Warner Bros. Discovery sues Paramount in South Park streaming fight

Warner Bros. Discovery is suing Paramount for allegedly "stealing" *South Park* content it claims it should have the exclusive streaming rights to, as reported earlier by *Variety*. In a lawsuit filed on Friday, HBO Max's parent company claims Paramount worked with *South Park*'s creators and its MTV subsidiary to "divert as much of the new *South Park* content as possible" to Paramount Plus to attract viewers to the platform.

In 2019, Warner Bros. Discovery says it paid around $1.6 million for each of the over 300 episodes that South Park Digital Studios (SPDS) — a joint venture between Paramount and *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone — agreed to license. Warner Bros. Discovery claims Paramount, which also owns Comedy Central, *South Park*'s long-time home on cable TV, "induced" South Park Digital Studios to breach this contract with Warner Bros. Discovery.

Paramount "used grammatical sleight-of-hand, characterizing new content as 'movies,' 'films,' or 'events'"

The deal was supposed to bring the show's entire library, as well as the 30 upcoming new episodes for seasons 24, 25, and 26 to HBO Max until June 2025. However, Warner Bros. Discovery alleges it didn't get what it paid for. It claims South Park Digital Studios fell short of its promise to provide 10 new episodes for each season and charged the company extra for the 50-minute *Pandemic Special*.

The lawsuit also takes issue with the massive $900 million deal Paramount made with the creators of *South Park* in August 2021 — just months after the launch of Paramount Plus. As part of the deal, *South Park* will exclusively stream on Paramount Plus after the contract with HBO Max ends.

The studio later went on to create several Paramount Plus-exclusive specials, including *South Park: Post Covid*, *South Park: Post Covid: The Return of Covid*, and *South Park: The Streaming Wars Part 1* and *Part* 2, which debuted throughout 2021 and 2022. Warner Bros. Discovery claims these specials should've been included in their contract, and that South Park Studios, Paramount, and MTV "used grammatical sleight-of-hand, characterizing new content as 'movies,' 'films,' or 'events' to side-step SPDS's contractual obligations."

In a statement to *Variety*, a Paramount spokesperson said the company believes "these claims are without merit" and alleges Warner Bros. Discovery "has failed and refused to pay license fees that it owes to Paramount for episodes that have already been delivered, and which HBO Max continues to stream." Paramount didn't immediately respond to *The Verge*'s request for comment.

The lawsuit comes at a pivotal time for Warner Bros. Discovery, which reported adding just 1.1 million subscribers across HBO, HBO Max, and Discovery Plus this past quarter, while losing another $2.1 billion. It clearly views *South Park* as a core component of HBO Max, as it calls the show "anchor" content that's "central to branding and marketing" in the lawsuit, and says having the series lets streamers "increase subscribers and subscription fees, as well as draw in advertisers."

Warner Bros. Discovery is suing Paramount, SPDS, and MTV for "significant monetary damages" that will be determined at trial.

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