



Stolen Ink

Holly Evans

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I'm Dacian, a tattoo magician, and my life went from my biggest concern being finding a pretty guy to fall into bed with at the end of the week to everything falling apart around me.

There are two problems in my life.

Number one – I'm an ink magician, the thing of myths. A lot of very powerful people would love to get their hands on me, and I have no intention of letting that happen.

Number two – A tattoo thief came to my city, and the magical community has decided that I'm the guy to stop them.

Somehow, I have to catch the thief without letting my secret out of the bag, and that's even harder than it sounds.

Stolen Ink Details

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From Reader Review Stolen Ink for online ebook

Achim says

3.5

Can't help it, I'm all for urban fantasy where it's completely normal to have supernaturals mixed among the human citizens, getting an idea how that might work out, how the different magic is handled as well as the tensions the different view on life is causing and I always appreciate when I'm not buried under chapter-long explanation and detailed world building. I like it when an author trusts herself and her art and let me explore more or less on my own.

Here I get that aplenty, so much so that it would suffice a novel but here on less pages all those creatures and magic sometimes becomes a bit a blur. That together with fact that we get only Dacian's view which often means his inner dialogue, his ideas and impression makes the relationships and emotions more a telling than a showing. That is somehow okay for the friendships but does no good for the romance. I don't necessarily need steam in a fantasy story but I need to feel emotions in a romance.

Those missing emotions and an end-fight that didn't live up to the promise the story created so convincingly made me decide regretfully to round it down to 3 stars ... but nevertheless that world is too rich, the characters too interesting and the magic concept to tempting that I already downloaded the next part.

Siobhan says

Tattoos and magic – two of my favourite things. It goes without saying that I would jump into this one. When you see a combination of your favourite things thrown together, you always jump at such books.

However, it also leaves you with very high standards. As the book contains your favourite things, you expect something wonderful.

Did this book deliver me the amazing story I had been hoping to receive? Unfortunately, it didn't quite make it. I know I have given the book a four star rating, but in reality it is more of a three-point-five read. I had an extremely lengthy internal debate as to whether I should give it three or four stars, but in the end the voice in the back of my head whispered 'tattoos and magic' which bumped it to the four star round up instead of the three star round down. A part of me still believes I should have rounded it down, but I'm going to stick with the gut reaction of rounding it up.

As the first book in the Ink Born series, this book does a lot to leave you interested in the story. We get to see a decent amount of the world, we're introduced to many aspects, and we're left with a lot of curiosity about many things. In terms of leaving me interested in reading more of the series, this book has certainly achieved something. Whilst it's not at the top of my 'grab the next in the series' list, it's certainly sitting on the list. I'm interested in where this series will head from here, and I want the answers to all the questions in my mind.

Although I am curious about where the story is to go, a part of me feels this story didn't quite deliver all it could have. I feel as though many aspects of the story weren't given the depth that it should have been given, with things entering the story to simple be rather than allowing us to truly appreciate the aspect of the story. Certain things may be developed upon in future books, but some parts I wanted to understand in this story. I'm a lover of understanding the world I'm thrown into, a lover of understanding the complexities of magical

systems and the laws of the world, but in this one I feel as though my understanding wasn't quite up to what I usually like.

Don't get me wrong, the magical system was a lot of fun. I just wanted to understand it more. I wanted to be left in awe of the system, but I never quite reached that point. I just accepted that two of my favourite things were connected, without them coming together in the mind-blowing way they could have. In part, this is my own fault. I really did have such high standards in my mind for the tattoo and magic link – in many ways I was destined to be let down.

Nevertheless, it was an interesting story. It was far too quick for my liking, but there was everything you needed to make an engaging read. I found myself picking up the story whenever I had the chance, interested to see where things would head next. It really did pull me in, even if I do feel as though it was over too quickly. I also feel as though certain themes were given more attention than they should have been. The romance, for example, took up a decent portion of the story but felt rather weak and clichéd. It wasn't a romance that I cared much for: it simply seemed to exist to add another element to the story. I would have been much happier had the romance not existed, and the magic was given more attention.

As a whole, though, I enjoyed this one. It was an interesting introduction to the series and I'm interested to see where things go from here.

As a final note, I would like to thank NetGalley and the publisher for allowing me to read this in exchange for a review.

Artemisia says

[He was after another guy for almost a year, one that he wants with a longing, but then meets Isa. And suddenly he has a boyfriend. What is it that makes him

Kristen Burns says

3 Stars

Full Review:

I received an ecopy of this book via NetGalley. This has not influenced my review.

So... this book sounded cool because tattoo magic! But it ended up not quite working for me.

One of my issues was that I didn't understand the world. I know everyone complains about info dumping, but I need a little bit of explanation. I finally got some answers in the second half of the book or so, but there's still a lot I'm unclear on. It seemed as though the vast majority of the population were either supernatural or had magic, and different types of magic were taught at colleges, but I have no idea if you have to born with an innate skill or if anyone can learn it. I also don't know how many different types of magic/magicians there are or what any of them do except tattoo magicians and breakers (Isaiah was a weaver, but I still don't understand what that meant). And I guess having magical animal tattoos inside of you was a common occurrence. Also, there was a council and a guild, but I don't know what either of them did or were in charge of.

And because I didn't understand what the council was or did, I didn't understand why Dacian was so afraid of them finding out about his magic. It was such an important thing, Dacian didn't want to get involved in the murders because he didn't want to reveal his ink magic to anyone and was constantly thinking about how he had a bag packed and could flee to Europe... but I had no clue why.

It also seemed like the author was trying to put more meaning into every relationship than was actually there. And there was so much... touching. Not that I have an issue with affection between characters in books, but this felt forced. Caressing and kissing wrists and brushing fingers over lips and rubbing thumbs over wrists/knuckles and cupping faces—between Dacian and Keirn, between Dacian and Isaiah even when they'd just met, even Ethan got in on the lip touching action at one point.

On a similar note, none of the characters felt three-dimensional. Isaiah was the scrawny-but-feisty stereotype, Vyx was kind of the same but female, Ethan was the flirtatious jerk who was actually a good guy, etc. Dacian was the only one who came close to being realistic.

Also, it took long time for anything to really happen. And then the resolution came suddenly and easily and was kind of anticlimactic. At least there was a solid resolution to the problem of this book though (with an opening for the series to continue). And I would still say this was more of a plot-driven than character-driven book.

Lastly, this is one of those nitpicky things, but I have never in my life called someone or been called or heard anyone refer to their friend as "old friend." Like, "Thank you, old friend." "I'm sorry, old friend." It just grated on me until, every time it was used, I would cringe and get twitchy.

Oh! It's probably also worth mentioning as a positive thing for anyone who likes reading about pets that there were lots of animals since Dacian had a cat and a snake (tattoos, but they came to life as corporeal things) and Keirn had a fox.

Overall, despite all my complaints, I wouldn't say this was a bad book, and Dacian wasn't an unlikeable character, but the characters didn't feel real to me, and I had a hard time getting into the story.

Recommended For:

Urban fantasy fans looking for something plot-driven and uncomplicated.

Original Review @ Metaphors and Moonlight

? Todd says

This story had **such a cool and unique concept** that I immediately knew that I had to read it.

The premise was that certain people had parts of their soul that manifested themselves as animals. The person would feel their animal clawing to get out, go to a tattoo magician, then the **tattoo magician would 'feel'** the identity of their animal and tattoo it onto their skin.

Once the tattoo was complete, its owner could then **press on the tattoo to 'release' it into the living world**. For example, the main character, Dacian, had both a cat and a snake, which spent most of the story as real

animals, much like pets would hang around the house. The tattoo animals could also push thoughts to their master, which I thought was **very cool**.

But there was also a **tattoo thief on the loose**, who was stealing people's tattoos, and since the tattoos were part of their owner's souls, **the victim would die an excruciating death**. So as a powerful tattoo magician, Dacian was tasked with the task of finding the tattoo thief and stopping the murders.

Then we had **the council**, who were the all-powerful ruling body governing all things supernatural. These were definitely the bad guys, so Dacian used every means available to keep them from finding out that he was much more powerful than they knew. They tended to make people disappear, never to be heard from again, so he wanted no part in that.

All of that sounds amazing, right? And it was, *mostly*. My problems with the story weren't surrounding the premise, but **the execution**.

The story was only **around 200 pages, but felt immeasurably longer**. Dacian tended to live inside his own head, so instead of most of the story surrounding actual conversations between all of the many, many characters, we're exposed to **page after page of his innermost thoughts**. It truly felt like too much.

I'd categorize this story as a **fantasy/magical suspense, much more so than as a romance**, as the romance aspects were also written more as a **telling versus showing**, which made it impossible for me to get many actual feels between Dacian and Isaiah.

In regards to steam, as with many fantasy stories, this book avoided sex entirely, with all of those scenes simply **fading to black**, which was entirely fine, as I didn't read this story hoping it would contain erotica.

The ending. What can I say about the ending? *It ended?* Very abruptly and much more easily than I thought it should have. For all of the powerful ink magician's skills, **his defeat was quick and relatively uneventful**, which left me feeling a bit hollow.

I do truly look forward to more stories in the Ink Born series, as we were introduced to a variety of different characters and flavors of magic (dreamwalkers, shifters, sorcerers, dragons, etc); however, **I do hope that future books do more showing and less telling**, plus provide the reader with **deeper levels of connection** between the MC's.

All things considered, I'd have to rate this one at **around 3.5 stars** and hope that the HFN ending progresses to an HEA for Dacian and Isaiah as the series progresses.

*This story is ***FREE*** with a Kindle Unlimited membership.*

NeRdyWYRM says

Unsettling

I have too many questions. You're kind of dumped into this world and it's immersive which is great. It's

visceral, raw, kind of dark, and a little terrifying. Everything has weight, but there's almost too much story with too little explanation.

The book gods know I hate an info-dump, but I also want to know *why* things are significant if it's not obvious. In this case there's all this inferred doom and gloom with no explicative reasoning for it. Ugh. Without the reasons and motivations behind these characters' actions, personalities and behaviors as they pertained to each other, to Dan, and to the surrounding world, they [and their society] were almost universally hard to swallow. That took away from the success of this story in my opinion.

The world is intensely interesting. Unfortunately, we don't get to see much of it. The details are too sharp and too vague at the same time. It's ... odd and unsettling. I am a massive ball of anxiety right now. At points I was almost nauseous.

Add in the character interactions and I felt like I got dropped into a scary alternate universe without any information or introduction. Like I said, unsettling.

Now, I won't say I enjoyed it because it's too ... mmm hard-edged for that. I am reluctantly fascinated but I don't hold out much hope that future books will untangle these foggy impressions and offer much clarity.

I'm a pretty smart cookie, and generally, I intuitively understand that reading is often about more than just the words on the page; there's also what's written 'between the lines'. I typically gain a sense of the author's intent through their voice. It's brain-muscle memory for me to just 'get' those impressions. Sometimes that's the only thing that smooths over jagged edges left in black and white, but I simply wasn't getting a clear grasp on intent here. Instead it felt like I was flailing and floundering my way through. It either takes a genius or something seriously skewed to confound me that way. I'm still not sure which I'm dealing with here.

It's very well-written and extremely evocative. At the same time, I feel a bit like a fine steak that's been pulverized into ground beef by a meat mallet instead of tenderly marinated. Kind of ruins the dining experience.

So I came away from this one bleeding ink from a thousand cuts and with too many questions to be satisfied. It won't stop me from continuing because it was *good* even though I'm an angst-xiety ridden mess. But I'm proceeding with caution and prepared to cut bait if it comes to it.

Qin says

Dear author, writing is not the same thing as vomiting; unless one is endowed with prodigious facility for style and truly great powers of imagination, publishing 600 pages in 6 months can only be conducive to gross literary failure. Your concept is pretty unique, but the execution of all three instalments (so far) of the story lacks so much in virtually every department, be it it pacing, narration, characters, world-building, dialogue or action scenes, that one can only suspect you to be selling unrevised first drafts penned at enormous speed to meet a looming deadline. Ever read before about foreshadowing ? building up a mystery tale with studiously disseminated clues and a cogent cast of suspects ? balancing a book so that it has a sharply defined beginning, an harmonious middle where all the twists and turns occur, and an ending providing full closure ? fleshing up your characters to make them three-dimensional and lovable ? sticking close to a well ordained conception of your mythology (magic, ink magic, magical beings, magical classes of users and so on and so forth), so that loose ends are reduced to the bare minimum and the reader is not forced to make informed guesses, when he is not busy second guessing everything he previously took for granted from your less than

explicit world building ? For you simply seem to hold that telling a tale is taking your reader for a journey from point A to point B through a mere theatre of shadows; as your narrator is an underwhelming bean counter whose focalization dulls the edge of what ought to have been foreys into a bright world of magic, there is neither flesh nor colours to your tales. You depict nothing, nor do you really tell what happens - you merely sketch the bare bones of the story. This is tantamount to a producer who promised some show featuring a ballet corps, only to deliver in its stead the corpse of the ballet dancers. Where is the literary pleasure in this dry, barren, dessicated map of an universe which held so much promise ? What you deliver is epitomized perfectly in the flat and jejune title of each novel.

Sadie Forsythe says

2.5

I was seriously disappointed in this book. There is such a cool idea here. The connection between characters and their tattoo/companion animals is really interesting. Unfortunately the author did not pull it all together in a complete, engaging story.

The biggest problem is the writing. Sure, it's readable and the dialogue isn't such that it feels amateurish, it's even pretty, but it all feels very shallow, like the reader is only given access to the surface of a much deeper story. I felt cheated. For a long time, after starting the book, I thought this must be a latter book in a series, because I wasn't sure what was going and the characters seem to have so much history that we're not given. Further, so much of the writing is tell, instead of show. I just never felt connected or invested in anything or anyone. Then it climaxes suddenly and is over.

I was left with some really basic unanswered questions, like what was the fundamental difference between and Ink and Tattoo Magician? Why did being an Ink magician need to be hidden from the council. Why was the council so scary and useless? What were the tattoo animals if not spirit animals, which they weren't as a spirit animal is something different? And if it's the bearer's, say, soul, which it is kind of inferred they may be, how can they have more than one? It all led to a deep feeling of dissatisfaction. I didn't hate it. In fact, I really wanted to like it because I liked the idea of it. I'd probably be willing to give the author another shot, but this one was a bust for me. Oh, and the cover doesn't match the dark tone of the book or main character at all.

Montzalee Wittmann says

I want a tattoo like those!

Stolen Ink by Holly Evans is a terrific fantasy with a magical tattoos, shifters, someone stealing tattoos (magically that causes death), lots of mystery, great characters, fun fantasy, and gay romance. Enjoyed it completely!

RoAnna Sylver says

Super intriguing concepts, super disappointing execution... which makes this almost more frustrating and discouraging. I looked forward to this one greatly/actually used it as a reward book - get stuff done, read the

cool ink-magic tattoo-thief serial killer book with tons of gay and one example of aroace rep. Sounded amazing. And that is why it has two stars instead of a flat one. The concepts can be interesting, and non-awful aro/ace rep is rare, and that is one part of the book that doesn't disappoint. Vyx is good and I'm here for her. THE REST, HOWEVER...

Unfortunately, we've got repeated use of the phrase "spirit animal," which as we should know in the year 2017 is appropriative as all get-out - doesn't matter if it's elves or another magic system, do not write this unless you belong to a Native/Indigenous culture that uses them. Especially not as presented as an actual magic concept in an urban fantasy, with no Native characters even in the book! At first I thought this was one of the (many) awkward-phrasing issues, until we're shown that no, these elven spirit animals (which are never explained further) are deliberately different from the 'ordinary' tattoo-magic animals... and it becomes an actual plot point.

Please. Stop. This. There's really no excuse left by now. I don't even know how else to say it, just don't do this, *especially* when presenting actually plot-relevant "spirit animals" in the realm of fantasy/further reinforcing the stereotype of actual cultures/spiritualities being magical/exotic/in this case, *literally* inhuman. (Elves!) It's just... never good, and is actively harmful.

Other various problems that kept me from enjoying this:

- * Many, many, many small editing errors. Wonky punctuation/missing or repeated words, or just very awkward phrasing. Unnatural dialogue and interaction - not referring to the copious touching/displays of affection that bothered someone else. I mean that characters will appear and disappear with zero explanation (Caiden and Ethan do this the most), small issues on their own, but enough of them to really take me out of a reading.

- * The same phrases being repeated/hammered in - I'm not talking about the "old friend" another reviewer mentioned, or even the "other half" of another side character who is called this and only this; I can buy that. (Elves, handwave, elves.) But small-but-often things like saying tattoo cat Kyra is a "disloyal wretch" - once, okay fine? And yes, believable, cats tend to follow the food. Don't need to hear it upwards of 5 times, and this is just the first example that comes to mind.

- * We're half-introduced to a ton of (interesting-sounding!) concepts, and then they're never explained - just a truckload of missing details or things that aren't fleshed-out. Did we ever even learn the name of "the city" in which this takes place? It's called "the city" around 17 times, but never NAMED. And not in a way that seemed intentional! It's in the US, and that is the extent of my knowledge. Why was the temporary truth spell not put to better use? What about the blood oath? This never comes up again, and they're both fairly significant implications. (I could go on - what's the deal with the "wild magic?" Alchemists? What is 'weaving,' specifically, aside from the small demonstration we're shown? How does ink magic differ from traditional tattoo magic, even? How does magical grading work, the different tiers? We're told so many things that have potential, but never shown specifics, and it leaves the book feeling empty.)

- * Lackluster characterization. Seriously. I couldn't begin to describe individual personalities, with the exception of Vyx and Keirn. Why is Caiden here? Why is Ethan here? Put Jake in a room with them, how do they interact in ways discernible from one another? Why are several one-off, never-explained or elaborated-on side characters introduced at all if they serve no narrative purpose, and,

(SPOILER AHEAD-)

- * Why is the actual murderer/thief none of these numerous characters, with next-to-zero foreshadowing or tangible suspense/mystery-crafting, with only the main character "recognizing him" from college where his (one-scene, never-elaborated) professor slept with a student? And he blames her for breaking up with him or something and this is his origin story (that and chaos magic, which again, is never really explained, and if I didn't already know what a chaote was, I'd be even more lost?). The professor slept with a student, and that student gets pissed when she broke up with him, and started killing people and taking their magic ink.

Because chaos magicians are insane. Or something.

OH. KAY.

(End spoiler.)

I really wanted to like this. Entirely seriously. The fact that this is my first negative review in a streak of 20 books is just... galling. Because it really could have been great. I even got pretty fond of individual characters (Keirn, Vyx, Isaiah grew on me a little despite the fact that aside from 'abused/tentative/slowly gaining confidence', I couldn't tell you the first thing about his actual personality, or explain the chemistry/connection between him and the MC) and wanted them to be okay. Unfortunately, given the rest of the book's issues, I can't see picking up the second. Especially if it, anywhere, contains the phrase "spirit animal."

Cadiva says

I so, so badly wanted to give this book a higher rating but it was just too frustrating. When it started I was absolutely delighted and felt like I was stepping into a new world with its own rules where magic simply existed as a natural thing.

The idea of tattoo magic was brilliant, I could see them coming to life on the skins of the people visiting the tattoo parlour but then the story narrative went off sideways on a danger that just never really felt earned or properly explained.

Too many concepts were thrown into the story without any real level of depth or any sense of how they fit into the world.

The supposed romance element was almost non-existent, there was more chemistry between Dan and Ethan than with Dan and Isaiah imho and Caiden's weird reaction to Dan's friendship with his tattoo partner Kiern came totally out of left field.

Oh yeah on the romance front. Everything apart from kissing, as is sadly often the case in fantasy novels, happens off page. I'm not expecting erotica or porn without plot, I do, however, expect an author to give me something on page which demonstrates two characters are supposed to be in love.

As for the ending, well let's just say that was a huge let down given everything that built up to it and as for being abrupt, if it had been any more instant cut off I'd have thrown my Kindle out the window.

There were also a few minor typos but as this an ARC they may get ironed out before publication. Because this is book one in a series, I'm hoping for a bit of better plotting and more exploration in the narrative as the series goes along.

#ARC provided by NetGalley in return for an unbiased review.

Calila says

Kind of all over the place. Feels like it starts in the middle of the story and then you never get filled in on what you missed. The bad guy is decent but he's off the page entirely too much and then he's handled pretty easily. Was the random stalker ever explained? The romance aspect was lackluster. It's not really even there,

but what is it more told than shown. I'm not sure why they had in common. I don't think they ever even truly spoke. There was just a lot of "let's go to bed." which does not a relationship make. The idea of tattoo and ink magic is so interesting and this book just doesn't do it service. I'm mildly curious about where the series ends up but I don't think I'm going to go out of my way to read them and find out.

Michelle Willms says

Original story

This tale is filled with a great cast of characters, a gripping plot, and a series premise interesting enough to ensure future books will be devoured. This does have some romance, so it's really not true urban fantasy, for those who are sticklers about the traditional definition. It's a worthy read, in any case.

Len Evans Jr says

Oh shit... just finished this and I'm a F-ing mess. I thought my heart was gonna explode... talk about an incredible, intense and an amazing ending. Ms. Evans has a fan for life. This is the 3rd book of by her I have read and each one has been extraordinary. The people she created for this book are just breathtakingly real. She had me so invested in their lives and what would happen to them that it was almost impossible to turn the last 20 pages of the book. I love the world of magic that she has created for this and the Forged in Blood series. It is so complex and diverse that she will very likely to write years and years of books in it. The more the better as far as I am concerned. I loved the relationships she wrote in this book, definitely Dacian and Isaiah's first and foremost but also the family that she created around them of Vyx, Keirn, and so many others. This book is just over the top awesome and anyone who loves paranormal fantasy would love it!!!

Stjepan Cobets says

My rating 4.3

Book "Stolen Ink (Ink Born # 1)" by Holly Evans is a pure YA fantasy novel, a lot of beautiful people and love events. The world in which the story is placed I must admit I liked it, the story is solid and fun. The world of the Earth, in which magic is ruled, is very beautiful, in which all races can be seen, from people, elves, fairies, wolves and various magical creatures. The story follows Dacian who is a tattoo magician, he does magic tattoos that are strongly associated with those who make a tattoo. These tattoos are alive and soulful are associated with the owner of a tattoo. Hiding behind the profession, the tattoo magician Dacian conceals the true truth about himself, he is an ink magician, but he soon finds himself to be tempted. An unknown killer takes tattoos and thereby kills tattoo owners who are inseparable ties related to tattoos. All close to him will soon be in immediate danger, his lover, friends, and all acquaintances. The only one who can stop the killer is Dacian. But if they do, they will be caught by the powerful magic houses that control the world. I would recommend the book to all fans of YA fantasy.
