

LINDA BUDINGER

COTTON

FBI

CIVIL WAR



BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

Contents

Cover	
What is COTTON FBI?	
The Author	
Title	
Copyright	
Prologue	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
Epilogue	

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

Linda Budinger is a freelance author and translator. She has been writing novels and short stories for over 20 years, which are mainly fantasy and speculative fiction. Her stories have been nominated several times for the *Deutschen Phantastik Preis (German fantasy award)*. She became known through publications for the role-playing game “The Dark Eye” and as a co-author of the series of novels “Shadow Realm” (*Schattenreich*) published by Bastei Lübbe. The author lives in Leichlingen, Germany.

COTTON **FBI**

Civil War
Linda Budinger

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

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Prologue

Louisville, Kentucky, the Ames Family estate, five years earlier.

Gupta hesitated a moment before carefully opening the screen door at the side entrance and inserting the key into the lock. He waited three seconds until the LED on the alarm system showed him that the key code had been accepted.

The lights in the building had been off for two hours, and he could safely assume that the woman was home alone. Presumably, she would already be in bed. The maid was on her day off, and Gordon, the woman's son, was spending the night at a friend's place. Maybe the two were more than friends. There was all lot of talk going around about the Ames boy. "Philanderer" was the kindest word the workers at the company had for Gordon. If Carl ever got his hands on the boy in a dark alley...

Gupta nervously rubbed his hands together and then put on his gloves. It wasn't the sultry night air that was making him sweat. He pulled the ski mask over his head, leaving only his eyes visible. Then he turned the key, opened the door, and slipped inside. Now he had literally crossed the threshold.

Jacking cars and taking them out for a spin, shooting at road signs, one or two fights--what twenty-year-old in the suburbs of Louisville didn't do those things? But burglary? He needed the money. Besides...

His employer had promised it would all be over quickly. Just play the bogeyman a bit, and his future would be secured.

It was too late to back out now, anyway. Gupta turned on his flashlight and stalked through the kitchen into the main hall, where aristocrats used to dance a hundred and fifty years ago.

Someone was there. The beam of light revealed a figure on the stairs, facing him. Gupta jumped back. "Shit!" he whispered, backing away. And then he had to suppress a hysterical giggle. He had been frightened by an oil painting.

Oh, man!

The Ames family portrait gallery flanked the stairs. At the bottom, the portrait of the late lord of the estate was on display. He stared down at the intruder with a stern expression.

Gupta fought the urge to turn back. He was breathing loudly through his mouth. His heart raced like his mother's decrepit sewing machine, but he had to keep going. Up the stairs, and then the second door on the left. His black sneakers barely made a sound on the carpeted steps. Maybe it was pure adrenaline that kept Gupta moving forward.

He flinched as a door creaked somewhere above him. He could hear bare feet gently padding across the floor.

He was probably not being as quiet as he thought.

"Rita? Are you back already?" a drowsy female voice asked. The woman's words were weary and heavy with grief, like she had taken a hundred Valium all at once.

Gupta clenched his fists. The flashlight flickered and then went out. Stupid piece of crap! Gupta had tested the thing out a dozen times and had even put in new batteries.

He hurried up to the first landing so that he wouldn't be stuck in the middle of the stairs in the dark.

The steps above him stopped. "Riiiiitaaa?"

Was the old lady drugged up or just completely out of it?

Gupta's palms tingled. His sweaty palms stuck to the latex gloves. He started to push the small black flashlight

into his jeans pocket, but suddenly realized that he still had the key in his hand. A second too late. The key fell with a muffled plunk onto the landing. The sound echoed in his ears like a gunshot.

He quickly shoved the flashlight into his pocket, bent over, and groped around for the key.

The door upstairs creaked again. This time, the steps were firmer, more determined. Excellent. The sooner the old woman found him, the faster he'd be out of there. When he was done with her, it would all be over.

But the damn key! He had to return it.

Gupta swallowed. His mouth was dry. His groping hands finally found the key on the edge of the landing. He reflexively rubbed his eyebrows with his thumb and index finger in relief.

A light came on in the hallway above him.

Half blinded, Gupta blinked and looked up.

A woman in a nightgown appeared on the landing.

"Give me your jewelry!" Gupta said gruffly to scare her. "Or you're asking for trouble." He tried to make his voice sound frightening, like Batman.

The woman froze, half hidden by the door.

That was easier than he had expected.

Gupta took a step toward her, one hand on the flashlight that was slipping out of his pocket.

He reached out towards the woman.

As he did so, the woman raised her arm, and two shots rang out. A fireball hit Gupta in the chest, nearly tearing him apart. Thrown backward by the blow, he crashed into the wall and tumbled down the stairs.

I can fly, was his last thought. Like Batman.

1

Perryville, Kentucky, October 8.

It was a brutal massacre. Clouds of gun smoke engulfed the hill outside of Perryville. The grass was a trampled, wet carpet. The rich Kentucky soil had been plowed up by thousands of feet and was riddled with rabbit holes and other tripping hazards. It seemed to reach out to grab the legs of the soldiers seeking to seize control of the state.

The Union brigade had fought their way up the hill, pushing the enemy lines back. They had previously secured much-needed water rations at Chaplin River. But at what price! Hundreds had died in the process. Now the survivors were marching deeper into the hill country. Marching towards the enemy, blind but utterly fearless.

The Confederates were hiding like an army of gray ghosts in the haze of gunpowder.

Everywhere you looked, fallen men. Even the standard-bearers had been shot down. But before the Stars and Stripes could touch the ground, it was seized up and carried on by the nearest man. From its fixed position, the artillery thundered on, Union cannons clearing the way for the infantry. Their roar became a more reliable guide than the company's drums or the officers' bellowed commands, which were largely drowned out by the continuous musket fire. Captains moved their lips, but their commands were inaudible to the soldiers. The commander's saber held aloft was the only sign they could comprehend, other than the howls and war cries of the rebels at every cannon ceasefire. The Confederates had ducked behind a wooden structure,