



RICHARD ADAMS LOCKE

EAST BRENT, UNITED KINGDOM, 1800 - NEW BRIGHTON, UNITED STATES, 1871

On 21 August 1835, *The New York Sun*, the newspaper where Richard Adams Locke worked, announced that the famous astronomer John Herschel (who was then at the Cape Observatory in South Africa) had made sensational discoveries that the newspaper would disclose soon. Four days after that announcement, it started publishing a preposterous series of six articles that narrated the alleged discoveries that Herschel, oblivious to these publications, would have made on the Moon: flora, water, unicorns or intelligent beavers were merely the harbingers of the greatest announcement, that winged beings that could pass for humans had been found. Thousands of people believed the "Great Moon Hoax" and the sales of the newspaper skyrocketed. Locke, who had studied in Cambridge, had edited Poe, and was a science-fiction writer, never acknowledged the authorship of the information that made him famous and that had been credited to a fake assistant of Herschel. Apparently, he intended to ridicule allegedly serious research of his time about the existence of life on the Moon. Echoes of this controversy still rang when Verne's explorers gazed the dark side of our satellite in *Around the Moon*.



CAMILLE FLAMMARION

MONTIGNY-LE-ROI, FRANCE, 1842 - JUVISY-SUR-ORGE, FRANCE, 1925

Nicolas Camille Flammarion was one of the greatest astronomers of his time. In 1858 he started working at the Paris Observatory; and in 1883, with the money he earned with his popular science works (which were real best-sellers at the time), he opened his own observatory in Juvisy-sur-Orge. Amongst his works are *The Plurality of Inhabited Worlds* (1862), *History of the Sky* (1867) and, of course, *Popular Astronomy* (1880), which got reprinted for decades and was translated to a plethora of languages. He is cited as an authority in many of Verne's novels, and his vast scientific work (which was acknowledged naming in his honour a crater on the Moon, another crater on Mars and an asteroid) included studying double stars and the planet Mars, as well as proposing names that would eventually be accepted for one of Neptune's moons (Triton) and one of Jupiter's (Amalthea). He also had a great interest in Spiritism, to the extent that his belief in the Afterlife ended up mixed with his faith in extra-terrestrial life. Such was his influence that, when he stated in 1910 that crossing the tail of Halley's Comet would poison the atmosphere, a wave of panic ensued.

GEORGES MÉLIÈS

PARIS, FRANCE, 1861-1938



A lover of shadow play, the magic lantern and phantasmagoria, and an avid reader of Jules Verne's adventures, Georges Méliès waived inheriting his family's business to devote himself to illusionism. As soon as he heard about the cinematographer, he wanted to use the new invention (in which he saw infinite possibilities) in service of his unstoppable creativity. Thanks to Méliès, cinema went beyond mere documentary recording and entered the fields of fiction and fantasy. The so-called *Wizard of Cinema* was a prolific innovator and created essential special effects like stop tricks, multiple exposures, time lapses, image blending and hand-coloured stills. He produced about five hundred films, and two of the most famous ones, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and *The Impossible Voyage* (1904), were inspired in Verne's novels. After World War I, audiences lost their taste for Méliès particular fantasy and humour. The filmmaker was ruined and, in an act of desperation, burned down his studio, his sets and his films, and started selling sweets and toys in a small shop at Montparnasse station. In 1928, the editor of the magazine *Cité-Journal* recognized him and organized a tribute for this unfairly forgotten figure of cinema.

H. G. WELLS

BROMLEY, UNITED KINGDOM, 1866 - LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, 1946



Science fiction is considered to appear as a genre in the 19th century thanks to the works of Verne and Herbert George Wells. But, while the French author usually focused on mere entertainment, Wells intended his works to reflect his political ideas, and we can find concepts like class struggle in *The Time Machine*, imperialism in *The War of the Worlds*, or the risks of turning science into a religion in *The Invisible Man* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*. Of humble origins and self-taught, he combined fiction works with social works, an inclination that was closely tied to the fact that he was a member of the Fabian Society, from which grew the Labour Party. In *The First Men in the Moon*, like Verne, he dealt with the topic of our satellite; but, far from becoming obsessed with verisimilitude like the French writer, he solved the issue of transportation using an imaginary substance named cavorite, which had antigrav properties. Verne, who always acknowledged Wells' merit as a writer, did not approve the way he dodged technical issues. It is clear that, combining the works of both authors, we can get a complete depiction of the exciting and conflicting spirit of the late 19th and the early 20th centuries.

JACQUES OFFENBACH

COLOGNE, GERMANY, 1819 - PARIS, FRANCE, 1880



Offenbach was the son of a synagogue cantor of Cologne who had taken the name of his hometown, Offenbach am Rhein. As a child, he stood out thanks to his mastery of the violin and the cello, so his father decided that he should study at the Paris Conservatory... but he dropped out of college soon to join the orchestra of the Opéra Comique. Offenbach is the best representative of the birth and growth of operetta (including all its different subgenres: *opéra bouffe*, *opéra féerie*, *vaudeville*, *musiquette*, etc.), with 102 compositions of this genre. After Verne's huge success in 1874 with the theatrical adaptation of his *Around the World in Eighty Days* at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, Offenbach wrote in 1875 the music for a libretto inspired in his lunar novels and entitled *Le Voyage dans la Lune*. This play was quite an event, and no expenses were spared: 24 majestic sets, 673 costumes, tricks and animals on stage. Jules Verne was one of the members of the audience, and he verified the similarities with his novels. In 1877, Offenbach wrote *Doctor Ox*, this time with permission from its author.