



Nightmare Ink

Marcella Burnard

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Nightmare Ink Marcella Burnard

From “smoking-hot talent”* Marcella Burnard comes a dangerous and captivating new novel that will get under your skin.

With her art and magic, Isa Romanchzyk has the power to create or destroy. In her tattoo shop, Nightmare Ink, Isa helps those in need by binding the power embedded in their Live Ink—the magical tattoos that can enhance the life of the wearer, or end it. But binding tattoos has earned Isa the contempt of her fellow artists—including her former lover Daniel.

When a friend comes to the shop with a tattoo on the verge of killing him, Isa can’t turn him away. For the first time in years, she works Live Ink—something she swore she’d never do again. But a broken vow soon becomes the least of her problems.

The real nightmare begins when she’s abducted and inked with a Living Tattoo against her will. Now, saddled with a powerful, amoral entity willing to do anything to win his freedom, Isa must fight to keep her Living Tattoo from consuming her completely...

Nightmare Ink Details

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From Reader Review **Nightmare Ink** for online ebook

Marlene says

This group review was originally published at The Book Pushers

Our Thoughts:

Cass: All thoughts were just removed from my head by my first glimpse at this horrid cover.

Okay, back on track. I jumped at the chance to read this book as soon as I we were told it involved DRAGON TATTOOS COMING TO LIFE. It really takes very little to get on my must-read list.

It is correspondingly evil to throw me into a rage-induced-book-boycott. I utterly hated torture porn Marcella Burnard subjected us too during Isa's abduction. I want to plaster the book with trigger warnings. I've sat through countless recitations of sexual assault that were less rapey than Isa's abduction scenes—which did not, if I recall correctly, involve any actual rape. I was disgusted and stopped reading until Marlene prodded me with her reminder that this review was due.

Sadly, forcing myself to finish the book did not improve matters. Did any of you enjoy anything about this book? Other than the dragons.

Lou: Now I had some issues with the book but overall I enjoyed it a lot more than you Cass. That scene was horrible to read about but it didn't stop me from reading the book. I did enjoy the story of Live Ink (tattoos) being alive and how if not done correctly, they can eat and kill their way through their host and end up escaping onto the streets. I think the idea behind it was awesome but I did have issues with the worldbuilding which never really felt solid to me. How did Isa, and other Live Ink tattooists use magic and pull these creatures from another supernatural plane? Where did their magic come from? How did the creatures survive on the other plane before being pulled into Earth? The worldbuilding foundation was a shaky but I did think it was something a little unique compared to other UF books.

What did you think about the heroine, Isa? At times I felt as if she was pushing people away needlessly, and other times I had sympathy for her. I suppose my favourite part of the book was Isa and Murmur (her Live Ink) battling for control over her body and mind, and living to co-exist with one another.

Marlene: I think I fall in the middle on this one. It wasn't just the torture porn that bothered me, it was the way that Isa became a victim and stayed a victim for most of the book. She was "pity poor me" for about ? of the story. Not that she didn't have plenty to feel sorry for herself after the lengthy torture porn episode, but I want my heroines to be in more charge of what's happening to them more of the time. Isa was not only beaten, but she continued to beat herself up for most of the story.

I agree with Lou about wondering where the magic came from, and how it worked. Also more about how it was discovered. It was fantastic that Live Ink wearers didn't seem to age, but it also seemed like one too many superpowers for something whose origin wasn't explained.

Also, it took me forever to locate the references, but there are two other books that use "magic tattooing" as major parts of the story; The Iron Hunt (Hunter Kiss series) by Marjorie M. Liu and Amazon Ink by Lori Devoti. I picked up Nightmare Ink because I liked both of those, but I think they did better with their

worldbuilding and making sure the heroine kept her agency.

Cass: I agree that the entire premise of Live Ink was fascinating (that's why I wanted to read!), but it was not executed very well. There were too many gaps in the world-building for the magic to feel real. Nothing was properly integrated in the story. Sometimes an author will tease this kind of information out over the course of a series, but I did not think that was the case here. The Mean Cop Lady was a perfect personification of this. She clearly had no comprehension of how magic worked, Isa's role in their society, or why the police referred cases to her. She was a cardboard antagonist. There simply to throw up pointless roadblocks in the investigation because she.....

Hates Isa – who she never met before, or

Distrusts Isa – despite her expertise and long-standing history of working with the police to keep the city safe from Rogue Ink, or

Has no idea how Ink works – despite being in charge of the Magic Division.

Notice how none of those options make any sense?

As for Isa, she's a goddamn idiot. Too Stupid To Live. I enjoyed her interactions with Murmur, because he kept challenging her idiocy, but otherwise? Ugh. Let her die already. I have no interest in her continued blunders. "Oh here's this cop that hates me, I will tell her something completely out of context that makes me sound like a Demon From The Lowest Bowels Of Hell. Seems like the thing to do when we are in the middle of a crisis!"

Lou: Oh, you've hit the nail on the head with The Mean Cop Lady. Why was she so mean and hateful towards, Isa? The police department have a magical investigation team but they outsourced to Isa to deal with Live Ink. What I didn't understand is how could Anne be in charge when her knowledge was so poor, and she had a raging hard-on for Isa. When Anne goes to hit Isa, in the police department, and she doesn't get reprimanded or sacked? There were a lot of gaps in the worldbuilding because I'm not entirely sure if Live Ink are demons or angels?

LOL. Isa did make some choices that were slightly questionable but I suppose I overlooked these because I was enjoying the idea of Live Ink so much. I understood why she wanted to move away from her friends because she was afraid that Murmur would take control and harm those surrounding her. I did enjoy Gus and Ilyria, the two little fuzzballs. I wondered how did they know where to find Isa when Daniel kidnapped her? Also, what other magic do Natasha, Steve, Oki and Troy have? It didn't seem grounded.

Marlene: There were two caricatures, The Mean Cop Lady and the Thug. Anne, the MCL (mean cop lady, one more time) seemed like she was there to be an obstacle, and to represent the facelessness of bureaucratic stupidity. She never felt like a person, and I couldn't understand why she acted the way she did. Or why the cops left her in any management capacity. She seems to represent the faceless secret police, or The X Files version of cops who can't be trusted. And of course, she couldn't.

The thug Ria was another blank. His purpose was to be thuggish and to use his friends in low places to find the criminal mastermind at the right time.

Lou: Talking about Steve, what did you think about the romance? I did enjoy it but at times I felt as if Steve felt faceless. He seemed to react just for the purpose of Isa. Am I making sense?

Cass: I was actually surprised when she and Steve hooked up. He was pretty firmly Friend-Zoned. They aren't going to last.

Marlene: I was shocked too. Absolutely Friend-Zoned. And when he suddenly wasn't, it felt like retconning, as if she changed her mind because the author needed an unattached male for the requisite sex scene.

Lou: I did wonder if there was going to be a love triangle between Daniel, Steve and Isa but Daniel's murdering cray cray showed quite early on. I do worry if Steve and Isa will last because there did seem to be a hint of something between Isa and Murmur towards the end. I don't want to spoil the ending but it's not something I did see coming. Overall, I did enjoy Nightmare Ink but I did have some issues with the worldbuilding. Saying that, I would definitely pick up and read the second book in the series when it's released.

I give Nightmare Ink a C.

Cass: Despite everything, I enjoyed Murmur. Which keeps this from being a flat out failure. I give Nightmare Ink a D+ for DRAGON.

Marlene: I got love triangle vibes at the end too. There seemed to be way more intimacy between Murmur and Isa than Isa and Steve. It could just be that Murmur felt more like a real character than Steve. Although the kitty warrior princess Ikylla was my absolute favorite character.

Also, it took me forever to locate the references, but there are two other books that use "magic tattooing" as major parts of the story; The Iron Hunt (Hunter Kiss series) by Marjorie M. Liu and Amazon Ink by Lori Devoti. I picked up Nightmare Ink because I liked both of those, but I think they did better with their worldbuilding and making sure the heroine kept her agency.

I also give Nightmare Ink a C.

Jen Davis says

After reading the blurb on this book, I was sure it was going to be a total ripoff of Jocelynn Drake's Angel's Ink. After all, the Urban Fantasy market isn't exactly overrun with stories surrounding protagonists who run tattoo shops featuring magic infused tats. On top of that, in both books, the main character is crazy powerful, hiding the extent of their abilities and creating a makeshift family with their co-workers. But I was pleasantly surprised to find that, despite the parallels, this book had a totally different feel than the other.

The premise on the tattoos goes like this: a magical tattoo artist has the ability to call forth the spirit of demon or mythological animal and bind it to their client in what is known as Live Ink. The wearer must fuse with the entity. It allows them fast healing and longevity, but it also changes who they are. And it can go wrong. Which is where Isa comes in. When the ink threatens the life of its host, she uses her gift to bind it.

Things start to go wrong for her when the police bring her a case where the man is past saving. Somehow, the tattoo manages to rip itself from its host's body, killing the guy. The resulting investigation, puts Isa back in the orbit of her powerful ex, Daniel, who ends up making her life hell. Plus, there is the matter of Isa's own Live Ink, whose plans for freedom include her death.

Overall, I liked the story. I liked Isa and I enjoyed watching her demon, Murmur, learn her world through her eyes. I really liked seeing Isa's perceptions about herself and Live Ink evolve. As a whole, I found it dark, engaging, and unpredictable. But there were some problems. At the beginning of the book, I felt overloaded

with characters and information, making it hard to connect right away. Also, Daniel was a flat villain. He was so 100% bad that there was no dimension to him. The investigator Anne lacked nuance as well. She came at Isa with guns blazing from the start and the depths of her antipathy didn't ring true. And finally, I found Murmur's attitude overhaul at the end way too abrupt. I liked that he had a journey he needed to take with his state of mind, but he spun 180 degrees in a very short period of time.

I will read the next one. I am very curious how the author will move forward from the twist at the end. I think dark UF fans will like the series, just don't expect an entirely smooth ride.

Rating: B-/C+

**ARC Provided by publisher for review*

Wyrdness says

I don't have the brainpower to write a proper review right now (or even my usual half-arsed notes to myself), hopefully I'll come back and do that in the next day or two.

For now I just want to say that this certainly kept my interest all the way through, though there were some moments and characters I could have done without. I also found the concept of living tattoos imbuing their "hosts" with traits they embodied quite novel and interesting. I think I'm going to be picking up the second book in this series when it comes out.

Carien says

I absolutely love all of Burnard's books I've read so far, so when I heard she had written an Urban Fantasy I had to read that as well of course.

And this is such a cool read!

The idea of Live Ink is really intriguing. At the start of the story there are a few hints about what these magical tattoos are, but later in the story it gets more and more clear that people who get Live Ink are in for a lot more than they know.

Isa is a complex, but very likeable, heroine. She wants to do the right thing, but it's hard at times for to see what the right thing is. She has been hurt, has her secrets (even for herself) and this made her cautious. She's not your average Urban Fantasy kick-ass heroine, but she has an inner strength that keeps her going.

There are lots of other cool characters as well, I really liked Isa's friends. They were there for her when she really needed them.

The story was suspenseful and had me hooked from the start. I kept worrying and wondering where things would go, and if Isa would find a way to survive what's happening to her. There's lots of intense situations, and lots of action.

The ending had me eager for more. Some major plot-lines get a resolution, but there are enough things left open that I need to know what will be next. I will most certainly get my trotters on the next book once it releases.

Denise says

Nightmare Ink is a deliciously dark and gritty tale. Isa is a tattoo artist gifted with the ability to tattoo living ink; however, due to past trauma she refuses to exercise this gift. Instead she tries to live a quiet life with her tattoo shop and associates eking out a living and trying to fly under the radar. She is contracted by local law enforcement to assist in binding the power of living ink gone wrong and / or events of magical ink related crimes. The tale opens with a horrible tragedy, an event of living ink tearing free of its host and killing the person in the process, the ink escaping and running amok. The chase is on, as is the search for how and / or why this is happening, as the casualties increase.

This story has all the wonderful elements a dark urban fantasy fan could want, a wickedly evil baddie with a dastardly plan, living ink haunting the streets, kidnaps, torture, and self-realization all rolled into one nifty package. There is exploration of magical properties, some Indian legends and traditions, greed, loss, love, and the true meaning of family. This is not a story for the faint of heart or gentle reader, but rather for those who enjoy the darker tales with plenty of action, likeable characters, as well as real evil that causes you to hold your breath waiting for them to get their due.

The writing is tense with 'sitting on the edge of your chair' intrigue and action and never a lull in the journey, which made it difficult for this reader to put it down once started. The world building is wonderful and there are awesomely colorful characters that would be a joy to call friends. Upon finishing Nightmare Ink I had to know when there would be more, love it when I am that excited about a book, and found an estimated release date for the next installment of this series expected in November 2014 and I cannot wait to see what comes next for Isa and the gang. I received this book via NetGalley.

All Things Urban Fantasy says

Review Courtesy All Things Urban Fantasy

One difficult thing about any urban fantasy or paranormal novel is the fine line between too much and too little in the world-building. Some, like THE HOST can bleed potential readers off because it's so top-heavy that the story fails to grab the reader. Then there's NIGHTMARE INK. I don't want to say there wasn't any world-building, but at times I kept looking it up on Goodreads to make sure I wasn't reading the second or third in a series.

It felt like the author was making knowledge assumptions – the kind you'd expect with a vampire/angel/demon type of story. Live Ink, binding ink, flat ink were all eventually spelled out, but NIGHTMARE INK jumped into story and action with no real time to get oriented in the universe. Important moments weren't recognized for what they were because there was no reference for the why.

Once I did understand the world a little better, and was able to focus on the characters and the story rather than the mechanics, I started to enjoy NIGHTMARE INK rather than endure it. I loved Isa's strength, the determination of her found family to stay by her side despite her attempts to keep them safe by isolating herself. And, without spoiling, I will say that I was pleasantly surprised by one formed relationship.

I'm on the fence on whether or not I'll return for the second book – I think it'll depend on the synopsis and how I think the story will turn based on what happened at the end of NIGHTMARE INK. But if it goes where I think it might, I will probably pick this world back up again.

Karin says

I absolutely loved this book. During the first two chapters I did not think I was going to, but once it grabbed me I could not put it down. I felt she developed her characters very well and I got to know them well. It was certainly a different kind of story, and I know it is not for everyone, but for me it was a great read and I am anxiously awaiting the next installment. For me it is the best of all the books she has written so far.

Melindeeloo says

3.5 stars - I liked it. Nightmare Ink (A Living Ink Novel) seems to have inspired a mixed response from readers but I still enjoyed it.

What worked for me is that I like the leading lady magical tattoo artist Isa(Ice), she's got issues that make her afraid to use her powers and cause her to try to keep her emotional distance from the others around her - but still she's gathered a new 'family' because she is basically a caring person who will do what's right despite the danger to herself. That 'family' has real potential but they don't come to clearly in focus here, but then again much of the book is about a new relationship for Ice and inner dialog that comes with that dominates the last half of the book and probably accounts for some pacing issues in the part of the book.

I really liked idea of magical living ink that is key to the world in this story, I thought it was interesting(I've liked other stories with magic tattoos too), interesting enough to pick up the next book and see what happens next for Ice.

Michelle Browne says

A fantastic urban fantasy tale

Absolutely delectable and a real rush. I was not sure about it at first, but the pacing and characters drew me in.

It is erotic and rough and tumble, and the magic system is really cool. The only criticisms I can give are that I spotted a couple places where the exposition felt really forced.

Still, the diversity is executed pretty well, with a great deal of attention to Najavo traditions and awareness of the main character's prejudices. There are some cool LGBTQ/QUILT BAG characters, and the Japanese and Latino factions felt a little stereotyped, but honestly everything makes sense and there is still diversity even within the factions.

I cannot wait to read the next one. I had a good feeling about the series when the first book came out, and now I hope the third one follows the second as soon as possible!

Stacy says

I gave it 3.5 stars

I was pleasantly surprised by NIGHTMARE INK. I wasn't totally sold on the whole living tattoo concept before I started reading, but it was nothing like I thought it would be when I started turning the pages. Isa is a talented tattoo artist, but she can go a step further and work rare magic with living tattoos. She had an unfortunate event during training and refuses to practice. Her one concession is binding living tattoos that go rogue. Nobody likes the fact that she binds their work and when she goes against threats to help a friend her life is put in danger.

NIGHTMARE INK was pretty emotionally charged. Isa has a lot of regrets and pain in her past. She has made a life for herself but still keeps herself apart in a way. The events that happen during NIGHTMARE INK show her how much support and love she has around her in her friends. The way they all came together to help her in dangerous times and stand by her, helped her heal a little bit. Through healing she was able to tap into what she can and wants to do.

A few parts of the story didn't feel as strong as other parts and the storyline wasn't as smooth as I thought it could have been which is why I am giving the score I am. Overall I really enjoyed the plot and I am interested in continuing the series.

* This book was provided free of charge from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Mogsy (MMOGC) says

3.5 of 5 stars at The BiblioSanctum <http://bibliosanctum.blogspot.com/201...>

Whenever I encounter cool, interesting new concepts in urban fantasy, it's always like a breath of fresh air. I mean, I love vampires, werewolves, wizards and such, but it's also nice to see something different every once in a while. And with this book, the idea of magical tattoos most definitely fits into the "that's not something I see every day" category.

The unique properties of "Live Ink" is what serves as the foundation for the magic system in Marcella Burnard's newest novel, in a world where tattoos are more than just body art. If integrated well, a Live Ink tattoo can enhance a person's life and augment their skills. But when things go wrong, they can also turn on their wearers and even wind up killing them.

Protagonist Isa Romanchzyk and others like her who have the ability to manipulate Live Ink can either use that power to create or destroy, making her tattoo shop a destination for both the cops and the mob alike -- or anyone who needs to get rid of a Live Ink tattoo gone bad. Isa's approach has always involved "binding" the tattoo, effectively killing it in order to save the life of the victim. Until one day a desperate friend turns to her for help, and for the first time in years Isa works Live Ink, fixing the tattoo instead of destroying it. But what she doesn't realize is that by interfering, she might as well have just painted a target on her back.

It goes without saying, when you take an interesting idea and throw in compelling characters, you get a winning combination. Nightmare Ink has this going for it. Isa's enigmatic past and her connections with both the law and the gangs of Seattle make her interesting to me. I thought I'd seen and heard it all when it comes to urban fantasy protagonists and their shady backgrounds, but I guess not! Information about Isa's history is doled out sparingly so you don't get to learn everything about her straight away, and I found myself being surprised by the darker revelations of her past even once I was well into the final chapters of the book.

However, the uneven way details are revealed also presents a bit of an issue. I noticed the introductory chapters are heavier on the info-dumps, going so far as to have a character ask Isa about Live Ink so that she can not-so-subtly explain all the ins-and-outs. But information becomes sparser after this, leaving me with a lot of questions about tattoo magic. For example, why does Live Ink only take to certain people and not others? There's also not much about the "etheric" world where a lot of Isa's interactions with Live Ink tattoos take place. It makes some of the later scenes in the novel involving her relationship with her own Live Ink very confusing. It is also implied that the Living Tattoos come from another realm, but again we don't get a lot of detail on that. There are many instances like this, and while it's a very interesting world I only wish I knew more about it!

At the time of reading, I wasn't sure if this was going to be a series, but I see now that there is at least one future book planned. In any case, Nightmare Ink works very well as a stand alone. Isa and her friends are a fantastic group of people I wouldn't hesitate to read about again, and the concept of Live Ink magic could definitely do with some expanding, fine-tuning and polish that another book could provide. Despite some holes in the world building, this was overall a very entertaining read.

Julie says

Posted at Yummy Men & Kick Ass Chicks

Nightmare Ink is the first book in a new urban fantasy series by Marcella Burnard. I wish I could say that I thoroughly enjoyed this book but unfortunately, I didn't. I enjoyed the idea of living tattoos but the execution of the story just made it hard for me to connect with the book or the characters.

Isa is a talented tattoo artist and is capable of inking living tattoos but chooses not too after an unfortunate incident that happened years ago. Isa has not had an easy life. At all. Add to that what happens to her in this book and whoa...she is strong of character because I don't know of anyone who could survive it all. Isa doesn't just survive it, she uses it to kick some ass in her own way. I did find I was rooting for her once in a while because of what she went through. But overall, I had trouble clicking with her, and I'll get into 'why' in a moment.

Patty is an interesting character but again, I was not able to click with her. In fact, there isn't really a single character in this book that I was able to connect with. The reason for that is the information we were given

about the characters and their situations, as well as explanations of why they were doing what they were doing, came about just too slowly. I feel the author's intention was to create some suspense and speculation about the characters but for me, that backfired. I felt more lost than anything when information was shared because only little tidbits were said at a time. Instead of making me want more it left me frustrated. For me all of that attempted suspense caused more of a block than anything and made it almost impossible for me to create a real bond with the characters.

Daniel is yet another character that I was confused about. He is a major character yet his motives were impossible to guess and when we know why he is doing what he is doing, it seemed to come out of nowhere and didn't seem to mesh with the story. I felt he was flat and not really interesting, which is a quality I think a good villain needs.

In the book, Isa is kidnapped and tattooed with a living tattoo against her will. (That is not a spoiler by the way, it says so in the blurb ;)) How long she was kept and how she was treated was absolutely horrible. I would not wish that on anyone. But once she escapes, the focus was on her recovery and how she was dealing with what happened. As to be expected. But again, not enough was explained so I was left feeling sorry for her without even knowing the whole story. So my feeling sorry didn't last very long as it was replaced with more frustration. It was past the 50% mark of the book that things started to pick up and the story started moving but by then, it was too late for me.

The living tattoo, Murmur, both interested me and drove me bonkers. Sometimes he was just a bit much. Too over the top. Then suddenly, he's not. I did like how the tattoo becomes a part of the person on which he is drawn and that he is a living being himself. He also enhances part of the person's character, for good or bad. Like a permanent drug. Pretty neat idea.

Overall, I wish I clicked with Nightmare Ink more but I just didn't. There were too many things that I didn't like, too many things that just didn't quite fit and too much time between vital information being shared about the characters in this story. For me, characters are the most important thing in an urban fantasy series and since I didn't grow to care enough for the people in this book, I will not be reading the next installment.

2.5 stars

Mara says

3 1\2

Like all books and reviews, everyone has different reasons for liking or disliking one peculiar book. The common refrain regarding Nightmare Ink seems to be lack of world-building. I don't completely agree. Mostly because, as a reader, you have the heroine's knowledge. And you realize that she has almost none. That almost all she knew is skewed or downright wrong. And this has to be taken into consideration. But yes, NI has some shaky foundations. Not enough to destroy, but they need some strengthening. :)

I liked the heroine, and disliked her at times too, as she was saddled with quite a few cliché I could have done without.

Moreover, while the story is intriguing, the plethora of secondary characters is not always full rounded. And some choices make you wonder what was on the author's mind.

One character is so overboard clichéd that the heroine asks her why she is such a clichéd caricature. (So, you

know it was the author's hand to draw it as such, and you wonder why. I never got the reason why.)

Still, I think this book deserves a chance. To me it's good new series opening with some bumps on the road. Let's hope it improves with the next book.

Libbie says

One difficult thing about any urban fantasy or paranormal novel is the fine line between too much and too little in the world-building. Some, like *THE HOST* can bleed potential readers off because it's so top-heavy that the story fails to grab the reader. Then there's *NIGHTMARE INK*. I don't want to say there wasn't any world-building, but at times I kept looking it up on Goodreads to make sure I wasn't reading the second or third in a series.

Read the rest @ [All Things Urban Fantasy](#)

Gwen says

I must admit that I did not enjoy Marcella's previous books, but this one..... **SUCKED ME IN !!!!!** Well who wouldn't enjoy a book where tattoos (ink) comes alive and can talk to you and in the end becomes a...., nope not going to tell you, you will have to buy the book to find out. I will definitely be buying the next book in the series, if I can last that long.
