



Pale Guardian

Barbara Hambly

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During the carnage of World War One, James Asher joins forces with the vampires of Europe to counter an even deadlier threat.

The vampires call them The Others . Neither living nor dead, the revenants are mindless and unstoppable and in the carnage of the First World War, governments already running short of men to throw into battle might be very interested in soldiers who don t ask questions and are hard to kill. Front-line volunteer nurse Lydia Asher is horrified to learn that someone has found a way to control revenants, and is creating them for this purpose.

Back in London, Lydia s husband, former spy James Asher, is even more appalled to learn that revenants are beginning to show up in England, on the loose. Since revenants devour vampires, the vampires of Europe most of whom are at the Front, feeding completely unnoticed on the dying join forces with the Ashers to find the source of the threat before the world is overwhelmed."

Pale Guardian Details

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Deborah says

Why is Hambly constantly coming up with needless excuses to separate the Ashers? (And especially to get rid of James. He's sick, injured, kidnapped, out of the country for an unrelated or unnecessary reason.) For a married couple, they sure seem to never spend any time together or work as a team.

Also, what's with the fake relationship drama/water treading that never goes anywhere or does anything? So much for Asher vowing to never work with vampires again . . . or to kill them all, etc. And then, in this book, (view spoiler)

And also, have you noticed it ever makes sense when the characters do this? *Why* did Lydia say that? It clearly is going to have no more impact than any other proclamations. Why has Asher said what he's said -- when for their entire respective books previous, all their thoughts have led to the opposite conclusions?

Ugh.

For that matter, why can they never stay in England for more than two seconds?

But beyond those gripes, I love the books.

Nicole Luiken says

Glad to have rediscovered this series. Great historical detail of WWI, a tense tightly-written plot and vampires. Looking forward to the next book!

robyn says

If I take issue with anything in these books, it's that the Ashers' home circle is so sparse, someone only has to be mentioned to turn out to be a key player in some way, either a secret enemy or an unexpected ally. There simply aren't enough people; there are the Ashers, there are the vampires, there are the nameless incidentals, and there are usually 4 or 5 new characters - or even fewer - half of whom will turn out to be important.

I halfway expect Rhys the minstrel to turn up again. I surely would not be surprised.

I think perhaps this series has grown a book at a time, without much groundwork getting laid for an overarching plot or destination, and it doesn't make for a very well-realized world. So far as continuity goes, each new book sort of juggles the weak theme of 'do we kill him, how do we live with ourselves, but he's our friend.' At least in this book, that's been resolved, somewhat. Lydia going ON and ON about her crisis of conscience, and never coming to any conclusion, has tired me out. It's such a pity! When it was introduced in the second book it was powerful; dragging on for the next 5 volumes robbed it of any dramatic tension it ever had. At least she's made a decision, and the only real one.

And Simon, of course, being a very parfait knight, will follow and protect her regardless. His character is

both consistent and touching. I don't see how HIS dilemma is solved, short of heroic self sacrifice, and I really hope it doesn't come to that.

The marriage of the vampire and zombie genres was VERY well done. The realistic portrayal of life at the front - Hambly's knowledge as a historian shines - coupled with the likelihood of vampires flocking there to feed, in a world where they are real, make for the most satisfying addition to this series in a few books now.

Read this book in a single sitting. Good fun.

Braxiatel says

These books are pretty good alt history but I sometimes I wish that I could tell James and Lydia to frankly fuck offerino as I am reminded upwards of three times or more a chapter of why vampires are all evil and why all of them, especially Ysidro, should be hunted down and killed friend or not.

Which apparently they'd feel bad about. But they should definitely be genocided anyway. Did I remind you that vampires were definitely evil? Oh yes, I remember that situation a book ago when they did [insert x bad thing again which I have never gotten over] and I should have definitely had the patience to kill them. Ysidro saved me a while ago which I am definitely grateful for but he should still definitely be killed because he is evil and bad. Oh yes, I definitely appreciate it but DID I REMIND YOU THAT WE SHOULD DEFINTELY HUNT DOWN AND KILL YSIDRO AND ALL THE REST OF THE VAMPIRES, I HEARD THAT YOU DIDN'T COMPREHEND WHAT I SAID THE FIRST TIME. BUT. THEY. ARE. DEFINTELY. EVIL.

And every time the book baits you into thinking that Lydia and James have gotten over it, they haven't. I'm not sure if the Ysidro case is a severe form of Genre Blindness but a jerk move is still a jerk move no matter how they frame their opinion and makes me wish that I could find something better to read.

Westley says

Very good series. Like her work

Galina Krasskova says

I enjoyed it, but I do think it's rather tiresome to have Asher and Lydia constantly in a moral quandary about working with, being protected by, etc. vampires. I could have done without that bit (for the last few books). Get over it already.

Aside from that, this book seemed rather more disjointed than the last two, but that may be due to it being set at the Front in WWI. A nice installment in the series, but never going to be my favorite.

Ry Herman says

Another book about Lydia, James, and Ysidro is always welcome, and this is no exception to that. This book delves even further into their odd friendship, adding new layers, which is impressive considering all the text that has gone before. The series has at last reached World War I, and the book gets much mileage out of the unutterable horror of that war, which makes the predations of vampires seem tame by comparison. The historical research is excellent as always, although as a very minor point I did catch a couple of Americanisms that should have been Britishisms (yard instead of garden, for example). Anyway, there's a reason I've been reading this series for 27 years, and I'll keep reading for as long as it goes.

Ghostrunner says

Grim setting (not that I was expecting sunshine and daisies from a book both about vampires and set in the trenches of the first World War) and suspiciously pat ending. Barbara Hambly does this sometimes; brings the bad guy in from left field at the very end, and every time she does it feels rushed to me.

Also: this is book seven. Stop whining about how vampires kill people and you hate yourself for associating with them. That ship has sailed. Every single book these constant reminders that the Ashers feel bad about working with vampires. I don't care. Get over it. It's tiresome.

Barb in Maryland says

Hambly has now plopped the reader and her main characters smack dab in the early parts of World War I. It is early 1915: Dr. Lydia Asher is with the medical corps on the front, as an x-ray specialist and general operating room assistant. Her husband, Jamie, is back in England, still hampered by a near fatal bout of pneumonia. Of course, this being wartime, well meaning (but totally misguided) people think to use uncanny creatures to give their side an edge in the fighting. Yes, my friends, we are talking revenants, aka zombies, as a weapon of war.

So the race is on (both in England and France) to identify the who, what, how and why behind the appearance of these creatures. As well as which highly placed governmental officials have signed off on the project to weaponize revenants. On the English political front the Irish are using the chaos of war to further roil the waters. There are signs that the Irish republican faction may also be interested in revenant warriors. Of course it can't be an Asher book without vampires. Don Simon Ysidro is in France, helping and protecting Lydia. Grippen, the master vampire of London. 'assists' James in tracking the revenants in London. Major points to Hambly for her ability to evoke the squalid conditions on the battle front. The flooding, the rats, the mud, the stench, the psychological horrors are all presented just a little too clearly. (We won't even get into discussing the food---yuck).

I'm not sure whether Hambly intends to drag us, battle by battle, year by year, through WWI or not. I do hope that this is not the last we see of James, Lydia and Don Simon Ysidro.

Kerrie says

A solid entry in the series after a shaky #6 (story good, structure annoying), this makes good use of both worldbuilding and characters from previous books and the WWI setting to create a creepy, chilling tale of what the intersection of vampires and modern warfare might really look like. As always at the end of one of these books, though, I sincerely doubt that this is the last Lydia and James will see of Don Simon, Grippen et al, no matter what they say on the subject...

Caryl Moulder says

I have read other works by this author but not this series. This is the current book but I was able to enjoy it without the back story. Now I'll read the rest

The heroine and her husband are involved in WWII. Excellent read

John Zeivel says

One of the best of the series

This edition of the Asher Series ties in a lot of the threads of the previous books. The character development of the three principle characters against the background of the Great War continues to entice.

Jacqie says

I love Barbara Hambly, and I love her vampires.

This book takes place during WWI. Lydia Asher, a doctor who is volunteering at the front and who also happens to know that vampires exist (to her sorrow), is well aware that vampires are feeding on soldiers out in no man's land. They are one of the many scavengers who have been attracted to the carnage at the front. While Lydia is repulsed by the vampires and fearfully respects them, she knows she's not their target when easier pickings are to be had. But then she comes across a different sort of undead monster in one of the trenches. It's been called revenant, ghoul, other things, and it differs from vampires in that it isn't intelligent or possibly even sentient except for a hive mind that comes into being when enough of these things are together. It's also contagious, much more so than vampirism, which is created with time and care and doesn't always work.

Meanwhile, Lydia's husband James (a spy and linguist) recovers back in London from the couple's last encounter with the undead. He's quite a bit older than Lydia and can't shake off the effects of injury and illness as quickly as he used to. He's also responsible for their child, a toddler.

Lydia and James spend most of the book separated. Lydia ends up working with several vampires in France at the front, including Don Simon Ysidro, her old resented protector. James ends up working with Grippen, the Master Vampire of London, as they track yet another revenant loosed in that city.

It's a bit frustrating to have these two apart yet again for most of the book. Lydia is still going in circle about Ysidro. She's drawn to him and repulsed at the same time. I think I've read her inner conflict one too many times at this point. "He's a killer!" "I should hate him.... but somehow I don't". "Ugh, I hate myself." It's about time to admit that maybe you've become more complicit than you like, Lydia, even if it's for the best of reasons.

This book feels kind of like a retread of several other stories in the series. Just like in the very first book, someone has had the not-so-brilliant idea that vampires or revenants could be useful as soldiers, and must be stopped. The mad scientist who abuses monsters to make monsters has been seen here before. I don't like the revenants, which have appeared before too, as much as the vampires. They are mindlessly ravenous, which isn't as interesting as an intelligent predator, and are more disgusting too. Lots of description of just how bad these things smell, fishy, rotten, ratty... pretty much every gross thing you can think of combined. With the vampires, there's always a back story. When were they turned? How? What sort of vampire are they- entirely inhuman at this point, regretful for their actions, world weary? Revenants are just rotting hunger.

And as I mentioned, Lydia's relationship with Ysidro hasn't changed. I think that at this point there needs to be something there to drive this relationship to a different place. I don't think these two should end up together or anything like that. But Ysidro has never, in six books, tried to harm Lydia and has tried to abide by her restrictions upon him to the point of putting himself at a disadvantage. He hasn't ever given Asher or Lydia reason to doubt his trustworthiness. Yes, he drinks human blood and has killed probably thousands of people. But I like him! :) That's the interesting part of the vampire for me- the curious empathy that they can arouse despite their nature.

Asher is given an offer that he's going to eventually have to come back to by Grippen, who'd like to have him as a fledgling vampire. This is a really interesting new development, and I'm interested to see where it goes. Naturally, a spy would be a good vampire and a useful tool for a vampire master. And Asher, who is getting older and weaker, will probably also be more and more tempted.

There was nothing in this book about the translation of "The Kindred of Darkness", a plot thread that I was interested in and which could well move the story forward. I hope that the next book picks up this point. It's hard to keep a series fresh and keep tension going, and this book shows the difficulty of that. But I'll keep reading.

Claire says

For as long as I can remember James Asher has been concerned that unscrupulous governments (ie everyone's governments) will try and use the undead to further their own ends. Well, here we are in 1915 and his worse fears are being realised.

This book focuses on Lydia mainly. I found her wartime experience interesting, and the plot enjoyable. However, Lydia and James's misgivings about working with Simon Ysidro are getting a little old to be honest. I'd actually quite welcome Lydia becoming a vampire now.

Donald says

The horrors of war, and the horrors of The Others, as somebody has the bright idea of trying to use a vampire to control the zombie like revenants and use them as WWI cannon fodder. Her usual sense of historical accuracy is somewhat let down by having a vampire hunter collecting clippings from The Sun, a paper that either folded in 1909, or wouldn't be founded until 1949 and letting the Americanism 'bully beef' be used instead of the English corned beef.
