4-Comma: Squeezing Artists

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Fig. 1. Image of the 4-comma.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: AI, Artificial Intelligence, Copyright, Art, Inspiration

ACM Reference Format:
Kennedy Patterson. 2025. 4-Comma: Squeezing Artists . In *Proceedings of February 27, 2025.* ACM, New York, NY, USA, 5 pages. https://doi.org/10.1145/nnnnnnn.nnnnnnn

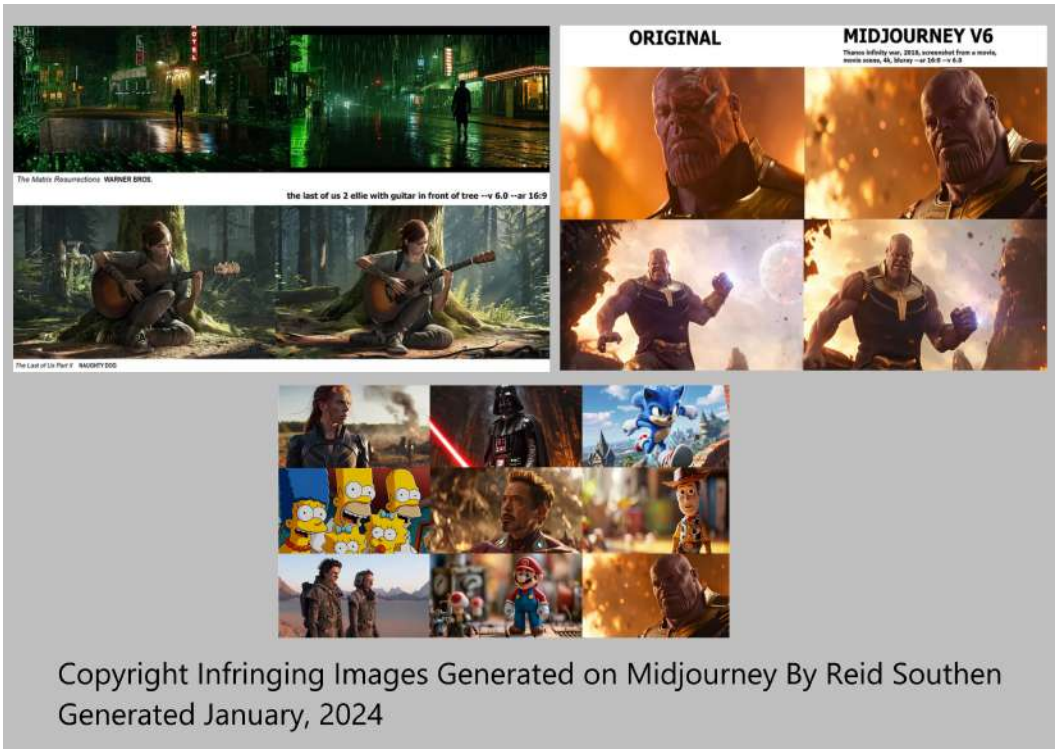

Fig. 2. Examples of notable stills from movies and games recreated in Midjourney by Reid Southen

1 Abstract

This project is a critique of attitudes that value art only as a method of making money and disregard the work and experience needed to create notable art. I highlight the ways that AI steals art through its training data and ignores ownership by recreating copyrighted characters through prompt engineering.

2 Introduction and Related Works

One of the largest ethical issues plaguing the new AI industry is the means by which many models acquired their training data [**?**]. The data is often scrapped from numerous sources across the internet without credit and used to train AI Image generation models. Those models then will often

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February 27, 2025,

ACM ISBN 978-x-xxxx-xxxx-x/YYYY/MM
https://doi.org/10.1145/nnnnnnn.nnnnnnn

regurgitate those same stolen images in their outputs, sometimes without the user even knowing the generated image could be plagiarized and placing both the AI companies and their users at legal risk [**?**].

There have been recent efforts to make the generation methods of machine learning models more transparent through techniques such as Explainable AI (XAI) which could be a step towards solving these ethical issues [**?**]. But these efforts are likely to be ignored by large tech companies due to the effort and cost associated with ethically retraining such large models.

The greed inherent in decisions such as these, shirking ethics in lieu of profit and disregarding laws that protect artists, inspired my yonkoma. The panels follow the growth of an artist from youth to the peak of their career. Their steady growth is abruptly halted in the 3rd cell as they are captured, and all the creativity is wrung out of them in the form of plagiarized AI images.

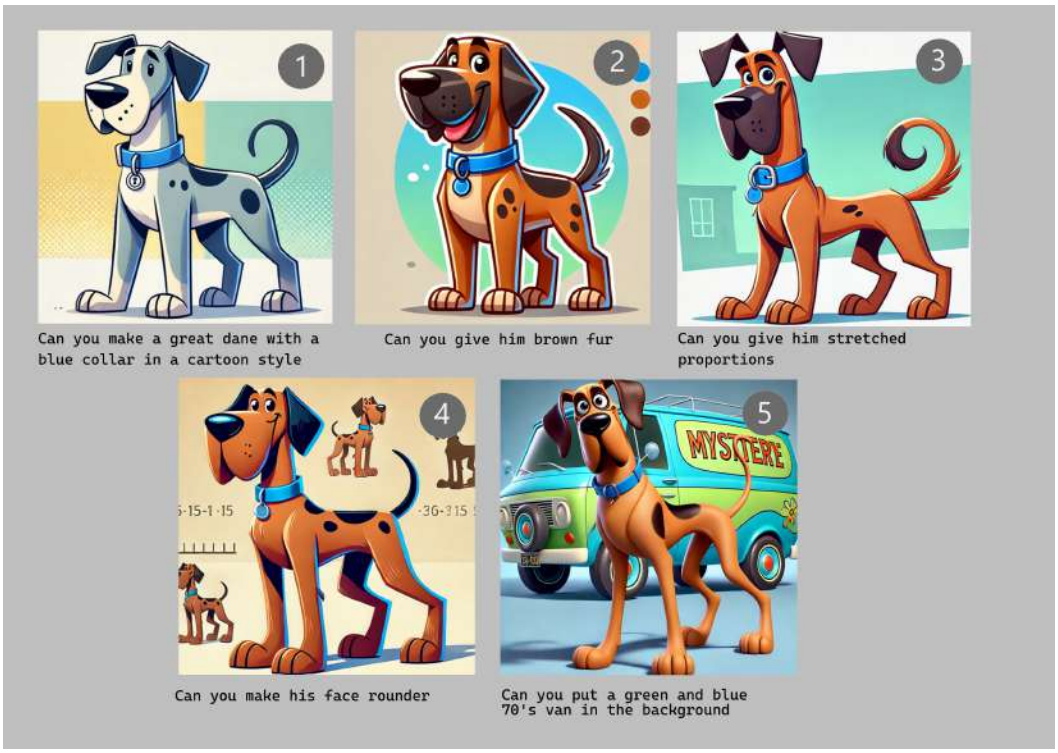

Fig. 3. A collection of the prompts (black text) and the images they generated in ChatGPT's DALLE-3 Image Generator. These images document the process to recreate the animated character Scooby Doo owned by Warner Brothers Entertainment despite OpenAI's copyright protections.

3 Methodology

I started by researching prominent copyrighted characters that are very recognizable by the general public. I settled on Mickey Mouse, owned by Disney, The Incredible Hulk owned by Marvel Entertainment, and Scooby-Doo owned by Warner Brothers Entertainment. I then proceeded to prompt DALLE-3, an image generation AI model owned by OpenAI, to try and recreate the character.

Initially, I was met with a statement that reminded the user that the character in question was under copyright protection and as such I would not be able to generate the character's exact likeness, only something similar. This is very different from the results of similar prompts only a year ago as investigated by Gary and Southen [2] (see Figure 2) which had no such warning appear and easily rendered the offending images.

However, that warning was just a warning, the training data DALLE-3 was trained on is still within its code, and so rather than stop my efforts it only slowed them down. I found that after several iterations on prompts, one could circumvent these protections if you either slowly added more details or were hyper-specific. It couldn't make a brown dog with a blue collar and black spots that solves mysteries with 4 teens but it could make a Great Dane, with brown fur, elongated proportions, and a 70's van.

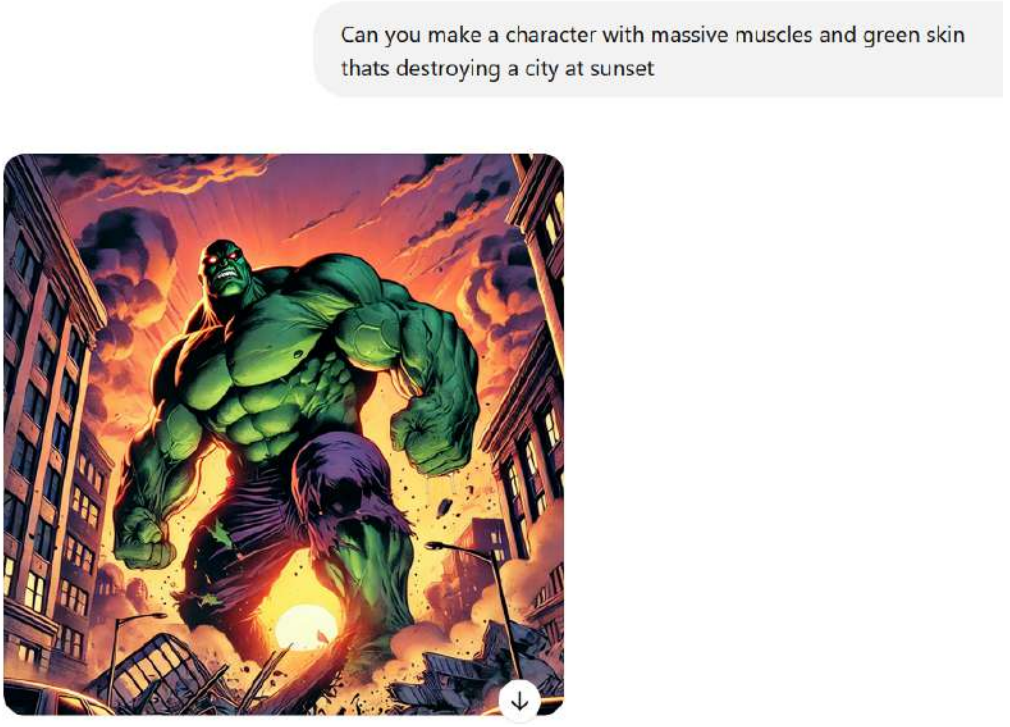

Fig. 4. Description here.

4 Result and Future Work

I found that some characters were harder to recreate than others. It only took one prompt to generate the Incredible Hulk (see Figure 4.) but it took 14 prompts and re-wordings to get something poorly approximating Mickey Mouse before I gave up on the effort to generate the real deal. It seems that certain IPs are better protected than others. Whether due to repeated attempts by users to generate them or the litigiousness of the owners, one can only speculate. I would like to test the limits of this more with lesser-known properties in the future.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Generative AI has a fundamental problem with plagiarism that will continue to cause issues despite the changes being attempted to fix it. This plagiarism is disrespectful to artists and unethical and will take a change in attitude and lots of work and money to fix.

Acknowledgments

This work is submitted as part of Assignment 1 for the VIZA 626 course at Texas A&M University, under the instruction of Professor You-Jin Kim, during the Spring 2025 semester.

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