

PETER MENNIGEN

COTTON

FBI

COUNTDOWN



BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

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What is COTTON FBI?

Your name is Jeremiah Cotton. You are a small-time cop in the NYPD, a rookie that no one takes seriously. But you want more. You have a score to settle with the world. And anyone who calls you “Jerry” will be sorry.

A new time. A new hero. A new mission. Experience the birth of a digital cult-series: Cotton FBI is the remake of JERRY COTTON, the most successful series of German novels with more than one billion copies sold, and it tells an entirely new story in e-book form.

Cotton FBI is published twice a month, with each episode a self-contained story.

The Author

Peter Mennigen was born in Meckenheim near Bonn. He studied art and design in Cologne before he turned to writing fiction. His novels have been published by Bastei Lübbe, Rowohlt, Ravensburger and other publishing houses. He also writes scripts for graphic novels and audio dramatizations as well as screenplays for TV shows and series.



Countdown
Peter Mennigen

Translated by Frank Keith

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

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Germany

Written by Peter Mennigen
Translated by Frank Keith
Cover design: Sandra Taufer, Munich
Cover illustration: © shutterstock / Dmitry Prudnichenko; Irina Solatges; Pavel
K; Birsen Cebeci
E-book-production: Urban [SatzKonzept](#)

ISBN 978-3-8387-4755-2

www.bastei-entertainment.com

Prologue

A metal monstrosity descended over New York City. The clock in the cockpit of the Boeing 787 showed four minutes after midnight, Eastern Standard Time. None of the three hundred passengers on the Dreamliner knew that the pilot was sending a distress call to the tower at JFK. The crew could no longer steer the plane; the controls weren't responding at all, and this just as the plane was about to land. The co-pilot pushed and pulled all sorts of knobs and switches, but to no avail. Every warning lamp in the cockpit was flashing and alarms were sounding. And then, bizarrely, after a few minutes the plane stopped descending and leveled off at an altitude of around four thousand feet, flying on its own.

As if controlled remotely or by a ghost, the plane suddenly changed its prescribed course and headed towards Manhattan. The brutal maneuver forced the Boeing into an acute angle, and if the passengers hadn't been buckled in, they would have been thrown out of their seats. Carry-on bags flew out of carelessly closed overhead storage bins, and other loose objects were tossed around.

It was then that most of the people on board the plane realized in horror that within minutes they could be crashing right into the heart of New York City.

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Cursing under his breath, Jeremiah Cotton went through the baffling security procedures at the entrance to the G-Team's headquarters. His hair was unkempt, his black sweater and leather jacket looked like they had been carelessly tossed on, and the stubble on his face was further proof of his hasty departure from home.

Shortly after 0100 hours, he stepped into the control center of the special FBI unit. Its headquarters occupied the vast majority of the basement of this featureless gray building complex. There was a whole collection of high-tech gadgets, mostly high-performance computer terminals and HD monitors, which cast a ghostly glow over the large, semi-darkened room.

A first glance into the room, which resembled a cross between a NASA command center and a futuristic spaceship bridge, would give the impression that it was ruled by chaos. People incessantly scurried back and forth, moving hurriedly between the chrome-and-glass desks. Telephones were ringing constantly. Information usually came in twenty-four hours a day, from all over the world. There were experts on hand to analyze all the different types of information coming in and to determine whether they were of any relevance to national security. Only a very few of these experts had served outside of the complex and/or fired a weapon; those sorts of tasks were left up to the Special Agents.

It was only recently that Cotton had joined this elite group as its latest member, still on probation. But even he would have guessed at first glance that something was amiss, if he hadn't already been warned by phone. There

was an almost tangible tension in the air. Every member of the G-Team was present, and given the time of night, this could mean only one thing: Code Red!

Special Agent Dillagio was standing together with another agent by a water fountain. The two men were whispering to one another. On the gallery surrounding the room, John D. High, chief of the G-Team, sat at his desk behind a transparent door. As usual, he was wearing a tailored suit, but tonight he was without a tie. If High hadn't even taken the time to put on a tie, then it was clear that very important things had to be done in a great hurry.

Standing across from High, on the other side of his desk, was Special Agent Philippa Decker. Her stance, a mixture of arrogance and poise, was impressive to behold. Both attributes were emphasized by her attire: black pantsuit, unbuttoned blazer, and a light beige blouse underneath.

Cotton couldn't hear what the two were discussing. He could only see that Decker was speaking to High. The uneasiness that Cotton had felt since he entered the headquarters increased.

Zeerookah noticed Cotton. He waved and gestured for him to come over. Cotton ambled over to the IT genius.

"What's up?" Zeerookah was lounging by a huge computer terminal that could compete with a mixing board for a Pink Floyd concert in terms of complexity. There were items on his desk that normally would have no business being there: a greasy pizza carton, a giant cup of diet coke, and a coffee cup with the words "I'm too sexy for this world", filled with a liquid that looked more like muddy water than anything else. "What're ya up to, Jerry?" Zeerookah looked like he'd been up all night, and now more than ever he seemed to embody all the stereotypical features of a nerd, with his pale face and hair so tousled that he looked like he'd just emerged from a wind tunnel.

"Don't call me Jerry," Cotton said. "I'm already irritated enough. What is so damn important that I have to be hauled out of bed at this ungodly hour?"

"I haven't got a clue," Zeerookah said, shrugging his shoulders. "Didn't Decker tell you what's up on the phone?"

"She only told me to get my ass over here for a meeting as soon as possible, and that it's very urgent."

"Get your ass over here? Those were her words?"

"More or less. Can you at least tell me what sort of meeting this is?"

"I saw some guys from Homeland Security and the chief of the NYPD paying High a visit a little while ago. I'm supposed to set up a video conference for someone in Washington."

"Who — some sort of chief of staff?"

"I think higher up."

"A security advisor from the White House?"

Zeerookah remained silent and pointed upwards with a finger.

"The president?"

"Bingo!"

"Wow! And what's my job as a member of this illustrious crowd? Why does Decker order me to come in instead of, say, Dillagio, who's been here longer than me?"

"Dillagio has other responsibilities. Besides, he's got all the charm of a bulldozer; not exactly ideal for a meeting of this magnitude. Watch out — the pretty one is approaching."

Zeerookah went back to tending to his computer. He clamped a phone between his head and shoulder and pretended to be very busy.

"And ... had a short night, Special Agent?" Decker gave Cotton a smile with a hint of empathy, which seemed about as genuine as the counterfeit money in the evidence room. "I'm sorry about that."

"I appreciate your compassion, dear Philippa."

“Great. Go and wait for me in the conference room; I’ll be there in a second.”

“I’m going to speak with the president? Then I think a dark suit would be more appropriate.”

Decker looked perplexed. “How did you know that the president will be involved?”

Zeerookah pulled his head closer to his shoulders like a turtle and made himself seem smaller than he was, hiding behind Cotton.

“I have my sources.” Cotton gave her an innocent smile that was anything but.

Decker looked at him with cool, narrowed eyes. “I would appreciate it if you wouldn’t spread such sensitive information around. Now go.”

Cotton entered the bug-proof conference room. In the middle of it stood the biggest table he had ever seen. It was brand new, stainless steel with a satin-sheen finish and a black glass tabletop that was completely bare. There were none of the refreshments and glasses that were usually to be found on top of such a table. Which might be a bad sign for this unusual meeting.

Hanging on the right wall was a 70-inch monitor. The connections for the video conference were already set up and the screen was split into various segments. The conference participants hadn’t taken their seats in front of the cameras yet. The sections of the monitor only showed the seals of the different government agencies involved: CIA, FBI, NSA, and the president’s seal in the biggest square.

Cotton picked out a place to sit on the long side of the table. He sat there for a while, and then dozed off a bit. A few minutes later, the chair beside him was moved. He opened his eyes and saw Decker, who was looking at him as if she could strangle him.

“Get a grip! You can sleep when you’re at home,” she said as she sat down. “Various high officials from the