Crunchyroll ends free streaming for new and continuing series

Crunchyroll will no longer offer free ad-supported streaming for newly-released episodes, the anime streaming service announced in an update on its site (via *Gizmodo*). Viewers who want to watch episodes of new or continuing series will have to upgrade to one of Crunchyroll's premium plans, which start at $7.99 / month.

Users didn't need a subscription to watch simulcast titles before the change, but there was a tradeoff – Crunchyroll would delay the release of new episodes by one week for free users, while subscribers could watch them one hour after their premiere in Japan. This was something I (and a lot of other people using Crunchyroll for free) happily dealt with as long as I actually got to watch the new episodes.

The new policy goes into effect this spring
But now, Crunchyroll is barring free users from watching delayed simulcasts altogether. The service's policy is set to go into effect this spring, as Crunchyroll plans to give users access to a "seasonal sampler," or a selection of simulcasts set to debut during the spring 2022 season, including *Spy x Family*, *A Couple of Cuckoos*, *Tomodachi Game*, and others. Crunchyroll will offer the first three episodes of each show in the sampler for free one week after their premiere until May 31st. Any viewing beyond the first few episodes or access to Crunchyroll's entire simulcast lineup will require a subscription. Crunchyroll says all users can still watch episodes previously added to the platform for free.

It’s unclear whether Crunchyroll will continue to offer seasonal samplers beyond spring 2022, or when the episodes from this season’s lineup will become available for free viewing in the future. *The Verge* reached out to Crunchyroll with a request for comment but didn’t immediately hear back.

Sony, which also owns Funimation, acquired Crunchyroll last year in a deal valued at $1.175 billion, but the service has only recently started making major changes. Earlier this month, Crunchyroll announced that it would be inheriting Funimation’s anime library in an effort to gradually merge both services. Although Crunchyroll says it “will continue to offer free content going forward,” doing away with free delayed simulcasts is a bit of a blow to fans who’ve been using the service for free for years, and also raises the question of whether Crunchyroll will decide to lock other content behind a subscription.

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