



The State of Fansubbing (It's Dead)

May 15, 2015 by Dark_Sage



This post was written by Dark_Sage. He is Dark_Sage.



Nothing I say here should particularly come as a surprise to anyone who's been keeping track of the scene. But this is the only site left where you can have an open-door discussion on the subject, so let's open the fucking doors.

History Time

Fansubs once mattered, believe it or not.

Spoiler: Hide

I hesitate to reminisce, since nostalgia goggles are blinding, but it needs to be stated that fansubs were legitimately once integral to the development of the anime scene in the west.



"Once" being the operative word.

With the exception of anime that aired on cable TV, or shows that people had to buy/rent/borrow on VHS/DVDs, translated series could not be reasonably experienced without the aid of fansubs. As an example, let's reach back to 2011 (arguably the last year fansubs truly mattered), where one of the hyped shows was Puella Magi Madoka Magica.

Unless you wanted to watch Madoka raw (e.g. without subtitles), you had to watch the series with fansubs. Turns out tons of people did, and it took a stagnating anime scene by storm.



Read: this shit is required viewing.

Like ~~many~~ most shows pre-Crunchyroll, Grimdark Lesbians owes much of its western success to the grey market for anime. Without the fansubs that the scene provided, the show would have been forgotten until it would be too late to matter.

Now think about the hype shows of the current gen: Attack on Titan. SAO. DanMachi. Naruto Shippuden filler arcs. People don't need fansubs for this shit anymore, and fansubbers are certainly not providing compelling reasons to watch their releases over the official options.

Ask new fans what they think about fansubs and you'll get blank stares — good luck getting a list of groups they like, let alone a definition for what a fansub actually is. The scene has completely lost its mindshare.

Why Fansubs Are Now Irrelevant

The fuck kinda optimism does anyone have for fansubbing now? I have none, and neither do any of the fansubbers I've had convos with on the subject. So when I hear whining in the comments here about all this *unwarranted* negativity, all I can think about is how fucking out of touch someone has to be to ignore the irrelevance corroding the scene.

Spoiler: Hide

Downloads (the primary metric by which groups measure their success) are down across the board even as anime itself keeps gaining steam in the English-speaking world.

Hell, even when fansubs can release their subs before official options, they will invariably get fewer downloads. No asterisk needed; it always happens.

Anime Sub	[HorribleSubs] Kyoukai no Rinne - 05 [1080p].mkv	↓	561.7 MiB	79	2	4499	0
Anime Sub	[HorribleSubs] Kyoukai no Rinne - 05 [720p].mkv	↓	334.4 MiB	203	4	10950	1
Anime Sub	[HorribleSubs] Kyoukai no Rinne - 05 [480p].mkv	↓	152 MiB	66	2	5050	0
Anime Sub	[FFF] Kyoukai no Rinne - 05 [FF3EAE53].mkv	↓	412.4 MiB	113	2	7441	5

FFF released a full two days before Crunchyroll, yet HorribleSubs is nearly tripling their numbers.

The saddest part? This is observable on fansubbing's "last bastion": nyaa.se. Fansubbers decided to circlejerk the wagons and go all-in on Nyaa torrents to the point where they organized fucking boycotts of all other sites.



Really guys, there are cuter ways to commit suicide.

If you go outside of Nyaa and look at the streaming sites (you know, where people actually go to get their anime fix), officialsubs dominate. With a few exceptions, the illegal streaming sites have no interest in making their bed with fansubs. And for the success of legal options... well, when was the last time you saw a fansub group sponsoring an anime con?

Some argue that even if downloads are down, as long as fansub releases still get downloads at all, they're successful. Everybody wins, right?



You pranking me right now?

Assuming these people are serious, If you aren't playing to win, you might as well not be playing at all.

Groups are quick to complain about how it's not "fair" that HorribleSubs gets more attention than they do, the brainless fucks. Here, let me clue you in on something:

Fansubs are not the fucking product. People do not fucking care about typesetting. They do not care about encode quality. They do not care about editing, karaoke, or timing. All the people want is anime. And they want to get it reliably. What you're selling is the *distribution* of anime via your subtitles.

Fansubs have forgotten this shit as insularity became their primary goal.

Let's just take a look at a few of the decisions the fansub scene has made in the past few years that pushed people away:



;_ fansubbing-chan

10-bit

Changing encoding standards from a strongly supported format (8-bit) to an unstable, unproven one (10-bit) was as boneheaded a move as you can make. Mac and mobile users were completely shut out for a long time. And it's still not handled perfectly across all platforms.

Whatever benefit was gained from adopting this standard was lost when people jumped ship for releases that actually catered to them. Short-sighted stupidity.

Consolidated distribution

One-site, torrent-based distribution was a stupid fucking idea. Compared to streaming sites' click-and-play functionality, the standard process fansubbing recommends is entirely "cost"-prohibitive. Not only do people need to acquire specific software to watch shows, they need to either pay for a seedbox or use a local torrent client and hope they don't get used as an example by some company's legal department.

XDCC's even worse and more convoluted, so don't even come at me with that fucking bullshit, fansubbers. Nobody should be surprised that people don't want to jump through hoops for their entertainment. This shit ain't supposed to be an obstacle course.

Take-it-or-leave it release options

You can't win where you don't compete. And fansubbers don't compete at the high-end (1080p) or low-end (480p, hardsubs) anymore. Humorously, the audience of those release types (as seen with HorribleSubs numbers), when consolidated, is often larger than the standard, 720p audience fansub releases are scrambling for.

While hindsight is 20/20, I already called the scene out on some of this bullshit back in [2012](#). My sagacity is clearly unparalleled.

The Current Fansub Strategy

Fansubbers appear to be resigned to the fact that they can't compete with officialsubs anymore. They're wrong, but that's the prevailing sense of self-justified apathy that emanates from their still-subbing corpses.

Spoiler: Hide



"There's still hope! Don't worry guys, it can all go back to how it was when people knew what fansubs were! Just as soon as simulcasting dies, we'll be right there to pick back up where we left off!"

I can understand where this thought process comes from, but fansubbers, *waiting* for progress is a fool's gambit.

To be fair, the fansub scene wouldn't have too much trouble ramping back up if it came to this. And fansubbers aren't wrong about this being a distinct possibility.



Oh I'll feed you baby birds.

The status of official subs in the US can only last so long as Japan wants to share its ball. And with Nipponia having some of the most capricious and short-sighted management around, it's not like this is the craziest possibility. Western companies don't exactly own these shows, and I'm sure Japan has enough "outs" in their contracts that one CEO's drunken directive could wreck Crunchyroll.

But as the years roll on, and a scorched-earth policy from Japan becomes less and less likely, the easy route doesn't seem like it's going to lead anywhere.



#Fansubbing

Now, if the SJWs get their way, fansubbing may just get the Hail Mary it's been waiting for. But that's an article for another time.

The Solution

It's tough being the monarch of a dead scene. But I am a generous king, so let's talk about how they can finally get senpai-sama to notice them.



Don't hold your breath, though.

Spoiler: Hide

Nobody has more to gain from a thriving fansub scene than me. Ruminates on that for a second and then consider these honest fucking suggestions:

1. Improve Group Branding



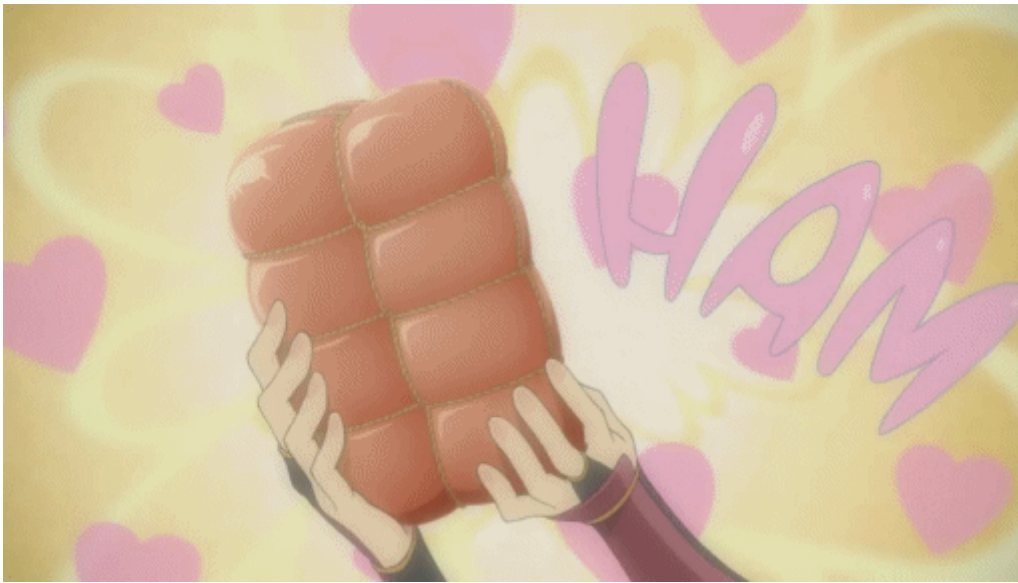
Make it clear that the “work” you do is actually done by you; it means nothing if you aren’t recognized for it. Credits, logos, whatever the fuck will clue in the average viewer. Taking the high ground (lol) just means you’re wasting your fucking time.

History time? History time. Branding went out of favor back when competition was only between fansub groups. There wasn’t a need for it, because it was a point of pride — a marketing scheme — that groups didn’t care if they got recognized for their work. Well, that was complete bullshit, as anyone who’s been a teen would know.

Really, branding was unnecessary because the anime-watching audience was relatively informed as to what their choices were. Now? Not so much. Especially since “pride” has been stripped from most fansubbers’ dictionaries.

2. Improve Release Distro

Release your branded work wherever the fuck you can. Official options are limited to the areas in which they can operate, but fansubs have no such restrictions. Go ham.



Every reasonably frequented torrenting site, every streaming site you can find, hell even every DC++ hub you can access... you get the point. Stop viewing downloads as the metric you're aiming for, and go for impressions.

If you want to use Nyaa as your staging hub, fine. But if you're not going where the users are, don't expect them to come to you when *they don't even know you exist*.

There are no better ideas at this point. The only path forward is pure propagation. Forget whatever social capital you have to gain by being just another group that keeps its head down and doesn't rock the boat. Try to matter for once in your non-sagey lives.



I'm wasting my time on you guys, I know that. But at least I fucking warned you.

Avoiding the Blade

If fansubbers want to fade into irrelevance, that's their own prerogative. But if they expect me to keep waving the scene's flag while they meekly do so, they're sorely fucking mistaken. I will recommend the best options for my readers, even if they don't happen to be fansubs. And if fansubs don't even attempt to compete with the official releases, don't expect me to hold my tongue about it.



If I mince anything, it won't be my fucking words.

Should this revelation be a great discomfort to some of you, then I guess so be it. I'm nobody's shill, and the only feelings I've ever cared about are my own.

Don't like it? Blame the scene; my narcissism didn't come out of nowhere.

Article, Fansubs

Article, Fansubs

Officialsubs Review: [Crunchyroll] Shokugeki no Soma (Episode 05)

Subtitle Comparison: [Crunchyroll vs FFF] Kyoukai no Rinne (Episode 05)