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## Book Review - Set List

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## Off the SHELF

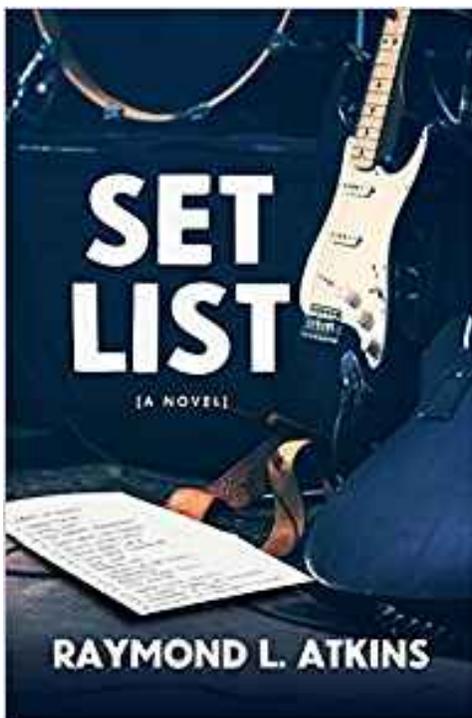
**Set List: A Novel** by Raymond L. Atkins (Mercer University Press, 2018: ISBN 9780881466669, \$27.00)

*Set List* tells the tale of Blanchard Shankles, a small-time Georgia rock musician. At the beginning of the book, Shankles has suffered a heart attack during a performance and subsequently has driven himself to the hospital, much to the dismayed annoyance of his best friend and bass player, John Covey. The book alternates between the aftermath of Shankles's cardiac event and his youth in the 1970s: surviving his childhood, establishing himself as a musician, and the early days of Skyye, his and Covey's band.

At the beginning of the book, Shankles is not terribly likeable. He moans and whines about everyone and everything, with Covey sparring with him on his every complaint:

"Hanging around with you for most of my life has brought me to Jesus for my own protection," Covey replied. "It's kind of like a spiritual flak jacket that I wear so that when the lightning bolt hits you, I won't end up as collateral damage, taken out by the shrapnel."

"The lightning bolt has hit," Blanchard said. "You're safe."



It is amusing but a little thin, but stick with it—once the story starts flashing back to Shankles's youth, it gets interesting. Without giving out details, to say that Shankles had a difficult adolescence is to put it mildly. As the story progresses, you meet the other members of the band, all of whom are amusing with their own little quirks. Together, they make the reader's travel through Shankles's life interesting. One minor note—although the book is ostensibly set in Georgia, you don't get a real sense of it. Most of the major events seem to happen in Tennessee.

Without giving too much away, it is fair to say that one thing the book is saying is that a person who suffers enough pain in his or her life will not remain happy. This message is not intended as an excuse for Shankles's actions, but it certainly acts as an explanation. But if you are lucky, your friends will stay with you, even when things get hard. The ending is a little surprising, but it doesn't come out of the blue, either. Overall, *Set List* is a sad but not depressing read, and it is worth your time.

Recommended for public libraries and adult readers.

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