

Mai: Issue #1 (Origin)

Mai is a young girl raised in an overbearing and paternalistic society. From the moment she can speak, Mai rebels against her role telling her mother and sisters, "I am more than this, I am better than this." At twelve years old, she is wed to a fat old rich sovereign in exchange for a large dowry. Her husband is cruel, overbearing and insensitive to her sexual naiveté. On her wedding night, she is brutally beaten because she fights off her husband's advances. She is sent home to heal then immediately returns to her cruel husband once her body is well enough. Because she is willful, he beats her to break her spirit and keep her in line. To avoid suffering another beating and rape, the girl kills her husband then flees to the desert. As she lies near death, a spirit named Naukara finds and aids her. The apparition leads her to a mystical cave deep in the desert. There, for the next few years, the girl is schooled in the art of elemental magick. To commemorate her new life and new beginning, she takes the name Mai, which is "I am" in reverse. Unknown to Mai, her dead husband's tribe has placed a large bounty on her. They have also raised a mercenary army to hunt Mai down and return her alive so they can humiliate her before she dies.

As Mai continues her training deep in the caverns, the army invades her sanctuary. Naukara and the spirits of the cave rally to defend Mai. The battle progresses and Mai uses her fledgling abilities but is eventually captured and the cave destroyed. Parched and weak, Mai wakes to find she is bound and gagged in a tent in the desert. With the sand as her only ally and weapon, Mai is slowly able to free herself. Before she can escape, a soldier enters the tent and tries to rape her. Mai retaliates and replenishes herself by absorbing the water in his body, leaving him a desiccated husk. Now revitalized, she reclaims her gear and weapons and fights her way through the camp. With the aid of sand and fire elementals, she defeats all of the soldiers except the captain. A sand elemental cocoons him in a sinkhole where he is held fast. Mai dismisses the spirits and approaches the captain. She tells him that he was spared so he can tell her husband's tribe she is coming for them and she will never stop. With that, she turns and vanishes into the swirling sand of the desert.

Mai: Issue #2 (The Road to Retribution)

Mai emerges from the desert and enters the same town she fled years ago. After the events in the desert, the bounty on her has increased substantially as have the varied number of takers. She enters a tavern seeking information on the Mustafa clan's presence in the town. She also hopes to find the location

of a town listed on the bill of lading she found in the desert tent. She discovers that the Mustafa family sold her ex-husband's palace and left town under a cloud of shame. Friends of the clan overhear Mai asking about the family and confront her in the street. A battle ensues in which she defeats them, destroying an entire section of the town in the process. She goes to Salim's former palace where the new owner tells her the family is somewhere East near the sea. Night falls and Mai rents a room where she is attacked by bounty hunters in the middle of the night. She fends off the attack but the rooming house is destroyed during the course of the battle. The townspeople are frightened and angry and believe she is an evil spirit. They band together to force her out of the town. As they confront her Mai leaves, having had her fill of destruction.

Mai is making her way East when a faint but familiar voice speaks in her head. The voice leads her to a skeleton buried in the sand. She inspects the body and finds an amulet. As she touches it, she hears the voice of Naukara clearly. Naukara states that, like her, he is still bound to this plane and confides in her the reason. Naukara's story unfolds in a flashback and tells how he and his tribe were captured and enslaved. The story continues, telling how Naukara's wife is killed and his infant daughter sold into slavery far away. Naukara never sees his daughter again and subsequently asks Mai to discover his daughter's fate so he can ascend.

Mai: Issue #3 (Riposte and Remise)

Mai enters the courtyard of the Mustafa compound and immediately confronts a large contingent of his elite guards. She defeats the guards and searches the fortress for Mustafa. During her search, she discovers the captain of the mercenary army she had fought in the cave and the desert. He has been beaten, tortured and imprisoned for his failure to deliver Mai. She rescues him and he agrees to help her confront Mustafa. They make their way to the bowels of the fortress where their path is blocked by a summoner who controls a large fire elemental. The battle is joined and, eventually, the fire spirit turns on its handler and kills him. It then escapes into the fortress with Mai and the Captain in pursuit. They follow it to Mustafa's chamber where it tries to attack him but Mai holds it at bay. She tells Mustafa she will protect him from the spirit if he will agree to leave her in peace. Mustafa refuses, indignant at the offer. Mai and the captain leave him to his fate as Mustafa's screams fill the halls. Without looking back, Mai returns to the desert.