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Rifftrax to AppleTV: A Step-by-Step Guide

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12-15 minutes

I love Rifftrax, and I love my AppleTV. Unfortunately, they don't play well together since most Rifftrax titles require keeping a DVD and audio track manually synced while watching. I knew that there had to be a way to fix that, so I found one.

I loathe caring for and loading DVDs every time I want to watch a movie, and the Rifftrax player for Mac OS suffers from various technical glitches (on my computers, anyway), so my most preferred form of entertainment—if I want it on my beloved AppleTV—is really only available through bit torrent. I think that Mike

and the guys deserve my money for their work, and I couldn't find any complete guides online that tell me how to get Rifftrax in a format that will work on a typical entertainment player/streamer, so I took the time to learn the software and steps necessary to make that happen. As an added bonus, this method should work for any device that supports the MP4 file format, which is pretty much everything.

Here are my goals (If you don't care, skip ahead to Step 1).

- The main thing is that I need for all of the audio and video of the main movie to have the Rifftrax audio mixed together so that I can watch bad movies being made fun of from an AppleTV and not have to mess with manually syncing a DVD with Rifftrax audio.

- Because I have a disturbing gadget addiction that includes many thousands of dollars worth of computer equipment and I have zero tolerance for broken equipment or maintenance, almost everything I own is made by Apple. As a result, this entire process had to be available for Mac OS.

- Although I don't mind paying something to have the right tools, I preferred for this process to be done using free

software. Fortunately, the best tools out there for this sort of thing are free.

- I feel deeply that people who add value to our lives deserve to be paid for their work, and I feel equally deeply that stealing is wrong. That is true for entertainment, software—whatever. Even though all of the software listed here is available for free, I encourage everyone to donate to the developer so that he/she/they can continue his/her/their work. This is especially true of the Rifftrax team. Don't steal their work! If you have found yourself in possession of the work of the Rifftrax team using means that gave them no compensation, be sure to go to their donation page. Also, don't steal the movies that are being riffed. They may be bad, but they still cost money to make and distribute, and it is still stealing to get them for free. (Stepping down from soapbox).

There are several steps required to get a full Rifftrax mix into MP4 format, but none of them are too difficult as long as you know what they are. Here is a quick outline:

1. Create an MKV file from a DVD with **MakeMKV**

2. Extract (demux) the audio and video files with **MKVTools**

3. Combine the Rifftrax audio file with the movie's audio file using **Audacity**

4. Put the audio and video back together (mux) using **MKVToolnix**

5. Convert the resulting MKV file to MP4 using **HandBrake**

6. (Optional) Add cover art and other info using **iDentify**

Here are the full details. For this example, I will be using *Avatar*. If you haven't seen this movie, buy the DVD and Rifftrax audio. This movie would have played out better as a video game than as a movie, but I digress. The riff of it is awesome. I chose this particular movie as an example because it includes an advanced feature that most movies won't require — forced subtitles.
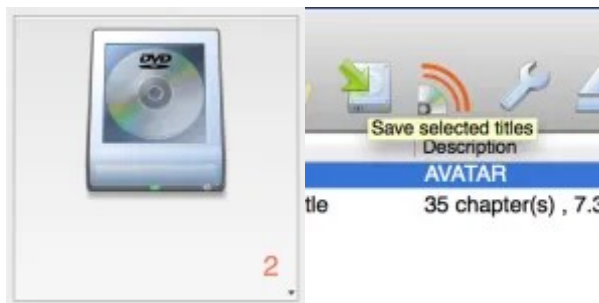
Let's get started

1. Create an MKV file from a DVD with MakeMKV

The first thing to do is to get MakeMKV. It is available here. Once you have downloaded and installed it:

1. Load your DVD into a DVD drive and open MakeMKV.

2. Click the big disk icon to have MakeMKV scan your disk.

3. Once that process has completed, check the first video track, uncheck all other other tracks, and then click the

"Save selected titles" icon. My particular copy of the Avatar DVD has only one track, so there wasn't any guessing about what to uncheck. For most DVDs, you will see a list containing many tracks, but examining the number of chapters and file size should tell you right away which track contains the movie.

4. This will take a while, so sit back and play a game or something.
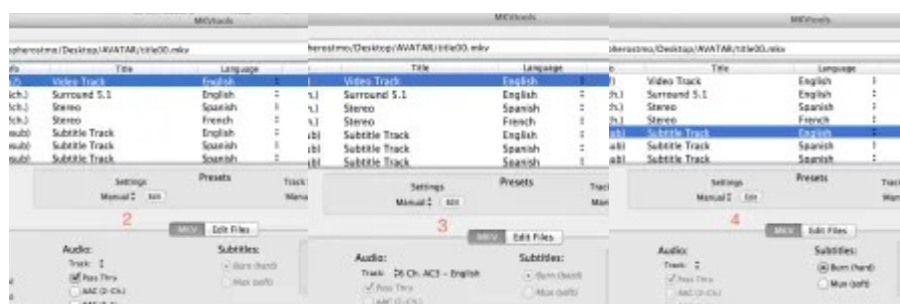

2. Extract the audio and video files with MKVTools

The next tool you will need is MKVTools, [which is available here](#). In these steps, you are going to separate the audio from the video in the MKV file created in part 1. If you haven't paid the $6 registration fee, there will be a couple of nag screens, but everything will work.

1. Open MKVTools

2. Drag your MKV file into the window and check only the video track, then click "Extract"

3. Once that has completed, uncheck the video track, check the appropriate audio track, then click "Extract"

4. Finally, uncheck the audio track, check the most appropriate subtitle track, then click "Extract." This step won't be required for most movies (assuming you don't normally want subtitles), but you will want them for this movie since there's a fakey language employed. Plus, how often do you get a chance to see the Papyrus font in the wild? That's "awesome" on so many levels, I don't even know where to begin. Back on topic…

3. Combine the Rifftrax audio file with the movie's audio file using Audacity

Now that you have separated the audio and video files from the movie, it's time to combine the Rifftrax audio with the movie's audio in Audacity. You can get Audacity here. If you do not already have the LAME MP3 encoder on your computer and configured in Audacity, you'll need to do that. Download and instructions are available

here. This is the most difficult part of the process, so have some patience while you're learning to get it right. Once you've done it a few times, it will get easier.

1. Open Audacity then click "File" and "Open." Select the AC3 audio file that was produced in step 3 above.

2. This part is necessary to get anything other than mono output. This may not be universally true, but in my experience, Audacity has opened movie AC3 files with tracks in this order: 1. Front left, 2. Front right, 3. Subwoofer, 4. Front center, 5. Surround left, and 6. Surround right. It may be possible to export a 5.1 surround sound AC3 file, but I've not taken the time to figure that out, so I am taking the easy road and downmixing to stereo MP3. To do so, select the down-pointing arrows to the left of the "Left" audio tracks (1 and 5) and select "Left Channel." Similarly, mark the "Right" tracks (2 and 6) as "Right Channel."

3. To make things easier to work with later, I like to save the movie audio now. Click "File" and then "Export." Select the "MP3 Files" format and set any options you would like.

4. Open the newly created MP3 file in Audacity (click "File" and then "Open"). Click "File," then "Import" and

"Audio…" Select the MP3 file that you purchased from Rifftrax. This will give you the movie audio layered on top of the Rifftrax audio.

5. Next, you will need to trim off the beginning of the Rifftrax audio so that it lines up with the movie audio. This may take a little testing, but Rifftrax give some pointers to figure out about when the audio should begin, and they provide time markers within the movie in which their DisembAudio voice will say things at the same time as the characters in the movie. Line up the movie audio with the Rifftrax audio by deleting from the beginning of the Rifftrax audio, and if you trim too much, you can insert empty space by clicking "Generate" and then "Silence." Play with it a little bit and you'll get the hang of it. Tip: Many of Audacity's controls are disabled when the audio is paused, so if it appears as though you are being blocked from performing a function, try clicking the Stop button.

6. It isn't necessary with all movies, but if you have a hard time hearing the Rifftrax track over the movie, you may need to adjust the level of the movie audio. To do so, adjust the Gain slider (the one directly beneath "Mute" and "Solo"). Typically, -2db to -5db is sufficient. Hint: James Cameron and Michael Bay movies are

extraordinarily loud, so they need to be adjusted more than most. **Bonus:** See the comment below from "senorbanana" for auto ducking the movie audio! This is probably going to be a better option than universally quieting the movie audio.

7. Once the audio is lined up and adjusted, export an MP3 file by clicking "File" and then "Export."

4. Put the audio and video back together using MKVToolnix

Now it's time to put the audio and video files back together again. You'll need MKVToolnix, which is available here. I use the pre-built binaries for Mac OS that are here.

1. Open MKVToolnix, click the "add" button and select the mpg video file that you created in part 1. Repeat this step to add the mixed audio file and the subtitle track.

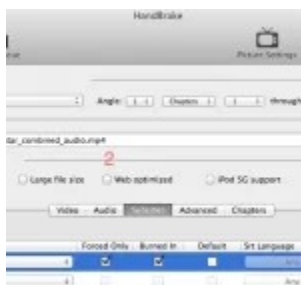2. Change the "Output filename" if you'd like and click "Start muxing."

5. Convert the resulting MKV file to MP4 using HandBrake

Now for the final necessary part — turn the combined MKV file into a format that any modern media player can deal with. If you don't already have HandBrake, [download and install it from here](#).

1. Open HandBrake and locate the combined MKV file (or click "File" and "Open Source"). Most of the default options will be acceptable, but feel free to explore the many, many configuration choices that are at your disposal.

2. Specifically for Avatar, we want to enable the forced subtitles, so click the "Subtitles button in the middle of the window. Select the appropriate subtitle track and check both "Forced Only" and "Burned In." Note: "Burned In" means that subtitles are always on, and since the AppleTV has no option to turn subtitles off and on, you can only turn the subtitles permanently on or off

when creating MP4 output. The "Forced Only" option makes it so that only the "forced" subtitles are included — that is, only the subtitles that would appear on the screen while watching the DVD whether or not you have the DVD subtitle track enabled. This step is not necessary for most movies, but you'll probably want it for Avatar and other movies that use forced subtitles.

3. When you're ready, click the "Start" button.

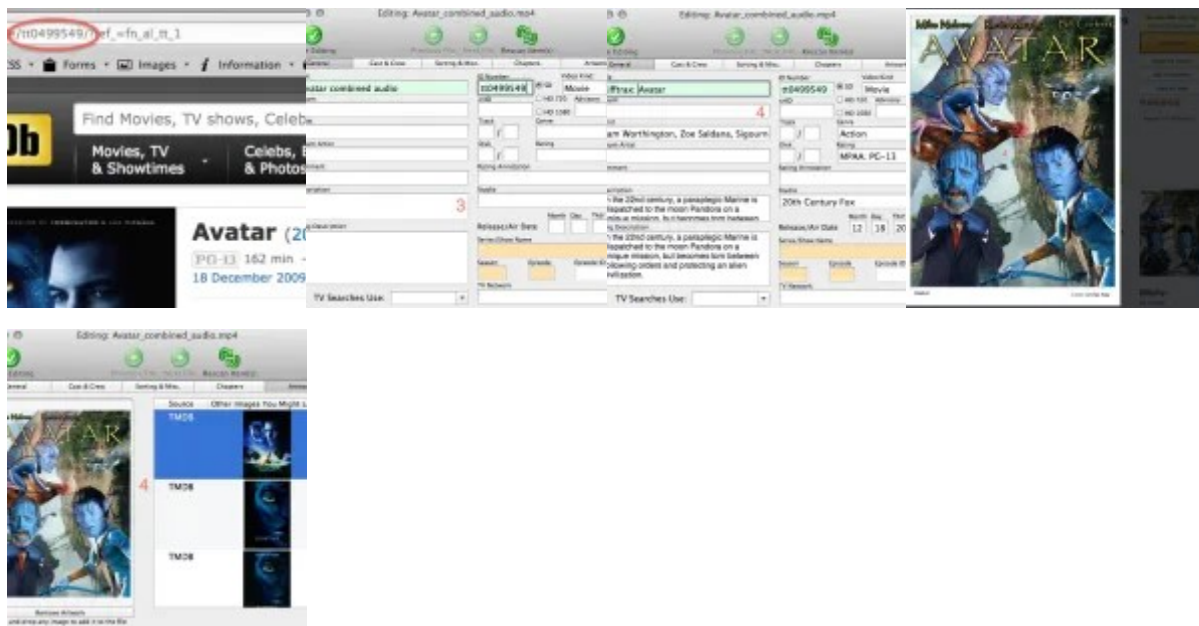## 6. (Optional) Add cover art and other info using iDentify

I like for all of the movies on my AppleTV to contain plot summaries, actor information and cover art. It makes the experience nicer. There are some programs available for free that allow you to manually set all of these tags within MP4 files, but I found one that does everything automatically. The small price has been well worth the many hours I would have spent getting this information into my movie files. The app is iDentify 2, and it is

available here (currently $9.99 USD).

1. Open iDentify and drag your output MP4 file into its window.

2. iDentify attempts to figure out what your movie's title is based on the file name, and if that file name matches an IMDb entry, all you will need to do is click the "Save Files" button. Since, for this example, I didn't name the file accordingly, I need to click the "Edit Tags" button.

3. The easiest way to get the proper tags imported is to supply the IMDb identification number, so I open IMDb.com, search for Avatar, and copy the identifier. In this case, it's "tt0499549." Back in iDentify, paste the IMDb identifier into the "ID Number" box and click "Rescan Item(s)." Notice that the lookup now succeeds and all of the green checkmarks indicate that the information was found and inserted.

4. For Rifftrax, I like to slightly modify the information retrieved from IMDb, so click the "Edit Tags" button again. Once there, I change the title to begin with "Rifftrax:" so that all of my Rifftrax titles are together in the AppleTV menu. I also like to replace the cover art with an image supplied by Rifftrax, so click the "Artwork" button. Go to rifftrax.com, locate the movie you are

preparing, click the thumbnail image of the Rifftrax cover art (on the right side of the screen), and drag the larger image into the Cover Art preview of iDentify.

5. That should be it, so click "Done Editing" and then "Save Files."

Copy the end result into an iTunes library that is shared by your Apple TV, and you're done. Now you can put that DVD back in the closet, archive your downloaded Rifftrax audio file, and enjoy the full Rifftrax experience on your AppleTV or media player of choice at any time without the hassle of trying to keep everything manually synchronized.