

A JAMES ASHER VAMPIRE NOVEL

*Those Who  
Hunt the  
Night*



BARBARA  
HAMBLBY

*New York Times*—Bestselling Author

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# Those Who Hunt the Night

Barbara Hambly



For  
Adrian and Victoria

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# ONE

“LYDIA?”

But even before the shadows of the stairwell swallowed the last echoes of his wife’s name, James Asher knew something was desperately wrong.

The house was silent, but it was not empty.

He stopped dead in the darkened front hall, listening. No sound came down the shadowy curve of the stairs from above. No plump Ellen hurried through the baize-covered door at the back of the hall to take her master’s Oxford uniform of dark academic robe and mortarboard, and, by the seeping chill of the autumn night that permeated the place, he could tell that no fires burned anywhere. He was usually not conscious of the muted clatter of Mrs. Grimes in the kitchen, but its absence was as loud to his ears as the clanging of a bell.

Six years ago, Asher’s response would have been absolutely unhesitating—two steps back and out the door, with a silent, deadly readiness that few of the other dons at New College would have associated with their unassuming colleague. But Asher had for years been a secret player in what was euphemistically termed the Great Game, innocuously collecting philological notes in British-occupied Pretoria or among the Boers on the veldt, in the Kaiser’s court in Berlin or the snowbound streets of St. Petersburg. And though he’d turned his back on that Game, he knew from experience that it would never completely turn its back on him.

Still, for a moment, he hesitated. For beyond a doubt, Lydia was somewhere in that house.

Then with barely a whisper of his billowing robe, Asher glided back over the threshold and into the raw fog that shrouded even the front step. There was danger in the house, though he did not consciously feel fear—only an ice-burn of anger that, whatever was going on, Lydia and the servants had been dragged into it.