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### Zarah the Windseeker

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Okorafor-Mbachu, Nnedi. *Zarah the Windseeker*. Houghton Mifflin, 2005. ISBN 0618340904. \$16.00. 320 p.

Reviewer: Gillian Streeter

Reading Level: Intermediate, Young Adult

Rating: Dependable

Genre: Fantasy fiction;

Subject: Coming of age--Juvenile fiction; Jungles--Juvenile fiction; Best friends--Juvenile fiction; Book-Reviews;

In a society that values style, civilization, and sticking close to what is known, Zahrah and her friend Dari stand out: Zahrah for her dada hair and Dari for his fascination with the Forbidden Greeny Forest. Zahrah soon realizes she is different in more than just her wild, vine-filled hair--one night she discovers that she can float through the air. This ability terrifies Zahrah, who wants only to blend in with others in her hometown. Dari and a mysterious woman from the Dark Market encourage her to practice her talent, but the only place out of view of the superstitious townspeople is the Forbidden Jungle itself! Dari is excited to enter the Jungle and explore while Zahrah clings to the common belief that "if you enter the jungle, even your ghost won't come out." When Dari's life is threatened, Zahrah must overcome her fears and set out for the heart of the jungle to save her best friend.

First and foremost, *Zarah the Windseeker* is a unique story, set on the jungle-covered planet of Ginen where people live inside large plants, grow computers, and spend flower petals as money. In spite of the imaginative setting and story line, there are some flaws in its structure and pacing. The author will sometimes tell rather than describe situations to the reader. The pacing is slow in the middle when Zahrah is lost and scared in the jungle; she spends more time being scared than the reader's sympathies can last. The book picks up again and has a satisfying conclusion, but in parts feels like a draft rather than a finished story.