

## CONTENTS

## EDITORS' NOTE

<b>Special Report</b>	2
Is that an O.K. word, usewise? By William Zinsser	
<b>Gallery</b>	4
An Eastern approach	
<b>Reviews</b>	8-10
Movie: <i>Alice's Restaurant</i> , reviewed by Richard Schickel	
Book: <i>Fat City</i> , by Leonard Gardner, reviewed by Frank Conroy	
<b>Letters to the Editors</b>	14A
<b>The Woodstock Rock Trip</b>	14B
Hundreds of thousands of kids descend on a Catskill farm for a music festival, and the result is the third biggest city in New York. Photographed by John Dominis and Bill Eppridge	
<b>Norman Mailer: A Fire on the Moon</b>	24
A remarkable personal study of the U.S. moon program undertaken for LIFE by the Pulitzer prize winner	
<b>Tragic House on the Hill</b>	42
Husband Roman Polanski comes home to the scene of the Sharon Tate murders. By Thomas Thompson	
<b>Close-Up</b>	49
Old smut peddler Barney Rosset of Grove Press: his new four-letter word is "film." By Albert Goldman	
<b>Books</b>	54
In <i>Stevie</i> , 18-year-old John Steptoe writes and illustrates a new kind of book about black children	
<b>Miscellany</b>	60

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## Norman Mailer at the typewriter

*A Fire on the Moon*, Norman Mailer's treatise on the moon landing, starts with this issue. It is the matching of a fantastic subject with a most unusual journalist. "I can't write anything in 5,000 words," Mailer told us, "and 10,000 words is just for poker money." This enormous instalment, in fact, runs some 26,000 words—the longest non-fiction piece LIFE has ever published in one issue. (The fiction record is held by Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and James Michener's *The Bridges at Toko-ri*.)

Mailer is a phenomenon as well as a writer—novelist, journalist, movie-maker, candidate for mayor of New York last spring, and all-around public outspoken. He doesn't cover a story in traditional fashion. Before writing *The Armies of the Night*, he broke two icons of journalism: he took no notes (for he had not intended to write anything) and he inserted himself into the story as the central figure. The book won a Pulitzer prize.

In *A Fire on the Moon* Mailer says he is not the central figure (Saturn V is) but is simply an observer and a voice. He is quite a bit more noticeable than that. Everything he sees and senses becomes part of his account. For example, on the night before the launch of Apollo 11, we invited him to a dinner party LIFE was giving at the Cape—and now it turns up as a major scene in his article.

Mailer uses transcripts of speeches and press conferences, and he does take notes, but they are reflections of his own thoughts rather than descriptions of the scene or quotes from the characters. He seems to hammer his perceptions into his subject until he finds a core of meaning, which is often different from what anybody else has found.

He likes to get in shape for his work. Preparing for a novel, he has been known to go in for jogging and calisthenics. To get along with the healthy astronauts, he had planned to get into "the best physical shape of my life," but his New York mayoralty campaign left no time. To help him understand the world of NASA, he at least had his education in engineering, without which he feels he might not have jumped to take the assignment.

After the moon launch, Mailer went to his summer home on the tip of Cape Cod to write. Working against a deadline, he finds himself pushing to stints of eight or 10 hours, more than double what he prefers. "The pleasures you get writing," he said last week after finishing this article, "are the pleasures of the marathon runner. What this means is that for three weeks I didn't have any fun."

Mailer writes fast (*The Armies of the Night* in nine weeks, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago* in six) as well as long. When he says, as he does in this week's article, that he is "not even a good journalist," he must have in mind some dizzying standard of his own. Whatever it is, he won't say when the other instalments will be finished. We say the next is due in six weeks, call it seven.



NORMAN MAILER

*Ralph Graves*

RALPH GRAVES  
Managing Editor

# TIME

**A MAJOR REPORT ON  
THE MOON VENTURE  
BY Norman Mailer**

**The  
Woodstock  
Rock  
Festival**



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