

PETER MENNIGEN

# COTTON

# FBI

SURVIVAL



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.

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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.

# **COTTON** **FBI**

## **Survival** **Peter Mennigen**

Translated by Frank Keith

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

# BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT

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

ISBN 978-3-8387-4880-1

[www.bastei-entertainment.com](http://www.bastei-entertainment.com)

# Prologue

Three Years Ago

To put it bluntly, anyone contemplating suicide or hoping to find out what it feels like to have their throat slit open can get their wish in Knoxville, Arizona.

Knoxville is located somewhere out in the middle of nowhere, near the Mexican border. It can be hard to believe that this hick town of ramshackle wooden houses used to be an important place in the old days, back when cowboys drove cattle through the region. These days, the desolate outpost has become something of a collection point for wasted lives. Hookers, junkies, crooks — the entire spectrum of losers is well represented among the population.

The hub of local social activity stands right in the center of Knoxville, bearing the colorful name 'Alligator Lounge'; of course, it's a bullshit name, since there isn't a single alligator in all of Arizona, except maybe one or two in a zoo. Maybe the name is intended to reflect the clientele that frequents the bar, often late into the night. They mill about aimlessly, waiting for unsuspecting travelers to drop into their snake pit of desperation and violence and volunteer to be cheated, robbed, or even killed, depending on the circumstances.

Until just recently, Special Agent Philippa 'Phil' Decker had had no inkling of Knoxville's existence. All this changed one sweltering day in June, during an operation on Knoxville's Main Street. She and a dozen other agents were crammed into three large Chevy SUVs parked along the

street. The FBI agents had been assembled from five different bureaus especially for this assignment.

The sun blazed hot in the steel-blue sky above them. Although they had all long since taken off their jackets, they were still sweating so profusely that their clothes stuck to their bodies like a second layer of skin. The vinyl seats didn't help matters much. The only positive thing about this hot, shadeless location was the clear view they had of the bar.

Decker and Special Agent Steve Dillagio were in charge of this operation. Zeerookah, the G-Team's IT expert, was also in attendance, on one of his very rare assignments outside of headquarters.

The agents were waiting for their main objective to appear: a man named Loco Hernando, the younger brother of the drug lord Pablo Hernando, whose cartel controlled much of the drug trade between Colombia and the US. The FBI had been informed that Loco would be here today to personally oversee a deal. If this information was correct, then the odds were good that there was more to it than just a simple drug deal.

After observing the bar for five hours, the agents were running low on water as well as patience. To everyone's relief, just after noon, the sound of an approaching vehicle gave them hope that the moment they had been waiting for had finally arrived. A large Hummer turned onto Main Street and rolled past the Chevys, stopping in front of the Alligator Lounge.

Three enormous muscular bodyguards dressed in black got out of the Hummer and looked around. They didn't seem to be the brightest bulbs on the Christmas tree, since the black FBI vehicles with their dark-tinted windows didn't arouse their suspicion. Having determined that the coast was clear, one of them opened the rear door of the Hummer.



Loco Hernando got out of the vehicle. He was a wiry Colombian in his mid-thirties. Decker was able to identify him from the photos she had been issued. She was surprised by the way he was dressed. Even though the FBI dossier on him mentioned his extravagant taste in clothes, she hadn't expected to see him wearing a pink designer suit. He disappeared into the dive bar, together with the medium-sized aluminum briefcase he was carrying and his heavyweight entourage.

Nervous, Decker drummed her fingers on the steering wheel. Now would be the ideal time to strike ... if it weren't for Loco's driver, who had stayed in the vehicle. The bald man was sitting resolutely in the driver's seat. His left hand was resting on the steering wheel, and his right hand was toying with an Uzi, as the agents could see through his open window.

This unforeseen situation sparked a heated debate among the FBI agents. Using their radios, they argued back and forth about how best to get Loco and his briefcase. Decker didn't participate in the discussion. Instead, she took off her shoulder holster and opened the top buttons of her blouse.

Dillagio let out a whistle and Zeerookah's eyes almost popped out of their sockets when the two men saw what she was doing.

"Are you crazy? I know it's hot in here, but you don't need to get undressed."

"A woman's greatest weapon ... ever heard of it?"

Decker had opened her blouse enough to allow a glimpse of her bra. "Every species has a weak spot. For men, it's sex."

"You want to play Venus flytrap in the lion's den?"

"That is what's known as a mixed metaphor." Decker worked on a stubborn button. "But I know what you mean. I guess you could put it that way."

"You do realize that if your idea doesn't work, we'll be visiting you in the cemetery?"