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Sinopsis

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Born in Victorian England, H.G. Wells had very strong ideas about the advantages and disadvantages of a society built on fixed social classes and endless imperialism--and these ideas would inform virtually everything he wrote over his long and distinguished career. Even in the handful of science fiction novels for which he is chiefly recalled today, Wells would return to these issues again, combining them with then-emerging scientific concepts to remarkably provocative effect.

In some respects *THE FIRST MEN ON THE MOON* is likely his most accessible novel to modern readers, for it is lighter in tone than such Wells novels as *THE TIME MACHINE* and *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS*, and it reads like an exceptionally well-written pulp adventure of the era. But the underpinnings are the same: class, conquest, and--as in *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS*--Darwin's controversial theories on natural selection and evolution.

In this novel Wells relies significantly on fantasy, presenting us with Professor Cavor, an eccentric (and quite comical) scientist determined to create a substance that is "opaque" to gravity, what we would today call an antigravity material. Cavor is interested in the work for the sake of knowledge pure and simple, but bankrupt businessman Bedford realizes the commercial implications and attaches himself to the project--and when the material is perfected the two men create a sphere that launches them to the moon!

If this is clearly the stuff of fantasy (Jules Verne sneered at it), what the two men find on the moon is not, or at least was not considered so at the time. In 1901 little was known about the moon, and many notable scientists thought it might hold life. Upon their arrival, Cavor and Bedford find an atmosphere of sorts, a host of strange plants, and ultimately an insect-like race of beings that reside inside the moon itself, beings who practice forced evolution upon their own kind in order to create a rigid, hive-like social structure.

As the nature of the "Selenite" society reflects Victorian concepts of fixed social classes taken to a logical and unpleasant extreme, so do the two humans reflect opposing points of sociopolitical

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view. Cavor is clearly an instrument of science, less interested in practicalities than in knowledge for its own sake--a point of view that Wells seems to hold in considerable sympathy. But for all this, Cavor is ineffectual; he must rely on Bedford's smash-and-grab imperialistic temperament to see them through. As in many Wells novels, the resulting clash of ideology is stalemate: both extremes need each other, but they are incapable of building compromise and neither is able to overcome the other to reach an outcome that will be satisfactory to any one concerned.