

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF ILLINOIS  
EASTERN DIVISION**

THOSE CHARACTERS FROM CLEVELAND,  
LLC,

Plaintiff,

v.

THE INDIVIDUALS, CORPORATIONS,  
LIMITED LIABILITY COMPANIES,  
PARTNERSHIPS AND UNINCORPORATED  
ASSOCIATIONS IDENTIFIED ON  
AMENDED SCHEDULE A HERETO,

Defendants.

Case No. 24-cv-11678

Judge Georgia N. Alexakis

**AMENDED COMPLAINT**

Plaintiff, THOSE CHARACTERS FROM CLEVELAND, LLC., by undersigned counsel, hereby complains of the Partnerships, Unincorporated Associations and others identified in Amended Schedule A attached hereto (collectively, “Defendants”), and hereby alleges as follows:

**JURISDICTION AND VENUE**

1. This Court has original subject matter jurisdiction over the claims in this action pursuant to the provisions of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. § 1051 et seq.; the Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. § 101 et seq.; 28 U.S.C. § 1338(a) - (b) and 28 U.S.C. § 1331. This Court has jurisdiction over the claims in this action that arise under the laws of the State of Illinois pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1367(a), because the state law claims are so related to the federal claims that they form part of the same case or controversy and derive from a common nucleus of operative facts.

2. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391, and this Court may properly exercise personal jurisdiction over Defendants since each of the Defendants directly

targets consumers in the United States, including Illinois, through at least the fully interactive commercial Internet stores operating under the Online Marketplace Accounts identified in Amended Schedule A attached hereto (collectively, the “Defendant Internet Stores”). Specifically, Defendants are reaching out to do business with Illinois residents in this judicial district by operating one or more commercial, interactive Internet Stores through which Illinois residents can purchase products bearing counterfeit versions of Plaintiff’s Copyrighted artwork. Each of the Defendants has targeted sales from Illinois residents by operating online stores that offer shipping to the United States, including Illinois, accept payment in U.S. dollars and, on information and belief, has sold products bearing counterfeit versions of Plaintiff’s federally registered Copyright to residents of Illinois. Each of the Defendants is committing tortious acts in Illinois, engaging in interstate commerce, and has wrongfully caused Plaintiff substantial injury in the State of Illinois.

### **INTRODUCTION**

3. This action has been filed by Plaintiff to combat e-commerce store operators who trade upon Plaintiff’s reputation and goodwill by offering for sale and/or selling unauthorized and unlicensed products using infringing and counterfeit versions of Plaintiff’s federally registered Copyright (the “Counterfeit Products”).

4. Defendants created numerous Internet Stores and design them to appear to be selling genuine Plaintiff’s products, while selling inferior imitations of Plaintiff’s products. Defendant Internet Stores share unique identifiers, such as design elements and similarities of the counterfeit products offered for sale, establishing a logical relationship between them and suggesting that Defendants’ illegal operations arise out of the same transaction, occurrence, or series of transactions or occurrences. Defendants attempt to avoid liability by going to great lengths to conceal both their identities and the full scope and interworking of their illegal

counterfeiting operation. Plaintiff is forced to file this action to combat Defendants' counterfeiting of Plaintiff's registered Copyright, as well as to protect unknowing consumers from purchasing unauthorized products over the Internet. Plaintiff has been and continues to be irreparably damaged through consumer confusion, dilution, and tarnishment of its valuable Copyright as a result of Defendants' actions and seek injunctive and monetary relief.

5. This Court has personal jurisdiction over each Defendant, in that each Defendant conducts significant business in Illinois and in this Judicial District, and the acts and events giving rise to this lawsuit of which each Defendant stands accused were undertaken in Illinois and in this Judicial District. In addition, each Defendant has offered to sell and ship infringing products into this Judicial District.

#### **THE PLAINTIFF**

6. Plaintiff, THOSE CHARACTERS FROM CLEVELAND, LLC is a limited liability company organized under the laws of Ohio and is a subsidiary of CloudCo, Inc. (formerly American Greetings Corporation).

7. Plaintiff is the official source of products bearing the CARE BEARS Copyright:

<https://www.carebears.com/>



8. Plaintiff is the owner of U.S. Copyright Registration No. VA 1-982-408 (the “CARE BEARS Copyright”).

9. The “CARE BEARS” are a fictional group of multi-colored bear characters, originally created in 1981 by artist Elena Kucharik for use on greeting cards by American Greetings. The characters were turned into plush teddy bears and soon appeared in a television series and three feature films.

10. A true and correct copy of U.S. Copyright Registration Certificate No. VA 1-982-408 is attached as Exhibit 1.

11. The Copyright Registration constitutes prima facie evidence of its validity, and Plaintiff has the exclusive right to use the copyrighted work pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 501.

12. Plaintiff’s Copyright is exclusive to Plaintiff and are displayed extensively on Plaintiff’s Products and in Plaintiff’s marketing and promotional materials. Plaintiff’s Copyright has been the subject of substantial and continuous marketing and promotion by Plaintiff at great expense. In fact, Plaintiff has expended significant resources annually in advertising, promoting and marketing featuring Plaintiff’s Copyright. Plaintiff’s promotional efforts include — by way of example, but not limitation — substantial print media, a website, social media sites, and point

of sale materials. Because of these and other factors, Plaintiff's name and Plaintiff's Copyrighted artwork have become famous worldwide.

13. Plaintiff's Copyright is distinctive when applied to Plaintiff's Products, signifying to the purchaser that the products come from Plaintiff and are manufactured to Plaintiff's quality standards. Whether Plaintiff manufactures the products itself or licenses others to do so, Plaintiff has ensured that products bearing its Copyright are manufactured to the highest quality standards. Plaintiff's Copyright has achieved fame and recognition. As such, the goodwill associated with Plaintiff's Copyright is incalculable and of inestimable value to Plaintiff.

14. Plaintiff has expended substantial time, money, and other resources in developing, advertising, and otherwise promoting its Copyrighted artwork. As a result, products bearing Plaintiff's Copyright are widely recognized and exclusively associated by consumers, the public, and the trade as being products sourced from Plaintiff.

#### **THE DEFENDANTS**

15. Defendants are individuals and business entities who, upon information and belief, reside in the People's Republic of China or other foreign jurisdictions. Defendants conduct business throughout the United States, including Illinois and within this Judicial District, through the operation of the fully interactive commercial websites and online marketplaces operating under the Defendants' Internet Stores. Each Defendant targets the United States, including Illinois, and has offered to sell and, on information and belief, has sold and continues to sell counterfeit products to consumers within the United States, including Illinois and this Judicial District.

## **THE DEFENDANTS' UNLAWFUL CONDUCT**

16. The success of Plaintiff's brand has resulted in its counterfeiting. Plaintiff has identified numerous online marketplace accounts and marketplace listings on platforms such as AliExpress, Alibaba and Alipay including the Defendants' Internet Stores, which were offering for sale, selling, and importing counterfeit products to consumers in this Judicial District and throughout the United States. Defendants have persisted in creating the Defendants' Internet Stores. Internet websites like the Defendant Internet Stores are estimated to receive tens of millions of visits per year and generate over \$135 billion in annual online sales. According to an intellectual property rights seizures statistics report issued by Homeland Security, the manufacturer's suggested retail price (MSRP) of goods seized by the U.S. government in 2021 was over \$3.3 billion, up from \$1.3 billion in 2020. According to a 2021 study on the impact of the sale of fraudulent goods entitled "The Counterfeit Silk Road - Impact of Counterfeit Consumer Products Smuggled into the United States" (the 2021 study), Internet websites like the Defendant Internet Stores are also estimated to contribute to over 653,000 lost jobs for legitimate businesses and broader economic damages such as lost wages in an amount over \$36 billion and a loss of federal and state tax revenue of over \$13.5 billion every year.

17. Upon information and belief, Defendants facilitate sales by designing the Defendants' Internet Stores so that they appear to unknowing consumers to be authorized online retailers, outlet stores, or wholesalers selling genuine products. Many of the Defendants' Internet Stores look sophisticated and accept payment in U.S. dollars via credit cards and AliExpress, Alibaba and Alipay. Defendants' Internet Stores often include images and design elements that make it very difficult for consumers to distinguish such counterfeit sites from an authorized website. Defendants further perpetuate the illusion of legitimacy by offering "live 24/7" customer

service and using indicia of authenticity and security that consumers have come to associate with authorized retailers, including the McAfee® Security, VeriSign®, Visa®, MasterCard®, and PayPal® logos.

18. Plaintiff has not licensed nor authorized Defendants to use its Copyright, and none of the Defendants are authorized retailers of its genuine products.

19. Upon information and belief, Defendants deceive unknowing consumers by using Plaintiff's Copyright without authorization within the content, text, and/or meta tags of their websites to attract various search engines looking for websites relevant to consumer searches for Plaintiff's products. Additionally, upon information and belief, Defendants use other unauthorized search engine optimization (SEO) tactics and social media spamming so that the Defendants' Internet Stores listings show up at or near the top of relevant search results and misdirect consumers searching for Plaintiff's genuine products. Further, Defendants utilize similar illegitimate SEO tactics to propel new online marketplace accounts to the top of search results after others are shut down. As such, Plaintiff seeks to disable Defendant Internet Stores through which their counterfeit products are sold.

20. Defendants go to great lengths to conceal their identities and often use multiple fictitious names and addresses to register and operate their massive network of Internet Stores. For example, many of Defendants' names and physical addresses used to register the online marketplace accounts are incomplete, contain randomly typed letters, or fail to include cities or states. Other online marketplace accounts use privacy services that conceal the owners' identity and contact information. Upon information and belief, some of the tactics used by the Defendants to conceal their identities and the scope and interworking of their counterfeit operations to avoid being shut down include regularly creating new websites and online marketplace accounts on various platforms

using the identities listed in the Amended Schedule A to the Amended Complaint, as well as other fictitious names and addresses.

21. Even though Defendants operate under multiple fictitious names, there are numerous similarities among the Defendants' Internet Stores. For example, some of the Defendants' websites have identical layouts, even though different aliases were used to register the respective online marketplace accounts. In addition, the counterfeit products for sale in the Defendants' Internet Stores bear similarities and indicia of being related to one another, suggesting that the counterfeit products were manufactured by a common source and that Defendants are interrelated. The Defendants' Internet Stores also include other notable common features, including use of the same online marketplace accounts registration patterns, unique shopping cart platforms, similar payment and check-out methods, meta data, illegitimate SEO tactics, HTML user-defined variables, domain redirection, lack of contact information, identically or similarly priced items and volume sales discounts, similar hosting services, similar name servers, and the use of the same text and images.

22. In addition to operating under multiple fictitious names, Defendants in this case and defendants in other similar cases against online counterfeiters use a variety of other common tactics to evade enforcement efforts. For example, when counterfeiters like Defendants receive notice of a lawsuit they will often register new online marketplace accounts under new aliases and move website hosting to rogue servers located outside the United States once notice of a lawsuit is received. Rogue servers are notorious for ignoring take down demands sent by brand owners. Counterfeiters will also ship products in small quantities via international mail to minimize detection by U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The 2021 study indicated that the Internet has fueled explosive growth in the number of small packages of counterfeit goods shipped through the mail and express carriers. This growth closely correlates to the growth of the ecommerce industry

which now make up 16.2% of all retail transactions as reported by the Census Bureau of the U.S. Department of Commerce.

23. Further, counterfeiters such as Defendants typically operate multiple credit card merchant and AliExpress, Alibaba and Alipay accounts behind layers of payment gateways so that they can continue to operate in spite of Plaintiff's enforcement efforts. Upon information and belief, Defendants maintain off-shore bank accounts and regularly move funds from AliExpress, Alibaba and Alipay accounts to off-shore bank accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court. Indeed, analysis of AliExpress, Alibaba and Alipay transaction logs from prior similar cases indicate that offshore counterfeiters regularly move funds from U.S.-based AliExpress, Alibaba and Alipay accounts to China-based bank accounts outside the jurisdiction of this Court.

24. On information and belief, Defendants are in constant communication with each other and regularly participate in QQ.com chat rooms and through websites such as sellerdefense.cn, kaidianyo.com and kuajingvs.com regarding tactics for operating multiple accounts, evading detection, pending litigation and potential new lawsuits.

25. Defendants, without any authorization or license from Plaintiff, have knowingly and willfully used and continue to use Plaintiff's Copyright in connection with the advertisement, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of counterfeit products into the United States and Illinois over the Internet. Each Defendants' Internet Stores offer shipping to the United States, including Illinois and, on information and belief, each Defendant has offered to sell counterfeit products into the United States, including Illinois.

26. Defendants' use of Plaintiff's Copyright in connection with the advertising, distribution, offering for sale, and sale of counterfeit products, including the sale of counterfeit

products into Illinois, is likely to cause and has caused confusion, mistake, and deception by and among consumers and is irreparably harming Plaintiff.

**COUNT I**  
**COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT (17 U.S.C. § 501(a))**

27. Plaintiff repeats and incorporates by reference herein the allegations contained in paragraphs 1-26 of this Amended Complaint.

28. Plaintiff's products have significant value and have been produced and created at considerable expense.

29. Plaintiff, at all relevant times, has been the holder of the pertinent exclusive rights infringed by Defendants, as alleged hereunder, including but not limited to the copyrighted artwork, including derivative works. Plaintiff's products are the subject of a valid Certificate of Copyright Registration issued by the Register of Copyright (Exhibit 1).

30. Upon information and belief, Defendants had access to the artwork through Plaintiff's normal business activities. After accessing Plaintiff's work, Defendants wrongfully created copies of the copyrighted products without Plaintiff's consent and engaged in acts of widespread infringement.

31. Plaintiff is informed and upon belief thereon alleges that Defendants further infringed Plaintiff's Copyright by making or causing to be made derivative works from Plaintiff's products by producing and distributing reproductions without Plaintiff's permission.

32. The copyrighted products include a copyright notice advising the general public that Plaintiff's products are protected by the Copyright Laws.

33. Defendants, without the permission or consent of Plaintiff, have sold and continue to sell online infringing derivative works of Plaintiff's copyrighted products. Defendants have violated Plaintiff's exclusive rights of reproduction and distribution. Defendants' actions

constitute infringement of Plaintiff's exclusive rights protected under the Copyright Act (17 U.S.C. §101 et seq.).

34. As a direct result of the acts of copyright infringement, Defendants have obtained direct and indirect profits they would not otherwise have realized but for their infringement of the copyrighted products. Plaintiff is entitled to disgorgement of Defendants' profits directly and indirectly attributable to their infringement of Plaintiff's products.

35. The foregoing acts of infringement constitute a collective enterprise of shared, overlapping facts and have been willful, intentional, and in disregard of and with indifference to the rights of Plaintiff.

36. As a result of Defendants infringement of Plaintiff's exclusive rights under its copyright, Plaintiff is entitled to relief pursuant to 17 U.S.C. §504 and to its attorneys' fees and costs pursuant to 17 U.S.C. §505.

37. The conduct of Defendants is causing and, unless enjoined and restrained by this Court, will continue to cause Plaintiff irreparable injury that cannot be compensated fully or monetized. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law. Pursuant to 17 U.S.C. §§502 and 503, Plaintiff is entitled to injunctive relief prohibiting Defendants from further infringing Plaintiff's Copyright and ordering Defendants to destroy all unauthorized copies. Defendants' copies, plates, and other embodiment of Plaintiff's products from which copies can be reproduced should be impounded and forfeited to Plaintiff as instruments of infringement, and all infringing copies created by Defendants should be impounded and forfeited to Plaintiff, under 17 U.S.C. §503.

**COUNT II**  
**VIOLATION OF ILLINOIS UNIFORM DECEPTIVE TRADE PRACTICES ACT**  
**(815 ILCS § 510/1, et seq.)**

38. Plaintiff repeats and incorporates by reference herein the allegations contained in paragraphs 1-37 of this Amended Complaint.

39. Defendants have engaged in acts violating Illinois law including, but not limited to, passing off their counterfeit products as those of Plaintiff, causing likelihood of confusion and/or misunderstanding as to the source of its goods, causing likelihood of confusion and/or misunderstanding as to an affiliation, connection, or association with genuine products, representing that their products have Plaintiff's approval when they do not, and engaging in other conduct which creates likelihood of confusion or misunderstanding among the public.

40. The foregoing Defendants' acts constitute a willful violation of the Illinois Uniform Deceptive Trade Practices Act, 815 ILCS § 510/1 et seq.

41. Plaintiff has no adequate remedy at law, and Defendants' conduct has caused Plaintiff to suffer damage to his reputation and goodwill. Unless enjoined by the Court, Plaintiff will suffer future irreparable harm as a direct result of Defendants' unlawful activities.

**PRAYER FOR RELIEF**

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays for judgment against Defendants and each of them as follows:

1) That Defendants, their affiliates, officers, agents, servants, employees, attorneys, confederates, and all persons acting for, with, by, through, under, or in active concert with them be temporarily, preliminarily, and permanently enjoined and restrained from:

a. using the CARE BEARS Copyright or any reproductions, counterfeit copies, derivatives, or colorable imitations thereof in any manner in connection with the distribution, marketing, advertising, offering for sale, or sale of any product that is not

- a genuine CARE BEARS product or is not authorized by Plaintiff to be sold in connection with the CARE BEARS Copyright;
  - b. passing off, inducing, or enabling others to sell or pass off any product as a genuine CARE BEARS product or any other product produced by Plaintiff that is not Plaintiff's or is not produced under the authorization, control, or supervision of Plaintiff and approved by Plaintiff for sale under its Copyright;
  - c. committing any acts calculated to cause consumers to believe that Defendants' counterfeit products are those sold under the authorization, control, or supervision of Plaintiff, or are sponsored by, approved by, or otherwise connected with Plaintiff;
  - d. further infringing Plaintiff's CARE BEARS Copyright and damaging Plaintiff's reputation and goodwill;
  - e. otherwise competing unfairly with Plaintiff in any manner;
  - f. shipping, delivering, holding for sale, transferring or otherwise moving, storing, distributing, returning, or otherwise disposing of, in any manner, products or inventory not manufactured by or for Plaintiff, nor authorized by Plaintiff to be sold or offered for sale including Plaintiff's CARE BEARS Copyright, or any reproductions, counterfeit copies, or colorable imitations thereof; and
  - g. using, linking to, transferring, selling, exercising control over, or otherwise owning the Online Marketplace Accounts or any online marketplace account that is being used to sell or is the means by which Defendants could continue to sell counterfeit products;
- 2) That Defendants, within fourteen (14) days after service of judgment with notice of entry thereof upon them, be required to file with the Court and serve upon Plaintiff a written report

under oath setting forth in detail the manner and form in which Defendants have complied with paragraph 1, a through g, above;

3) Entry of an Order that, upon Plaintiff's request, those in privity with Defendants and those with notice of the injunction, including any online marketplaces such as AliExpress, Alibaba and Alipay and any related entities, social media platforms, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, Internet search engines such as Google, Bing and Yahoo, web hosts for the Defendant Internet Stores, and online marketplace platforms, shall:

- a. disable and cease providing services for any accounts through which Defendants engage in the sale of counterfeit products using Plaintiff's Copyright, including any accounts associated with the Defendants listed in Amended Schedule A;
  - b. disable and cease displaying any advertisements used by or associated with Defendants in connection with the sale of counterfeit products using Plaintiff's Copyright; and
  - c. take all steps necessary to prevent links to the Defendants Internet Stores identified in Amended Schedule A from displaying in search results, including, but not limited to, removing links to the Defendants Internet Stores from any search index;
- 4) That Defendants account for and pay to Plaintiff all profits realized by Defendants by reason of Defendants' unlawful acts herein alleged as provided by 17 U.S.C. § 504(b);
- 5) In the alternative, that Plaintiff be awarded statutory damages pursuant to 17 U.S.C. § 504(c) of not less than \$200 and not more than \$150,000 for each and every use of the CARE BEARS Copyright;
- 6) That Plaintiff is awarded its reasonable attorneys' fees and costs; and

7) Award any and all other relief that this Court deems just and proper.

Dated: December 11, 2024

Respectfully submitted,

By: /s/ Michael A. Hierl

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

The undersigned attorney hereby certifies that a true and correct copy of the foregoing Amended Complaint was filed electronically with the Clerk of the Court and served on all counsel of record and interested parties via the CM/ECF system on December 11, 2024.

s/Michael A. Hierl