

A Guide to Running Demos of Avalanche Press Games

by Doug McNair

As someone who's been running demos of Avalanche Press games since the year 2000, I've gained a lot of insight into what grabs the attention of customers who may not have experienced our games before. I'd like to share some of those insights to help you introduce customers to our games in a way that will spark interest and boost sales.

Step One: Overcome Unfamiliarity

The thirty- and forty-something generation of gamers is familiar with the type of games we publish, because they grew up playing similar games from companies like Avalon Hill and SPI. Unfortunately, many of those games had huge rulebooks and took days to play. So, even folks who enjoy our kind of game may be wary of picking them up today because they think they'll never have time to learn or play them. But Avalanche Press' mission is to take historical wargaming into the 21st Century by publishing games for people with lives. Most of our rulebooks are no more than 16 pages long, and we provide one-page rules summaries that give players all they need to start playing in just 5 minutes. Best of all, our games are fast-paced and can be played in a few hours or less. So, by demoing our games for customers and handing out our "5-Minute Rules," you can dispel the perception among the older crowd that boxed wargames are hard to learn and take forever to play.

As for the younger generation, most of them grew up on roleplaying and collectible card games, so the main obstacle to overcome with them is simple unfamiliarity. This is easy to do since most of them have played *Risk* and *Axis and Allies*. You can tell them that *Soldier Kings* is a game of worldwide conflict just like *Risk*, but that it's about a real war and not a fake one. *Defiant Russia*, *Red Vengeance* and *Second World War at Sea* are just more realistic versions of what happens in *Axis and Allies*, while *Rome at War* has lots of crossover appeal for roleplayers.

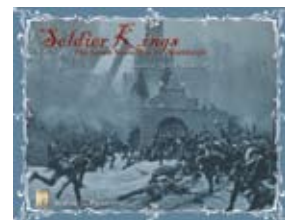


Step Two: Get Them Rolling Lots of Dice

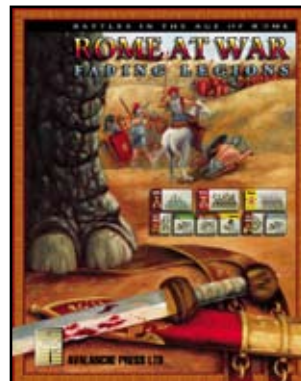
Once you've got people at the demo table, haul out a bucket of six-sided dice and start passing out handfuls, saying "Here, you'll need these." Most Avalanche Press games use the "roll for sixes" combat system, and let players roll five, ten, fifteen or more dice each time they attack. Gamers really like this, and the simple act of rolling lots of dice and counting the sixes helps break the ice and kills any perception that the game is complex. To get them rolling the dice quickly, you'll want to run one of the battle scenarios from our *Great War at Sea* or *Second World War at Sea* games, or a small scenario from one of our *Rome at War* games, or one of the one-year scenarios from *Soldier Kings*, or a few turns from the start of *Defiant Russia*, *Red Vengeance* or, *Strange Defeat*. The *Panzer Grenadier* system doesn't use roll-for-sixes, but its tank vs. tank combat system is a breeze to learn and will have players blowing each other up in no time. *They Shall Not Pass* also doesn't use roll-for-sixes, but the Germans get to attack with overwhelming numbers so the customer will have no trouble pushing you out of the trenches in a hurry.

Suggestions for Demoing Specific Games

Soldier Kings: This is one of the best demo games, because it's multiplayer and allows up to eight customers to gang up on each other while using historically-accurate event cards to mess up each other's plans. And victory conditions are obvious: grab the land areas with the most gold pieces printed on them. Run any one-year Europe scenario, and tell Prussia and Britain that they're allied to each other, France and Austria that they're allied to each other, and the remaining countries that they can ally with whoever they wish or act as free agents.



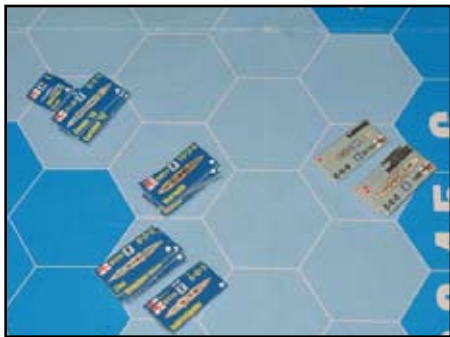
Rome at War: Gamers like lots of different toys, so pick a small scenario that has the widest possible variety of troop types (infantry, cavalry, archers and slingers, elephants, etc). If you're playing against the customer, let them play the Romans, since the Legions have more staying power



and will kill more of you than you kill of them. If customers are playing against each other, have them play a small scenario they can finish quickly, and give them the victory conditions in advance so they know that even if one side gets destroyed, it can still win if it inflicts enough losses on the enemy.

Great War at Sea & Second World War at Sea:

Pick a battle scenario where each side has a few powerful battleships plus a few fast destroyers that can go for torpedo runs on the battleships. If you're playing against the customer, make sure the customer has the ships with more hull boxes, more gunnery factors or heavier armor (so they'll have fun sinking you). If two customers are playing each other, make sure they're more or less evenly matched.



Defiant Russia, Red Vengeance, Strange Defeat and They Shall Not Pass:

These are good ones to run when it's you playing against one customer, or when you're introducing customers to our games for the first time. Play the Russians in *Defiant Russia*, the Germans in *Red Vengeance*, and the French in *Strange Defeat* and *They Shall Not Pass*. The objective for the customer in all these games is simple: Throw overwhelming numbers of troops at you, kill your units and push your lines back so he can take cities and forts. Just run the first few turns of the game so the customer can have fun rolling huge numbers of dice (or overrunning your trenches in TSNP), and forcing your lines back before bad weather and your reinforcements slow him down. Best selling point for these games with brand new customers: They're just \$19.99!



Panzer Grenadier: Once again it's all about the toys, so pick a scenario that has mainly tanks on each side, or one side with tanks and the other with lots of AT guns. Tank combat is simple: Roll two dice, add your anti-tank fire value, and subtract the target's armor value. If your modified roll is a 10 or more, you kill the tank! The introductory Airborne game sells for \$19.99 and the rest of the series games go up from there, and we publish new scenario books (\$17.99 - \$24.99) every month or two to keep customers interested in the system.



Step Three: Let Them Know There's Lots to Choose From

Once you've run the demo, let the customers know that each Avalanche Press game is part of a series, and that if they like what they played there's a large number of different games using the same game system from which to choose. Point them toward the games in the series and let them browse, and also let them know that we come out with new series games every month. Anything in a box is a "core module," and they can be played in any order. Make sure they get a copy of the 5-minute rules to keep the demo fresh in mind, and visit www.avalanche-press.com often to stay in the loop about upcoming games and to get assistance from our Retailer Support page.

If you have any further questions about demoing our games, please e-mail me directly at doug@avalanche-press.com. I'll be happy to help you promote our products. Thanks for your support!

Doug McNair
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