



Based on the universally familiar tale of the clever suitor who must use his wits to win the hand of the beautiful and intelligent maiden, *The Hunter and the Ebony Tree* is set in the village of Tombakonda and features an array of characters including several creatures that assist the hunter in his quest.

In the publishing world, it is unusual for authors to provide their own illustrations, but the editors at Moon Mountain invited Nelda to do just that after seeing her proposed acrylic and paper collages. In order to accommodate the gutters on double-page spreads as well as the placement of text, she had to make some modifications to the artwork. The new batch of collages, 17 in all, took two and a half months to complete, says Nelda: "I was on a timetable—getting by on three hours of sleep. But I love when you're in that process—in the zone. The collage format is sort of spontaneous; you never know what you'll get. But you get to direct it."

With no formal training in art, Nelda experimented with different brushes to achieve her backdrops. Although her human characters appear to be clothed in exotic fabrics, the materials are actually paper cutouts. Nelda remembers drawing on Matisse for inspiration. "I always thought it was cool that he painted with scissors," she says.

Born in Tunis, Nelda spent the first 18 years of her life overseas, traveling extensively through Africa, Europe and Asia with her family. "The first time I ever spent four years in one place was at Harvard," she says. Her career highlights

