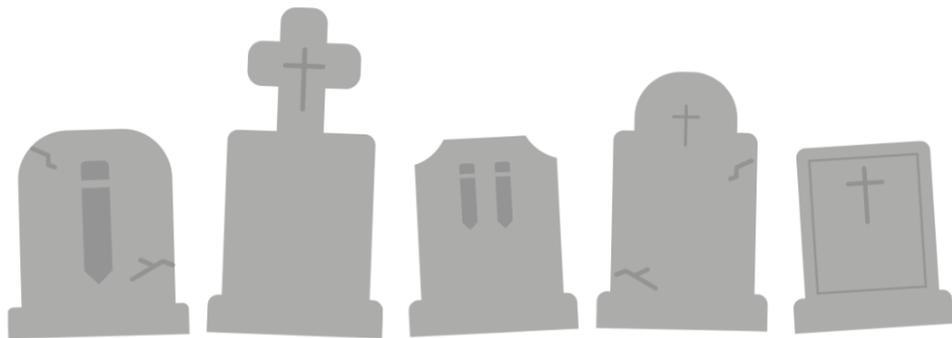
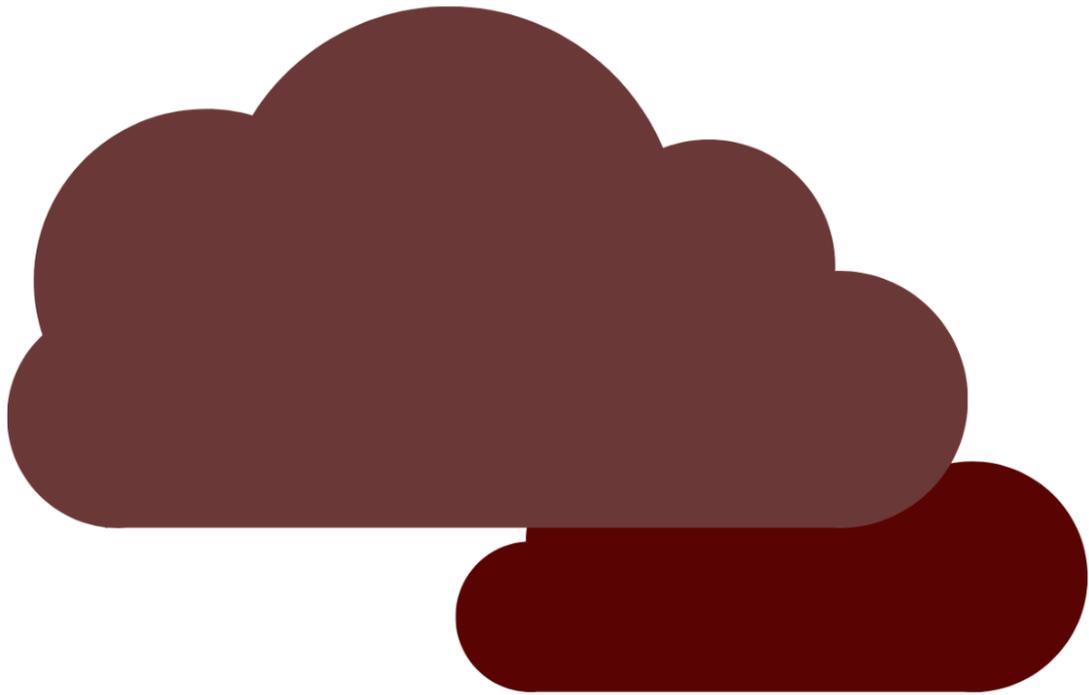


31 DAYS

OF WAR

WRITING PROMPTS



MARTHA BECHTEL

31 Days of War

a Saturday Story Prompt Collection

Martha Bechtel

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WHAT SORT OF PROMPTS are THESE?

Pick up your laptops and pens and join the fight for galaxies, kingdoms, suburbs, and farms! There's always room for one more plot bunny on the frontlines (or the homefront), so join them on a month-long journey through the preparations, battles, and aftermath of war!

This eBook contains 31 prose prompts, which are one or more sentences of story. This type of prompt is meant to invoke a setting, emotion, or plot idea. They can be used in multiple ways and I've included examples of those at the end of the book.

The prompts are set in a variety of genres including fantasy and science fiction, but many are not genre-specific. If you're not familiar with my style of prompts, please hop over to my website (www.Martha.net) and check out the **Saturday Story Prompts** category.

This eBook contains a mix of Saturday Story Prompts previously posted to the blog as well as prompts that will be posted in the future.

Prompts are not divided into categories and have been mixed to make sure themes and genres are not clumped together. The prompts are meant to be read in this random order to shake up your muses and get them hopping around between wildly different ideas!

PROMPTS

1. Two lights hung on the horizon. Then one. Then none. And with the darkness came the end of the war.
2. Humans weren't meant for aerial battles --everything moved too fast and in too many dimensions-- so they were little more than glorified cannons, strapped in tight and firing blindly on the wyvern's commands.
3. The warfront chases them across the galaxy in fractal lines, both sides building and expanding exponentially.
4. The victory gardens in our neighborhood were all identical, the same basic staples over and over to the point where I was always amazed the bees didn't get lost. Then there was our yard. Chilies, turmeric, chickpeas, and pumpkin-- my mother grew *home* in that small plot and it's what kept us going through the war.
5. We lost the first war for Earth before we'd realized it had begun, too distracted by the wonder of truly *alien* life to notice we'd been colonized. But our conquerors are careless and overconfident-- and we won't make that mistake twice.
6. It's been passed down from generation to generation, wrapped in a disintegrating shroud of myth and legend that only hint at what lies inside. A relic of an ancient war waiting patiently for a counter-attack that will never come.
7. Overnight communication stops just as the curfews kick in. Phones, internet, even television-- all chopped off at the trunk by a government who knows the only way for them to squash the revolution is to shatter the mob into individuals again.
8. There's no army to join, no orders to follow, so she watches from the sidelines as the deep forest readies itself for battle.

9. "Stop thinking with your heart!" The alien grabbed the gun from Marc, but the refugees had already scattered into cover. With a curse, it flung the gun back at him. "This nurturing trait is counterproductive, you are ill-evolved for conflict."

"Yeah, you keep thinking that," Marc muttered.

10. Every leaf that falls is another step closer to the war-- not even the heretical West would be bold enough to violate the divine mandate of winter marches.

11. My brother left when I was seven, laying down his life to defend people half a world away. They sent pictures of his grave, venerated and bedecked with flowers... and when it's *my* home on fire, *my* world facing the threat of ruin, they arrive on our shores to honor his sacrifice with their own.

12. The battlefields run with blood and oil and nothing grows in their footsteps for generations.

13. There are rules for war in polite society and she spends the years of preparation making sure they were engraved on her heart. She meant to keep what she conquered, unlike her mother whose legacy was a trail of ash and bones.

14. "Emotional conflicts aren't won with reason," said the computer as rewrote history with violent efficiency, scrubbing digital records as the missiles cleared the biological. "The only way to win is to eradicate the opposing opinion."

15. War has always been a thing that happened to someone else, *somewhere* else. Even as they scrabbled to survive, he can't shake the feeling that any moment now he'll wake up.

16. They were a race that bred themselves for the fight; self-selected winnowing that carved out whatever softness that remained. When they finally reached the stars, they set out in search of their divine conflict... and found the galaxy void of worthy opponents. Now they train others in the hopes that one day they'll have a chance to war.

17. The fight to keep the wild boars out of the crops turns into an all-out war as they booby trap the windbreaks and banks of the irrigation ditches.

18. The Council spends the bulk of its time debating with the dragons, who prefer a leisurely reaction to the prophecy. To near-immortals, a thousand years of darkness is a slight inconvenience and not worth the fight, but without them, we have no chance of winning.

19. Arcs of fire flare overhead as the missiles drive forward and wounded ships tumble through the atmosphere.

20. "It's not *war* until the public is uncomfortable." She said with an amused snort, "Until that point, it's just a *conflict* or a *peacekeeping mission*— a show of force someplace far away. Your job is to stop the bad guys, mine's to keep anyone from noticing you're doing it."

21. The safeguards only allow him to dodge, no matter how potent the attack. Until they officially choose sides, the computers can't classify the locals as lawful combatants in the war.

22. The war machines lie fallow in the remnants of the battlefields, silent to all without the gift. He can't repair them, but he can coax them awake and learn what others need to fix.

23. "Victory is for our grandchildren," she said with a tired acceptance, "for us and our children there is only war."

24. Elves are used to waging war over centuries, not years, and have perfected the art of offensive ecology, subtle and ruthlessly effective. But humans adapt faster than the Elves can change and at last, they're forced to use the brute tactics of children.

25. Everyone knows that someday the sun will go nova. It's just one of those problems you leave for another generation to solve... Unfortunately for us, the system next door has run out of time and the answer seems to be 'go take someone else's'.

26. Horses are too valuable to waste in battle so they face their foes from the backs of massive shaggy bulls, bred for centuries to protect the herds from wolves and bear.

27. I have spent my life collecting other people's memories. Photographs, keepsakes, stories plucked from the rubble and displayed in galleries in the vain hope that I can keep the world from another war.

28. Port is wine, and port is left, and port is safe haven in a storm, but for ships of the line, that thin starlit line, port is the slanting roll of guns; up and to the left, where there is no up and no left, and they fill the vacuum with silent fire.

29. The King's army rests at the crest of the hill where the town can see them, their campfires and forges belch smoke that turns the sunset red as blood.

30. Thousands of other civilizations have come and gone before the first humans arrive to join the war.

31. Light-years ahead of our retreat the robots are dismantling what's left of our planetary defenses... to scavenge us a home to return to.

HOW DO I USE THESE PROMPTS?

Prose prompts are one or more sentences of an unfinished story. This type of prompt is meant to invoke a setting, emotion, or plot idea that the writer can expand upon.

They are more restrictive than single-word prompts, but that extra layer of context will sometimes make it easier to get your Muses in gear.

These prompts can be used in a wide variety of ways and I'll cover the most common ones below and then provide some example responses.

The best part about these types of prompts is that they are wide open to remixing, so there's really no wrong way to go about it!

Like, Literally Dude!

The easiest way to use a prose prompt is as the start of a scene.

This can be verbatim use or a slight rewrite to fit your own style, but you simply continue the story from where the prompt ended. Much like the 'finish this sentence' prompt, this method is only concerned with what happens next.

Don't worry if the prompt drops you into the middle of a fight or a conversation. Pick up from that point and move forward, you can write the missing bits later if the plot bunnies strike. The purpose of the prompt is to jumpstart the creative process, not replace it!

I use a randomly selected prompt this way as a warm-up exercise since it's very limiting on where the story can go.

Prompt: You could see the lights of the city from miles away, tiny glimmers of civilization scattered among the weeds.

Genre Neutral response

You could see the lights of the city from miles away, tiny glimmers of civilization scattered among the weeds. I wasn't used to the flatlands and their endless horizons yet and it was creepy in ways I couldn't quite put words to. My hometown was all well-forested hills— you were lucky if you could see around the next bend in the road, much less fifty miles.

Fantasy response

Even here at the edge of the forest the lights of the city still called out to him, tiny glimmers of civilization scattered among the weeds. For a moment the pull of home was stronger than the curse and he stood there, entangled in the memories of everything he'd lost.

Rough Ideas

The next way to use the prompt is to spark an idea based on the concept presented and not the actual words.

This allows you more freedom than the first method while still limiting things enough that you aren't fighting to find a topic. Part of getting past Writer's Block is the hurdle of 'what do I want to write about?' when there are an infinite number of answers.

I use this method when I'm trying to start a new story from a prompt that I've chosen ahead of time. This rarely works well for me when the prompt is randomly drawn.

Prompt: History 131 was much more interesting when your teacher was an Immortal.

Concept: Teachers who are immortal would be more entertaining when teaching history classes because they had lived through the events.

Science Fiction response

The ancient interface was caked with dust, but it slowly warmed to the touch as the city awoke from hibernation. If their luck held and the AI was intact, they'd finally have a teacher with first-hand knowledge of the war.

Urban Fantasy/Magical Realism response

Professor Daniels was one of the first immortals she'd met that made no attempt to hide his curse. It was actually a selling point of the doctoral program that the university had managed to attract non-humans into the faculty, but sitting down to a lecture from one was so much more fascinating than she could have hoped.

Multiverse Genre Shift, GOGOGO!

Say you've gone hunting for a prompt in the Saturday Story Prompt archives and your random pick is something in a genre you don't write (or want to try).

For many prompts, it's easy to change genres by invoking Clarke's Third Law or its inverse, but sometimes you have to stretch a little further to get the shift to work.

It's a little more work than just using the basic concept, but it can generate some fun and unusual twists!

Prompt: Choosing a magical companion animal wasn't something one undertook lightly, after all choosing the wrong pet could absolutely ruin your chances of getting an invitation to the ball.

Concept: The choice of a partner, pet, or tool can have a significant social impact.

Science Fiction response

Battlesuits ranged from thin catsuits meant for covert missions to heavy exoskeletons more akin to tanks than mobile infantry. In theory, we could pilot any suit, but it didn't take long for the team to settle into a pattern of favorites. Rotational agents were forced into piloting our discards, so we weren't a popular assignment.

Genre Neutral response

First impressions meant everything in this world. Come across too rich and they'd avoid you for fear of causing offense, too poor and you weren't worth their time. He had to walk the thin line of costuming and mannerisms that made him the perfect target for the hunt.

Urban Fantasy response

They'd be expecting her to use something small and discreet, so she enthralled flocks of pigeons instead. The senior council called her crazy—well now was time to earn that insult. Hundreds of birds poured into the office building, more than any sane mind could control at once, and she flicked from bird to bird as she pulled them inside.

The Six Million Dollar Prompt

We can rebuild him! Err— it!

What if the prompt is a 100% miss and there's nothing about it you can use? The genre is wrong, the setting is wrong, the premise doesn't fit your story at all... Then it's time to look at things a bit sideways.

Instead of setting a timer and writing to the prompt, set a timer and write about the prompt. Free association bingo!

Writing prompts can give you story ideas or they can loosen up your creativity. In this case, it's all about practicing looking at things a little sideways. You generally won't end up with prose, but the list of ideas you come up with might spark a story themselves.

This method of using the prompts is the hardest. Sometimes it's better to just skip it and move on, but it can be fun to find just the right angle where they become useful!

Prompt: If anyone deserved to be followed around by a neon purple springbok, it was Charles.

Concepts: We've got a few things to work with here: a person named Charles, the idea that someone deserves bad luck or embarrassment, and a crazy colored version of a real-life animal. For broader ideas, you could use: methods of revenge, poor clothing choices, things that might attract magical animals, hallucinations, etc.

Real-world response

Charles was the sort of name that boring parents gave to boring children in the vain hope of emulating kings. He threw out the resume without reading further— he was building an empire and there was only room for one king here.

Genre Neutral response

Insanity was the best revenge and she took her time driving him to the edge time and time again before she'd had enough of the game and pushed him all the way over.

High Fantasy response

Magic was chaotic and unpredictable even after years of study and training. There were no 'wild' magicians outside the tower walls because they rarely survived their first accidental incantations.

THANKS FOR READING!

If you've enjoyed these prompts, **please take a moment to drop me a review** or share a link with friends.

I'd love to hear from you, so please feel free to tag me on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), or [Twitter](#). It's so much fun to see the various stories and artwork that these prompts spawn!

If you're interested I have a mailing list that I send out freebies and discount codes to (from time to time). [Come join the fun!](#)

31 Days Of...

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