

CLASKO reminded Luzzu of Gatta. Sure, the Chocobo Knight was a couple of years older than his subordinate – that must have been why Clasko had been allowed to take a proper role in the investigation while Gatta had been made, quite rightly in Luzzu’s opinion, to stay on the sidelines – but they had the same sort of nervous tension, the same obvious lack of self-belief. It was because they were young: Luzzu had been the same at that age. Only after a few operations with the Crusaders had he begun to gain some confidence.

These boys were the same, he told himself: a couple of years of active service was just what they needed. But until then – Clasko, having been made to leave his chocobos, was clearly having trouble focusing on his task. He sat, and then stood decisively, and then sat again, looking bewildered; then he traced an erratic pattern in the dusty ground with his finger, and then he paused and erased it viciously with his boot.

Luzzu approached him. “Hey,” he said.

“Sir!” Clasko responded immediately, drawing himself up.

Chuckling, Luzzu sat on the ground opposite him. “I think,” he said, “technically, you’re *my* superior.”

“Maybe,” said Clasko, visibly deflating. “I never really got the hang of all that stuff.”

“Well, there’s still time,” said Luzzu cheerfully. “Although it looks like you’d rather take your mind off it. What do you say?”

Clasko hesitated, and then leant forward and said, “Don’t tell Captain Lucil, but ... I’m kinda nervous.”

“OK,” said Luzzu. “I know what might work.” He fished around in his trouser pocket, and pulled out the small case containing the miniature chess set he was accustomed to carrying. “You know how to play?”

“Yeah,” said Clasko dully. “But I’m terrible.”

“Like you’re *terrible* at being a Chocobo Knight?” Luzzu replied, raising an eyebrow. “Sorry, but I don’t believe it. You just need more self-confidence.”

Sure enough, twenty minutes later, Clasko had somewhat apologetically won the game.