

INTENSE SECRET

Short Story by **WESLEY WHEN**

AS hot anger flooded through him, he cursed: "I'll fight those Martians to my last breath and I'll kill those bastards! I'm Jake Squarejaw, I'm humanity's last chance - I shall search their ship and I'll find out the secret to their incredible powers!" The scaly, green Martian invaders were winning the war with Earth because of their nearly supernatural strength and agility. No coward, of course Jake snuck onto their flagship battlecruiser in a desperate hunt for their secret - either that or a counter to it; and he muttered to himself for inspiration. "The Earth's depending on you, Jake - you will succeed!"

After many fruitless hours of exploration of the shadowy nooks and dark crevices of the Martian ship, he fumed, "Where in God's name is that enigma of theirs? When I find that secret right up their slimy sleeves I'll shove it where the sun won't ever shine!" Suddenly, far down the hallway he espied the object of his search and cried "That'll be it - the answer that will save all mankind!" Ahead he saw a silvery, luminous alcove with a sign adjacent to the entrance - "DANGER / TRANSMOGRIFICATION CHAMBER / INTERLOPERS SHALL BE VAPORIZED / SEVERE SIDE EFFECTS WILL RESULT FROM MISUSE" - and he exulted jubilantly. "Here's their secret - now I'll figure it out and I'll take it back to our

scientists!" Once inside the room Jake muttered expectantly to himself as he pressed the large, bright red "POWER" button.

"This will be the big moment, old boy." Then: "Aaaieee - intense radiation is filling the room, the very air is vibrating!" As his body was flooded by harsh, lucent rays he wailed "...will I withstand their alien operation - shall I perish? No - to the contrary: I feel pregnant with power, my omnipotence shall increase; I, Squarejaw will attain the secret abilities and might of the Martians!" As the radiation's intensity died away he rejoiced in his success - but only for a moment.

"Uh oh - something's wrong." The sign now was flashing ominously, "HYPERTRANSMOGRIFICATION IS COMPLETE / CYCLE IS ENDING". With panic in his voice Jake cried, "My limbs feel wrong; what will happen to me?" Then he screamed at the sight of his alien appendages and his scaly, green skin, "Cursed am I - for I will be absorbed by THEM! They - we - will win the war not through strength but via their secret rites of assimilation." Now subject to the Martians' secret yoke, his mind aligned with his new body and he announced dispassionately: "I will join my new brothers now."

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This is Wesley When's first contribution to Astoundingly Short Stories. He hopes that "Intense Secret" will be remembered by someone in the decades ahead, since he worked diligently on each individual sentence. He also worked very hard to come up with an appropriate title.