topic. Although of course all the anomalies are documented elsewhere, it's nice to have some of them (there are more, such as the puzzle of different methods to measure the half-life of the neutron giving different values) collected together and presented in a lively manner by someone involved in one of them, already knowledgeable about some others, and having well researched those outside of his field. — Phillip Helbig.

References

(1) R. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (William Morrow and Company), 1974.
(2) P. Helbig, *The Observatory*, **146**, 2026 (in press).
(3) A. A. Penzias & R. W. Wilson, *ApJ*, **142**, 419, 1965.

From the Library

A Fire on the Moon, by Norman Mailer (Penguin Classics), 2014 (originally published 1970 by Little, Brown and Company). Pp. 421 (including 8-page introduction by Geoff Dyer), 20 × 13 cm. Price £10·99 (paperback; ISBN 978 0 141 39496 1).

Yes, *that* Norman Mailer (1923–2007), the great American novelist (by whom I've read one other book[1]). With a degree in aeronautical engineering (Harvard, 1943) and already a reputation as both journalist and novelist, Mailer was certainly qualified to write about the *Apollo 11* mission. The book (finished when *Apollo 13* was returning to Earth) is an expanded version of a three-part series in *Life* magazine, for which Mailer was paid somewhat less than $450 000 ("this ... figure, while certainly too generous, was not vastly inaccurate"). By contrast, in 1969, Armstrong, as a civilian, was paid an annual salary of $27 401, Aldrin and Collins (both Air Force officers) $18 623 and $17 148, respectively (multiply by a factor of 8 or 9 for the modern equivalents). As expected, the book is well written, sometimes reminding me of Dickens, Whitman, or Ginsberg. Mailer (who refers to himself as Aquarius) appears as a character in the book, much of which is in the New Journalism style.

Taking the number of pages and the small size of the print into account, there is very much information in the 15 chapters (grouped into three parts): technical information about the space programme, comments on the social and political situation at the time, long quotations from the radio communications between the astronauts and Mission Control, the geography and hotels of Florida and Texas, contemporary news coverage, and so on, all written essentially as the story unfolded. The first part sets the stage with a broad-brush overview and contains more on Mailer's own perceptions and activities; the second (making up about half of the book) is a detailed chronological account from lift-off to the docking of *Eagle* and *Columbia* after ascent from the Moon; the third (and shortest) includes the splashdown and related events but is more concerned with Mailer's philosophical reflections on the event. Mailer tells the story like a modern myth, except that it really happened. As one of the most significant events of the 20th (or perhaps any) Century, much has been written about *Apollo 11*, both from a technical and from a sociopolitical point of view. Mailer manages to cover both areas seamlessly, and is equally at home whether writing about how liquid oxygen is cooled and transported or about contemporary politics (also in 1969, Mailer finished fourth of five in the Democratic primary

for mayor of New York City). As mentioned in another review[2], though I was young at the time I have many clear memories of the Apollo programme, which jibe well with Mailer's much more detailed account. (I noticed only a couple of minor mistakes, almost certainly essentially just typos.)

Already at the time, there were suggestions that the Moon landing was fake, and Mailer debunks them. There are other prescient inklings of what was to become the future: "[c]omputers the size of a package of cigarettes"; the rather quick loss of interest in even such a substantial feat, with "[T]he horror of the Twentieth century [being] the size of each new event, and the paucity of its reverberation". Although many aspects of the book are impressive, perhaps the most impressive is the scope, from the Greek myths through the *Star Trek*-style technical optimism of the 1960s to the different ways (then) future (and now current) society would look back on such a monumental event. The book is not just historical but might prove to be historic, a rare first-hand account of history in the making where the witness understands both the nitty-gritty details and the vast sweep of human history of which it is a part. — Phillip Helbig.

References

(1) N. Mailer, *Ancient Evenings* (Little, Brown and Company), 1983.
(2) P. Helbig, *The Observatory*, **144**, 210, 2024.

ASTRONOMICAL CENTENARIES FOR 2026

Compiled by Kenelm England

The following is a list of astronomical events whose centenaries fall in 2026. Births and deaths of individual astronomers are taken from *Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers* (2nd ed., Springer, 2014). This was supplemented by the on-line Obituary Notes of Astronomers and Obituary Lists of RAS Fellows and other societies. For events before 1600 the main source has been Barry Hetherington's *A Chronicle of Pre-Telescopic Astronomy* (Wiley, 1996). For the 17th to 20th Centuries lists of astronomical events came from Wikipedia and other on-line sources, supplemented by astronomical texts made available through the NASA Astrophysics Data System. Discoveries of comets, asteroids, novae, and other objects for 1926 appeared in the February issue of *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* in the following year. There were also references from *Popular Astronomy*, *Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, and *Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific*. Professional discoveries and observations were followed up in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, *Astronomische Nachrichten*, *Astronomical Journal*, and *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*. Gary Kronk's *Cometography* Volumes 1–3 (Cambridge, 1999–2007) provided details on all the comets. Details on meteorites can be found in the Meteoritical Society's Bulletin Database. Finally, NASA's *Five Millennium Canons of Eclipses* and planetary tables were consulted for information on eclipses and planetary events.