



PROMPT #3: Your main character has been stranded on a desert island for months. Alone... or so they thought. One morning, they wake up to a message written in the sand.

Blood & Thunder: A Rhapsody of Destiny

by LL

1

“Hang tight! We’re going down!” Ludarro shouted, shoving the stick forward and forcing the Dauntless into a dive. The plane descended; its nose aimed straight at the ocean’s depths. At the last possible moment, he yanked the handle back with all his strength, the frame groaning under the strain. His gamble paid off—the Vietnamese MiGs streaked overhead, momentarily disoriented.

“Shut up, Sleet!” he barked, ignoring his rear gunner’s panicked shouts. Inverted, he lined up the shot and squeezed the triggers. The .50-caliber guns roared, and flames erupted as his first target disintegrated.

He adjusted his aim. Another burst of gunfire, and the second MiG exploded in a fiery cloud. As the adrenaline subsided, he leveled the plane and checked his compass. “Setting course for Tan Son Nhut,” he proclaimed.

Sleet groaned. “I hate it when you pull that stunt.” “It was us or them,” Ludarro replied.

“Radar clear?” Sleet asked, his voice still shaky.

Ludarro’s tone darkened, “Yeah. Unfortunately.” Sleet fell silent, understanding the gravity of his words. They flew in somber quiet for an hour, the engine’s hum their only companion. Just as land broke the horizon, another threat loomed: dark skies.

“Bad news—thunderstorms,” Ludarro said grimly.

“Of course,” Sleet muttered as turbulence jolted the plane. A flash of lightning cracked across the horizon, illuminating the storm clouds with an eerie glow. The turbulence grew violent, and a second bolt struck the wing, sending a tremor through the frame.

“Brace yourself!” Ludarro shouted, his knuckles white on the stick. Another lightning bolt hit—then another, each strike blinding and deafening. The final bolt hit dead center, searing through the cockpit with a bright flash. For a fleeting moment, there was nothing but radiant light... and then, only darkness.

2

Ludarro awoke coughing, rough sand clinging to his skin. The crash site loomed behind him, the jungle alive with strange sounds, while endless ocean stretched before him. Pain flared through his body as he staggered upright, his gaze landing on the cockpit. His breath caught at the sight of Sleet, slumped in his chair, bloodied and still.

Ignoring his own aches, Ludarro dragged himself over, dread tightening his chest. He reached out hesitantly, pressing two fingers to Sleet’s neck. The touch was met with silence—no pulse, only a corpse. Grief clawed at him; however, he forced it down. Now, he could only fight to survive and keep the memory of his friend alive.

“I’m sorry,” Ludarro whispered, nausea clawing at his stomach.

He scavenged what he could from the wreckage: rations, a med kit, two 1911 pistols, and a survival kit. His hands trembled as he worked, the weight of guilt pressing down on him. Before leaving, he hesitated, staring back at the wreckage. His throat tightened. “I’ll come back,” he murmured, retreating into the jungle.

The dense foliage rustled with unseen life, shadows moving in the periphery of his vision. The jungle’s cacophony of chirps and howls was a constant reminder of its hostility. But the familiarity of the wilderness grounded him. Growing up in the mountainous forests of Tennessee, Ludarro had spent countless days navigating dense woods, hunting with his father, and building shelters by hand. The jungle—alien as it was—felt eerily similar.

He wove a hammock from vines and leaves, climbed in, and stared up at the night sky. Relief turned to unease as his gaze fell on the stars above. Something was wrong. The constellations were unfamiliar.

“This isn’t Vietnam,” he whispered, panic tightening his throat. “Get ahold of yourself,” he muttered, forcing his breathing to slow. Exhaustion overtook him, and he drifted into uneasy sleep, underneath a strange heaven.

3

When Ludarro awoke—hours, maybe days later—the wreckage was gone. Not a single trace of the Dauntless remained. In its place stood a sinister message: a six-foot stake jutted from the ground, with an “X” of smaller limbs lashed to its center. And adorned on that unholy monument was Sleet.

Tears streaked Ludarro’s face as he staggered toward the effigy, each step revealing the horrors of this new world. Flesh had been torn from Sleet’s body, jagged and uneven, as if clawed away by savage hands. Deep gashes crisscrossed his chest in deliberate patterns, and strange symbols carved into his forearms glistened with dried blood. He fell to his knees, rage consuming him at the sight of his friend’s desecrated remains.

“They’ll pay for this,” Ludarro growled, pulling Sleet’s battered remains down and burying him beneath a mound of stones. He couldn’t leave his friend like that.

For the next 39 days, the jungle became his battlefield. He hunted and foraged with relentless focus, sharpening sticks into weapons and weaving vines into snares. His Tennessee upbringing gave him the skills to survive, yet rage gave him the will. Every morning, he notched his knife sheath as he consumed the last of his rations. When they ran out, he lived off the land—edible plants, small creatures, and strange alien critters became his sustenance.

By the 40th day, he was ready. The smoke from his campfire billowed high into the dawn, challenging whatever creatures sacrificed his best friend. He climbed into the canopy, lying in wait for whatever destiny may offer.

At last, the first trap was sprung. A flare shot into the sky, followed by inhuman screeches. Ludarro’s punji stakes claimed the first victim, then the second. He moved through the trees, listening to the satisfying crunch of bones and the howls of pain as his traps claimed their toll. He didn’t know how many there were, but it did not matter, he was determined to kill them all.

Then, silence.

A hulking, green-skinned figure stepped into the firelight. It stood eight feet tall, its tusks glinting in the glow, and its eyes burned with intelligence. Draped in rags, it looked like a fiend brought to life, torn straight from the depths of a nightmare.

The beast sniffed the air, its nostrils flaring, and slowly turned. Its gaze finding Ludarro.

4

Instinct took over. Ludarro leapt into the morning light, swinging through the trees as the beast's thundering steps shook the ground below. Branches tore at his skin, but he pushed forward, leading his pursuer toward the cave he had fortified for his final stand.

As he approached the entrance, a smaller green creature with yellow eyes and floppy ears stepped into his path. Without hesitation, Ludarro raised his pistol and fired twice. The creature crumpled, and he dived into the cave, rolling behind cover as guttural voices filled the air outside.

The traps sprung in quick succession. Spikes snapped, ropes lashed, and grenades detonated, filling the air with the screams of his enemies. One by one, the noises subsided, until only silence remained. Ludarro crouched low, gripping both pistols as his eyes darted toward the shadows.

Then came the heavy footsteps.

The hulking figure emerged from the darkness, dragging a crude club across the cave floor. Its tusks gleamed in the faint light as its gaze pierced his soul. It roared, shaking the walls with its fury, and began its slow, deliberate approach.

Ludarro fired blindly, both pistols blazing as the cave filled with smoke and the deafening cry of gunfire. Bullets ricocheted off stone, some striking flesh, but the beast kept coming, its thunderous voice shaking the walls.

His fingers trembled—this was his last chance.

The beast loomed over him, dropping its club with a resounding thud. Ludarro stumbled back, his breath coming in ragged gasps.

With a surge of desperation, he hurled the empty pistol, holstered the other, and drew his knife. Forcing out a battle cry, he charged. The beast swatted the blade aside effortlessly, its massive hand snapping around his wrist like a vice.

It yanked him close, its hot breath washing over his face. Ludarro twisted, desperate to break free. Yet it was hopeless. Before he could make another move, searing pain ripped through him, and everything went black.

5

Ludarro awoke in a swaying wooden cage strapped to the beast's back, his body wracked with pain. As the creature lumbered forward, he noticed tribal carvings etched deep into its scaly hide, casting a shadow of dread deep into his bones. The dense foliage gave way to a firelit clearing, where dozens of yellow-eyed creatures gathered, their stares drilling into him. The chanting stopped, and an eerie silence fell over the crowd as unseen eyes bored through him.

The beast flung the cage to the ground, and it rolled to a halt before a robed figure leaning on a gnarled staff. Its wizened, old black eyes studied him with unsettling intensity. With slow movements, it raised a bone flute to its cracked lips and blew a haunting note. A purple mist swirled through the air, burning Ludarro's lungs. Just as the world began to spin, he was seized by a startling clarity.

"Great warrior," the figure rasped, its words now comprehensible. "You massacred many of our kin. For that courage, I offer a chance at life."

The cage swung open, and Ludarro stepped out, stretching sore muscles. Before he had a moment to think, the same hulking green beast let out a bone-rattling war cry, slamming its club into the ground, the sound reverberating through the clearing like thunder.

Ludarro drew a steadying breath. Hand poised over his pistol, he stood firm—one shot, one chance to defy destiny.