

The EJFS saga continues as Abhu, and his best friend Singh embark on another journey to save the world from an evil, elusive cabal: The Shadow State, as they continue their quest to rid the world of corruption, terrorism, and tyranny.

EJFS Episode 2: The Shadow State

By Michael J. Beasley

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EJFS EPISODE 2: THE SHADOW STATE

MICHAEL J. BEASLEY

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Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-909-8 Ebook ISBN: 978-1-64719-910-4

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc. 2021

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data Beasley, Michael J.

EJFS: ELITE JUSTICE FORCE SQUAD SERIES - Episode 2 - The Shadow State by Michael J. Beasley

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021923214

Table of Contents

Acknowledgmentsg	9
Preface1	1
Prologue13	3
1: The Set-Up	7
2: Call to Action: Abhu's Stunning Revelation29	9
3: EJFS Emergency Briefing: Kim Taken in for questioning	3
4: Judson Clayborn's Re-education: EJFS Questions Kim56	5
5: Kim's Questioning Begins: POTUS Hill's Dark Secret66	5
6: Enter Kim's Doppelganger: Zima and Gyan plot America's Election Day Demise80)
7: EJFS Stonewalled: Vritra's Remains Unsealed)
8: POTUS Hill National Address: Kim's Doppelganger's First Act of Sabotage97	7
9: EJFS Arrives in NYC: The Storm to End All Storms is Created	9
10: EJFS Readies Assault on Gyan's Compound: Kim's Doppelganger Strikes Again120	O
11: Gyan's Home Under Siege by the EJFS126	5
12: Gyan in Custody: The USA In Peril	
13: Gyan Interrogated: Zima Flees to Budapest142	2
14: Kim Learns of Caleb's Dual Identity: Alicia's Latest Sabotage	9
15: The Second Briefing: Kim Scorned by POTUS Hill's Duplicity	1

16: Drake's Defection and Escape: POTUS Declares War on EJFS
17: Drake Meets Khali Under Ultimatum from POTUS: EJFS TAC Teams Deploy to Budapest
18: Gyan's Escape: Nicolas and Logan Make Amends 213
19: Drake Departs for EJFS Zurich Ghost Site: EJFS Vacates US Airspace
20: Midnight Thunder Activated: Nationwide Blackout235
21: POTUS Hill's Video Conference with Canada and Mexico: Drake Arrives at Zurich EJFS Ghost Site248
22: Anastasia Zima Arrives in Budapest: EJFS TAC Team Stakeout at Russian Embassy263
23: Abhu's Ominous Dream: Black Sparrow Zero's Identity Revealed
24: A New Day Dawns: EJFS TAC Team Arrives in Warsaw, Poland292
25: Abhu's and Durga's Dual Device Scan: Zima Interrogated
26: Warsaw EJFS Under Attack: Tragedy Strikes the EJFS
27: CIRB Director Confronts Matthews: Vritra's Necklace Resurfaces
28: Zima and Bradford Face-Off: EJFS TAC Team Attacks Rumbeke Castle
29: EJFS Returns to Atlanta: Richer Makes His Move 351
30: Shadow State Sleeper Cells Activated: Kim Begins Training
31: Kim's Transition into EJFS Superagency Begins: Richer Targets EJFS Atlanta Base370

Episode 2: The Shadow State

32: Atlanta-EJFS Thunderhead Base Defense from Hill's Wrath: Amir Laments Naveen's Death
33: EJFS Strikes Back: POTUS Hill and Shadow State Exposed
34: EJFS Oversees Hill's Impeachment: Another Government Mole Operative Activated408
35: Khali Arrives in D.C.: Drake Assumes Command419
36: Khali Testifies in Congress: EJFS TAC Team Forms Boundary Along US East Coast
37: EJFS Strikes Richer Manor: Shadow State Seizes Offshore Oil Rig438
38: The Last Hurrah over the Southeast Atlantic: Vritra's Cataclysmic Return
39: Vritra Consumes Midnight Thunder456
40: The Final Battle in The Atlanta Skies465
41: Hill Learns His Fate: Khali in Dire Straits472
Epilogue: Three Days Later479
After-Story
1: Khali Missing: Singh Overcome with Grief 482
2: Abhu Debriefed: Singh Seeks Sharma's Counsel 490
3: Singh Debriefed: Khali Bound for Siberian Prison 501
4: Singh Makes the Call: Hill's Parting Shot 509

1: The Set-Up



Judson Clayborn

R-Line

Lexington Avenue 59 Street Subway Station

Lower East Manhattan

New York City, New York, USA

November 1, 2024

10:00 PM EDT, Friday Night

On one rainy night in the lower east side of Manhattan, a slender middle-aged man in his 40s, named Judson Clayborn, walked down the street. At the late hour in the evening, he wore a brown leather trench coat in the pouring rain.

Judson Clayborn was a buyer from a local expedition group, hoping to locate the necklace containing Vritra's remains after

the willfully human-caused seal breach at the hands of the fallen Final Wave terrorist organization in Siberia during the previous year. He wanted to see the full extent of its power.

Clayborn boarded a subway train, heading to the Western Hotel by the Grand Central Station. He was to meet with a courier for inside information on the whereabouts of the lost item.

Clayborn briskly but carefully trekked down the stairs to the Lexington Avenue subway station in the pouring rain.

The torrential downpour created tangled traffic in the city. Land-based and flying cars overhead honked at each other in the distance.

After Clayborn made it down the stairs to the subway station, he boarded the R-Train to the Grand Central Station on the Lower East Side, hoping to bypass the traffic jams throughout the city.

Meanwhile, a cloaked, athletically-built female arrived at the Western Hotel near the Grand Central Station area and retired to her hotel room. She had already booked it hours earlier, after running an errand.

The cloaked figure was the courier offering the sale of valuable information. The intel would lead to the whereabouts of Vritra's remains encased in the ancient dragon-shaped necklace vessel, which contained its evil power from eons ago.

The cloaked woman brought a sealed file inside a locked fingerprint-scannable courier case onto the elevator to the Western Hotel's fourth floor.

She unlocked the hotel room door with a key card and tapped on the reader device to enter the private suite.

The courier set up the room with a table, and two chairs prepared, one for the buyer and one for the courier facing the doorway to the suite.

Meanwhile, the R-Train arrived at Grand Central Station. Clayborn disembarked from the train and left the station to go to the nearby hotel.

After Clayborn crossed the street to the entrance of the Western Hotel, he walked in. As he wiped his feet on the rug, he discreetly picked up an identical access card beneath it. The courier had placed it to give him exclusive access to the room.

Clayborn took the elevator to the fourth floor and walked down to the hall where Room 477 was located. He tapped in his key card and walked into the room, causing the shadowy figure to draw her handgun. Clayborn reacted and drew his pistol, and they both stood off, gazing at each other.

"Is this how you treat your potential buyers?" Clayborn asked intently.

"Only to those that show up over five minutes late," The cloaked figure in the hooded jacket retorted in a sick, deranged voice.

"You sound demented," Clayborn replied.

The cloaked woman cackled and lowered her handgun, which led Clayborn to holster his pistol.

"I'll let this slide. I know the weather is horrid tonight." The cloaked woman responded in a calmer tone.

"Who are you anyway?" Clayborn asked bluntly.

"That's a very forward question, Judson." The courier in the shadowy outfit replied with hostility.

"I want to know if you are human," Clayborn added.

"I suppose I'll let you judge for yourself," The courier replied and took off the hood of the coat, revealing a lifeless, sullen face with pale skin and dark circles under her eyes.

"My name is Anastasia Zima," The courier revealed her name to the buyer as her haunting face came into view.

"You look like a ghost," Clayborn rudely pointed out.

"I would be cautious about your line of conversation, Judson. I could have had you eliminated by now if I wanted. But enough of this foolishness. Let us get down to business. Take a seat in front of me," Zima dictated in a pressing tone.

Clayborn was hesitant at first but approached the table.

"Take off your trench coat so that I know that you are not wearing a wire," Zima demanded sharply.

"Seriously?" Clayborn's face soured as he grew tired of the treatment from the courier.

"I'm always serious. Take it off," Zima continued, and her eyes narrowed to slits.

"Okay, fine," Clayborn took off his trench coat and showed Anastasia that he was not wearing a wire.

"Happy now?" Clayborn asked irritably.

"I'm satisfied. Now take a seat," Zima insisted.

Clayborn made a hostile facial expression and took a seat in front of Zima.

Zima retrieved her courier case and placed it on the table in front of Clayborn.

"Here are the terms of the deal. They are non-negotiable: I require that you wire transfer money to my offshore bank account in Macau, China, in the amount of \$50,000. You will be given three minutes total to read the file. If you exceed that time limit, I will kill you, and the information I offer will remain in my control."

"Jeez, talk about sudden death," Clayborn shuddered as a chill ran down his spine.

"Those are the terms. You can take it or leave it. Need I remind you that your expedition company has been looking for leads on this ancient artifact for months? If you walk away now, you will have wasted those months and this meeting. There's no guarantee that you will find this information anywhere else," Zima enticed the buyer to remain committed to the sale.

"You know what? I'm out. I don't believe you are legitimate. I will tell all my partner companies to stay away from doing business with you," Clayborn replied and abruptly got out of his chair to leave.

"I'm sorry we couldn't complete the sale. Maybe you will have better luck in...another lifetime," Zima forewarned.

Clayborn was wary of her words, prompting him to put on his trench coat quickly. He hastily left and slammed the door.

Clayborn raced down the hall to the elevators as a housekeeper wandered down the hallway with a cleaning cart. He stared intently at the fleeing expeditor.

Clayborn briskly passed by the housekeeper and boarded the elevator.

After Clayborn boarded the elevator, the housekeeper pulled out his smartphone and speed-dialed an associate.

"The buyer has left the suite. Keep close and watch his movements," He instructed quietly.



CIRB Asset, Grant Bradford

"Acknowledged." The asset representing the corrupt CIRB, the Counterintelligence Response Bureau, Grant Bradford, watched the security footage from the surveillance van outside the hotel.

Bradford noticed Clayborn briskly storm out of the hotel to the Grand Central Station. Clayborn was seen rushing to board a train bound to Upper Manhattan.

Bradford suspected Clayborn was about to notify the authorities of what just happened. Clayborn could not have known that the US Government set up the failed deal orchestrated by the CIRB.

CIRB vehicles doubled back around the street, surrounding the station, as Clayborn noticed the increased activity. At the same time, he darted inside the station and reached the R-Train platform for northbound to upper Manhattan.

Clayborn, scrambling in a panic, tried to elude the CIRB agents on his tail as he waited to board the R-Train. However, the train was not due to arrive for another minute.

Zima packed up her gear at the hotel suite, loaded and placed her handgun in her holster, and lowered her hood to conceal her face.

She sought to hunt down her failed buyer, whom she contemplated killing after he stormed out of her hotel suite. She suspected that Clayborn would become a whistleblower.

At Grand Central Station, the CIRB agents received reinforcements and searched the building to find their target. In the shadows, Clayborn continued to wait for the train to take him north.

Finally, the train arrived at the R-Line platform, and he quickly boarded to return home several miles north.

The train closed its doors before the CIRB agents arrived on the scene and quickly departed.

One of the CIRB agents contacted Zima. "The target is on the R-Train going northbound. What do you want us to do?"

Zima quickly answered her smartphone. "Pursue the target down to the Lexington 55 station. He doesn't live far from there. Stay on him until I get to his residence."

Zima hung up as she briskly walked down the hall with her gear and courier case she kept secure in her messenger bag. From there, she hurried down the stairwell to the parking garage.

Clayborn rested on the subway train, under the impression that he had escaped the heat.

However, another CIRB asset was onboard the subway train and kept a close eye on the target. Clayborn caught a glimpse of a darkly-clad agent.

Clayborn was still in a slight panic and noticed out of the corner of his eye that another possible CIRB asset watched him in one of the rear-view mirrors.

Clayborn sat in his seat and felt anxious about what was happening around him. Other travelers were looking at him, confused by Clayborn's neurotic demeanor.

The CIRB asset kept his line of sight locked onto Clayborn. The agent planned to apprehend him as soon as the subway train arrived at the destination, where Clayborn would disembark to go home.

Meanwhile, Zima made her way to the parking garage by the hotel and boarded her motorbike. From there, she departed the garage heading to Clayborn's residence to pin him down.

On the subway train heading northeast, the CIRB asset accessed the subway operations program on his smartphone. He prepared to cause a derailment on the R-Line to cover up what they were doing in a false-flag operation.

The CIRB asset accessed the NTSB operations manifest on his smartphone. He then changed the train's course to a blocked railway in an under-construction station.

Soon after, the train stopped at the Lexington 55 station under its new guided path.

Clayborn was placed in handcuffs as the CIRB asset stopped him on the train. The asset escorted Clayborn off the train as other CIRB assets were on location to take Clayborn to his residence. Zima was destined to confront her buyer, who had reneged on the failed deal.

Flanking him on all sides, the CIRB assets walked Clayborn out of the station.

The assets escorted Clayborn to a black SUV with tinted windows. Clayborn was placed in the backseat to be taken to his residence.

Clayborn was terrified of what the CIRB assets wanted with him, but he remained silent, not knowing what was happening or why he was in the custody of the CIRB.

The black SUV arrived at Clayborn's residence, where Zima was waiting with several other CIRB agents awaiting Clayborn's arrival.

The CIRB assets escorted Clayborn inside his residence. Zima and her CIRB agents' team followed them inside.

One of the CIRB assets used a skeleton key to unlock the front door to Clayborn's home. They took him to his living room, sat him down on the couch, and prepared to question him while they searched his home for anything incriminating.

Zima and a few CIRB agents stayed behind while others searched the entirety of Clayborn's home.

"Do you know why we've brought you here?" Zima asked in a haunting tone.

"I can wager a guess. I think you are setting me up," Clayborn retorted in defiance.

Agent Grant Bradford, one of the athletically-built CIRB agents, punched Clayborn on his left cheekbone, causing him to groan in pain.

Zima leaned forward as she sat on the coffee table, trying to get into Clayborn's head.

"Why did you want to set up an information exchange when you walked out? Are you afraid of what you have gotten yourself into? Do you even know the history behind this necklace and its terrible powers?" Zima asked him.

"What do you people want with me?! Why are you rummaging through my home?!" Clayborn shouted.

"Quiet! We ask the questions, not you!" CIRB agent Bradford barked at Clayborn.

"I think you don't know what kind of trouble you have gotten yourself into. But I think you can be of use to us. Our network is looking for participants to sway the election to keep the current President in power for another term, perhaps beyond. We cannot let you go if you plan to expose us," Zima continued.

"Look, I don't want any part of what you people are planning. Let me go!" Clayborn pleaded.

"That's not possible at this point. You've dipped your toes into forbidden waters. You are now aware of our operation. You cannot continue to live your life without us on your tail. So, you can choose to either oppose us or work with us, and we will let you stay here, but on a short leash. Whether you like it or not, you have involved yourself in this organization. Join us, and we'll give you whatever you want as long as you stay out of our way," Zima scolded Clayborn.

Clayborn remained silent. He felt backed into a corner.

Suddenly, one of the CIRB agents, searching Clayborn's home, entered the living room with a piece of evidence that he wanted to share.

"I found a trip itinerary for a vacation in Guadalajara, Mexico, this weekend." CIRB Agent Cortez handed over the itinerary to Zima to inspect.

"Why are you taking a trip to Mexico this weekend? Did you intend to sell the information that you were going to buy to another party?" Zima asked as she reviewed the information on Clayborn's itinerary.

"Okay, I was going to put the information on the black market. I was looking to make money on return investment. Are you happy now?" Clayborn confessed.

"Very much so, Judson. You have just given us a reason to keep you in our custody. You are part of this operation for the long haul now," Zima snapped her fingers to her associates, and CIRB Agent Bradford covered Clayborn's face with a blackout blindfold.

The last words Clayborn heard before losing consciousness were chilling:

"Welcome to the Shadow State."

The CIRB agents and Zima took Clayborn out of his residence and boarded black SUVs. Their destination was a remote black site where the Shadow State operated in the upstate New York region.

Later that night, the same subway train that Clayborn once rode, sped down the wrong line and derailed off the tracks, causing everyone onboard to be killed in the wreckage. Along with first responders and the NYPD, DHS agents swarmed the area to examine the incident scene.

Around 11:00 PM on the US's east coast, the Elite Justice Force Squad saw the events unfold on the news in Atlanta's skyline. This spurred the EJFS super-agents and tech analysts to respond to the Manhattan incident after the train derailment.

Master Khali, the Chief Commander and Head of the EJFS, spoke on their network's AERIAL VOIP video calling system with the Chief of Police at the NYPD and the Deputy Director of Homeland Security.

Khali contacted all EJFS agents who were off-duty to return to action as a developing situation unfolded in New York City throughout the late-night hours.

2: Call to Action: Abhu's Stunning Revelation



EJFS Agent Abhu Dhuval Sandeep

Singh's Beachfront Villa Savannah, Georgia, USA November 1, 2024

11:10 PM EDT, Friday Night

EJFS Agents Abhu Sandeep and Singh Sherpa were vacationing with their love interests: Durga Deshmukh and Gangi Bhanuni. They were in Savannah, on the beachfront property owned by Agent Singh.

Agents Abhu, Durga, and Gangi were houseguests staying at Singh's villa during the week on their vacation period.

Agent Singh brought out a chilled bottle of white wine from the blast chiller.

The foursome relaxed in their comfortable beach clothes. They lounged on the patio overlooking the ocean, listening to the pounding waves hypnotically beating the shores.

The four agents gathered around a fire pit and spent the late evening hours having a little liquor to spice up the night while making s'mores.

"This brings back so many memories of my childhood years, except there was no Zinfandel involved." Agent Abhu scorched his marshmallows on the metal skewer over the fire pit.

"Well, let's make this a new time-honored tradition." Agent Singh toasted, and they all took a drink from their stemmed wine glasses.

"Here, here!" Gangi cheered for the new tradition.

"I'll drink to that too," Durga raised her glass and took a sip of her wine.

"So, Abhu, when did you have your first legal drink?" Gangi asked openly.

Abhu licked the nearly-incinerated marshmallow mess from his fingers. Abhu started to assemble his s'more sandwich treat. "Probably back when I had to move out of my family house. I think I had about two or three shots of rum and cola."

Singh took a bite out of his s'more sandwich and felt young again. "Mine was after I graduated from college. I enjoyed an East Indian Negroni with some friends from Georgia State. It was a real treat."

Gangi candidly spoke after she took a bite out of her s'mores treat. "I often drink mimosas and screwdrivers. I love citrus-based drinks mostly."

Durga took moderately big bites out of her toasted marshmallow treat that smelled like burnt sugar. "I'm more of a wine type of girl. All I need is a nice bottle of pinot noir by the fireplace, and I'm all set for the evening."

Abhu reflected on the events from the time he first enlisted in the EJFS.

"Man, I can't believe it has been over a year since Singh and I defeated Vritra. Now, we are amidst another presidential election in a few days," Abhu marveled.

Singh replied. "Indeed, my friend. This has been an incredible lead-up to the ensuing election. It's vital that our organization be a voice for truth and justice in this political season."

Durga spoke on the subject matter. "Does anybody think President Hill could win a second term?"

Gangi scoffed as she took another sip of her beverage. "Ugh, I would hope not. I think he is a menace."

Singh reacted. "Only time will tell. He *is* leading the polls, though."

Abhu interjected, "Sometimes, the polls are inaccurate. The last days of the campaign could be make-or-break for either nominee."

Singh concluded the political banter. "We must not be too biased in our line of work. Everyone in the EJFS knows that we must determine the truthfulness of each nominee. The electorate will have the final say on the outcome."

The four of them finished their late-night desserts and polished off their wine.

Agent Singh started to feel sleepy from the late hour and alcohol consumption.

"It's getting pretty late. We should head off to bed for the night. Have a good rest, everyone. I'll see you all in the morning,"

Singh washed his hands in the kitchen sink then wiped them with a dry towel.

The four of them entered the kitchen to wash up and clean their wine glasses.

Shortly after, the foursome went to bed in the beachfront home property for the night, relaxing to the waves pounding the beach. The foursome split up for the night, each pair eager to enjoy a romantic evening on the beachfront.

A gentle, fresh sea breeze blew through the open windows and made the environment comfortable.

When everyone was asleep, Abhu started having an intense dream involving an oppressive shadow government in another country.

Abhu saw images of captives being put into internment camps, forced into slave labor. During the vision, Abhu was a spectator in the dream.

Then, Abhu heard a raspy voice behind his ear that uttered: "You can't escape your destiny. This is your future!"

Abhu witnessed a scoundrel who stood tall with an upgraded Victorian-style building as the backdrop. A tyrannical leader's statue overlooked the building's main entrance, which was located near a clearing in the woods.

* * *

Suddenly, Abhu woke up to the sound of Master Khali's vibrating ringtone. The tune had an exotic Indian flair.

Abhu was startled out of his slumber, and he saw the time display on his phone, indicating it was 6:07 a.m.

Abhu answered the call after he sat up in bed to grab his phone from the nightstand.

"Hello?" Abhu answered his smartphone with a lethargic look on his face and his long wavy hair disheveled.



EJFS Chief Commander, Master Khali

"Agent Abhu, it's Khali. I am sorry to inform the four of you that your vacation has been cut short. We have a situation that is an ongoing development. Everyone is being called back to the base. We have an emergency briefing at 9:00 a.m. I need the four of you to get back to the Thunderhead Base right away. That's an order."

Master Khali spoke from his office in the EJFS Thunderhead Base over the Atlanta skyline while watching morning news coverage out of New York City.

During Abhu's call from Khali, Durga woke up at Abhu's side. She checked her phone and saw a flash message ordering all Atlanta EJFS agents back to the Thunderhead Base Palace immediately.

Abhu complied. "I understand. We'll be there soon."

Abhu rubbed the slumber from his eyes while Durga rustled out of bed to get dressed.

"Thank you, Agent Abhu. I'll see you all when you get back here." Master Khali ended the call and continued calling on all the veteran EJFS agents on vacation to return to action.

Abhu and Durga outfitted behind some changing screens in their room. Both grabbed their badges and guns from their nightstand drawers. They equipped both items after they donned their EJFS uniforms with strapped-on accessory belts and assorted gear-holders on their black cargo pants.

Abhu knocked on Singh and Gangi's bedroom door to inform them that Khali had ordered all agents to return to the base headquarters stationed over Atlanta.



EJFS Agent Singh Puneet Sherpa

Singh was already getting clothed in his uniform when Abhu knocked on his door.

"Khali needs us back at the base," Abhu informed them from the hall.

Singh and Gangi were getting clothed out of view behind the two changing screens facing each other. "We know, Abhu, we've got the flash message." Singh spoke in a breathy tone as he quickly suited his Herculean body up in his uniform.

Singh's breath made the wind blow towards his love interest Gangi, frustrated with the windy draft originating from Singh's mouth.

"Ugh, Singh, you're messing up my hair," Gangi moaned in frustration.

"Sorry," Singh apologized.

Singh finished suiting up and staggered to his nightstand to retrieve his badge and handgun from the drawer.

Singh wrapped his holstering equipment around his thigh and stored his handgun in the concealed holster.

Gangi fixed her hair before she finished getting dressed, and she grabbed her gun and badge from underneath her pillow.

Singh noticed her habitual storage routine and called her out on it.

"Seriously? You keep your gun and badge under the pillowcase?" Singh arched his brow.

"Old habits," Gangi responded coyly.

Singh chuckled softly and kissed Gangi gently on her lips, and they packed their gear to depart.

As Abhu and Durga finished packing, Gangi followed Singh outside to his car parked in the driveway.

The four agents entered Singh's car and ascended to the EJFS Thunderhead Base, hovering above the Atlanta skyline.

**

The four agents made their ascent into the Thunderhead Base, no longer in stealth mode as in previous years before the EJFS went public.

Singh drove down the automatic parking garage on the second sub-level floor with Abhu in the passenger seat and Durga and Gangi in the backseat riding along.

Agent Pranay greeted them with the briefing materials circulated to their tablets when the two dating couples entered the main lobby hallways.

"Welcome back, lovebirds. Here are your briefing materials. I have sent them to your tablets in a batch email to all agents. The briefing begins in less than a few hours. All of you better start studying the reports."

Returning Agent Pranay Prem grinned at them as he walked by his partner, Agent Garjan Bankim, who welcomed the returning agents.

Agents Abhu and Singh said goodbye to their lovers as they returned to the Level Four Opal Quadrant Unit, joining the other residents in a quick meeting.

Abhu and Singh returned to the Level Five Residential Quadrant Sapphire Unit after tapping their key cards and scanning them to enter.

The gate opened, and the duo entered the quadrant and witnessed their old friends as they hustled and bustled down the halls, settling back in after some had taken vacation time for a week.

"Hey! Welcome back, guys!" Agent Naveen greeted Abhu and Singh as they shook hands and hugged their colleague.

"It's good to be back," Agent Singh spoke and reciprocated the hug, and Abhu did the same.

"Good to see you again," Agent Abhu greeted him after a quick embrace from Naveen.

Agent Darsh stepped out of the quadrant office and welcomed the returned agents from their vacation in Savannah.



EJFS Agent Amit "Darsh" Darshan Vivek

"Ah, welcome back, you two. Both of you can head to your rooms and unpack, then meet us in the dining hall for a quick huddle this morning," Darsh welcomed both agents Abhu and Singh.

Both outstanding operatives arrived in their private quarters, which were next door to each other.

Both agents unloaded their luggage from their little vacation. They placed their dirty clothes in their laundry bags. The sorted laundry would be picked up by the crewmembers in the sublevel cleaning center of the Thunderheads for washing and cleaning.

They each placed their dirty clothes down a chute attached to a bin designated for every floor and quadrant unit. Then, workers began processing their clothes to sort and clean. After they were cleaned, they would be returned to their proper agents' quarters. After both Abhu and Singh settled back into their respective rooms, they reviewed the briefing materials on their tablets and looked through the field reports composed by EJFS agents who had been on-site in New York City during the events the night before.

Inside the first section was a dossier file for Judson Clayborn, captured by the CIRB. Both Abhu and Singh studied the summary alone in their rooms and read through the reports submitted jointly by the EJFS and the NYPD.

Both flipped to the next page on their tablet screen, showing surveillance footage of the hooded individual in the Western Hotel, as they checked into their suite in preparation for an exchange of inside information.

Abhu and Singh individually continued to examine the documents, viewing surveillance photos at the New York Subway Station in Manhattan, which exhibited Clayborn being taken away in handcuffs and escorted to a black SUV.

Both agents turned to the next page in their digital briefing, showing crime scene photos from the subway crash and an illegal search and seizure of property by the CIRB as its agents searched the home of Judson Clayborn.

Both agents panned through the photos and examined all the evidence collected thus far.

The last photo in the digital briefing piqued interest: it featured a spray paint tag on the subway station wall near the derailed train with the acronym TSS.

There was a poster of a shadowy, athletic, feminine creature wearing a hooded striped jacket and holding up a palm facing forward, which showed a triangle and the acronym 'TSS.' Also visible was a tagline that read, "Destroy from Within" on the bottom caption of the poster.

After Abhu and Singh individually studied the advance briefing documentation on their tablets, they exited their quarters and gathered in the dining hall to reunite with their fellow agents.

Abhu and Singh sat next to each other along with the other agents in the unit. Amit "Darsh" Vivek, Pranay Prem, Naveen Kamboja, and the remaining agents assigned to the quadrant unit gathered at the long table for a discussion before the briefing later that morning.

Agent Darsh opened the symposium.

"Welcome back, gentlemen. I hope you have had a good time off. But it is now time to get down to business. Last night, there was a situation in New York City involving the CIRB, an unidentified party, and a man named Judson Clayborn. Here is what we will be scrutinizing in the briefing today: We will be reviewing evidence submitted by the NYPD Chief of Police to examine key elements involved in last night's events and the subsequent subway train derailment in New York. Then we will plan a mission outline and set of objectives. Finally, we will reconvene and revisit our assignments later."

"Now, I suggest everyone grab some breakfast downstairs and kick yourselves into high gear. This is a top priority case. The allagency briefing will take place at 9:00 a.m. Don't be late," Agent Darsh warned.

The EJFS agents exited the dining hall and headed down to the main floor cafeteria for a homecoming breakfast banquet for the returning veteran agents.

The returned agents and new agents became acquainted after they had returned from their vacation.

Agents Abhu, Singh, Darsh, Pranay, Basu, and Naveen sat at one end of the table with the new EJFS agents.

All agents were given a stack of pumpkin pancakes as an autumnal treat with butter, maple syrup, and some pumpkin-spiced coffee with cream and sugar.

The agents indulged in their breakfast treat and familiarized themselves with the newest class of agents in the EJFS.

"Where are y'all from?" Agent Abhu asked between bites.

"My name is Anil, and I'm from Atlanta."

"I'm Baadal, and I'm from Marietta."

"Hi, I'm Daarun. I'm a transplant from the New York Division."

"Hello, I'm Ettan. I'm from Savannah."

"My name is Garjan, and I'm from Columbia, South Carolina."

"Hi, I'm Meghnad. I'm from Galveston, Texas."

After getting to know each other, the topic shifted to what was gathered from the brief they analyzed from their tablets.

Darsh asked the group of twelve seated at their table. "Has anyone been able to decipher what this acronym "TSS" represents?"

Tech Analyst Ettan gave his insight. "I think it could be the name of a secret society type of an organization. I have a few names running through my head right now, and it appears dire."

Agent Anil suggested. "I think it might have been a governmentrun false flag operation with the intent to distract the public from voting in the upcoming election."

Agent Singh asked. "Have we vetted everyone in both of the nominees' campaigns?"

Agent Garjan indicated. "We ran everyone in the database, and there were a handful of staff members on President Kenneth Hill's campaign who appear to have some extreme views about which direction they want America to go."

Agent Abhu inquired. "Such as?"

Agent Pranay chimed into the discussion. "There are a few liaisons and interns on their payroll that have some active involvement in separatist groups opposed to a 'fascist government regime' in their mission statements."

Agent Meghnad pulled out a file folder containing dossiers of campaign staff members on the incumbent President's payroll.

Meghnad elucidated. "There are staff members on Hill's team who have had some questionable political affiliations in their career history."

Agent Meghnad began but paused. "There are a few of them who aren't very well-known. However..."

Agent Daarun whispered to Meghnad. "Should we really be telling him this?"

Agent Darsh insisted. "Go ahead, Meghnad. Abhu has the right to know."

Abhu asked abruptly. "Right to know what?"

Agent Meghnad paused again. "Well, Abhu. I'm sorry to have to inform you this but..."

Abhu stared blankly and expected horrible news.

"...Your sister, Kim Porter, is on this list of questionable affiliations. She is an event planner in the President's campaign, and she has been involved in some liberal extremist rallies this past summer at her alma mater. She advocates for some political activist groups considered by many to be domestic terrorists. They identify as a socialist uprising group known as "Upheave Fascism," Agent Meghnad continued grimly.

Agent Abhu disputed. "Wait a minute, I know my sister, and she would not get herself entangled in this mess. I mean, I know she is, you know...A bit...out there in her political ideology, but she is not that extreme."

Darsh countered. "That doesn't change the fact that she has a relatively politically active lifestyle. We must interview her later today, but you cannot be involved in her questioning since she is your sister. However, we will not go overboard on her interrogation out of respect for your family. We currently have a watch team hovering over her in her apartment to keep her surrounded."

Abhu was stunned. His appetite disappeared. He could not imagine that his sister would be engaged in this sort of political extremism.

Darsh continued. "She will be brought in later this morning for interviewing. Khali has permitted you to observe during the questioning, but you must exercise restraint or excuse yourself if you need to blow off steam. I'm sorry."

Abhu held his head in his hands and sighed, "This is going to be another long one."

Singh felt empathetic and comforted Abhu before the breakfast period was over.

Singh consoled Abhu, who felt sick to his stomach. "I'll make sure that they go easy on her. We need answers to find the ones responsible for this. Then we will let your sister return home. We have to follow protocol."

The twelve agents somberly exited the cafeteria and reported to the Level One auditorium for an emergency briefing regarding the last night's events.

3: EJFS Emergency Briefing: Kim Taken in for questioning



EJFS Second-In-Command, Agent Raj Ajith Kalidas

EJFS Briefing Auditorium – Level One

EJFS Palace Base Headquarters – Atlanta Branch, Eastern US Division

20,000 feet over Atlanta

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

November 2, 2024

8:55 AM EDT, Saturday Morning

The entire EJFS roster gathered into the main auditorium foyer to check into their assigned seats inside the Atlanta subdivision.

Agents Abhu and Singh signed in on the alphabetical sign-up tablets sorted by the first letter of their last name. The

receptionists then transmitted the briefing materials to their tablets and other devices.

Once all the EJFS agents had assembled in the auditorium, the lights dimmed. The head of the EJFS superagency, Master Khali, entered the stage connected to the center of the odeum with his entourage: Second-in-Command Agent Raj Ajith Kalidas at his right, Agent Kumar at his left, Agent Devdas behind Raj, and Khali's new adviser Tanveer Bhattacharya.

The top brass of the EJFS took a seat at the curved table in the center of the chamber.

Agent Raj curled his index finger towards Singh to cue him to the curved table to join him. Agent Singh had since been promoted to Raj's task force team (the most elite team possible in the agency).

Singh rose from his seat, joined the elite five, and sat next to his partner, Agent Devdas, at the far end of the curved table.

Master Khali led the briefing to open, "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for attending this emergency briefing on such short notice. We have received word from our New York subdivision that there was an incident late last night involving an inside information exchange. Taking part was a key player in the apocalyptic events that transpired over a year ago. We will be issuing assignments to all units shortly. But first, Agent Raj will be giving us a briefing report and mission overview to explain the situation and our unified approach to correct the problem."

Agent Raj took control of the briefing, and Kumar enhanced the high-resolution digital presentation on the screens.

The first graphic displayed on the screens showed a surveillance video obtained from the Western Hotel in Lower East Manhattan, indicating a cloaked figure entering the hotel with a courier case and checking into their suite.

The facial recognition software picked up a glimpse of the suspected perpetrator. A dossier report appeared, showing the description and headshot of Anastasia Zima, an ex-KGB operative, and a former biotech engineer for the defunct Final Wave Terrorist Organization. The network had since been disbanded over a year ago following the defeat of their leader, Ravan Kanda Ganesh, and their zealous monstrous dragon figure, Vritra, in September of 2023.

Raj spoke into his Bluejaw and provided the first set of details from the failed information transaction from the night before in New York.

"Good morning. Last night around 10:08 p.m. EDT, an inside information deal was supposed to go down inside the Western Hotel in Lower East Manhattan of New York City. We have obtained surveillance footage indicating a hooded character carrying a courier case seen entering the hotel. When the suspect entered the hotel, our facial recognition technology collected a partial frame of the suspect's face obscured by their hooded jacket. We processed the partial in the database. We found a match to a key player tied to the events of 14 months ago during the operation against the fallen Final Wave terrorist organization," Agent Raj began.

"The suspect is Anastasia Zima, a KGB operative during the end of the Cold War. She is now believed to be working with the CIRB in New York, forming a shadow government in some aspect of this network. I will explain more about that shortly," Agent Raj continued as the agents in the EJFS followed along and took notes on their tablet devices.

The presentation continued: another graphic was displayed on the screens that showed another player involved in the buy. A man in a trench coat was shown entering the Western Hotel. He acquired a hidden access card to the hotel suite number 477, where the failed transaction occurred.

The facial recognition technology pulled his profile out of the database, a 42-year-old male from Manhattan's Upper East Side. His profile and dossier report displayed on the screen showed his description and affiliations.

Agent Raj continued the briefing, "In this next slide, we have surveillance footage from around 10:13 p.m. EDT, showing a man that we have identified through facial recognition software as Manhattan native, Judson Clayborn. This man was believed to have been involved in the brokered meeting orchestrated by the CIRB in Upstate New York, where he runs his expedition operation involving ancient artifacts," Agent Raj began.

Information about Clayborn's company was displayed on the screens as part of the high-resolution presentation slides.

Raj continued, "Judson's company, named Expro Incorporated, is a well-known expeditor based in the Greater New York area. Judson stormed out of the hotel suite, passing by a housekeeping worker on the fourth floor. That housekeeper was then seen calling another contact on his phone, dialing a number registered to a CIRB asset named Grant Bradford. After Judson left the hotel, he rushed to Grand Central Station to board a subway train several blocks northeast to the Lexington 55 station. This is where CIRB assets apprehended Judson and escorted him back to his residence, presumably to search Judson's home and interrogate him."

The following graphic was displayed on the screens inside the auditorium. After a 911 call from a concerned neighbor, the

images showing the crime scene established that something happened at Clayborn's house, which also appeared to be related to the subway train derailment in Manhattan around 11:00 p.m. EDT.

"In this next slide, we have obtained crime scene photos in partnership with the NYPD from Judson's residence. The area was mostly wiped clean before the forensics team arrived to respond to the emergency call. This is where the trail dead-ends for Judson. He has been declared missing after multiple failed contacts from his family and authorities. However, his registered phone has been disconnected. There may be indications that he was transported out of town to a remote site cut off from the grid. The next slide that I have prepared gives us clues on the identity of this group operating against the West."

Agent Raj switched the graphic over to the next in the presentation.

The wreckage from the subway train derailment in Manhattan close to the Brooklyn Bridge had graffiti tags. A poster showed a triangular logo bearing the acronym "TSS" on the palm of the shadowy figure's hand on the photo. The graffiti tag read "Destroy from Within" in the crime scene photos obtained from the NYPD.

"This last slide in the series shows that following an orchestrated terrorist attack on the subway metro system in New York. Items of interest to the NYPD and our agency provide clues into this network's identity connected to the failed buy at the hotel and the train derailment. Anastasia Zima and the CIRB appear to be part of a vast, global, underground network working against Western societal values to undermine freedom and peace to tip the world's balance into a perpetual state of civil unrest and dissent. The acronym "TSS" as seen on the palm of the hooded

figure on the poster represents a terrible, formidable network that challenges the EJFS infrastructure to its very core..." Agent Raj trailed off.

The EJFS agents watched and listened with heightened interest and anxiety.

Agent Abhu sat with his tablet stylus pen pressed against his lips, vexed about what Raj explained in the briefing.

"This network is known as The Shadow State. They ostensibly mimic our technology in modifying weather patterns, resulting in more disruptive and menacing than the intended design we have adopted and safeguarded for almost a decade. A notorious tech giant and corporate owner, known as Jagmohan Gyan, has spearheaded the project and has been funding research and tests to advance the technology to control the weather. This man is coordinating with The Shadow State to equip them with this tool in a method that is detrimental to the entire world."

Agent Raj continued as the EJFS agents watched and listened with intent and fear.

"As you all know, the 2024 US Presidential Election will be held on Tuesday of next week. Our network all over the country has been monitoring, vetting, and researching all background information on both nominees. There is a troubling matter involving sitting President Kenneth Hill's campaign. Several of Hill's campaign staff members are tied to a political extremist group known as "Upheave Fascism." They are analogous to the disruptive. Bolshevik Uprising and much more longstanding operation of ensuring a corruption-free and honest election is still in effect until the time after the election and the votes have been tabulated. We are going to crack down on this extremist group and put an end to any of the campaign staff members' careers that have been deliberately engaging in this activity," Raj continued.

Agent Abhu looked on in dismay, knowing that his sister, Kim Porter, had been implicated in political extremism.

"Finally, in the coming days of the election, all agents and analyst teams are to remain watchful and vigilant for any terror threats that may impact the election. Continue to monitor the darknet and the radio chatter to indicate possible terrorist threats that may surface in the final days of the campaign trail. This has been an intense election cycle that has proven contentious on every level. I will hand the floor back over to Master Khali to close out the briefing. Thank you all for your continued active service," Agent Raj concluded, passing the floor to Khali.

"Thank you, Raj. Now, I will assemble joint task force teams in conjunction with the New York Subdivision to handle the active case against The Shadow State. Raj's task force team and other assigned units will be responsible for bringing in the President's campaign staff members suspected of involvement to Upheave Fascism. The remaining agents and analysts will continue to monitor the developments surrounding the election. It is the home stretch until the peak of the action occurs. Stay sharp and on task. This briefing is adjourned," Master Khali concluded.

Agent Raj insisted Singh stay behind and called forth Abhu to join him regarding the agent's sister Kim Porter and the plan to bring her in for questioning.

"Agent Abhu, please join us. We need to speak with you," Agent Raj asserted in his thick and powerful thunderous voice.

Abhu joined Singh and Raj on the stage as the EJFS agents headed back to their assigned locations.

"I understand that you have been made aware of the fact that your sister, Kim, is going to be picked up by our agents to be questioned, correct?" Agent Raj asked Abhu calmly.

"That's what I've been told. I still do not think Kim is that extreme on the political spectrum. I can't picture her going that far left," Abhu responded, still in denial that Kim would be involved in political extremism.

"I'm sorry that this has caused you such grief. I am willing to grant you the option to entrust the task of picking Kim up by the agents of your choice. We will go easy on her, given the fact that she is your sibling. If she is cleared of wrongdoing, we will take her back home to her apartment after we have questioned her and her testimony is confirmed," Agent Raj consoled Abhu. He felt terrible for the junior agent during his disturbing revelation.

"I request that you and Singh pick her up. I think she'll be willing to talk with agents like you that she'll recognize," Agent Abhu entreated.

"Fair enough, Singh and I will fly over to Kim's apartment and pick her up. If she is not involved, you two will not have anything to worry about. She'll be safe in our care," Agent Raj comforted Abhu and hugged him to soothe his emotional anguish. Abhu felt comforted after the embrace from Raj and was given another soothing embrace from Singh.

"Don't worry, my friend. We will be kind to her," Agent Singh consoled his best friend, Abhu.

Abhu felt a little more at ease but still experienced some anguish, knowing his sister would be brought to the EJFS Detention Center not far from the main Thunderhead.

"Thank you both," Agent Abhu smiled weakly even though many thoughts were racing through his mind.

"Well, Abhu. You can head up to the command center to work a shift for the time being. You will be issued an assignment within the next hour to assist in the Anastasia Zima case. Keep an eye out on your email account for your mission brief. We will be back in about a half-hour. Let's go, Singh," Agent Raj finished.

Agents Raj and Singh left the auditorium while Abhu lingered, still in a state of bewilderment.

Abhu grabbed his tablet from his seat and left the auditorium to head up to the command center briefly. Abhu hoped that Kim would not resist, knowing she carried an oppositional attitude, in particular, toward those in law enforcement.

Raj and Singh entered an elevator to the parking garage to ride a white ICV (Interchangeable Vehicle) down to Central Atlanta's surface, not far from the University of Georgia.

Agent Raj took the driver's seat, and Singh rode in the passenger seat. Raj started up the ICV and drove down to the parking garage's exit bay housed in the Thunderhead's sublevel floors.

Raj entered Kim Porter's address into the GPS overlay in the manifest screen, then carved a route to her apartment building in the Atlanta Metro area. Immediately, the wheels were locked into place by the metal stoppers on the floor.

The two agents scanned out, and the timer on the screen counted down from five to zero.

After the timer reached zero, Raj floored the gas pedal and launched off the exit ramp to descend to the surface in Atlanta, Georgia.



Kimberly Porter

Meanwhile, in Kim's apartment suite in Central Atlanta, Kim was getting dressed for meetings with campaign staff to plan the election night festivities in Washington D.C. for Tuesday. She had a private flight booked to depart at 10:45 a.m.

Kim packed her portfolio in her travel bag and suddenly heard a rumble of thunder in the distance. Kim did not seem too concerned. Her flight may be delayed, but that was all that worried her.

The rain started pouring down gloomily as a storm summoned by the EJFS watch team modified the weather to obscure the apartment building area, which was suddenly surrounded by a thundercloud.

Kim grabbed her smartphone and her charger. She checked the weather forecast and the current conditions, which indicated a strong storm was blowing through the city.

Kim received notification from her flight tracking app that her flight had been delayed due to stormy weather in the airport's vicinity. "Uh-oh. Not now," Kim whined as she grabbed her coat from her walk-in closet to dress for the stormy weather.

She would not settle on staying in her apartment suite. She needed to get past security for her check-in at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport at 10:00 a.m.

Suddenly a louder clap of thunder resounded in the apartment. The occurrence caused the building's lights to shut off, and Kim's phone powered down on its own.

"Lovely," Kim sarcastically muttered as she left her closet and decided not to chance it.

Kim stayed put while the storm remained intact and quasistationary for well over fifteen minutes.

Suddenly, Kim heard another considerably deep rumble of thunder followed by a brief police siren wailing. The sound came from a white ICV, which had arrived from the EJFS Thunderhead Palace Base above.

Raj pulled the white ICV into a guest parking space as Singh grabbed raincoats to stay dry in the inclement weather.

Kim looked out the window and saw two incredibly powerful Indian super-agents wearing EJFS uniforms and reflective navy-blue raincoats with the EJFS acronym on the back.

Kim started to panic inside as she saw the two huge agents enter the apartment building and head upstairs.

Agents Raj and Singh lumbered up the stairs inside and reached the apartment complex's third floor. Both agents located apartment suite 302. Raj knocked on Kim's front door with authority. "EJFS, open up!" Agent Raj commanded in his authoritative, booming voice.

The agents' arrival startled Kim, who deduced she was about to be arrested by the world-renowned Elite Justice Force Squad for something they had on her.

Kim felt shaky as another peal of thunder boomed in the sky.

Kim walked to the front door and opened it. She saw the two gigantic super-agents standing twice as tall as her 5'10" frame and felt intimidated by their presence.

"Why are you two here?" Kim asked fearfully while looking up at the two behemoth EJFS super-agents towering over her.

Agent Raj revealed his EJFS badge and identification to Kim, "Miss Porter, my name is Agent Raj, and this is my partner Agent Singh. We are from the EJFS. We first met you during the crisis events 14 months ago. If you do not mind, we would like to talk to you back at our base. We have some questions to ask you regarding your alleged involvement with the extremist group Upheave Fascism. We need to talk to you about it."

"I'm sorry, but there seems to be a bit of confusion. I do not know what you are talking about with that group. Now, if you do not mind, I have a flight to D.C. I need to catch in less than an hour." Kim resisted the two, but Singh wedged his large and robust size 18 6E boot in the door to prevent it from shutting.

"Kim, please don't make it hard for us. Your brother requested to have both of us bring you in after hearing about your alleged extremist activities. We will not arrest you if you cooperate with us, but we have a subpoena order from the EJFS to take you in for questioning. We will notify your people that you may need to take a later flight, if necessary. You must come with us and

answer some questions," Agent Singh pleaded to Kim, who remained motionless with disbelief.

"I, *uh*—, okay. Let me grab my stuff. I want you to give me a ride to the airport once you clear me of any wrongdoing. If Caleb insisted on me coming, I will comply," Kim acknowledged as she surrendered to the EJFS agents.

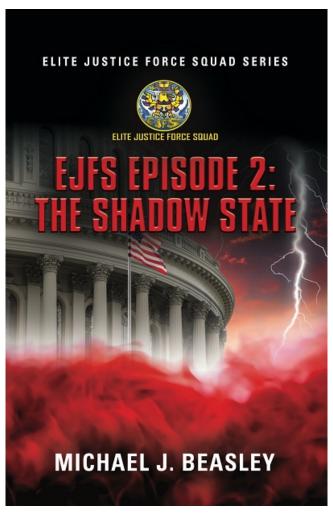
"We will have that arranged for you. Just come with us." Agent Singh beckoned to Kim to bring her up to the EJFS Thunderhead Base.

Both agents escorted Kim down the stairwell with great care and placed her in the back seat of the white ICV.

Kim buckled her seatbelt, and the two immense agents entered the front seats and soared to the EJFS Thunderhead after Agent Raj engaged flight mode causing a tube to emerge from the steering wheel.

Raj blew a strong gust of wind into the tube, which summoned a wind vacuum to suck up the ICV, and they started flying upward toward the EJFS Detention Center.

After the vehicle shot up into the air, the strong thunderstorm cleared up. The clouds parted, showing some sunbreaks after the storm had hovered for 20 minutes over Kim's apartment building during her interaction with the EJFS agents.



The EJFS saga continues as Abhu, and his best friend Singh embark on another journey to save the world from an evil, elusive cabal: The Shadow State, as they continue their quest to rid the world of corruption, terrorism, and tyranny.

EJFS Episode 2: The Shadow State

By Michael J. Beasley

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