

Death of the Creative Wall

By Austen Tucker · 2026

A suited anthropomorphic rat stands in profile against a sunset city skyline.

There's a thing AI generation has given me that I don't think people fully understand yet.

It's iteration. Cheap, fast, joyful iteration.

And once iteration becomes cheap, entire categories of creativity unlock.

Walls

For most of my life, creativity had walls around it.

Some walls were skill-based. I can write. I can sing. I can design layouts. But I never learned to draw well enough for animation, never had the budget for a studio, never had the time to spend six months on motion graphics just to make a stupid joke land.

Other walls were time. Could I have laid out my own novels ten years ago? Yes. I was Editor-in-Chief once, I know Quark like a champ.

Would I have?

Absolutely not.

The friction was too high. The energy required to move from "wouldn't it be cool if..." to "here is the finished thing" was enormous.

When I got early access to OpenAI's Sora, I fell in love almost immediately. Not because it was perfect; because it was playable. The idea of making weird little 15-second videos felt electric. Suddenly, instead of saying "I wish I could make that," I could just... try.

And somehow, the first thing I made that anyone actually gave a shit about was a chicken-fried possum lawyer from Chicago.

Meet Jebediah O. Hickory.

The Birth of a Possum

I made Jebediah to make fun of my wife. As all good jokes do.

My wife, D, is a public defender, which means they come home with stories that sound like exhausted true crime screenwriters wrote them in a Waffle House at 2AM. A guy who tried to evade arrest by laying down in an alleyway. A guy who thinks kicking puppies is okay. The one who had relations with a peacock (to the death!). A defendant whose logic looped so aggressively it achieved cartoon physics.

So I thought: why not make newspaper-comic-style micro cartoons about this stuff? Heightened little sketches. Tiny bursts of character.

From that extremely normal creative impulse emerged Jebediah O. Hickory: chicken-fried possum lawyer of Toontown Chicago.

My first video was rough as hell. An animatic of generated images and duct tape optimism. I wrote my own music, owned every word of the script, spent days trying to nail character consistency.

It was horrible. The important thing is that it existed.

I Made Slop. So. Much. Slop.

Another word for slop is reps.

You ever read your favorite writer's first story? No? Yeah, that's on purpose. We all suck when we start.

My first story was a 14000 word Sonic fanfic: Archie Comics flavor, not the cool kind. It's still on the wayback machine somewhere; gods, if I could burn it from my memory I would. Painful, overwrought self-insert fiction. But if I hadn't written it and shared it, I wouldn't have become a writer.

The difference between people who eventually become good and people who stay frozen at the starting line usually isn't innate genius. It's reps. Embarrassing attempts. Publishing anyway, even with no audience, because the audience follows the work, not the other way around.

AI changes the economics of those reps. That's the real revolution.

Audiovisual work used to mean enormous startup costs. Now I can make twenty weird experiments in a weekend, nineteen of them will fail, that's fine. Same growth pattern as ever, just dramatically faster.

People call this stuff "slop" like it's a moral failing. Sometimes it is. But slop is also the garage band before the first good album. Slop is the sketchbook before the masterpiece. Slop is the open mic.

Slop is practice with the lights on.

Exhibit A: The First Jebediah

YouTube video

Look at this thing. It's janky. It's awkward. It barely moves.

And I adore it. Before AI, this joke would have lived entirely inside my skull.

That's the part people miss. AI didn't replace an animator — there was never going to be one. Just me, alone at my desk at 1AM, thinking "what if there was a good ol' chicken-fried possum lawyer from Toontown Chicago?"

For the first time in my life, the distance between "idea" and "artifact" collapsed.

A Month Later

Talent is stubbornness+reps. That's the equation. Always was. Always will be. And talent matters because AI is a skill. Not magic. Not cheating. A skill that has to be learned one painful mistake at a time.

Through all the slop, I got better. Not because the machine got smarter. Because I did.

A month later:

YouTube video

A demo reel for what I called toontok: what a TikTok feed would look like if cartoons were real.

Still weird. Still imperfect. Still deeply, gloriously homemade. But better.

Then the Possum Started Working

Eventually I made this:

YouTube video

And suddenly people got it. Not because it looked like Disney. Not because it fooled anyone. Because it was funny.

Jebediah isn't technically impressive. He's charming. And charm carries farther than polish ever will.

The Multiverse Expands

What if I dropped Jebediah into my Bait-and-Switch universe?

The premise: some kids turn into cartoons when they come of age. Nobody knows why. Nobody has ever been able to explain it. And in my telling, Chicago has more of them than anywhere else, because Chicago let them in.

YouTube video

And this is where it clicked. Every time someone suggested a funny idea for Jebediah, I didn't have to sigh wistfully and move on. I could make it. Immediately.

The wall was gone.

Hyper-Art

I keep struggling to describe this feeling. The closest phrase I've found is hyper-art.

Not because the art is "better than human" — that framing misses the point. It feels hyper because throughput changes your relationship to ambition. The old creative world trained us to think carefully before attempting something.

Now I can just try.

I can test ideas, remix them, build visual languages for jokes that would have died in the shower five years ago.

And maybe none of it changes the world.

That's fine.

Right now I'm putting in reps, and reps are the only things that matter. The skill compounds. The confidence compounds. And eventually, maybe, you make something extraordinary.

But you don't get there by waiting for permission. You get there by making the weird possum video, over and over again, until you break through.

You can let the wall stop you. You can climb over it. Or you can throw yourself at it, confident it will break before you do.

I can think of no better metaphor for creation than that.