remarkable. Look at this, old fellow. What do you make of it?"

The letter was dated midnight of the preceding night and ran in this way:

> My Dear Mr. Surly Homes:
>
> I am a stranger in your city and country and have heard of your unusual reputation. I am at a loss in deciding how I may best understand your people and your way of life. I hope you will consent to be my guide for a short period of time. I will be at your lodgings tomorrow evening and am writing this so you will plan to remain at home.
>
> Very truly yours,
> Anhown Roule

"Rather presumptuous," I remarked. "The famous Surly Homes becoming a guide!" I chuckled. "What will you do?"

He rubbed his long, nervous hands together furiously. "No, no, Watchson. You've missed it completely. The handwriting, Watchson -- written with a pen and yet flawless, as if written by a machine. And the paper -- " He held it up to the gaslight. "Peculiar. Most peculiar. Certainly not an English paper, and neither European nor American. I think, my dear Watchson, that we're going to have a most unusual visitor!"

As if in answer, rapid footsteps sounded outside our room. Homes threw down the letter. "On your toes, Watchson. The game's afoot!"

His composure renewed, Homes opened the door to admit our visitor. He was a small man, clad in a tight-fitting, immaculate coat and thin grey trousers, with no overcoat or hat. His narrow face was extremely florid, and his skin appeared tight and dry, suggestive of that of a mummy. The most significant aspect about him was his ears: large to the point of being elephantine and thrust outward to resemble pink, dry cups.

"Mr. Surly Homes?" he asked shrilly, and Homes nodded I had suspected that Homes would display interest at the stranger's odd appearance, yet he maintained his air of nonchalance which almost bordered, I thought, on affectation.

"Mr. Roule," said Homes. "You want me to be your guide? Rather an intriguing proposition. You're a stranger to England?"

A slight apprehension came upon me as the small man, with some hesitation, seated himself. I seemed to sense an emanation of suppressed resentment, perhaps even of hatred, radiating from those dark, unblinking eyes.

"This is my first trip to England," said he.

"You have come a long ways?" asked Homes politely.

"Very far."

"And why do you require a guide?"

"I felt as if I needed not only a guide, but also a protector. I understand that your city is overrun with thieves, cutthroats, outlaws of all descriptions. I simply cannot feel secure here. I should wish to see the city as quickly as possible and then be on my way."

Homes thought for several seconds, observing the small man, "Really, my dear sir, I am afraid that I am at this time unable to accept employment by one who hates London as much as you. I suggest that you return at once to Mars."

I choked with alarm and astonishment. Mars? The great man's mind had snapped. Use of the needle had at last destroyed the sensitive tissues of the once great brain.

And yet the small man, with an inarticulate roar of fury, made for the door, his eyes like those of a fear-crazed beast intent upon escape. A moment later he was gone, his swift footfalls fading into silence.

Homes smiled, his eyes bright. "I am not mad, Watchson. My deductions were logical and inevitable. The nature of the letter's handwriting at once indicated a most unusual intellect, one that could produce handwriting with a machine-like precision. The appearance of the man was similarly informative. He approached our lodgings with the utmost rapidity; yet unlike our other visitors, he was not in the least out of breath after scrambling upstairs. Indeed, during his stay I observed him to take only two long, barely perceptible breaths. Hes respiratory system obviously requires very little oxygen.

"The dryness of his skin indicated his homeland to be a place of little or no moisture. And the strange development of his ears reveals beyond a doubt that he lives in a quite thin atmosphere. Such conditions, taken together, are to be found only, if I recall my astronomy, on the planet Mars. His presence here was apparently dictated by his superiors. He was sent to observe life on our planet, even though he detested it."

He cocked his head quizically. "I may have acted rashly in letting him escape, for a visitation by a Martian must indeed be infrequent -- but I find myself thoroughly disinclined to serve one who so disparages our beloved London."

I gasped in awe at the tall, proud figure. "Remarkable, Homes. Utterly remarkable!"

Homes shrugged, picking up his battered violin with reborn enthusiasm. "Elementary, my dear Watchson. Elementary."

A Letter
(Mycroft to S.)
by Jon White

(from Fistula, 1968, copyright 1968 by editor Jon White. According to the introductory "historical note," by "Horace Horace, Curator of Documents," this letter "was found in a tantalus fished out of Hudson Bay, on August 9th, 1967.")

Dear S.,

It was with the greatest of delight that I received your note, despite its discouraging contents, because, old boy, it's been a damn long time!

Well, now. It is indeed a surprise that you, of all people, could get into such a predicament. I am not too sure that I can handle this problem properly. When, so long ago, you used to come to me with a difficult murder or such, I could advise you with confidence. But this is a bit out my field. And you, dear brother, are the last person in the world to whom I would have expected this to happen.

In brief, you say this woman from Bohemia, this Irene, is blackmailing you, with compromising photographs, into marriage.

Well, now. Is it really such a bad thing as that? According to that Boswell of yours, a rather dim fellow I've always thought, this Irene is quite a prize. And besides, don't you think it's time you settled down?

It's also time, brother, that you grew up in regard to women. This is your most serious lack, an immature dependence upon the maternal type, such as Mrs. Hudson. (And herein lies my surprise that this Irene can blackmail you at all. I was unaware of the fact that you had ever put yourself into any compromising position, or positions. Your naivete on such grounds is extraordinary, and seems almost to give the lie to the photographs.)

Further, it is obvious that the woman possesses a genuine fondness for you. She cannot wish to marry you for your money, for you have no wealth. She is willing to go as far as blackmail in order to affiance you. Strange, is it not, that she cannot rely on her own very abundant charms, the same charms that have captured the hearts of half the men in Europe? It is a sad reflection on you, brother.

"Mycroft Holmes"
Sidney Paget

There is nothing more to say. Marry her! It will do you a world of good.

I suppose you still have many doubts. Drop around the Diogenes Club this evening, and we can have a long talk about it, man to man.

Your loving brother,

Mycroft.

Moriarty and the Binomial Theorem
by Doug Hoylman

(from Proper Boskonian #6, 1970. Copyright 1970 by the New England Science Fiction Association, Inc. Editor: Dick Harter.)

Of the mathematical works of that "Napoleon of modern crime," Professor James Moriarty, we know of but two: in The Valley of Fear, Sherlock Holmes tells Dr. Watson, "Is he not the celebrated author of The Dynamics of an Asteroid -- a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there was no man in the scientific press capable of criticising it?"[1], and in the fortunately misnamed The Final Problem, Holmes says, "At the age of twenty-one he wrote a treatise upon the binomial theorem which has had a European vogue. On the strength of it, he won the Mathematical Chair at one of our smaller Universities." A paper purporting to be the former work appeared in STROON #8,[2] so perhaps some discussion as to the possible nature of the latter treatise would be in order.

A binomial is the algebraic sum of two terms, such as $a+b$. If a binomial is raised to a power, $(a+b)^n$, the resulting poly-

1. One may ask how anything with applications to astrophysics can be classed as pure mathematics, but, as we shall see later, Holmes was no authority in such matters.

2. This paper gives rise to much speculation, as it contains references published as recently as 1962. Did Moriarty have a time machine, or total precognition? Having, like Holmes, survived Reichenbach and the ravages of time, did he revise his article just recently? Or is this the work of a contemporary namesake, perhaps a descendant of the Colonel or the stationmaster? Speaking of namesakes, much ink has been spilled over the names of Professor James Moriarty and Colonel James Moriarty. But there is one explanation that nobody seems to have thought of, namely that "James Moriarty" is one of those annoying unhyphenated double surnames found so often in England -- like, e.g., White Mason in The Valley of Fear. The professor, being a practical-minded man, would have considered one surname enough for anybody and have gone simply by "Moriarty." [Cf. "Some Notes on the Name of the Brothers Moriarty," by David Skene Melvin, BSJ, XXI (June 1971), n.s., pp. 90-96. -- BSJ]

nomial can be computed by multiplication, but for large values of n this becomes cumbersome. The binomial theorem gives an explicit formula for writing down this product term by term:

$$(1)\quad (a+b)^n = a^n + na^{n-1}b + \dots \frac{n(n-1)(n-2)\dots(n-r+1)}{1\cdot 2\cdot 3\cdot \dots \cdot r} a^{n-r}b^r + \dots + b^n$$

If a is not zero (and if it is, the theorem is devoid of interest), we may write $(a+b)^n$ as $a^n(1+\frac{b}{a})^n$. Then, making the substitution $x=\frac{b}{a}$, the theorem may be written more simply as

$$(2)\quad (1+x)^n = 1 + nx + \dots \frac{n(n-1)(n-2)\dots(n-r+1)}{1\cdot 2\cdot 3\cdot \dots \cdot r} x^r + \dots$$

If n is a positive integer, there is no need to indicate the last term in the expression, as it "shuts off" automatically after n+1 terms, i.e., the coefficients become zero. The definition of the exponential notation a^n may be extended to allow n to be any complex number. In this case (2) may still be valid, but in general does not terminate, becoming an infinite series. Then the additional question arises of whether the series converges, i.e., whether it may be said to have a sum.

Forms of the binomial theorem were known in ancient times to the Egyptians and Arabs. Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) used it for arbitrary values of n, though without proof. It remained for the Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel[3] (1802-1829) to give a complete proof of equation (2) for all complex values of x and n, including the question of convergence.[4]

Thus in Moriarty's time (Baring-Gould[5] dates this treatise about 1865) there were no remaining problems concerning the proof of the binomial theorem itself. So what was the subject of Moriarty's paper? Poul Anderson[6] says, "It seems probable...that [he] was working on the basic idea of number itself, and that he developed a general binomial theorem applicable to other algebras than the one we know." Presumably Anderson does not mean "algebra" in the technical sense (a vector space with multiplication),

3. Oeuvres completes, Christiania, 1839, pp. 66-92.

4. For anyone who's interested, the series is absolutely convergent when $|x| < 1$ or when $|x|=1$ and Re n (the real part of n) is positive; conditionally convergent when $|x|=1$, $x \neq -1$, and $-1 < \text{Re } n \leq 0$; and divergent otherwise.

5. Watson, John H. et al, The Annotated Sherlock Holmes, William S. Baring-Gould, ed., Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., New York, 1967. Librarians being an unimaginative lot, you will probably find this catalogued under Baring-Gould or Doyle. All Holmes quotations in the present paper are taken from this edition.

6. "A Treatise on the Binomial Theorem," Baker Street Journal, V, 1 (new series), January 1955, pp. 13-18. Unfortunately I have not had access to this publication, so my quotation is at second hand from Baring-Gould, op. cit.

but "algebraic structure." Now the simplest algebraic structure having both addition and multiplication (raising a quantity to a positive integral power is simply repeated multiplication) is a ring. Rings may be either commutative (ab=ba) or noncommutative. In a commutative ring the standard proofs of (1), for n a positive integer, are valid without alteration, so the generalization is of no interest (here na, for example, is not a product, since n need not represent an element of the ring, but simply a+a+...+a); while in a noncommutative ring no simplification of the expansion of $(a+b)^n$ such as the binomial theorem represents is possible. If, on the other hand, n is allowed to represent an arbitrary element of the algebraic structure, then in general we obtain an infinite series and the problem of convergence arises. The concept of convergence requires that of limit, which in turn necessitates a topological structure as well as an algebraic one. But this combination of algebra and topology was unknown until the 1920's, so it could scarcely have been included in a paper which had a "European Vogue" circa 1865.

"Moriarty" -- Sidney Paget

Of course, there is the possibility that the sort of ab- abstract algebra developed by Moriarty was altogether different

from that in use today. Whether this development came to naught because only Moriarty was capable of handling it or because it proved to be a dead end is a matter for conjecture. The second supposition would seem more consistent with the term "vogue."

Without rejecting Mr. Anderson's thesis outright, I would like to put forward my own suggestions as to the nature of this lost work. The first is that it constituted a new method of teaching the binomial theorem. Moriarty was, after all, a professor, and apparently a good teacher. The traditional proof of the theorem, involving mathematical induction and some cumbersome algebraic manipulations, is difficult to understand and almost totally uninteresting, as anyone who has taught college algebra can testify. A better proof would certainly be welcome.

But I have a second conjecture which I consider more satisfactory. The clue for this was the discovery that Holmes knew very little mathematics. Yes, despite his knowledge of European literature, ancient languages, and other fields seemingly unrelated to the science of detection, Holmes' acquaintance with mathematics did not go beyond elementary geometry.

He had indeed studied geometry, which was probably the minimum mathematics required for graduation from __Cambridge
__Oxford
(check one); and, like almost every geometry student from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the present century, his text was Euclid's Elements, written circa 325 B.C. As evidence of this we have The Sign of the Four, wherein Holmes complains to Watson, "You have attempted [in A Study in Scarlet] to tinge it [the science of detection] with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid."[7]

And Holmes could apply his knowledge of geometry to practical problems, as in this use of similar triangles from "The Musgrave Ritual": "Of course the calculation was now a simple one. If a rod of six feet threw a shadow of 9 feet, a tree of

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7. The fifth proposition states that if two sides of a triangle are equal, then the angles opposite those sides are equal. Euclid's roundabout proof is much more difficult than those given in modern texts, and this proposition "was to become known as the pons asinorum [Latin, "asses' bridge"] (a slighting commentary upon the alleged inability of medieval students to progress beyond it)". (Reichmann, W.J., The Spell of Mathematics, Methuen & Co., London, 1967, p. 29.) Baring-Gould (op. cit.) says that there is no apparent reason for Holmes to have chosen this proposition over any other for his illustration, but I suspect that he was making a subtle comment on Watson's reasoning ability, without, as usual, the doctor's being aware of it.

The fifth proposition should not be confused with the fifth postulate, the "parallel postulate," omission of which gave rise to the so-called non-Euclidean geometries.

64 feet would throw one of 96 feet, and the line of one would of course be the line of the other." (In mathematical circles, anyone who repeatedly says "of course" is suspected of not being able to prove his assertions.)

But his ignorance of any higher mathematics is betrayed in "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane," an account which he wrote himself -- there's no blaming Watson's bad memory for this one. Holmes is describing Ian Murdoch, a mathematical coach at The Gables: "He seemed to live in some high, abstract region of surds and conic sections with little to connect him with ordinary life." Now anyone who regards "surds and conic sections" (about either of which Newton could have told you everything worth knowing) as belonging to a "high, abstract region," or imagine them to be of major concern to a twentieth century mathematician manifestly does not know very much about mathematics.

Thus we have the following picture: Holmes, nearly innocent of mathematics, is attempting anyhow to read a paper of Moriarty's on the principle of "Know your enemy." Suddenly among all the strange words and symbols, "binomial theorem," a familiar phrase (though he probably could not tell you what it means) catches his eye. Henceforth the paper is tagged in Holmes' haphazard mental filing system as "Moriarty's treatise on the binomial theorem," though the actual relationship may be quite incidental.

Now the binomial coefficients, the numbers which appear in the binomial theorem, are very important in mathematics, important enough to have a special abbreviation:

$$(3)\quad \frac{n(n-1)(n-2)\ldots(n-r+1)}{1\cdot 2\cdot 3\cdot \ldots \cdot r} = \binom{n}{r}$$

where r must be a positive integer but n may be any number. If n is a positive integer as well, then, surprisingly, $\binom{n}{r}$ is always an integer. The principal use of the binomial coefficients in mathematics in in the <u>theory of combinations</u>. If you are given n objects and want to <u>select r of them</u>, in how many different ways can this be done? Or, how many <u>combinations</u> are there of n things taken r at a time? The answer turns out to be just $\binom{n}{r}$. The theory of combinations and its close relative, the <u>theory of probability</u>, have direct applications to gambling games; indeed, this is what motivated Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) and Pierre de Fermat (1601-1665) to develop the theory. As an example, there are $\binom{52}{5}$ possible poker hands, $\binom{13}{5}$ possible flushes in any suit, $4\binom{13}{5}$ flushes altogether; hence the probability of being dealt a flush is $4\binom{13}{5}/\binom{52}{5}$.

So it seems quite possible that Moriarty's treatise was on the theory of probability. As old as this theory is, it was in

the nineteenth century, and is today, an open field with many unsolved problems available for study. And not only does this agree with Holmes' description (in view of his limitations), but a paper with applications to gambling would be an appropriate foreshadowing of Moriarty's career to come (Holmes tell us in The Valley of Fear that Moriarty's criminal empire includes "card-sharpers," and undoubtedly other gambling enterprises were involved), if indeed he had not already begun it at the age of twenty-one.*

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* Cf. Theodore W. Gibson's discussion of Moriarty's use of game theory and of his over-estimation of Holmes' mathematical ignorance during "The Final Problem" ("You're Matching Me," BSJ, 1956 Christmas Annual, pp. 15-18).

The Irregular Reviewer
"The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes"
Dean W. Dickensheet, I.S.:B.S.I.

(from No 7, February 1971, ed. Ruth Berman.)

"THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES". A United Artists release, produced and directed by Billy Wilder; screenplay by Wilder and I.A.L. Diamond. Rated GP

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle actually considered the Sherlock Holmes adventures to be boys' stories, a fact evinced both by his introduction to The Casebook and by his suppression of "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box" for 23 years because it involved marital infidelity. Sir Arthur would not be happy with Mr. Wilder's film; nor will a number of persons who see Holmes as a Victorian Tom Mix, a mixture of virtue and papier mâché. Lamentably, this group includes many of the Eastern reviewers.

Dedicated Baker Street Irregulars, however (despite the insinuations of the aforementioned reviewers), do not see Holmes and Watson as stainless demi-gods, but as flesh-and-blood Englishmen whose actions and personalities may be extrapolated far beyond the bounds of the Canon. They, therefore, may disagree with Wilder's and Diamond's interpretations, but not with their right to make them. Far more scandalous positings have appeared in the pages of Sherlockian Journals.

So, then, to the film. Less an attempt to retell or expand the Sherlockian Canon than one to provide a neglected set of illustrations, it is a most engaging film, when it is not forced.

Robert Stephens as Holmes

The Victorian Baker Street contrived by Art Director Tony Inglis and Set Decorator Harry Cordwell is magnificently right, even when one remembers that it was never that narrow nor that clean; Christopher Challis' photography enhances the illusion artfully. The acting is consistently excellent, even when it fails to surmount the direction -- Irene Handl would have made a marvelous Mrs. Hudson, had she not been reduced to a meddling busybody; Molly Maureen is, despite some overly-ingenuous lines, the best Queen Victoria this reviewer has seen (Sorry, Miss Hayes!). It is when the film attempts hard satire or hard plot that it fails. And, of course, the notorious Wilder-Diamond "humor," derived directly from *Captain Billy's Whiz-Bang*, makes a few gristly appearances (there is, however, one pure sight-gag, directed entirely at the viewer, which is a 20-second masterpiece).

The plot is an episodic one, the first part discrete (if its subject matter will allow that term) and the last two interconnected. (There is evidence that there were at least two other episodes in the original script, and that Wilder perhaps left the equivalent of another entire film on the cutting-room floor.) The first incident involves the offer, by a Russian ballerina (Tamara Toumanova), of a Stradivari violin in return for Holmes' (Robert Stephens) siring her child. Out of his element, and lacking the ready wit in the circumstances shown by George Bernard Shaw[1], Holmes provides a defense which proves most embarrassing to the womanizing Dr. Watson (Colin Blakely).

1. Shaw was once (so it is said) approached by an actress with a similar request. "How the world would profit," she said, "from a child with my body and your brain." "But, my dear woman," Shaw replied, "what if the wretched creature has *my* body and *your* brain?"

The principal portion of the plot belies the earlier segment by at least implying that Holmes can use sex as an appurtenance to detection, and perhaps even enjoy it. An amnesiac foreign woman (Genevieve Page) is pulled from the Thames and is found to be clutching a card bearing Holmes' address. She is brought to Baker Street by a cabman, given a sleeping draught by Dr. Watson, and put to bed. Later, Holmes parlays her bout of semi-somnambulism (some male Sherlockians wish that Wilder had gone for an "R" rating rather than so heavily crop Miss Page's nude scene) into a solution of her amnesia. Engaged by her to find her husband, a Belgian marine engineer, Holmes and Watson encounter Mrs. Wilson, a not-too-notorious canary-trainer, a thin Mycroft Holmes (Christopher Lee[2], in a Diogenes Club only slightly larger and more opulent than White's or Brooks's), monks, midgets, gravediggers (including a wasting of Stanley Holloway), The Society for the Preservation of Scottish Monuments, naval architects, Her Majesty the Queen Empress, and -- well, what would you expect to encounter in Loch Ness?

Scarcely The Hound of the Baskervilles, but still very far from Sherlock Holmes in Washington.

There are flaws of research a-plenty for Irregulars, of course: various references date the occurrences as 1886, 1891, and after 1902; Swan-Lake was never danced in London during the Victorian reign; Holmes already had a Stradivarius.... But all this is totally irrelevant quibble.

The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes is, in sum, imperfect, but fascinating, arguable but endearing, and unequivocally well-made (to quote Holmes regarding the King of Bohemia's equipage: "There is money in this, Watson, if there is nothing else"). Everyone who can believe in the fallible humanity of Sherlock Holmes should see the film; Sherlockians should see it twice, once to assimilate and dispense with the plot and once purely to bask in the aura of Baker Street.

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2. Lee has previously played both Sherlock Holmes and Sir Henry Baskerville; he need play only Dr. Watson and Mrs. Hudson to complete an honours trick.