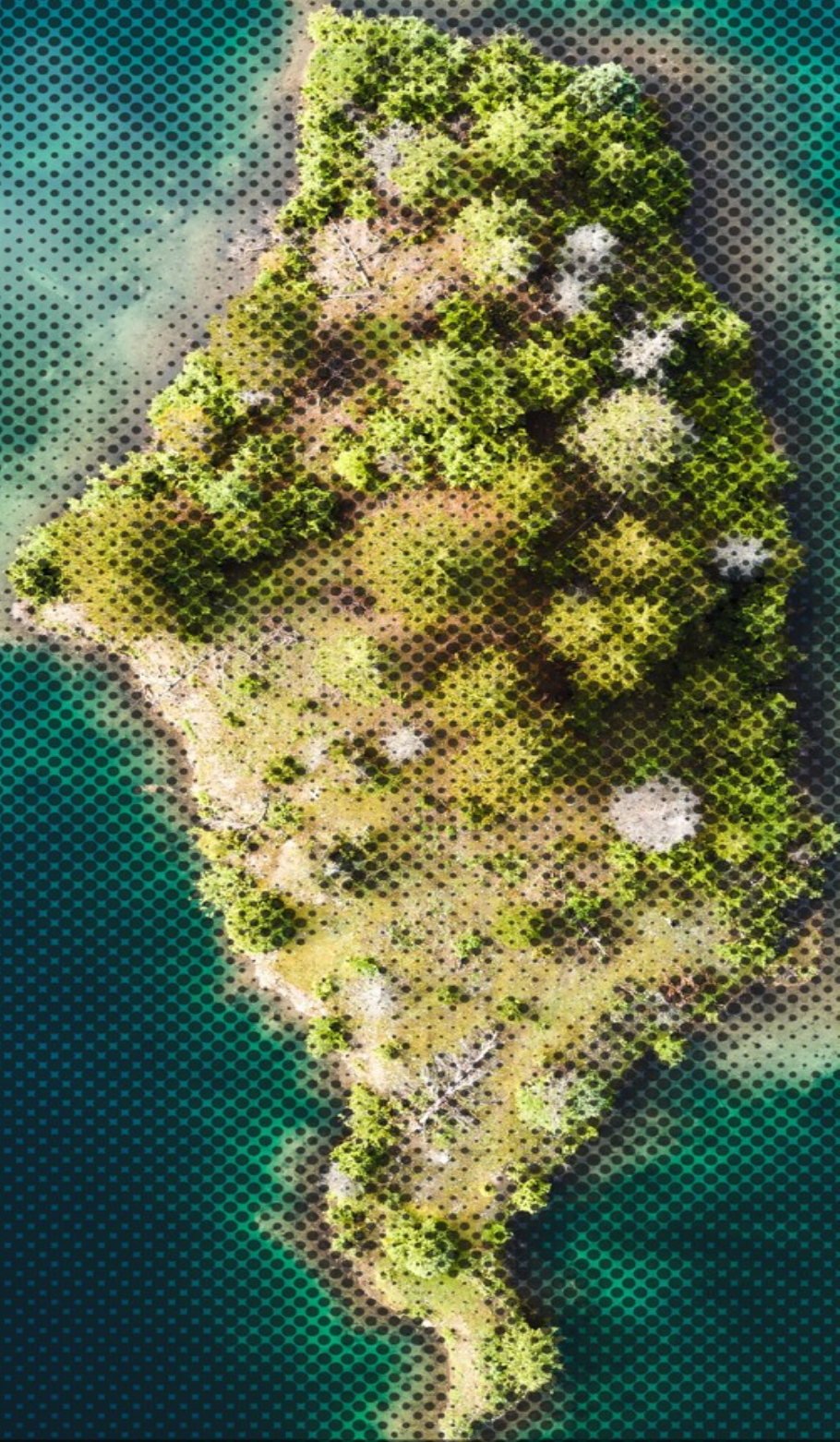


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Proteus Island

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THE brown Maori in the bow of the outrigger stared hard at Austin Island slowly swimming nearer; then he twisted to fix his anxious brown eyes on Carver. "Taboo!" he exclaimed. "Taboo! Aussitan taboo!"

Carver regarded him without change of expression. He lifted his gaze to the island. With an air of sullen brooding the Maori returned to his stroke. The second Polynesian threw the zoologist a pleading look.

"Taboo," he said. "*Aussitan* taboo!"

The white man studied him briefly, but said nothing. The soft brown eyes fell and the two bent to their work. But as Carver stared eagerly shoreward there was a mute, significant exchange between the natives.

The proa slid over green combers toward the foam-skirted island, then began to sheer off as if reluctant to approach. Carver's jaw squared. "*Malloa!* Put in, you chocolate pig. Put in, do you hear?"

He looked again at the land. Austin Island was not traditionally sacred, but these natives had a fear of it for some reason. It was not the concern of a zoologist to discover why. The island was uninhabited and had been charted only recently. He noted the fern forests ahead, like those of New Zealand, the kauri pine and dammar—dark wood hills, a curve of white beach, and between them a moving dot—an *apteryx mantelli*, thought Carver—a kiwi.

The proa worked cautiously shoreward.

"Taboo," Malloa kept whispering. "Him plenty *bunyip!*"

"Hope there is," the white man grunted. "I'd hate to go back to Jameson and the others at Macquarie without at least one little *bunyip*, or anyway a ghost of a fairy." He

grinned. "*Bunyip Carveris*. Not bad, eh? Look good in natural-history books with pictures."

On the approaching beach the kiwi scuttled for the forest—if it *was* a kiwi after all. It looked queer, somehow, and Carver squinted after it. Of course, it had to be an *apteryx*; these islands of the New Zealand group were too deficient in fauna for it to be anything else. One variety of dog, one sort of rat, and two species of bat—that covered the mammalian life of New Zealand.

Of course, there were the imported cats, pigs and rabbits that ran wild on the North and Middle Islands, but not here. Not on the Aucklands, not on Macquarie, least of all here on Austin, out in the lonely sea between Macquarie and the desolate Balleny Islands, far down on the edge of Antarctica. No; the scuttling dot *must* have been a kiwi.

The craft grounded. Kolu, in the bow, leaped like a brown flash to the beach and drew the proa above the gentle inwash of the waves. Carver stood up and stepped out, then paused sharply at a moan from Malloa in the stern.

"See!" he gulped. "The trees, *wahi!* The *bunyip* trees!"

Carver followed his pointing figure. The trees—what about them? There they were beyond the beach as they had, fringed the sands of Macquarie and of the Aucklands. Then he frowned. He was no botanist; that was Halburton's field, back with Jameson and the *Fortune* at Macquarie Island. He was a zoologist, aware only generally of the variations of flora. Yet he frowned.

The trees *were* vaguely queer. In the distance they had resembled the giant ferns and towering kauri pine that one would expect. Yet here, close at hand, they had a different