

FICTION

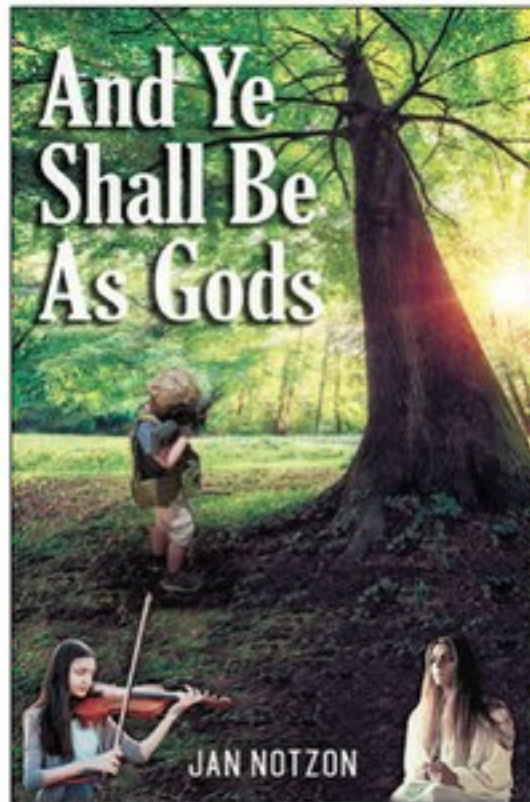
And Ye Shall Be as Gods

Jan Notzon

454p, e-book, \$2.99, ASIN BOC4VWHBBQ

Set mainly in Aguagria, a border town in Texas, the complex coexistence of good and evil is the theme of Notzon's existential sophomore novel, which concerns a former lawyer hunting for a more meaningful life, while facing the secrets of the past and the worst of humanity. Home for his father's funeral, Jacob Kazmareck is concerned about his adopted sister Grace's slide into a dark place. A talented violinist and survivor of childhood tragedy, Grace mysteriously gives up recording music, muttering to herself "Grace is a mistake." Meanwhile, Jacob suffers an assault he can't remember and a bout of amnesia, and he experiences a wrenching encounter with his former lover, Dolores Martínez, a friend of Grace's confined in a mental health institution for killing her mother.

Amid all this, despairing over the "pointlessness of a human pursuit" and haunted by intense discussions with a Holocaust survivor, he discovers that the truth of that murder is somehow linked to his sister's



Engrossing existential novel about a brother-sister bond and an urgent mystery.

Great for fans of Burhan Sönmez's *Labyrinth*, Brian Phillip Whalen's *Semiotic Love*.

characters cast a serious spell. Especially moving is the tender bond and profound understanding between Jake and Grace. The impact of childhood sibling rivalry, another urgent theme, resonates.

Divided into two parts based on Jake's journey, the novel succeeds in weaving together the cast's disparate stories with a considerable degree of skill, illustrating its themes but never feeling schematic. A prologue highlights key ideas but gives away much of the denouement, so the resolution doesn't surprise, exactly, but it makes a potent case for empathy, communication, and human resilience. Readers who relish fiction that interrogates the "human pursuit" will find this entertaining and edifying.

withdrawal from the world. "What are we?" Jake asks, and Notzon captures his searching despair in pained, charged language touched with the philosophical and the poetic, balancing the dark and the sumptuous. At times, the prose's density comes at the cost of narrative momentum, but the diverse