Twitter Thread by Erik Wade



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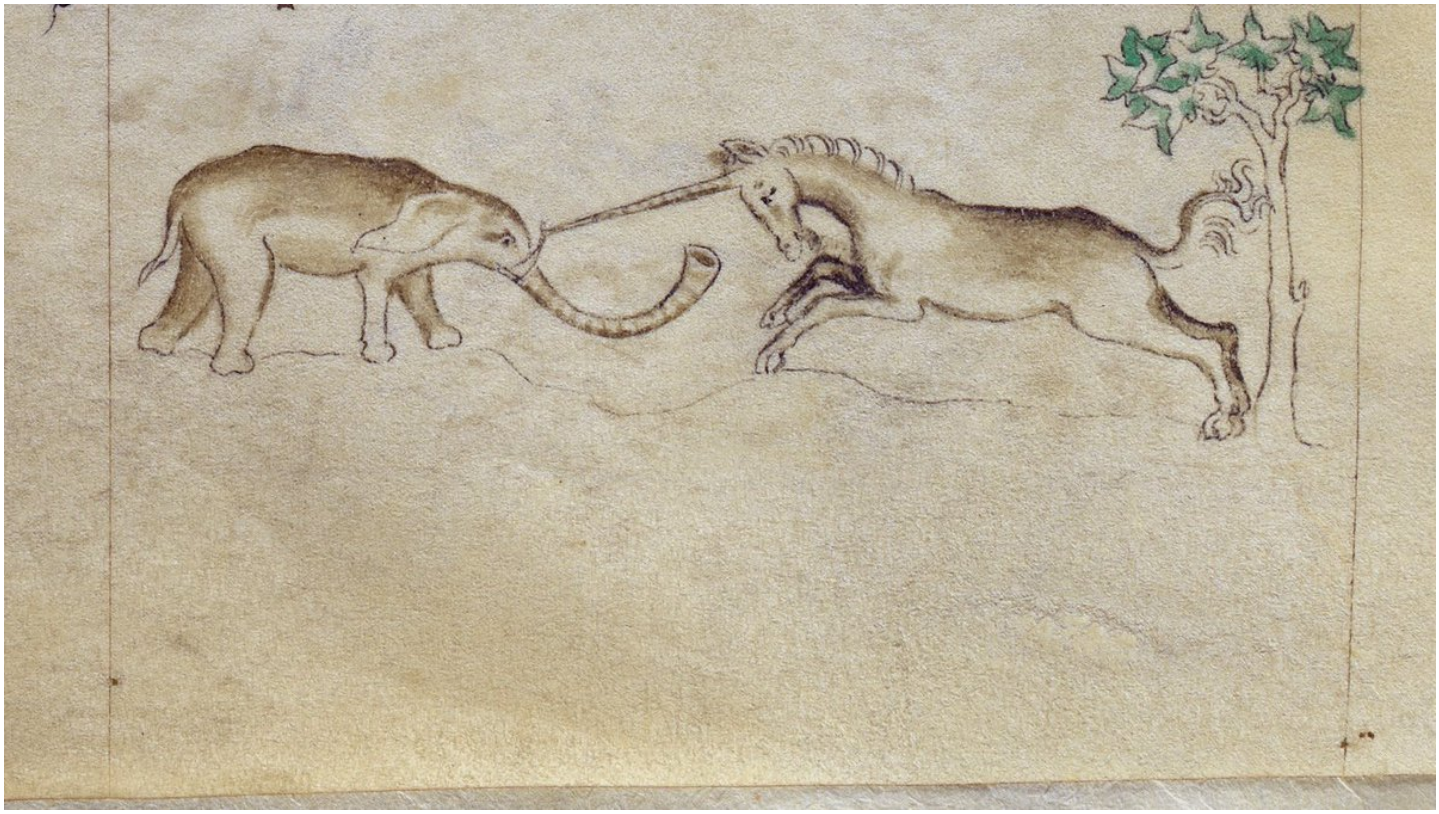
Modern viewers may be horrified by medieval images of people hunting unicorns, but--to judge by medieval images of unicorns--medieval people may have seen unicorns as a little....murdery.

(BL, MS Sloane 3544, f. 4) #MedievalTwitter



When not being hunted, medieval unicorns mostly seem to be attacking other creatures, like this poor elephant.

(BL, MS Royal 2 B VII, f. 100v)



Or these bears.

(BL, MS Royal 10 E IV, f. 157)



Or this lion.

(BL, MS Royal 2 B VII, f. 190v)



Here's a whole troop of them fighting Alexander the Great.

(BL, MS Royal 15 E VI, f. 21)



Fighting this man.

(Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 828, f. 7v)



Here's a common allegorical image, where the tree represents a person's life and the unicorn represents.....death.

(Morgan, MS M.729, f. 354v)



Here's another version of the same image.

(BL, MS Additional 37049, f. 19v)

Behalde here as you may se
A man standyng i a tree
And ane vnycorne ~~fast~~ fast pseuyng hy
Yt caused hy i ye tre to clym
And be nethe hy was a dragon fell
Gapyng hy redy for to quelle.
And whyte mowse t a blak ye tre gnawyng
Besily hy downe for to bryng.
And also vndyr ye rote of yis tre
Ffoure serpentis loke oute sawe ho.
Ye tre stode opon a sodde al grene
And a whawe myre a bowte it seene
Zitt for al ye perels ~~he~~ yt he standis in
A hony drop he hastes hy for to wyn
And lytel hede of al yir perels dos he take
Ffor dt ye ony drop he purpos mery to make
Yis man betokens both man t wyfe
And ye tre betokens of yaime ye lyfe
Ye vnycorne yt hastis ma for to kyll
Betokens deth yat sla hy wyll
~~Ye whawe is to be vndyrstande~~
Ye whawe myre is to be vndirstande
Yis warld yat en is fals t flowand
Ye turfe opon whilk grows ye tre
~~[illegible]~~ ye foure serpentis as ze may se.
Betokens mans body i yis warld here
Yt is made of foure elymentis sere
Ye whyte t ye blak mowse is ye nyght t ye day
Yat mans lyfe fast wastes a way
And ye gapyng dragon as q zow telle
Is vndirstand ye mouthe of helle
En mans saule besy to wyn.
Yat her dos dye in dedly syn.
And ye hony drop vndirstand may be
Yis warldis worthe t vanyte
Ffor ye whilk men labors both day t nyght
And for to gyt it dt alle yair myght
And yis yaim solfe yai for gett
And al ye perels yat yai ar i sett
It is iny cocunsol ma[illegible]
In gode lyfyng
Or fro [illegible]
[illegible]



"You've got to come down sometime, dude!"

(Morgan, MS M.763, f. 251r)



Here's St Anthony being tormented by demons, including one in the shape of a very threatening unicorn.

(BnF, MS Français 313, f. 298)



"I've got you cornered, buddy."

(Morgan, MS M.1093, f. 154r)



They even attack marginal decorations!

(Morgan, MS W.82, f 205v)



More marginal carnage.

(BL, MS Additional 42130 f. 15)



A unicorn gleefully menaces a terrified lion.

(Bodleian Library, MS Douce 48, f. 221v)



In conclusion, medieval unicorns woke up every day and chose violence.

