

BUILDING A NAVAL WARGAME TABLE

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What follows are some guidelines for building the 'perfect' gaming table. Of course, 'perfect' will always be what is perfect for you given your space, budget and carpentry talent. Each of these limitations has, at one time or another in my life, been the deciding factor for my game table construction projects. It is not my intent to provide detailed "plans" but rather to provide some basic ideas, which may prove useful in the design and construction of your perfect table.

As you read on, please keep in mind that as a very amateur carpenter, I have always opted to build the tables without professional assistance so it should be easy for most anyone with the proper tools to duplicate the results. Having previously built some of the more simple types of furniture for my home (bookcases, desks, entertainment centers, etc.) on numerous occasions, I already had most of the required power tools (circular saw, drill, sander, etc.) as well as the other common home workshop tools (hammer, staple gun, squares, screwdrivers, etc.).

I have constructed a number of gaming tables (both permanent and storable) and have discovered that by far the most sturdy and versatile design is a center pedestal-type. In this design, there are no wobbly legs and at a height of 30" (from floor to top of table), it's quite comfortable to sit at with most any dining room or office chair. I do prefer using the canvas and wood director chairs since they are reasonably-priced AND they can be stored easily as well.

Even tables with the sturdiest of legs tend to get accidentally kicked which is not only hard on the table, but can upset a battleline worse than the most forceful of destroyer attacks. Although one would have to assume a rather awkward position in order to kick the support for the pedestal table, in consideration of the fact that many games are often accompanied by consumption of alcohol, the pedestal table offers the additional protection from "accidental bumps. Laws of physics being what they are, a table of equal weight with more surface area in contact with the ground will always offer greater stability.

Of course, you'll probably want to have the largest table possible given the floor space you have available, but there are two additional factors (four if your table is not permanent) to consider which will also limit the size of your table:

1. Access to the center of the table

With a "waist-high" table height, the table should be no more than about six feet in width. This assumes a normal comfortable reach to be about 36". However, you can usually count on having gamers present who can easily reach 40" or more so widths of 80" or more can still be considered. Also, if you plan to sit at the table, a 30" height (floor to table surface) is recommended.

2. Maximum available width of cover material

Of course, this all depends on what cover material you want for your table. Most indoor/outdoor carpeting is available in widths of eight to ten feet or more, however, it is often difficult to find upholstery vinyl in excess of 80" widths. Also, remember to allow a few inches extra width so that the material can be folded over the side and stapled.

3. Ease of handling table pieces (if a storable table is needed)

Nothing makes a table more storable than easy setup and takedown, especially if the table is designed so that one person can accomplish the task. The two considerations here are the

weight and size of the individual piece. Even a large table top can be handled by a single person if the construction materials are light enough. Although my table top is 6.5' x 9.5' and somewhat awkward to handle due to its weight and sheer size, it is still reasonably light and with the addition of removable casters on one side, make it possible for one person to maneuver it into place.

4. Size of storage area

Obviously you will want your table to fit in the intended storage area. Since my table is stored against the rear wall of the garage, the width couldn't be more than about 7-1/2 feet (so the table would still clear the lighting and other ceiling fixtures when placed on its side and moved to the wall).

CONSTRUCTING THE TABLE

The table top itself extends out approximately 18 to 24 inches on all sides from a center pedestal which is approximately the same dimensions as the table top, less the 18 to 24 inches on both sides and ends. For example, a 6-1/2' (78") x 9-1/2' (114") table top would be mounted on a 38" x 74" pedestal, allowing 20" of overhang on each of the four sides. This usually offers sufficient legroom and the pedestal can be a frame as opposed to a solid piece. Of course, if you intend a permanent table, then the pedestal can be made as heavy as you like, incorporating shelving for storage, side panels, etc.

In my case, I just didn't have room even for a pedestal that was over 3' x 6' in my garage, so I constructed two identical pedestals which measure approximately 24" x 36" each. When spaced about 18" apart beneath the table top, they allow for a 24" overhang on all sides and can be stacked on top of one another for storage. Thus, the table top is stored against the back wall of the garage (shortening the garage by about 7" and the two stacked pedestals occupy a 30" x 30" section in a corner (and make some great temporary storage shelves!).

The pedestal itself is nothing more than four legs with a frame around both the top and bottom portions (2x4 frame around the top and a 2x6 frame around the bottom. These frames can be nailed (instead of bolted) to the legs, but it should be remembered that the more solid the pedestal, the more stable the table so you may want to consider other ways to strengthen the pedestal (such as flat corner braces, side panels, L-braces, etc.). The resulting pedestal shouldn't wobble in any direction when weight is applied.

If your table needs to be bigger than 4'x 8', and it probably does, then you will need to decide how you're going to deal with the seams created by the joints between the pieces of the plywood (or whatever other material you use for the table top). Although this is more an aesthetic or cosmetic consideration, it can become an issue if you are planning to use range estimation (and someone knows that that first seam showing through is exactly 20" from the edge of the table). However, filling and sanding the seams will take care of most of the problem and, if not, then a layer of indoor/outdoor carpet placed beneath the vinyl will ensure that no seam shows through. I prefer using blue or black upholstery vinyl as the final covering. I used carpeting on my first table and found that it often "snags" miniatures when you attempt to slide them during movement. The vinyl is easily obtainable in 80" widths from most any upholstery shop but this can be a fairly expensive proposition if you can't find a remnant piece that is long enough. I generally fold the vinyl over and staple it to the side of the table frame, then tack some 1.5" or 2" wide lattice around the entire table to hide it. Sanding and staining the visible wood portion of the frame also adds a really nice touch, but it can be painted instead just as easily.

If you're constructing a storable table, placing some three-wheel "furniture mover" casters along one side certainly helps maneuvering the top into place and can make it possible for one person to handle the setup and takedown. I'm using three casters which are bolted in place using wing nuts so they can be easily removed when the table is set up.

NOTES:

1. A lighter alternative to plywood for the table top is Lauan panels; same size but much more refined (in surface texture, size and thickness) than plywood and often provide smoother seams (but may require more cross-bracing).
 2. For most of the frame construction, nails are appropriate. However, bolts, washers, lock washers and nuts (or wingnuts) should always be considered for constructing the pedestal and fastening the table top to the pedestal since these will provide your table with greater stability.
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PHOTOGRAPHS AND DRAWINGS



Game table ready for a game of SEEKRIEG.



Game table underside and pedestals (note that table is resting on casters and can be easily maneuvered for storage).

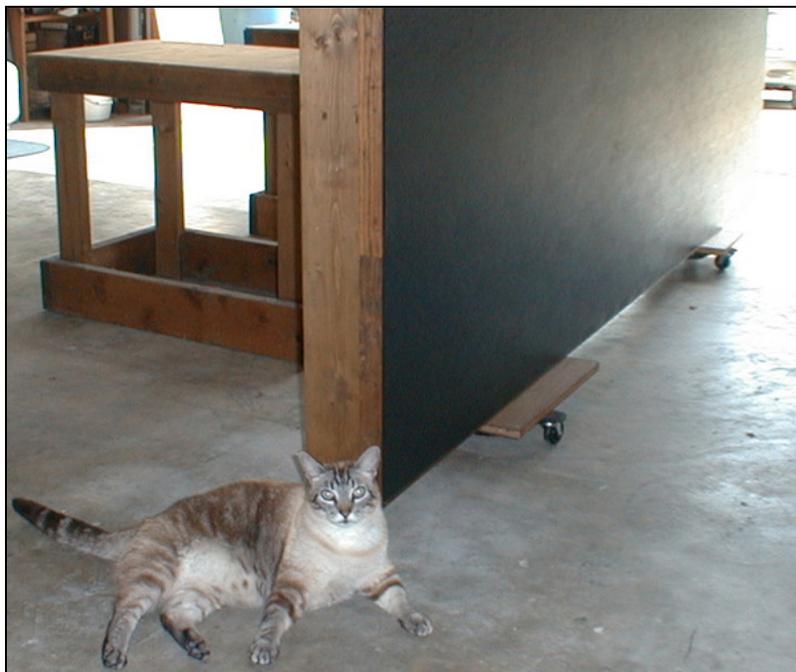


Photo of table top mounted on casters for moving. The cat (Admiral Halsey) is shown for scale and because he wouldn't move.



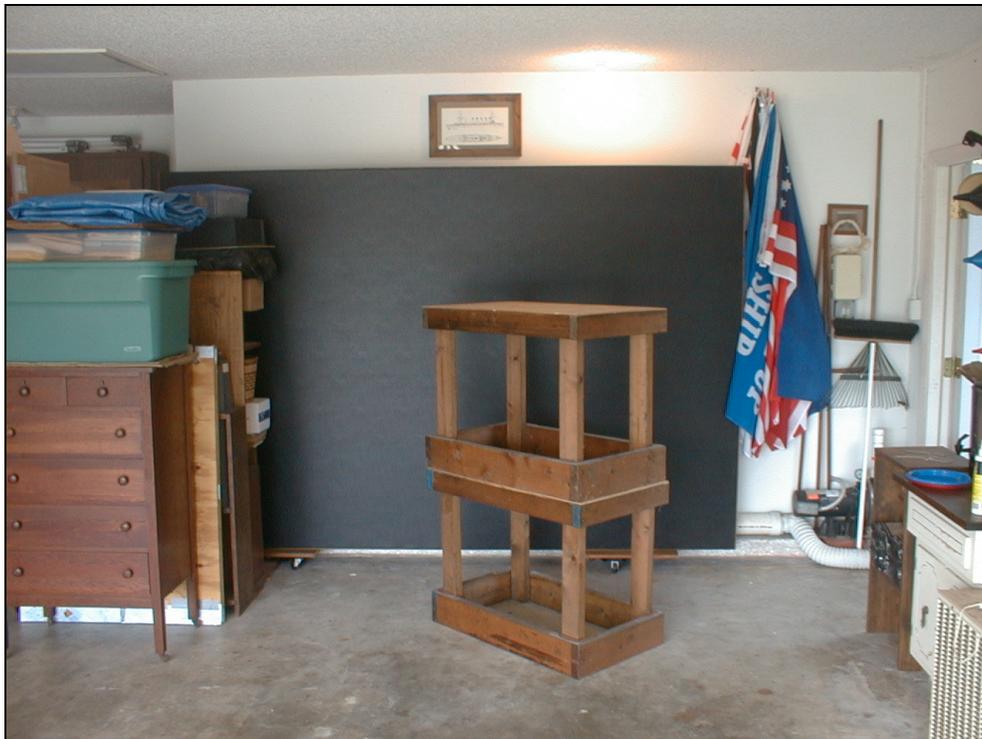
Photo of game table in use



Closer view of table ready for action - ship models and beer optional but the beer is highly recommended.



Close-up showing the tri-wheel caster attachments



Storing the table and pedestals at the back of the garage

PEDESTAL WARGAME TABLE
OVERHEAD VIEW OF FRAMING

DESIGNED BY:
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VERSION:
2.1 (9/25/99)

 2x6
 2x4

OVERALL DIMENSIONS
Length: 115"
Width: 78"

