Preface

In the “Introduction; or, How Star Wars Became Our Oldest Cultural Memory” of the first volume of *Critique of Fantasy*, the gambit of a contest between science fiction and fantasy was already sketched out. J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis aimed to separate the fantasy from the techno-science foregrounded in works by H.G. Wells, for example, and raise the fantasy or fairy-story to the power of an alternate adult literary genre. My study of the contest between the B-genres for ownership of the evolution of the social relation of art out of the condemned site of daydreaming required in the first place a reading apparatus, which the first volume derived from psychoanalytic theories of daydreaming’s relationship to conscious thought, the unconscious, and artistic production as well as from their prehistory, the philosophies of dreams, ghosts, willing and wishing.

Long ago, I followed Freud into Daniel Paul Schreber’s delusional system, which stages (in the trail of the Enlightenment assignment of the afterlife to outer space) the “science fantasy” of colonization of the other outer space, psychosis, for the survival of the species. By reading science fiction at the border to fantasy, I return to my long-term endopsychic excavation of the principal points of impact at once evacuating and restarting the connection with reality: mourning and the psychotic break.

The opening chapter of this volume picks up where we left off between a crypt and a datemark. We go once more around the block in mourning from the B-theory of evolution to the A-list of modernism, keeping our eyes on the price owed the dead. In
the chapters that follow immersion in speculative nonfiction gives way to reading closely across a breadth of fictional examples selected from the context of the contest. The novels comprising Lewis’s “Space Trilogy” and the short works of American science fiction that Gotthard Günther selected and elucidated for the 1952 German readership offer a readymade *Gestell* for steering through the contest eligibility requirements. Günther sees American science fiction propound a new mythic fairy tale that disbands the throwback metaphysics incarnated by the old fairy-story, the mainstay of the fantasy genre. In turn, Lewis identifies throughout his trilogy science fiction as the nihilistic force that Christian fantasy marches against as to war.

In addition to the vertical contrast, the volume traverses the horizontal expanse of association and influence around these and related works, those composed in fealty to the contest requirements as well as the hybrids that ply more overlaps than gaps between the facing genres. For this preface I’d like to take a look at the TV version of Michael Crichton’s *Westworld* because it hovers over all the above, the vertical and horizontal controls. The apparatus carried forward by the contest between B-genres has been pared down for the small screen. Science fiction works behind the scenes, perfecting the machinery and programming of the entertainment. However, science fiction no longer contributes psychotic aberration and delusion, but rather human error inspired by grief. In the foreground is the Wild West alone, which means the resort no longer reaches back through a concise history of the West illuminating a new-world and science-fictive perspective but provides instead fantasy and fantasying entertainment for the here and now of TV viewers, a modality that extends digitally through the Web.

Herobic or anti-heroic sojourns in the android underworlds retrench old-world metaphysics within a surfeit of copying references lifted from the open quarry of countless unnamed sources, which afford the fantasy enigmatic detail and texture. Before the exhaustion of the scriptwriters begins to tell, however, there is, in the first episode, a preoccupation on the part of the fiction-scientists with details taglined “reveries.” That they are assessed on the show as “memories” is prep work for the heroic sagas. They are peripheral details in the comportment of the androids, which
were not originally programmed but subsequently selected from the detritus that wasn’t deleted, and then added as “updates,” synonymous in the show with “mistakes.” Indeed, the “reveries” are only “memories” to the extent that they are indeed “mistakes.” Their basic programming permits the androids to perform outside time. Only the play left in their scripted programming for a measure of improvisation simulates being in time (which is already Siri’s lot). It is as “mistakes,” then, and “updates” that the “reveries” herald the science fantasy of evolution and its retrofit with heroic journeys through new underworlds.

Just the same, the TV fantasy show inhabits the frontier zone that the shoot-out between B-genres left behind upon the arrival of the digital relation. The problem the show addresses is that of the digital record. Nothing is ever really deleted. And even if there is too much to know for surveillance to operate as more than a belief system, the question remains: Where does it all go? That’s why the uncanny valley of the park androids (really: surrogates) fits the epistemology of the Internet and its peripheral legends of dark underworlds shaped and shattered from within by the testing of military techno-psychologies. Just as the show relies on the contest that is history for texture and detail, so the Internet requires the crypt of the total wars of the twentieth century, their confluence of fantasy and science fiction, occult and technical mediation, to head us off at the impasse of post-Nazi nihilism.