The story of one of the deadliest fires in American history that took the lives of ninety-two children and three nuns at a Catholic elementary school in Chicago. An absorbing account...a tale of terror. —New York Times Book Review

Many books have been written about real-life tragedies, and in this sense, Cowan and Kuensters book is no different. However, there is a thin line in these type of books between boring the reader by burying the human aspect of the story with an overload of factual material and becoming nothing more than a non-fiction hankie weeper. Quite a few books have disappointed me in the past by straying to either one side or the other. Not so with this one. It is a solid piece of reporting that does not lose the human dimension of the tragedy. Nor does it obscure the investigation and the facts with too much emphasis on the human dimension.
The fire at Our Lady of the Angels was one of the worst tragedies to strike America, made even more so in that the vast majority of its victims were innocent children. The authors follow the story from the day it occurred to the fire itself and the heroic efforts of the fire department to the later delegation of blame and recriminations from what was seen as a bureaucratic conspiracy. In doing so they manage to bring the reader into the story not merely as a spectator but almost as a fellow reporter, sharing not only facts, but also conjectures and whispers plus personal items about the victims, always careful always to straddle the line between objectivity and the trap of a crusading journalism. By letting the story speak for itself, they bring it home all the more forcefully, to where no one who reads it will remain unaffected.
This book should also serve as a warning against the false sense of security that this sort of thing cannot happen again. There are still many schools, public and private, at risk, and this is a book that should be read by every parent with children still in school, and not only during Fire Prevention Week.