

# **GIFwatcher 1.0**

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GIFwatcher is shareware. If you use it, please send \$15 to:

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Suitcase is a trademark of Software Supply.

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Stuffit is...well, I don't think it's a trademark, but it is a nice program by Raymond Lau.

I don't think White Knight is a trademark of the Freesoft Company either, but I'm trying to cover my bases. (Like someone's really going to sue me if I don't say all of this, anyway!)

## **Introduction**

GIFwatcher is a Macintosh desk accessory for viewing GIF files. It is especially designed for viewing GIF files during download. Using GIFwatcher, you can see what type of image you're getting before your download has been completed. You not only get something to watch during downloading, but you get the opportunity to cancel a download if you don't like what you see — saving time, download credit, and connect charges.

You can install GIFwatcher with the Font/DA Mover, or a program like Suitcase. For GIFwatcher to work, your communication software must allow time for background tasks while it receives files. I have tested GIFwatcher with White Knight 11.04, with which it works quite well. As long as your "apple" menu still is accessible during file reception, GIFwatcher should function properly.

Since GIFwatcher is meant to operate as a background task, it grabs just a little of the file it's reading periodically for display. Even so, it's fast enough to keep up with a 2400 bps file transfer without slowing things down noticeably. GIFwatcher can be used to display completed GIF files as well, but this is not its forte. Other software, such as Giffer by Steve Blackstock and Vision Lab by John Raymonds are much faster GIF converters, by a factor of 2-4. What GIFwatcher can do that I haven't seen other programs do is display GIF images on a monochrome Macintosh. Dithered black and white images are, of course, a far cry from full color pictures, but if it's all you can get, it's better than nothing!

To use GIFwatcher, follow the ordinary procedure for downloading a file with your communication software. Pay attention to what file the incoming data is being stored in. If your software is writing into a file named “Untitled” for instance, this is the file you will want to open. If you are using White Knight like I am, X-modem transfers that aren’t in MacBinary format do go to “Untitled”, to be renamed after the transfer is complete. A Z-modem transfer, however, starts as “Untitled” but is soon renamed — you should wait the few seconds that it takes for the renaming before using GIFwatcher to examine the file.

Once the file transfer is going — and you know where it is going — bring up GIFwatcher just like any other DA. Choose **Open GIF...** from the GIFwatcher menu. Select the file to which your communication software is writing from the file dialog, and the image should start to appear. The top of the GIFwatcher window will show you whether or not the file is a valid GIF file, and if so it will display such file information as the dimensions of the image and number of colors.

Pet peeve: If a GIF file has been “compressed” into into a Stuffit archive, or a .ZIP or .ARC file, it won’t be readable. The reason I put the word “compressed” in quotes is this: GIF files are already compressed — it’s an inherent part of the format. Using other compression techniques on GIF files is usually ineffective, and often makes the files actually grow in size by a small amount. So if anyone out there who runs a BBS reads this, please leave your GIFs in normal format, and undo any “compression” that may already have been done! Everyone else should upload GIFs without any “compression.”

Smaller pet peeve: There are a number of GIF files out there that claim 256 colors in their screen descriptor, but then state only 2 colors in their image descriptor. They all turn out to have 256 colors anyway... somebody’s GIF encoder isn’t working right.

Hardly even a peeve/more of a wish: It would be nice if more GIF files were encoded in the interlaced format — you can tell much sooner what the picture looks like!

## **Other features**

Well, now you should know how to do the most basic thing you’ll want to do — open and view a GIF file. Now I’ll explain a few other features...

Under the **Edit** menu, **Clear** will close any file currently being read, and clear GIFwatcher’s window. **Undo**, **Cut**, **Copy**, and **Paste** won’t do a thing. Everything else is under the **GIFwatcher** menu.

**Open GIF...** normally displays all 'TEXT', 'GIF ', and 'GIFf' type files. If you hold down the option key while selecting **Open GIF...**, all files types will be presented. The **Close GIF** item will terminate further display of any image that is being read.

**Best Color** causes your display's palette to be altered to matched the GIF colors as closely as possible. **Available Color** uses whatever colors happen to be around. If you have 24-bit color, the choice of color modes shouldn't make a difference. If you've only got 4-bit color, **Available Color** may actually look best, because GIF color tables aren't always well prioritized, so the "best" really isn't. For standard 8-bit color, however, **Best Color** generally will, like it says, look best. The reason for using **Available Color** instead is that this mode is less disruptive of your color environment. You can select **Best Color** after an image as been read, or while it is being read, using the **Available Color** mode — the colors will change. Going back to **Available Color** from **Best Color** won't have an immediate effect — the colors that are then available *are* the best colors for the current image, and until something else changes the palette, switching to Available Color won't effect the current image.

**Dithered B&W** serves two purposes. One is for showing images on monochrome systems that can't show them any other way. The second is for saving memory. Desk accessories can't always count on lots of memory being available, so if you get a "Not enough memory" message while trying to display an image in color, try **Dithered B&W** instead. Note: if an image has already be displayed as color, selecting **Dithered B&W** will only effect the next image read. Similarly, selecting either of the color modes will not convert a dithered image to color, but only change the way the next image is displayed.

The last item in the menu, **About GIFwatcher...** is a wonderful feature that lets you know that I wrote this software, slaving many hours over a hot computer. It also tries to guilt you into paying the shareware fee. (Is it working?)

### **Some parting comments**

I have yet to see a single GIF file that didn't have a global color map, that used a local color map, or had more that one image — even though all of these things are technically possible under GIF specifications. Consequently, GIFwatcher expects a global color map, doesn't like local color maps, and will only pay attention to the first image in a file. Unless I here many pleas to handle any or all of these features I probably won't do anything about it. (In fact, I still might not do anything about it!)

Please let me hear your comments, listen to your suggestions, and deposit your checks. This is the first release of GIFwatcher, so I imagine that there might even be a bug or two to be reported. I can be reached on GENie at K.SHETLINE or on Internet at kshetlin@hawk.u Lowell.edu.

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