

alace Green was blocked, an armoured car emphasising a point she would have thought established sufficiently well by police vans. Uniformed coppers -- the Special Patrol Group, of recent ill reputation -- and camo-clad squaddies were kitted up for riot, as natives kept out of homes and offices muttered themselves towards a resentful shade of disgruntled. To Kate Reed, this patch of Kensington felt too much like Belfast for comfort, though passing trade on Embassy Row -- veiled woman-shapes with Harrod's bags, indignant diplomats of all nations, captains of endangered industries -- was of a different quality from the bottle-throwers and -dodgers of the Garvachie Road.

TV crews penned beyond the perimeter had to make do with stories about the crowds rather than the siege. Kate saw Anne Diamond, collar turned up and microphone thrust out, sorting through anxious faces at the barrier, thirsty for someone with a husband or girlfriend trapped inside the Embassy or, better yet, among the terrorists.

'Evenin' miss,' said an elderly bobby, the survivor of a notionally more genial past, bewildered among the armoured thugs now sharing his uniform, 'it's been a funny old week at Palace Green ...' Sensing the imminence of an anecdote with a moral, Kate showed him her NUJ card and won open sesame. 'We've been waiting for you,' he said, with fatherly concern, lifting a plank from the barrier. 'This is a rum old do and no mistake.'

Anne Diamond and a dozen other broadcast and print hopefuls were furious that one of the least significant of their number had a free ticket to the big carnival. It wasn't even as if Kate were the only vampire hack on the street. She'd spotted Paxman, drifting incorporeally in mist-form through the crowds. She was, however, the only journo Baron Meinster would talk with.

For two years, she had been waiting for the Transylvanian to call in the favour he'd granted by spiriting her out of Romania via his underground railway. She knew he'd helped her to spite the Ceausescus, with whom he had a long-standing personal feud, but his intervention still saved her life. This was not what she had expected, but the development didn't surprise her either. Since Teheran, embassy sieges had become a preferred means of the powerless lording it over the powerful. Not that the Baron, *soi-disant* First Elder of the Transylvania Movement, would consider himself powerless.

A tall, moustached vampire in police uniform took charge of Kate with a firm grip on her upper arm. Her real police sergeant kept his distance, and retreated without offering the traditional cup of tea.

'Daniel Dravot,' she said, 'it has been a long time.'

'Yes, Miss Reed,' said the vampire, unsmiling.

'Still *Sergeant* Dravot, I see. Though not truly of the Metropolitan Police, I'll wager.'

'All in the Service of the Queen, Miss Reed.'

'Indeed.'

She was walked over to the command post, a large orange workman's hut erected over a hole in the pavement. Dravot lifted a flap-door and ushered her inside.

he found herself among uncomfortable men of power

