

the good



LEVENTE  LUKÁCS

Lucasgold



The Quod is the reanimated body of Eli Reynolds with the mind scans¹ of him and his sweetheart, Ashley Harbor, infected and controlled by the “Probe II”, a computer that is the modified version of the original “Probe”, a computerized pistol operated by an artificial intelligence created to invade, take control, analyze, work with, transfer and store data of humanoid² brains and mind scans. It was created by a small group of criminals and coders – including the two mentioned above – operating underground and on the black market.

The Probe acts like a Trojan: its purpose is to infect an intelligence and take advantage of its capabilities – mainly analyzing and translating data of it – while establishing safety for the individual mentally and physically, maintaining the belief of normal, uninterrupted circumstances and even

¹ Mind scans are digital information of the conscious thinking, thoughts, memories, and system data of both biological and mechanical creatures.

² Although the Probe can create scans of most species with brain tissue, analyzing and working with the scanned data is only possible for human-like individuals as the artificial intelligence hadn’t been trained to work with more complex or significantly different brain structures.

take control of the host if necessary while the Probe is working, hence allowing the process to take place without difficulties of mental stress or serious physical injuries. It is a perfect undercover tool to gather and use classified information, weaponize systems and individuals, and to copy one's mind and data of consciousness onto a portable computer chip.

The Probe II is a customized build of the Probe with its own neural network system for the purpose of reanimating a creature with a mind scan of their brain in a standalone host, to seek out data through mental torture and ever-lasting interrogation sessions. The biggest difference between the Probe and the Probe II is that while the former is a temporary intruder in one's consciousness, the latter gives either a simulated environment or a new host / body to it. It had never left its prototype phase as its production was discontinued after its source code and prototypes were destroyed, however it was further developed by Ashley Harbor for the purpose of reanimating Eli Reynolds.

The Probe II was originally designed to work with one mind scan and for interrogation purposes, however The Quod contains a modified version of it with two mind scans of two different individuals, Eli Reynolds, and Ashley Harbor in a common body for the purpose of reanimating them and making them interactable with the real world again. The artificial intelligence was designed to be able to handle even the most violent emotional outbursts, however due to having to deal with two mind scans in a non-hostile manner, plus having undefined malfunctions and rewritten, faulty code, whenever any serious outrage, suicidal thoughts, uncontrollable aggression occurs, the processing power of the Probe II exceeds safe measures and could be at risk of system failure, so to avoid that the artificial intelligence tries to push the consciousnesses into acceptance of their circumstances and prohibits certain thoughts, feelings, and memories, to comfort and keep the consciousnesses safe, therefore any of the mentioned psychological outbursts would not lead to serious mental or physical injuries – otherwise, if such prohibition is not possible due to the extreme nature of the emotional disturbance, the artificial intelligence takes over decision making in terms of bodily functions and locks either one of the consciousnesses, or at times, both away from access to their body, letting the emotional outburst happen while saving up processing power and memory. Because The Quod contains a modified, half-finished prototype of the Probe II, along with one too many mind scans, malfunctioning behavior, and severe mental stress, along with flashbacks from the past, outbursts in rage, chaotic and aggressive, at times unforeseen actions and choices occur more often and varied than in normal circumstances.

The connection between the two mind scans of Eli Reynolds and Ashley Harbor within The Quod is varied. Routinely they are aware of their circumstances and can reflect on them, however the artificial intelligence is trying its upmost to maintain calm and accountable mindsets and mental states for both due to the extreme liability in both Eli's and Ashley's mental health. Since the Probe II was initially designed for one mind scan only, and since the artificial intelligence is not capable to realize the double mind scan situation, the presence of both Eli and Ashley could be either at the same time, which is the dominant scenario and results in shared thoughts and vocals – borderline having a third person who is the combination of Eli and Ashley –, or separately, only one person at a time. The latter results in the other person missing out on events and said dialogue, which can cause confusion and stress in either of them.

In terms of physical attributes, The Quod is the combination of biological and mechanical workarounds in the body of Eli Reynolds, that is missing its left arm, left leg, head and neck, its lungs, and its heart due to massive trauma and damage. Replacing those vital- and non-vital body parts are a metal endoskeleton – most importantly the skull and the torso, along with the limbs and some parts around torn muscles –, a set of artificial iron lungs connected to a gas- and oxygen mask – that alongside maintaining oxygen in the body, also has a module that accelerates some of the breathed

in air, working as a miniature power generator –, iron lungs, the iron heart that is also the power supply unit for the mechanical parts, and the Probe II, located in the skull and working as a mechanical brain, and that is connected to a body-wide wiring and pressure sensors. In the left side of the chest are two metal pipes and tubes connected to the stomach and liver, that sucks in, shreds, and slimes food and liquids, while on the left side of the torso is a metal pipe that extracts excrement and urine out of the body.

Of the seven human senses, The Quod is capable of vision, audition, tactility, movement, and proprioception due to external modules of the Probe II and the pressure sensors in the body. In terms of tactility, The Quod can feel pressure, however pain is an uncertainty due to the disturbed nature of the Probe II. Also, using the data of the two mind scans, the artificial intelligence can make The Quod believe that it can smell or taste in different scenarios, however those are just illusions and flashbacks of tastes and smells that either Eli or Ashley had experienced in their lifetime.

Ashley Harbor



Ashley Harbor was an illegal weapons trader, computer chip- and code dealer, amateur street musical performer, computer- and software engineer specialized in robotics and prosthetics and ex sex trafficker, stripper and prostitute aged 23 at the time of her death. She was born in 3018 into a relatively modest – borderline wealthy – family with a businessman of a father and marketing manager of a mother as the youngest sister of 4 siblings. Because of her family background she was put in a higher-level elementary school where she studied at until the age of 8. Her studies heavily emphasized computers and technology alongside music and instrumentals so she learnt basic computing logic and how to play a basic acoustic guitar; she also got to know the piano, cello and flute a little bit throughout her studies and with the help of her father.

One day on her way home from school she was kidnapped and got thrown into a car where her kidnappers told her that her family is dead, and she will be sold on the black market or get killed as well if she doesn't comply with them. She was held captive for around a week when she took her

chances and ran from the arms of one of her kidnappers – through luck or lack of will on her kidnappers, she was able to get away and become free again. She believed her family was still alive however her environment and the streets felt unfamiliar, and she could not orientate or tell where she was to find her way home, so after days of wandering around, she gave up on finding her family – her only chances of survival were staying in the dark at night, begging on the streets in the day, and occasionally stealing food from markets at opportune moments.

One day she came across a street musician with a guitar and after waiting hours for her moment, she stole the guitar and ran away with it. The guitar became her livelihood on the streets – although not much, but enough to buy some food and drink to survive day by day. She was 9 years old when she met *Lily Allison*, 13, as she was performing with her guitar on the streets. From that point on Lily visited Ashley almost daily and they became good friends. Over time their relationship turned sexual, and Lily would often take Ashley up to her apartment and down to clubs to get drunk and high on drugs. When Ashley turned 12, Lily introduced Ashley to her livelihood about which she, for a long time, had always been secretive and uninformative.

Lily took her to a popular strip club and introduced Ashley to her working partners. Although a little bit terrified at first, Ashley ended up trusting in Lily's words and promises, and began privately stripping for adult customers and started earning about ten times more than how much she did with being a street performer daily. At the age of 13 she got comfortable enough with her situation as to follow Lily's steps and to seek out and hire other girls and boys alike.

She was 14 years old when she was sexually assaulted for the first time by one of her customers. She was also beaten regularly, and it pushed her on the edge of nearly quitting, however her emotions and trust in Lily kept her going forward time and time again. She began publicly stripping in the club alongside importing robotic prosthetics from underground circles with her working partners as metal and electronica became a major sexual appeal³. In her free time, Ashley would learn and seek out as much information as she could about prosthetic programming and designing as she found it just as attractive and exciting as the public opinion, despite being severely scared of the idea to get any herself. Around this time, she got her first tattoo on the left side of her torso, and her relationship with Lily seemed to be on the downside as they began to slowly lose interest in each other, which hurt Ashley a lot emotionally.

At the age of 15 she got pregnant by one of her customers and she had to go through an illegal abortion procedure which scarred her deeply both mentally and physically. She overdosed on hard drugs that resulted in the left part of her upper body along with her left hand getting partially numb. Her disabilities held back her work performance and reduced her payment, plus she got insulting and discriminating comments about them constantly, so she decided to get artificial muscle fibers in her upper body and a whole new robotic left arm as around the time, it was cheaper to amputate than to rework the muscles in her left arm - she also got her tattoos on her back and above her breasts. She used her prosthetic arm to further experiment with robotics and programming and she would help other workers and dancers install and modify their own robotic body parts. She would also modify and extend her own arm over time, and it was also a good tool for defending herself when she critically needed to.

At the age of 16, she met and recruited an 11-year-old girl named *Tinsley Mabee*, with whom she got really close to and the two would spend a lot of time around each other, up until the point when

³ Some of the workers and dancers would go as far as to willingly get rid of body parts or organs to replace them with mechanical parts and artificial limbs.

Tinsley was brutally raped and murdered by a group of unidentified adult customers. After this incident leaving Ashley devastated with guilt and emotional trauma, she chose to stop sex trafficking girls and her hate towards the sex work industry found a critical way to grow. Despite its importance, or maybe because of it, Ashley hardly ever mentions Tinsley to anyone, even refrains from doing so to her closest associates.

One time she had an encounter at the strip club of which she believes she saw one of her siblings leaning against the bar and admiring dancers, by then as an adult. She tried following them and finding out their identity, but she never sees them ever again – despite the circumstances, this encounter started a fire in her heart that her family might still be alive and dropped her down a spiral of hopeless searching, longing for having a family and slowly reevaluating things in her life over time. By this time, she hadn't heard about Lily for at least half a year, and she is all by herself.

At the age of 17 she got punched so hard in her face by one of her customers that her sight was permanently damaged in her right eye. On another occasion, one night walking on the streets during a cigarette break with a friend, after her friend finished her cigarette and their paths parted, Ashley, walking around the streets, stumbled into a couple of guys who began following her and then jumped her in an alleyway with the intentions of wanting to sexually assault and beat her. In the struggle, she managed to cut one of the guys' throats with her robotic arm on accident, which resulted in the other to flee the scene and her committing her first murder. She runs away from the scene and the event leaves her unsettled but also makes her realize that she is not as defenseless as she thought to be prior.

Becoming a rather popular worker and dancer, the owner of the strip club got in touch with her about her past and present and would visit her regularly, eventually introducing her to a higher class of customers alongside her normal job. With the thoughts and stress about her family background constantly bothering her head, she hired professionals to investigate and look for clues and whereabouts of her family – she only remembered vague details about that part of her life, but enough so that the detectives could get to work. She was also regularly modifying and selling prosthetic body parts and modifications on underground markets and among work partners and associates.

She was 18 years old at the time when she first met Eli Reynolds.

Eli Reynolds



Eli Reynolds was an illegal computer chip- and weapons dealer, computer engineer, self-proclaimed cyber body modifier and ex street fighter and drug dealer aged 24 at the time of his death. He was born in 3017 into a family with religious backgrounds, although he didn't experience much of it as by the time Eli was born religion was not an important factor nor for the world, nor for his parents. His father passed away when Eli was 6 years old in a gang robbery gone wrong, so he only has vague memories about him. His mother turned towards alcohol and abused him both physically and mentally on a regular basis until her sudden death by suicide in their home around the time Eli was turning 11.

After her mother's death he was put into an orphanage from where he attempted escaping multiple times but where he initially stationed until the age of 16. He couldn't socialize well with other kids in the institution, nor with the nurses and staff members. His education didn't reach further than high school studies as he was dropped out of several educational institutions due to his lack of care and poor performance. He was a regular and a familiar face on the street and around underground clubs and drug stores. When he was 12, he met his lifelong best friend *Ralph Bardy* who also was put into

the orphanage and unlike the rest of the kids there, Eli and Ralph felt a connection to each other almost right away. They became close friends and Ralph introduced Eli to a small group of teenage criminals, coders, gym-enthusiasts, and drug dealers operating underground. He would also love playing sports, especially soccer and with Ralph and some other members of the group they would often play for hours on end.

At the age of 14, Eli began exercising and training regularly at a local gym and, along with a couple of the group members – including Ralph –, began selling hard drugs in the night. They often robbed their customers from lower classes after drugging them, along with stealing goods and items off homeless people on the streets. At the age of 15 he began competing in street fighting in underground circles where he gained respect within the teenage fighters and learnt how to truly take a beating and keep going. That is where he met his superior fighting coach and his considered father figure, *Gregorio Sullivan*, a 27-year-old cyborg wrestler. They got close to each other and throughout the years Gregorio would teach him priceless lessons about enduring pain and beatdowns and gave him important life lessons alongside being an excellent trainer who got to know his student to the core.

At the age of 16, Eli escaped from the orphanage and became a resident of Ralph's apartment, undercover from authorities resulting in him dropping out of the educational system as well. He stopped selling drugs and instead took interest in robotics and began studying and practicing cyber body modification and firearms handling. By this time, he had been in many gunfights and had done several successful – and at times, unsuccessful – robberies with the group resulting in committing his first murder at the age of 17.

One night at a pub with Ralph while being drunk, they had a brainstorming idea of a tool with which they fantasized that they could read and turn minds into readable and usable data – Ralph laughed about it while Eli took the idea seriously and for months, he wouldn't forget about it. He spoke to many of the more committed programmers and engineers of his social circle from which most found the idea impossible to create, except for two young and ambitious coders, *Lisa* and *Myles* – they named their idea "Invader" and Eli would, at times, have hours long conversations with them about the idea of such a tool as a weapon in the means of infecting one's mind and copying data from it, about if they began working on it, how they would design it and base it on already existing technology of brain scanning and mind exploration.

At the age of 18, he began training kids himself the basics of combat and fist fighting at the gym. He suffered several serious injuries at street fighting competitions so by this time he had several skin replacements by metal on multiple parts of his body, including his head, face, arms, chest and even his thighs – he deliberately chose to go with metal because according to him, in a way this method immortalized his injuries and had physical proof of both his experience and time in street fighting.

At a famous and respected fighting event when Eli was going against a feared and record-breaker opponent, *Charles Klammer*, Eli was beaten bad but after several rounds he ended up taking down his opponent and became a champion himself. Unfortunately, his celebration could not last long as a few days following the victorious event, the gym where Eli and Gregorio were training at was jumped by a masked group of criminals who shot up the place and beaten and murdered Gregorio Sullivan at the age of 30, while also assaulting and leaving Eli with shattered ribs, a poked left eye, and a broken right arm.

He was found by Ralph who took him to an underground doctor and prosthetics specialist where he stationed for weeks until his full recovery, getting back on his feet with a mechanical eyeball, metal ribs on the left side of his chest, artificial muscle fibers in his right shoulder and left thigh, and a

hardened right arm with prosthetic addition to his bones and muscle fibers. After his recovery he swore to take revenge on the group and on Charles Klammer and trained himself as hard as he could. He competed in more dangerous fighting competitions but ultimately stopped after being talked down by friends and taking interest in illegally modifying and trading firearms along with writing codes and engineering robotic prosthetics within his social circle.

Eli sits down with Lisa, Myles and Ralph and they talk about their plans regarding project Invader. Ralph finally realizes the potential in the idea, the project gets renamed to “Probe” and they begin working on it alongside trading weapons on the black market. Eli would spend most of his time keeping his strength up and working on the Probe with his friends as he sees it as the ultimate solution to his revenge on Klammer. Whenever he’s outside and not doing trading business, he spends his time in the strip club with hookers and strippers.

He was 19 years old at the time when he first met Ashley Harbor.

Ashley meets Eli



The two first met in a private room at the strip club Ashley was working at. Initially neither of them felt that it would be anything special that they were seeing each other, only after a few months of consistency, Eli's undisturbed elegance and endearment made Ashley trust him more than most of her regular customers. They would, apart from the sexual activities, share ideas and stories with each other and often fall into long conversations about their lives and robotics. Despite the Probe being a secret project, Eli – call it irresponsibility or him being reckless – grew to trust Ashley enough to share some aspects of the project with her. She didn't think much of it at first but felt engaged in each conversation about the Probe. With time, the first prototype was almost complete – the crew would test the Probe on either homeless people or for hire on unreliable, backstabbing business partners in the underground weapon trading industry.

Ashley around this time was on edge both physically and mentally. She's been stressed about work, the elite social circle of private customers, and the lack of actual results and sometimes lack of response regarding her family from the detectives that she had hired. Also, she had been feeling

something new but ancient in her heart that she hadn't quite experienced other than when she was with Lisa as a kid. She slowly, with time, started catching feelings for Eli despite her upmost efforts to hide it not just from Eli, but most importantly, from her own self.

One day when she was in a private room with a wealthy executive officer to whom the owner of the strip club had strong ties to both business- and emotional-wise, she was on edge and mentally disturbed and exhausted, and the officer was being both physically and mentally insulting. He was about to sexually assault Ashley when she had enough and beheaded the officer with her left prosthetic arm after punching and biting him several times.

The incident didn't go unnoticed, and Ashley didn't have any other choice but to flee the scene in a hurry – she got filled with anger, hate and disgust throughout the many years of sex work towards the industry and its people and she knew that from that very point onward, her livelihood as a sexual worker and stripper was over and that she wouldn't make it far on her own anymore. She decided to go to the underground club of what Eli talked about where he would often station with his friends, in hopes of finding him and asking for help. He was there and upon seeing Ashley and hearing what happened, Eli took her up to his apartment and offer a place to stay, that which Ashley humbly accepted and was grateful for.

In the next few weeks, he would take her down to the club where he worked on the Probe with his friends, introducing her to the group and eventually getting her working on the project with them and joining the group. Under a yearlong period, they managed to get through most of the hardships with the project and they operated mostly successfully under classified aliases on the black market with weapon- and computer chip trading.

After many trials and errors, countless hours of coding and bug fixing, they managed to create a relatively stable and usable version of the Probe printed onto a portable computer chip. The Probe at this point can analyze, translate, and copy data from humanoid brain structures. The idea of putting the computer chip containing the Probe inside a modified pistol came from Lisa, as the whole project was theorized of in the concept of a weapon – the trigger would be pulled and then a sharp electric needle with a hook attached to a strong thin wire would be launched into the skull of an individual, sticking into their brain, and connecting it to the Probe.

The connection time possible between the individual and the Probe is about 10 minutes at this point, then after the usage of the Probe, the user would pull the trigger again to disconnect the needle from the person's brain and leave them blacked out for a minute, pulling the needle out of their skull and back into the pistol. Connecting another computer chip to the Probe, it is theoretically possible to copy a consciousness onto another computer chip, but that feature has neither been tested enough nor was successful enough to be considered a stable feature at this point.

Connection



Eli and Ashley grew closer and closer to each other over time, however as much as Ashley's attention was distracted by Eli, she kept on having dreams about her family and the detectives turning up with results – in reality, the detectives were out of Ashley's reach due to her having to hide in anonymity, and as she understood more of the risks and as they kept updating the Probe and as it was becoming more stable, she had the idea to volunteer as a test subject for creating the first standalone mind scan and consciousness copy in hopes of finding out information regarding her family, under the only condition that nobody else but Eli would access her mind scan.

After days of consideration, eventually everyone from the group agreed to the idea and Ashley and Eli would get together one night to do the whole procedure in private. Before they would start, Ashley would ask Eli with deep trust to not talk about what they will find on her mind scan to anyone, and Eli promises. Ashley, feeling like she can fully trust Eli, kisses him slowly then lets them start the procedure.

It took the Probe two and a half hours to copy her entire consciousness onto another computer chip, then Ashley, along with Eli, investigated her mind scan together. To find the information they were looking for, they had to go through a lot of her past and feelings, that although made both uncomfortable and nervous, after about 90 minutes of browsing, they found data of photographic memory producing blurry images of school- and street environments from Ashley's childhood, and although they were vague and lacking details, they were accurate enough to be almost instantly recognizable and point to a specific district of the city. Ashley bursts into tears and the very next day Eli and Ashley travel in disguise to the district they've seen from her memories to find clues of her family.

As they follow the images they got from the Probe, they find Ashley's old school – at least what's left of it; by this time, the school is abandoned and just an empty, dusty, and rusty building, reciting memories of what it once used to be. Walking around the area, although a lot has changed throughout the years, Ashley finds the path she used to walk on to go from her home to school and vica versa. Following the path, they ended up in a small neighborhood where Ashley expected to, but ultimately would not recognize her old house among any of them. Ashley gets both frustrated and depressed, they look and search for hours and hours, walking up and down the area and its surroundings to find the smallest clue that Ashley would recognize, but all without results.

Throughout the years, deep down her heart, she refused to believe the idea that her kidnappers planted in her head about her family being dead, but the closure Ashley was looking for is not delivered: it breaks her heart and leaves her angry, sad, and alone with grief. Her only real support around this time is the group and most importantly, Eli, who helps her and stands by her side as much as he can.

Ashley stays in bed for days and in the meantime, Eli would spend a lot of time with her and the two would end up getting intimate with each other, unlike any of the sexual contact they ever had. Afterwards they promise loyalty to one another and despite not knowing exactly how, they start being in a relationship and Eli's methodical, gentle, and understanding manner turns out to work well with Ashley's soft, emotional, and clingy heart.

They feel something neither of them truly felt before: unconditional love, understanding and relatability of the other person's mind and thoughts, and true partnership in life. Their mutual support and cooperative worldview get each other through hardships and at times, they can truly forget about the bad and live in the moment of each other's harmony and admiration.

Fuel for vengeance



Alongside romance, however, there was plenty of room for seeking revenge and justice in their hearts.

Eli fueled his rage and thirst of vengeance against Charles Klammer day-by-day, training and seeking out individuals who might know about his whereabouts, as he, too, stopped competing and is hiding from the public eye by this point. Throughout the years he got close to him many times, yet ultimately failed catching up to him. As the Probe would get better and faster regarding information collection, the more he would use it on ex fighters and underground mercenaries to find information about Klammer with little to no luck.

At this time, in total, not more than 3 pistols with the Probe were made: one for Eli, one for Ralph and one for Ashley, as they came to be the persons when it was about action and aggression out on the streets and in business. The 3 would spend a lot of time together and among criminal circles grew a fearful reputation as they were an influential power in the weapon trading industry and work for hire.

Ashley would begin to seek out ex sex workers and dancers to find out and collect information regarding the strip club's owner and its social circle, as the time spent around them was not enough to know enough. She would shelter and aid the people she would encounter, point them in the right direction either they wanted to stay in the industry or not, and overall would try her best to be helpful to those who need support. In cases of exact identities of abusive customers, she would go as far as to even pay them a visit and give them a valuable lesson in the means of beating and intimidating threats of murder, and abuse of confidential information she would gather from them with the usage of the Probe.

One day she would bump into Lily, the by-now-burnt-out woman who found Ashley on the streets so many years ago when they were kids. They sat down and had a long conversation and Lily was in her worst shape imaginable. She was used by the sex work industry, chewed on, then spat out, after which she was not needed anymore. She also expressed guilt and terrible sorrow that all those years ago she involved Ashley in the whole situation, as well, along with all the other girls and boys she recruited. The kind, attractive and cheerful Lily that Ashley once knew, turned into a harsh, broken, and hopeless girl, and seeing her like that broke Ashley's heart. She offered Lily her help, but Lily refused it out of shame and self-respect, and that was the last time Ashley would see Lily ever again. That day Ashley promised herself she will make a change in the industry and make those pay that made so many people's lives a living hell on Earth.

Eli and Ashley would both end up with vengeance scenarios and in the next 2 years, they would help each other in their fights as much as they could, fighting for their own justice, their own way.

Unexpected meeting



Throughout these 2 years, they kept working in the weapon trading industry and were a popular choice for assassination or intel hijacking requests. Eli kept on Klammer's tail, while Ashley, under another alias, released all the evidence that she collected from the people she met from sex work against the industry and the strip club she used to work at, however it did not get enough attention to have any palpable effect on neither the industry or its people – despite that, her voice started being louder and louder.

Words of the Probe's existence and their users began to spread in criminal and weapon trading circles. Eli and the group considered the commercialization of the Probe before way back in the early development stages, but as they got further ahead with the project, the more they realized it would be foolish and reckless to give so much power into anyone else's hands, and instead they would profit from using the Probe themselves, hence why only 3 pistols with the Probe existed.

One day, however, Eli would get a message from an influential and famous weapon trader, *Nate Lester*, about his intentions to speak to Eli and make a deal regarding the Probe. Eli didn't take the

message seriously but a few days later, Nate showed up with bodyguards at the underground club Eli and his group would station at. He made his intentions clear, and Eli sat down with Nate to talk.

He talked about how he heard of the Probe, that he would like to invest in it and sell copies to his wealthier and reliable business partners, of which in return Eli and his group would get a share of the Probe's price each time a person would buy one. Eli was sterile and quiet the whole time and he made it clear that he would not want to do business regarding the Probe, to which Nate went into details about the payouts and benefits Eli would be offered in case they were to make a deal, their lives unbothered by this matter, included. He also mentioned that he knows Eli's ways around the weapon trading industry and more about his past than Eli would think, why he looks the way he does, and that lately he has been keen on knowing Charles Klammer's whereabouts, which could be found out in a matter of days through contacts Eli could never reach, in case Eli would settle a deal with him, of course.

Nate also made it clear that if he wanted to hurt Eli or his group, he would've already done so. Eli doesn't believe him but after half an hour of thinking, he said he would make a deal under one more condition: the group would not let other manufacturers produce the Probe; therefore, the source code and the Probe's exact mechanics would not be outsold to anyone. Nate was uncertain but after brief consideration, he agreed to those conditions, and they shook hands. No matter how Eli felt, he knew that the deal was already settled the moment Nate Lester showed up, knowing his influence and about his determination when it comes to business and weapons.

After the meeting, Eli would share what had happened with the group. Most of them felt betrayed and upset, especially Ashley because words had been said that Nate Lester had ties to the sex work industry and is very much a supporter of it. Eli defended his decision that he did it for the group because otherwise Nate would've gotten the Probe anyway, with them being alive or dead, it wouldn't have mattered – plus, they will get a lot of profit of it and Ashley and Eli could think more about their future. Ashley didn't see it that way and for the first time, the emotional connection between the two shakes.

Down the spiral



In the following weeks they would go through the business plan and began the mass production of the Probe. Nate Lester also delivered his promise, and he shared the exact neighborhood and building where Charles Klammer was stationing at. Eli, along with Ralph, visited the area and found Klammer along with some of his friends, whom they murdered and saving Klammer as last for Eli, he shot him right between his eyes after torturing him for several minutes. He got what he'd wanted for many years by then and torching the place up, he left Klammer's body among the burnt ruins of his hideout.

In the following year production of several pistols with the Probe was done and by the time Eli turned 23 and Ashley was 22, they had sold more than 20 pistols with the Probe inside them – also, for the concept of a potential next project, they also had an underlying system network that allowed them to turn the Probe into a spyware, illegally copying mind scans made by the customers of certain individuals for analyzation and learning purposes.

Ashley grew more and more concerned regarding Eli, as he seemed to have changed his views about Nate and his overall behavior felt different, as Ashley put it. She would try to talk about it to Eli but each time they would end up arguing, and Eli would feel like Ashley isn't supporting him, while Ashley felt that she's been bamboozled by Eli because now he's, along with the whole group, is working for someone whose income from their own product partially goes into the stripper and sex work industry as well, the last thing Ashley would've ever wanted. They would always conclude their fights that they will find a way, and with or without Nate they will put up a fight against the sex work industry and although Eli meant it, Ashley wasn't so sure about him.

Recently, she's also been getting closer to Ralph, who also became worried about Eli and the whole situation they were put in, so the two would have long conversations one on one when Eli was either busy or asleep. It was around this time from when Ashley began both dreaming and hallucinating about a young, small girl to whom she felt great emotional connection to, the shadow of an old and painful memory and her intuitions. The girl would keep reappearing in her dreams and on the streets, and each time Ashley would try to get to her she would not be able to catch up.

She talked about the girl to Ralph and to Eli, and while talking to the latter she realized and for the first time, expressed in words that she considers wanting a child, despite not ever thinking she ever would – the thought was deeply rooted and felt familiar, and it filled her heart with warmth; the idea that she could have a family with Eli the way she used to have one before she was kidnapped made her almost tear up each time. Eli would not be very considering of the concept, and after Ashley bringing it up repeatedly for months, he told her that he doesn't feel like the timing would be right for it and he doesn't feel ready to have a family. Ashley didn't say a word but felt heartbroken inside, and recently all her emotions and feelings would be only welcomed by Ralph. She felt like Eli has been distant and cold to her ever since Nate showed up and she couldn't handle it by herself – Ashley and Ralph would get intimate one night, and tormenting guilt started painfully eating up her from the inside.

About a year and a half after Ashley, under another alias, published records and testimonies of many unnamed ex- and then-current sex workers and strippers, a famous media celebrity, who also happened to be a sex worker herself, spoke up about it on live broadcasts and radio stations, leading to other influential celebs, musicians, and television people to speak up, causing massive media attention. Ashley considered this a massive success and got really excited about the news, however, chose to be silent and not speak up publicly herself because of the fear of being targeted by criminals and her overall shame of her involvement in her past.

One day, Eli, along with a couple of members of the group, were called in for a business meeting between him, Nate Lester, and some of his business partners to talk about the project idea "*Probe II*" – a more advanced version of the Probe with longer usage time and new ways to torture and keep a consciousness occupied – and its legitimacy in the weapon trading market; by then a handful of prototypes were made, however further planning and more concrete plans were required to advance in its development. The meeting lasted significantly shorter than Eli would come to expect, and they hadn't reached any important conclusions either.

A few days later, as Ashley was wondering about in the underground market, she began noticing some people continuously following her. Soon enough, she was attacked and chased by 3 or 4 well-trained mercenaries. Barely, but she made it out alive and safe and escaped her chasers. While hiding from them, Ashley gets a closer look at one member of her chasers and has a feeling that he knows him from somewhere.

Eli and Ashley had been rather distant lately; Eli has been busy with their business and grew to be colder than ever before, while Ashley had been avoiding contact because of the guilt she's been feeling inside of her regarding what happened between her and Ralph, however after the attack, she instantly tries to find Eli and leaves several voice messages about what had occurred. They meet as soon as they can and Eli hugs her tightly, making sure she is safe. She tells him all that had happened and that she believes she recognized one of her attackers but cannot get to the bottom of who he is. They start searching the data on one of her mind scans in hopes of finding more information about who the individual could be, when the realization hits Ashley that she believes she saw him around the time she was a sex worker among the higher-class customers. To get more accurate data about that time, they decide to take the first mind scan they made of her all those years ago and investigate the matter: they find photographic memory producing accurate images about the attacker and among the people surrounding him, was none other than Nate Lester. She recognizes both when they see the pictures and remembers that they were regular around the strip club and its owner, and they always had a good time, leading to the assumption that the attacker and Nate were, and possibly still are, good friends or business partners, which is proven by further data they find on Ashley's mind scan.

They both get shocked and feel lost and don't know what to do, however at this point, even Eli starts doubting in Nate and believes he is not to be trusted, and work with him won't be possible anymore. Ashley eventually comes up with the plan to make sure and steal the mind scans that have been made of them throughout the years, then steal already existing prototypes of the Probe II, along with the source code and blueprints for the Probe, then move as far out of reach from Nate as possible and blackmail him that if he doesn't make sure of Ashley's and the rest of the group's safety and if he doesn't break contract and stop selling the Probe, they will leak its source code and blueprints along with the half-made Probe II to the underground weapon trading industry. Although they fear those people's safety who also worked on the Probe and Probe II, including their own friends, they believe with the sex work allegations and the potential damage by the details of the Probe and Nate's involvement in making it, are powerful enough of threats for Nate to stand down and leave them be. The same night, Eli talks to Ralph about his and Ashley's plans, and writes a letter to Nate Lester regarding their actions, their conditions, and the consequences if he tries to counteract them or harm anyone who had an involvement in the Probe and Probe II.

Final weeks



Eli and Ashley delivered to their promise: after making the final known mind scans of themselves for safety reasons, they took the source code, took the blueprints and a prototype build of the Probe II, and after delivering the letter to Nate Lester, the only person with whom they secretly kept in touch with was Ralph; other than him, they were hidden from both the public and underground eyes. They were occupying basements and empty apartments, carrying the stolen equipment and the mind scans, changing guards at night, and never staying in one place for longer than a couple of days. During this time Eli and Ashley got closer again; Ashley was denying her cheating so much in her head that she almost forgot about that it had happened, and the two of them felt a tiny bit of love again.

One night, after continuous convincing from Eli to Ashley for them to let their guard down for once and sleep together, Ashley gave in and for the first time in many months they were in bed next to each other. Later that night, as they were sleeping, Ashley woke up and felt terribly sick. She didn't alert Eli; she got some stuff from a nearby drug store and by the time she came back she felt worse, and she vomited in the bathroom. She made a pregnancy test and it turned out that she was

pregnant. Eli woke up to her crying, but she quickly hid the test and said that she felt a bit strange and stressed out because of the happenings lately, but she is okay. He hugged her and they went back to bed and shortly after, Ashley felt something weird about Eli.

As he was sleeping next to her, Ashley looked at Eli's nape, seeing slowly flashing red lights from underneath his skin. She woke him up and just with that, their room's door was kicked in and Eli was shot in his back, arms, right leg, and head multiple times with an automatic shotgun. As the rounds were fired, multiple windows were shot out behind them, along with some of the desk lamps, furniture and walls, and Ashley, in an adrenaline rush, jumped out one of the broken windows, landing on the rooftop of another, shorter building. She lightly hurt herself from the fall and some of the fired shells injured her arms, but she was able to get away, only to realize her situation and the death of Eli – all her hopes and dreams lost with him.

She was hiding and waiting for two hours, avoiding their attackers looking for her and the equipment, before they gave up on searching so she could sneak back into the apartment they were in, to find the bloodied corpse of Eli, still laying on the bed among the mayhem that is left of the apartment – he died at the age of 24. His head and back were shot open, his left arm and leg lied separately from his body on the ground; she also found the destroyed transponder near his head that sent signals of their location and that would presumably activate when Eli was asleep. It had to be put inside his head either a long time ago or at the last meeting he had with Nate Lester.

She looked for the equipment they stole and luckily the attackers didn't find them, as Ashley's final resort lied within the mind scans and the half-baked prototype of the Probe II they stole. She put Eli's body in a body bag, lied him down next to the equipment, ready and looking for a new place to stay. She found an abandoned apartment, secluded from most activity where she would spend her final weeks working on keeping Eli's body from decomposition and configuring the Probe II with the latest mind scan of him in the apartment's basement, so that he could live again.

The biggest difference between the Probe and the Probe II is that while the former can only intrude a brain to make readable and copyable data of it, the latter can use that data to animate the consciousness that is made up by the data, basically bringing the person, that is the data, to life within a simulated environment – closest example of such a state is when a person is dreaming, only difference is that it is happening inside the Probe II and they cannot wake up or intervene the events of their dream on their own⁴ – or in case of an available host, real life circumstances, making the animated consciousness come alive in the real world. To achieve that, the Probe II has an internal artificial intelligence taught to analyze the many illegally made copies of the mind scans that had been produced throughout the usage of the Probe copies, along with media and written diagnosis of people's behavior and thought processes, then combine those methods with the mind scan and data of the individual's brain. This feature, in the case of biological hosts, required extensive body implants and modifications to allow the consciousness to control its body properly, and was not finished in the prototype build that Eli and Ashley had stolen.

In the following weeks, Ashley would copy Eli's mind scan onto the Probe II's hard drive, extend the coding and collect illegal body modifications, drugs for arterial embalming, tools for infusion, artificial organs, and mechanical workarounds for biological and cyborg technology symbiosis from unnamed

⁴ As a result, this feature would've been used to torture and interrogate a consciousness of the sought data, since this method wouldn't have just been faster, but also easier for users because of the amount of data a brain scan beholds, and since, in theory, the limitations of the torturing methods are far less because of the controlled environment and the lack of danger regarding physical injuries caused by mental stress, such as stroke, heart attack, or self-harm.

sellers on the black market. She had to modify most of Eli's body to make it work again and be compatible with the Probe II and the other mechanical parts, so Eli's body would not decay and would be in symbiosis with the cyborg extensions. For Eli to be able to perceive the world again, Ashley wired his entire body with pressure sensors and cables underneath his skin, connected them to- and configured them in the Probe II, providing movement and proprioception, while also attaching video- and audio feed modules to the Probe II, providing vision, audition, and Eli's ability to speak. His mindset was tested numerous times on test runs, and it required countless trials and errors for Eli to be able to analyze, recognize, overcome, and live his situation without falling apart mentally or physically. The Probe II was also difficult to work with and memory management and proper usage of the mind scan and Eli's body also required many hours of coding and testing. Eli's voice and words throughout the test runs kept the hope and will in Ashley, however, who when she first heard Eli speaking again after his death, felt unstoppably determined to reanimate him and have him in his arms at least one more time.

One night, as Ashley was working on the Probe II and Eli, Ralph showed up out of nowhere. She was stunned and burst into crying, along with Ralph when he saw and realized that Eli is dead. Ralph told Ashley that Nate didn't blink an eye regarding the threats against him and he ambushed the group, resulting in several deaths and the uncertainty regarding the whereabouts of those who survived. Nate also knows about the missing Probe II and wants it even more now because some of the group members had the time and opportunity to destroy everything that they already had regarding the Probe II, including the blueprints and the other prototypes, so the one that Ashley has now is the only existing prototype there is. Throughout their conversation, Ashley also admitted that she was pregnant and that the kid must be of Ralph's, since Ashley and Eli hadn't had sexual contact for a long time by then. Ralph hugged her close and they spent that night talking to each other about what Ashley is doing and what she thinks should be done. Although Eli was Ralph's best friend, or maybe because of that, but Ralph found it unethical to bring him back to life under such harsh and fake circumstances; a part of him felt like it was selfish, however Ashley couldn't let go of Eli and when Ralph heard her talk about how much she loves Eli and how much more there should've been in store for them, he felt both heartbroken and accepting about it. Ralph loved Ashley and he saw how much she loved Eli, and that she is swimming in guilt for what had happened between him and her. He asked about the kid that is in Ashley, but she wasn't ready to talk about it. Ashley wanted Ralph to stay overnight, however she wanted nothing to happen between them, she only feared that she would have a transponder in her head, too, somehow, in which case Ralph could confirm if he sees anything. The next morning Ralph reassured Ashley that he saw nothing, and a couple of hours later he was gone and that was the last time Ashley ever saw him.

As the days went by, she started to think more and more about her kid. She's been so focused on work and just like with her cheating, she almost wanted to deny the fact that it's real. She couldn't imagine herself with Ralph anymore, however she remembered Eli's words about raising a family and how he thinks it's not the right time nor that he would be ready for one, so amidst all the work she was doing, she had an idea and attempted to change his opinion by altering some of the data that is found on his mind scan, based on data from her own mind scan that related to the subject matter of wanting a family and kids. This has not been done before due to the high risk of corrupting one's consciousness, as thought processes and data of the human brain is complex despite its easy readability through the Probe, but since she made a copy of Eli's mind scan, she took the risks and tried her best. If only she had more time to perfect the method, things would've happened way differently.

During one of the test runs at night, due to unknown circumstances, Ashley rushed out of Eli's room and vanished from the apartment. Presumably in the following five hours she was sexually assaulted and physically tortured and abused, then murdered at the age of 23.

The test run was not shut down and the Probe II suffered a system failure causing Eli's consciousness to become partially corrupted, all due to the data modification Ashley had performed on his mind scan and the Probe II having faulty code. Several system reboots were initiated by the artificial intelligence of the Probe II, forcing Eli into a cycle of confusion, mental stress, and non-stop emotional distress. The artificial intelligence, to protect the Probe II from overheating and causing physical problems with the device, locked Eli away from the Probe II's external modules and his body, so his suffering could not be heard or seen in the outside world.

Approximately 3 to 4 days after Ashley's death, Ralph came around the apartment and found her body just outside amongst trash and dust, her clothes all over the place, soaked with blood and dirt. Ralph brought her inside the apartment and put her on a table, collapsing on top of her body, knowing that he hadn't just lost his best friend, now he lost the one who was not only the love of his life, but also the would've been mother of their child who died with their mother as well. Ralph spent the rest of the day in the apartment without doing anything, then in the middle of the night he went downstairs to the room that Eli and the Probe II was in.

Either the Probe II's artificial intelligence eventually found a way to shut down the system or the system collapsed on itself over the time it was left alone without user management, Ralph started up the Probe II which indicated that it does not have an active mind scan to work with. Eli looked through the equipment laying around in the room and looking through the mind scans, he found Ashley's last mind scan that was made before they escaped from the public eye with Eli. He inserted it into the Probe II and fighting his tears, he booted up the system, hearing Ashley's voice once again. He talks to her about his feelings and tells her that she is in the Probe II and what had happened after her scan was made.

He tells her about their escape, what had happened to Eli and the Probe II, Nate Lester's actions and motivation and what had happened to the rest of the group; then, he tells her about their kid, the unmeasurable love he feels for Ashley and what had presumably happened to her sometime lately, causing her death. He tells her his plan on wanting to revive her in either her body or in another young female's body, the same way she wanted to revive Eli and that he wants to have a kid, just like how she wanted to and would've had one if fate wouldn't have interrupted the way it did. He asks her help as he was working the Probe II himself, but he feels like he can't do it alone and he would need assistance with the reworked code and body modification setup. Ashley stays silent once Ralph begins his speech, however not for the reasons he thinks she does.

The same way Eli's consciousness was locked away in the Probe II for power and memory management, so was Ashley's, however despite the Probe II indicating having no mind scans active, Eli's copied mind scan was still loaded and in function when Ashley's was inserted into the Probe II, resulting in both mind scans functioning at the same time – which means all that Ralph had said was heard not just by Ashley, but also by Eli. Being in misery and under the amount of mental stress Eli was under for days and hearing about Ashley cheating on him with Ralph and becoming pregnant by him, along with hearing her death and Ralph's plans with the remains of Ashley, under unexplained circumstances, Eli took control over the Probe II and his body and in rage, without hesitation, stood up and tore Ralph apart with his bare hands. Ashley witnessed everything as she was sentinel during the attack, but she was unable to hold Eli back.

With Eli and Ashley both being sentimental, and realizing what had happened and what their situation is, kneeling above the corpse of Ralph Bardy, both imprisoned in the same body and under the control of the Probe II and its artificial intelligence, without hope and with the inability to escape,

The Quod was born.



For a quick draft-like summary of the events following this origin story, go to www.lucasgold.hu/TheQuod_ending.png

