

"I got a real sugar rush and cluster headache reading this bittersweet book by Steve Almond-joy, the sugar daddy himself. I won't sugar coat it—this book is one sweet treat."  
—AMY SEDARIS



"Steve Almond is the Dave Eggers of food writing."  
—JOHN THORNE

by **Steve Almond**

# Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America

*Steve Almond*

Download now

Read Online ➔

# Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America

*Steve Almond*

## **Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America** Steve Almond

Perhaps you remember the whipped splendor of the Choco-Lite, or the luscious Caravelle bar, or maybe the sublime and perfectly balanced Hershey's Cookies 'n Mint. The Marathon, an inimitable rope of caramel covered in chocolate. Oompahs. Bit-O-Choc. The Kit Kat Dark.

Steve Almond certainly does. In fact, he was so obsessed by the inexplicable disappearance of these bars--where'd they go?--that he embarked on a nationwide journey to uncover the truth about the candy business. There, he found an industry ruled by huge conglomerates, where the little guys, the last remaining link to the glorious boom years of the candy bar in America, struggle to survive.

Visiting the candy factories that produce the Twin Bing, the Idaho Spud, the Goo Goo Cluster, the Valomilk, and a dozen other quirky bars, Almond finds that the world of candy is no longer a sweet haven. Today's precious few regional candy makers mount daily battles against corporate greed, paranoia, and that good old American compulsion: crushing the little guy.

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.

## **Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America Details**

Date : Published May 4th 2004 by Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill (first published 2004)

ISBN : 9781565124219

Author : Steve Almond

Format : Hardcover 266 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Food and Drink, Food, Autobiography, Memoir, Humor, History

 [Download Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbell ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America Steve Almond**

---

# From Reader Review Candyfreak: A Journey through the Chocolate Underbelly of America for online ebook

## Luann says

I had to read this one quickly because it was bad for me. Very bad. Is there anyone who has read this and didn't feel the overpowering NEED to eat chocolate while reading this book? If so, please post in the comments to this review because I want to know where you get your incredible willpower! And the problem was that if I wasn't eating chocolate, I just had to be eating something, anything, while reading this book! I defy anyone not to salivate at his descriptions of chocolate. Here's just one example of his description of a favorite candy bar:

The Caravelle tasted more like a pastry: the chocolate was thicker, darker, full-bodied, and the crisped rice had a malty flavor and what I want to call structural integrity; the caramel was that rarest variety, dark and lustrous and supple, with hints of fudge. More so, there was a sense of the piece *yielding* to the mouth. By which I mean, one had to work the teeth through the sturdy chocolate shell, which gave way with a distinct, moist snap, through the crisped rice (thus releasing a second, grainy bouquet), and only then into the soft caramel core. Oh, that inimitable combination of textures! That symphony of flavors! And how they offered themselves to the heat and wetness of the mouth--the sensation of the crisped rice drenched in melted chocolate, chomped by the molars in the creamy swirl of caramel. Oh, woe and pity unto thee who never tasted this bar! True woe! True pity!

He had me laughing from the very beginning with his bit about Baker's Chocolate as the cruelest food product ever invented. I have vivid memories of biting into that block of chocolate as a child despite warnings from my mom that I wouldn't like it.

There were parts I didn't find quite as humorous or as interesting - such as when he would veer off-topic into his thoughts on politics. But overall, I found this quite fascinating. They need to market this book with a sample box of all the candy bars mentioned! Some I had never heard of, and some I haven't eaten in a while and now need to go find, such as the Big Hunk! Ah, the memories.

---

## GoldGato says

Before reading this book, I had never heard of **Valomilk** candy bars. Now I must have one, thanks to the description by author Steve Almond.

*But here, inside my mouth, it was finally dawning on me: the way in which the airy tones of vanilla infused the chocolate and lent the heavy tang of cocoa a sense of buoyancy. The chocolate in the Valomilk was transcendent; I would go so far as to call it velvety.*

The process to make the Valomilk is itself, antiquated. In a day and age when candy is mass produced with little flavour and an obsession with corn syrup, the Valomilk stands alone. Pure cane sugar is used, rather than beet sugar. Bourbon vanilla, grown exclusively on Madagascar, is used instead of artificial vanilla, as with other products. The marshmallow is hand-made with pan-dried egg whites instead of spray-dried egg

whites. Everything is then mixed, by hand, into a snow-white meringue. The chocolate itself is tempered by hand. *This is almost unthinkable impractical - the rough equivalent of GM casting their bolts by hand.* By hand!

***When did the devil come? When first attack?***

Excuse me, John Betjeman, for using your poetry to describe the decline of the candy bar, but it is appropriate. In the United States, there used to be THOUSANDS of candy concoctions. Now, there are just a few, almost all owned by the Big Four of Nestle, Hershey, Mars, and Mondelez. As with any product that can be mass produced, the quality is so yucky that I haven't eaten a candy bar in a long time.

***The years fall off and find me walking back***

When you grow up in an immigrant family that doesn't have much surplus money, the attainment of a candy bar is something to behold. The 25¢ extra (yes, I'm dating myself) at the end of a long hard-working summer month could be spent on a comic book, a soda (such luxury!), or a piece of candy. What to do, how to choose? I remember candy bars being bigger and tasting better. Like real chocolate. By the time I hit my teens, the bars had shrunk and the taste had changed. Then Big Chocolate took over, dominating the checkout stands and candy aisles. If a small candy company wants to get their product into a grocer, they must cough up minimal slotting fees of \$20,000 or more. Throw in Wal-Mart and its dominance of America, where only mass-produced items can make it to a consumer's hands, and one has the almost complete obliteration of old-style candy.

There's more, such as the company that still makes Idaho Spuds and the splendiferous Owyhee Butter Toffee.

*Let me say this about Owyhee Butter Toffee: if you are one of those people who views butter as the high point of western culinary achievement, as I do, track down some of this stuff. It was like sucking on a sugar cube sautéed in butter, only much smoother.*

As the author notes, some of the straggling regional candymakers are still known to their small fan bases, but for the rest of us, these are only found in souvenir shops when travelling the backroads. I still prefer See's Candy to all others, as it was what every San Franciscan craved, but now I am going to check some of the retro candy online to see what they carry and to try some taste tests. Steve Almond made this a very enjoyable read, not least because we both dislike coconut in candy. His passion for his childhood love comes through as does his worry that the big corporations aren't just ruining our physical environment but also our environment of memories. Support your local candymaker.

***When did the devil come? When first attack?***

Book Season = Year Round (where's Willy Wonka when you need him)

---

**Grace says**

I applaud myself on having consumed only two candy bars during the process of reading this book. However, seeing as I read this book mostly over the course of a single day, that may not be something to brag about. I advise you to read this book while at a *very* safe distance from any candy sources, because I was sitting next to an enormous candy display in a bookstore and could not resist the purchase of a pack of

turtles, which I had just read about, the 5th Avenue, which Almond mentions in passion early in the book, and the Take 5, which just looked delicious in a so-bad-it's-good kind of way.

In all seriousness, this was a highly interesting look at the candy industry. Almond writes about the business side of things in an easy-to-consume (punintentional) way that keeps things interesting (and alarming, of course) without getting preachy or really taking sides (except with the political thing, which I appreciated). In fact, despite the general light tone of this book, the parts that most stuck out to me were the serious parts - the portrait of his cotravelers on the bus from Sioux City to Kansas City and his description of "what America really looks like". If you want to see this, he advises you take the bus, because "the only people in airports are rich people." I cannot help but support his theory; the analogous city situation is cabs/private cars vs the public bus.

I was similarly touched by his rant against Bush the second. His summary of the election followed by 9/11 and its aftermath - in four tidy sentences - is one of the best summaries I've read. And his new view, with the help of one president of a candy company, of the evils of Walmart is also eye-opening: you know it's evil but you still don't know every way in which its evil.

Maybe the fact that I read this after a weekend in South Bend, Indiana helped, but reading this book gave me a very deep appreciation for the simplicity with which we can get a product on the shelves of our local supermarkets in Portland, that there is such a strong market for the strong and the independent, that chains have at least *slightly* less influence in my hometown than they do in the rest of the country, as well as real hope that the growing presence of this trend in other big cities indicates a growing movement away from the mega-corporations.

One can hope.

But back to candy: this is a wonderful tribute to obsessions and sweet teeth, a hilarious romanticization of the type of candy that I would generally consider mediocre - but which, as previously mentioned, while reading, I couldn't help but purchase a few for my own consumption. It also reminded me vaguely of the book *Lost Cosmonaut*, with its comedic style tinged with a real heavy-heartedness, a real sadness about the actual state of things, but which, somewhat masterfully, does not affect the overall flavor of the book too strongly.

I'm also incredibly relieved to know that someone in Idaho is making chocolate covered potato chips and would like to see those more regularly. And not the Trader Joe's variety - the chocolate is far too thick on those.

---

## Heather says

This is a really easy, enjoyable read. I guess I'm not quite on the freak level of Almond because he is a real sensualist when it comes to candy, coming up with eating strategies that I never would have considered. It makes for some interesting, funny reading. On the downside, it's a little depressing to think that even the world of candy is super capitalistic and cut-throat.

I found a lot of the candies that he talks about in the book for my book club tomorrow. I have a huge sweet tooth, so I hope that everyone else is as excited as I am to try these things. They probably aren't, but they might humor me. :)

---

## **Elizabeth says**

The back jacket describes Candyfreak as 'hilarious' - I think that's a bit of a stretch. Like Not That You Asked, I found Candyfreak a quick and enjoyable read - but not one that I expect to reread.

Personally, I wish this book was more about the candy industry and the small producers Almond visited. The highlights for me were his descriptions of the candy-making processes and of the candymakers themselves - interesting, fanatical characters who were often involved in every detail of the process. Much less interesting to me were Almond's frequent digressions into his own Freak-iness, as well as his insistence on referring to himself as a Freak (with a capital F).

I guess I just wanted more candy, less Almond - which may be why I've always been a Mounds kind of girl.

---

## **Tama Filipas says**

I laughed SO HARD during the first half of this book. Super interesting story of the small guys in the candy biz and where they've (mostly) all gone, gobbled up by the big guys. I wanted to search out some of the old school candy bars, and did find some, though it wasn't easy. Made me think back to my tiny hometown and the local chocolate shop that was on Main Street, at the base of West Hill. Where did they go? I have a vague memory of going there on a class field trip at some point in elementary school while they were in the midst of making thousands of chocolate creations for Easter. Where have all those little businesses gone? Sad.

---

## **Livia says**

Mr. Almond does a great job of interviewing and touring various real candy factories in the US. He made me WANT to try the Idaho Spud. His description of a food trade show was accurate, if a little depressing. The trade show featured cheesecake, chicken wings, pizza, french fries, etc., with NOT A VEGETABLE IN SIGHT. Oh sorry, there were some fake veggies. The story of candy comes through and carries readers along.

---

## **Alison says**

In a creative non-fiction critique workshop with Steve Almond ( at <http://vcfa.edu/writing/pwc>) was where I first heard about this book, and how candy serves as an antidepressant for some children. Like Steve. And me. An enjoyable, informational read by a funny, insightful writer.

---

## **Nancy says**

This guy is REALLY obsessed with candy! I read the beginning and it was very humorous, but it just

seemed way too long for the subject. It could have been novella size and that would have been enough for me. I think his obsession just sort of freaked me out.

---

## **Thom says**

Read this shortly after it showed up on the library "new books" shelf. Agree completely with another reviewer - there are some definite five star sections in here. One stellar example is the history: what used to be thousands of candy companies are now, a century later, down to just over 100. The games the major companies play (and get away with) for shelf space is tragic.

Other parts of the book were autobiographical and not as well written. Seeing similar things in his newest book. Steve Almond seems to have a definite sense for important topics, but trouble with solid conclusions.

Read in 2004

---

## **Melissa says**

If Steve Almond is a candyfreak, then I'm a candywhore. I'll take it where I can get it and I'm not half as discriminating about its origins.

That said, you can't help but laugh outright at the sugar-fanaticism of a man who gets faint with joy witnessing the birth of chocolate bunnies and is rendered speechless at the thoughtless waste of even one piece of chocolate, recalling, "I stood there in a cloud of disillusionment...I'm someone who has been known to eat the pieces of candy found underneath my couch."

Goaded by the disappearance of his adored Caravelle bar, Almond (yes, he talks about the name) tours independent candy companies (read: anyone other than Mars, Nestle, or Hershey) to, "chronicle their struggles for survival in this wicked age of homogeneity, and, not incidentally, to load up on free candy."

The best laughs are all in the first five chapters. I giggled, chuckled and guffawed my way through the author's confessions of freak-like candy-hoarding, reveling in the kind of sweet self-effacing wit only a candy junkie could muster.

From there, it's mostly an historical tour of the four candy companies he visited, fascinating and richly detailed, yet interspersed with progressively more disturbing moments of personal crisis. At one point the author himself notes, "I realize that I am over-sharing," a phrase that, in a work of humor especially, should be immediately followed by the words, "so I'll quit while I'm ahead." No such luck. From that point on, we are treated to sad reflections on how one may ineffectively attempt to use candy to fill the void created by emotionally unavailable parents, an alarming, overly personal description of penile hypochondria, and finally, how Dubya, terrorists, college hockey players and Reaganomics are to blame for everything from airport security to the author's inability to give up pot and find love. I found the experience much like seeing a house guest naked -- you don't know whether to avert your eyes and mumble an apology or pretend it's hilarious and hope he laughs along.

The erratic emotional pitch of the book can be summed up by Almond's description of a candy-orgy during a

San Francisco layover; "A brief jolt of good humor...followed by a plunge into hypoglycemic grumpiness." If this book were a candy bar, it would start with a light, crispy, sweetness, get sort of sticky and tasteless in the middle, and end heavily with an artificial, saccharine jolt, leaving the reader with a nasty aftertaste and the vague notion that he should have quit after the first bite.

Perhaps if Almond has just stuck to candy, the last bite...er, *page* would have been as good as the first.

---

### **Vonia says**

Being a Candy Connoisseur myself, I had high expectations for this. Did it live up to my expectations? Not quite. I suppose I was wanting something less personal-diary-coming-of-age-story, more candy-chocolate-informational-enlightenment. Almond was extremely honest, writing this as an essential documentation of a personal cross-country road trip, inserting personal stories, anecdotes, and/or tangents that were sometimes funny, sometimes interesting, but always distracting.

At the same time, he did provide a look inside some of the smaller confectionery companies in this country, my personal favorite being that of Annabelle (Big Hunk, Abba Zabba, U-No Bars) in The California Bay Area, being that those are the only ones I am familiar with. A few of the other places he visited, such as The Idaho Candy Company in Boise, described candies that I would be most interested in sampling (The Valomilk, The Twin Bing, The Goo Goo Cluster, The Idaho Spud, A Peanut Butter-Apple Big Hunk), but as clearly stated, unlikely unless I were to visit the area and/or order online. he did make one point very clear: The Big Three (Nestle, mars, Hershey's) make it nearly impossible for these smaller family confectioners to be successful, causing distributors to raise their fees, then stores to charge ridiculous "slotting fees" simply to be displayed at \$20,000+!!!!!!....

Aside from the above information regarding his cross-country candy adventure, Almond also managed to get me seeing why I will always be a kid at heart. For various reasons, candy and/or chocolate has always been a nostalgia thing for many of us, as childhood is when candy is the most prevalent. Unlike most individuals, I never grew out of this. To this day, I love candy. To this day, I still collect Care Bears. To this day, I love fluffy stuffed animals. To this day, I am a kid in a candy store.

---

### **Raina says**

I wish that this wasn't read by an actor - I can hear the acting a bit. But maybe Steve Almond isn't like David Sedaris. And that's ok.

I really enjoyed this story of candy. He traces the descent of small businesses in amerika and the evil big three takeover of amerikan candy. Also imparts lots of anecdotes and issues lots of chocolate porn descriptions of the candy he consumes as he travels across amerika touring various candy factories. So fun. Funny too, though probably too sophisticated for middle school booktalking.

---

### **RandomAnthony says**

From the book, page sixteen:



*Every now and then, I'll run into someone who claims not to like chocolate or other sweets, and while we live in a country where everyone has the right to eat what they want, I want to say for the record that I don't trust these people, that I think something is wrong with them, and that they're probably-this must be said-total duds in bed.*

*Candyfreak* provides way too much candy-metaphor fodder for the weak-hearted reviewer. I don't know I can resist saying things like "the writing pulses as if Almond (of course, Almond...) were a five year old on a sugar high" or "the vivid descriptions of the nuances of biting into different candy bars sent me running to the candy store" (entirely true, by the way). So I will not resist. I'll surrender to the flow like a log of caramel on the conveyer belt through the chocolate enrobing machine.

This book functions both as tribute to the small businessman and candyfetish pornography. Almond's travels lead him through the factories of one-building companies struggling to survive in the shadow of the candy world's "big three" (Nestle, Hershey, Mars). He chronicles a fading world of beautiful machines churning out regional candy bars that maybe, just maybe, you'll find on the less desirable candy rack real estate (if you're lucky) but not in mainstream locations or near eye-level because the company owners can't shell out the tens of thousands of dollars necessary to place their products in the big stores. The spirit of invention lives in these factory owners as well; when they talk about product development they sound insane, honestly, in the best way possible, as if they can *taste* the new candy before they produce the first sample.

Almond stumbles a little when he stereotypes small town living (sir, I defy you to get on a Greyhound bus anywhere, even in your precious Boston, and find anything different than you describe. It's not like the Bostonians on Greyhound are wearing cardigans and reading Kant.) and he slips into "I'm a successful author but pity my pathetic personal life" territory more often than he should. Still, reading *Candyfreak* is flat-out fun, the kind of experience that raises your pulse a little when you pick up the book, like you're about to do something you want to do after a long day of the opposite. Almond's descriptive powers and childlike passion carry the day. And candy bars that look like potatoes sound cool. I want one right now.

Epilogue: I would say I'd read more Almond, but I realized after I read *Candyfreak* that I had once picked up his *Not That You Asked* at the library and put it back after reading the first few pages. So, in full disclosure, the jury's still out on Almond the author, but *Candyfreak* (pop) rocks.

---

## Jon says

There are definite five-star sections within this book. The author travels around the U.S. to visit a number independent candy manufacturers and tell their stories. These are great parts. It is a real eye-opener to hear that in the early 20th century there were over 6000 American candy companies and now there are only 150 or so. The rise of the "Big Three" of Nestle, Hershey and Mars has made it nearly impossible for any other manufacturers to get their products into stores. Reading these parts of the book filled me with an urge to "buy local", as much as that is possible with candy, and support a dying tradition.

My problems with "Candyfreak" are the author's autobiographical interludes. These are straight one-star confessions of how awful his life has been (professor at BYU -- boo-hoo) and how he has used candy to fill other gaps in his life. The level of self-pity in these sections is unbelievable. And if that wouldn't be enough, the author then treads upon the goodwill of several companies he visits by stealing samples and, in one unbelievable passage, pretending he is a representative of one company so that he can get into a food fair

illicitly. All of these are presented in a boastful tone! Grow up, Mr. Almond.

---

## **Michael says**

My review, 3.0:

First I would like to quote MC Pee Pants.

"I want candy, bubblegum and taffy.  
Skip to the sweet shop with my girlfriend, Sandy.  
Got my pennies saved. so I'm a sugar daddy.  
I'm her Hume Cronyn, she my Jessica Tandy.  
I want candy!

I need candy, any kind will do  
Don't care if it's nutritious or FDA approved.  
It's gonna make me spaz like bobcats on booze..."

etc, as the song stops being about candy.

The cover blurb calls the author "the Dave Eggers of food writing" ... which seems not only wrong but a little mean. He comes off more like the Anthony Bourdain of candy writing!

This book is terribly enjoyable, and yes, it made me go buy candy, although Safeway's candy selection is pretty pathetic. Walgreen's at least provided me with Reese's Elvis-themed peanut-butter and banana cups. (um, what the hell.)

The best parts about the book, though, apart from laughing out loud at some of Almond's turns-of-phrase, were the moments when he evoked my own memories of lost childhood 'freak' moments. I can still recall the smell of Coulson's Pharmacy in Lewiston and the comics arrayed on a low shelf by the entrance. The sounds of the old (now gone) video arcades of the early 80's. The panoply of GI Joe figures at the local Gold Circle and the quest to track down each one, well before the days of thirtysomething toy collectors. :) These are the things that shaped my life, just like candy shaped Almond's life. These things are golden, never to return, always cherished.

---

## **Christy Sherrill says**

This book is sweet. The author explores why sugar makes him shallow. The redeeming fact to this sweet and shallow book is the author apologizes for this in the preface and then goes deep to find the history, facts, industry, theories and thoughts surrounding sugar. Some of my favorite quotes from this exploration:

" So, the question: Given all this moral knowledge, how can I lead the life of a unbridled candyfreak?"

"I hate most vegetable.....I realize that I am going to hell."

" In the ideal world, moms and dads would have enough time and energy to fill their children with love, and brothers would take care of one another, and there would be lots of extended family members to pick up the slack. But as the developed world has become a cold, atomized place in which people are cut off from their internal lives and therefore subject to the most basic form of self-esteem extortion -materialism- which means that they have agreed to be judged by what they eat and wear and drive, by their fitness as capitalists, as opposed to say the content of their characters.

And it goes for children as well, who are, if anything, more apt to project their emotional life onto objects rather than people. Any parent whose child has favorite blankie or sippy cup will back me up on this. What folks in the board rooms at Madison Avenue sussed out a couple decades back is this: Manipulation of family dynamic= big bucks. Thus, the guilty dad will buy off his kid. And the deprived child will learn to seek love in the material form."

"We are, are furthermore, in the midst of what I would call a radical object disconnect. For the most of human history, people essentially knew where their stuff came from..... Watching the process by which products are made reconnects us to the wonders of production..... Candy companies are servants of late-model capitalism, just as surely as Exxon and Dow. They dehumanize workers, both here and abroad, and pump out pollution and provides an indulgence that is unconscionable, given that the great many people who are starving to death-which is all the more reason to lose oneself in the trance."

I was going to put the quote about Cameron Diaz's eyeball, but after I read it again I remembered how creepy it was and that I didn't like it as much as I thought. I started reading this book at the begin of the weekend. I was addicted and didn't put it down until I finished it. When I did finish it, I felt like I had binged and was sick to my stomach.

---

## **Leigh says**

Candy Freak is the story of Steve Almond's obsession with candy, particularly candy that no longer exists. Almond begins the story lamenting the disappearance of the candy bars of his youth, and wonders why such perfect candies aren't being made anymore. He sets out to explore the "chocolate underbelly of America", touring several small candy factories and getting the viewpoints of small, independently-owned candy companies. Almond discovers that there are indeed many candies being made by these small companies, but that corporate competition between the "big three" - Mars, Hershey, Nestle - has all but pushed out everyone else, and the small companies are fighting hard every day just to keep their production lines running.

This book found its perfect writer. There is no one who loves candy bars more than Steve Almond, I am convinced. The prose itself seems to drip with corn syrup and cocoa. That said, I found myself less than 100% engaged in the story. This book lacked the "so what" factor necessary for non-fiction writing to hold my attention. I needed more depth to the personal anecdotes so I could see how Almond's trip was affecting him. I needed a stronger political slant so I could feel more angry about the "big three" monopoly on what should be a mom-and-pop friendly industry. What I got instead was a book that relies heavily on rich description of candy bars and the quirkiness of its author's obsession with them to keep the reader interested, and for this reader, it only worked so-so.

---

## **Malbadeen says**

Steve Almond is deep passion veiled as giddy enthusiasm. So much of his writing just makes you want to high five the world and scream "F\*\*\*\* yeah!"

If you're not careful you might lose your self in the enjoyment of it all and begin to take for granted his amazing ability to lift up the ordinary and point it out in a way that has you remembering your own forgotten sensations/images/relationships.

As an educator I am always begging/pleading/admonishing my colleagues to please give our students opportunities to "think deeper". I can't help but to think that in general Steve Almond makes you (me) feel deeper. And he frequently does that while making me laugh!....I love you so much Steve Almond.

So that's Steve Almond in general, this is Steve Almond in regards to Candy Freak:

ha ha ha ha.  
sigh.  
oh- yeah.  
ha ha ha ha.  
me too.  
sigh.  
little tear swell.  
I remember those.  
huh? I would never admit that.  
ha ha ha ha ha ha ha  
oh, Steve - why you gotta be married (is your twin brother married?).  
ha ha ha ha ha ha  
mmmmm I wish I had one of those right now.  
ha ha ha ha ha  
yes!  
those too, me too,  
I KNOW!  
ha ha ha ha ha  
sigh.....

---

## **Jill says**

*Candyfreak* is the most delightful book about candy that also happens to record the author's deteriorating mental health. What a combination: Goo-Goo Clusters, Snickers, Valomilks, and Big Hunk bars all alongside ample doses of liberal guilt, childhood neglect, failure to commit emotionally in relationships, and a dooming fear of failure! Steve Almond is a clever writer who decides to explore America's dying Mom and Pop candy industry in order to distract himself from his own depressing life.

So basically this book is the literary version of binge-eating when you're sad.

It's pretty great, laugh out loud funny at times while also being terribly somber. As you will learn, in the early 1900s, the candy bar had its heyday. Across America thousands of provincial factories were pumping out regional candy bars. Years pass, a couple of world wars break out, and the zany, homegrown candy industry, like so many other industries, sublimates into three international conglomerates: Mars, Hershey's,

and Nestlé. Grandma and Grandpa's favorite concoctions disappear to be replaced by national brands like Snickers, Three Musketeers, and the ubiquitous Hershey's Milk Chocolate Bar.

It's a sad story but not very original. Local stores are swallowed up everyday by corporations. But Almond recognizes that candy is special. We have a more intimate relationship to candy than most products. A favorite candy bar is equivalent to Proust's madeleine: the precise crunch of the chocolate between your teeth can recall a whole barrelful of hazy childhood memories. Maybe your mom always bought you a certain treat if you were good during grocery shopping or maybe your grandparents could always be depended on having a certain chocolate goodie in a bowl on their kitchen table when you came to visit.

Candy is simply about pleasure. So candy memories are tight little balls of happiness mixed with nostalgia and thus, according to Almond, worth preserving. And he's right. Almond embarks on an American roadtrip stopping at small, family-owned candy factories that have somehow managed to stay in business and continue serving their regional delicacies that have charmed for generations. It's fascinating to see candy production on a small-scale; it's devastating to realize how many of these century-old family businesses won't see the other side of this century; it's salivating to read pages and pages about nougats, taffies, marshmallows, chocolates, nuts, and caramels.

*Candyfreak* is a book for freaks—anyone desperately obsessed with anything, candy or not, will recognize herself in Almond's effusive romp through America's candy factories. Just be careful. You may find yourself on a boutique chocolatier's website, considering whether the \$20 price tag plus shipping for a box of only four chocolate bars is a good deal. After reading Almond's ecstatic descriptions of these sugary delicacies, you will become another full-blown candyfreak.

---