

Graphic Novels: A Letter by Phil Earle

What do graphic novels mean to Phil Earle, best-selling, award-winning author of *When The Sky Falls*? More than you might think...

Without comic books I would not be a writer.

It really is that simple.

Why? Because novels scared the life out of me. Too long, too scary, TOO MANY WORDS.

I needed them breaking up. Would it have hurt to have a few pictures in there???

Then *Roy of the Rovers* happened. A thirty-two page comic all about football. I read it every Monday without fail, then a hundred times more until the next one arrived. Why was I obsessed? BECAUSE I DIDN'T FEEL SCARED OR EXCLUDED BY IT.

There were words and pictures together on the page, and colour, loads of it, eye-popping amounts. To my brain, THIS made sense. It got my pulse racing. It made me a reader.

I suppose you could say I used comic books as a stepping stone to novels, and that's a valid path, but an EQUALLY valid one is for readers to grow and develop using comics ONLY. Just as fiction becomes more complex and layered as you get older, so do comics and graphic novels.

That's why I'm so overwhelmed to have this new edition of WHEN THE SKY FALLS.

Watching how many teachers have taken the novel to use in class has been the biggest thrill and honour of my writing life. But this question remained in my head?

Would 11-year-old me have wanted to read it?

Probably not. Not enough pictures. Too many words. So that's why I'm thrilled about Fred Fordham's adaptation.

If I'd seen this book as a kid, I would have devoured it, on repeat, and I may have had the confidence to then read the novel too. I want the experience of discovering *When the Sky Falls* to be inclusive – it's a story, it's escapism – it's not a challenge. And so that's why I'm so pleased that there is a version for the kid I was, and that so many kids are. Kids who are scared of the written word and need something to spark them into readers – and possibly writers – of the future.

Reading isn't just about novels, or flat words on the page. It's more than that. So much more. It doesn't matter if you like your books in colour, or if you want images to run alongside the words. There are no rules and if somebody tells you you aren't a proper reader because you only like comics, look 'em straight in the eye and tell them they're wrong. And I'll back you all the way. Read the things you love. Surround yourself with them. Because the only reason to read, is guess what? For pleasure.