Writer’s Note

Dead Signals grew partly out of the time I spent around teenagers, both as a high school drama teacher and as a father raising three of my own. My daughter has talked with me about how important it is to see gay characters written as complete people, with lives and relationships that aren't defined entirely by their sexuality. She has told me that she appreciates that approach in my own writing, and I wanted it to be true of Mel and Vee.

Over the years, my daughter talked to me about friendships, best friends, feeling understood, feeling left out, and all the complicated ways those relationships can change as people grow up. I wanted Mel and Vee to know each other's jokes, habits, defenses, and weak spots. Their sexuality matters, but the emotions driving their relationship aren't exclusive to any one sexuality. Most people know what it feels like to love someone, depend on them too much, fear losing them, or realize that growing up may change a relationship you thought would always stay the same.

I was also influenced by stories I love. *Ghost World* has always stayed with me because of the friendship at its center and the way two people who feel alienated from everyone else can create their own little world. I love the *Life is Strange* games for similar reasons, particularly the emotional dynamic between Max and Chloe. I wasn't interested in recreating either story, but I loved that mixture of intimacy, loneliness, humor, and melancholy. For Mel and Vee, that became two young women hiding from adulthood in a dead shopping mall, discovering an abandoned Cold War bunker, and turning an obsolete emergency broadcast system into a pirate radio station.

Music was essential to the mood I wanted. Mel and Vee's tastes reach backward through punk, post-punk, alternative, and underground music, much of which continues to be rediscovered by younger listeners. I also loved putting them in an analog world. Instead of building another story around phones, texts, and social media feeds, I could put two people in a bunker with microphones, records, old equipment, and voices coming through the darkness.

One of the ideas I kept returning to was how easy it is to be surrounded by connection and still feel incredibly alone. Social media gives us endless ways to be seen, but being seen isn't necessarily the same thing as being known or heard. Mel and Vee disappear underground and remove the image completely. For the people listening, they are only voices.

What begins as a private refuge for two lonely young women slowly becomes a refuge for other lonely people as well. The complication is that Mel wants to preserve what she and Vee created as something that belongs only to them, while Vee begins to understand that listening to other people may be part of finding her own way forward.

For me, *Dead Signals* is about the difference between visibility and connection. It's also about two people discovering that loving someone doesn't mean keeping them exactly where you found them. Sometimes growing together requires giving each other enough room to change.