

Cosmic Wimpout: History and Design

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According to Andrew Looney (in Lowder, James (ed.). Hobby Games: The 100 Best. Green Ronin Publishing, 2007. pp. 69–72. ISBN 978-1-932442-96-0), Cosmic Wimpout was designed by Cosmic Wimpout Clubhouse members (C3, Inc.) circa 1976. A 25th Anniversary tournament was held in Granby, Massachusetts, September 2000, further narrowing the game's origin to 1975 (image of detail from tournament T-shirt below).

In its earliest incarnation, the game was played with five standard pipped, six-sided dice, also called “cubes”. Four white dice were called “Common Cubes”. The fifth, having special game properties, was red for ease of distinction, and at some point in the game's development, a sun with shooting star was screened over its wild “Three” face, which became known as the “Sun-Star”.



(These and all uncredited images below provided by Chris Anderson.)

As the game's popularity grew, it was decided to design and make official sets for sale to the public. The manufacturer provided a number of sample sets before the final version was approved, and the original “Two” face used stars to reflect the shooting star on the Sun's face. This sample set's Common Cubes, believed to be made of Bakelite or Catalin, were considered too expensive:



(Photo courtesy of Maverick, one of Cosmic Wimpout's founders, whose efforts to help document the game's many variations are greatly appreciated.)

This manufacturer's sample did not have the desired visual appeal:



(Photo courtesy of Maverick.)

The approved design, with the translucent Sun Cube made of phenolic resin:



A less-common variant of the final first generation design:



(Photo courtesy of Maverick.)

This first generation of official cubes had flat surfaces, and the screened designs wore off easily because they were rolled far more frequently than dice in most games. This was a surprise to Massachusetts-based Athol Games, an early manufacturer of Cosmic Wimpout. Another quirk of the game was that the symbols were not uniformly placed on the cubes, as is traditionally done with six-sided dice. It seems that early manufacturers wanted to charge extra to organize the cubes so the sides added up to seven, but they were eventually convinced that Cosmic Wimpout is not a traditional game, and random cubes were realized.

An idea considered early on was to make a "magically heavy" set (weighing about two pounds) consisting of 2cm cubes using an Osmium-Tungsten alloy. The Common Cubes would have been gold-plated and the Sun platinum-plated. Each face was to have been recessed and blackened, with the Sun rendered in gold. This was never accomplished due to cost.

Around 1980, production of a second generation began through Koplow Games (actual manufacturer unknown), using cubes with slightly concave faces to prolong the life of the symbols. The "Two" face was changed from stars to a pair of Saturn-like planets with rings, and the colors varied, depending on the whim of the person placing the order.

Many color variations exist for this generation, some of which are shown here:



A group of the game's founders, known as the "Amorphic Cosmic Wimpout Traveling Circus", Travelers, Masters, Wizards, or Clowns, and whose slogan was **Watch out for us now because we will be run out of your town real soon**, went out promoting and teaching the game. Circus members, including Rider (the Ring Master), Argo, Kargo, and Maverick, called this yellow/green color combination "The Circus Set", and it became informally known as the "Marty Feldman Set", due to the feeling that one's eyes were bugging out from the lack of contrast in low lighting:



A very common color combination:



A good example of how the designs still wore off with use:



(Photo courtesy of Maverick.)

More color combinations:



(Photos courtesy of Maverick. The white Sun cubes were made for the black sets described below.)

One of the less-successful color variants was black with white Flaming Sun cubes. Playing the game with a black Sun cube added a challenge, due to the difficulty of keeping track of the sun.



(Photo courtesy of Maverick.)

Around 1990, a re-designed set was produced using a new process, a precursor to the injection-molded sets currently being distributed (in 2019/2020) by Koplou. The 5 and 10 faces returned to the stylized numerals of the first generation, and the “Three” face’s top triangle (also called “pyramids”) acquired an eye to resemble the Eye of Providence symbol. The symbols on this “Hot Foil” set were still not very durable (especially the Sun), due to the process used to apply the images. This was also known as the “kiwi” set, as some players saw the “Two” face as a pair of kiwifruits, rather than UFOs or spaceships.



The creators of Cosmic Wimpout were fans of the rock band The Grateful Dead and gave away tens of thousands of stickers at their concerts. The game became informally associated with the band as a result, and at one point they had to ask fans to stop putting stickers on their bus. The spaceship / flying saucer design used for this set’s “Two” face was modeled after the ceiling of the Oakland Coliseum Arena, renamed Oracle Arena in 2007 (<https://blog.sfgate.com/opinionshop/files/2013/06/OaklandArena-e1372109787737.jpg>), where the Grateful Dead played more concerts than at any other venue (<http://www.deadlists.com/deadlists/venues.asp?order=4>).

A very limited number of beautiful wood sets were handcrafted in Tibet based on this design:



(Photo courtesy of Maverick.)

Around 2004, the current design was introduced, using injection molding to (finally) prevent the symbols and numbers wearing off. The “Two” face changed once again, from flying saucers to a pair of crescents or “Half Moons”:





(Photo courtesy of Maverick.)



A set of five different-colored suns is called a Sun Set (think of the variant rule possibilities!):



(Photo courtesy of Maverick.)

Subsequently, the design changed again, with the Two becoming a pair of shooting stars with comet-like tails (as seen on the face of the Sun since the beginning) and subtle changes in the other symbols. This version is current in 2020:



Felt and cloth score “boards” have been produced since the late 1970s. These can be used as rolling surfaces and to mark scores with personalized tokens. Early packaging included cardboard tubes containing a felt board, dice, and rules:

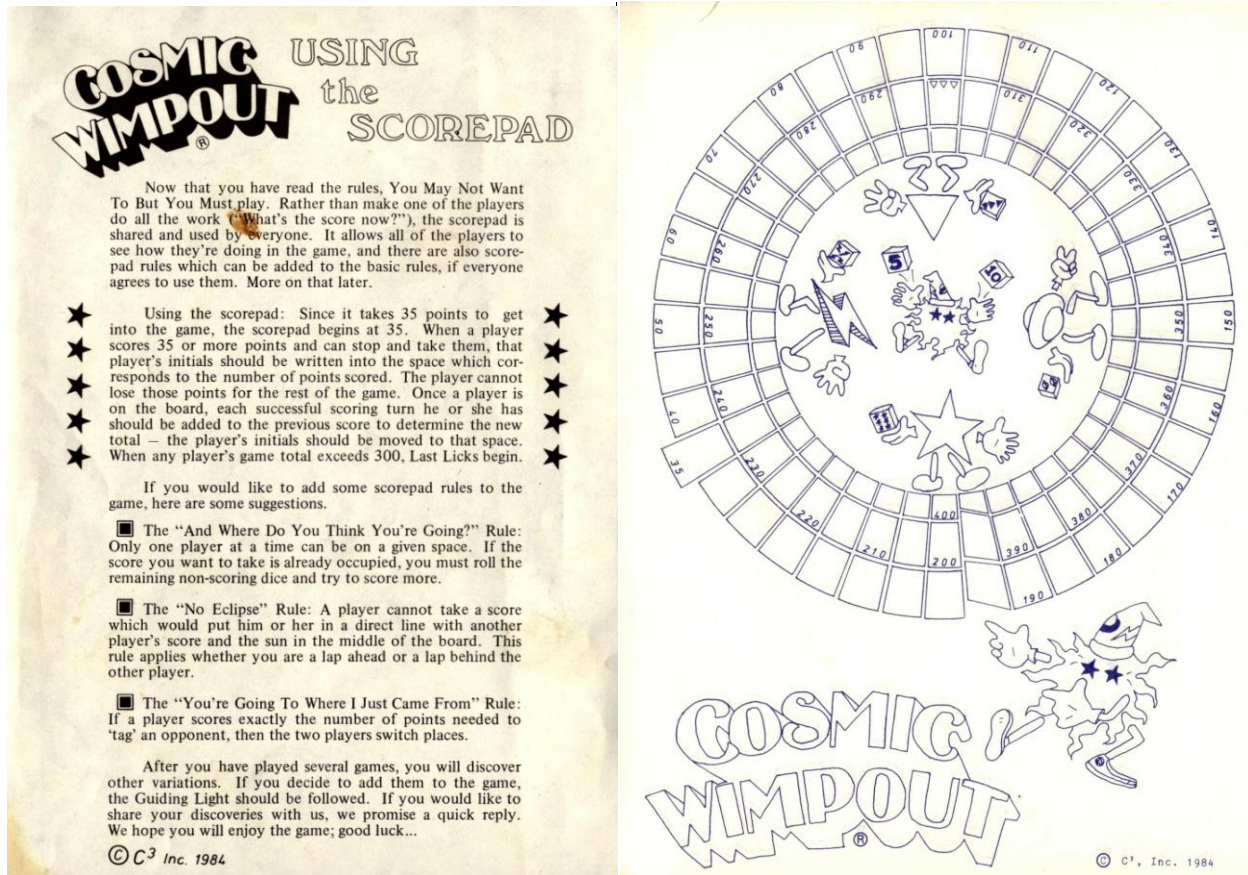


(Photos courtesy of Maverick.)

A selection of stickers from the 1980s and a scan of the box containing the red/black second generation set pictured above:



This set also included a scorepad, which required some explanation:



Other items have been made from "distressed" Cosmic Wimpout cubes, including cufflinks and tire valve covers.

Detailed rules for Cosmic Wimpout can be found at the official site, <https://cosmicwimpout.com/>, where you can also purchase cloth score boards, dice, stickers, ballcaps, keyfobs and other items.

Many thanks to "Maverick" of Cosmic Wimpout for taking the time to search for variants, photographing the rare ones, and for providing much of the detailed information in this compilation.