



# Trolls

**By Brian & Wendy Froud. Published by Abrams Books**

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Not since Brian's conceptual design work with Jim Henson on the classic films, 'The Dark Crystal' and 'Labyrinth', has Brian created a faerie world with such imagination, dimension, depth and detail. *Trolls* is a large format "world book" that explores trolls and troll culture in a dynamic merging of pictures and words that brings their world vividly alive. *Trolls* reveals the past, present and future of these magical creatures through images, tales, mythology and archaeology. *Trolls* presents strong, individual, heroic characters and reveals troll philosophy and wisdom with contemporary relevance. Most importantly, *Trolls* is bound together with a compelling narrative: a central story that affirms that trolls are real, have lived and are living now.

*Trolls* features new and classic 2D and 3D work by both Brian and Wendy that are woven together with troll "artefacts", symbols and the natural world to create a fascinating revelation of their world. Brian's images are deeply immersive, even cinematic at times; *Trolls* draws the viewer into the texture of the world and its stories of characters born of lichened rocks, twisted trees, rainbowed waterfalls and shadowy thickets.

## **Author/Artist**

Brian Froud has created some of the most respected and highly acknowledged mythic artwork of our time. His work has been the inspiration for such films as 'The Dark Crystal' and 'Labyrinth' (both with Jim Henson's Creature Shop). He has won numerous awards, including an Award for Best Original Artwork. Wendy Froud is a doll-artist, sculptor and puppet-maker, best known for her work creating creatures for the Jim Henson films 'The Dark Crystal' and 'Labyrinth' as well as work on the Star Wars films including being the fabricator of Yoda.

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Brian and Wendy  
Froud, *Brian  
Froud's Trolls*.

# An interview with Brian Froud

Heather Robbins

**F**or over 35 years, Brian Froud has been an internationally renowned and bestselling faerie artist and an authority on faeries and faerie lore. His international best-selling book, *Faeries*, with fantasy illustrator Alan Lee, is a modern classic of art and British fairy folklore, while his cult hit movies with Jim Henson, 'The Dark Crystal' and 'Labyrinth', set new standards for design, puppeteering and animatronics. With over eight million books sold to date, Brian's international bestsellers include the *Lady Cottington's Pressed Fairy Album* series with Monty Python's Terry Jones and Prof. Ari Berk, *Good Faeries/Bad Faeries* and the *Faeries Oracle*, as well as collaborations with Prof. Ari Berk on *Goblins!*, the *Runes of Elfland* and *Brian Froud's World of Faerie*. Two festival events, Faerieworlds and FaerieCon, are held in his honour and attract over 30,000 guests each year. Brian lives in Devon, England, with his wife, internationally acclaimed doll maker Wendy Froud. Their latest book, *Trolls*, is available now. Sussex Centre assistant Heather Robbins interviewed him on his work, his plans for the future and, of course, *Trolls*.

Brian, your work always appears to stay close to the traditions of fairy folklore. What percentage of your working time is taken up with researching fairy folklore as opposed to painting and sketching, or are the two activities closely bound up in one continuous process?

*I hardly ever read novels but I do lots of research reading, the more obscure, the better, usually the book at the bottom of a tottering pile in my studio – unfortunately I never remember anything, but it does have a way of percolating through and emerging in my art, so it must all be in there somewhere.*

Where do you go or what resources do you use for your research? Is there a particular book that's falling apart from over-use as inspiration?

*Over the years I have collected a large library of research books – in fact they are taking over most of my studio at this point. I do have books I return to more often than most – anything by John Matthews but especially **The Western Way**, by Caitlin and John Matthews.*

I have not had chance to see *Trolls* yet, but I've read that it includes troll 'artefacts' and an exploration of 'troll culture' through their tales, mythology, and archaeology. Can you explain more?

*These are local trolls (Dartmoor) – not the Nordic trolls that people are most familiar with. Wendy and I have tried to give the reader a glimpse into their world by presenting not only images of the trolls themselves but using photographs of their symbolic, ritual and everyday objects with explanations as well as recording their tales and tale fragments.*

Aren't trolls just grumpy creatures living under bridges? Did you uncover any folklore that suggested otherwise?

*Yes – we suggest that trolls, for the most part, are not lurking under bridges but supporting the structure of the bridge and are indeed sometimes the bridges themselves, connecting our world with an inner world. Of course, there ARE those few really bad trolls that do just lurk, but they are in the minority.*

Your book *Faeries* struck such a chord because it felt like the first illustrated book on fairies in a long time that had depicted them as tricky, grown-up, even dangerous. Do you hope that *Trolls* will change the general opinion of trolls in the same way?

*Yes! We hope so. We felt that trolls had had a bad press for years and that it was time to redress the balance.*

Did your experience of painting trolls differ from your experiences of previous books with fairies and goblins? Did trolls offer new challenges or lessons?

*The challenge was to have continuity between the new work and the paintings, of which there are quite a few in this book, that I painted over thirty years ago – however it was mainly pretty easy because trolls insisted on looking the way they look.*

As a student of Celtic and world mythology, do you think the old myths are still relevant in modern times? Or are they more to be used as a romantic escape and a source of inspiration?

*They always will be relevant because they aren't about a romantic past but are an expression of the land itself. The tales and the songs are embedded in the landscape and speak to us now as strongly as they ever did.*

The fairy-tale landscape of Dartmoor, your home, and its rich folklore are very evident in your work and have inspired many other artists and writers. Do you think your art would be very different (or even impossible) if you lived elsewhere?

*Not impossible but it would not be as true or strong if I lived elsewhere.*

The variety of media used in your artwork, the glowing earthy colours, and the emotive expressions given to each fairy creature, are a very potent combination and create, I think it can be fairly said, an inimitable style. I read that a book of Arthur Rackham's work inspired you at art college – are there any other artists whom you particularly admire?

*Obviously John Bauer, the Pre-Raphaelites, the northern European Renaissance artists, Durer, Brueghel and Bosch.*

Copies of your books, especially *Faeries*, are invariably much treasured and well-worn. What quality is it that allows you to create artwork with such a powerful effect on people, and which continues to top the bestsellers' list for over 35 years?

*I think it's because the work is truthful and heartfelt and there is a quality about the work that defies ordinary explanation. I am grateful to have been a part of this.*

May we ask, as we ask everyone at some point, what your favourite fairy tale was when you were a child?

*It was 'The Tinderbox' (I think that's the title but I'm not certain) by Hans Christian Anderson – the one with the dog with the eyes as big as saucers. It was partly the story and partly the illustration that went with it in the book I had – I don't remember who the illustrator was – it wasn't anyone well known.*

I heard that while you usually prefer to create the picture and allow the text to form later, you might one day be tempted to illustrate Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*. We're big fans of Mervyn Peake here at the Sussex Centre – in fact, Prof. Bill Gray is currently working with Peter Winnington on a book of last year's Peake conference that includes many of Peake's own illustrations. Do you think your own edition of *Gormenghast* is likely to happen or are there too many projects going on at the moment for you to seriously consider it?

*I fell in love with his dark world years ago when I was young, but I really feel that I want to explore my own worlds, dark and otherwise.*

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Interview by Heather Robbins





Alan Lee,  
'Hunting Twyth',  
*The Mabinogion*.