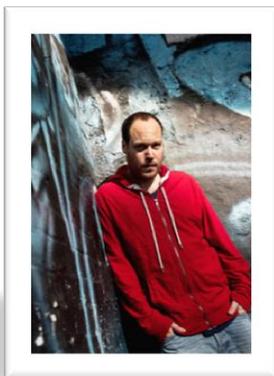

AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT



Lavie Tidhar on *The Candy Mafia*

ABOUT THE BOOK

In a city where candy is a crime and sugar is scandalous, Nelle Faulker is a 12-year-old private detective looking for her next client.

When notorious candy gangster Eddie de Menthe asks for her help to find a missing teddy bear, Nelle Faulker is on the case. But as soon as the teddy turns up, Eddie himself goes missing! As a seemingly innocent investigation unravels into something more sinister, Nelle and her friends quickly find themselves swept up in a shady underworld of sweets smugglers, back alley deals, and storefront firebombs.

If Nelle has any hope of tracking down her missing client, first she'll have to unmask the true faces behind the smuggling ring. Can Nelle and her friends find a way to take the cake? Or will they come to a sticky end...?

Q: What inspired you to write a story about a group of candy-smuggling kids?

A: It was a bunch of things all coming together, as is usually the case I think. Mostly I suspect it just sounded funny!

Q: You've written many books in the past. What was different about this project?

A: I wrote the book after finishing a really demanding one—*A Man Lies Dreaming*, which is absolutely *not* a children's book! And I didn't really know what I could do next. I really just wanted to do something for fun. And the funny thing is, it actually shares a lot of DNA with *A Man Lies Dreaming*. Both are parodies of hardboiled fiction, and both have these underlying themes about responsibility, about loss, about navigating through the world as best you can, of trying to make sense of it. It's funny because of course they couldn't be any more different, and yet they're two of my favorites.

Q: How does your writing process change when you're writing for both younger and older readers?

A: It really doesn't. I never—right or wrong—think of the audience as such when I'm writing. The book always has to be for me first. I guess with *The Candy Mafia*, I was trying to write the sort of book I would have liked at that age, and also, ideally, that I'd like at any age.

Q: Did you have to do any research before writing this book? If so, what did it entail?

A: I was determined that when we do finally see inside the chocolate factory it would be a real one, so I ended up watching a lot of videos of chocolate-making machines! Which are strangely soothing to watch—you should try it!

Q: In this book, we're limited to only Nelle's perspective. If you could tell the story from another person's point of view, whose would it be? Why?

A: Well, it's Nelle's story, really. I did have in mind a short story about Sweetcakes at some point from her early candy-hijacking days, which I thought would be funny, but no... This is very much Nelle Faulker's book.

Q: Did any famous detectives (real or fictional) inspire Nelle's character?

A: Well, she's sort of Philip Marlowe, obviously, if Philip Marlowe was a 12 year old girl! Which again, I thought was funny, and a good way to interrogate some of the problems with Raymond Chandler's fiction, as much as I obviously love it too.

Q: *Are there any qualities of Nelle Faulkner that remind you of yourself when you were her age?*

A: I wish! No, she is way cooler than me I'm afraid.

Q: *Which chapter did you enjoy writing most, and why?*

A: I'm not really sure. Maybe the pie-throwing scene. I love slapstick, and it just felt in a way like the heart of the novel to me, that moment when they go back to being kids again, but also that they become friends then. In a way it's the central scene of the book, more so than finally figuring out the mystery. You know, I don't think mysteries are ever really that important, though I always try to play fair. But it's more about the journey.

Q: *Were there any scenes that didn't make it into the final story? If so, which deleted scene is your favorite?*

A: Quite a lot went by the wayside in editing. My favorite scene was probably considered a little too... scary? Grown up? I'm not sure! It had Nelle being spooked by a couple of really small kids who really, really wanted some chocolate... sort of like a little zombie horror scene there! I think instead of "braaaaaaiinnnns..." they kind of went "Caaaandyyyy..."! Ha! I can probably see why my editor wanted it out but I do miss it...

Oh and I really liked the librarian in the original draft. She was someone who really liked chocolate even though it was illegal! And she was nice to Nelle.

Q: *Did you include any hidden details or clues readers should look out for that hint toward the answer to the mystery?*

A: As I mention above, I think you have to play fair in any mystery story, so yes! I've been writing quite a few mystery stories recently. It's really interesting to write—it's like a formal challenge, where you have to make sure the reader has a chance of figuring it out before the detective. I think the more "hardboiled" stuff, like *The Candy Mafia*, is a little less mannered than classic Golden Age puzzle-type stories, but still! So it's always,

how do I put it in there but hopefully not make it too obvious? It's a challenge!

Q: *What do you hope young readers take away from Nelle's experiences in the story?*

A: I just really hope it's fun. It was definitely fun for me to write it, and I hope that comes across.

Q: *What's next for you?*

A: Hopefully another middle grade novel soon! And I'm really interested in doing some chapter books. But I'm also incredibly busy with the adult stuff—this year sees publication of my revisionist Arthurian fantasy, *By Force Alone*, and next year *The Escapement* comes out—my publishers describe it as "*The Gunslinger* meets *The Phantom Tollbooth*"! I actually have books contracted up to 2022. And my first graphic novel, *Adler*, is out soon. It's sort of a fun team-up of all the great Victorian heroines. It's out as a comics mini-series right now. But you know, if I could keep doing children's books, I would be very, very happy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lavie Tidhar is the World Fantasy Award winning author of *Osama* (2011), *The Violent Century* (2013), the Jerwood Fiction Uncovered Prize-winning *A Man Lies Dreaming* (2014), and the Campbell Award-winning *Central Station* (2016), in addition to many other works and several other awards. He works across genres, combining detective and thriller modes with poetry, science fiction and historical and autobiographical material. This is his first book published for children. He lives in England.