



Emily Nemens

Topics

Culture and Society

Travels From

New York

Bio

Emily Nemens is a writer, illustrator, and editor. Her debut novel, *The Cactus League*, was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in February 2020. The *Los Angeles Times* praised the book: “For a book about the notoriously languorous sport of baseball, this is a quick and often thrilling read. For a debut novel, it’s remarkably self-assured.” The *New York Times Book Review* wrote: “She provides her readers what amounts to a miniature, self-enclosed world that is funny and poignant and lovingly observed.” Her publicity tour for *The Cactus League* will take her to twenty cities. In 2018, Nemens became the seventh editor of *The Paris Review*, the nation’s preeminent literary quarterly. Since her arrival, the magazine has seen record-high circulation, published two anthologies, and produced a second season of its acclaimed podcast. Previously, she coedited *The Southern Review*, a storied literary quarterly published at Louisiana State University. Nemens has spoken about editing at major literary conferences and in creative writing programs around the US, and she has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Vogue Italia*, and *Vanity Fair*. As an illustrator, she’s published her work in *The New Yorker*, and her

short stories have appeared in *Esquire*, *n+1*, *The Iowa Review*, and elsewhere. Nemens grew up in Seattle and received her BA from Brown University, where she studied art history and studio art. She completed an MFA degree in fiction at Louisiana State University. She lives in New York and remains a Mariners fan.

SPEECHES

***The Cactus League* and Sport Literature** Nemens discusses her book and the landscape of American sports fiction.

***The Cactus League* and other Leagues: Community Fiction** Nemens discusses the ensemble structure in the novel.

Women in Sports Literature: *The Cactus League* and Beyond Nemens discusses the role of women in her novel and in other modern and contemporary portrayals.

The Debut Novelist, from the Writer's Desk and the Editor's Nemens discusses writing and publishing a debut novel, and how, as an editor, she helps other emerging writers grow.

Literary Fiction and the Publishing Landscape Nemens discusses literary publishing in the twenty-first century, from literary quarterlies and other entry points, to big-five publishing.

Literary Magazines: Then, Now, and Tomorrow Nemens discusses the history and future of literary magazines in American letters.

BOOKS

[The Cactus League](#) A Novel

Farrar, Straus and Giroux

One of The Wall Street Journal's 10 New Books You Should Be Picking Up First In 2020 and one of The Millions' Most Anticipated Books of 2020. An explosive, character-driven odyssey through the world of baseball from Emily Nemens, the editor of *The Paris Review*. Humming with the energy of a ballpark before the first pitch, Emily Nemens' *The Cactus League* unravels the tightly connected web



of people behind a seemingly linear game. It's a journey that, like the Arizona desert, brims with both possibility and destruction.

HARDCOVER

REVIEWS: Praise for *The Cactus League* "There are probably more good novels about baseball than any other sport. More bad ones, too. Emily Nemens's *The Cactus League* definitely belongs in that first lineup . . . [Nemens has a] capacious, clear-eyed understanding, which goes way beyond that of the casual fan, and her evident sympathy for her characters . . . in *The Cactus League* she provides her readers with what amounts to a miniature, self-enclosed world that is funny and poignant and lovingly observed."

-Charles McGrath, *The New York Times Book Review*

"[Nemens] demonstrates deep knowledge not only of baseball but also of American desperation . . . Nemens makes us care about even the worst of [her characters], a neat trick of unsentimental empathy and a testament to the power of careful, almost loving, observation . . . With her sharp eye for the details of unremarkable lives, Nemens at times reminds one of Joan Didion, and her Southwestern dreamers . . . For a book about the notoriously languorous sport of baseball, this is a quick and often thrilling read. For a debut novel, it's remarkably self-assured."

-Kate Tuttle, *Los Angeles Times*

"A panoramic portrait . . . Nemens's adoration of the game is infectious, and her novel is packed with winning details."

-Karen Heller, *The Washington Post*

"[*The Cactus League*] tempers the grandiosity inherent in baseball and implies that games have always been an important part of being human . . . Its many pleasures come from spending time with Goodyear and the others whose lives connect to the game, and from pondering how the dramas of everyday life and the imperatives of professional sports influence each other."

-Josh Ostergaard, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"[A] wise debut . . . [*The Cactus League* speaks] strongly to baseball's enduring vitality. The home runs and strikeouts may be background noise, but they're ubiquitous all the same. They've defined this community -- its heartbreaks, its victories, its changes. They've created a world."

-David Canfield, *Entertainment Weekly*

"[Nemens] works within the quirky register of the heart, writing about one of her great passions: baseball. She crafts a humorous and emotional novel about a star outfielder, and the coaches, fans and criminals who inhabit the same off-kilter world."

-Cody Delistraty, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Baseball is said to be the most literary of sports, inspiring fiction that aims to capture its artistry and symmetry, so a book like *The Cactus League* that succeeds as a robust social novel hits the elusive sweet spot . . . Nemens creates an alternative world with nuance beyond the score sheet, rife with ambition and jealousy, disappointment and victory."

-*National Book Review*

"In *The Cactus League*, baseball remains a sturdy vehicle to contemplate contemporary American culture, in addition to the whole dense spectrum of human relationships . . . captivating."

-Brady Brickner-Wood, *Harvard Review*

"You don't have to enjoy baseball (sport, game, or what have you) to find this semi novel-in-stories a richly layered, often tender and generous, exposé of the life of players, fans, and everyone in between . . . There is more to this book than the best sports reporting: peeling back the curtain, examining the people behind the statistics, and understanding that sometimes the most crucial plays are the ones happening off the field."

-Sara Cutaia, *Chicago Review of Books*

"Nemens delivers an engaging, eccentric cast of players, coaches, families, and others who inhabit the world of baseball . . . From start to finish, Nemens captures the spirit of the game."

-*The Millions*

"[A] quirky first novel . . . [*The Cactus League*] showcases a fascinating gallimaufry of characters who swirl around the edges of the springtime ritual . . . Nemens finds a kind of attenuated hope along with melancholy in these sharply etched character studies that "end not with 'out three' but 'out maybe.'"

-*Booklist*, STARRED REVIEW

"[An] insightful debut . . . each character is brought to life in convincing detail . . . this debut entertainingly illuminates people and problems usually overlooked in the sports pages."

-*Publishers Weekly*

"Emily Nemens's magnificent debut is a masterwork of great empathy and detail, uncovering the realms of incredible pain and beauty enmeshed within every level of America's pastime. If you love baseball, you won't put it down, and if you don't love baseball, you might by the end."

—J. Ryan Stradal, author of *The Lager Queen of Minnesota* and *Kitchens of the Great Midwest*

"A debut? You've got to be kidding. *The Cactus League* reads like the work of a seasoned novelist. The way the story's tension ramps, the richly drawn characters, the indelible imagery—you'll never see a ball park the same—not to mention Emily Nemens's knowledge of America's pastime is downright encyclopedic. And while all those things are true, absolutely true, the heart of this amazing novel is Emily's understanding of the crucibles faced by those both in the limelight and out of it. Goodyear and the rest of the gang are a cast for the ages. Hip hip hooray for this achievement."

—Mitchell S. Jackson, author of *Survival Math: Notes on an All-American Family*

"*The Cactus League* is not just another baseball novel. I can't think of another book that so carefully examines the complex ecosystem of professional sport. With both compassion and objectivity, Emily Nemens deftly depicts the rich lives and stories that swirl beneath the 'meaningless' innings of spring training."

—Chris Bachelder, author of *The Throwback Special*

"Emily Nemens gets beneath the image—the macho chewing, spitting, ball fondling, the studied nonchalant distraction—to the real people on the field and off. She's a true fan, and one hell of a writer. *The Cactus League* is crisp, clean, funny, and just plain good. If you love baseball, and fiction, you'll love this book."

—Brad Watson, author of *Miss Jane*