



Nathaniel & the Midnight Movers

J. Ronald M. York

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Heists and aesthetic opinions abound in the hilarious Nathaniel & the Midnight Movers.

If those sofa cushions could talk, it would be X-rated. *Nathaniel & the Midnight Movers* is a madcap comedy about a gay man coming of age in the 1970s. He has an eye for interior design and the sticky fingers to go with it.

Ricky is young, petty, and ambitious, but his high-end taste in furniture, carpeting, and home decor doesn't match his budget. However, if his bank account has limits, his conscience does not. By night, Ricky becomes "Nathaniel," breaking into for-sale houses that have been staged for real estate tours. Ricky feathers his nest with stolen baubles and sells his extras at yard sales. His twenty-year crime spree is aided by "The Midnight Movers," a gay boy gang that includes Ricky's best friend, his college roommate, and an ex-lover or two.

From hijacking a chocolate-colored wall-to-wall carpet, to smuggling a velvet sofa across state lines, "Nathaniel" is fearless. He doesn't see his stealing as a bad thing: he's liberating beautiful things from people who don't deserve or appreciate them.

As an unreliable, amoral narrator, Ricky is charming. His voice is clearly written, with plenty of snippy asides. His first-person narration reads like a stand-up monologue and is funny, moving, and self-aware.

Historical details about the decades he spends accumulating goodies are well placed, offering some context. For example, colors like avocado and Pepto Bismol pink are the "signature shades" of the 1970s. Over time, these are replaced by the aggressive taupe and bisque of the minimalist 1990s. Hairstyles and clothes change, too, and Ricky has plenty of zingy opinions as he assesses the world around him. However, although he considers himself an expert on style and taste, it's clear that his preferences are in part informed by the culture and community he grew up in. This creates a small personal crisis. Ricky must keep stealing to support his decor habit, but is he taking the right things?

The book is packed with slapstick situations that are clearly described. For all his luck, Ricky comes perilously close to being caught multiple times. As in any heist story, the tension and drama heightens as soon as things start to go wrong—and for Ricky, plans rarely go off without a hitch.

The book is structured as a series of robberies and subsequent sales, told partly in flashback by an older Ricky, still on his yard sale hustle. The episodes start to feel repetitive, but it's a gag that works. Author J. Ronald M. York is a master at humorous suspense, and the book's high-stakes premise is irresistible.

Nathaniel & the Midnight Movers is a hilarious story of good taste run amok.

CLAIRE FOSTER (May 2, 2019)

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