

# The Mind Thief

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**I**N the year 2065, Mumbai was a city where technology and tradition coexisted in a delicate balance. Neon lights reflected off ancient temples, and drones buzzed above street vendors selling spicy vada pav. Amidst this fusion of old and new, Sunny “the Ghost” Kapoor was infamous.

Sunny had earned his moniker due to his unmatched ability to slip in and out of high-security buildings undetected. A master thief, he had successfully evaded the police and even the advanced AI surveillance systems. But what truly made Sunny dangerous wasn't his physical dexterity — it was his mind.

Sunny had created something that the world wasn't ready for: the Thought Extractor. A sleek, handheld device, no bigger than a smartphone, could extract a person's thoughts and memories like files from a computer. With it, Sunny could infiltrate not just vaults and safes, but also minds.

He had used the device to blackmail powerful figures, steal trade secrets, and make himself a small fortune. Yet, with each heist, he felt an emptiness growing inside him, something deeply unsettling about the technology he had birthed, something more than the guilt of his actions.

One evening, as Sunny sat alone in his high-rise apartment, surrounded by the trappings of wealth he had acquired through the Thought Extractor, he found himself unable to escape the gnawing sense of unease. The walls, adorned with stolen art, seemed to close in on him. He picked up the Thought Extractor, turning it over in his hands.

“What have I created?” he muttered.

His phone buzzed, breaking his trance. It was a message from one of his contacts, a man named Arjun, who had hired Sunny to extract memories from a rival businessman. Sunny was good at this — too good, in fact. He had learned to read people's deepest fears, their darkest secrets, and their most vulnerable moments. But the more he learned about others, the less he understood about himself.

He tapped a response to Arjun, agreeing to meet the next day. But as he put the phone down, he hesitated. Something inside him felt... wrong. He shook it off, convincing himself it was just another job, just another payday.

The next day, Sunny met Arjun in a shadowy corner of an upscale lounge in South Mumbai. The city's elite moved around them, oblivious to the conversation that was about to unfold.

Arjun leaned in, his voice low. “You have the device?”

Sunny nodded, sliding the Thought Extractor across the table. “Who's the target this time?”

Arjun smirked. “Siddharth Menon. He's holding onto something big, something that could ruin me. I need you to find out what it is and bring it to me.”

Sunny didn't ask questions. He never did. But as he pocketed the cash Arjun handed him, a nagging doubt crept into his mind. He knew Siddharth Menon by reputation — a man with a clean record, a philanthropist who had devoted his life to helping the underprivileged.

That night, Sunny prepared for the heist. He knew Menon lived in a heavily fortified mansion in Juhu, with security systems that would challenge even the most seasoned thief. But Sunny wasn't just any thief.

He slipped into the mansion under the cover of darkness, bypassing the AI-powered drones and biometric locks with ease. As he reached Menon's study, he paused for a moment, his heart racing. The Thought Extractor hummed in his hand, ready to pull Menon's memories.

Sunny placed the device against Menon's temple, the older man sleeping soundly in his chair, unaware of the intrusion. As the device began to work, Sunny saw flashes of Menon's life — his childhood, his rise to power, his philanthropic work. But then, something unexpected appeared: images of a lab, a project code-named “Aegis,” and a young woman who looked eerily familiar.

Sunny's heart skipped a beat. He had seen that woman before.

Two weeks earlier, Sunny had been planning his next heist in a small café in Bandra when he overheard a conversation at the next table. A young woman, animated and passionate, was talking about the neurological impact of traumatic memories and the potential of technology to heal them.

Her name was Dr Ayesha Sharma, a brilliant scientist just out of her PhD programme, specialising in neurotechnology. Sunny listened in, intrigued despite himself. Ayesha spoke of a vision where technology could erase or suppress traumatic memories, allowing people to heal from PTSD and severe anxiety.

Sunny had approached her, partly out of curiosity and partly out of the desire to know if she could be a threat to his own operations. “Excuse me, but do you really think you can erase memories?”

Ayesha, startled by the interruption, looked at Sunny with wide eyes. “Not exactly erase, but yes, suppress or recontextualise them. Why?”

Sunny smirked. “What if I told you I have a way to extract memories? To see them as clearly as watching a movie?”

Ayesha's eyes narrowed in suspicion, but there was a flicker of interest she couldn't hide. “You're joking, right?”

Sunny wasn't joking. He showed her the Thought Extractor, and for the first time, he saw someone look at it with awe, not fear or greed. Ayesha was fascinated, but also horrified by the potential misuse. “This could change everything,” she whispered.

Sunny had nodded, a rare moment of sincerity. “I know. That's why I need your help.”

That had been the start of their unlikely partnership. Sunny, the thief with a dark past, and Ayesha, the idealistic scientist with a vision for the future. Together, they had delved into the possibilities of the Thought Extractor, discovering ways to reprogram traumatic memories, making them less harmful to the psyche.

Ayesha had been ecstatic, believing this could revolutionise mental health care. Sunny, for the first time, saw a path to redemption.

But as Sunny stood in Menon's study, the images of Ayesha flashing before him, he realised they were in grave