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Candyfreak: A JOURNEY THROUGH THE CHOCOLATE UNDERBELLY OF AMERICA



Synopsis

Perhaps you remember The Marathon, Oompahs, Bit-O-Choc, or Kit Kat Dark. Where did they go? Driven by his obsession, stubborn idealism, and the promise of free candy, self-confessed candyfreak Steve Almond takes off on a quest to discover candy's origins in America, to explore little companies that continue to get by on pluck and perseverance, and to witness the glorious excess of candy manufacturing. Part candy porn, part candy polemic, part social history, part confession, Candyfreak explores the role candy plays in our lives as both source of pleasure and escape from pain. By turns ecstatic, comic, and bittersweet, Candyfreak is the story of how Steve Almond grew up on candy---and how, for better and worse, candy has grown up too.

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Customer Reviews

Picture a magical, sugar-fueled road trip with Willy Wonka behind the wheel and David Sedaris riding shotgun, complete with chocolate-stained roadmaps and the colorful confetti of spent candy wrappers flying in your cocoa powder dust. If you can imagine such a manic journey--better yet, if you can imagine being a hungry hitchhiker who's swept through America's forgotten candy meccas: Philadelphia (Peanut Chews), Sioux City (Twin Bing), Nashville (Goo Goo Cluster), Boise (Idaho Spud) and beyond--then Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America, Steve Almond's impossible-to-put down portrait of regional candy makers and the author's own obsession with all-things sweet, would be your Fodor's guide to this gonzo tour. With the aptly named Almond (don't even think of bringing up the Almond Joy bit--coconut is Almond's kryptonite), obsession is putting it mildly. Almond loves candy like no other man in America. To wit: the author

has "three to seven pounds" of candy in his house at all times. And then there's the Kit Kat Darks incident; Almond has a case of the short-lived confection squirreled away in an undisclosed warehouse. "I had decided to write about candy because I assumed it would be fun and frivolous and distracting," confesses Almond. "It would allow me to reconnect to the single, untarnished pleasure of my childhood. But, of course, there are no untarnished pleasures. That is only something the admen of our time would like us to believe." Almond's bittersweet nostalgia is balanced by a fiercely independent spirit--the same underdog quality on display by the small candy makers whose entire existence (and livelihood) is forever shadowed by the Big Three: Hershey's, Mars, and Nestle. Almond possesses an original, heartfelt, passionate voice; a writer brave enough to express sheer joy. Early on his tour he becomes entranced with that candy factory staple, the "enrober"--imagine an industrial-size version of the glaze waterfall on the production line at your local Krispy Kreme, but oozing chocolate--dubbing it "the money shot of candy production." And while he writes about candy with the sensibilities of a serious food critic (complimenting his beloved Kit Kat Dark for its "dignified sheen," "puddinglike creaminess," "coffee overtones," and "slightly cloying wafer") words like "nutmeats" and "rack fees" send him into an adolescent twitter. ...the Marathon Bar, which stormed the racks in 1974, enjoyed a meteoric rise, died young, and left a beautiful corpse. The Marathon: a rope of caramel covered in chocolate, not even a solid piece that is, half air holes, an obvious rip-off to anyone who has mastered the basic Piagetian stages, but we couldn't resist the gimmick. And then, as if we weren't bamboozled enough, there was the sleek red package, which included a ruler on the back and thereby affirmed the First Rule of Male Adolescence: If you give a teenage boy a candy bar with a ruler on the back of the package, he will measure his dick Candyfreak is one of those endearing, quirky titles that defy swift categorization. One of those rare books that you'll want to tear right through, one you won't soon stop talking about. And eager readers beware: It's impossible to flip through ten pages of this sweet little book without reaching for a piece of chocolate. --Brad Thomas Parsons --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The appropriately named Almond goes beyond candy obsession to enter the realm of "freakdom." Right up front, he divulges that he has eaten a piece of candy "every single day of his entire life," "thinks about candy at least once an hour" and "has between three and seven pounds of candy in his house at all times." Indeed, Almond's fascination is no mere hobby; it's taken over his life. And what's a Boston College creative writing teacher to do when he can't get M&Ms, Clark Bars and Bottle Caps off his mind? Write a book on candy, of course. Almond's tribute falls somewhere

between Hilary Liftin's decidedly personal Candy and Me and Tim Richardson's almost scholarly Sweets: A History of Candy. There are enough anecdotes from Almond's lifelong fixation that readers will feel as if they know him (about halfway through the book, when Almond is visiting a factory and a marketing director offers him a taste of a coconut treat, readers will know why he tells her, "I'm really kind of full"; he hates coconut). But there are also enough facts to draw readers' attention away from the unnaturally fanatical Almond and onto the subject at hand. Almond isn't interested in "The Big Three" (Nestle, Hershey's and Mars). Instead, he checks out "the little guys," visiting the roasters at Goldenberg's Peanut Chews headquarters and hanging out with a "chocolate engineer" at a gourmet chocolate lab in Vermont. Almond's awareness of how strange he is; the man actually buys "seconds" of certain candies and refers to the popular chocolate mint parfait as "the Andes oeuvre"; is strangely endearing. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I didn't set out to read this book in particular, but last week, Garageman called me to his office (i.e. the garage) to listen to an interview on sports talk. You can imagine my total joy...an interview about sports. Woo! As I listened to this very articulate and entertaining man talk about the book he had just written on football and why he both loves and loathes it, I became entranced. I decided to find his name (Garageman couldn't remember) and the book (he couldn't remember that either. At the end of the program, he did remember that maybe the guys last name was Allman and 10 years ago or so, he wrote about all about candy, and his trip across America to small, family owned and run manufacturers, and how the big three were slowly killing them off. Eureka! I had that book! I started reading it years ago, and for some reason never finished, so I did a little research and dug it out. (I also purchased Against Football: One Fan's Reluctant Manifesto for later.) Candyfreak made me squeal with delight, shake my head yes in knowing empathy, and made my stomach pine and mouth water for all those pieces of sugary goodness that were mostly regional, and that are long gone, or very hard to find. It delves into the disgusting practices of the big three and how they pay retailers huge fees to stock only their goods, pricing mom and pop manufacturers out. It led to discussions between Garageman and I about the lack of new candy and limited twists on the old, how pathetic they are, but at least it's something new. I was thrilled to find my favorite hometown candy with its own chapter - Valomilk, and to this day it pisses me off greatly, that in order to buy a hometown made candy, I have to go to Cracker Barrel because of the stocking

fees charged by grocery stores and encouraged by the big three. I buy them by the box, and hide them in the freezer. No one in my family knows this, and if you tell them I will have to kill you. I admit, for a long, long time, I was an M&M freak, but the minute I started watching NASCAR and saw that Mars sponsored a driver who must remain nameless in my household, I banned all Mars candy from crossing my threshold. I still allow Nestle and Hershey, but no Mars products, since I protest not with signs and marches, but by withholding my dollars. Anyway, back to the book. It made me long for the days of Mary Janes, rock candy, root beer barrels, peanut clusters, buttons, wax fingers, and all those wonderful penny delights of my childhood. I enjoyed his trip across the country and envied his ability to sneak a piece of candy off a production line. Thanks to Mr. Almond's Freak Appendix, I now have websites to connect with certain candy fetishes, and I recently found The Vermont Country Store, who sells many of these same delights. I'd give the book five thumbs up, but he said nicer things about other candy makers than he did Russell Sifers who makes Valomilks. In my book, that makes Mr. Almond slightly suspicious.

This was a fun book to read and had some great insight into the candy businesses of old and now, (NOT boringly technical or detailed). After reading it we noticed some very old brands in the stores that we hadn't noticed before. It was also fun to see some of our old favorites mentioned, to learn how some of the candy bars got their names, and to 'go along' on a few factory tours where not everything goes as planned. We will now enjoy watching for some of the hard to find gems out there. We recommend it for anyone curious about that industry's beginnings and what the future holds for these family-owned older companies, anyone with an interest in the search for old brands (that could be a fun vacation), or just some entertaining, light reading. Liked the sources in the back for finding the candy that is still available online. But, Steve, honestly, who likes Big Hunk better than a Look Bar, (a Big Hunk covered in dark chocolate), which was barely noted ;>)

A bittersweet chronicle of the ill fated independent candy bar industry. The author does a fine job recounting joyous memories of long departed, or forgotten, delectable confectionary treats but casts heavy notes of gloom on the future prospects of cottage-industry salvation, or rebirth, to this once glorious enterprise. A toothsome tale for reading, none the less.

I really enjoyed this book! But it made me starved for all kinds of chocolate candy! I had to go and read the 'bad reviews' like I always do, before reviewing a book that I love. I'm really shocked that there are that many closed-minded readers in this world in 2010!! I think the 'F' word is used TWO

times, and the marijuana reference is used maybe THREE. I don't judge an author, I read their book. There is tons of literature out there that you will be hiding from if you are afraid of a curse word or a drug reference! People - read and learn!! This is a cute and cool book. It's not ONLY about candy bars and chocolate factories. You also get to learn about HUMANS in it - the author, his family, and people who work in the candy industry. I loved his descriptions of people and their personalities and physical traits - it gives the stories more realness and appeal. If you just wanted to learn about candy factories - look them up online, or read an encyclopedia... He uses humor, passion and feelings in his writings. I loved hearing all the old candy names too - it was just fun. I am going to look up the candies online, and see how many I can order and try that I have not eaten before. I don't expect to get them shipped in hot weather, but I'm making a list - and checking it twice!! I really enjoyed this book, and the author's style. I would like to read other books that he's written.

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