

# Book festival Northern Arizona

***The Ordinary Seaman*, by Francisco Goldman  
Reviewed by Rose Houk**

In this novel, based on a true account, Francisco Goldman presents an unflinching examination of humanity and inhumanity. Fifteen Central American men--fifteen "ordinary seaman"--sign on to work on a ship, the *Urus*, docked in Brooklyn. Through the eyes of 19-year-old Esteban, we witness the crew surviving, one bleak day after another, aboard the rusting hulk, eating sardines and rice, amid rats and roaches.



They remain on board for months, working without a cent of pay. The ship's captain, Elias, pays regular visits, constantly assuring them that they'll be paid as soon as the ship's owner can get certain matters straightened out. As it turns out, Elias himself is the owner, with an old college roommate, Mark. Their plan was to repair the ship and sell it for scrap or sink it for the insurance money.

Esteban finally escapes his imprisonment, finding friendship in the nearby neighborhood and supports his crewmates. The crew's salvation rests in the hands of people who do have a sense of humanity, but the book's ending is as ghostly as the ship itself.

**Northern Arizona Book Festival**

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