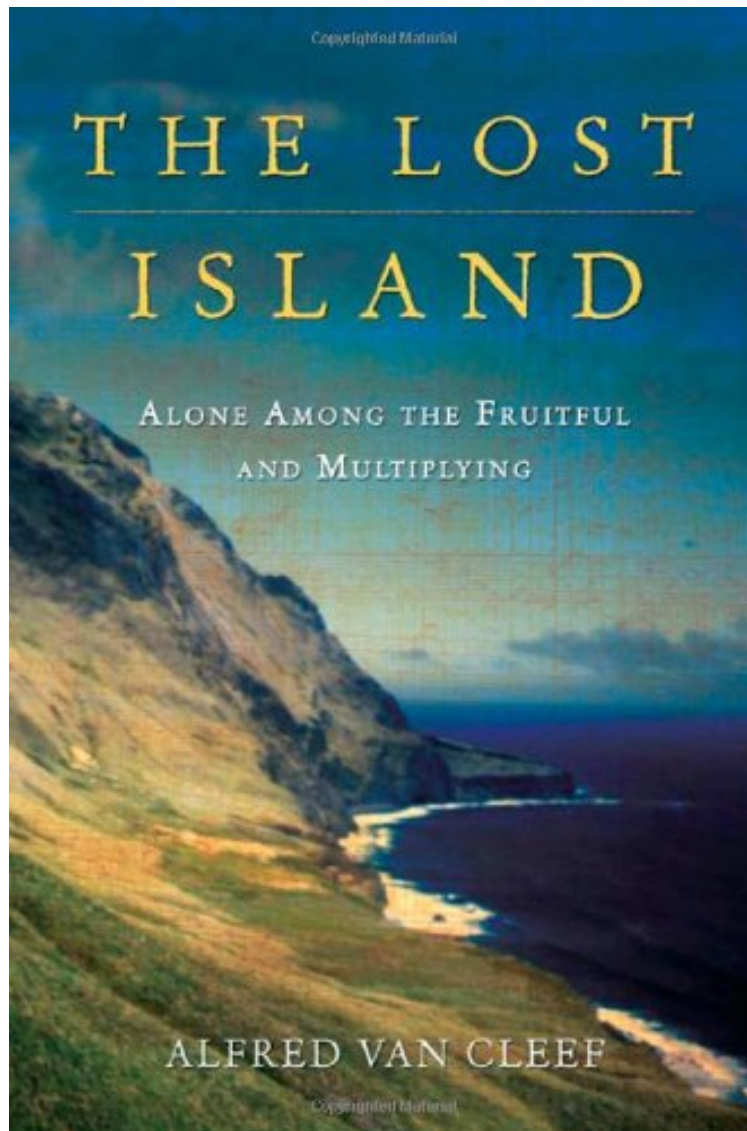


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The Lost Island

Alfred van Cleef

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Alfred van Cleef : The Lost Island before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Lost Island:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Nice diversion for frustrated adventurersBy David M. BeckmannI liked the book!Excellent description of Amsterdam Island. The "sterile man" goes to fecund island motif meant nothing to me.Being a fan of Bovefoya, the two page mention of what really is the world's most isolated island was wrong. He dissed it because there is virtually no way to reach, and live on, that island.It was a good fun read and I

finished it in two days. Recommended for all armchair explorers who want to experience the southern seas vicariously! 3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Interesting but flawed
By Richard Sorsky
Van Cleef does an excellent job in his description of the joys of working with the French bureaucracy. It is a case of the bureaucrats defending their turf just to prove they can. This should be particularly poignant for anyone who has had the bad fortune of working within the system, of trying to do what can't be done because there is no bureaucrat willing to take the responsibility of saying "yes". Ample historical background is given for Amsterdam Island and Van Cleef provides an interesting memoir of what life is like for the government employees doing their tour of duty on the island. All inhabitants of the island are government employees. The great flaw in the book is the lack of photography. Any book dealing with the remote regions of the world, especially the southern Indian Ocean islands, should have photography. Photography is necessary to establish some idea in the reader's mind as to the environment of these islands. Jean-Paul Kauffmann's *Arch of Kerguelen* suffers from the same flaw. The reader has no idea of the desolation to be found in this region of the world. I would recommend Andre Migot's *The Lonely South* circa 1956 (the US edition is *Thin Edge of the World* but it lacks some of the text and photos of the original) for anyone interested in a good read on Kerguelen Island.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent travel/adventure account
By A. Reader
I could not put this book down. The idea behind the voyage. The frustrations. The author writes eloquently but simply of his experience on this far-flung island in search of solitude and himself. His shared personal history only serves to enhance our experience through his eyes and come to like him all the more. Highly recommended for its history, both natural and human and for the delicately shared gentleness of its author.

A striking narrative of a man's inadvertent discovery of the life force that persists in the most secluded of places-and isolated of beings After the death of his father, Alfred Van Cleef-the last of a family of Dutch Jews-learns that he is unable to have children. Seeking the remotest spot on the planet, far from the gleefully reproducing couples of Amsterdam, Van Cleef picks a forbidding island in the Indian Ocean, a bizarrely bureaucratic French weather station, two thousand miles from the nearest continent. Finally entrenched on this lonely, wind-battered rock-following an eight-year odyssey to obtain a visiting permit and three weeks' rough passage-Van Cleef anticipates a total escape from the sexual frenzy of humanity: the island, ironically named Amsterdam, is inhabited solely by a group of thirty-six men. Yet this stark environment turns out to house a riotously mating society of albatrosses, sea elephants, fur seals-and especially bdelloid rotifers, an all-female species able to reproduce without males. It is in this unlikely setting that Van Cleef is forced to reckon with his most profound existential concerns. With wry humor and probing insight, Van Cleef weaves geography, natural history, and biology into this original narrative of a lost island and a man, finally found.

From Publishers Weekly
Rising out of the southernmost Indian Ocean, halfway between Australia and Africa, is a tiny island, an extinct volcano, that is one of the most isolated places in the world. Named Amsterdam by a Dutch explorer in the 17th century, it is only six miles around and is now claimed by the French, who won't allow anyone to stay there to visit the island's weather station for more than two days. In this idiosyncratic memoir, van Cleef (*The Lost World of the Berberovic Family*) gives a lengthy account of the years he spent wrangling with France's Department of Southern Lands in order to get permission to visit the island. He then tells of the three-week sea voyage to get there and his seven-week sojourn on the rocky protrusion, which has little to offer except punishing winds, treacherous marshes, furiously mating seals, and eccentric meteorologists and biologists, whom he identifies only by monikers such as "the Ascetic" and "the Dreamer." Van Cleef's descriptions of the island are clever, but the real fun is the subtle ways in which he uses his dry sense of humor to lampoon French bureaucrats, who, he implies, need any patch of land to help them maintain their shrinking sphere of influence in the world. Illus. not seen by PW. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
From Booklist
First and last. The first Dutchman to make an extended stay on the isolated Indian Ocean island of Amsterdam, van Cleef writes as the last surviving member of a Jewish family decimated in the Nazi death camps. His journey is as much personal and psychological as it is global and geographic. Even as he searches for traces of the island's eighteenth-century Dutch visitors, the author ponders the tragic modern destiny of his own Dutch family. Because that destiny has stranded him in incurable infertility, he cannot perpetuate his genealogical line--and has already failed in his romantic relationship with a child-hungry lover. This intensely personal perspective suffuses with pathos even the biology of an island where the seeds of the only indigenous trees no longer will germinate and where wounded male seals retreat from the battle for reproductive success. But van Cleef finally rejects self-pity: caring for an ailing fisherman, he reconnects with humanity, and scaling the island's highest summit, he surmounts the fractures in his own psyche to affirm his place in a unified cosmos. A memoir of compelling honesty and emotional resonance. Bryce Christensen
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About the Author
Alfred Van Cleef is a novelist, journalist, and producer of radio documentaries. For twenty years, he was a reporter for the leading Dutch daily *NRC Handelsblad*. He lives in Amsterdam (Holland), where he is working on a novel.