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Opening extract from

Wigglers on the Run

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Chapter 1

Their eyes strained to look deep into the darkness ahead. They sensed that something was lurking in the blackness of night, but what, they didn't know.

They had left the safety of the wubblehuts, whose reassuring glow was now far away in the distance. Now all that surrounded them was a vast open space of nothing. It was a moonless and beautiful still night, with twinkling stars above as far as the eye could see. They could barely see each others' faces, it was so dark. Only the whites of their big frightened eyes showed, not knowing.

It was not long after they had noticed the strange fluorescent orange glow in the distant night sky, flickering like a burning fire. No sooner had they seen them than they disappeared, possibly over the mountain range beyond. It was only when they heard the low *Boom…boom* sound far away, yet so unlike thunder, that they suspected something unusual.

Reluctantly, they edged forward, their eyes wide open, straining against the blackness of night, half expecting to see something at any moment. Their arms were outstretched, ready to touch whatever might be in front of them. Very slowly, their eyes became more accustomed to the dark, managing to avoid the odd rock or two in front of their large and clumsy feet. Beyond that, they could see nothing…

BOOM…BOOM…! It was louder this time. Suddenly, two bright orange lights reappeared, glowing large and fluorescent, though they seemed to be still some way off in the distance.

The Wigglers were frightened. They were timid by nature anyway, and this was not helping their nerves. There was an eerie feeling all around them, it almost felt like a presence, adding further to their sense of vulnerability. They knew it would take some minutes to hurriedly waddle back to the safety of their homes.

The air seemed to turn chillier, and a sudden breeze from nowhere swept past their bodies. Something in the distance was getting closer and now, strangely, the surrounding night air didn't feel fresh any more. Instead there came a gradual smell, almost sulphuric, like rotting eggs. The air also felt more dense, as if there was a huge presence in front of them, but they couldn't see and their eyes were still straining, their minds confused.

Suddenly they saw them, flying from nowhere out of the darkness, their huge, angry, burning red eyes looming closer and closer. Some were ten feet tall and there were so many of them, maybe five hundred or more.

The Wigglers tried to run, their short little legs bounding as fast as they could manage back towards the wubblehuts. But for them there was nowhere to hide. They were outnumbered. It was a desperate but futile attempt at safety as the giant aliens pounced like wild cats on their prey, engulfing them to nothing.

Then the aliens, not content to simply slay a few Wigglers, bounded quickly towards the wubblehuts, a peaceful settlement for the Wigglers and their families. These aliens were Wogglebots, the most feared to travel the skies and they had only one mission: to kill all peaceful inhabitants on this planet and make it their own. So, with pulsating flashes of burning red and orange laser fire flying in all directions at every Wiggler that moved, attention was then turned to their homes and families.

Their mission accomplished, the Wogglebots turned their huge, dark, scaly backs away from the burning mass, chuckling wickedly to themselves as they did so, the yellow sulphuric steam rising from their overheated bodies. Having previously failed to take over the planet

belonging to the Wobblers, the Wogglebots had found the Wigglers a much easier target.

En-mass, they headed back joyfully to their ships, more confident now of destroying the next Wiggler settlement. As quickly as they had arrived, they were gone, the bright orange auras of their ships disappearing back into the starry night sky.

Chapter 2

It was another quiet evening for Wiggle, who was sitting outside by one of the planet's crystal-like rock pools, the waters glistening in the moonlight, looking above at the many thousands of stars and moons that dotted the sky. Wiggle imagined what it would be like to be out there, in another world, another galaxy. The Planet Oggle was a sanctuary of peace and tranquillity, but nothing really ever happened here. 'Yesterday was the same as today. Today will be the same as tomorrow...' pondered Wiggle. 'I just imagine I will be sitting here for many more nights, looking up and wondering what could be out there.'

He gazed at all the twinkling stars set deep amongst the dark purple sky, the occasional shimmering light trailing and disappearing, a distant firework losing its spark. Staring up, totally lost in thought, Wiggle failed to notice that a few of the stars in the twinkling mass above were getting brighter, larger, as if moving closer.

As the distant stars in the night sky got brighter, Wiggle could see from the corner of his eye that something wasn't quite right. He decided to wander over to his friends' dwelling, which was just several yards away, and stopped at the wubblehut, a bubble-shaped stony white home that belonged to Giggle, Wiggle's closest friend.

'GIGGLE! It's Wiggle, Come out and see this!'

A little figure, very similar in characteristics to Wiggle, but with larger more prominent ears and the most mischievous of faces, came waddling out of the dwelling. Wiggle pointed up at the sky with long gangly fingers.

Giggle turned her head to look upwards and began spinning around on the spot in all directions. 'What! I don't see anything!' she replied, almost falling over. Giggle was forever being silly and enjoyed winding the other Wigglers up.

'Look at those stars,' said Wiggle. 'They're moving and getting brighter.'

Giggle stopped spinning around and, looking up, also noticed that something was not quite right. 'Shooting stars?' she asked.

But shooting stars they were not. They gradually got brighter still, and appeared to be moving slightly from side to side. The two Wigglers were mystified.

'Let's call on Tiggle and ask!' suggested Giggle. So a few minutes waddle away, beyond another rock pool, they waddled over to their friend's wubblehut. When they arrived outside, bright lights streamed from the round windows of Tiggle's home, and a much smaller collection of lights were dotted around the curvature of the doorway. It always appeared warm and inviting.

Wiggle and Giggle both knocked on the door loudly, then Giggle rushed to the side of the wubblehut to hide. A voice came from the other side of the door. 'If you are selling anything, I am not interested,' said Tiggle, whose face was now squashed up against the frosted window in the door.

'No, it's Wiggle and Giggle. Come outside. We've something to show you!' The two friends looked at each other when Tiggle failed to reply. 'There's something strange happening in the night sky. Come and see!' pleaded Wiggle.

With that, the door creaked open. 'What, what...?' Wiggle and Giggle waddled away from the wubblehut, then stopped and pointed up at the sky. 'LOOK!'

Tiggle wandered over and looked up. By now the lights in the sky had grown larger and brighter, their movements more erratic than before, as if they were dancing around. 'They are not stars…' said Tiggle, looking mystified.

'Let's call on Poggle.'

So off they all waddled over to Poggle's place that was just a few steps away. In contrast to Tiggle's home, it was always a dark wubblehut, as Poggle only ever put one light on at a time when he was home. So you could always tell which room Poggle was in. A light was on in the upstairs window. The Wiggler friends knocked loudly on the door. The noise they heard coming from upstairs suddenly stopped, but there was no answer. Giggle crept over to the side of the wubblehut, ready to pounce on the target.

They knocked again. Now there was a loud stomping sound coming from upstairs. The little window above opened and a very irate-looking face popped out. 'DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS?' said an equally irate voice.

Suddenly, a small mound of earth came flying through the air, aimed at Poggle but promptly hitting the side of the window and disintegrating into a cloud of dust. 'WHO DID THAT?' yelled Poggle, whose alarmed face was now covered in dust.

'Poggle, look up at the night sky!' Wiggle demanded.

Poggle looked up, his head jerking from side to side, then noticed the bright moving lights in the sky. His mouth fell open in surprise. 'I'm getting dressed again and coming down.'

'OH NO!' replied Giggle, waddling back to the others. 'Brace yourselves!'

After more stomping sounds from upstairs, the light went out. There was a *thump, thump* noise as Poggle came clambering down the stairs. Then the door flew open.

'Has anyone knocked for Woggle?' Poggle asked. The others shook their heads. 'I have to do everything myself yet again!' he moaned impatiently. So now they waddled over to Woggle's home that was also not too far away. When they got there, they noticed a Wiggler lying outside on the ground, its small body curled up as if trying to keep warm.

'Looks like Woggle didn't quite make it to the front door again!'

said Tiggle, bemused. Woggle had a habit of falling asleep before he got to bed, or wandering off without telling anyone, which was forever frustrating the others.

Giggle waddled over to the nearest rock pool that lay alongside Woggle's home. Kneeling down, she scooped up a handful of water with her long fingers tightly clenched, then crept over to where Woggle was sleeping, ready to throw the water over his head. But, just as she went to take up attack position, she tripped over, promptly spilling the contents over herself!

With the noise of the others' laughter, Woggle started to wake up, wondering what all the commotion was. 'Aarrhhh…' he yawned, stretching out long tired arms. 'Why is Giggle lying on the ground, all wet?' he asked in a sleepy, confused daze. The others chuckled quietly to themselves.

Suddenly, the moment was interrupted.

'LOOK! There's Riggle and Jiggle!' observed Tiggle, jumping up and down and waving, trying to get their attention. Riggle and Jiggle were close friends of the other Wigglers and on most days, they would all spend time together, playing and exploring. They enjoyed racing on bobblers, which were tiny space-hoppers the size of dustbin lids, or paddling in the rock pools with their stunning waterfalls. Some days the friends would venture over to the mysterious dense forests beyond the sand dunes, curious to investigate the strange noises that came from there. Whatever they did, they enjoyed themselves. That was the typical philosophy of a Wiggler.

Riggle was the smaller of the two friends and almost half the height of the average adult Wiggler, and so normally he had to rush around twice as fast just to keep up with the others. Riggle also had the loudest, funniest and most infectious laugh, and a big happy face that was always pleased to see you. Once Riggle was amused by something, it was difficult to stop him laughing, especially when Giggle was being silly - which was often.

Jiggle was just as immature as Riggle, although not as loud, and

although much taller, he only had one leg due to a serious accident with a bobbler. However, that didn't hinder Jiggle one bit and if anything, he was now even more adventurous than before, especially since he'd had a new leg fitted.

'What are you all doing here so late in the evening?' Jiggle asked the others. The others looked up at the sky and pointed.

'Something strange up there. LOOK!' replied Tiggle anxiously. Riggle and Jiggle looked up. They could see the strange lights amongst the many stars, flickering away and gradually getting larger still.

Riggle looked over at Jiggle, mystified. 'THEY ARE NOT STARS!' said Jiggle excitedly.

'Well, whatever they are,' replied Riggle, looking worried, 'they appear to be heading straight for us…'

The seven friends stood there quietly (which was unusual for them), looking upwards, the strange lights now appearing big and bright like car headlights beaming at them head on. It was as if something was about to bear down on them like a meteorite, looking more and more threatening by the second. The light was so bright now, they had to cover their eyes.

Suddenly all around them came a rumbling sound, followed by a gradual shaking of the ground as if the beginning of a sudden earthquake. The Wigglers now looked terrified, not knowing what was about to happen.

There was a sudden rush of strong wind that almost blew the Wigglers over, creating clouds of blinding dust as the terrifying objects above grew louder. It was so bright now, the Wigglers could no longer see.

Chapter 3

The seven Wigglers huddled tightly together, wondering what this frightening disturbance could be. All of the other Wigglers came rushing out of their wubblehuts, panicking with terror and hurriedly waddling in all directions, not knowing what to do or where to hide. To them it was more of a shock as they had been sleeping quietly in their beds.

From the dark night sky above, illuminated by the thousands of stars and moons, the Wigglers were able to determine the many mysterious objects now hovering above their heads in such a threatening manner. There must have been a hundred or more large spider-shaped crafts, their surfaces shiny, black and metallic, covered with bulging white lights like menacing pairs of eyes. Each craft was dominated by giant protruding spiders' legs, stretched out with flat bases like feet as if they were preparing to land.

The terrified Wigglers could bear this sight no longer and they all started to waddle as fast as they could inside their wubblehuts, clutching each other for guidance. There was nowhere else to go, nowhere to hide. The seven Wiggler friends rushed quickly into Woggle's home. They huddled together, crouching low on the floor by the front window, hoping the invaders would not see them. There came a high-pitched whistling sound and a violent rush of wind outside, as the alien crafts landed one by one.

The Wigglers huddled closer together in the darkness of the wubblehut. 'Keep very still and quiet,' whispered Wiggle to the others, though his voice was now shaking. The noise from outside grew

quieter and the air had become still and pensive. It was an eerie silence.

'What is happening now?' whispered Tiggle, her eyes large and frightened in the gloom. Wiggle decided to crouch up very slowly and peer cautiously out of the little window to see what was going on outside. The alien crafts had landed. They were now squatting on the ground like giant spiders poised to attack.

All seven Wigglers peeked out of the window as low as they could, watching… waiting…

'*Whoooosshhhh!*' A series of loud rushing air disturbed the silence; it was as if compressed air was being released. The noise was coming from each one of the crafts, producing a cloud of yellow thick steam. Then suddenly, walkways began to descend from each alien ship, at first opening upwards, then outwards until straightening out onto the ground below. The Wigglers' ears pricked up in fright, their eyes wide and frightened and their bodies shaking. They could hear noises emerging from each craft, a mixture of grunting and high-pitched squeals like those of a giant boar. Then a cloud of musty yellow engulfed each entrance, as if steam was coming from whatever was inside, and then wafted out into the night air.

The Wigglers still watched intently, silently waiting…

The area around each opening was bathed in light, and huge exaggerated shadows began to appear on the ground, moving along in small jerky movements. Something was approaching. The Wigglers clutched each other's hands tightly… The grunting sounds grew louder, and the shadows larger still.

From a whiff of yellow cloud came movement, and large bulbous arms. Each grotesque creature waddled heavily from side to side down the walkway of the craft, until they came to a stop on the surface of the rocky ground. The Wigglers lowered their heads even lower behind the window, terrified at the prospect of being seen. They could see from all the other wubblehuts dotted around that other Wigglers were doing exactly the same thing, crouching low behind doors and

windows of their homes anxiously fearful of being spotted and dreading, as to what these unknown, creatures wanted.

As the Wigglers watched transfixed, they noticed that the creatures had stopped at the bottom of each platform and turned towards each one of the wubblehuts. The Wigglers' mouths flew open with horror, for what confronted them now was incredible and horrible.

The thing they noticed the most was the eyes. Great big slanting blood-red eyes that had such a menacing stare, as if each creature knew exactly what it was after. With loud grunts and squealing noises, the creatures began to waddle heavily towards each wubblehut. Unbeknown to the Wigglers, each creature was carrying a weapon concealed behind its back, what appeared to be silvery in colour with a protruding tube. Each object glistened in the reflecting moonlight. The creatures pulled the silver objects from behind their backs, pointing them directly in front towards each wubblehut.

The Wigglers yelled out in terror, jumping up in such panic and giving all their secret hiding positions away. Now it was too late. The creatures known as Wogglebots, nasty bully aliens notorious in the galaxy for taking over the planets of innocent peace-loving creatures, now had the Wigglers in their sights.