INTRODUCTION

"Wheel in the sky keeps on turning / Who knows when I'll be returning"
(performed by Journey)

The ancient Celts believed in the Wheel of Time, known as Taranis, upon which the course of history turned. History will repeat itself, come round again on the Wheel. Their pagan religion believed in cycles and when Christianity came to Celtic Britain, the Wheel was incorporated into the cross and they believed that Christ hung upon a Wheel, went to the Summer Lands, and would return as the wheel ran its course.

Arras, like Ypres and the Somme, was a place where men fought and died in long waterlogged ditches reinforced by crudely cut timbers. They rushed over the sides of their trenches into a mess churned up by shells and innumerable running feet into a dark porridge of mud and blood. Hundreds of thousands struggled over the slashing wounds carved into the earth, the soil poisoned by toxic gas and chemicals. Soldiers flopped down into craters only to look at grinning skulls that belonged to the men who tried and failed before them.

Above them, canvas and wood falcons fought and tore, raking each other with bullets while their bombs fell among the surging masses of men. Here was the cruelest month, Bloody April, Vimy Ridge, whatever you choose to call it.

As a boy, such thoughts were far from me. My introduction to World War One was through comic books, notably *Enemy Ace*. Rittmeister Hans von Hammer, the Hammer of Hell, soared through the skies in his red Fokker DR-1 Triplane, a knight of the air, saluting his victims as their aircraft spun down in flames. It was more realistic than other war comics of its era, as von Hammer was tormented by his kills as they haunted his dreams. His attempts at romance failed because his lips were cold as ice and behind his back his men called him a human killing machine. His only friend was a gray wolf of the Black Forest, an equally adept killing machine.

Now, the wheel has turned again, and the nightmares of those days have returned across the half-thawed fields of Ukraine, where men fight and die in trenches not unlike those of Arras. Now they deal death at a much longer range thanks to improved munitions, and seldom resort to bayonets. Above them buzz the drones, spying, always spying, pointing out targets for shells or rockets, or dropping their own payloads on the unfortunate enemy. There are no knights of the air here, only a mythical Ghost. After nearly a century of swift, mechanized warfare supported by swarms of aircraft, the wheel has turned again.

Welcome to the 2020 *Annual*. Our wheel has turned again to a conflict too large to be held in a regular issue. The flimsy biplanes of the last century once more take flight over the dark, leprous ground and its zig-zag lesions. Men, guns and tanks give voice to the rage of war. The forces of the Entente are attacking to drive the hated Hun from their lands as well as the skies above. Come with us now as thousands of soldiers try to beat death, even though it is—Against the Odds

Andy

TABLE OF
CONTENTS