

Between the Abyss and the Deep Blue Sea - The Elohi Frigate in Armada

Part 1 - The Elohi Class Frigate

Let's begin our deeper dive into the Elohi frigate by looking first at the fleet of Basilea – the most powerful, influential and advanced of all human factions. At least in their own eyes! The Basilean Navy is vital to the Hegemony; the faction's capital City of the Golden Horn is a port city that acts as one of the centres of trade and commerce for all of Pannithor. Without the ability to exercise security over these vital shipping lanes leading from the capital to all corners of the world, the Hegemony's power would be all but lost. And, for a nation reliant on the sea, a powerful navy is absolutely essential. The highest points value Basilean ship in the game's starter set – and the Basilean booster fleet boxed set – is the Elohi-class frigate. Fast, resilient and packing a real punch in her broadsides, the Elohi encapsulates the heavenly grace of the Basilean people in her sleek lines and evocative figurehead. But to explore the origins of this staple unit within the Basilean Fleet, we need to dive down into the basics and start with one simple question: what on earth is a frigate?

Middleweight Prize Fighter

The definition of the frigate has changed over the centuries. Today, in an age where multi-million pound warships need to fulfil many roles, a frigate is a multi-role warship that specialises in Anti-Submarine Warfare, defined by her primary role and not her size. Back in the age of sail, a frigate was a warship built for speed and agility. The term *warship* is key here; navies from all over the world employed a variety of sailing ships for fighting, but other types of ship such as the sloops and brigs we see in the Basilean fleet were not specifically warships; both a sloop and a brig were types of ship defined by their arrangement of masts and sails, not their size; a sloop could be much larger than a brig, and vice-versa. Brigs, sloops, cutters and brigantines were all used for trading and transport as well as fighting. But the frigate was a ship of war through and through.

So, with gun-bristling frigates of some 1,000 tonnes literally towering over some of the smaller trading ships, were frigates the sea-faring kings of warfare? Absolutely not. Taking the Royal Navy in the 18th and 19th Centuries as an example, warships were 'rated' depending on the number of guns they carried. The brigs and sloops we have briefly mentioned were too small to warrant a rate; frigates were either Sixth or Fifth rate depending on how many guns they sported but were defined as carrying their main armament on a single, continuous deck. However, Fourth all the way up to First rate warships were known as ships of the line, designed to fight in line of battle during major engagements with the enemy. Whilst a 40-gun, Fifth rate frigate possessed the punch to turn a small sloop into matchwood, the same could be said of a 100-gun First rate ship of the line when compared to the much smaller frigate.

Then if a frigate was so outmatched in battle by the heavy ships of the line, why bother with frigates at all? Frigates were fast and ideally suited to patrolling sea lanes, able to cover a greater amount of sea room than the slower ships of the line, and also at a fraction of the cost. An 800-man First Rate ship of the line was crippling expensive to put to sea when compared to a 200-man, fast Sixth Rate frigate. And, given that a Sixth Rate packed more than enough punch to deal with most pirates and privateers, it was a far better use of assets. Frigates formed the backbone of any fleet; in 1814, the

Royal Navy had 121 Fifth Rate and 25 Sixth Rate frigates in full commission, compared to 7 First Rate and 5 Second Rate ships of the line.

So that's a hugely superficial overview of a massive part of historical naval warfare. But we're here for fantasy wargames, not historical ones, so how does all of that fit in to Pannithor and the world of Armada?

Backbone of the Hegemon's Fleet

Whilst Armada currently presents only the Elohi as a frigate in the Basilean Navy, it is still logical to assume that Basilea employs other classes of frigates. Given the need to keep Basilea's sea lanes secure, it is these frigates that form the backbone of the Basilean Fleet. The novel 'Pious' describes the Basilean Fleet as having two major naval bases; the base at the City of the Golden Horn, which is home to the war fleet of the ships of the line such as the notorious Dictator-Class battleship, whereas the port of Thatraskos on the island of Keretia is the centre of operations for frigates and smaller ships employed in patrolling sea lanes and hunting pirates.

The Elohi itself can be compared in many ways to a historical lighter Fifth Rate frigate. The Elohi's primary armament is two dice of heavy weapons in each broadside, supported by a single die of light weapons and a single die of close quarter weapons. In terms of lore, the light and heavy weapons are simply different sizes of cannons; the two heavies representing the line of guns along each side of the ship whilst the light would more likely be smaller guns up on the fo'c'sle at the front of the ship. The close quarter weapons are reminiscent of historical carronades; a simplified and shorter type of cannon that was light, easy to operate and devastating at short range. But these weapons were named after the Carron Company in Scotland, so we certainly can't call them by that name in the world of Pannithor! Weapons like these were typically mounted higher up on the quarterdeck, as heavier cannons mounted higher up on warships could cause stability issues. The Elohi in game utilises the red turning template which, coupled with a movement of 5, gives the Basilean player the ability to move a decent amount of firepower across the board quickly and with agility – just like the Elohi's historical counterparts.

Looking at the miniature itself, one of the most eye-catching aspects of the Elohi is the figurehead; the angelic form carved or cast into the front of the ship. Anybody familiar with the Kings of War setting will know that one of the defining attributes of the Basileans is their faith and religious fervour. Literally the chosen people of the Shining Ones, their armies march to war certain in the knowledge that they go with their gods, and even sometimes accompanied by the Elohi – the angels of the Shining Ones from Mount Kolosu. The Elohi frigate continues this theme of faith. When the Elohi fly down to accompany the ships of the Basilean Fleet, flames emerge from the tips of the staffs carried by the Elohi figureheads on the bows of the frigates. Whilst all Basilean warships now carry religious artefacts or relics, it was the Elohi that was the first warship to be designed with a compartment in the ship to house a relic.

For the crews of the Elohi class vessels there is much pride in being part of the ship's company of a frigate, or at least as much as is possible in a navy which, like nearly all others, is crewed to a large extent by pressed sailors who are forced into servitude in more dangerous conditions, cramped living spaces and for a lower pay than their merchantmen counterparts. But for the crews of a frigate, that pay is at least all but guaranteed. Even for a nation as wealthy and mighty as Basilea,

putting fleets of Dictator-class battleships to sea on a regular basis is not logistically and financially possible so crews languish in ports on reduced pay whilst their comrades on the frigates continue to lead an often glamorous existence and catch the public eye with regular tales of derring do on the high seas. And in Pannithor's case, the low seas as well!

Part 2 - The Elohi Batch 2

In part 1 we chatted through the Basilean Elohi frigate – the lore, the historical inspiration and a little bit about its advantages on the tabletop. Now we will continue the exploration of the Elohi by looking at the next stage in its evolution: the Batch 2.

The Batch 2? Never heard of it! Then read on...

Evolving Seapower

Just as the real world has seen military technology and capability evolve over centuries, so too has the world of Pannithor. Basilea, like every other faction, must continually improve its arsenal if it is to keep pace with ally and foe alike. The Batch 2 Elohi is this next stage in the development of the Basilean frigate; it is described in the novel 'Pious' as being a little longer than the original Batch 1, fitted with a third mast, and carrying an increase in firepower with 36 guns. Could that actually work, such a plan being drafted in the dusty offices of the Basilean Admiralty? Let's briefly go back to the history books...

Classes of warships improving in 'batches' is a real-world concept. It's still ongoing today. The process sees lessons learned in service from utilising a warship being fed back to the boffins at the drawing boards, who then modify the plans to ensure that the next batch of ships constructed are an improvement over the last. In terms of frigates, the Royal Navy's Type 22 frigates that served up until 2011 were built in three batches, each growing in length compared to its predecessor to see an increase in over 50 feet and some 800 tonnes from first to last hull.

Does this translate across to the fine minds of the Basilean ship designing authorities? Well, increasing the overall dimensions of a ship in between batches is a well trodden path. Planting a third mast in a ship originally designed for two masts? Certainly tricky, but not impossible. Three masts, accompanied by the hilariously named 'spanker' on the rear, or mizzen mast is the standard configuration for a frigate, maximising on speed and agility. Basilea coming to this realisation then taking a proven war-fighting asset such as the Elohi and re-designing it to accommodate a third mast is logical.

The *Pious* is the second of the Batch 2 Elohis; the simpler and cheaper Batch 1s continue to be produced, however, and are far from being yesterday's news. With a ship now sporting a third mast and a slightly lengthened hull, what will the net effect be? First off, damage resilience. Deliberately aiming weapons at a ship's sails and rigging was a commonly accepted and utilised tactic, and now the Batch 2 has more redundancy built into this area – she can take more of a shoeing! She also has just a little more room and a bit more capacity to carry weight and crew. So let's stick some more guns on her.

The Batch 2 sees an increase up to 36 guns – a middle weight Fifth Rate, then, compared to the bottom end of the Fifth Rate in the Batch 1 which would probably be more comparable to a historical 32-gun frigate. But are all cannon equal? Certainly not. Not only did the size of cannon vary immensely, so too did a warship's *actual* weapon fit stray from its original design. A 36 gun warship could comfortably be retrofitted with extra firepower to take her to 40 guns. There's not really much of a rule of thumb here as there are so many variables in weapons sizes. This would certainly make sense in the Basilean Navy, in a nation who are far from achieving perfection in their own cannon and are in many ways are still reliant on arms trading with their dwarf neighbours. The Basilean fleet would therefore see variations in performance and firepower even from two ships that originally left the dockyards with identical characteristics. This neatly explains page 42 of the rulebook – 'Upgrades', or 'Pimp my Boat'.

Back to the Batch 2, does this leave her as a dangerously unstable platform based on pioneering technology? Nope! Any navy managed by half competent leaders (so, not orcs, then...) will put a newly designed ship through a series of sea trials before signing it off as able to operate in battle. The Batch 2 would have seen months if not years of tentative steps forward to trial every aspect of her handling before being released to some quarterdeck lunging, rum quaffing Basilean captain to take to war. But the Batch 2 can't just be... better than the Batch 1 with no adverse effects? In terms of capability in battle, it can be. But to acquire that capability a navy has to pay the price for it, and in game terms we would see this as a higher points cost. But more of that later! Let's see if we can build one of these things!

Amateur Conversion Hour!

Don't run away yet! If, like me, you love the hobby but are literally useless at the modelling and painting side, don't worry! I've got you covered. In this section we will look at how to take a standard Elohi miniature and convert it into a Batch 2. I'm sure I'm not the first person to look at these guides with trepidation as my skills aren't up to much, so rest assured that this is not a difficult mod. So, let's begin by making like a naval aviator and going to your haircare draw. You'll need a hairdryer...

The Batch 2 is, as we've said, a bit longer than the standard Elohi. This is a BIG conversion to carry out, so instead we will use smoke and mirrors to fool the human eye by giving the *impression* of being a bit longer. Use your hairdryer on a warm, but not hot, setting to warm up the figurehead part of your model. Only for a few seconds or you'll melt it. Then, with the material pliable, bend the torch forwards a little and then the flames back upward, as shown in the photo below.



You can cut the flames and glue them back on to make for a more clinical line without the bend at the top, but I decided against this as it makes the mini a little less durable. Next, file down the end of the Elohi's torch, the bit below the arm pit. Without doing this, it looks a little odd as there is a clear bend in the torch.

Next off, we ready ourselves for the three masts. Fill in the two existing holes with green stuff, putty; whatever works for you. Once dry, sand it down to be flush with the deck and then use a sharp knife to carve lines through it to align with the existing deck plank lines. Next, you'll need to drill three holes in for the new mast positions. I used a cheap multi-tool and it was pretty messy, but works well enough. Start with the front mast, ensuring clearance from the figurehead and its flames. Then go for the rear mast, again positioning the mast before making the mark so you can work out where it will go so as not to collide with that raised quarterdeck. Finally, measure the distance between the two holes and drill the final hole exactly half way between.





We're getting there! Next: the guns. You'll notice from the photos above that there are some new additions at the front of the ship. We said the Batch 2 would pack a bit more of a punch, and there are several different ways you could choose to represent this. I elected to go for a fo'c'sle battery, so some more guns at the front. The gold-plated solution here is to use the superbly detailed and perfectly scaled cannons from the sloop models, but if you can't get hold of these you might have to be more amateur. I made some gun carriages by cutting some scrap plastic into size and gluing them down. The guns were made by finding a thin bit of plastic of cylindrical proportions – in this case a 28mm panzerfaust. Admittedly, these look rather crude and awkward and benefited from some filing down of the cannon muzzles after this photo was taken, but keep in mind that they become nearly invisible once the masts are fitted so don't have to be great. That's my excuse, anyway.

That's sort of it, except for the sails. Like the guns, this is your boat and your game so do whatever you think looks cool. My first go utilised the two standard Elohi masts in the front and central position, and then a second bigger Elohi mast at the back, with its accompanying and enormous spanker! I enjoyed writing that. However, it just didn't look right.



You see, I'm one of those awful rivet counters – a historical wargamer who guffaws awkwardly at the slightest deviation from authenticity. And that focus is probably the main reason why I lose nearly every wargame I take part in. The overwhelming majority of square-rigged, three mast warships did not have the main and mizzen mast reaching up to an equal height. The mizzen mast was smaller; normally smaller than even the foremast. I tried snipping the top off the mizzen mast, but it wasn't enough. So I ripped the entire thing out, causing great damage to my amateur conversion works so that you don't have to, and replaced it with the mast and spanker from a Basilean gun brig to give this as my final photo:



99% of people won't notice the difference, but to me it means I can now sleep at night. The smaller spanker also helps with that illusion of increased size.

The Rules

Ok, we've talked about frigates and battles *ad nauseam*, so let's now cut to the chase and go straight into the rules to put this thing to sea:



Movement: the Batch 2 might be a little faster, maybe not. Not enough to warrant a significant change on the tabletop. Movement remains at 5.

Nerve: follows the same ratio for other Basilean ships, so increases to 30 to remain in line with...

Structure Points: Damage resilience increased. Up to 40.

Crew Strength: A slight increase in the crew size but not enough to warrant a change.

Manoeuvre: She's still a frigate. Might be marginally more agile, might be marginally less. Remains red.

Weapons: We've looked at an increase from 32 to 36 guns in terms of lore. That's about 10%, so adding 10% to the non-critical damage from a broadside means increasing light weapons from 1 to 2.

Special Rules: Retains Halo of Light, but due to this ship being rarer, only a single Batch 2 can be included in a force. Note that this does not count as a named ship so one of these may also be taken.

Points Cost: Increased by approximately 10% to cover the corresponding increase to SP, Nv and weapons.

So there we have it! The Elohi Batch 2 is presented as a minor improvement; a variation on a theme to give the Basilean player another option to put to sea. But, before you go to town on the conversion, you might want to try the Batch 2 out using a regular Elohi to represent it in game. But only once – if you continue to use the improvements without putting the time in the convert the mini, that makes you very much a scurvy dog! That's what a pirate would call you, at least. But they're relatively polite. A Basilean naval officer would call you something I simply cannot write here.

Thanks for reading!