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LOCAL AUTHOR AND TEEN ARTIST PARTNER TO INSPIRE GIRLS WITH SCI-FI SERIES AT FIRST ANNUAL WAKANDACON

Former Miss America contestant writes brown girls into the spotlight; 9th grader illustrates

CHICAGO July 31, 2018 – Young women of color can identify with new bold champions in the young adult science-fiction fantasy series, *The Hibouleans*. Writing and drawing their heroes into existence, author and former beauty queen, Octavia Reese joined forces with fourteen-year old illustrator Aaliyah Lachel'e. Together, the girl team is filling a void, bringing young brilliant brown girls to the forefront of epic adventures.

"I'm a big nerd," Octavia said. "I grew up admiring Stan Lee, Stephen King, Chris Van Allsburg, Tim Burton and Ed Gorey. But my favorite adventures always seemed to leave out characters that looked like me. I was tired of watching everyone else have all the fun. My main character, Taryn, looks like me."

Octavia said she wrote the series for all the brown girls out there that love problem-solving, strength-building, lab experiments and dream of having super powers and being the hero in epic adventures.

Her idea resonated with child-artist Aaliyah, also known as "PeanutBuddar," who jumped at the invitation to illustrate *The Hibouleans* when Octavia reached out to her mom.

"When I first heard about *The Hibouleans*, I couldn't wait to read it – it's the kind of story I love to read and watch," Aaliyah said. "Being able to bring fantasy characters to life is so exciting, plus they look like *me* and the main character is my age. It's like I'm drawing my own story."

Aaliyah, who has been drawing since she was three years old, started her own company, **PeanutBuddarArt**, when she couldn't find characters in fashion and media that matched her features.

"I love cartoons, visual novels and books, but I never really got to see any characters that I could relate to – not in their skin, not in their hair, and not in their shapes," Aaliyah said.

"No one really looked like me at all. So, I drew some that did." Aaliyah's colorful and charming characters adorn backpacks, lunchboxes, notebooks and pencil cases.

"Kids should be able to read books and watch TV shows and be able to see themselves in those characters," she said. Aaliyah has already been published twice as an illustrator and in addition to thriving in high school, playing sports and running her business, she plans to work with Octavia throughout *The Hibouleans* 10-book series.

Octavia and Aaliyah were both thrilled to be a part of the first annual Wakandacon Convention, which aims to unite fantasy fans and comic-book-loving people of color around the central theme of Black Panther's Wakanda.

Find *The Hibouleans* and PeanutBuddarArt this weekend at **Wakandacon: Friday, August 3, 4pm – 8pm; Saturday, August 4, 11am – 8pm; and Sunday, August 5, 10am – 2pm**. For more information, visit www.wakandacon2018.com, www.octaviareese.com, and www.peanutbuddarart.com.