

# Manifest Destiny: A Player's Introduction

by Allen Doum

In Manifest Destiny each of from 3-to-5 players runs a *mercantile empire* during three different *Eras*, starting on the east coast of North America, then expanding across the continent and eventually around the world. The board is divided into territories, and the territories are grouped into regions. The size of your empire determines your Profit, which is the income you receive each turn. This is a *type* of "Card Driven" game, but there is a twist...

## This Time the Cards Drive You

In most "Card Driven" games, the cards a player holds in his hand represent opportunities to perform a variety of actions. In **Manifest Destiny**, it is instead the actions you take that will give you the opportunities to play cards from your hand. For instance, many of the cards can be used to trigger a Product Payout. When this happens, all of the players who possess territories that have that particular product will be paid based on the number of those territories they control. So there will always be the temptation to hold the card until you control more of the territories, thus increasing your Payout.

But there is a price to pay for delay. Players start with a hand of three cards, and will gain at least one more each turn. At the end of each Card Play phase, you lose \$5 in Profit for each card over three that you haven't played. This leads to a *card vise* situation where you neither want to play a card nor hold on to it. Playing the card as an event can ease such a situation. All cards have events, and most give the player some benefit, or perhaps cause some discomfort to an opponent. Some events are not based on who played the card, but on some other determining factor, which could even hurt the current player. For example: *World War*, which targets the players leading in VPs, Profit, and Cash on Hand. That could be you! Another example: *Wright Brothers* gives a substantial discount on the 'Airplanes' Progression, but will be wasted if the player is not yet ready to purchase Airplanes. Other cards may require a turn or two to *set up* to gain any benefit. All cards are marked with the specific Eras in which they can be played, which must be carefully monitored by all participants.

Each player also starts with one Destiny card, which adds another wrinkle to game play. These cards trigger both an

would like to benefit from both. But only one Destiny card can be played on a turn. If another player plays one first, the other players will just have to wait.

Cards are also the way that the turn order is decided. Each card is numbered, and the player who plays the highest card will choose their turn sequence for the next turn. When you are trying to play a Destiny card, as well as several other reasons, this can obviously be critical. So sometimes you will want to play a card, simply because it has a high number, even if it is not otherwise helpful to you.

The net effect of all this is that a player's short term goals will be defined by the cards in his hand. And **MD** requires you to keep an eye on the short term. For the long term you have to...

## Buy Your Way to Victory

Victory Points are not earned by holding territory, but by the gaining of Progressions and Breakthroughs. Each not only gains a player VPs, but also changes the rules to that player's advantage. This is the heart of the game.

The 15 Progressions are all available to every player (well, as soon as they can afford them). Each of five categories contains three Progressions that must be bought in sequence (clearly diagramed on the player mats). Because some cards give substantial discounts on certain Progressions, a player will occasionally be distracted from their long-term goals, so be careful.

The first strategic choice is *horizontal vs. vertical* Progressions. There

are advantages to buying horizontally such as a Profit bonus when a row is complete and discounts on the more advanced Progressions are deeper down in the deck. The disadvantage of horizontal is that the effects of the third row Progressions are quite powerful, and the game may end before you can take advantage of them.

If you do go vertical, the category you choose will set your strategy. (I assume here that everyone will get the entire first row.) For example, the 'Transportation' category will allow you to spread your empire into rich areas before the other players can get there. 'Steamships' (row two) opens up South America, Hawaii, and Alaska, as well as allowing access to all coastal territories. 'Airplanes' (row three) open up the world. The downside of 'Transportation' is that it is the most expensive category, although big discounts may later come up. 'Government' is the least expensive category, and has the most discounts. (*Hint: this is a great choice if you are trying to catch up.*) There is also a recurring event, *Racial Unrest*, which Government protects you from. On the other hand, there are events that can penalize players who specialize in certain areas. For example, *Business or Pleasure?* will harm players focusing on 'Telecommunications' or 'Leisure'. It's not easy filling Donald Trump's shoes.


Players must purchase Pioneers (which have both a monetary and opportunity cost) or be lucky enough to get them for free from events, in order to *research* Breakthroughs. The research is conducted by rolling dice, and all of the players can be competing for the same Breakthrough. This adds to the tension inherent in the game.

There are four Breakthroughs ('Turnpike', 'Mechanization', 'Storytelling', and 'Patriotism') available during Era One. In a five-player game, there will be a race for these. As you would imagine, the four Breakthroughs offer certain advantages to those who possess them. It is possible, of course, to forgo the expense of Pioneers and try to win the game without Breakthroughs. I have seen this attempted, but it is difficult to do.

In addition to the above, you will also have to buy the Tokens you will use to...

### Manifest Destiny

**Published:** 2005  
**Game Design:** Bill Crenshaw  
**Game Developer:** Ken Gutermuth  
**Art Director:** Rodger B. MacGowan  
**Map & Cards:** Mark Simonitch

<b>TRANSPORTATION</b> Railroads \$40 	<b>GOVERNMENT</b> Westward Ho \$25 	<b>BREAKTHROUGH</b> Patriotism 1 VP 
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**Contents:** 64 Playing Cards; 228 wooden blocks; One 22x34 inch Map; Rule & Reference books; Player Aid Cards & Mats; Bookcase Box  
**Playing Time:** 3-to-4 hours  
**Age:** 12+ Years and up  
**Players:** 3-5

# Manifest Destiny: Introduction

## Expand your Empire

If players begin this game with an idea of *conquering an empire* in the traditional sense, they will be starting down the road to defeat. This is mainly due to fact a geographic empire not only has no advantage over a scattered one, but can actually be brought down by events more easily. Players will initially expand from their one *Home* territory, into the vast empty board, watching their Profit rise. Each territory is marked with the number of tokens needed to claim it. Purchases of Pioneers, Cities and extra Cards are also made using these tokens.

When the board isn't empty anymore, or even before, players will eventually try to expand into other player's empires. This costs the same number of tokens, but requires the "attacker" to win a competition roll. The basic roll is for the attacker to roll two dice and the defender one. If the highest die of the attack is higher than that of the defender, the attacker takes the territory. That gives the attacker about a 58% chance of success. If he fails, he can try again (until he runs out of tokens).

If there is a city in the territory, it costs one extra token to attack, and the defender gets to roll an extra die. This reduces the attacker's success probability to 47%. Virtually all additional modifications from Progressions, Breakthroughs, and cards help the attacker. With the 'Telephone' Progression, for instance, the attacker gains an extra die roll. This improves his success rate to 66%. Other effects may include rerolls, reduced costs, and having the attacker win ties.

This makes Manifest Destiny a remarkably fluid game. If another player wants one of your territories, he is likely to get it. And, of course, you are likely to get it back. But should you want to? If you assume that he wants it because he is setting up a payout, and you knock him out of those territories, he will not play the card, or instead play it as an event. If you leave him with the payout, as long as you hold some of those territories, you will collect too. If you use your effort to set up the payouts on *your* cards instead, you will benefit twice. (All of this live-and-let-live stuff has a limit if he is leading in the game, of course.)

The final nail in the coffin to the geographic empire is *The Depression*. This Era 3 card will devastate an entire region, leaving each player with only one territory in it. If you are the (perceived) leader, all of the other players will see you as the obvious

target. If you are the only player in a region, only you will suffer.

Economic concentrations make more sense, since you may get a big payout. There are dangers here as well. *Trustbusters*, an Era 2 Destiny card, allows players to select two products, and every player who has more than two of them, has to "divest" down to two, actually giving them to their opponents.

So a player's empire is just a source of income. Income that is used to buy the Progressions and Breakthroughs that provide the VPs, until...

## History and the Game Ends

The game ends in one of two ways. The deck of cards, which has been triggering the change of Eras, runs out, giving players one final chance to get Progressions and Breakthroughs. Or a player gets to 30 VPs, and the game ends at the end of the current phase. That 30 point total neatly breaks down into ten groups of three. Progressions are worth 1, 2, and 3 VPs in each category. Since players are likely to buy all of rows one and two, each Progression from row three that the player doesn't buy, means that three points must be gained elsewhere. Breakthroughs are likewise worth 1, 2, or 3 VPs. Gain 6 points there and you save the need for two Progressions. There is only one additional source of VPs: the player with the most cities gets 2 points. Not enough to make up for a missing Progression, but helpful nonetheless. Of course, if the game ends because the cards run out, it's every VP for itself. And now that you know how you can win you can...

## Get Started on the Path to Victory

As the game begins, the players must all make a rather complex decision. Each player has \$60 in his corporate pocket. Not only will this be the only money available for Progressions and Tokens (and therefore Pioneers and Cities) for the first turn, but players also have to bid for the right to choose their Home territory. The high bidder also gets first choice of player order for turn one. There is a three-page strategy article in the Reference book, and over half of it is about the first turn choices, for good reason. The gist of the article is:

1. Look at your cards.

In a five-player game there are four Destiny cards that can only be played in Era 1. While planning your opening bid, the restrictions on Destiny cards may be

important consideration, but they are not the only ones. Your other cards will have events, potential payouts, or discounts on Progressions. From this you will have to decide how important location and turn order for turn one is to you. If it is not important, you can save money for Progressions or more tokens. Experience with the game will improve your decisions. Until you have that experience, I have another piece of advice for you...

2. Don't be a warmonger.

Getting involved in an immediate conflict with another player in the East doesn't make sense. The game is called Manifest Destiny, and it is initially about going West. If for instance, Virginia tries to cut off Pennsylvania on turn one, either it won't work because Pennsylvania will have used the money he saved on the bidding to buy 'Telegraph' (or 'Railroads') and simply move past Virginia to the West, or he will have started a costly spat that the others players will gladly watch as *they* go West. Most of the territories that are used in the attempt to box in another player cost two tokens to expand into, and initially it is better to expand into twice as many territories by going after land (generally to the West) that only costs one token. Even the nasty cards, like *Revolutionary War*, are better saved to remove another player's foothold in the West instead of harassing them in the East. No one should mind if the Quebec player takes New England or New York on the first turn to establish himself in the US before the actual *Manifest Destiny* card is played. But both of those territories cost two of his tokens, and he can't cross the Great Lakes on turn one. With 'Telegraph', 'Railroads' or *Remember the Alamo!* the Quebec player has better choices than to get in a scrap.

With only four turns in which to play Era 1 cards, you will need to have a plan and be flexible enough to handle some surprises. Not all of the surprises are bad. Other players may play cards giving you a payout, or that offer all players a discount. Sometimes it is better to play a card early for no effect than to wait until other players will benefit.

I have tried in this article to offer some of the design's flavor, and also give some insight that will get you through your first game of **Manifest Destiny**. My best advice? This should come as no surprise to the players of "Card Driven" games...

3. Learn the cards...and have fun!