



## Pitch Black

*Youme Landowne (Visual Art) , Anthony Horton*

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*On 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—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—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." —*New York Times*, Feb. 6, 2012

## Pitch Black Details

Date : Published October 1st 2008 by Cinco Puntos Press

ISBN : 9781933693064

Author : Youme Landowne (Visual Art) , Anthony Horton

Format : Hardcover 40 pages

Genre : Sequential Art, Graphic Novels, Comics, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Graphic Novels  
Comics

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## **From Reader Review Pitch Black for online ebook**

### **Philip says**

Oscar Wilde says, "The critic is he who can translate into another manner or new material his impression of beautiful things."

Pitch Black didn't really move me, and because of that I almost gave it a really bad review. They're easier to write, and lets face it, everyone loves a good bad review.

But I didn't want to haphazardly jot off some cursory thoughts based on a book I hadn't really given much thought to. So, I stopped and thought about it a little bit. (It may have helped that I'm re-reading The Picture of Dorian Gray right now and that both of these books are essentially about art and life mirroring each other.)

Maybe Pitch Black is symbolic of the former African-American experience - being somewhat underground, unappreciated, ok as long as you stay out of everybody's way.

Maybe it speaks to devaluing the homeless and stereotyping rather than looking at the possibilities and unseen beauty.

Maybe it's about overcoming fear with art.

Maybe it's symbolic of the struggle we all have, not wanting to be alone.

Maybe it's about the purpose of art.

I don't know, but I can't rip this book a new one just because it didn't move me in the first read-through. Giving it one or two stars would be selfish and easy.

"So, you're an artist?"

"Isn't everyone?"

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### **Lisa says**

Graphic novel set almost entirely underground. This is a collaboration between children's author/illustrator Landowne, and Anthony Horton, who was homeless when they met on the subway. Black and white sketches bring beauty, but do not soft-pedal the harsh realities of Horton's life among the people and rats who take shelter in New York's subway tunnels.

Like other books from Cinco Puntos Press, this is a direct and compassionate story: simply told, with subject matter beyond the range of what most picture books ever touch.

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### **Harris says**

As a collaboration between two artists, one homeless, "Pitch Black," packs a lot of power and impact in a short, concise work. It reflects the diverse, multicultural environment of New York City above ground and the world of those forgotten by society below it, in spite (or because) of being rendered in black and white. "Pitch Black" explores ideas of artistic expression, "home," and meaning, does not present either an idealized or a stigmatized view of the homeless. In fact, the comic opens up much discussion on this (and other) social problems.

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### **Daisy says**

Just cause you can't see. Don't mean ain't nothing there. People always looking but they are just see the thing they want, they forget something is important, the road the happen to the city is maybe same like everyday, people habit all of these, so they won't the look for the new thing. This is a short story but it has a very deep meaning.

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### **Nelly says**

A book that slightly parallels how one modern African American lives below the ground in secrecy much like slaves who gained their freedom by way of the Underground Railroad. The book's illustrations are wet and often atmospherically appropriate for the subject matter, but this style is not so appealing to me. I felt as though the book was simply a vignette rather than a complete thought. The story has endless possibilities but an abrupt ending.

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### **Alicia says**

This unique graphic novel with its long pages and black and white sketching and drawing is a blend of hard urban and creative art with the pain and issues of the homeless, those that co-exist in their hussle-bussle lives moving in and out of the subways without thinking twice, and the artists whose imagination is like breathing.

Highly recommended in the first-person narrative of living below ground in the tunnels of the subway, the friends and family you meet along the way, and the life of a struggling artist.

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### **Behind The Book says**

Based on the true story of Youme Landowne and Anthony Horton's uncanny friendship, Pitch Black tells the story of how Landowne, a Brooklyn-based artist, meets Horton, street artist and member of the underground community known as the "mole people", on the platform of a subway stop one day. Both admiring the same piece of art, Horton asked Landowne if she was an artist. "Isn't everyone?" she replied. From there the two struck up conversation and spent an entire afternoon riding the train, uptown and back down again. After inquiring about his life in the tunnels, Horton takes Landowne to his underground home where upon seeing his art, she asked if he'd like to collaborate with her in sharing his story.

Depicted through tone appropriate B&W illustrations, Pitch Black is the graphic novel that was created

between the two to showcase Horton's life. From his parents abandonment, to the tragic flaws of the social service system, to his eventual dissent into the tunnels, the illustrations coupled with blocks of dialogue depict with haunting subsistence the ways in which people become lost to society. Sitting on the train on my way home, I was asked by two nearby passengers what the graphics were telling. Inching closer, the three of us flipped through these images until we reached our perspective stops, a quietness lingering between us.

There is something raw about each of the illustrations depicted in this book. Knowing that each represent Horton's actual life adds a touch of humanity, and a continuous nagging in the back of your mind that forces you to think about those living in the shadows of our ever-present society and culture.

He shares, with little modesty, the rules of living underground:

- Remember anything you need can be found in the garbage
- Always have a way out that is different from the way in
- For everything you find there is someone to buy it
- You would be surprised what you find in other people's garbage
- Always keep a light on you

His depictions of each leave you feeling wide-eyed, if not squirmy. But that, to me, is the point of his story. We here on the insides of society cannot possibly grasp what it would mean to take yourself out of it, or understand the rules we'd instinctively create in order to survive. While Horton cannot force us to understand what we as the reader have not lived, he and Landowne do a great job at painting us a picture to this lifestyle.

I highly recommend sifting through the pages of this book. The dialogue short and crisp, the story illustrations speak for themselves and tell with remarkable clarity and sadness of what it means to be truly in "pitch black."

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## **Yannick says**

**CATEGORIES/GENRES FOR THIS CLASS FULFILLED BY THIS BOOK:**

Graphic Memoir

**ESTIMATE OF GRADE LEVEL INTEREST:**

YA

**ESTIMATE OF READING LEVEL:**

5-12

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION:**

Youme, an artist living in New York, befriends Anthony, a homeless artist who describes his life to her and how he lives in a subway tunnel.

**IDENTIFY AT LEAST 2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THIS GENRE AND SUBGENRE AND DISCUSS HOW THEY APPEAR IN YOUR BOOK:**

A characteristic of a graphic book is that a series of panels advances a fictional narrative line. In this book, each illustration gives us sequential information about how Youme and Anthony first met, and then how he told her how he became homeless, and then how he ended up living in a subway tunnel. Another

characteristic of a graphic book is that there is a continuing conversation between text and illustration. In this book, the illustrations are dependent on the narrative, and vice versa. For example, one text bubble says, "You would be surprised what you find other people's garbage." Then there are illustrations of someone finding shoes, clothes, and a book. Without the pictures, the reader wouldn't know what was found in the garbage, and without the text the viewer wouldn't know why someone was finding the objects.

#### IN WHAT WAYS AND HOW WELL DOES THE BOOK AS A WHOLE SERVE ITS INTENDED AUDIENCE?:

Some reviewers say the book is for YA and others say it is for adults. If intended for YA readers, it is definitely for the more mature YA reader as there are references to prostitution, drug use, and theft. The black and gray watercolor illustrations are uniquely disturbing and powerful. They are very different than the usual cartoonish style illustrations found in some graphic novels for young adults. The heavy use of black water color and dark shading does an excellent job of portraying the abject humanity that one would find in this gritty, realistic world. The oppressive, claustrophobic, dark atmosphere of living in a tunnel is also effectively rendered through the use of many gray and black tones. YA readers will admire the original and emotional artwork, the story of the girl who befriended the man to learn his life story, and also the hopeful message that he espoused.

#### AWARDS IF ANY:

None found.

#### LINKS TO PUBLISHED REVIEWS FROM PROFESSIONAL SOURCES:

Kirkus Reviews, 09/15/08

Library Journal, 01/21/09

Multicultural Review, 03/01/09

School Library Journal starred, 03/01/09

Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA), 04/01/09

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#### **Akoss says**

I wasn't expecting a short book like this one to pack such a punch. In fact I went into it knowing nothing and expecting nothing but "something different".

Well, the part of me that cares deeply about social justice got hit (in a good way). From the spreads with no words, to the ones with dialogue bubbles, everything gave me pause, made my heart weep and then left me pondering. This book took me to so many places, I'm surprised it's such an under the radar book.

I know I'm going to keep it around until I run out of library renewals.

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#### **Patrice Jones says**

This has got to be the shortest graphic novel that is out there. I only gave it 4 stars, because the story just seemed incomplete to me. I got to see how he came to be living in a tunnel under the city, but the book never explained how he and others were rescued from living down there. Great graphics, but for the retail value I feel there should be more.

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## **Candice M (tinylibrarian) says**

"Pitch Black" is the moving true story of how author and artist Youme Landowne met co-author/co-artist Anthony Horton. Youme meets Anthony one day as she is taking the subway in New York. They start to chat and end up talking about life and art for hours. Anthony is homeless, has been since he was a teen, and lives in the subway tunnels. He tells Youme his life story, shows her the tunnels that he has lived in, and the art that he creates while down there. The text is meager but concise, and the artwork conveys bleakness, beauty, and hope in its black, white and gray watercolors.

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## **Kristin says**

I loved this book. I was a huge fan of the film Dark Days when it first came out, and this is another great first-person story from the tunnels. Just beautiful.

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## **Shazia says**

I really enjoyed Pitch Black; I just finished reading it but I keep going back to reread certain pages and to admire the artwork. 4 stars instead of 5 because I wish there was more. I feel like there was so much more that could have been incorporated into this graphic memoir - just more on what it was like to live in the tunnels.

It's super depressing to find out that Anthony Horton passed away from a fire in a subway tunnel a few years after this was published. Pitch Black is so different from anything else I've read and I'm really glad that I had heard about it and checked it out.

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## **Raina says**

I like unique things. This is unique.

It's a thin, long, hardcover book, so it looks a bit like a picture book. Sometimes it has panels, sometimes one illustration takes up a full two-page spread. It's autobiographical, and issue-based. I was impressed with the vulnerability and openness of the narrator. And illustrations are stunning - the black and white only adds to it.

I've always lived in the same house. So one of my fantasies, growing up, was what it would be like to live somewhere else. In the house I'm passing on the road. Under that overpass. In that tree. Swiss Family Robinson, The Borrowers, and the Laura Ingalls Wilder books were some of my favorite stories growing up. Anyway, so that's probably why I'm extra-fascinated by this depiction of life lived in the subway system.

There is a definite narrative, and it dances around issues of poverty, race, class, home, identity, friendship, family, and of course... I LOVED the discussion of art, what is art, who are artists. LOVE. The more I think about it, I feel more LOVE for this book.



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**Karen says**

This is the kind of book that's hard to give a review on because it's based on a true story. Pitch Black is a short graphic novel about two artists' chance meeting on a subway platform. It's the story of the homeless man who illustrated the book (Anthony Horton), and what his life was like. The illustrations are unique--rough but still detailed. I think it's worth a read.

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