

The Myth Remains

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All my children went through a phase in which they became totally immersed in fantasy novels and movies. As I read the stories with them or watched the movies,

Dr. William Razska, Editorial Board Member, Pediatrics

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All my children went through a phase in which they became totally immersed in fantasy novels and movies. As I read the stories with them or watched the movies, it seemed to me that a popular motif was the presence of a unicorn. The unicorn was always mysterious, wild, wise, beautiful, and for some reason, white-haired. Never did

I read about or see an ugly, shaggy, evil, or even dark-haired unicorn. I have never quite understood why in almost all cultures and traditions this mythologic creature is depicted the same way. It turns out that current fantasy riders may have it wrong.

[As reported on CNN](#), remains of a real unicorn have been uncovered in Kazakhstan. Scientists have long known that creatures that resembled unicorns, in that they had a single pointed horn, roamed the earth in prehistoric times. These animals, called “Siberian unicorns” or more correctly *Elasmotherium sibiricu* were thought to have gone extinct 350,000 years ago.

However, the discovery of a well-preserved and intact skull suggests that the creature was around as recently as 29,000 years ago. If true, this means that the animal lived alongside humans for thousands of years. However, the Siberian unicorn did not resemble our current depiction of unicorns-which tend to resemble horses with a long, spiraled central horn. The Siberian unicorn looked more like a rhinoceros. It was about six feet tall, 15 feet long, and may have weighed 9,000 pounds. It was likely shaggy.

Why the Siberian unicorn was able to survive so long in this particular part of the world and not elsewhere is not known. While the serious minded can speculate on the role migration and climate change have on evolution and species survival, I keep thinking of all those white, toy unicorns still adorning dusty bookshelves in our basement. Perhaps, because the Siberian unicorn was so rarely seen, as it was limited to one specific area, it became part of an ancient lore, and that lore was preserved through many cultures. Anyway, while I am happy to read and watch fantasy movies, I am hoping, however, that someday, a unicorn will be depicted as they might really have been-big, shaggy, and dark-haired.

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<http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/29/living/real-unicorn-remains/index.html>

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