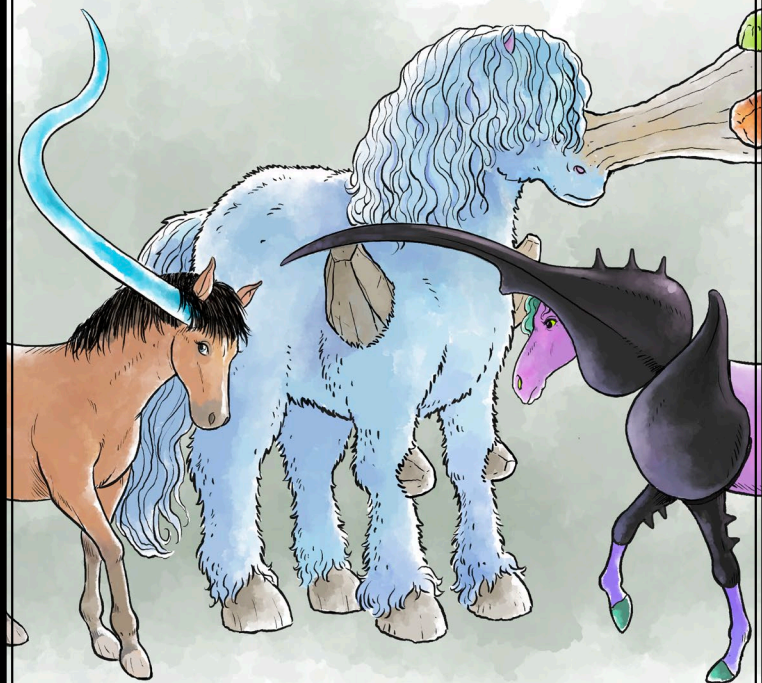


# Those Presumicorns



by Kelly Ishikawa

Last night, in a dream, a voice narrated an article I'd seen in the paper:

The Presumicorns technically *do* have magic horns, and they *are* horse...ish. But of course everyone agrees they aren't real unicorns.

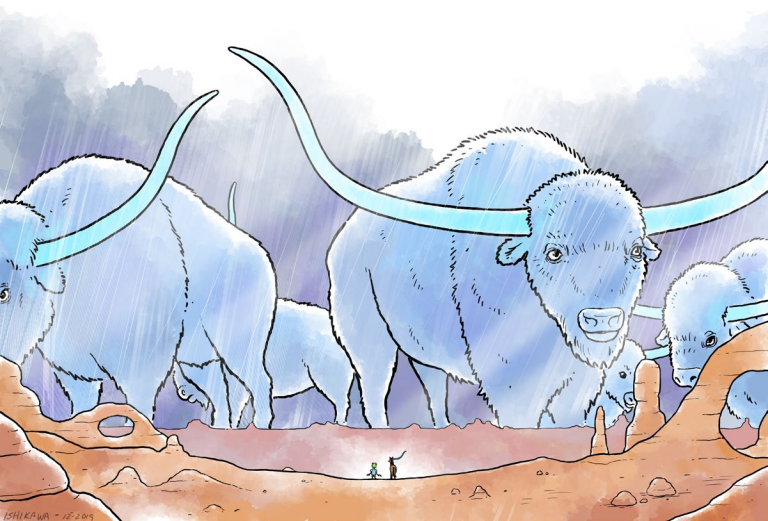
One has a horn that protrudes out the side of its head, like on a cow. Only half the pair, so it *is* technically a 'one-horn'. There are tales of this animal from distant desert lands, claiming she can change the landscape. Canals appear where she drags her horn, and farm lands crop up where she walks. These tall tales she would cite towards her claim as a unicorn. Those who've seen her say she is *wrong*...

On a world of frenzied evolution, great shaggy megahorses with bony plates on their faces pound at ice to reach their food. Stories emerge of one barbaric horse whose plates protrude into a ridiculously massive horn. It leaves entire plains littered with motionless adversaries. It shatters mountains with its pummelings. Could this lumbering savage attain unicorn status, where the other, desert-dwelling one failed? No. With her violent nature and aura of destruction, witnesses deem this one *badder*...

Finally, there is the one from a far-away, cursed jungle. They say she moves along the treetops and swings

from vines. A sinister protuberance of mysterious power arcs over her brow. She is marred with the black armor of the terrible mincing beetles, who are known for wrapping sliced up animals in skins along with spices and breadcrumbs. Can it be that this bizarre horse/insect horror is a flesh eater?! It would be unrectifiable taboo. Of all the creatures presuming to call themselves a unicorn, she is *worst...*

In my dream I chased these “Presumicorns”. The one from the deserts first, over sandstone hills and under wind-bored arches. It was a brown mustang with a white stripe down its nose. It ran in fear, but not from anything. When it tired and stopped, I followed



it's gaze. Together, we stared just past the horizon, at a sky-filling vision. A vision of bison, with rough, blue hair, and wide, sprawling horns. Horns of crystal blue, like the one on the mustang. I asked about it.

“I grew up running with the blue rong bison,” the horned mustang said. “Something of them remained behind,

with me, but I can't catch up to them." She tensed, about to start after them again. Then relaxed. I hadn't realized it had been raining, but now it was letting up. Only where the giant bison milled about, did the showers continue. The presumicorn looked around at me. "Are you supposed to get me where they are?" she asked. The horse's horn was glistening as dark clouds parted. The light from her horn was dripping, forming a little pool.

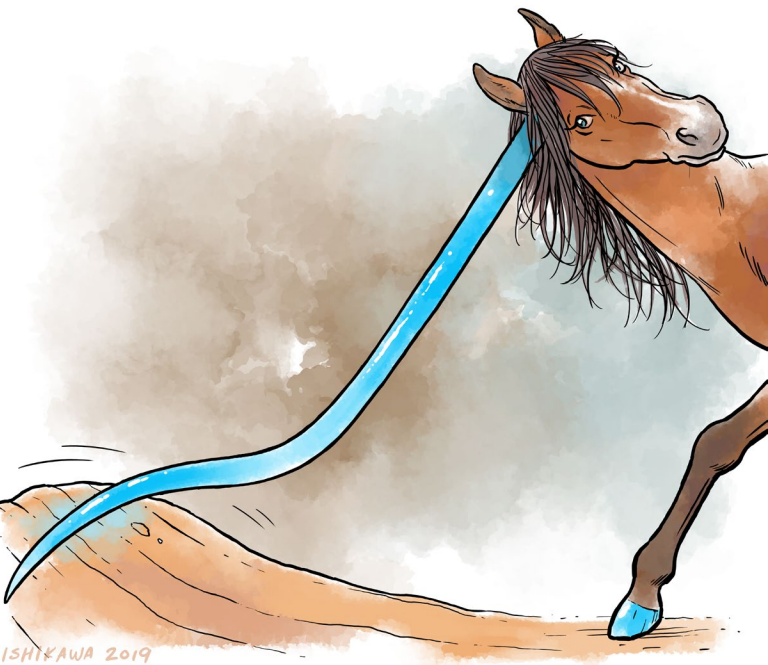
"I don't think so." I answered. "I sometimes have interesting dreams, but I'm only a cataloger at a spool factory."

She tensed again. The herd of bison faded as the rains cleared. "Is that

from your factory?” she asked, indicating with a nod of her head. I looked down and saw a strand of very rough, blue wool. Someone’s far-off voice was mingling with the fading thunder.

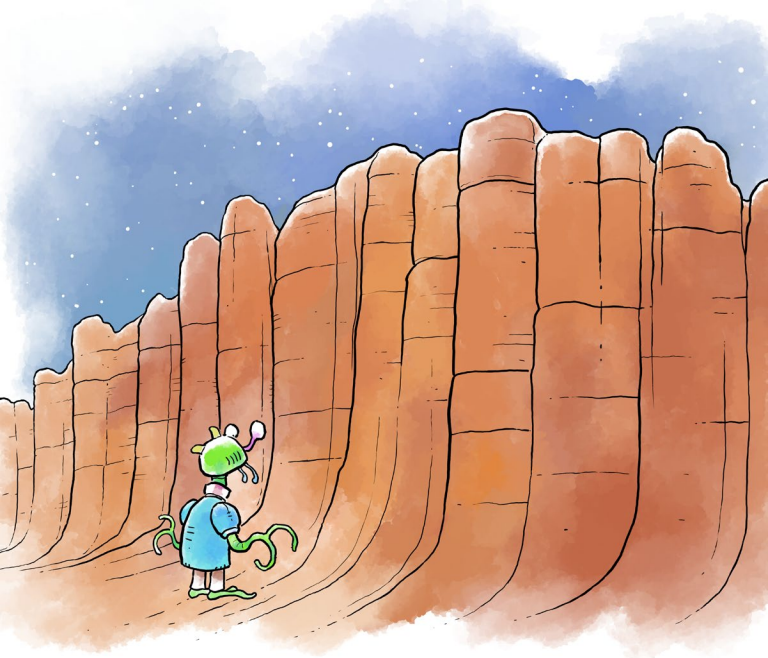
“Is that from the bison?” I asked.

“I don’t think so,” she answered. Then the horse began walking, head tilted, so the tip of her horn dragged a line in the ground. The line sparkled and overflowed with water. Soon, a small rivulet trailed behind her. The faraway voice was called louder. “*Rong-Horn! Rong-Horn!*” I started to follow, until she remembered me. “I won’t wake up with you hitchin’ along... Bye!” She nudged her horn into the ground, to-



wards my direction. I had to step back as the ground between us buckled, rising up into a rocky ridge. A great wall between us. I probably could have climbed over it or walked around it, but I didn't want to impose myself. The clack of her hooves trailed away.





I went back to the strand of wool and saw that it wound its way through the sandstone hills and towers. I walked, but my footsteps sounded different and I kept sliding. I was crunching through snow—through a blizzard. The wool lay lightly atop the snow so I could still follow. Through the wind,

I herd bashing. Lights flashed through the white. Something lay crumpled against a rock, and the wool was forgotten.

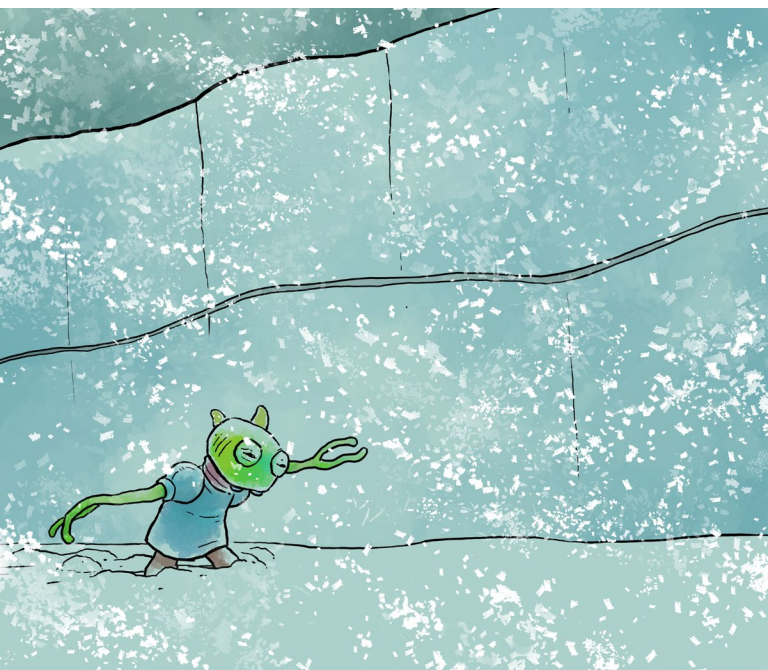
It was a robot, cubes and gold metal, trying to lift its head. I moved to help, but the lights in its eyes faded.

“I couldn’t save her,” said a deepish, gruff voice. The snow let up and the second Presumicorn appeared. It was blue, somewhat similar to the bison. But its hair was shaggier, and coarser. It towered over me and its club-like horn was, indeed, ridiculously huge. The horn’s end protruded rough crystals of red and green. Its shoulders bore craggy bones or maybe rocky

outcroppings. “Everyone kept saying, ‘Just back up her mind! Then she’ll live forever’... But that’d just be making a copy or a clone. The *real* her would’ve still been here in *this* body, looking out. Imagine if she saw a copy of herself looking back at her. She’d’ve been horrified, just like you or I. I know what happens to us when we die, but not what happens to her.”

She cried horribly, and swung her mighty horn against a wall of ice, shaking the entire land, rending a gigantic crack in the wall. Which kept cracking—splitting its way along the wall, disappearing into the blizzard. The horse stomped away, leaving me with the remains of the robot. As I

watched, it became buried under the heavily falling snow until all that was seen was the cold metal of one arm. The cracking continued, and it formed the name of the horse. *Badder-Horn...* The wool was gone, so I followed the crack.



The snow let up, and as I walked along the wall of ice, it became less and less opaque. It seemed more like glass. Then this became fogged, as steam began to billow around me. Steam and mist. The cracking sound faded; became more like hissing. The glass wall undulated and I found I was looking at a waterfall. Not serene or soothing, or even majestic and riotous, but seething and sinewing. Its waters snaked through, as the fog lifted, a dense, dark jungle of strange, twisting plants. I stood in these waters.

Down a ways, through the mesh of trees and vines, I saw the third Presumicorn, eerily walking down the side of a large tree. It was, indeed, a monster

in beetle-black armor. Armor that tapered to a curved, sinister horn. The horse was purple, with greenish blues here and there and blueish greens.

I did not want to draw closer so I peered through the vines. But it knew I was there.

I became suddenly and acutely aware that these waters were unable to clean anything—especially and specifically a small blue and green crystal sphere. “What sphere?” I asked aloud. The Presumicorn’s horn dipped into the stream and turned over a mud-covered rock. It bobbed in and out of the water but continued to ooze slimy mud, caked with strangely twigs and

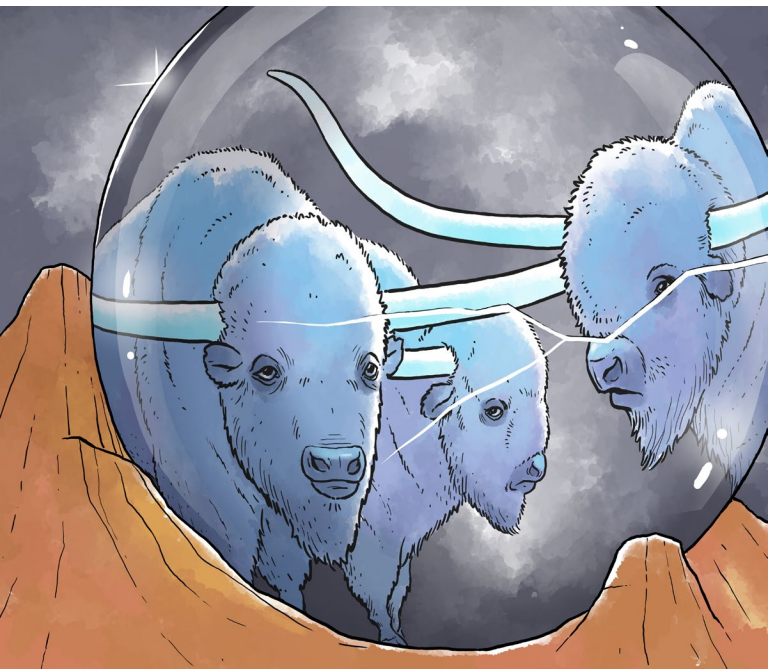
moss. Another sharp perception flared out of the blue in my mind. That the slimy gunk was grisly magic. In the background, the small animals of the forrest chirped and buzzed. The horn of the Presumicorn glimmered, and a green barb exuded from its tip. As the slimy rock floated away, the beetle-horse walked down to the stream. It poked at the sludgy stone again, but its emerald barb fell into the water. I don't know why, but I feared that barb as if it were poison. To my horror, it drifted, not downstream, but up, towards me! The chirping around me seemed to coalesce into the chanting of a word. *Wurst. Wurst. Wurst.* The buzzing seemed to undulate into a pattern. *Horn. Horn. Horn.*

I took slogging, willed steps backward through the stream's mire as the barb sped nearer. I put all focus into pulling one leg free, then the next, but I wasn't fast enough. I could only cry out as the barb was upon me!

Just as it was about to connect, it swerved around my leg, and shot up the waterfall, high into the mist. I searched the sky frantically, for I had dread sureness it was meant to land on ME. I glimpsed the segmented tale of the horse creature as it slinked back into the dark canopies, leaving the background cacophony of its name: *Wurst-Horn. Wurst-Horn...* I looked up and saw a green glint as the barb



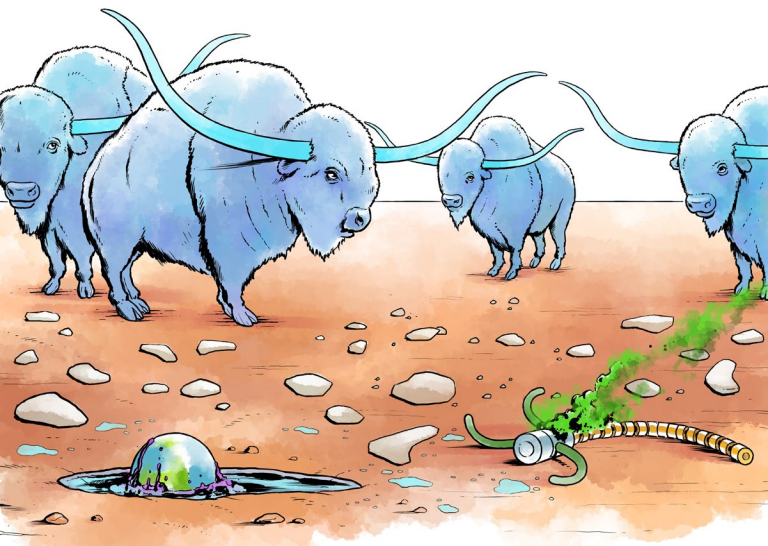
reached its zenith and began its return. Whichever way I started, it seemed to hone in. The mists swirled as I turned this way and that. Snow flurried past my face and the world began to spin. I slid as the stream returned to ice; the waterfall was a massive crystalline wall. I crawled and reached banks



of red sandstone as lightning flashed and thunder rolled. Through the glass wall, I saw the great blue bison, filling the sky as before, though distorted, as if through a lens. A lens that, as the crack reached it, shattered into an explosion of shards! I was drenched in a great splash of water from out of nowhere, and saw the green barb flash past my eyes...

Gasping, I blinked and wiped my face...

I stood once more on the sandstone of the desert. No sign of snow, ice, waterfall or jungle. The bison stood before me, without otherworldly largeness, but down on the earth, close enough



to touch. I wished to tell the mustang and looked around, searching...

Down on the ground, I saw the robot's arm, where the emerald barb had landed. At the point of puncture, the arm began disintegrating into a verdant vapor, rising and dissipating

upwards. The sinister sensations associated with the barb seemed also to have vanished. The vapor gleamed serenely, and became one with the sky. There was only peace. I knew that, like the mustang, the giant wooly horse wouldn't be there, but I looked around and found the source of the splash...

The great dirty stone had fallen right into a pool in the red rock. A pool of radiant light that was enough to finally clear the grime away. I pulled out the green and blue crystal sphere, holding it up to clear sunlight. It was a world, clean and pure. Sunlight gleamed off its edges...

I woke as morning rays spilled past

the edges of my window. Everyone said my dreams would lead to my departure someday. Dreams of thunder over sandstone and cracks in glaciers. Dreams of black beetles, and rains of light. But never so overflowing and clear as this dream.

I was released from my job at the spool factory, gifted with a length of special wool. I had enough saved to buy supplies for deserts, blizzards and jungles. I'm starting with the article, which came from off-world. The light gleaming off the crystal sphere had shown me faraway lands, separated by impossible distances. Yet, word of all three horses had reached the author of that article. Somehow, I would find a



way to span those distances. Perhaps, like the giant bison behind the lens, I would find the distances lesser than they seemed. Perhaps, like the emerald barb, things would be drawn towards me. Like the wool that became a crack in a wall, I had a feeling that, once started, things would somehow develop on their own. From wrong, to badder, to worst.