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# Pitch Black



## Synopsis

"[Landowne and Horton] collaborate here to bring Horton's story of perseverance and hope to print, and the fluid black-and-white sequential panels tell it well. The horrors attendant on homelessness are not sugarcoated, and the language is as raw and gritty as one might expect.

Powerful."&#151;Kirkus ReviewsOn the subway, do ever notice that people are always looking, but they only see what they want to? Things can be sitting right in front of them and still they can't see it. That's your guide Anthony speaking. He'll show you how he lives in the tunnels underneath the New York City subway system&#151;that is, if you'll let him. Which is exactly what Youme decided she would do one afternoon when she and Anthony began a conversation in the subway about art. It turns out that both Youme and Anthony Horton are artists. While part of Youme's art is listening long and hard to the stories of the people she meets, part of Anthony's is making art out of what most people won't even look at. Thus began a unique collaboration and conversation between these two artists over the next year, which culminated in Anthony's biography, the graphic novel *Pitch Black*. With art and words from both of them, they map out Anthony's world&#151;a tough one from many perspectives, startling and undoing from others, but from Anthony's point of view, a life lived as art. Youme Landowne (known as Youme) is a painter and book artist who thrives in the context of public art. She studied cross-cultural communication through art at the New School for Social Research and Friends World College. She has interned in public schools and has been a student at the Friends World College at the Nairobi and Kyoto campuses. Youme has lived in and learned from the United States, Kenya, Japan, Haiti, Laos, and Cuba. She currently lives in Brooklyn, New York. Anthony Horton lived most of his life as a homeless artist, surviving and creating in the secret underground tributaries of the NYC subway system. On February 5, 2012 Anthony died in a fire in an abandoned subway room under the city. "Mr. Horton found solace in the blackness of the tunnels. He made the subway the subject of his canvases, the muse for a graphic novel that he co-wrote, and the place he called home for the better part of his adult life, even when he had other places to stay." &#151;New York Times, Feb. 6, 2012

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 8 Up  After meeting on a subway platform in New York City, Landowne and Horton share a conversation about art and life while riding uptown and downtown. Youme listens carefully as Anthony tells his story of living on the streets after being abandoned by his adoptive family. At first he stayed at a homeless shelter where he witnessed, "things no kid should ever see." He discovered a city below the city when one day the police chased him into a subway tunnel. In these dark passageways, Anthony built a makeshift home and found a canvas for his artwork. After showing Youme his life six stories below the city, the two artists begin a collaboration that ends in this beautiful, gritty biography. Both Youme and Anthony contributed text and art to the book-their black and gray watercolors are tender and raw, their words spare and poetic. This book's unflinching look at homelessness and the ability to find hope and inspiration in the dark will appeal greatly to teens.  Lauren Anduri, Brooklyn Public Library, NY Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"In the four years that Youme Landowne, a Brooklyn artist, has known Anthony Horton, a homeless man who used to spend most of his nights underground, in nooks and crannies wedged around subway tunnels, [she has] learned several basic rules for subterranean life. The rules are spelled out in a spare, affecting book of illustrations. The book details the filthy and often frightening conditions in the subway tunnels and introduces the readers to a handful of colorful characters, though its focus is on the two main characters' friendship and collaboration."  New York Times "I sat right down and read through [Pitch Black]... I found it immediately engaging and also interesting in the respect that at first you think it's about homelessness then, as you read on, perhaps about race and, finally, you discover that it reaches for something beyond those thorny and somewhat shopworn subjects; the simple and pure light of hope."  Lee Stringer "The two

artists [began] a collaboration that ends in this beautiful, gritty biography. Both Youme and Anthony contributed text and art to the book; their black and gray watercolors are tender and raw, their words spare and poetic. This book's unflinching look at homelessness and the ability to find hope and inspiration in the dark will appeal greatly to teens." *School Library Journal* "Artist and writer Youme Landowne was standing on a New York City subway platform in 2005 when a black man standing nearby came over to talk to her; They two not only came to know each other as fellow artists and friends but have collaborated on *Pitch Black: Don't Be Skerd*, a children's book released this past fall by Cincos Puntos Press that tells the story of their friendship and Horton's life as homeless man living and drawing in the subway."

" *Publisher's Weekly Comics Week* " Muralist and book artist Landowne met Horton shortly after the release of her 2004 picture book *Selavi*; the two collaborate here to bring Horton's story of perseverance and hope to print, and the fluid black-and-white sequential panels tell it well. The horrors attendant on homelessness are not sugarcoated, and the language is as raw and gritty as one might expect. Powerful." *Kirkus Reviews* " *Pitch Black* could serve as a tool for educators when approaching the difficult subjects of homelessness and cultural differences (the publisher would like to place it in school libraries to make it accessible to young readers), but it is likely to be most appreciated by adults for its thoughtful and forthright handling of the material." *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* " Many lives of rejection, despair, survival, and hope live underground beneath the drawings just as Horton lived underground in New York subway tunnels; We want to know more about Horton, but like peering down a dark tunnel, we only catch glimpses. For academic and high school libraries, and teen as well as adult collections in public libraries." *Library Journal* " This short, collaborative graphic novel introduces teens to a life unheard of by most; The artwork done in black, white, and gray watercolor tones is realistic and sparse with subway details illustrating a wide range of multicultural characters riding the subway." *Voya*

The description of this book is intriguing. What is life like down in the subway tunnels of New York? This book captures much of its narrator's experience in picture while leaving your imagination room to work too. It's really an interesting look at those in society who are otherwise invisible. Landowne's art isn't quite my cup of tea, but I did like it overall. Her depictions of buildings are attractive. It establishes a good mood too. The only real downside to this book is how short it is. This could have easily been 3 - 4 times as long, there's no doubt that this story is just the tip of the iceberg. the plus side is that its brevity allows for repeat readings and it never gets old.

I tried very hard not to weep while reading this book. I was not successful. "Pitch Black" is a true story that is like a fairy tale in its ability to reach into the depths of the heart. A young man, abandoned by all who should have cared for him, is chased into a dark wilderness where he finds friends and the only home he's ever known -- the NYC subway tunnels. A male, urban Snow White in black skin, there was even a princess to help him rescue himself. But alas, all too late. Anthony Horton died in a fire in the place he called home. The sad irony is that the publication of "Pitch Black" might have brought him some measure of safety and security. He was a beautiful soul, tossed on the garbage heap, like so many other good and useful things. Luckily, this book leaves us for all time with a glimpse of his magnificent mind and heart.

Riding the L in Chicago, I would always gaze out the windows into the darkness, wondering what/who was out there. This book gives some insight into that question. This story takes place in NYC, and for a moment, I felt like I was in the tunnels with him. This is a book that can be returned to many times. There are many small details that are overlooked the first time but are there to be discovered the next. At the end of the book is a photo of a tunnel grate open with a ladder descending into pitch black. Look into the darkness.

I used this for a class. It is an interesting book.

I found out about this book today after reading a headline on Google News. Unfortunately, one of the co-authors died in a fire in a room in the subway tunnels he was still living in. [...] [...]

I first learned about Anthony Horton when he died in a fire in his underground home in a subway tunnel in New York City. Mr. Horton was given away by his birth parents and then spent years in the foster care system. He was involved with the criminal justice system and lived in homeless shelters. He found the shelters to be dangerous and undesirable places. While running from the transit police, he accidentally found the underground subway tunnel community that exists in New York, as well as in many other cities such as Las Vegas. Somehow through all of this he maintained a noticeable kindness that was remarked on by others and thus made friends and benefactors. Some of these benefactors attempted to help him live a "normal" life which he did for awhile. However, he was not able to find happiness in that aboveground life and returned to the tunnels, where he lived in his two room tunnel home which was furnished with a sofa, bookcases, bed and other items found in the trash. After reading about Mr. Horton and his artwork in the tunnels and finding that

some of his work had been published, I wanted to find his book.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/nyregion/the-fiery-end-of-a-life-lived-beneath-the-city.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/nyregion/the-fiery-end-of-a-life-lived-beneath-the-city.html?_r=0)

The book is co-written by an artist Mr. Horton met in the subway with whom he formed a friendship. It is basically a graphic memoir with illustrations by both authors. I think it is an important work as well as a fascinating story and includes his rules for living underground. The most important one may be "Remember, anything you need can be found in the garbage." Five stars

There are conditions that many humans live in that many Americans would deem unfit for animals. "Pitch Black" tells the story of what can be seen in the deep, dark tunnels beneath the biggest city in America, New York City. The homeless, drug deals, prostitution, are only some of the more tame things one would see in this harsh environment. Joint written and illustrated by both Landowne & Horton, their efforts tell the story of the deep depths well, making "Pitch Black" a highly recommended story worth reading.

First, this is just a nicely done graphic novel, and that shouldn't be overlooked. I typically gravitate towards more elaborate or precise drawing styles, but the loose, urbane style employed in Pitch Black turns out to be perfect. It comes across almost like a book for children at first, except that it will take you for a brief moment to one of the most horrifying places on earth. This thin volume shook my complacent foundations.

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