



# **All Cheeses Great and Small: A Not So Everyday Story of Country Folk**

*Alex James*

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## All Cheeses Great and Small: A Not So Everyday Story of Country Folk Details

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# From Reader Review All Cheeses Great and Small: A Not So Everyday Story of Country Folk for online ebook

## Yuliya says

Nothing can compare to Bit of a Blur. But I like to read about cheese a lot, so this was good. Not enough cheese though. And not enough Blur.

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## Changeling72 says

James is/was the bassist in the Indie group Blur and, although I don't object to a bit of Blur, I was more interested in his account of how he bought a farm after Blur broke up and his adventures in coming to grips with country living, animal husbandry, cheesemaking and the like. I have to say, I find James an evocative writer, not least in his accounts of his childlike wonder and joy at the mysteries and beauty of nature. Of course, one needs to be very rich to buy and run a farm. Indeed, the great irony is that one arguably needs more money to live in the country than in the city. Equally, I was musing, that one can't be anonymous in the country.

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## Antonomasia says

In saying that this contains some of my favourite writing about the countryside I've read, I don't expect many people to concur. But it does, and this book was among the loveliest things I've read all year. Reading it whilst basking outside in the June sunshine in a garden or park certainly helps. (Perhaps I should have posted about it nearer the time, on the offchance of encouraging one or two others to enjoy it similarly, but 5-star reviews can be the hardest to write.) Not only was it a treat, but starting it before I intended to also lifted me out of a truly awful afternoon.

Much of the enjoyment of this book turns on one's attitude to hearing a really really lucky person be really really enthusiastic about their life and interests. It's just too puppyishly charming and naive and *keen* to be smug. Still, some would hate having it all waved in front of them, the gorgeous countryside and house and freedom to indulge in things as hobbies which to many are jobs and not easy ones. But as an escapist daydream of what you might do if you won the lottery and were perfectly healthy or/and [insert preferred proviso here], it's the best I've ever encountered in book form (though most people would surely think having five kids excessive). There's always something happening, yet it's also an incredibly relaxing read.

A review like this needs examples. I didn't want to make notes, I just wanted to enjoy it, so here, from opening a few pages at random:

*I stomped back to the vegetable garden with trowel-type onion retrievers just as a hot air balloon floated past, very low and large. There was hardly any breeze and it was a victory for the serene and the immaculate. There is something about a hot air balloon passing close by that makes everyone want to run after it. The toddler had dropped her strawberries and was shouting 'Bawoon! Big big bawoon!' and involuntarily moving towards it, mesmerised. Claire and I ran over the fields as it gently climbed over the trees and slipped away in slow motion.*

[This is better than any relaxation tape ever. I just want to close my eyes and daydream now, not keep typing bits of book to prove a point I'm completely happy with myself.]

*Suddenly it was cold, really cold: wet and cold but beautiful. Water everywhere, collecting in puddles, knee-deep in clear pools around farm gates, swelling hidden ditches and working quiet rivers up into torrents. The meadows at the bottom of the valley were gone. Now there was just a huge flat black mirror: the entire landscape transformed, unrecognisable from the week before and full of different-looking plants and animals. Snipe flew up and zigzagged off out of a clump of undergrowth. Midwinter and not a soul in the valley other than startled birds. It was perfectly still, as if it had all been there, unchanged for eternity, all bold primary colours and simple geometry. I thought I'd never see anything as pretty again but then the first hard frost arrived under the spell of a perfect full moon and I woke up inside a Christmas card.*

There's a scene in Daylesford Farm organic shop which was briefly notorious in the papers for its pretentiousness, but reading it within the book, I saw a mixture of marvelling and laughing at the place which seems to me a natural reaction to walking into some modern consumer paradise that isn't exactly quotidian for you, a Selfridges, or a luxury hotel, or indeed a very posh and very abundant deli. He doesn't sound used to it, that's the thing. For me, the only bit that grated (oh dear, that's a pun given the title, isn't it?) was a scene which nonchalantly listed various high end cars belonging to visiting friends. Even that was offset, though, by the fact that James himself had a scruffy £2k Volvo estate (no zero missing). That also happens to be what I'd get if I could drive.

There's virtually nothing here about any disagreements with people (e.g. he later parted ways with one of the cheesemakers mentioned here) but I don't mind a little bit of whitewash if the resultant work makes me this happy. (It's usually only music as an art form that has mood-altering properties this strong.) And there was enough loveliness here that it was quite possible to ignore those bits about - as a friend of mine put it - "his friends whom I wouldn't care to socialise with myself".

Much of the content is Cotswold idyll and farming anecdotes, but there are a couple of chapters about music. Having at some point in the last few years got fed up with music writing that wasn't *both* technically aware and entertaining to read, I found these episodes satisfying, yet they also wouldn't require an average unmusical reader to look anything up.

Even looking through the book to write this, I'm grinning again. I dunno how one person gets that lucky, but he sure as hell appreciates it. And the curiously innocent enthusiasm of the writing means it's very nice to partake of this daydream for a while too.

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## **Fanny Dingaling says**

Really two and a half stars. It was a good read but I could've done with less waffling on about how gorgeous and pretty the farm was/is.

I do like Alex James' style of storytelling though. He makes you feel like he's telling you his life story over a few at the pub.

And I did love the quote about tea and love.

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## **Godzilla says**

Another Fopp bargain, I picked this up as I had enjoyed his previous book Bit of a Blur.

This one opens with him buying a farm, almost on whim, but falling in love with the idea of becoming a farmer.

I knew he was a celebrated cheese maker these days, but it was fascinating to hear how he got to that point from being a bass player in a 90s rock group.

Boy can he wax lyrical about the pleasures of living in the English countryside, and he draws you into his fascinating new lifestyle with ease.

There's a brief mention of Blur reforming, but make no mistake, this is a book solidly about changing lifestyles and finding what's truly important in life.

I'm not sure what the target market for this is: Blur fans will not like the lack of music detail, farmers will be too busy in diggers and tractors to read it, and it will seem too middle class and twee to some people.

I found myself loving his honest and open approach to adapting to a new lifestyle, and slightly envious that he's managed to do it, write so eloquently about it and still come across as a really nice guy who it would be a pleasure to bump into anywhere.

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## **Bill Boswell says**

Very interesting book about Alex adventure to move from London and set up his own cheese making business

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## **Snoakes says**

When Alex James got married and settled down, he did what every self-respecting aging musician does and bought a farm. He pootles about in his affable floppy haired fashion, continually bemused at his own good fortune. It's a lovely feel good book - Alex is the consummate host as he shows us his farm and his life - and he has the good grace to realise just how lucky he is.

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## **Lara says**

Alex comes across as an easy-going chap with an attractive boyish enthusiasm for living, whether its wowing them at Glastonbury or sniffing blackberries in his (extensive) hedgerows. He's good at playing the guitar, making cheese and writing about his enchanting life.

If his wife ever gets bored I would like to put myself forward as a replacement.

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## **Katrin says**

I loved the book "Bit of a Blur" by Blur's guitarist Alex James, so when I spotted this book (apparently about "what happened next") in London (where I was staying because of a Blur show!), I bought it, of course. And it really is about what came next: Alex James and his wife Claire bought a big farm, on impulse, during their honeymoon. The next 10 years were spent having five children and transforming the farm into a house for the family, stables, greenhouses and a cheese factory. Alex James still has a pleasant writing style (especially speaking about nature), and you feel glad that he seems to have found his place (in the country ...), but some of it is just not that interesting, and it must be said that the book could have done with some more editing: Some statements he makes again and again, and some facts are unnecessarily repeated. Half the book would have been enough! Oh, and he also talks about Blur's reunion, just a little. But most of it is about sheep, tractors, pigs and country people.

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## **Casey says**

I lived beside and helped out on a farm for part of my childhood, so the endless toil Alex captures rings true. However, there's just something about the endless optimism and gushing that started to wear thin about halfway through the book. Some parts are interesting, but his tangents about his love of piles or going shooting can get tedious.

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## **Wireless says**

Alex James bought a house, a very big house in the country.

Readers of a book by Alex James, may understandably be initially perplexed that the content is not music related. However he already published that one; it is called 'A bit of a blur'. If you are expecting more of those music industry, tour bus tales and have absolutely no interest in the workings of a farm or the maintenance of a large house, do not pick this book up. James' time as a rock star is largely irrelevant here, in fact it is not until the last chapter that it gets more than a passing mention. Instead what we essentially have is a love letter to the English countryside.

Once you accept the book for what it is, there is actually plenty to enjoy, provided you are at least a tiny bit interested in the subject matter. Having spent some of my childhood years living in the English countryside, I got a warm and fuzzy glow of nostalgia from reading this. This is itself a result of the childlike wonder James exudes on every page as he jumps headfirst into his post blur lifestyle. As such, I found it perfect as a light and fluffy feel good bedtime read.

There were a couple of occasions when I found James' prose a little galling, maybe due to my own political and social views. In particular his description of Daylesford Organic (a kind of posh farm shop/ supermarket for the upper classes) and its patrons was pretty obnoxious. However, overall James has enough charm to pull it off.

As an aside, inspired by the book, I also managed to pick up some of his cheese in the supermarket, and it was pretty tasty.

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## **Suyin says**

I quite enjoyed this!

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## **Kathleen says**

Alex James meets a woman, falls in love with her, and then whisks her off to a farm in the English countryside to live happily ever after. Am I reading my own diary from high school?? That has been my dream since I was 16 and first saw the "She's So High" video in 1990, so in that sense this was a bit of an excruciating read. Looking past my lifelong pining for James...he's a wonderfully descriptive writer and I could visualize the farm and all the kooky characters helping to run it so vividly. It truly sounds like a paradise.

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## **Alex Sarll says**

He may have acquired some friends with whom I wouldn't care to socialise myself, but even aside from the fringe, I could never hate a man capable of lines like "The moon was in a part of the sky where the sun never goes, casting odd shadows and suggesting that great things might be true."

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## **Louise Armstrong says**

This is a very engaging ramble - there's not much 'hard' information in it, but it is an insight into hoe Alex James' mind works - he sees things in a poetic fashion. Here he is on the farm keeping him busy:

"The utter boredom afforded by the riches and misanthropy inherent in international rock stardom had been replaced with different troubles. 'Why?' had gradually turned into 'How?' and that's a much better class of problem to have."

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