



In conversation with **DEB CALETTI**, author of *True LIFE in UNCANNY Valley*

With a few well-placed lies, Eleanor lands a summer job as a nanny to her secret half-brother. What is her motivation?

Eleanor's father is Hugo Harrison, a charismatic, beloved billionaire and the creator of a hugely popular AI art app, as well as a highly anticipated, top-secret new release. Everyone seems to know him except Eleanor herself. In her house, Hugo is the enemy, and she doesn't dare even try. But when she gets this chance to experience life with Hugo, his glamorous wife, Aurora, and her little brother . . . she has to do it. Even if it means betraying Team Mom with increasingly catastrophic lies.

In the past, you've said that all your books are personal. What connects you to Eleanor's story?

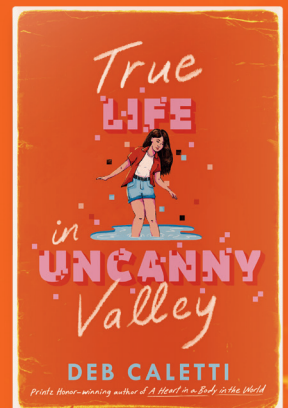
At its heart, the story is about narcissism and how it plays from the smallest private arena—the family—to the largest, societal ones. We've all been increasingly witnessing narcissism's effects in the wider world, but many of us, me included, have either experienced a narcissistic family dynamic or watched it play out with someone close. Eleanor's dad's ego is the story's showiest, but her golden sister and mom's exclusionary relationship is what pains her most. Unfortunately, many kids will relate.

The rise of AI is dominating headlines. What inspired you to use this timely topic as a jumping off point for Eleanor's story?

A large part of narcissism is the inability to see others. Not truly seeing others has been an ugly truth for generations, but lately, there seems to be an ever-growing epidemic of it, and certain uses of AI reflect that. When we don't acknowledge the original makers of art, we aren't seeing other. When we steal an artist's deep and personal creation and use it to train AI, we aren't seeing other. We're also not seeing ourselves—how our creativity is part of what makes us most human. In the book, I mention other seemingly outlandish tech, too, that zeroes in on our humanity. But it's all based in truth—either here now or currently being researched.

In *True Life in Uncanny Valley*, Eleanor faces a question that technology can't answer: What is your true self, and how do you know when you find her? What answer do you hope readers will take away with them?

Mostly that you may or may not be an artist like Eleanor, but you—with your compassion and empathy, your creativity, vision, and unique light—you hold the pen to your own life story.



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