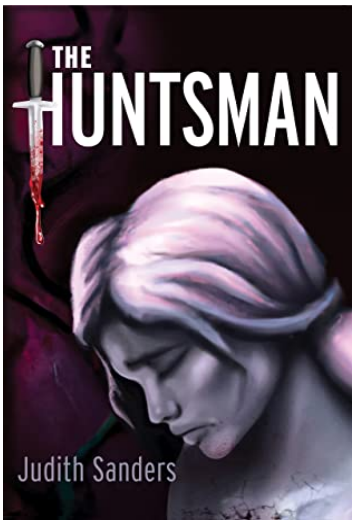
An Award-Winning Author's Psychological Thriller Explores What It Takes To Be A Serial Killer – And What It Might Take To Capture One



"This shrewd exploration of a killer's mindset will unnerve and enthrall readers."
--Kirkus Reviews

"Sanders teases out the mysteries with an emphasis on suspense rather than serial-killer gore...and the novel is powered by fleet, sharp-edged scenes, memorable dialogue, and pared-down prose tinged with dark poetry. "
--Publishers Weekly's BookLife Reviews

"...an extraordinary thriller. More than that, it approaches its subject from a wholly unique perspective; one that is sure to keep the reader guessing until the story's shocking conclusion."
--Steven Jon Whritner, Emmy-winning Writer & Producer

The Huntsman is a psychological thriller set in a small New England town that feeds the unquenchable thirst for today's fans of films, television shows, and books that focus on the killers amongst us. Author Judith Sanders's fourth novel provides some unusual twists and angles that are not typically seen in the genre.

With an MO like the character in the *Snow-White* fairytale, reporters label a serial killer "The Huntsman." An ugly calling card is left behind at each of the victims' homes: the woman's heart, cut from her body, left strewn with a half-eaten apple. This mysterious figure of fear seems to be unstoppable.

When another woman goes missing, she is presumed to be the Huntsman's seventh victim. Three months pass without a clue. Not even her heart is returned to her grieving husband. Is she alive or dead?

The police's prime suspect falls into a coma and the clock is ticking on saving the seventh victim. In an odd twist, the missing woman's husband is an ICU nurse and is assigned to care for the injured suspect. He decides to take finding his wife into his own hands.

ICU nurse Max Mason reads nightly to the helpless patient. It is not a kindness, for Max is sharing his own murderous thoughts. Max fears his pregnant wife is the latest victim of a serial killer who has terrorized their small New Hampshire town. The investigation is at a standstill. In a desperate and unethical act, Max sits at Lincoln's beside night after night employing brainwashing techniques and subliminal suggestion to convince the suspect they are kindred spirits, hoping it will lead to a confession or at least a clue.

Like one of Stephen King's or Dean Koontz thrillers, the husband attempts to get into the brain of his traumatized patient by reading books to him. Nightly, the nurse sits at the suspect's beside

but he is not a good Samaritan, and he is not just reading. He's building a bridge of friendship in the hopes that when Lincoln wakes, he remembers and takes him into his confidence, and he can find his wife. When Lincoln awakens, he draws Max into a whirlpool of terror, deception, and violence, ultimately pulling Lincoln's wife and daughter into the vortex as well.

Sanders drew the nurse's character based on her 17 years as a retired nurse. "As a nurse, I was exposed to humanity in all forms," says Sanders. "I truly discovered who people are when I saw them at their most vulnerable. I worked in a ward for the homeless – and in a psyche ward, where I was threatened physically repeatedly. My book shines a light on violence perpetrated against women, I seek to not only tell an interesting, entertaining story, but to do some good."

Proceeds from the sale of *The Huntsman* are donated to support New Hampshire crisis prevention efforts.

She also was able to write these scenes based on her own recent experience of being in an incapacitated position similar to one in a coma – She had a cerebral aneurysm that left her in the ICU for a month. "I was totally out of it," says Sanders. "I don't remember what happened during that entire month. It is just a blank space on my resume."

Sanders is available to discuss the following:

- Could anyone be a serial killer – do they hide amongst us?
- Insights on trends in psychological thrillers
- How we think we know people – but really don't know them
- Why you can't anticipate the exciting ending
- Explore the powers of the subconscious world
- What she discovered in researching serial killer profiles

"I helped save lives in the real world, but in my book, the taking of life is also explored."

Character-driven, fast-paced, and action-oriented, *The Huntsman* provides an edgy murder mystery that delves into the minds of those who commit murder – and those who seek justice.

Excerpted From *The Huntsman*

"Do you want your child to grow up to be a psychopath? If so, read them Snow White at bedtime. Yes, I know it's a fairytale. But come on, think about what drives these characters: ambition, jealousy, lust, grandiosity, and a taste for violence.

"Remember the apple? Dip the apple in the brew. Let the Sleeping Death seep through... There's a great life lesson for a child. If you can't beat the competition, poison their food. Oh, and if that doesn't work, hire an assassin.

"Snow White must have been required reading for the local reporters, because they have christened me the "Huntsman." I'm not flattered. I may be a psychopath, but give me a break--I'm nothing like that leather-clad fool in the fairytale.
I'm better. Smarter.

"When I decide to cut out a woman's heart, I do it."

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Judith Sanders
Biography

Judith Sanders was born and raised in New Jersey, where she spent most of her childhood exploring the great outdoors and dreaming of one day becoming a nurse. After graduating high school, she pursued her passion for healthcare and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing from Graceland University.

The Huntsman is her fourth novel. Her first book, *Crescent Veil*, is a novel about germ warfare which Heartland Reviews praised as 'nonstop action based on the real deal by authors who should know what they are presenting'.

In His Stead, her second book, is an award-winning look at the effects of wartime service on families. With a number of relatives having served or currently serving in the military, *In His Stead* is a tribute to the impossible jobs, bravery, and sacrifices made by our service members and their families every day in the name of peace and freedom. Sales of *In His Stead* support HeartsApart.org, a charity for military families.

Her third novel, Star Finder, the first book in THE DIAMOND ISLAND SAGA, is her venture into young adult fiction with the story of Lilly, a book-smart savant, who is being hunted by a group that wants to harvest her brain.

She was an Indie Excellence Award Finalist for *In His Stead* and was shortlisted for Chanticleer International Book Awards for *Star Finder*. She has been featured in interviews by dozens of news media outlets.

Judith's dedication to her profession led her to work on the front lines in community hospitals and as a civilian nurse at the US Army's lead infectious Disease Institute in Maryland, where she gained invaluable experience and knowledge that would shape her life and career.

After raising three boys and moving around, living in Somerville, NJ, San Antonio Tx, Albany, NY, Frederick and Clarksburg MD, Phoenixville, PA, and Leland/Wilmington NC, she and her husband finally settled in rural New Hampshire, where she found solace in the quiet lakeside days and evenings that inspire her writing.

Judith's extensive experience in nursing has not only helped her develop a keen sense of empathy and understanding for people from all walks of life but has also allowed her to draw inspiration for her writing from the stories of real people living and struggling through life one chapter at a time. Her best stories are a collage of bits and pieces taken from these experiences, creating a rich tapestry of characters and situations that resonate with readers of all ages.

For more information, please consult: www.judithsanders.com

Judith Sanders
Q & A
The Huntsman

1. Your newest book, *The Huntsman*, is an enthralling psychological thriller. What is it about? THE HUNTSMAN centers around two desperate men; one a compassionate nurse and the other a suspected serial killer. The tranquility of a small New England town is shattered when a ruthless serial killer strikes. The HUNTSMAN leaves a calling card: it is the victims' hearts, cleaved from their young bodies, and next to the hearts a poisoned apple. The prime suspect is a landscaper, Lincoln Raider. The abductions seem to stop when Linc falls off a ladder at home and lands in a coma at a local hospital. ICU nurse Max Mason decides to read to the helpless patient. It is not a kindness, for Max is sharing his own murderous thoughts. When Lincoln awakens Max is drawn into Linc's world that includes Linc's wife and newborn daughter. In the meantime, the clock is ticking down on the life of another woman, held captive by THE HUNTSMAN. My emphasis in the novel is on suspense, not serial-killer gore. THE HUNTSMAN is a plot of the mind…examining a killer's motivations, not just their actions so the reader sees into their pathology.

2. What inspired you to write it? It was an idea that came to me when I was doing research for a different book. I was listening to a Sci-fi-like TED talk about manipulating memories of mice. As a nurse, I had always been curious about the subconscious which we know remains active even when we are sleeping or in a coma. For instance, patients often repeat word for word conversations they overheard while heavily sedated or in a coma. So, I combined these things and took them to another level in THE HUNTSMAN, beyond what had been done in movies like "Total Recall" and "The Manchurian Candidate". I truly wanted to reward readers who enjoy psychological thrillers like GONE GIRL, BIG SKY, and MARE OF EASTTOWN.

3. What research did you undertake in order to write about a serial killer! Beyond the research into memory manipulation, brainwashing if you will, I tried to understand the motivation and psyche of real serial killers like Ted Bundy and John Wayne Gacy and I found some very scary YouTube interviews with real serial killers. I studied the demeanor of those killers in the videos and the total lack of empathy and remorse was chilling. One of the killers even bragged and laughed about how easy it was to strangle 40 women.

4. Were you surprised to see *Kirkus Reviews* gush that your book is a "shrewd exploration of a killer's mindset that will unnerve and enthrall readers"? My editor warned me that this was an awesome read, so I was hopeful and pleasantly rewarded by the Kirkus review and

similar reviews by BookLife and others. Most important to me has been the positive responses of everyday readers, many of whom asked when this will be a movie.

5. Is the book's title based on the *Snow-White* fairytale? Why? You could say that my choice of a Rohypnol-laced apple used to abduct the Huntsman's victims came from my memories of the *Snow White* fairytale. Beyond that, as BookLife noted in their review "As with the Huntsman in Snow White, themes of jealousy and love drive the plot." After all, remember the quote "dip the apple in the brew, let the sleeping death seep through." And The Huntsman's objective was to capture the heart of innocence, Snow White.

6. You served for 17 years as a civilian nurse at the US Army's lead Infectious Disease Institute and in community hospitals. In your book, an ICU nurse plays a pivotal role in the action. How did your nursing experience inform your writings in *The Huntsman*? First, in my nursing career I cared for people in desperate situations and from all walks of life. I did a lot of listening and found that I naturally sympathized with people's situations and wanted to understand their circumstances in order to help them. Of course, my training and research in medicine also helps me with the biology not only of what is but what might be in terms of future advances, including both the good and potential side effects and possible misuse of those advances. I also spent some time working in a mental hospital for the criminally insane and came face to face with people who would have preferred to take my life rather than my care.

7. How does The Huntsman differ from your earlier novels? My previous novels were family-centered. And so is THE HUNTSMAN, but it comes from a surprisingly different direction. My other novels were based on events in history and science and THE HUNTSMAN has that edge too. Like two of my favorite movies GONE GIRL and TOTAL RECALL that leave us with questions about truth or about the border between dreams and reality, I wanted similar questions to linger in minds of readers of THE HUNTSMAN. Too often we want clear heroes and villains but real life doesn't give us that. We have a bit of both of those in all of us and my characters in THE HUNTSMAN reflect that. I also wanted to create a bit more suspense with unpredictable twists and turns in the plot of THE HUNTSMAN.

8. How would you describe your writing style? Which authors are models for you? I am a fan of fiction and sci-fi in particular. Frank Herbert's Dune series, Nora Roberts, Clive Cussler, Steven King among others. As for my writing style, I want readers to feel like they see themselves in the action and minds of the characters. My best example of this comes from my first novel CRESCENT VEIL where I describe a scene in a flooding cave where one of my characters is threatened with drowning. A number of my readers have said that they felt claustrophobic and a bit panicky reading that scene. I relish making that happen for readers. In my own reading I am a bit bored if I can predict the outcome too soon in a book. As such, you'll find a bit of unpredictability in my writing.

9. An Emmy-winning writer and producer says your story has a "shocking conclusion." What goes into creating such a build-up that the reader is left guessing what is next all the way to the end? In my prework of my novels I create an extensive list of "what-ifs". What if this happens or that happens in the various scenes. So, when I get to writing I eliminate the most obvious and let my left brain generate the alternatives. I will also sprinkle in clues that may lead the reader to imagine the obvious, but incorrect conclusion.

10. The cover of *The Huntsman* is quite graphic. Do you feel readers demand a high gore factor to draw them in? It is often said that one should not judge a book by its cover. But, when you're competing with thousands of other books in your genre, something has to get the reader's attention. Having said that, there are also a number of clues in the cover to the plot of the book and this cover saves me a thousand words in that picture. Beyond this, the cover was designed by a college art major friend of the family who had read and enjoyed the novel. As such I felt a cover designed by a young reader would help attract that age group.

11. Why do you feel there is a big fascination, in literature, television, and films with serial killers! You could ask the same thing about why people get on a roller coaster or go to a "fun" house or set up or visit haunted houses at Halloween. There's an excitement and thrill of the unknown, unpredictable in getting our hearts pumping and adrenaline flowing, at least for a short time, before going back to life's normal routines. Add to that the media coverage and promotion of such elements and you create the demand.

12. What do you find challenging as a writer? How about rewarding? The most challenging bit of writing is getting recognition…the competition is huge (at one point a few years back there were over 4000 new manuscripts being circulated each month) and it's fierce. It's nearly impossible to get the attention of literary agents outside of memoirs and other nonfiction books. The most rewarding part is hearing from my readers, their thoughts, questions, and pure honesty.

13. How do you straddle two lives — that of your day-to-day and the mindset of your characters dancing in your head while writing a book? You're absolutely right. But,,I can do things like vacuum, iron clothes, or listen to my husband drone on about something and think about my characters, my what-ifs, and plots at the same time. Importantly, my pen, notebook, and iphone are never far away to capture ideas and plans. As for the actual writing, I do set quiet time for writing and once I'm in that mode I can block out everything around me. Of course, like most authors blocks do happen and when that does happen, I can go back to my chapter outlines, character arc profiles and what ifs for new inspiration or just walk away for a time. And don't forget a big part of our lives is our sleep and many times remnants of dreams, or nightmares, work their way into my writing.

14. Do you have to think like a serial killer in order to write about one? It's often said that you should write what you know. But believe me, I have never had such thoughts and no such aspirations to be one. It's also said that perception is reality, so, perhaps the better question is how well did I do portraying serial killers or your perception of serial killers, and to answer that you and others should read THE HUNTSMAN and let me know.

15. If you could meet a serial killer from history, who would it be — and why? As long as it was in a safe place and not some back alley in London, I would truly like to meet and understand Jack the Ripper as there's been so much about the events and very little about the man…or woman…who did these horrible things and why.

5-Star Amazon Book Reviews
The Huntsman

5.0 out of 5 stars **KIRKUS WAS RIGHT: Enthralling and (a bit) unnerving.**

'Truly enjoyed the perspectives of each character clear throughout the book. The ending has me waiting for the sequel."

5.0 out of 5 stars **Griping murder mystery that keeps you second guessing right up to the end.**

"It was hard to put the book down after the very first page. You are not sure how all of the characters fit in until the end. I highly recommend reading this book. Judith Sanders does an excellent job of keeping your interest to the very last page."

5.0 out of 5 stars **Unique well told storyline**

"This is a great read! As a fan of murder mystery novels this one is unique both in story line, character development and being told in 1st person. It grabs your attention fast and hold you page after page. You think you have everything figured out but it's one twist after another! Highly recommend!"

5.0 out of 5 stars **Really well done. I couldn't put it down!**

"A quick, suspenseful page turner. I couldn't put it down. The twists, turns, and surprises kept me guessing until the end. I know this is a book I'll be thinking about for a while."

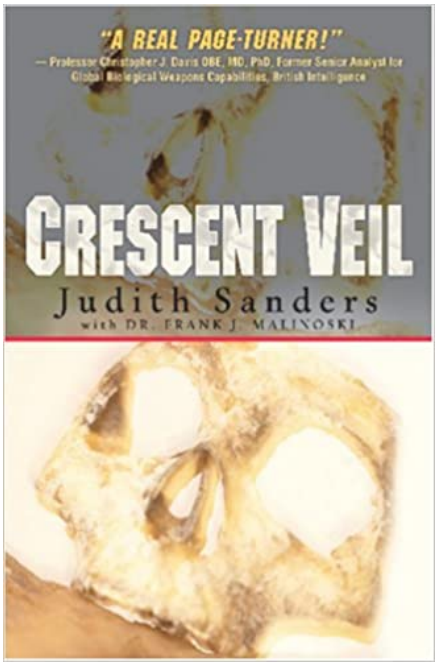
5.0 out of 5 stars **You will not be able to put this suspenseful thriller down.**

"From the first page to the suspenseful ending I could not put this book down. I highly recommend this murder mystery which you will not be able to put down. Trust me when I say you will not be disappointed with this thriller."

5.0 out of 5 stars **Great read**

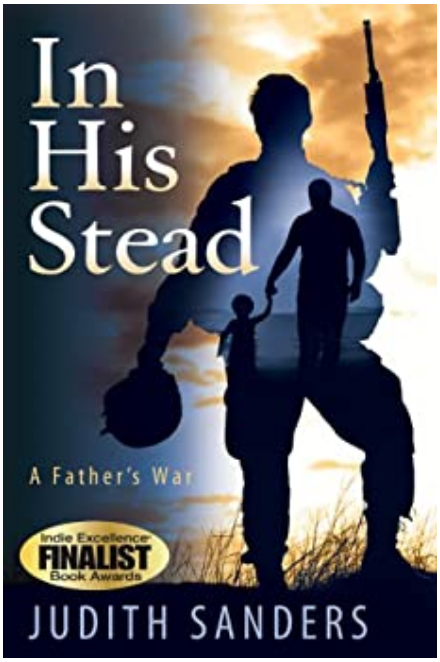
"Very interesting story and great characters."

Other Books By Judith Sanders



Former Major General Tariq Saeed hated every moment he was forced to spend in this backward territory. Outwardly, he maintained the façade of an Iraqi loyal to the new order after Operation Iraqi Freedom, but his heart ached for the power he had become accustomed to during Saddam Hussein's reign of terror.

5.0 out of 5 stars **Best Action Thriller of the Year**
"Ms. Sanders writes in a compelling style that will pull you into the world of international terrorists and the people who possess the skills and courage to fight them. Ms. Sanders is in the same league as Baldacci, Grisham, and Brown. This is an incredibly entertaining read that will also open your eyes to the most frightening possibilities of biological and chemical warfare. Ms. Sanders and her husband Dr. Malinoski have done a great job researching the possible outcome of biological and chemical weapons falling into the wrong hands." -- Timothy T. Redden, Amazon Review



The cause of war may have changed since America's conception but the loss of a child remains unbearable. In His Stead, A Father's War is a tale of redemption and the power of a father's love.

Retired Army Ranger Thomas Lane once burned for the taste of gunpowder and the thrill of the battle. But as he struggles to cope with his own PTSD and the death of his eldest son, killed by an IED in Afghanistan, Lane learns that the beast called war demands more.

Now the National Guard is calling on Lane's youngest son to serve. Consumed with sorrow, Lane knows he will do anything to save his child—even if it means going in his place, a pursuit unheard of since the Civil War when slaves were sent in place of their masters.

This is the tale of Thomas' internal and external conflict as he battle the United States Army, its JAG corps, a vengeful officer, the very son he is desperate to save, and his own wife, who has the Solomon like choice to risk her husband or another son. Filled with both tense action and heartbreaking tenderness, In His Stead captures the essence of family life in wartime—the good, the bad, and the hopeful—as it exposes what it means to be a father and a man.

"A serious, sharp-edged Young Adult escapade"

--*Kirkus Reviews*

"A unique story that is a mix of coming of age and high-tech adventure and suspense...Intense and well constructed."

--5 STARS READERS FAVORITE BOOK REVIEWS

SHORTLISTED for the CAC18 CHANTICLEER INTERNATIONAL BOOK AWARDS

Lilly spends every waking minute of every day learning; she is a know-it-all whose father keeps her cloistered away from the prying eyes of the world. She has two diversions; she picks locks and in a dream-like trance meets a virtual friend, Skye, an interstellar immortal trapped in its own world. All of this is not Lilly's fault. Unbeknown to her, Lilly is a valuable genetic experiment who, along with Skye, are viciously sought after by the criminal consortium Nautilus.

As Lilly turns 13 she craves the experiences of the off-limits world around her. In a rebellious moment she escapes her father's watchful eye to visit an ice cream shop. What should have been all sprinkles and whipped cream turns into a terrifying reality--a chase through the streets of D.C., her father's disappearance in a fiery confrontation with Nautilus, a gypsy who kidnaps her, and a homeless streetwise teen, Bobby, who comes to her rescue.

One wrong move in this dangerous life and death struggle may put the lives of many on the line. Will Lilly process the cascade of emotions and events and realize the power that true friends bring to overcoming adversity in time?