



# Designer's Notes: GURPS Castle Falkenstein: The Ottoman Empire

## Drive to the East

by Phil Masters

I don't think that it's any great secret how *GURPS Castle Falkenstein: The Ottoman Empire* came to be. Back when the original *Castle Falkenstein* was first published by R. Talsorian Games, I approached them as a freelancer to discuss working on the line, and (no doubt partly because of my previous work on *GURPS Arabian Nights*), I landed the job of writing the necessary book on the major Middle Eastern power of that world. However, the company and the line hit problems and largely disappeared from public view before my work could see print. All that reached the public were a few sections of the book which I extracted and sold to *Pyramid* (with RTG's permission, of course).

Then, a couple of years later, Jim Cambias and I were commissioned to write *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*, which incorporated a few snippets from work which both of us had done on the old RTG game. In the wake of that, persuading Steve Jackson Games to provide a home for my old manuscript seemed only logical. That said, my commission from RTG had been for a 96-page book, whereas the minimum standard for *GURPS* volumes these days is of course 128; on the other hand, it was only logical to add comprehensive *GURPS* materials to this new version, and those along with a few added details easily made up the difference in word count. All this took a little time and effort, and I think that the results were worth it.

Thus it is that Steve Jackson Games are publishing the first completely new book for *Castle Falkenstein* in several years. However, I hope that it will be of use to more than players of that specific game or *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*. With the recent minor boom in Victorian- era and especially steampunk games (facilitated not least by the admirable *GURPS Steampunk*), a little attention to the fringes of the late Victorian world seems justified.

And things don't get much fringier than the 19th century Ottoman Empire. It was scary how much I *didn't* have to make up for this project. With mad sultans, scheming viziers, huge and pointless wars, revolting Bedouin, eccentric or aristocratic European travelers, bold (or crazed) railroad projects, bandits, spies, harem girls, and dervishes, this was definitely one of those places that was, as the saying goes, manufacturing more history than it could consume locally. Unfortunately, it kept trying to consume it anyway, as it held the outside world in disdain. Adding flying carpets, *Arabian Nights* djinn, and a cinematic sensibility to this supersaturated solution caused a lot of bizarre shapes to crystalize out. And it's a plain fact that GMs playing non- *Falkenstein* Victorian games will probably only need to subtract or modify a few specific elements to get something useful for themselves.

That said, being a relatively backward area, the Ottoman Empire tends to come out a little light on the Steampunk side of Fantastical Victoriana. Which is not to say that steampunk features can't be inserted with a little effort. By way of illustration, here's an idea which I never got around to developing for the book, though it arises logically enough from something in my text.

# The Ottoman Landfortress Program

The Prussians are pretty determined to keep their uncertain allies in Istanbul sweet, so when Sultan Abdul Aziz *kept* importuning them to sell him some of the giant war machines which he'd so admired on his visit to their country, they eventually felt that they had to do *something*. So their engineers dug out some experimental early-generation designs, scoured the rust off their armor, added working guns, dismantled them, shipped them down by rail a bit at a time, and presented the reassembled vehicles to Abdul Aziz with much pomp and ceremony.

(Backtracking a bit, the shipping process could be an opportunity for a scenario or two in itself. Did the Prussians bully the other states through which the components traveled into letting these weapons shipments pass, or did they just not mention the uses to which these "heavy machine parts" would be put? Could the Second Compact expose the secret and cause trouble, or maybe sneak aboard the cargo trains for a detailed examination of Prussian armored vehicle technology, or a little light sabotage? Or would it be better to just let the whole thing go, because quite frankly, even the Prussian engineers reckon that the whole idea will just end in tears *without* any help from third parties?)

So now the Ottomans have landfortresses -- three of them, which they've named the *Angora*, the *Izmir*, and the *Trebizond*. Of course, they don't have properly trained crews, and the few half-competent Turkish steam engineers are now run ragged between these and the Sultan's equally unhappy modern navy, but the neighbors and some semi-independent Arabian towns are still a little worried. The Bedouin nomad rebels of the desert, on the other hand, are laughing themselves silly. In the event of serious warfare involving the Ottoman fortresses, agents aiding their opponents should have some time to study, assess, and sabotage these things as they clatter towards the front. If our heroes feel that it's necessary to *aid* the Turks, on the other hand, their best bet might be to persuade them not to rely on their beloved war machines, or to keep them "in reserve" as a psychological weapon or a distraction for the enemy. Turkish PCs may see them as a symbol of national pride, or yet another indication of the need to reform the government.

## ***Spahi Class Light Landfortress (Castle Falkenstein Version)***

**Cost:** 56 days at 5,600c

**Size:** Large [120 wounds]

**Powered By:** Steam Engines

**Operation Time:** 6 Hours

**Controlled by:** A Complex and Intricate Arrangement of Levers and Metal Cables and a Captain's Wheel

**Moves with:** Clanking Metal Treads with lots of Gears and Driving Wheels

**Armed with:** Gatling Gun (x1), Artillery Guns (x2)

*Note:* The *Castle Falkenstein* supplement *Steam Age* notes that the time to build a machine calculated from the main rulebook's design system is in *days*, not weeks. As a first attempt at anything on these lines for many on the design team, this vehicle was treated as the product of someone with *Good* Tinkering. Also because of its experimental and imperfect design, it was treated as being built of iron (rather than steel or armor plate) when determining its wounds rating.

## ***Spahi Class Light Landfortress (GURPS Vehicles Version)***

(For explanations of the following design format, see *GURPS Steampunk* or other recent supplements.)

*Subassemblies:* Body +5, right top Turret +2, left top Turret +2, two Tracks +4.

*Power & Propulsion:* 300 kW Forced-Draft Steam Engine w/tracked drivetrain.

*Fuel:* 72 cf coal, 4 hours.

*Occupancy:* 2 NCS, 6 NS, 2 NCS [Tur]

*Cargo:* 20 cf

**Armor** F    **RL**   **B**    **T**    **U**

*Body:*    4/40 4/40 4/18 4/18 4/18

*Tur:*       4/20 4/20 4/20 4/20 4/20

*Trk:*       4/30 4/30 4/30 4/30 4/30

### **Weaponry**

2 x 105mm Naval Gun [Tur:F] (6 SAPLE each)

1 x 37mm Gatling [Bo:F] (200 solid)

### **Equipment**

*Body:* TL5 Navigation Instruments.

### **Statistics**

*Size:* 12.5'x10'x15.25'    *Payload:* 6,476 lbs.    *Lwt.:* 98,195 lbs.

*Volume:* 2,453 cf        *SizeMod:* +5            *Price:* \$14,261.81

*HT:* 10    *HP:* 2,275 [Body]    809 [Trk]    361 [Tur]

*gSpeed:* 25    *gAccel:* 2    *gDecel:* 20    *gMR:* 0.25    *gSR:* 6

Low GP. Off-Road Speed: 17 mph. Service Interval: 53 hours.

*Design Notes:* This vehicle was designed at TL5, with the addition of a very experimental tracked drivetrain with double weight (and hence volume and cost) for its power rating as compared to the TL6 standard. It uses a heavy structure and standard materials throughout. The total vehicle cost was divided by 10, in accordance with the rule on p.120 of *GURPS Castle Falkenstein*. The weapons installed in the design are detailed in *GURPS Vehicles*.

Each Light Landfortress in Ottoman service suffers from several bugs, as described on p.198-9 of *GURPS Vehicles*. The exact list can vary from vehicle to vehicle, at the GM's whim; *Restricted Visibility* (to the rear) is inherent in the design, and *Hangar Queen* is virtually mandatory (reducing the above service interval by 10-60%). A single vehicle might well also have *Complex Controls*, *Very Poor Handling*, and *Weak Brakes*. A more serious treatment of the idea could have fewer problems; the design concept isn't pointless, just poorly executed in this case.

Although the design can maintain top speed for only 4 hours, it can "cruise" at half power for twice that, achieving 17 mph on the road or 11 mph off; this is its normal "campaign speed" (if it can get the coal).

### **General Comments**

This design lacks any kind of internal cooling system (no "Environmental Control," in *GURPS* terms), which means that it goes from merely impractical to seriously hellish for the crew in very warm regions, at least unless they keep all the hatches open. However, "air conditioning" could be added in place of some cargo space (and keeping the cooling systems working would then become the first priority for the mechanics). In fact, given that the vehicle was only designed for short occupancy, the crew will need to get out and stretch their legs (as well as running maintenance) distressingly often.

The Light Landfortress is a simple box with two rectangular limited-rotation turrets on the front corners. Both turret cannons are can only fire in a 180 degree forward arc; yes, they do inevitably obstruct each other when attempting level fire to the sides. The vehicle also has a single rotary ("mechanical gatling") gun in a forward casemate mount (giving a 90 degree arc of fire). If

attacked from the rear, either the vehicle has to maneuver hastily, or the crew have to pop hatches and blaze away with sidearms. The design has carrying space for 12 shells for the main guns and 200 rounds for the gatling; these are carried in the main body, where the loaders work -- only the gunners are actually seated in the turrets. These vehicles often have to be supported by extensive baggage trains carrying ammunition as well as coal and sometimes water. Desert expeditions aren't really a practical idea.

Actually, on paper, the *Spahi* class has its virtues; it's relatively fast (even off-road), fairly hard to hurt, and intimidatingly noisy. Unfortunately, even aside from the fact that it will require logistical support which the Ottoman Empire just isn't equipped to provide, it's vulnerable to lucky *rifle* fire from the rear, and to courageous, well-handled artillery from any quarter. Even with its broad tracks, it might well get bogged down in soft sand, and its systems aren't "ruggedized." While it could roll right through any band of desert rebels or Balkan irregulars who were foolish enough to take it on in pitched battle on level ground, it's a natural victim for the sort of irregular warfare, sabotage, or cunning plans which are the natural province of PCs.

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