



by Peter Wensierski
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Paradise Station: the last journey of Matthias Domaschk

*Jena-Paradies: Die letzte Reise des
Matthias Domaschk*

review

A dramatic account of the final days of Matthias Domaschk, who died in a Stasi detention centre in 1981 at the age of twenty-three, *Jena-Paradies* explores how state repression can impact the lives of ordinary young people. Peter Wensierski is a well-regarded author, journalist and filmmaker who has written a lot about revolution and discontent in the GDR. This expertise shines through in his meticulously researched and captivating biography.

The Stasi has long been a subject of interest for an English-language readership, with titles like *Stasiland* and *The Grey Men* and films like *The Lives of Others* reaching an audience far beyond Germany. Peter Wensierski capitalises on this interest, yet unusually chooses not to focus purely on the Stasi's activities. Instead, *Jena-Paradies* pays equal attention to the life of a young man, Matthias Domaschk, his family, and his friends from the opposition youth movement in Jena. The result is a dramatic and moving human take on a perennially fascinating subject.

Jena-Paradies (also the name of a train station in the east German city of Jena) is divided into three main chapters, following a foreword and prologue. Chronicling the events of three consecutive days in April 1981, they switch between a narrative about Matthias and his

friends as they set out for a party in Berlin, and one about the Stasi officers attempting to stop them reaching the city and (they believe) disrupting the socialist party congress taking place there. Despite being clear that this story will end in Matthias's death, the rapid pace of the action, detailed backstories and insightful view of the young man's personal relationships lend the story drama and keep the reader enthralled.

Wensierski draws heavily on archive material and first-person accounts, including thirty pages of photos. Following the main chapters, he moves on to a considered analysis of the short- and long-term impacts of Matthias's death, informed by wider opposition to the GDR and its ultimate collapse.

Though the book's primary focus is on an ordinary individual, it sets the events of April 1981 against a far broader political and social context, conveying how authoritarian repression often causes intense suffering among the younger generation who represent the state's future. In the 21st-century political context, this is a timely and insightful book that should have a broad appeal, including to younger readers.

Read more on the publisher's website

here: <https://www.aufbau-verlage.de/ch-links-verlag/jena-paradies/978-3-96289-186-2>

about the author



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Peter Wensierski was born in 1954 and studied politics, history and publicity at the Freie Universität Berlin. He is an author, journalist and documentary filmmaker who has received numerous awards for his work, including the Federal Film Prize, the European Film Prize and the German Order of Merit. In 1985, the government of the GDR imposed a work and entry ban on him in response to his reports, books and documentaries about the opposition movement in churches and among young people. Since 1993 he has been a journalist for *Spiegel*. His recent books include *Berlin – Stadt der Revolte* (2018) and *Die*

*unheimliche Leichtigkeit der
Revolution (2017).*

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