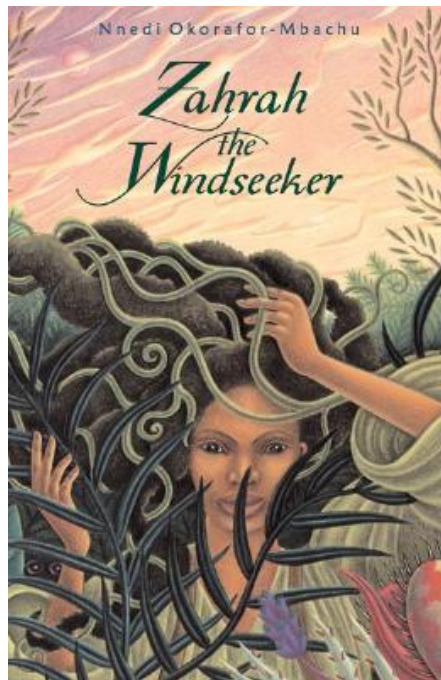




Zahrah the Windseeker

Nnedi Okorafor

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Zahrah the Windseeker Nnedi Okorafor

In the northern Ooni Kingdom, fear of the unknown runs deep, and children born *dada* are rumored to have special powers. Thirteen-year-old Zahrah Tsami feels like a normal girl -- she grows her own flora computer, has mirrors sewn onto her clothes, and stays clear of the Forbidden Greeny Jungle. But unlike other kids in the village of Kirki, Zahrah was born with the telling *dadalocks*. Only her best friend, Dari, isn't afraid of her, even when something unusual begins happening -- something that definitely makes Zahrah different. The two friends investigate, edging closer and closer to danger. When Dari's life is threatened, Zahrah must face her worst fears alone, including the very thing that makes her different.

In this exciting debut novel by Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu, things aren't always what they seem -- monkeys tell fortunes, plants offer wisdom, and a teenage girl is the only one who stands a chance at saving her best friend's life.

-from the Hardcover edition

Zahrah the Windseeker Details

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Author : Nnedi Okorafor

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From Reader Review Zahrah the Windseeker for online ebook

Cherie says

Zahrah lives in the northern Ooni Kingdom, where fear of the unknown runs deep. She is born dada, with vines growing through her hair and believed to have special powers. Besides their fear of dada, the people of the Ooni Kingdom also gravely fear the Forbidden Greeny Jungle, which begins on the outskirts of their small village. But when Zahrah notices changes going on within her and is then faced with having to save Dari's life, she's ready to confront all her fears head on, and challenge everything she's been taught.

This was a fun adventure. I enjoyed Zahrah's trek through the jungle and the various creatures she met therein. Because this is a children's book (ages 9–12), it also teaches a few important lessons, many which I believe strongly in to this very day. That one being to not believe everything you're told if you don't feel comfortable with it. It's okay to challenge old, outdated beliefs to forge the way for the future. Another is that you are definitely stronger than you think when faced with seemingly impossible odds.

Maggie Desmond-O'Brien says

Full disclosure: Nnedi Okorafor is one of my favorite science fiction authors of all time. So you may forgive me if this review is a little biased. But truly, even if I hadn't already been in love with Okorafor's work, this book would have been just as much of a delight, and I can't recommend it more highly for those new to Okorafor.

The novel's charm resides, as usual for Okorafor, in its plucky heroine: young, vain, clever, anxious, and ultimately courageous Zahrah. Middle grade and YA novels are particularly susceptible to "issue" characters--characters that preach morality tales instead of telling real, meaty stories--and Zahrah is the perfect example of the character I'd like to see instead: imperfect, afraid, and lovable anyway. Zahrah's friendship with Dari, which becomes the catalyst for the entire plot, is also sweet and true-to-life. It's the kind of almost-romance that makes this reviewer's cold heart melt around the edges.

The world of Ooni, which I had already gotten to know in *The Shadow Speaker*, is just as offbeat and lovely, from the village marketplace to the Forbidden Greeny Jungle. Okorafor weaves quirky and believable lore for her characters to explore, from terrifying jungle creatures to a tribe of sentient gorillas to a giant fortune-telling frog. It has the best anything-could-happen feeling of good fairy tales, while the African mythology it draws on gives it an unfamiliar and heady air in a middle grade market saturated with dragons, unicorns, and other European fantasy creatures.

In the end, what makes this novel a winner is the power of its ending: the culmination of Zahrah's quest, and how she comes to terms with her new almost-grown-up self. It's rare to see an author who has the courage to make her female characters both vain and smart, both silly and strong; flawed and powerful and beautiful. I hate to make any book all about messages, but this is the kind of book girls everywhere should read: one that tells them they can become their very best selves.

Bridget Mckinney says

Zahrah the Windseeker is another book I'm adding to the pile of things that I can't wait for my daughter to

read. It's definitely the most imaginative and interesting fantasy novel that I've read in a long time.

Zahrah is a girl born with "dadaloeks," basically thick dreadlocks with vines growing in them, but at 13 she tries very hard to be otherwise normal. Her best friend, Dari, however, wants to explore the Forbidden Greeny Jungle that lies outside the borders of their town. When Dari is injured by one of the animals there, Zahrah goes on a quest to find a cure for his illness and travels through the jungle alone where she has to use all her resourcefulness--and her newly-discovered ability to fly--to survive and save her friend.

There's just so much to love about this book.

Zahrah is a great character, and her journey to self-acceptance and self-love is one that I think basically anyone who has been through puberty can understand. Zahrah is clever and tough and determined, and while I don't generally enjoy first-person narratives from the perspective of teenagers Nnedi Okorafor does a wonderful job writing Zahrah's words. Zahrah sounds like a teenager, but one I'd love to get to know.

The setting, the Ooni Kingdom, is beautifully described, and I loved the melding of nature and technology. Flowers are used as currency and everything from computers to library buildings are grown. The Greeny Jungle is filled to the brim with dangerous snakes, two-heading turtles, deadly scorpions, friendly bees, tree spirits, talking panthers, helpful gorillas, and more. There is definitely an Alice in Wonderland-like quality to Zahrah's journey through the jungle, and it's consistently lovely. There's even a frog who makes a Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy reference that delighted me.

Finally, the cover artwork for the US hardcover edition is just gorgeous.

Zahrah reads a little on the young end of young adult, so it might be more suited to middle-grade readers, but I would recommend it to anyone who enjoys imaginative fantasy adventure stories.

Snarktastic Sonja says

Never as I was reading this did I feel like it was a children's book. Yes. The mc was a child. But, the story was so interesting and the world so creative that it never occurred to me that I was reading a children's book.

I feared that when she started off on her journey, that it would become boring and just be descriptive. But Zahrah's inner dialog and experiences were absolutely fascinating.

I really enjoyed this book and I recommend it to all ages.

A Random Rubee says

This novel, *Zahrah the Windseeker* by Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu, takes place in the Ooni Kingdom. In the story, there is a Forbidden Forest where dangerous creatures live. Some people in this Kingdom are born with powers, which makes them unique. People who live in this kingdom fear Zahrah because of her powers. Zahrah is one of the main characters in this dystopian novel. She is a girl with dada hair. Dada hair means that you have special powers. The power Zahrah was born with was the ability to fly.

Zahrah is considered a hero because throughout the book, she goes through the Forbidden Forest to find a cure to save her best friend, Dari's life from being bit by a poisonous snake. The Forbidden Forest is where unusual creatures live. She is known as brave for accomplishing this task and successfully helping Dari.

Zahrah seeks power, because Zahrah would go to The Dark Market where she found a woman who has dada hair just like her. Her name was Nsibbi. Zahrah would go to her whenever she wanted to learn more about her hair.

The author of this book wants you to understand how society determines the way that people act. In society people who are different have to prove that they deserve to be accepted. When Zahrah was bullied for having dada hair, no one cared until she risked her life to save Dari. Zahrah saving her best friend symbolizes what good friends do in real life. A friend is someone who accepts you for who you are and always supports you. I did not want to put this book down! I enjoyed all the suspense and magic in this story. You could actually picture yourself traveling along with Zahrah as she went on this adventure. I like this book because of the characters and their personalities. My favorite character in this book is Misty. I like how the author created Misty to be a caring and wise gorilla. I'd recommend this book to anyone of any age. This novel can teach children about a valuable friendship and it could also make adults see society in a different way.

Shira Glassman says

At its core, *Zahrah the Windseeker* is both a story about a girl rescuing a boy, and a girl growing into her own strength, both of which are themes I enjoy. Zahrah's story is pretty linear, straightforward, and in some ways predictable, so what really makes this book stand out is the TOTALLY GLITTERPANTS WORLDBUILDING. If there's such a thing as phytopunk, this book is it -- Zahrah's people have all the latest in today's technology, only it's all *botanical*. They plant *computer seeds that grow computers* which continue to evolve as the owner uses them, flowers are used as money and lanterns, and a five-story library that sounds like the most cutting-edge futuristic architecture with floor-to-ceiling windows is actually made out of a see-through "glass" tree. (Maybe this is just regular solarpunk. Don't know my "punks" very well.)

The plant technology isn't the only fun stuff. The forbidden jungle where Zahrah earns most of her Personal Growth Narrative, is populated by a menagerie of invented animals, some dangerous, some entertaining. Zahrah's human family and her best friend are all sympathetic characters, and I love the image of the wise leader Papa Grip wearing a hot pink caftan.

I did have a little cognitive dissonance because a major theme of the book is Zahrah freaking out over the fact that she gains the ability to levitate when she gets her first period, because this isn't normal even in her whimsical fantasy environment. It was hard for me to understand how someone could live in a place so fanciful yet be bewildered by *this* specific type of magic. It doesn't really matter, though--the story's still fun.

By the way, the story is totally approachable to people intimidated by complex speculative worldbuilding. Many of the plant widgets are just cool plant versions of modern real-world devices, and many of the animals are explained by entries in a faulty "digi-book" from the library that romantically sometimes won't turn on or can't load the whole entry (I liked this touch; it puts the lie to that accusation that modern technology leaves us bereft of certain 20th century plot gimmicks.)

Terra says

Zahrah the Windseeker by Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu is a wonderfully written fairytale. This story is for anyone who would like to escape reality and jump back into their childhood made up of dreams and fantasies.

Zahrah is a thirteen year old girl with a rare gift which no one is entirely sure what she will be able to do.

Born with vines growing in her hair, she has been taunted beyond tears most of her life. Very shy, withdrawn with low self confidence and a deadly fear of heights she is about to find herself doing things she never would have remotely considered.

Dari is a fifteen year old boy and quite the daring adventurer. Always wanting to do the forbidden, his insatiable curiosity leads him into a life and death situation that will change forever how the people in his city look at life and what it has to offer.

The story starts off with our two characters supporting each other with their problems and how to deal with them. They are the best of friends and can share anything with each other without fear of ridicule or chance of gossip. They are indeed true friends beyond the sense of the word.

After Dari is attacked and left in a coma it is up to Zahrah to go into the Forbidden Greeny Jungle to find the one item that may save her friend from a possible permanent coma to quite likely death. Does she have the courage and stamina to accomplish such a task. This is something she is about to find out the hard way.

Relying on an out dated field guide Zahrah sets off to find her way through the Jungle braving all kinds of horrible creatures and plants, eating what is available and taking chances that she will not be poisoned in the process. She soon finds out that the field guide has only the basic information when it decides to give it and she must rely on her intuition to help her accomplish something that has not been done by an adult in many years and has never been tried by a child.

The author has given us an amazing story of love, devotion and courage that it was a true delight to read. I can actually envision being a child in a village at dusk with an elder sitting there telling all the children of this marvelous tale. It is highly colorful, intriguing and encouraging to say the least. A delight for teens and adults this tale should not be missed.

Melanti says

This is such a fun, lighthearted read!

My only other experience with Ms. Okorafor is with her issue-laden *Who Fears Death* which deals with such heavy topics as FGM.

This one, though, is at the lower end of the YA scale and the closest thing to an "issue" it deals with is Zahrah being teased over her dada hair (a sort of supernatural but natural dreadlocks) which, I assume, would sound really familiar to any girl who wears her hair naturally curly while those around her either have naturally or chemically straight hair.

Other than that, it's a fairly straightforward adventure/quest type story, but rather than pulling in western plot elements, it incorporates lots of beings and ideas from African mythology. It was a very refreshing change of pace!

Wealththeow says

This was a really sweet book about a young girl born with "dada-locks" (dreadlocks with vines growing through them). Her hair marks her as different and just a little fey, which makes her an outsider. She and her

best friend decide to explore The Forbidden Greeny Jungle, and have strange and dangerous encounters. Zahrah lives in a tree city, where people grow computers out of plant seeds and grow buildings instead of building them. Her world is far more interesting than the book itself, which is marked as YA but is really more a children's book.

Jim says

This is a YA novel which, in some respects, follows a very familiar storyline. Zahrah is different from the other kids. She's picked on by her peers at school. She's shy, but destined for greatness. She has a popular friend named Dari who encourages her to be more daring and explore with him. When something happens to Dari, this provides Zahrah with the push she needs to overcome her timidity and set out on her own to try to save him...

Sound like something you've read before? Now try this.

Zahrah was born *dada*, with vines growing within her thick locks, vines that twined themselves to her hair while she was still in the womb. She lives on a planet colonized ages ago and developed with biological technology, a world rooted in African culture and folklore. Zahrah grew her own computer from a seed. Shots are given using insects, and the patient is swabbed with sugar water so the insect will bite and inject the medicine. And oh yes — Zahrah can fly.

I loved it. I loved the animals, the talking gorillas and the trickster frog and even the poor, confused war snake. I loved the details, from the mirror-adorned fashion to the glitchy electronic guidebook to the background history of the library to the underlying theme of rebellion against ignorance. I loved Papa Grip and his pink caftans, and the rhythm beetles who were drawn to the music.

There were times during her quest in the forbidden jungle when it felt like Zahrah was a little too lucky (such as her encounter the whip scorpion), when other animals and characters conveniently arrived to help her. I definitely noticed these points, but they didn't throw me out of the book. It felt right for this kind of story, which blends the flavors of science fiction and folklore and fairy tale and makes it work.

Random side note: the day after I finished this book, I dreamed about flying. (I also dreamed my car fell into a lake, but I don't think that had anything to do with the book.)

I'd recommend this one to pretty much anyone.

Jain says

Your average juvenile fiction quest fantasy, except that the protagonist is female (somewhat rare), she's brown-skinned (much rarer), and her world is based on an African rather than European or Asian model (very rare indeed). Interesting worldbuilding, though the marriage of fantasy and technology didn't always ring true for me. Unfortunately, my favorite parts of the book were those that took place before the quest, so I was a little disappointed with the direction that the plot took. That's more my problem than the book's though; overall, I think it's a nice, solid fantasy novel, albeit one that likely holds more appeal for children than for older readers.

Ana says

The writing sucked me into the story, but it was the world-building which kept me there. The world felt familiar and strange all at once, but once Zahrah started exploring the jungle, the sense of danger and thrill of discovery made me fly through the book.

Katie says

>Zahrah the Windseeker is a sweet little fantasy adventure about a young girl born with dada hair that marks her as unique among her people. She quickly discovers that she has hidden powers she's afraid of using, but is pushed to exercise them - and to venture into the infamous Green Jungle - when her best friend Dari is threatened. It's a very standard story made unique but some great world building. The story is set in the Ooni Kingdom, where technology is plant-based and fairly advanced (there are Kindles and Plant Internet) but where the culture is very closed-off. The Greeny Jungle is where most of the author's inventiveness shines through. Even though the middle chunk of the book turns into "what magical creature will Zahrah meet this time!" it doesn't really get old, in large part because Okorafor has such an interesting, vivid imagination.

I was caught a little off guard with this book being YA (I had recently come off of Okorafor's *Kabu Kabu*, which I really really loved), and that may be reflected in my review. I know that I shouldn't hold that against it for any reason, and it's silly to blame a book for being something it never promised to be. This book would be *wonderful* for middle school girls, and I'd give it 5 stars on that front. But the emotional beats of the story are a little simplistic and well-worn, and that stands in stark contrast to all of the inventiveness surrounding it.

Stef Rozitis says

A beautiful, innocent, book with inventive and mostly seamless world-building. At times the fourth wall does slip (do I detect the author having a giggle?) for example:

"Let me guess," the frog interrupted, "Like every other human explored I've even met, you want to know the meaning of life."

"I didn't-"

"The answer's forty-four. The machine was off by two" the frog snapped, "Believe me, it makes a world of difference..."

If that's not a hitchhikers reference then what is it? Nevertheless the author does not make the mistake of being pompous (no study questions in the back" there is plenty of wisdom that is both easy not to get too drawn into, and knitted well enough into plot and character to not irritate (at least I wasn't irritated). Zahrah has beautiful relationships with all the people in her life (apart from some petty bullies that she manages to outgrow), she has some angst, fear and emotional pain which she reveals to the reader without becoming a whinger, and she succeeds due to a mixture of courage, determination, love, loyalty, great and loving mentors and resources. Technology is part of her self-resourcing (but turns out to be less significant than her ability to rise above - literally as well as figuratively). Zahrah is "special" but that is nicely balanced by flaws, indecision, lack of confidence and lack of experience. She is no superhero. She speaks to a chief about the same way she speaks to labourers (politely but not fawningly). There is a sustainability Utopian dream (admittedly a bit far fetched) within the world-building and intelligent animals (with casual comments such

as "we will refer to them as people because they are more intelligent than us".

There is some light romance in the book which I won't discuss in as much detail as I like because of spoilers, but suffice it to say it is girl/boy and so sweet and respectful that I enjoyed it and am not even tempted to add some snarky comment about heteronormativity. I also loved how trusting and casual the parents were around that. All in all the book refreshingly exudes innocence (but not naivety).

The flaws (mainly the occasional loss of voice) do not ruin the experience. It's a simple book (though don't be misled by the simple story line there are flavours in it) but then again fresh mango sorbet is a simple dessert. Simple is not always bad.

I recommend this for anyone who is sick of the same-old same-old or is looking for a positive tonic of a book that won't depress.

Oh and it's chockers full of likeable characters too!

Corinne says

Every time I placed this book down, my mind was flooded with the vivid imagery of the Ooni Kingdom and the surrounding jungle. This was almost surprising since as I was reading the writing often felt simple and straightforward. I enjoyed following Zahrah as she learned more about herself and her abilities as a dada girl. I especially enjoyed many of the quirky jungle creatures, my favorite being the Speculating Speckled Frog!

2018 Reading Women Challenge: A fantasy novel written by a woman of color
