

Runner's Moon 4: Challa by Linda Mooney

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Title: Challa
 Author: Linda Mooney
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 Reviewer: Merrylee
 Heat Level: Oral Sex, Sex in Shifted Form Rating:

Challa's memories of her life before escaping the Arra seven years ago with thirty other Ruinos aren't happy ones. Unfortunately, her life for the past two years with Lawson Hall's Carnival and Sideshow hasn't been much better. Starving and so weak the night Lawson caught her raiding his kitchen that she couldn't change into her human form to disguise herself, Lawson turned her into a sideshow attraction as Challa, the Alien Girl. She was the draw he'd needed to save his struggling carnival. In return, he'd provided her with everything she needed to live, but he'd also caged her again, just in a different way. He didn't care about her. All he cared about were the gate receipts she brought in. When she discovers her destined life mate in the audience at their first show of the weekend in the small town of Cooper, she knows there's no way Lawson's going to let her stay with him. Former Army Lt. Compton Scott, medically discharged after an RPG left him without a right leg — not to mention scarred and nearly neutered — had come home to Cooper and his family farm to wallow in his self-pity. It takes his best friend dragging him out to the carnival on a blind date to finally get him out of the house. The woman who garners his interest, however, is not his date, but the green-skinned woman that the sideshow barker claims is a real, live alien. He thinks she certainly looks the part. Hissing and growling through her needle-like teeth, she reaches through the bars of her cage, slashing with lethal-looking talons at the gawking crowd, a crowd that backs hastily away from her in abject terror. Danger, however, isn't what Comp picks up from her. He sees the sadness in her beautiful purple-blue eyes, and she smells so good, like honeysuckle, he wants...no, needs to get closer to her. He gets exactly that when she draws blood from one of her spectators and notice from local law enforcement. To protect her, Comp secrets her away in his home. Challa knows they must make love to bond, but when the proof that they are indeed blood mates doesn't materialize, she knows their future together isn't meant to be. Sadly, knowing she'll never see her beloved Compton again, she returns to the carnival under the guise of fetching her things. Frantic when the carnival picks up and leaves town ahead of schedule, taking Challa with them, Comp knows he must find her. Her alien nature aside, in just one night of sexually explosive passion, he knows Challa is his destiny. What he can't even begin to imagine is how important it is to find her, sooner than later. As luck would have it, some of Challa's fellow escapees, as well as their mates and trusted friends, step in to help, but in gathering together, they once again attract the Arra's attention. Since coming to Earth, Challa's friends have fought the Arra slavers off several times, but this time, the unrelenting aliens have come in search of the Ruinos and their blood mates with a deadlier weapon than any of them had ever seen. One that will test Comp's military training to the nth degree. And then some! Challa is the fourth installment in Linda Mooney's terrific Runner's Moon series. Also including Jebaral, Tiron and Simolif — these books will capture your imagination and inspire a desire in you to read more Runner's Moon books from Ms. Mooney as soon as possible. You'll want to keep reading Challa until you've finished it. Although part of a series, you can read it alone, but I wouldn't recommend it. For deeper enjoyment of the plot and characters, I'd advise readers to start with Jabaral and progress through the books in order. Believe me, you'll enjoy meeting the recurring characters in their own books before reading about Challa in hers. Challa is one of those books you just can't put down, but of course it is; it's a Linda Mooney book! Like everything she writes, this story is captivating from beginning to end, but then, frankly I think Ms. Mooney could draw you into a scene about taking out the garbage. She's just that kind of writer. Her plots are riveting, and she makes you feel her characters, right down to their toenails. Ms. Mooney didn't have to say outright that Comp's prosthesis was painful. I knew it; could almost feel it in my own bones from the way he walked and from Challa sensing his need for strength and then feeding him her own. I love how all the Ruinos have such a strong core sense of devotion to their mates. Their emotional love scenes really cut to the heart, making the reader sigh with pure pleasure. Add raw danger and compelling suspense in a smooth flow of prose and dialogue, all of it moving at a fast pace, and you have more than just a really good book. You have a Linda Mooney book, a book that spins a story you shouldn't miss. Along with the first three books in the Runner's Moon series, Challa is definitely a keeper. And since there are at least eight more Ruinos out there looking for mates, I hope to see many more releases in this wonderful series.

