

Final Fantasy VII Low Level/No Items/New Equip/Assec. Challenge FAQ

by Thundaka

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FINAL FANTASY VII: LOW LEVEL/NO ITEMS/INITIAL EQUIPMENT/
NO ACCESSORIES CHALLENGE
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VERSION HISTORY

v1.00: As the number implies, this is the first version. If you can suggest any improvements in my strategies, or if you've noticed any mistakes I made while writing this guide, feel free to e-mail me.

v1.10: Made some minor modifications, corrected typos, and added a note about the Shinra truck in Corel Prison.

INTRODUCTION

This challenge was the brainchild of GarlandG, a veteran of the GameFAQs challenge community. After completing the formidable Low Level/No Materia/Initial Equipment/No Accessories challenge, which relies almost exclusively on items, Garland decided to turn the tables: what if we banned the use of items instead of materia? This was no small revision. Up to that point, items like Molotovs and S-Mines had been considered necessities for finishing the game's bosses; Demons Gate especially seemed impossible without Molotovs. And what to do for an enemy like Proud Clod, whom you have no hope of killing with magic? As it turned out, these problems were all overcome.

Here are the rules for the LLNIIENA challenge:

1. No character can exceed Level 28 at any point in the game.
2. You may never use the Item command in battle.
3. With the exception of the Save Crystal in the Northern Crater, you may never use the Item submenu under the field menu.
4. You may never use the Equip command under the field menu.
5. You may not use or equip the Steal, Steal as Well, Throw, Morph, or W-Item materia, since these materia violate the No Item restriction.

Not surprisingly, your survival is critically dependent on how well you are able to implement your materia. One of the most important materia is Enemy Skill; within a single materia slot you can hold a wide range of spells that fulfill multiple functions. Big Guard is needed to blunt some of the most powerful boss attacks. White Wind acts a full-party heal, and also removes most negative status effects. But the most important enemy skill of all is Magic Hammer. Magic Hammer allows your characters to heal themselves and cast

spells at the enemies for as long as you need, and against certain bosses it can prevent particularly deadly attacks like Aqualung or Lapis Laser.

You also need various support materia to help you survive the game. You will often need to use basic magic materia such as Cure or Barrier when enemy skills either don't do the job (poisoning the enemy, for instance) or cost too much MP. In lieu of special armor or accessories, Elemental and Added Effect are crucial for protecting your party against elemental and status attacks; you cannot afford to miss them. Support and independent materia like All and HP Plus, which either increase the effectiveness of your spells or directly make you stronger, are also important at times.

Because you must rely so heavily on materia, the Initial Equipment restriction will often be the most difficult part of the challenge. This is particularly true when fighting with Barret, Tifa, and Aeris, all of whom have just one materia slot. A large part of the challenge is being able to make the best use of the materia slots you are provided with.

Where it is relevant, I will give the MP value of each boss. This will tell you how many times you can replenish your MP with Magic Hammer, and when necessary how many Magic Hammers are needed to eliminate certain attacks.

Though you cannot use Steal or Morph to obtain items to sell, it is legal to sell items and equipment you pick up in the field or win in battle. Under each section heading I will list items and equipment that can be sold for good gil, along with any useful materia in the area. Items that sell for 1 gil--Turbo Ethers, Ribbons, any weapon or armor available only after the Highwind--will not be listed.

Finally, make sure you have a calculator handy. You don't want to kill off your allies too early and get creamed by the boss because of it; but by the same account, you don't want all of them to still be alive when the boss dies. Sense can serve this purpose, but it cannot be obtained until after you fight Reno; also, most Disc 2 bosses are immune to Sense. Without a means of knowing when the enemy is about to die, you cannot hope to faithfully follow the battle plan and stay below Level 29.

BATTLE PLAN

The most important part of any Low Level challenge is the battle plan. In order to minimize EXP gain, it is generally necessary to have only one survivor per battle. The designated survivor will get full EXP from that battle, while those not participating will usually receive half EXP; the two KO'd characters will not receive any at all. If a character temporarily leaves the party--Cloud and Tifa in the middle of Disc 2, Yuffie during the Wutai sidequest--they do not earn EXP while they are gone. To ensure that one character does not receive a disproportionate amount of EXP and break Level 29, it is recommended that you follow this battle plan to the letter.

Enemy	EXP	Survivor	KO
MP x2	32	Cloud	
Guard Scorpion	100	Barret	Cloud
Air Buster	180	Cloud	Barret, Tifa
Aps	240	Aeris	Cloud, Tifa
Reno	290	Barret	Cloud, Tifa
Mighty Grunt x3	150	Barret	Cloud, Tifa

Sample: HO512		300	Barret		Cloud, Red	
Heli Gunner		250	Red*		Aeris, Barret	
Rufus + Dark Nation		310	Cloud*			
Motor Ball		440	Aeris		Cloud, Red	
Bottomswell		550	Aeris		Cloud, Red	
Jenova-BIRTH		680	Aeris		Cloud, Red	
Death Claw x2		192	Cait Sith*		Cloud, Barret	
Dyne		600	Barret			
Stinger		290	Aeris		Cloud, Red	
Stinger		290	Aeris		Cloud, Red	
Gi Nattak		1400	Aeris		Cloud, Red	
Materia Keeper		3000	Aeris*		Cloud, Barret	
Palmer		1800	Cloud*		Barret, Red	
Zemzelett		70	Cloud*		Cid, Red	
Beachplug x3		285	Cloud*		Cid, Red	
Razor Weed x2 + Tail Vault		1190	Cloud*		Cid, Red	
Red Dragon		3500	Aeris		Cloud, Cait Sith	
Demons Gate		3800	Aeris, Cait Sith		Cloud	
Razor Weed x2 + Tail Vault		1190	Cloud		Barret, Tifa	
Touch Me		170	Cid		Cloud, Barret	
Jenova-LIFE		4000	Tifa		Cloud, Barret	

| END OF DISC 1

Stilva		1000	Cait Sith		Cloud, Barret	
Icicle		500	Cid		Cloud, Red	
Icicle		500	Cid		Cloud, Red	
Icicle		500	Cid		Cloud, Red	
Schizo		4400	Cid		Cloud, Tifa	
Jenova-DEATH		6000	Tifa		Cloud, Cait Sith	
Zemzelett		70	Cait Sith		Cid, Barret	
Beachplug x3		285	Cait Sith		Cid, Barret	
Harpy		148	Cait Sith		Cid, Barret	
Attack Squad x2		600	Cait Sith		Cid, Red	
Submarine Crew x2		1700	Tifa		Cloud, Barret	
Submarine Crew x2		1700	Tifa		Cloud, Barret	
Submarine Crew		850	Tifa		Cloud, Barret	
Submarine Crew x2		1700	Tifa		Cloud, Barret	
Underwater MP x2		1640	Cloud		Barret, Tifa	
Carry Armor		5700	Cid		Cloud, Red	
Submarine Crew x2		1700	Cid		Cloud, Red	
Submarine Crew x2		1700	Cloud, Cid		Red	
Submarine Crew x3		2550	Cid		Cloud, Red	
Mystery Ninja		160	Cid		Cloud, Cait Sith	
Attack Squad x2		600	Cloud		Barret, Yuffie	
Attack Squad x2		600	Cloud		Barret, Yuffie	
Attack Squad x2 +		1530	Cloud		Barret, Yuffie	
Senior Grunt						
Rude + Attack Squad x2		4000	Cloud		Cid, Red	
Senior Grunt		930	Cloud		Cid, Red	
Diamond Weapon		35000	Cloud		Tifa, Cid	
Attack Squad x2		600	Tifa		Cloud, Red	
Attack Squad x3		900	Red		Cloud, Cait Sith	
Rapps		3200	Cloud		Barret, Red	
Proud Clod		7000	Cait Sith		Cloud, Yuffie	
Hojo		25000	Yuffie		Cloud, Cait Sith	

| END OF DISC 2

Pollensalta		1000	Cloud		Barret, Red	
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EXP Remaining Before Level 29

Cloud: 6
Barret: 620
Tifa: 1053
Red: 1888
Cait Sith: 833
Cid: 803
Yuffie: 1341

* - The survivor of these battles must equip Red's All materia. This is to ensure that the materia levels up before you face Demons Gate, so you can cast an extra Barrier-All.

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LLNIIENA STRATEGY GUIDE
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*****DISC ONE*****

I. Midgar - Sector 1
-Materia: Restore
-Items: Assault Gun

So it's time to begin the LLNIIENA challenge. The fun is just about to start. (He he he he...)

Only a few seconds after you've started, you will engage in your first battle.

MP x2
30 HP

You have to ask? Just hit them.

Move onto the next screen to talk with the AVALANCHE members. You will now have to name Cloud and Barret. (Except for Red XIII, I will use the default names for all characters.) As with all Low Level challenges, you must run from every random battle unless otherwise noted.

Since you have no way to heal on this mission, you must focus on reducing your damage as much as possible. Move Barret to the back row, and have him defend while you are escaping. Don't worry about Cloud; more damage just means he'll be easier to kill when you face Guard Scorpion.

Head down the ladders as usual, and make sure to use the save point. There's a Restore materia directly in your path, but you can't equip it yet. Plant the bomb.

BOSS: Guard Scorpion
800 HP

Barret's physical attack does about 35 damage, while Cloud can do 90 damage with Bolt. Cloud should get Braver, which does 130 damage at this point,

pretty quickly; once Barret's limit gauge fills, have him defend. Enter your commands during Guard Scorpion's attack animation so you don't prematurely trigger Tail Laser.

Once you've reduced to him around 150 HP (you need to start using your calculator), it's time to kill off Cloud. Wait for Guard Scorpion to raise his tail, and have Barret defend if he hasn't already. While the tail is raised he counterattacks with Tail Laser, dealing 70 damage to Cloud and 18 damage to Barret. He also cuts all damage done to him in half; Bolt will do 45, Braver around 60-70, a physical attack less than 20. Two Tail Lasers should be enough to kill Cloud; if not, Cloud can cast Bolt on himself to finish the job.

Once Cloud is dead, use Big Shot or a few physical attacks to end the battle.

Save your game, and get the hell out of here. In the back row and defending, Barret should have no trouble surviving a few random battles alone. If you get attacked from behind, change rows and then defend. (Note that holding L1+R1 automatically turns you around and prevents double damage from a back attack.)

After the reactor blows up, Cloud will be revived and left by himself. Buy a flower if you want to, and make your way down toward the train. Have Cloud run from the guards by selecting "Later" three times in a row. After a few cutscenes, you will arrive in Sector 7.

II. Midgar - Sector 7 and Sector 5

-Materia: All, Cover

-Items: Ether x4, Tent, Titan Bangle

Go to Tifa's bar to advance the plot and rest up. Before you leave, you have a few things to do. Go to the Beginner's Hall above the weapons shop to pick up an Ether and an All materia. Then visit the materia shop. Sell everything in your inventory and buy three Fires, one Restore, and one Lightning. (If you're cheap, you can get away with just buying one Fire and one Restore.)

Equip Restore=All on Cloud and Restore on Tifa, then save and board the train. If possible, try to get all the way to the end of the train. The fewer random encounters you have, the less MP you will have to spend on Cure on the way to Air Buster. Go down the hole, pick up the Ether, and make your way to the Sector 5 reactor. Go to the bottom, plant the bomb, and climb up the stairs to reach the elevator. Open the chest on the top floor for an Ether, then push the button at the same time as Barret and Tifa. Finally, save. Have Tifa cast Cure if Cloud has lost any HP.

BOSS: Air Buster

1200 HP

Before you begin the battle, you must know something about attacking Air Buster from behind. Air Buster takes 5 times normal damage if you hit his weak side, rather than the standard double damage. However, his weak side is not necessarily his back, but the side opposite the direction he attacked last time. If he just used Big Bomber or his bodyblow counterattack, Air Buster's weak side will be the back; if he just countered with Rear Gunner, his weak side will be the front. A physical attack to his weak side does 120, while Braver or Big Shot can do over 500 to his weak side.

Since Air Buster will be facing Cloud, have Barret perform the first attack. If he counterattacks, have Cloud perform the next attack. Otherwise wait for him to attack on his turn, and again hit his weak side. Repeat this until Air Buster has less than 500 HP and Cloud has Braver ready. Have him defend, while Barret and Tifa either attack themselves or allow Air Buster's counterattacks to kill them. In any case, Air Buster must deliver the killing blow to your second character on his turn. This will ensure that his weak side is turned toward Cloud, so Braver can win the battle while both allies are dead. Have Tifa cast Cure if Cloud is running low on health. There should be no need to heal Barret or Tifa.

You will fall into the Sector 5 slums, where you will meet Aeris. Before you know it, Reno and his grunts will be after you. Tell Aeris to run the first time, hold on the second time, and run again the third time. To deal with the second guard, go to the top barrel and push it. Then simply stand still while Aeris approaches you; this should save you a random encounter. Outside the church head northwest into the Sector 5 slum, and sleep at Aeris' house. Don't forget to pick up the Ether and Cover materia in her garden.

III. Midgar - Wall Market and Sector 7

-Materia: None

-Items: Ether x3

A Cure=All combo on Cloud will help tremendously on the way to Wall Market, as some of the enemy formations--particularly the Whole Eater x3 attack from both sides--can inflict very high damage.

To avoid the EXP from Corneo's guards, you need to have Cloud chosen as his date. You can guarantee this by obtaining four key items: Silk Dress, Blonde Wig, Sexy Cologne, and Diamond Tiara. Here's how you get them:

Ask the man at the Honeybee Inn about Tifa, then talk to the guard at Don Corneo's mansion. After talking to the girl in the clothes shop, go to the bar on the second screen and talk to her father. Tell him you want a dress that "feels soft" and "shimmers." Upon returning to the clothes shop, you will receive the Silk Dress. Now go to the gym, and hit Square-X-Circle over and over to beat Big Bro. This will earn you the Blonde Wig.

Don't visit the clothes shop yet. Enter the restaurant just north of the item shop. Sit down and order anything on the menu; when prompted say, "It was alright." Take the Pharmacy Coupon you're given to the item shop, and exchange it for a Digestive. Now go all the way north to the bar, and talk to the woman in the bathroom. Offer her the Digestive; in relief and gratitude, she will give you the Sexy Cologne. Finally, talk to the man inside the shop on the northeast corner of the first screen. Accept his offer, stay at the inn, and buy the 200 gil item from the vending machine. He will give you the Diamond Tiara.

Once you have all the items you can return to the clothes shop and change. Save your game now. Enter Corneo's mansion and talk with Tifa. Don't forget to pick up the Ether in the basement. After a number of unpleasant cutscenes, you will be thrown into the sewers. Give Restore to Cloud and Fire to all three characters. Move Cloud and Tifa to the front row. You will really need a calculator here.

BOSS: Aps

1800 HP

This battle can be very difficult with the wrong strategy, because of Aps' tendency to kill himself with Sewer Tsunami. He uses two versions of this attack: a forward version that does 180 damage to him and 45 damage to the party (if they are in the front row), and a backward version that does 45 damage to him and 90 damage to the party. If you are not prepared, it is easy for him to kill himself while all three characters are still alive.

Fortunately, Terence has discovered that Sewer Tsunami is only triggered under certain conditions. He always opens the battle with Sewer Tsunami, and if left undisturbed will only use his tail attack and Lick. However, after being hit by a magical attack Aps enters Tsunami mode. Tsunami mode lasts for four rounds: Aps skips his first turn, uses the forward version of Sewer Tsunami, skips his third turn, and finally uses the backward version of Sewer Tsunami. He will then exit Tsunami mode until he is hit by another spell.

Have everyone in the party cast Fire for the first four rounds. By the time he uses the backward Sewer Tsunami, Aps should have about 300 HP left. Cloud casts Cure on Aeris, Tifa casts Fire on Aps, and Aeris defends. If the forward Sewer Tsunami doesn't kill Cloud and Tifa, have them cast Fire on themselves to finish the job. One final Fire from Aeris should finish him.

After the battle, Aeris will jump from Level 2 to Level 5. Give her Restore, and make your way out of the sewers. Ignore the Steal materia, since the rules of the challenge prohibit its use.

It is quite possible for Aeris to make it through the train graveyard by herself, so long as you are conservative with your MP. Make your way to the second screen, ignoring all the items. Hop into the first lighted train to clear a path, then hop into it again to move it out of the way. Now hop in the second lighted train, climb up the ladder to your right, and make your way out of the train graveyard. If you're feeling lucky, you can pick up an Ether in the barrel on the lower left of this screen.

Once back in Sector 7 your HP and MP is restored. Save your game and get up to the top of the plate. When you meet Barret, equip him with either Fire or Ice.

BOSS: Reno
1000 HP

Reno's attacks aren't particularly damaging; his staff does 60 damage in the front row, while Electro-mag Rod does 75 and sometimes paralyzes its target. The problem is having only Barret alive without getting a Game Over from Pyramid. Get Reno down to around 50 HP using either Fire, Ice, or physical attacks. Once you get to this point, have Barret defend while the other two characters kill themselves. Whenever he uses Pyramid, break it immediately with a physical attack. Reno must deliver the killing blow on the second character, so Barret can finish him immediately with Big Shot or a spell.

After the cutscenes are over, Cloud will be revived. Go to Aeris' house, watch the cutscene there, and save. Rest upstairs. Now it's time to go back to Wall Market. Pick up the Sense materia on the way there, and equip it on one of your characters. Buy the Batteries from the weapon shop, and climb over the maze of pipes and wires to reach Shinra Headquarters.

IV. Rescuing Aeris

-Materia: Elemental, All, Poison

-Items: Star Pendant, Four Slots, Talisman

We will be taking the stairs. Once you save outside the building, immediately soft-reset and reload. This should prevent you from getting a random encounter on Floor 59, which would require you to reload from your previous save and climb all 59 flights of stairs again. Yes, it is that important that we avoid the EXP.

After climbing the stairs (they cover a total of nine screens), you will be forced to fight one battle.

Mighty Grunt x3

230 HP

Both physical attacks and magic work fine on Mighty Grunt's first form. You really should use either magic or limit breaks to kill the second form, though; you'll have a hard time connecting with physical attacks. Kill off the first two, Sense the third, and make sure Cloud and Tifa are both dead before Barret ends the battle.

Now that you have the key, take the elevator up to Floor 60. This part can be pretty tough, and may force you to climb the stairs a few times. Cloud, Barret, and Tifa must get past the two sets of guards without being spotted. The guards on the right are a bit faster than the guards on the left, and so it is more difficult to avoid them. The hardest part is crossing the middle gaps, since there is always a guard watching; you must dash across the instant the guards start to move, or you will be spotted.

When you finally get past them, go up to Floor 61. Talk to the man wandering around the south end of this floor for Keycard 62. Now head to Floor 62. If you guess Mayor Domino's password on the first try, he will give you an Elemental materia. This is one of the most useful materia in this challenge, and there are only three in the whole game, so you should definitely get this. There are four libraries on this floor, each devoted to a branch of Shinra's operations: urban development, scientific research, the space program, and the Peace Preservation. In each library is a book that does not belong there--for example, in the urban development library there might be a book about a space mission. Look at the number before that book's title. Now count the letters, and write down the letter corresponding to that number. If the book was titled "The Ancients in History" and had the number 4 before it, you would write down the letter A. Do the same for all four libraries, and you will have the four letters of the passcode.

If you want an extra All materia, you can do the minigame on Floor 63. Talk to the computer terminal, examine the ventilation duct, then go to the top of the room. Open the door to your left, then walk left as far as you can. Now open the door below you, and walk into the room with Coupon A. Climb into the shaft, go down and right, and then climb out the middle ventilation duct. You will be in the room with Coupon B. Exit this room, and unlock the door to the left for access to the room with Coupon C. Now climb back up the ventilation duct, and go right to drop down next to the computer terminal. Perform Coupon Exchange, and you will receive a Star Pendant and Four Slots in addition to the All materia.

Once on Floor 64, you can save your game and rest to revive Cloud and Tifa. Head up to Floor 65, and put the Midgar Parts into the model. (Fortunately,

you can now escape from random encounters.) Collect Keycard 66, go back down to rest if Barret has taken too much damage, and then go up to eavesdrop on the meeting. Follow Hojo to Floor 67. Move Cloud to the front row, equip Restore on Barret, turn down the battle speed to reduce poison damage, and save. Don't forget to pick up the Poison materia next to the save point.

You will now confront Hojo, and gain the newest member of your party. Because the XIII in his name is so completely pointless, I will call him Red. Tell Tifa to escort Aeris.

BOSS: Sample:H0512
1000 HP

The main problem here is Shady Breath, which poisons all your characters. But his little helpers' magic and Rolling Attack can be fairly painful as well. Open by having Red use Sense on the Sample. Cloud and Red should attack him with Fire or Ice, while Barret uses physical attacks. Depending on how many attacks they focus on Barret, he may have to heal himself rather often. Kill off Cloud and Red when Barret can finish the Sample in one shot; with the damage from poison and the little guys' attacks that shouldn't take very long. (For future reference, after an enemy has been Sensed you can keep track of its current HP in the help window. Press Select to bring up the help window.)

V. Escape from Shinra HQ

-Materia: Enemy Skill

-Items: Mythrill Armlet, Protect Vest, Star Pendant

Split up the party however you want, making sure that someone has Restore. Do not forget the Enemy Skill materia; you will be relying on it for most of the challenge. Go down to save your game. Attempt to use the elevator, and you will be captured.

Once in your cell, talk to Aeris. Then choose to get some sleep. When you wake up, some ominous things will be afoot. Make your way up to Floor 69; do not forget to use the save point. You will find President Shinra's body on the top floor, and see a brief cutscene involving Palmer. If you want, Cloud can go back down and save so you don't have to watch that cutscene again.

Head outside to talk with Rufus. When you gain control of the party, move everyone to the back row. Remove Cloud's materia. Set up your materia like so:

Aeris: Lightning
Barret: Sense
Red: Restore = All*, Lightning
Elemental = Poison

(All* represents the All materia initially equipped on Red, with 1000 AP already earned.)

Now take the elevator down. This is going to be a very long ride.

BOSS: Hundred Gunner
1600 HP

Have Barret use Sense, then use physical attacks, while Aeris and Red cast

Bolt. Limit breaks come pretty quickly, especially during the Main Artillery and Wave Artillery stages, so use them freely. Once Red falls to about 30 MP, have him stop casting Bolt and reserve his MP for Cure. This phase is a piece of cake; I finished him before the second Wave Artillery, and didn't even need to heal.

Heli Gunner
1000 HP

Much nastier, but you should still be able to cope. Heli Gunner loves inflicting Sleep and Poison, and can inflict both on the whole party with Firing Line. Have Aeris activate Healing Wind ASAP, as he can do some serious damage. Sense him, then fire away with Bolt and Barret's physical attack until he falls below 250 HP. At that point he stops using status effects, and starts using Spinning Bodyblow and Flying Drill; Flying Drill does almost 90 damage in the back row. Reduce him to around 50 HP if you plan to kill him with Bolt, or 100 HP if you'll finish him with Sled Fang; his Defense and Magic Defense are boosted substantially in this phase. Red should Cure himself and defend if he's not poisoned (poison damage breaks the defensive stance), while Aeris and Barret move to the front row. They will die pretty quickly; once they do, finish him.

Shift to the rooftop. Remove the other characters' materia now, and equip Restore and Red's All on Cloud. It would be wise to increase the battle speed to the highest setting.

BOSS: Rufus, Dark Nation
500 HP, 140 MP

Focus on killing the Dark Nation first; this will prevent Barrier and the painful Bolt. After that, start meeleing Rufus to death. Cast Cure as needed. Chances are good you will learn Cross-Slash after this battle.

Have Cloud run down to the save point ASAP. Then talk to Tifa. When you gain control of Aeris, head down toward the exit. An event will occur, and the motorcycle minigame will commence.

Before you start, form a party of Cloud, Aeris, and Red. Move them all to the front row. I would recommend fighting at the slowest battle speed, since you will be able to take maximum advantage of your limit breaks this way. Your materia setup:

Cloud:	Lightning
Aeris:	Lightning
Red:	Restore = All, Sense
	Ice

Press Start to initiate the minigame. Do your best to keep the Shinra pursuit troops away from the right side of the car; damage dealt during the minigame will be subtracted from your HP in the boss battle.

BOSS: Motor Ball
2600 HP

Motor Ball always opens the battle by attacking the party from behind, so the front row becomes the back row. His opening wheel attack does 20 damage,

nothing to be concerned about. For the first two turns he will use Arm Attack for 40 damage on the target with the highest HP (usually Cloud); he may use Arm Attack twice on the same turn. Have Red sense him, while Cloud and Aeris attack with Bolt; after that everyone casts spells nonstop. He will then change to his second form, and use Twin Burner for 80 damage on the whole party. He again uses his wheel attack for 20 damage, then takes a turn to transform back to the first form. When he changes forms the second time, have Red cast Cure-All immediately; Motor Ball is about to use Rolling Fire, which deals 200 damage to the entire party. Everyone should gain limit breaks after he uses it.

At this point Motor Ball should have less than 400 HP. Activate Healing Wind first, then Sled Fang. When he falls below 325 HP he will counter by immediately changing to the second form and using Twin Burner. This should give you plenty of time to move Red and Cloud to the front row and kill them. Cure Aeris once before Red dies. When Aeris is alone, finish Motor Ball with one final Bolt.

VI. Midgar Area and Mythril Mines

-Materia: Heal, Choco/Mog, Long Range
-Items: Ether x3, Peacemaker

Welcome to the world map. Form a party, and head northeast to Kalm. Before entering the inn, there are some things to do around town. Enter the materia shop (it's the middle one) and buy a Heal materia. You can find Ethers under the stairs of the leftmost and rightmost houses, and in a cabinet on the top floor of the second house from the left. The third house from the left has a Peacemaker at the top of the spiral stairs.

Now it's time for the famous flashback. While you are in Cloud's past, there is one thing I strongly suggest doing. As soon as you enter town, visit Tifa's house. Go upstairs and play her piano, saying, "I jammed on it." Play the following sequence of notes: X, Square, Triangle, R1+Triangle, R1+Square, X, Square, Triangle, R1+X, Circle, X, Square, X. If you do this now, you can obtain the third and final Elemental materia immediately after getting the Highwind.

Once the flashback is completed, exit Kalm and save on the world map. Head to the chocobo farm. Talk to one of the chocobos behind the fence and select the first option. After an entertaining cutscene, you will receive the Choco/Mog materia. Now it's time for you to cross the Midgar Zolom's swamp. We are not buying Chocobo Lure. It's a waste of time and gil, and catching a chocobo without greens could be very difficult; but most importantly, the extra EXP from a chocobo battle would push some characters to Level 29. Instead, we are going to use the save-reset trick. Save at the edge of the swamp, and walk as far west as you can. When you see the Zolom appear at the edge of the screen, immediately open the menu and save. You must be quick about it; the Zolom can force a battle even if he reaches you after the world map screen has disappeared. Now soft-reset, and load your game. The Zolom will be far away now; immediately head left, and save once again when you see the Zolom. You should be able to reach the other side in two or three tries this way. Save after you see the cutscene with the Midgar Zolom.

When you enter the Mythril Mines, head right to the next room. There is a vine along the left wall; climb it to pick up the Long Range materia. There's a chance you may get attacked from both sides by Ark Dragon; if so, kill him with limit breaks or Bolt/Ice. (He absorbs Fire and the Flamethrower enemy skill.) Now leave this room and head all the way left for the cutscene with

the Turks. Climb up to the platform where Tseng was standing, and take the door out to the world map.

VII. Junon Area and Cargo Ship

-Materia: Shiva, Revive, Seal, Enemy Skill, HP Plus, Ifrit

-Items: Power Wrist, Ether, Wind Slash, White Cape

If your MP is running low, rest at Fort Condor in the south. Otherwise just head for Junon, taking care to avoid the forests. Form a party of Cloud, Aeris, and Red outside the city. Your materia setup:

Cloud:	Poison = Fire
Aeris:	Restore
Red:	Sense = Fire

Make sure everyone is in the back row, and save. Enter the city and head down to the beach to initiate the next boss battle.

BOSS: Bottomswell

2500 HP

Open the battle by having Red sense him and Cloud cast Bio. Continue casting Bio until he is poisoned. If his idle animation remains the same, do not touch him for the rest of the battle. By letting the poison kill him, he will never use the hated Waterpolo or Big Wave (except as his final attack). But if he has started convulsing up and down, you need to assault him with magic and limit breaks until he stops; so long as he is in this stage, Waterpolo can still be used. If he should use a Waterpolo, have Red or Cloud get rid of it immediately with Fire; physical attacks and Bio will do no damage.

Aeris should do nothing but defend, except when she needs to heal herself with Cure. Once Bottomswell is poisoned and in the first form, move Cloud and Red to the front row; they should be killed off in pretty short order. Only use Healing Wind after they are both dead, and be sure to defend again after you heal. He always uses Big Wave for about 90 damage (45 if defending) when he dies, so make sure you have enough HP to survive one physical attack plus Big Wave.

After the battle you will have to perform CPR on Priscilla. Five full lungfuls of air should revive her. Sleep in the house near the entrance to town. When you wake up in the morning, go up the stairs to Priscilla's house. She will give you the Shiva materia, then go down to the beach. It is now time to jump with Mr. Dolphin. Blow the whistle twice, without moving, and you will reach the platform above the water. Walk to the ladder to reach upper Junon.

Next comes the annoying parade minigame. You can aim for a high score if you want--a very high score will net you 6 Ethers or 5000 gil, and could allow you to buy an extra materia or two--but there's really no need. GarlandG's Low Level/No Materia FAQ has a good strategy for getting a high score. Anyway, once the parade is over and you've been drilled in the send-off procedure you are free to collect some materia. Talk to the man standing outside the first door in the residential area, and buy one Seal and two Revive materia. Don't worry about having enough gil; you can easily get 20,000 gil by selling all the items and equipment you've collected.

Whatever you do, don't miss the second Enemy Skill materia. Enter the last

door in this area, and talk to the Shinra soldier on the first floor. Follow him down to the room below to collect Enemy Skill.

That's all for Junon. Save your game, and head over to the dock. You need to win the first HP Plus materia now, or else you will have to pay 8000 gil for it at Cosmo Canyon. This is the prize if you get between 60 and 90 points during the send-off. Pressing the right button in the right position earns you 10 points; the special earns you 30 points. Once you reach 60, just sit back and wait. Board the ship when you gain control of Cloud.

Inside the ship, open one of the chests to your left for an Ether; there is an All materia between the crates on the right wall. Talk to Tifa and Red, and then talk to Aeris twice. Now talk to Barret twice to progress with the plot. Form a party of Cloud, Aeris, and Red. Your materia setup:

Cloud:	Fire = Sense
Aeris:	Fire
Red:	Restore = All, Long Range

Save and go down to the cargo hold. Walk up to the soldier, and you will fight Jenova for the first time.

BOSS: Jenova-BIRTH
4000 HP

Begin the battle by sensing Jenova's HP. Cloud and Aeris should cast Fire, while Red uses physical attacks. Use Cure when a party member (particularly Aeris) is low on health, and Healing Wind otherwise. Jenova can cast Stop up to three times, but at the highest battle speed this should only last for two or three rounds. Be sure Aeris has at least 10 MP left over for the end of the battle.

Reduce Jenova to below 50 HP (you may need a physical attack from Cloud to do this), and have Aeris defend. The others must then move forward; Jenova should kill them within two or three rounds. Once both Cloud and Red are dead, have Aeris end the battle with Fire.

Aeris should learn Seal Evil after the battle. Pick up the Wind Slash (on the catwalk above) and the Ifrit materia before exiting the room.

VIII. Costa del Sol and Corel Areas

-Materia: Transform, Ramuh

-Items: Fire Ring, Motor Drive, W Machine Gun, Star Pendant, Wizard Staff, Silver Armlet

Once in the Costa del Sol, head into the house at the end of the bridge. In the basement is the Fire Ring and Motor Drive, both of which sell for decent gil. Stay at the inn to revive Cloud and Red and restore everyone's MP. Finally, if you missed Seal and Revive in Junon you can buy them here. Once you're ready, head out of the Costa del Sol and west into the Corel mountains. It would be wise to equip your summon materia in case you get attacked from both sides.

Take advantage of the save point on Mt. Corel. You can pick up a W Machine Gun and Transform materia on this screen. The first time the track breaks, hold left and press the O button rapidly to get a Wizard Staff; the second time, hold right and mash O to get a Star Pendant. The third time you should

jump over the track. Take the upper path off this screen, get into the shack, and lower the bridge. Now walk around and follow the path to North Corel.

I would advise you to save on the world map before entering the Gold Saucer. Sell everything in your inventory at the weapon or item shop. Rest at the inn if your MP is low, though this shouldn't be necessary. Then enter the Gold Saucer, making sure you have 3000 gil with which to buy a ticket. Pick whoever you want to accompany you, and go to Wonder Square to meet Cait Sith. Move him into the back row right away. Then go to the Battle Square, and you will be thrown into Corel Prison.

Run down to the cabin, making sure to save along the way. Note that you can restore your HP and MP by resting in the front seat of the Shinra truck, a short distance southwest of the cabin. After the dialogue is over, make Cait Sith the third member of your party. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Enemy Skill = Fire
Barret: Enemy Skill
Cait Sith: All* = Restore, Manipulate, HP Plus

Soon it will be time to face Dyne. But before that, we need to learn Laser. Save your game, and head out to the first "desert" screen. (Be careful not to wander into the desert proper, as it's possible to get lost for a long time out there.) Run around this area until you encounter two Death Claws.

Death Claw x2
400 HP

Have Cait Sith attempt to manipulate one of the Death Claws, while Cloud and Barret focus on killing the other one. Use Laser once each on Cloud and Barret, if the Death Claws haven't done so on their own. Then move Cloud and Barret to the front and kill them off with magic, while the Death Claw gradually exhausts its HP and MP casting Laser on itself. Once they are dead, have the Death Claw use a physical attack on itself to finish it off.

Give the second Restore to Barret, and have Cait Sith rush back to the save point. Don't worry about reviving Barret; he will be recovered to full HP and MP before fighting Dyne. Now head all the way to the junkyard, and face off with Dyne. It is a good idea to lower the battle speed before the battle starts.

BOSS: Dyne
1200 HP

This battle is deceptively simple. All Dyne's attacks do 70-80 damage. Have Barret Cure himself when he falls below 170 HP (it heals about 280 HP) and use physical attacks or Big Shot otherwise.

After about the fourth Big Shot, things can get difficult. Dyne starts using Needle Gun and either S-Mine or Molotov Cocktail in a single combo, dealing up to 160 damage per turn. At this point Barret will be alternating between Cure and Big Shot; there will be no time for normal attacks. If you don't suffer a critical hit--this will mostly cause a Game Over--Dyne should fall after the eighth Big Shot. He will often use Molotov Cocktail as his final attack, but if you were prepared for his turn that shouldn't be a problem.

Barret will learn Mindblow after the battle. It's now time for some chocobo racin'. Don't forget to pick up the Ramuh materia before talking to Ester. It's easy to win the race so long as you switch to Manual mode and hold down the R1 and R2 buttons; this eliminates stamina loss while riding normally, and reduces it greatly when dashing. Tap Square repeatedly to make your chocobo speed up, sprinting when necessary to build a lead over the rest of the pack.

IX. Cosmo Canyon

-Materia: Added Effect, Gravity

-Items: Black M-Phone, Ether, Fairy Ring, Wizer Staff

When you gain control of Cloud again, you will be in the buggy on the world map. Save immediately, and head up to North Corel to restore your MP and revive Cloud. Now head south to the Gongaga area. Stay far away from the forests in this area--particularly the forest around Gongaga Village, since entering will force you to fight Reno and Rude.

Save again before entering the Cosmo area, since Griffin's Peacock can easily wipe out the party's MP. Leave the buggy, and enter Cosmo Canyon. After you've watched the scenes with Red upon entering, head up to Bugenhagen's observatory. Ignore the materia shop for now; you need to save your gil for Barrier. Talk to Red, then talk to Cait Sith in the room right of the materia shop to form a party. Your choice of characters is not particularly important. Head back up to Bugenhagen.

Once that cutscene is over, go down to the Cosmo Candle. Talk to Tifa, Barret, Aeris, and finally Red. When prompted to form a party, make Aeris your third character. Your materia setup:

Cloud:	Enemy Skill = Transform
Red:	Restore = All, Enemy Skill Sense = Revive
Aeris:	Restore

Use the save point opposite the weapon shop, and then talk to Bugenhagen to enter the Cave of the Gi. The enemies here are pretty nasty; they come in large groups and do considerable damage per hit, Heg can poison you, and numerous enemies can inflict Death Sentence and Paralysis. There is nothing for you on the first screen. Enter the third enclave and break open the rock to clear the way to the next area. If Aeris has a full limit break, save it for Stinger.

When you reach the second screen, take the first left you see. To avoid getting hit by the spikes (and consequently reducing the entire party to 1 HP), WALK through the slime instead of running. Now go down, and you will end up on a ledge overlooking the first screen that holds the Added Effect materia. Next to Enemy Skill, this is the most important materia in the game; you cannot afford to miss it. Go back to the main path, once again walking to avoid sliding on the slime. Farther ahead, you can take some stairs down to a slightly lower level. Walk all the way south for a Black M-Phone, and northeast of the stairs for an Ether.

As soon as you enter the third screen, use Cure-All on your party. Enter through the second tunnel to fight Stinger and clear out the path.

Stinger
2200 HP

Have Red sense him and Cloud cast Mini at the beginning of battle. His physical attacks will now only do 1 damage, and it is safe to move all your characters to the front row. He can still use Sting Bomb to take off 3/4 of a character's HP, but only three times per battle (twice as a counterattack). And if Aeris uses Seal Evil, he cannot use Sting Bomb at all; this will also stop him from moving for a few turns. Cloud and Red can each use Laser once for very good damage; after that you should rely on physical attacks. When he has less than 100 HP remaining kill off Cloud and Red, and have Aeris finish him off.

After battle, remove Red's Revive and give it to Aeris. Have her revive both Cloud and Red, then reequip Restore. Once they are revived, have Red Cure them back to full health. Now immediately turn around and leave the Cave of the Gi. Rest at the inn; it's inside the door due north of Cosmo Canyon, just above the bar. Then save, and return to the cave.

NOTE: On the screen with the Stingers, you will sometimes get ambushed from both sides by two Gi Spectors. They are vulnerable to restorative magic. Two Cures, or one Cure and one limit break, will be sufficient to kill one of them; defend and escape from the other one. The Spectors can easily kill one of your characters, and in particular seem to like killing Aeris with two successive back attacks.

Before fighting the second Stinger, you may want to collect the Fairy Ring. Go through the sloping entrance again, and this time follow the path that slopes down to the left. Now head south, and turn on the position indicator with the Select button. Press down and right simultaneously, and you will end up going down a hidden tunnel. The Fairy Ring is in a chest at the end. Now go back to the main path, and walk north to fight the second Stinger. The strategy is exactly the same as before.

Leave the cave and rest at the inn one last time. Save your game once again, and reenter the cave. Before reaching the screen with Gi Nattak, you must kill Cloud and Red in a random battle. Since you'll probably need to fight Gi Nattak a few times, I would do this: Move Cloud and Red to the front row. Get into a random battle in the first screen of the cave, and have Aeris defend while Cloud and Red kill themselves by whatever means available. Go out of the cave and save your game. Now Aeris must make her way to the final screen of the cave by herself. Have her heal between battles, saving at least 34 MP (68 MP or more if possible) for the boss battle. When she gets there, switch Restore for Revive.

BOSS: Gi Nattak
5500 HP

Between Gi Nattak's high HP, his powerful attacks, and his ability to steal back HP and MP, there's only one way to beat him with your current party. Since he is undead, the Life spell can instantly kill him. Unfortunately Life will miss fairly often; and Aeris only gets two chances to cast it if she isn't killed by the Soul Fires first. Simply cast Life until it succeeds; if she runs out of MP, allow her to die and try again.

Make sure to pick up the Gravity materia he drops. Then head forward for a very touching scene.

When prompted, form a party with Cloud, Barret, and Cait Sith. Equip Restore=All on both Cloud's and Cait Sith's weapons, and Elemental=Ifrit,

Revive, and HP Plus on Cait Sith's armor.

X. Mt. Nibel and Rocket Town

-Materia: Destruct, Counter Attack, Barrier, Exit, Elemental

-Items: Platinum Fist, Silver M-Phone, Twin Viper, Enemy Launcher, Rune Blade, Plus Barrette, Powersoul, Jem Ring, Yoshiyuki, Drill Arm, Sniper CR, Edincoat

Save immediately on the world map, in case your MP gets wiped out by Peacock. Get into the buggy, and head north across the river to Nibelheim. I would recommend just passing through, but if you insist there are some marginally useful items here. There is a black-caped man on the second floor of Tifa's house; talk to him for a Platinum Fist. You can also acquire a Silver M-Phone, Twin Viper, Enemy Launcher, and Destruct materia in the Shinra Mansion. Don't worry about Destruct; by the time you need it you will be able to buy it in Mideel.

Save just before entering the Nibel mountains. The enemies on the trail hit hard (Kyuwilduns and Sonic Speed both do 300+ damage per attack) and the ones in the mountain itself are even worse (Dragons deals 500 damage with both Flamethrower and his physical attack). Have Cait Sith take care of most of the healing, and if necessary revive Barret or Cloud. The others need to save their MP for Materia Keeper, though in a pinch you could let Cloud cast a few Cures. There is a Rune Blade and a Plus Barrette on the first screen; once again I recommend just ignoring them.

When you get into the cave, slide down pipe number 2. Pick up the Powersoul, then drop down in front of Materia Keeper. At the save point, unequip Cait Sith's materia and switch him for Aeris. And for God's sake, save. Your materia setup:

Cloud:	Sense = Poison
Barret:	Restore
Aeris:	All*

Approach the boss. You need to press X to initiate the fight.

BOSS: Materia Keeper
8400 HP

Though the strategy is pretty simple, there are far too many things that can go wrong here. There is a 1/3 chance that he will open with Trine; this is an unavoidable Game Over. If that doesn't happen, and everyone survives, have Aeris freeze him with Seal Evil. Barret and Aeris should defend (if he attacked one of your characters, Barret should cast Cure first), while Cloud casts Bio until Materia Keeper is finally poisoned. Then Sense him. If Materia Keeper ever performs Hell Combo or a critical hit on Cloud, he will be dead and you will have no way to cast Poison or Sense; hence, it is crucial that the first few rounds go your way. Feel free to use Cross Slash, but only if Materia Keeper will be above 4200 HP immediately after it's used. The whole point of poisoning him is to prevent the Cure2/Trine stage from being triggered. Don't worry about healing Cloud after this, as he'll die before long anyway.

Because Aeris must equip Red's All materia--the 200 AP is mandatory for leveling up the materia--she will not survive long by herself. Hence, it is vital that both she and Barret stay alive for most of the battle. Barret's Cure heals just under 300; keep him above 300 HP and her above 210 HP at all times. If Aeris is at relatively low HP, make sure he has more than 400 HP in

case Materia Keeper targets him with Hell Combo next. Aeris should always defend except when using Healing Wind. (Seal Evil also stops poison damage, and forces Barret to waste more MP on Cure. It's not worth it.) A critical Hell Combo will in most cases lead to a Game Over; there's not much you can do about that.

When Materia Keeper has around 600-1000 HP left, move Barret to the front. Unless you are outrageously unlucky, he should die before the battle ends. Hopefully Aeris is at full HP when this happens. If she defends and uses one Healing Wind, she can generally survive long enough for Materia Keeper to die.

As soon as the battle is over, give Aeris Restore and heal her back to full health. Head straight back to the save point, hoping you don't get any random encounters. There is no need to revive Cloud and Barret; Aeris can make it to Rocket Town on her own. Pick up the Counter Attack materia the boss dropped, head off the right of the screen, and then follow the curve leading to the world map.

Save once again outside the mountains, and head north for Rocket Town. To get things out of the way, I recommend advancing the plot a bit first. As you enter town, you will see an old man near the path to the rocket. Talk to him twice, look at the rocket with him, and he will reward you with the Yoshiyuki. Now head into Cid's house on the right. Go through to the other side, and you will see the Tiny Bronco for the first time. Don't forget to pick up the Drill Arm from the chest. Head up to the top of the rocket, and you will meet Cid. Ask about the rocket to continue the story.

Before entering Cid's house again, there are several things you must do. First, sleep at the inn to revive Cloud and Barret. Second, enter the building to the left of the old man. Though it calls itself an item shop, they double as a materia shop--and what great materia they sell. Sell everything in your inventory, then buy two Barriers and one Exit. Third, go back to the world map and switch Aeris with Red. In order for Cloud and the others to survive Mako Gun, they need to be under Sadness--and to get it, you have to take a trip back to Mt. Nibel. While you're at it, it's time to pick up the second Elemental materia. Equip Restore=All on Red and Manipulate on Barret, and head south again.

When you return to the screen with the save point, exit to the bottom of the screen. Jump off the edge, and walk through the opening behind you. Ignore the chest on the first screen. (It contains an Elixir, which sells for 1 gil.) Pick up the Elemental on the second screen of this cavern, in the Mako fountain you saw in the flashback. At the start of the next screen you will come to a fork in the road; go right. Make sure to take the next left detour to pick up the Sniper CR. Then head down.

You should now be on the trail heading to the reactor. In this area you should encounter an enemy called Screamer who swings a mace. Have Cloud and Red defend while Barret attempts to manipulate him. When successful, have him use War Cry to inflict Sadness on all three characters. Then escape from battle. Go to the end of the trail and walk through the door behind the reactor. Press X to unfold the ladder below you, and save as soon as you reach the save point. (Dragon can often kill your characters even with Sadness, forcing you to reset and try again.) Run back to the world map, and open the menu one last time outside Rocket Town. Your materia setup:

Cloud:	All* = Restore
Barret:	Poison
Red:	Restore = Sense, HP Plus

Move your characters to the front row and save your game. Enter Cid's house to initiate the next series of cutscenes, leading to the boss fight with Palmer.

BOSS: Palmer
6000 HP

I have yet to encounter a challenge where Palmer is a serious obstacle. Mako Gun is equivalent to Fire2, Bolt2, or Ice2, and does about 300 damage with Sadness. A single Cure should fully heal the damage.

Have Red use Sense on Palmer; he will be primarily responsible for healing the damage from Mako Gun. Meanwhile, Barret uses nothing but Bio until Palmer is poisoned. After that, it is your choice. You can keep attacking him with limit breaks and physical attacks, but you have to be careful not to kill him before Barret and Red are dead. Personally, after he's poisoned I would sit back until he's used Mako Gun 10 times; after that Palmer will be at 20 MP, and unable to attack anymore. Kill off your other characters, and have Cloud attack away. At the highest battle speed, Poison should finish him off rather quickly.

XI. Preparing for the Temple

-Materia: None
-Items: None

You are now in control of the Tiny Bronco. Head north, then east, and then north again, until you are back in the Rocket Town area. Get off at the beach, enter the town, and rest at the inn. Get back into the Tiny Bronco, and get off at the Wutai beach. Remove Barret's Poison, and switch him for Cid. Move everyone to the back row. Your materia setup:

Cloud: All* = Restore
Cid: All = Transform, Enemy Skill = Sense
Long Range
Red: Enemy Skill = Manipulate

It is now time to learn a few vital enemy skills, starting with Magic Hammer. To avoid the long walk to Wutai proper, and the deadly lightning and poison attacks of the native monsters, head east from the beach to reach a grassy area. Run around here until you encounter two Razor Weeds with a Tail Vault.

Razor Weed x2, Tail Vault
1000 HP (145 MP), 960 HP

First have Cid cast Mini-All on the enemies, rendering them relatively harmless. If it misses anyone, particularly the Tail Vault, cast Mini again. Once that is done, have him sense each of the enemies. Cloud should defend, while Red attempts to manipulate one of the Razor Weeds. When he succeeds, use Magic Hammer four times: twice on the other Razor Weed to prevent Spaz Voice, once on Red, and once on Cid. Note that this will reduce Cid's and Red's MP to zero, making them unable to cast any magic until you stay at an inn after the battle. Move everyone to the front, and start meeleing the Tail Vault and second Razor Weed. When they are both gone, concentrate your attacks on the second Razor Weed. Until you see the message "Razor Weed's skill power is used up," have Cloud only attack with Cross Slash; if inflicted

with Fury his physical and magical accuracy will be seriously hurt. Kill off Cid and Red once the Razor Weed is at around 100 HP, then have Cloud end the battle.

After the battle you have two options. First, you can switch Cloud's Restore for Revive to bring Cid and Red back to life, reequip Restore and heal them with two Cure-Alls, then replace All with one of the Enemy Skills and use Magic Hammer in a random battle to restore his MP. Second, you can go back to the Rocket Town inn to revive and fully heal your allies. I would go with the second method, as it's considerably simpler and faster.

Once you're in good shape again, take the Tiny Bronco through the river that bisects the continent. Head east, passing north of the Temple of the Ancients, until you encounter a beach to your immediate north. Make sure that Cloud still has Red's All equipped. Run around until you encounter a lone Zemzelett.

Zemzelett
285 HP (36 MP)

If he casts Thunderbolt before you are able to manipulate him, he will not have the MP to cast White Wind; run away and try again if this happens. When Manipulate finally succeeds, cast White Wind on the party to learn the skill. Use a physical attack to break Manipulate, move everyone to the front row, and start killing Cid and Red. If he is in the air, use Cross Slash and otherwise wait for him to come down so Cloud can finish him off.

Leave this island and head back the way you came. Get off at any beach in the Gongaga/Gold Saucer area, and run back and forth until you encounter three Beachplugs.

Beachplug x3
200 HP (100 MP)

Have Red target one of the Beachplugs with Manipulate, while Cloud and Cid attempt to kill the other two. When successful, cast Big Guard on the party. If you get the side attack formation, keep a second Beachplug alive; you will need to cast Big Guard twice (once on Cid's side, once on Red's), and each Beachplug can only cast the spell once. Kill off Cid and Red, and have Cloud finish the battle.

You should now have two Enemy Skill materia with Laser, Magic Hammer, White Wind, and Big Guard. Also, All will level up after this fight. Save your game. Now go up to North Corel, and enter the Gold Saucer. Once inside, remove Cid's and Red's materia. Having 3000 gil for the ticket shouldn't be a problem. Head for the Battle Square, go right to Dio's showroom, and examine the Keystone. Dio will offer it to you in exchange for a round at the Battle Arena. To save some time, simply escape as soon as you enter the battle. When you attempt to leave, a long series of cutscenes will be initiated.

After the date and Cait Sith's subsequent double-cross, you will have to form a party with Aeris. Make Cait Sith the third character. Give him Manipulate; Exit, Restore=All, and Enemy Skill would also be wise. Now leave the Gold Saucer and head back to the Tiny Bronco. Before entering the Temple of the Ancients, it is necessary to put the party under Sadness. Take the river to

the western end of the continent, and go to the far north. Then head east across the world map until you can go no further. You should be in the chocobo farm area now. Disembark, then run up and down the beach until you encounter an Elfadunk. Manipulate it and use Shower on each of your characters, then escape from battle. Go back the way you came, and make your way to the Temple.

XIII. The Temple of the Ancients

-Materia: Luck Plus, Bahamut

-Items: Trident, Silver Rifle, Rocket Punch, Princess Guard, Trumpet Shell, Work Glove, Dragon Armlet, Gigas Armlet

Approach Tseng to acquire the Keystone, then use it at the altar to enter the temple. Make sure to save outside beforehand, in case you screw up and have to try again. You can pick up the Trident, Rocket Punch, and Luck Plus materia on the first screen; climb the vine at the top of this screen to reach the chest with the Silver Rifle. Head on to the second screen, and dodge under the rolling rocks here. Ignore the Morph materia, since it is prohibited by the rules of the challenge.

In the clock room, head to door IV for the Princess Guard and door VII for the Trumpet Shell. Be careful to avoid the second hand; it will knock you into the room below, triggering a forced encounter with some Ancient Dragons. Finally, enter room VI. As soon as you gain control of Cloud, jump down to the second level and enter the second hole from the right to catch the Ancient. Hop down to the lowest level and pick up the Work Glove, then enter the lower right hole to end up on the top level again. Walk into the clock room, and immediately return; the Ancient will now be on the top level.

Set the battle speed to a medium level. This should allow Poison to deal damage fast enough without your Barriers wearing off too quickly. Set up your materia like so:

Cloud: Sense = Poison
Aeris: Enemy Skill
Cait Sith: All = Restore, Revive, Enemy Skill
Elemental = Ifrit

Save your game now. (You may want to employ the same trick you used for Shinra HQ, and reset immediately after saving. I lost my first attempt because I was killed by a group of Ancient Dragons before being able to save.) DO NOT rest; this will remove Sadness and screw you for the next two fights. Once you are ready, enter the mural room.

BOSS: Red Dragon
6800 HP (300 MP)

If he opens with Red Dragon Breath on Cloud or Aeris before you can put up a Big Guard, or for that matter after a Big Guard has worn off, they will die. If he kills Aeris, you must restart; it is vitally important that she stay under Sadness for Demons Gate. Killing Cloud isn't the end of the world, since Cait Sith can revive him and Aeris can place him under Big Guard; but if he is targeted again soon after, it will be difficult to keep him alive long enough to poison and sense him. He can usually survive Red Dragon's physical attacks, but even at full HP you're pretty lucky if Red Dragon Breath doesn't kill him without Sadness.

If no one is killed have Cait Sith cast Cure on whoever was hit, Cloud use

Cross Slash (if he has a limit break), and Aeris use Big Guard in that order. Cast Bio until he is successfully poisoned, then Sense him. Except for using limit breaks or defensive magic, your characters always defend from now on. You will most likely have to renew Big Guard three times. Have Cait Sith cast it the second time to reduce Aeris' MP load. Obviously, you will need to use Magic Hammer; cast it when your characters have about 30 MP remaining. Whenever anyone falls below 300 HP, have Cait Sith cast Cure. If Cure doesn't heal enough, use Healing Wind or White Wind. The only way that Red Dragon is likely to kill a character prematurely is if his bite attack goes critical, which under Barrier will do 440 damage if you're not defending.

When Red Dragon has about 500-1000 HP remaining, move Cloud and then Cait Sith to the front row while Aeris defends; simply don't heal the front row character, and they should die from his physical attacks within a few rounds. If it looks like he'll die from the poison damage while more than one character is still alive, cast Cure; this will heal about 400 HP. Once both Cloud and Cait Sith are dead, have Aeris use Healing Wind, and if necessary White Wind, to keep herself alive until Poison finishes him off.

IMPORTANT NOTICE ABOUT BARRIERS: Since your characters must be in constant Barrier and MBarrier status to survive this fight, it is crucial that you know precisely when to recast them. To the immediate right of your characters' names in the battle window are a pair of gauges: these represent how much longer your characters' current Barrier or MBarrier status will last. The gauge starts out full immediately after Barrier or Big Guard is cast, and gradually empties toward the left. (It empties twice as fast when under Haste--a notable disadvantage of Big Guard.) This emptying occurs in small, discrete steps after a certain number of seconds, which I will refer to as "ticks." Contrary to appearances, Barrier status does NOT disappear the instant the color disappears from the gauge. Instead, it is still active for one more "tick" of the gauge.

On the one hand, this means that you can often be protected against an extra attack even when your gauges are apparently empty. But on the other hand, it makes maintaining your Barriers a difficult task. If you cast Barrier or Big Guard too soon, it will miss; your MP will be wasted, and you would be no better protected than if you had cast it too late. Though 56 MP wasted can be a serious detriment, you can usually just cast another Big Guard and survive the battle anyway. This problem is more serious in the next battle, where you only have a limited number of Barrier-All's.

Pick up the Bahamut materia now. Then head right to advance the plot. If Aeris has 37 MP or more remaining, give her the Revive materia and cast Life on Cloud. Now give Revive to him and cast Life on Cait Sith; then equip All=Restore and heal the party with two Cure-Alls. Either way, get back to the Ancient and save your game ASAP. Once again, don't rest. Sadness is even more crucial for Demons Gate.

Before you can face him, you'll need to restore the party's MP by fighting random encounters in the mural room. If Aeris ended the battle with less than 37 MP, she'll have to fight the first battle solo. Give her Enemy Skill, and hope she encounters a solitary Doorbull. (The other formations will quickly overwhelm her.) Use Magic Hammer, healing with White Wind if necessary, and run away; then revive Cloud. Once your allies are alive, you'll need to swap around the Enemy Skill materia for a bit so everyone is at nearly full MP; this should take about three or four battles. The Transform=All combo is useful, as the enemies here can do some nasty physical damage. It would still be a good idea to let them charge your limit breaks, though, particularly Aeris'.

Once the party is in good shape again, leave the mural room and REDUCE THE BATTLE SPEED TO THE SLOWEST SETTING. This is extremely important. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Enemy Skill = Revive
Aeris: Restore
Cait Sith: All* = Barrier, Restore, Sense
All = Barrier, Bahamut, Enemy Skill

Save your game now. Walk north through the clock room, then approach the door. And what a nasty door it is.

BOSS: Demons Gate
10,000 HP (400 MP)

This is the toughest battle in the whole challenge, simply because it depends so heavily on luck. A little over half your Game Overs will occur at the beginning of the battle, as a result of Demons Gate opening with a rock drop on Cloud or Cait Sith. Aeris can survive one rock drop unprotected--this is one of the reasons she's under Sadness--everyone should survive Cave-In, and if he opens with Petrif-Eye or charging for Demon Rush this isn't even an issue. This is assuming he doesn't get critical hits or use a double rock drop; these will screw you up whether you're under Barrier or not. If that happens and someone dies, you're on your own.

Once you've properly protected yourself, there are a number of things that have to happen right. First, Demons Gate must not kill any characters until you're ready for him to do so. Cave-In does 220 damage through Barrier, Demon Rush does 300 damage, and the rock drop does 380; Aeris' Sadness reduces this by one third. At full HP, everyone can survive a normal hit from Demon Rush or the rock drop and a critical hit from Cave-In; with Sadness and her higher HP, Aeris is particularly difficult to kill at full HP. But Demons Gate loves to perform critical hits. He also will sometimes drop two rocks on the same turn, which very often land on the same character and kill him.

Second, you must get lucky with Cait Sith's Dice. This limit break is your primary source of damage, and there's no way you'll kill him in time if it doesn't dish out a lot of damage. You need at least a few Dice that do over 1000 damage to kill him before your Barrier-Alls wear off and your survival becomes precarious. Though it usually isn't a problem, you also need to make sure that Cait Sith is targeted often enough that he can actually use his limit break; a Cloud or Aeris killing spree could drag out the battle to your death.

Third, your Barrier-Alls cannot be allowed to miss. Unless you get pretty lucky with your Dice damage, you will have to put the whole party under Barrier three times. Single-casting Barrier does not work very well; you will still have to deal with healing the boss's damage while your other characters stand unprotected. Casting it with Big Guard is even worse, for three reasons: it halves healing due to MBarrier, it casts Haste (making Barrier last only half as long), and the 56 MP required will quickly make the battle unsustainable. But because you can't directly observe when the Barrier has run out (see the note under the Red Dragon strategy), it can be hard to know whether it's too soon to recast your protections. Defending before you recast Barrier can help reduce the risk, but it's dangerous nonetheless.

The battle itself is pretty simple. Aeris will be your primary healer; if only one target is damaged on a given turn, she is the one who casts Cure.

Healing Wind is reserved for healing immediately after Cave-In or Demon Rush. Cait Sith casts Barrier-All on his first turn, uses Dice, and then senses Demons Gate. He also acts a secondary healer. To ensure that his limit breaks aren't wasted, do this: When multiple characters need healing and Cait Sith has just gained a limit break, have him cast Cure before Aeris. The bar should fill up very quickly during Aeris' turn; as long as you activate the limit before the Cure animation finishes, he will use Dice before Demons Gate. Unfortunately, if no one needs healing and he doesn't have limit break he just has to stand there; the necessity of getting Dice quickly means that he will rarely be able to defend. Cloud should always defend, except when he gets Cross Slash or heals the party with White Wind. Cross Slash deals 160 damage--not enough by itself, but when used many times it can make the battle significantly shorter. (Cait Sith can also cast White Wind, though he should never need to use it.) Have Cloud and Cait Sith use Magic Hammer if they fall below 40 MP.

If Cloud is not dead when Demons Gate falls below 2400 HP, stop using Dice; there's a chance that it could kill him in one shot, earning Cloud an unacceptable amount of EXP and forcing you to try again. Move him forward, and allow Demons Gate to kill him. Bahamut is your trump card; when he falls below 1200 HP use Magic Hammer to raise Cait's MP above 100, then summon it for an instant win. Be glad we can let both Aeris and Cait Sith survive this battle; it is a hundred times easier with him there to the end.

Congratulations. You've beaten the toughest battle in this challenge, and one of the tougher battles in any FFVII challenge. Everything gets easier from here, even though we lose precious Aeris.

XIII. Searching for Aeris

-Materia: Titan, Kjata, Enemy Skill, Comet

-Items: Water Ring, Aurora Armllet, Wizard Bracelet

You will wake up in Gongaga Village. Leave the inn, talk to Barret and Tifa, and then head for the world map. Raise the battle speed so you can escape from battle more quickly, and save your game. (Presumably you'd rather not experience Demons Gate again.) You can pick up the Titan materia from the Gongaga reactor if you'd like, but it's not at all necessary.

Go south to get to the Tiny Bronco, then follow the coast north until you reach the river that runs across the continent. Follow it to the other side, and go all the way north to Bone Village. We will be digging up the Lunar Harp now. Climb the ladder to the top level, and move Cloud so he is obscured behind the plume of white smoke rising from the building below. From the south edge of this area, take a few paces north. There's no need to order a search. Simply select "Done" immediately, set off the bomb, and press Square to designate the dig spot without moving. You should get the Lunar Harp within a few attempts this way.

You can now walk through the Sleeping Forest. On the second screen, you may notice a red dot that is periodically visible among the trees. If you can catch up to it before it disappears, the Kjata materia is yours. Again, not a necessary summon; but the more materia you have, the better. There is a Water Ring under the log on the next screen. To continue, go through the log and past the fourth screen to get back to the World Map.

As you enter the City of the Ancients, take the left path. If you follow it to the end, you will reach a room with a platform in the middle. Take the stairs down as you enter, and open the chest here for the Aurora Armllet. Head

back toward the entrance of the city, and this time take the right path to the second screen. Enter the second building, climb the ladder, and sleep in the bed.

You can now go down to meet Aeris. But before you do that, we still have several things to do. First, pick up the third Enemy Skill materia behind the bed. Now leave the City of the Ancients, and take the Tiny Bronco back to Wutai. Equip the empty Enemy Skill on Tifa, and Enemy Skill=Manipulate on Cloud. Run around in the same grassy area you learned Magic Hammer last time.

Razor Weed x2, Tail Vault
1000 HP (145 MP), 960 HP

The procedure is the same as last time, though we don't have Mini to reduce the damage. Have Cloud manipulate one of the Razor Weeds, then use Magic Hammer to learn it on the third Enemy Skill materia. Now suck the Razor Weeds' MP dry to stop Spaz Voice, and kill two of them off. Kill Barret and Tifa, and allow Cloud to finish the last one.

Replace Tifa with Cid. Give him Tifa's Enemy Skill materia, and have him revive and heal Barret. Go all the way back to where you started the trip, at the Gongaga forest. Run around the first screen here until you encounter a lone Touch Me. Added Effect=Transform on Cid's armor is recommended.

Touch Me
300 HP (74 MP)

Have Cloud manipulate it, then cast Frog Song on himself, Barret, and finally Cid. Once all three characters have learned it, have Cid drain its MP with Magic Hammer. Make it use Frog Jab on Cloud and Barret, then on itself to break Manipulate. Now move your characters forward, and kill off Cloud and Barret. Cid should be able to finish it in three hits.

Get back in the Tiny Bronco and head to Bone Village. Ask for a search, then immediately end it; this will allow you to rest for free. Fill Cloud's limit gauge in the Sleeping Forest entrance, then return to the Tiny Bronco. Head to the far east, and get off on the beach near the chocobo farm. Run around here until you encounter an Elfadunk. Manipulate it and use Shower on all three characters. (From now on, if I tell you to meet an Elfadunk you know where to go.)

You are now ready for Jenova-LIFE. Reenter the City of the Ancients, and this time take the center path. Before heading down the glowing path, pick up the Comet materia at the top of the spiral ramp. Once at the save point, fully restore your HP, move everyone to the front row, and equip the following materia:

Cloud:	Enemy Skill = Sense
Barret:	Enemy Skill
Tifa:	Enemy Skill

Head toward Aeris to see the saddest scene in the game. And to fight a boss.

BOSS: Jenova-LIFE
10,000 HP (300 MP)

The only dangerous part of the battle is the beginning. Jenova will sometimes cast Aqualung before your first turn; this will deal over 1000 damage to the party, ending the battle instantly. Otherwise, Cloud will be able to paralyze her with Cross Slash. So long as you use Magic Hammer twice before Paralysis wears off, you're good; she will only have 100 MP, and cannot use her Reflect counterattack against the last Magic Hammer. With no MP, Jenova cannot attack at all.

Once she's disabled, have Cloud Sense her HP. Then have everyone melee her to death. I know it seems boring, but you have to get used to using physical attacks. You don't have the MP to finish Schizo or Jenova-DEATH with magic either, not to mention the coming Midgar bosses. Besides, you get to relax to Aeris' Theme for a while. Once Jenova falls to 200-300 HP, kill off Cloud and Barret. Have Tifa finish Jenova with a few quick punches.

So long, Aeris. We'll miss you.

*****DISC TWO*****

XIV. Corel Valley and Great Glacier

-Materia: Magic Plus, Added Cut, All

-Item: Viper Halberd, Bolt Armlet, Hypno Crown, Safety Bit

Go back to the building where you spent the night, and stay there again to revive Cloud and Barret. Before we can catch up to Sephiroth and grab the Black Materia, we need to make one last trip on the Tiny Bronco. Form a party of Cloud, Cid, and Cait Sith. The following materia setup will be sufficient to get you through the Great Glacier and Gaea's Cliff:

Cloud: Enemy Skill = HP Plus
Cid: All = Restore, Enemy Skill = Exit
 Added Effect = Seal, Elemental = Shiva
Cait Sith: All = Restore, Enemy Skill**, Revive
 Elemental = Ice, Manipulate

(Enemy Skill** denotes the third Enemy Skill materia, the one that does not have Laser.)

Meet an Elfadunk, and have it inflict Sadness on the party. Temporarily form a party with Tifa and Barret, giving one of them Manipulate, and get into a second Elfadunk battle to put them under Sadness. Put Cid and Cait Sith back into your party. Then return to the City of the Ancients and follow the path Sephiroth took. Go left around the spike staircase and back in the other direction to open the chest with the Viper Halberd. Go up the spikes to reach the next screen. Climb into the left crack to go up, and go left. Climb into the next crack, get off in either direction, then choose to go up; the Bolt Armlet is here. Go to the right to reach the next crack. Go down this crack, and in the chest down here will be the Hypno Crown. Go all the way to the top of the crack, go left to climb up the next crack, and climb the ladder. First descend to pick up the Magic Plus materia, then rise to reach the world map.

Save outside Icicle Village. Enter the house farthest to the right, and choose to take the map in the den. There are plenty of items here, but none that sell for more than 1 gil. Just head straight for the exit, and you will initiate the scene with Elena. To avoid her punch and save some time, hold the Cancel and left directional buttons. Then enter the center house, talk to the boy so you can take his snowboard, and snowboard down the mountain.

Because walking would just be too easy.

This area can be a bit confusing. If you get lost, I recommend using the ASCII map in Apathetic Aardvark's excellent FAQ. My directions will assume that you turned right on the snowboard course at both intersections. Head north until you encounter a frozen lake. If you want to pick up the Safety Bit, go northwest and cross the ice floes; otherwise continue on northeast. You must not wander around too long, or you will collapse; then you will have no choice but to rest at Holzhoff's cabin, which will remove Sadness. Head right on the screen with the lone tree, and from there just keep going north. There is an Added Cut materia two screens past the four-way split.

When you reach the snow field, take note of the horizontal and vertical lines in the snow. Simply walk along one of the vertical lines, tapping X frequently to set markers behind you. When the screen starts to turn, stop moving; the markers should help to point you in the right direction. You will walk past an igloo in the middle of the snow field, which contains an All materia; after you enter and exit the igloo, the screen will be oriented with north on top again. You can and should use the save point inside Holzhoff's cabin, but do not talk to Holzhoff himself.

XV. Gaea's Cliff

-Materia: None

-Items: Javelin, Fire Armlet, Enhance Sword

While on the outside of Gaea's Cliff, you must keep your temperature above 26 degrees at all times; if not, you will return to Holzhoff's cabin and have to start from the beginning. Frog Song is a lifesaver; every enemy here is susceptible to Sleep, including the nasty Malboro and Stilva. Malboro's Bad Breath and Stilva's Magic Breath will in most cases cause a Game Over, so get through this area as fast as possible. You can pick up the Javelin in a chest in the first cave area. The most important thing for now is that Cid and Cait Sith do not get killed; the battles ahead become very nasty if you lose Sadness.

As soon as you reach the save point, remove Cid's Enemy Skill materia. Now replace Cid with Barret. Turn the battle speed down to a medium level. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Enemy Skill** = Restore

Barret: Enemy Skill

Cait Sith: All = Restore, Enemy Skill, Revive

Elemental = Lightning, Manipulate, Magic Plus

Save your game, and run around this area until you encounter a Stilva.

Stilva

2000 HP (300 MP)

Stilva must not cast Magic Breath before Cait Sith manipulates him, or this strategy will fall apart. If he does, reset and try again. Otherwise have Cloud use Cure to heal any damage received and Barret cast Big Guard. Trine should do less than 400 damage to Cloud and Barret, and less than 200 to Cait Sith; it is crucial that everyone survives Trine. Fully restore Cait Sith's HP before Magic Breath; he needs 450 HP to survive it. This will easily kill the other two. Have Stilva finish himself off with Magic Breath; if that doesn't succeed, an additional Trine or Big Red Clipper certainly will.

Revive Cloud and Barret with Life-All, then restore them back to full health. Remove Barret's and Cait Sith's materia, and form a new party with Cloud, Red, and Cid. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Enemy Skill** = HP Plus
Red: Restore = All, Enemy Skill
 Elemental = Ice
Cid: All* = Restore, Enemy Skill = Exit
 Added Effect = Seal, Elemental = Shiva

Go around the trail outside. Be sure to grab the Fire Armlet before fighting the Icicles.

Icicle, Evilhead x4
3000 HP (300 MP), 740 HP (45 MP)

If Cloud or Red is hit by Ultrasound, have Cid use White Wind; otherwise, everyone casts Frog Song to immobilize the Evilheads. When all the Evilheads are disabled, have Cloud and Red move forward to kill themselves; in the meantime, Cid should use Magic Hammer. The moment they are dead, have Cid use Laser on the Icicle to end the battle.

Do not jump down yet. Heal any damage Cid may have sustained.

Icicle, Evilhead x4
3000 HP (300 MP), 740 HP (45 MP)

Just have Cid cast Laser. Hope that they don't all use Ultrasound, as its damage can be very painful.

Still not time to jump. Once again, heal Cid back to full health.

Icicle, Evilhead x4
3000 HP (300 MP), 740 HP (45 MP)

Same as above.

Now you are ready to jump down. Have Cid revive the others and Red heal the party. Save right away, and then climb over the icicles to the outside. Pick up the Enhance Sword in the chest, follow the trail to the outside, and make your way to the save point by the spring. Don't use the spring; we need to keep Sadness for the time being. Remove Red's materia and switch him for Tifa. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Enemy Skill** = HP Plus
Tifa: Enemy Skill
Cid: Restore = Revive, Enemy Skill = Sense
 Elemental = Ifrit, Elemental = Shiva

Set the battle speed to slowest now, and save. Run down the hallway to deal with a certain two-headed freak.

BOSS: Schizo (Right), Schizo (Left)
18,000 HP (350 MP) for both

He can be dangerous during the first few rounds. If he gets a turn before Big Guard, he will be able to cut down Cloud or Tifa in one Breath attack. Also, if both Breath attacks are focused on Cloud or Tifa they will die even with MBarrier on. After the initial Big Guard you should focus four Magic Hammers on one head as fast as possible, using White Wind to heal the damage. If someone is killed during the first few rounds, don't bother reviving them until both heads have used their third Breath attack. After that you will have two rounds to revive the fallen character, finish draining the MP from the first head, and use four quick Magic Hammers to neutralize the other head while Schizo charges for Double Breath. Tifa can survive this under Sadness and MBarrier, and Cid will easily survive it, but Cloud will die no matter what.

Once both heads run out of MP, the battle becomes a million times easier. Neither head can attack on its regular turn, and his full-party counterattack also can't be used. The only attack he can still use is his final attack, and we have a while before we see that. Restore your characters, most importantly Cid, to full health via White Wind or Cure. Then Sense both heads, and move to the front row.

Have Cloud and Tifa cast Trine at Schizo for a while. Be careful that Cloud saves at least 3 MP and Tifa at least 59 MP, respectively. Cid will only use physical attacks; once their MP has reached the limits given above, Cloud and Tifa should do likewise. Focus all your limit breaks and physical attacks on Schizo (Left), until it falls to around 300 HP. Then do the same for Schizo (Right), again stopping once you hit about 300 HP. This should take about 20 minutes.

Make sure to do the following exactly as described, or it's quite possible you'll completely screw up and waste all the time you just invested in this battle. Have Tifa cast the final Big Guard, and finish off one of the heads with physical attacks. This should kill Cloud and do 400 damage to Tifa (assuming she's still under Sadness). Have Cid heal himself with two Cures, then finish off the last head. The second final attack will definitely kill your allies, and Cid should be standing with about 200 HP remaining.

Before you do anything else, immediately run off the end of this screen. There is a glitch in the game such that if you get a random encounter before leaving the screen, the game will think you are still in the boss battle and will prevent you from escaping. Because we are playing a Low Level game, you will have to fight the battle again if this happens to you. (This has happened to me three times. Every time, the forced encounter was a Blue Dragon.)

Once you're sure you have avoided the glitch, have Cid revive the others with Life-All and restore them to full health with Cure-All. Replace Cid's Elemental=Ifrit combo with Added Effect=Seal, and go back to the save point. Heal at the spring, then save your game. If you run into any random encounters on the way, be sure to steal back some MP with Magic Hammer. Remove Cid's materia, and replace him with Cait Sith. Set up your materia like so:

Cloud: Enemy Skill** = HP Plus
Tifa: Enemy Skill
Cait Sith: Revive = All*, Enemy Skill, Sense
 Elemental = Ifrit, Restore, Magic Plus

Head out of Schizo's lair, and into the Whirlwind Maze.

XVI. Whirlwind Maze

-Materia: Neo Bahamut, MP Turbo

-Items: Ether, Kaiser Knuckle, Reflect Ring, Poison Ring

On the way to the next save point, Tifa will stop to give a dramatic speech. It will no longer be possible to take her out of the active party until we complete the Whirlwind Maze. Pick up the Neo Bahamut materia, go a little bit beyond the save point to see a cutscene with the Highwind, and save. One of the black-caped men who is knocked back at the first windy pass turns into an Ether when you examine him. The next boss is a lot easier if you enter the battle with Cross Slash ready, though you can probably survive either way.

The Whirlwind Maze is one of the most annoying areas in a Low Level challenge, because of the windy passes you have to cross. If you get knocked down by the wind (or by cyclones or lightning on later screens), you will have a forced encounter with a Wind Wing. You need to cross two of these windy passes without getting knocked down before you can reach the boss and save afterward. Be sure to pick up the Kaiser Knuckle in the chest between the two passes.

While in principle you could just go straight to Jenova, I strongly advise you to be under Sadness before initiating the boss battle. To do this, get into a random encounter with a Gremlin. Cast Laser on him twice, putting the other enemies to sleep with Frog Song. At low HP he will frequently use Bad Mouth, putting your characters under Sadness one by one. Since Bad Mouth is a rather powerful physical attack, it might be wise to cast Mini on the Gremlin.

Lower the battle speed as soon as you reach the second screen. Head forward to start the battle.

BOSS: Jenova-DEATH

25,000 HP (800 MP)

If Cloud and Tifa enter the battle with Sadness, everyone should survive one Red Light should Jenova get to act first. Otherwise, Red Light will kill them and you'll need to have Cait Sith revive them. Use White Wind to recover HP and remove Silence. Then cast Magic Hammer 8 times to eliminate Jenova's MP. If Cloud has Cross Slash, use it immediately; this will allow you to drain Jenova's MP much faster, substantially reducing the risk that she will wipe you out with her nasty chains of Red Lights.

Once her MP runs dry, Sense her and move to the front row. Physically attack until she only has a few hundred HP left. (Like Jenova-LIFE, magic is largely ineffective against her.) Then kill Cloud and Cait Sith, and have Tifa deliver the final blow.

Give the Black Materia to either Barret or Red, then talk to Tifa to continue on. Before you start moving, have Tifa revive Cloud and Cait Sith; Cait Sith should heal the party with Cure-All. Use the save point, grabbing the Poison Ring and MP Turbo materia as you go. Cross the final pass; you'll make it if you cross just after the third cyclone. Go to the other side, and a long series of cutscenes will start. When the cutscenes are over, you will be in control of Tifa in Junon.

XVII. Escaping Junon

-Materia: None

-Items: None

When you talk to Barret, Rufus and Heidegger will come in and lead you to the execution chamber. There is a save point on the way, though you don't really need it. Be sure to give Enemy Skill to Barret before the fighting starts.

Once Weapon interrupts, some Shinra soldiers will charge at you. Contrary to appearances, this is not a forced encounter; just escape from this battle as usual. Try opening the door in the lower right corner a few times to trigger the next cutscene. When it's over, talk to Cait Sith and exit this room. Then head right and progress toward the airport. Needless to say, we're still running from random encounters.

When in control of Tifa, press X, X, Triangle, Triangle+X, Circle+Triangle, Circle to free her. Hit the left button to stop the gas, and try opening the door. Time to get out of here. Climb down until she falls, then head up to the end of the cannon. Time for a little payback. When she's put Scarlet back in her place, Tifa will make her escape. The party is now in control of the Highwind, giving you unparalleled mobility around the world. Talk to Red on the bridge, talk to the pilot, then go down to the control room to form a party. It makes absolutely no difference who you put in the party, since you're not going to be fighting any battles with this formation.

XVIII. Mideel, Fort Condor, and Corel

-Materia: Elemental, HP Plus, Destruct, Earth, Manipulate, Chocobo Lure

-Items: None

Before you head to Mideel, there is one important thing Tifa needs to do. Set the airship down outside Nibelheim, and go into Tifa's house. Examine the piano, and she will find the third and final Elemental materia. (This is assuming that Cloud played the proper sequence of notes in the flashback.) Now go over to Mideel, and walk toward the back of town to trigger the cutscene with Cloud.

Cid is now the leader of the party. Since Cloud and Tifa won't receive any inactive party EXP until they rejoin the party, we are going to teach several Enemy Skills to the third Enemy Skill materia now. But first we should buy some materia. Set back down in Mideel, and buy two Gravity, two HP Plus, and one Destruct materia. Don't worry about gil; if you picked up all the items I recommended, you will easily be able to afford them. Then fly north to Kalm, where you will buy two Earth materia. Finally, set down at Fort Condor, talk to the man at the table, and go up to the materia shop. Buy two Manipulate materia; though not strictly necessary, these will make learning enemy skills and gaining Fury/Sadness much easier.

Form a party of Cid, Barret, and Cait Sith. Equip all three Enemy Skill materia and two Manipulate materia. Also, equip Long Range on Cait Sith. Wander around the Junon area until you encounter a solitary Zemzelett.

Zemzelett

285 HP (36 MP)

As before, you need to manipulate him before he casts Thunderbolt. If successful, use a physical attack to remove Manipulate and kill off everyone but Cait Sith. Cait should be fine finishing Zemzelett with physical attacks.

Next it's off to the Costa del Sol beaches. Use the same party as before.

Beachplug x3
200 HP (100 MP)

Manipulate one of them, cast Big Guard (make sure it targets the character who has the third Enemy Skill equipped), and again kill Cid and Barret. Cait Sith can finish them with one Trine.

Finally, we need to make a brief trip to the chocobo farm. As you enter from the south, there will be a Chocobo Lure materia lying on the right side of the screen. Pick it up, and get back in the airship. Equip Chocobo Lure and Heal on someone, and head to the chocobo tracks east of the Gold Saucer desert. Run around this area until you encounter a chocobo battle with a Harpy.

Harpy, Chocobo
800 HP (200 MP), Varies

Don't worry about the chocobo; the sole purpose of this battle is to encounter a Harpy. Manipulate it and have it cast Aqualung; Harpy may cast it on its own if you're too slow. Cast Poisona if he uses Poison Storm on anyone. Make sure your HP stays above 600, since Aqualung can pack a punch. Remove Manipulate with a physical attack, put the Harpy to sleep, then kill off Cid and Barret one last time. One casting of Aqualung will be enough.

It's time to progress with the story. Go back to Fort Condor, go to the top, and agree to start the minigame. Allow the attackers to reach the top so you fight Commander Grand Horn. No need to make a box for this battle; simply have one of your characters suicide with Aqualung. The party will be revived with 1 HP, and Fort Condor will be closed forever. Too bad. Restore yourself to full health with Cure-All.

Next we have the Corel mission. Park the airship outside North Corel, and make your way north through the mountains. When you get to the save point, switch Barret for Red. Give him Barret's Enemy Skill, put Added Effect=Seal on Cait Sith's armor, and save. Head forward to the reactor to fight some Shinra troops.

Attack Squad x2
1300 HP (100 MP)

This battle is just as easy if you kill off Cid and Red beforehand. Either way, make sure that they are dead before the battle ends. Have Cait Sith kill them with two Aqualungs.

After battle, Cid will board a train to pursue the Huge Materia. Once the timer stops, sit back and do nothing for 10 minutes. To avoid the EXP from the battles on the train, we need to let them get away. Well, you could catch up to the other train and allow it to crash to get a free rest and the opportunity to buy the Ultima materia. But Ultima is really not worth it; it costs 50,000 gil, and requires 5000 AP before you can start casting the spell. Besides, Aqualung and Magic Breath are quite sufficient for all remaining enemies.

One major obstacle remains before we get Cloud back. Put Elemental=HP Plus and Elemental=Earth in Cid's armor, and Elemental=Earth in Red's armor. Meet an Elfadunk, and have him put the party under Sadness. Then set down outside Mideel, lower your battle speed, and save. Talk to Tifa in the clinic, then walk outside to fight Ultimate Weapon.

BOSS: Ultimate Weapon
100,000 HP (400 MP)

Hopefully you will be able to put up a Big Guard before he opens with Quake2. If not, that's okay too; Cid and Red will only take 450 damage, and Cait Sith may or may not survive as well. Have Red cast Big Guard, then start casting White Wind continuously. On his next turn he will use a physical attack; this will kill Cait, but Red or Cid should be alright. Next comes Ultima Beam. Cait and Red may die, but Cid will survive; and that's all that matters. Ultimate Weapon automatically escapes from battle on his fourth turn.

Next we have the Lifestream sequence. A brilliant bit of story, but much too long for my tastes. When you eventually control Cloud and are prompted to form a party, choose Cloud, Barret, and Tifa. Give all three of them Enemy Skill materia. It would be wise to have Elfadunk put Tifa under Sadness before you enter Junon.

XIX. The Underwater Reactor and the Sunken Gelnika
-Materia: Double Cut
-Items: None

Go to the Shinra elevator at the back of lower Junon, and pay the guard 10 gil to ride up the elevator. Use the save point in the airport, and then head for the tunnel in the middle of the city. Enter the elevator at the end of the hall.

Submarine Crew x2
1500 HP (85 MP)

Cast Frog Song on each of them, and kill off Cloud and Barret. Finish the Submarine Crews with two Aqualungs.

When you exit the elevator, you will be forced to fight another battle. No need to revive your allies, though it might be wise to have Tifa heal herself.

Submarine Crew x2
1500 HP (85 MP)

Once again, two Frog Songs and two Aqualungs.

Tifa should be able to get down to the Underwater Reactor by herself. Frog Song works wonders here; I was able to take care of all my healing in-battle with White Wind and Magic Hammer. When you see a soldier pacing back and forth in front of you, make sure to talk to him before advancing forward. Otherwise you may be caught in a three-enemy attack from both sides that Tifa has little hope of surviving.

Submarine Crew
1500 HP (85 MP)

Frog Song, Laser, and Aqualung in that order.

Advance to fight the soldiers guarding the door.

Submarine Crew x2
1500 HP (85 MP)

Same as the first two battles.

Before you dispatch the final group of soldiers, you need to make the long trek back to the surface. Revive Cloud and Barret, and take the elevators up to the city. When you are back in upper Junon again, head left. Talk to the sailor in the middle of the street to take the helicopter out of Junon; this should save you a little time. Form a party of Cloud, Red, and Cid, and have Elfadunk inflict Sadness on all of them.

Make your party Cloud, Barret, and Tifa once more, get to the Underwater Reactor save point, and save the game. Approach the final group of soldiers.

Underwater MP x2
1000 HP (100 MP)

These guys are quite irritating, as they can attack three times in the same turn. Cast Frog Song on them, kill Barret and Tifa, and have Cloud finish them with two Aqualungs.

Continue along the path to see the Huge Materia get pulled out of the reactor. Enter the next screen, and it will be loaded onto the submarine. You must be careful NOT to approach Reno yet. Instead, run back to the save point and make your party Cloud, Red, and Cid. Your materia setup:

Cloud:	Enemy Skill = HP Plus
Red:	Elemental = Lightning, Enemy Skill HP Plus = Revive
Cid:	Elemental = Ramuh, Enemy Skill = Sense Restore = All*, HP Plus = Revive

Restore your MP to full in random battles, and save your game. Lower the battle speed all the way and fully heal the party before approaching Reno. It's time to rumble with the infamous Carry Armor.

BOSS: Carry Armor, Left Arm, Right Arm
24,000 HP (200 MP), 10,000 HP (100 MP), 10,000 HP (100 MP)

Carry Armor's deadliest attack is Lapis Laser. Even with Sadness, this does 1100 damage to everyone; he sometimes uses this as a sneak attack at the beginning of battle, before you have a chance to protect your party. If he manages to use it before you can put up a Big Guard, a Game Over is guaranteed. Fortunately, Lapis Laser requires 10 MP to cast. Once you've

used Magic Hammer twice on the body, he can no longer cast it. But we can't cast Magic Hammer right away, because we need as much MP as possible to kill the arms before they can use their equally deadly Arm Grab.

Your first move must be Big Guard. If possible have Red cast it, since his MP is just about perfect for it; you can use Cloud or Cid instead if Red's turn is too far away, but you will most likely have to sacrifice one Magic Breath because of it. Should he use Lapis Laser, have Cid cast Cure-All and Red follow up with White Wind. Ideally your turn order should be this, assuming he never uses Lapis Laser or Arm Grab: Red casts Big Guard, while Cid and Cloud cast Magic Breath. Cast Cure if Cloud's HP falls below 550, since Lapis Laser will kill him otherwise. Cloud casts Magic Hammer on the body, while Cid and Red cast Magic Breath. Red casts Magic Hammer on the body, sealing Lapis Laser, while Cid casts Magic Hammer on an arm. Unless Magic Breath missed, both arms should have less than 4000 HP remaining. If the spell did miss, sense the arm that wasn't hit and use your limit breaks and possibly Trine to put it below 4000 HP. Three Magic Breaths in quick succession will kill them, bypassing the most dangerous part of the battle. (Below 2500 HP the chance of an arm using Arm Grab jumps to 50%--this both deprives you of a Magic Breath caster and forces you to spend extra MP on Life.) Note that one arm still has 100 MP remaining; you can draw on this if Carry Armor forces you to cast Life or White Wind.

Once the arms are dead, you are safe. Sense Carry Armor, move your characters to the front row, and start using physical attacks. Red can use up all his MP on Trine, but Cloud and Cid need to save theirs. The extra damage from Elemental=Ramuh and Elemental=Lightning will make this phase much faster. When he falls to a few hundred HP, kill Cloud and Red and finish the battle with Cid.

Replace Cid's Sense with Magic Plus. He should not revive his allies. Head over to the submarine, ignoring the chests, and fight the first battle outside the sub.

Submarine Crew x2
1500 HP (85 MP)

Cast Frog Song on both of them. Drain the MP from one, cast Aqualung, drain the MP from the other, and finish them with Trine.

Revive and fully heal Cloud before fighting the next battle. Give him the Revive materia just in case.

Submarine Crew x2
1500 HP (85 MP)

Use the same strategy as above, but make sure that both Cloud and Cid end the battle with full HP and as much MP as possible. You will go to the next battle without having a chance to open the menu, and we need Cloud to divert the Submarine Crews' attacks; it would be nearly impossible for Cid to live to his second turn otherwise.

Submarine Crew x3
1500 HP (85 MP)

This is an attack from both sides; two Submarine Crews are in front of the party, while one is behind. Cloud and Cid will have to take three hits before their first turns, two of which will probably be back attacks. Have Cid kill the group of two with Magic Breath, while Cloud casts Frog Song on the surviving enemy. Have Cloud kill himself, then let Cid end the battle.

Finally, a save point! Take the troops in the front as prisoners, and initiate the sub minigame. It's very easy if you stay a short distance behind the leader sub and mash the Square button; I can usually kill it in 20 seconds or less. Be aware that you must win this, as otherwise you would need to fight another battle and hijack the red sub to get the Key to the Ancients.

There are two things you need to do once you get the sub. First, pick up the Key to the Ancients. In the northwest corner of the ocean is a long trench. Follow it straight to the end, and there will be a tunnel leading to the right. Go in this tunnel to pick up the Key to the Ancients. And second, visit the Sunken Gelnika. It is at the end of the underwater trench near the Gold Saucer.

Use the save point in the hallway, and go through the doorway next to it. In the northeast corner of the next room, on the lower level, is the Double Cut materia. Pick it up. The enemies here are very strong, but fortunately all of them are susceptible to Sleep. Expect to do some reviving here.

XX. Rocket Town and Midgar Area

-Materia: Full Cure

-Items: None

Leave the Gelnika and return to the surface. Sleep in the old woman's house in Junon, then board the airship. It's time to recruit Yuffie. Set down outside the Rocket Town forest, and replace Red with Cait Sith. Put Added Effect=Transform in Cid's armor. Kill off Cloud and Cait Sith in another battle.

WARNING: If you want to collect the Magic Shuriken, Hairpin, or Dragoon Lance before starting the Wutai materia sidequest, you will have to get them prior to this fight.

Mystery Ninja

600 HP (117 MP)

One Trine will kill her.

After battle, you will be on a field screen with Yuffie. Do not open the menu at any time. Instead, talk to her and select the following:

"Not interested."

"...petrified."

"Wait a second!"

"...That's right."

"...Let's hurry on."

Yuffie is now a member of your party. Rest at an inn, and replace Cait Sith with Red. Have Elfadunk put them all under Sadness.

Then form a party of Cloud, Barret, and Yuffie. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Enemy Skill = Restore
Barret: Manipulate
Yuffie: Enemy Skill = Transform, Sense
Added Effect = Seal, Cover

Set the airship down in the Wutai grasslands, but do not approach the village of Wutai itself. Have Yuffie attack Razor Weed until his Spaz Voice counterattack successfully inflicts Fury. Get back into the airship and set down outside Rocket Town. Save your game. Finally, head toward the rocket. When you get close you will be forced to fight three consecutive battles.

Attack Squad x2
1300 HP (100 MP)

Yuffie is going to learn Clear Tranquil in this battle, by using her Greased Lightning limit 8 times. Have Barret attempt to manipulate one Attack Squad, while Yuffie casts Mini on the other until he is shrunken. Have the manipulated Attack Squad use Machine Gun on Yuffie to fill up her limit gauge. Whenever Yuffie gets a limit break, used it on the non-manipulated Attack Squad; he should be able to take five Greased Lightnings before he dies. On the turns when she doesn't have a limit break, Yuffie should heal herself or use Sense on the Attack Squads. Cloud, meanwhile, should defend and periodically cast Cure. Once the first Attack Squad is dead, Barret will need to re-manipulate the survivor after each Greased Lightning. If more than one Greased Lightning goes critical, you'll need to do this battle again.

After the required number of Greased Lightnings have been used, inflict Mini on the second Attack Squad as well. Then kill Barret and Yuffie, and have Cloud end the battle.

Attack Squad x2
1300 HP (100 MP)

Use Frog Song on both enemies, drain MP with Magic Hammer, and kill them with two Aqualungs.

Attack Squad x2, Senior Grunt
1300 HP (100 MP), 2600 HP (245 MP)

Cast Frog Song on the Senior Grunt, then the Attack Squads. Magic Breath may or may not kill the Attack Squads; if not, finish them with Trine. Drain any needed MP from the Senior Grunt, and kill him with Trine. Do not bother with Aqualung; the Senior Grunt is resistant to water.

At this point Cid will demand to come with you, and you will have to pick a new party. Select Red as your third character. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Enemy Skill = HP Plus
Cid: Restore = Comet, Enemy Skill = Revive
Added Effect = Seal, Magic Plus = Destruct
Red: Restore = Revive, Enemy Skill**
Sense

Set the battle speed to the slowest. Then climb the ladder to face Rude and the guards.

Rude, Attack Squad x2
9000 HP (240 MP), 1300 HP (100 MP)

Cloud should have Cross Slash now; use it to paralyze Rude. If he manages to cast MBarrier first, Cid's DeBarrier will remove it. Have Red cast Big Guard and Cid eliminate the Attack Squads with Magic Breath. In the next two rounds everyone should cast Aqualung, then eliminate Rude's MP with Magic Hammer. If he damages Cloud, cast Cure immediately; each Grand Spark does 200 damage with MBarrier, and it will occasionally happen that all three Grand Sparks hit Cloud.

Continue attacking with Aqualung, and you should have plenty of MP left near the end of the battle. Make sure Rude is below 600 HP before you start preparing for the end. Cast DeBarrier on Cid and Red and move them forward, making sure they both have enough MP for Big Guard plus a few Cures. If Red dies first, Cid can kill himself instantly with Comet. Have Cloud cast Aqualung immediately afterward to end the battle.

Heal Cloud if necessary, and walk into the rocket to trigger the final battle.

Senior Grunt
2600 HP (245 MP)

Open with Frog Song on the Senior Grunt, and drain some much-needed MP with Magic Hammer. Finish him with Laser and Magic Breath.

Now head into the cockpit. The rocket launches into outer space, and you can now collect the Huge Materia. Press Circle-Square-X-X to collect it on your first try. Or if you don't want to bother, you can simply walk out of the cockpit without collecting it.

Eventually, you will be back on the airship. Set down on the west side of the Cosmo area, and walk into Cosmo Canyon. Rest at the inn. You can climb the ladder on the right side of the village to pick up the Full Cure materia, though it's pretty useless even if we overlook the 3000 AP required to learn the spell. Head up to Bugenhagen's observatory and talk to him. If you've picked up any of the Huge Materia, choose to go down after he shows you the machine. You will be transported directly to the airship.

Head north to the Icicle area. Set the airship down in the space just south of the City of the Ancients, and enter. Take the left path to the room where you picked up the Aurora Armet, this time taking the upper path. Walk to the end and approach the platform in the center of the room. A long cutscene will take place. Walk away from the pillar, and another cutscene will occur. Then, when you leave the city and board the airship, one more cutscene will take place on the world map. It's Weapon time!

Set the airship down in the Midgar area. Form a party of Cloud, Tifa, and Cid. Equip these materia:

Cloud: Enemy Skill = HP Plus
Tifa: Enemy Skill

Cid: Enemy Skill = Magic Plus, Restore = Revive
Elemental = Fire, Destruct = Comet

Have Elfadunk put the party under Sadness. Then reduce the battle speed to the slowest setting. Wait for Weapon to reach Midgar, and save your game. Approach him to trigger the battle. You need a calculator for this fight.

BOSS: Diamond Weapon
30,000 HP (30,000 MP)

Keep your party constantly under Big Guard, and you should only occasionally need to heal. Since he has virtually unlimited MP, you can steal as much with Magic Hammer as you want. His fire-based spit attack does 550 damage with Sadness, while his foot stamp does almost 800. The foot stamp is always used on the character with the highest current HP.

Unfortunately, Diamond Weapon is immune to Sense. I cannot stress enough how important it is that you accurately calculate his remaining HP; if you kill him too early, the unnecessary survivors will get 35,000 EXP each. The most effective attack against Diamond Weapon is Trine; it does 600 damage--almost as much as Magic Breath--for a mere 20 MP. Do not use more than one limit break; this will trigger Diamond Flash, cutting the party's HP by 7/8 and inflicting Silence. You cannot afford that.

When one more Trine or Magic Breath from Cloud will kill him, have Cid cast Comet on Tifa and then on himself. This should easily kill them even with MBarrier and Sadness. Then have Cloud finish the battle.

XXI. Wutai

-Materia: MP Absorb

-Items: Magic Shuriken, Hairpin, Dragoon Lance, Peace Ring

Before we can progress with the story, there is one very important sidequest that has to be taken care of. To avoid fighting the Turks in Midgar, we will have to go through the materia sidequest in Wutai to rescue Elena. But since your materia is taken away, and you have neither items nor healing limit breaks to heal, how are these battles possible?

As it turns out, Yuffie only steals 48 materia. She always takes them in this order (thanks to Apathetic Aardvark for the list):

Master Summon
Knights of Round
Master Command
Master Magic
Bahamut ZERO
W-Summon
W-Magic
Mega-All
Counter
Typhon
Hades
Quadra Magic
Mime
Magic Counter
Ultima
Shield

Full Cure
Neo Bahamut
Phoenix
Enemy Skill
Double Cut
Slash-All
Exp Plus
Alexander
Kjata
Bahamut
W-Item
Contain
HP<->MP
Morph
Steal As Well
Added Cut
Final Attack
Manipulate
Sneak Attack
Added Effect
Comet
Elemental
Throw
Leviathan
HP Absorb
MP Absorb
Odin
MP Turbo
Titan
Ramuh
Deathblow
Ifrit
Gil Plus
Counter Attack
Shiva
Long Range
Pre-emptive
Chocobo Lure
Choco/Mog
Enemy Away
Luck Plus
Magic Plus
Speed Plus
Enemy Lure
All
HP Plus
MP Plus
Cover
Destruct
Gravity
Time
Barrier
Exit
Transform
Mystify
Seal
Revive
Earth
Poison
Sense

Steal
Heal
Restore
Lightning
Ice
Fire
Underwater

There is no way you'll be able to keep Enemy Skill, because it is too high on the list. But fortunately, you won't need it; the basic magic materia will take care of all your offensive and defensive needs, and the battles are short enough that MP is not an issue. The highest-ranked materia we really need are the three Gravity materia; hence, you need to possess 48 materia ranked higher than Gravity.

The cheapest way to do this is buying lots of Cover materia. They are sold for 1000 gil apiece, making Cover the cheapest materia that does the job. But since the only place that sells them is Wall Market, we need to make a trip to Bone Village. Tell them you're looking for good treasure, and when selecting the dig site choose right next to the crashed plane at the entrance, near the cockpit. After a few attempts you should get the Key to Sector 5, allowing you to reenter Midgar. Go through Sector 5 and Sector 6 to Wall Market, and visit the materia salesman. (He's the guy who asked you to sleep at the inn during the Don Corneo mission, in the upper right corner of the first screen.) Move Gravity and all lower-ranked materia to the bottom of the list, and count how many materia you have remaining. Then buy enough Cover to increase that number to 48. Depending on how many materia you picked up on the way, you may need to buy as many as 20 Cover materia. Don't worry about being able to afford it; if you picked up all the items I suggested, you should have close to 100,000 gil by now.

Now set the airship down in Wutai, just outside the village. Make a party of Cloud, Tifa, and Red. Equip the following materia:

Cloud:	Restore = Poison
Tifa:	Restore
Red:	Transform = Sense, Lightning

Attempt to enter Wutai, and the sidequest will open with a battle.

Attack Squad x2
1300 HP

Have Red inflict Mini on them one at a time, while Cloud poisons them. Tifa should do nothing but defend now. Then have Red sense them, and kill off Cloud and Red. On the highest battle speed, Poison should end the battle pretty quickly.

Now enter Wutai. Head northwest to the screen with the bell and the pagoda. Enter the building on your right, and enter the room to your left. Sleep here, then examine the wall to enter a secret passage. At the end is a Magic Shuriken. Go right to the second screen, and enter the secret passage in the first room to pick up the Hairpin. Now talk to the man lying on the ground four times to make Yuffie come out. Enter the Turtle's Paradise (the bar on the southwest corner of the main screen), and talk to Elena for another cutscene. Go north to the item shop, and open the chest for an MP Absorb materia; it will be immediately stolen from you. Head to the far right of this screen, enter the house, and fold back the fabric to uncover Yuffie.

Finally, examine the moving pot outside the Turtle's Paradise and punch it three times to corner Yuffie.

Have Cloud press either the left or right switch when prompted; both will trap your other party members. Then press the switch again to release them. Now go to the save point. Replace Tifa with Cait Sith. Give Transform to Cait Sith, and make sure Red has a Restore materia. Return to the screen with the Pagoda, and ring the bell to access a hidden passage. Go downstairs to see a familiar face. Then head upstairs, and you will have to fight some more Shinra grunts.

Attack Squad x3

1300 HP

There's three of them this time. But thanks to Mini and Bio, they are just as easy as before. Once all three are poisoned, kill off Cloud and Cait Sith. You could also kill them off with Bolt; it does a decent 200 damage, and Red has more than enough MP.

Head down and then left to exit the building. Don't forget to rest in the nap room. Now go outside and talk to Reno. Before you fight the next battle, you need to fill Barret's limit gauge. Though the Razor Weed's Spaz Voice can be useful for getting limit breaks faster, be sure to rest again if anyone is under Fury; you do not want your attacks to miss in the coming battle.

Make sure your party is Cloud, Barret, and Red. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Restore = Gravity
Barret: Gravity
Red: Gravity = Heal, Restore
 Revive = Barrier

Save your game and go up Da-Chao Statue. Go right, then left, then down. (The cave Rude is standing outside, on the third screen, has a Dragoon Lance.) Then go down to initiate the boss fight.

BOSS: Rapps

6000 HP (300 MP)

The danger lies in Rapps' opening move. Aero3 is instant death for one character; if he opens with Aero3 on Red you will lose the ability to revive your allies and heal poison. Opening on Barret isn't much better, since the 34 MP needed for Life can seriously strain Red's MP--not to mention that you can't prevent Aero3 until he fills Barret's limit gauge once more.

Fortunately, the chances of this happening aren't so great. Have Barret use Mindblow as soon as possible to eliminate Rapps' MP.

Once his MP is gone, the battle becomes very easy. Unlike most bosses, Rapps is vulnerable to gravity; the first casting of Demi will do 1500 damage for a mere 14 MP, and Demi will continue to do several hundred damage per casting for quite a while. This is especially fortunate because Rapps has obscenely high Magic Defense, making most magic little more effective than physical attacks. Plus, with Demi there's no chance of accidentally killing him. Restore and Poisona should take care of all your healing needs.

When Demi does 100 damage or less per casting, kill off Barret and then Red. Have Cloud defend, while Red casts a Barrier on him. Once Red is killed,

Cloud can finish Rapps with Cross Slash.

That wasn't so bad, was it? Not only did you get to avoid the Turks in exchange for three easy battles, you earned an MP Absorb materia as a bonus. Now that we've gotten that out of the way, we can finish the storyline. Fly the airship over the Northern Crater to initiate a cutscene. Then fly it over Midgar, to start one of the most trying segments of this challenge.

XXII. Midgar, Sector 8

-Materia: None

-Items: None

Use the save point before descending into the Sector 8 underground. This is a nasty area, and you will probably need to do a lot of Cure and Magic Hammer casting. (Be sure to put Behemoth to sleep if you wish to use Magic Hammer on him--his Flare counterattack is deadly.) Head down, take the ladder to the next screen, and attempt to go right. The floor beneath you will collapse, and you will have to climb the ladder to your left. Do so, walk through the pipe to the other side of the screen, and run for the save point near the exit.

You will encounter the Turks in the first screen of the tunnels. Fortunately, they have not forgotten what you just did in Wutai. Avoid this fight, then head forward. Before we can approach the cannon, we need to make a detour to Shinra Headquarters. Go right at the first fork in the road, head up the tunnel, and then go left. Climb the ladder and you will be outside Shinra HQ. Make a party of Cloud, Cait Sith, and Yuffie; make sure all of them have Manipulate. Take the elevator to Floor 65, and run around until you encounter Sword Dance. Manipulate him, and have him use Slap to put all three characters under Fury.

Go back down, and save outside the building. Set up your materia like so:

Cloud: Enemy Skill = Revive
Cait Sith: Restore = All, Enemy Skill, Long Range
 Double Cut = Counter Attack, Barrier, Revive
Yuffie: Enemy Skill = HP Plus, HP Plus
 All = Restore, Destruct

Now go back in the tunnel, heading down three screens to the first fork in the road. This time head left. Along the way, Scarlet and Heidegger will attack you with the most boring boss in the game.

BOSS: Proud Clod, Jamar Armor
60,000 HP (320 MP), 20,000 HP (300 MP)

Before you start, let me warn you that you cannot fight this battle without a calculator. Due to Proud Clod's enormous HP and Magic Defense, we have no choice but to fight this battle using physical attacks and limit breaks. Because of this, to kill him you are forced to do a little damage at a time hundreds of times over the course of about an hour and a half. In order to ensure that Cait Sith is able to finish him quickly once he is the only one left alive, you need to know Proud Clod's exact HP right until you're about to kill him. Proud Clod is immune to Sense, so you can't rely on that.

That said, it's really not as bad as the previous paragraph makes it out to be. Dice still does up to 2400 damage per use, and Cross Slash is also pretty

powerful at this point. Even when you don't have limit breaks, Cait Sith and Yuffie are both doing more than 100 damage per hit; Cait Sith is both attacking twice per turn and counterattacking after getting hit by Proud Clod. Their regular attacks will miss a lot due to Fury, but the more frequent use of limit breaks more than makes up for it.

Because constantly casting Cure can drain a lot of MP over the course of the battle, Yuffie's Clear Tranquil will take care of most of your healing. With Fury, you should only rarely need to heal--generally after a particularly nasty critical hit. When not using Cross Slash or a defensive spell, Cloud should defend. The machine guns are Proud Clod's deadliest attack, particularly if used twice in a combo; they are also the only way your characters are likely to die if you keep them above 800 HP. You can revive fallen allies with Life in a pinch, though if Yuffie is killed healing will start to become difficult. Materia Jammer casts Reflect, making Cure bounce away; have Yuffie cast DeBarrier to remove it.

Draw all your MP from Proud Clod himself first, to disable his potentially devastating Beam Cannon. Once he gets on his knees, you need to abuse Magic Hammer until his MP is gone. The 300 MP from Jamar Armor should be more than enough to sustain you for the rest of the battle. Each time Proud Clod tries to use Beam Cannon he will waste three turns: getting on his knees, a charge turn while on the ground, and getting up after Beam Cannon has failed.

Once he is down to a few hundred HP, cast Barrier on Cait Sith and have him defend. Meanwhile, Yuffie and Cloud should move to the front row. They should die pretty quickly. Have Cait Sith finish him with Dice when they do.

Once that's done, immediately revive the others and restore them to full health. Then backtrack to the Shinra building and save. Rest on Floor 64 to remove Cait Sith's Fury, and come back down. Run all the way to the save point at the base of the Sister Ray. Your materia setup:

Cloud: Enemy Skill = Restore
Cait Sith: Enemy Skill** = Long Range, Heal, Counter Attack
Barrier = All*, Double Cut, Sense
Yuffie: Enemy Skill = Restore, HP Plus
Added Effect = Seal, HP Plus

Make sure that you reduce the battle speed to the slowest setting possible before you start the fight. Believe me, this is important.

BOSS: Hojo, Bad Rap Sample, Poodler Sample
13,000 HP (250 MP), 11,000 HP (120 MP), 10,000 HP (200 MP)

This is the easy part of the battle. Cast Frog Song on both samples, then Big Guard to Haste the party. Sense Hojo's HP, and damage him with physical attacks. The Samples should wake up when Hojo has about 4500 HP remaining; cast Frog Song on them once again and continue attacking. MP will not be a problem in this battle, but make sure to drain as much as you can at the end. When one more attack from Yuffie will kill him, have Cait Sith cast the first Barrier-All.

BOSS: Helletic Hojo, Right Arm, Left Arm
26,000 HP (200 MP), 5000 HP (300 MP), 24,000 HP (400 MP)

While it is alive, the Right Arm can attack one of your characters for 800 damage; it can do so twice on the same turn. Cast Laser on the Right Arm

once, then finish it with three Aqualungs. Cait Sith may Sense the body parts at any time. Killing the Right Arm will disable the arm attack, so the body can only cast Sleepel on your characters or revive the arm. Wake Cait Sith up with Cloud, and Cloud with Yuffie; Sleepel can do nothing to Yuffie. For the most part, we will be taking out the Left Arm with physical attacks and limit breaks. Once both the Left Arm and the Right Arm are dead, Helletic Hojo will automatically die. With Haste, you should be able to kill the Right Arm before it can attack every time.

Cast the second Barrier-All when the Right Arm regenerates for the last time. For you to survive Hojo's final form, Cait Sith and Yuffie need to enter with as much MP as possible. Have them both use Magic Hammer, then have Cait Sith deal the final blow with Trine. Cloud should stand by for the moment.

BOSS: Lifeform-Hojo N
30,000 HP (100 MP)

This is the big one. Have Cloud use Magic Hammer as soon as he appears to prevent Slow. Unfortunately, that's all the MP you'll have for the rest of the battle. The challenge is removing his 30,000 HP while surviving his status effects and the high damage from Combo, without running out of MP. Damage-wise, this battle is very similar to Demons Gate; though your normal attacks and Cross Slash are much more effective, you'll have trouble winning this if you don't get some good rolls with Dice. Counter Attack is particularly helpful, as Cait Sith gets three chances to strike back every time he is targeted by Combo. Darkness will definitely hurt your accuracy, but even so a large chunk of your damage will come from physical attacks. Like Proud Clod, Lifeform-Hojo N is immune to Sense.

Obviously, the big problem is Combo. The last three hits inflict Poison, Darkness, and Sleep; if all four hits do normal damage, it does around 800 damage. But since they are physical attacks, they can and will go critical--possibly two or more times in the same Combo. This is particularly dangerous if the second or fourth hits go critical, as they do much more damage than the others. Whenever one of the first three hits goes critical, the target should immediately defend; this will cut the remaining damage in half. Remember that you have no way to revive characters that get killed.

How you treat Combo depends on who the target is. If you see Yuffie is the target, defend no matter what; despite the HP Pluses, it is too easy for Combo to kill her. Since she is immune to Sleep, all it takes to heal her is Poisons from Cait Sith plus Cure (or Clear Tranquil if she has a ready limit break). If Cloud is targeted, have Yuffie wake him up. Make him cast Cure on himself and Cait Sith cast Poisons; when he gets his next turn shortly after, cast Cure a second time. Hopefully, most of the Combos will be directed at Cait Sith. Have Cloud wake him up, Cait Sith cast Poisons on himself, and Yuffie cast Cure once; this will give him time to use Dice. Cloud should be able to cast a second Cure before Hojo moves again. Note that there will be times when the remedies listed above don't work--if the character is at very low HP and a physical attack will kill them, for instance. Those are the times you should use White Wind. Have Cait Sith cast it if possible, since he will have the most MP left over.

Hojo has a strong tendency to use Combo on the character who attacked him last. To take advantage of this, do your best to ensure that Cloud and Yuffie never attack unless Cait Sith gets another attack before Hojo's turn. This should guarantee that Cait Sith is the target most of the time, ensuring you the maximum number of counterattacks and Dice uses for your MP. He will still sometimes target other characters, so be ready to have them defend if a critical hit arises.

Stop using Dice when he hits 2400 HP, since there is a risk of ending the battle prematurely. Hopefully you will have enough MP left over to cast two or three Trines. Reduce him to 500 HP or below, so Yuffie's Trine will kill him. Have Yuffie defend while Cait Sith casts Barrier on her, then have both Cloud and Cait Sith move to the front row. Keep her healed until both guys are dead; thank God we don't have to worry about Sleep. Then finish him off.

"How sad... for him." I couldn't have put it better myself.

Besides the cutscenes, there's nothing left to do until you change to Disc 3.

*****DISC THREE*****

XXIII. Descent into the Northern Crater

-Materia: Hades, HP Absorb, Mega All, Shield, W-Magic, Counter

-Items: Save Crystal

Before we can go into the Northern Crater, there is one very important materia to pick up in the Sunken Gelnika. Take the airship out of here, set down in Junon, and take the sub to the Gelnika. Take advantage of the save point and go left, then forward. (Be sure to put Serpent to sleep if you encounter him, since he can wipe out the whole party with Aqualung.) The Hades materia is underneath the helicopter; grab it. For our purposes, Added Effect=Hades in an armor is almost as good as a Ribbon.

Save on the world map, and head into the Crater. Pick up the Save Crystal at the top. This is the one item you're allowed to use, and the final segment of the game will be far more irritating if you don't. Remember to put the enemies to sleep before you drain their MP; Dark Dragon, Allemagne, and King Behemoth all have violent reactions to magic. Send Cloud, Barret, and Red along the left-down path. Once you get to the screen designated "Bottom of the Northern Crater," use the Save Crystal to create a save point and save your game. Now walk back the way you came, until you get to the split point. This time head to the right.

You will be on top of a spiraling path. Walk up and down the top of this area, taking care not to wander too far down. Make sure all three characters have Enemy Skill, and Cloud and Red have Manipulate. You will sometimes get attacked from both sides by a pair of Death Dealers; unless you have Exit and Red is miraculously spared, this will cause a Game Over in most cases. Hope this doesn't happen, and keep wandering until you encounter Pollensalta by herself.

Pollensalta
4000 HP (220 MP)

Attempt to manipulate her until you succeed. Have her cast Angel Whisper on all three characters. Then drain her MP with Magic Hammer, use a physical attack on her, and kill Barret and Red. Cloud can easily finish her with a few Lasers and Trine.

After battle, revive and heal Barret and Red. Then get out of here, and return to the bottom via the left-down path. Time for your final save. There are a variety of materia available in the Crater: HP Absorb on the second screen from the top, Shield on the second screen of the swamp, and W-Magic and

Counter on the grassy screen just after the swamp. But you don't need any of them, and in my opinion collecting them is a waste of time. You also have access to Movers now. These little guys are found three at a time in the swamp areas. They grant 0 EXP and 2400 AP per battle and are easy to beat, making them perfect for leveling up materia in a Low Level game. But once again, you don't need to fight them; your materia is fine as it is.

XXIV. The Final Battles

-Materia: None

-Items: None

Select "Let's go, everyone!" to make the final journey down the stepping stones. Yuffie and Red would be a good choice for a party. Equip Enemy Skill on everyone and Long Range, Counter Attack, and Double Cut on Red. All the remaining bosses are immune to Sense, so don't even bother equipping it. Frog Song will disable every enemy on the way, and is very good for recovering MP for the next battle. When you get to the bottom level, set the battle speed to the slowest setting. Then head up for the last Jenova fight.

BOSS: Jenova-SYNTHESIS A, B, C

60,000 HP (600 MP), 10,000 HP (600 MP), 8000 HP (600 MP)

Cast Big Guard right away. Then cast Aqualung until both arms are dead. If she manages to cast Stop or Bio2, remove the status effects with White Wind; because of MBarrier, this will also be your main method of healing.

While the arms are dead, pound away with physical attacks. When the arms are revived, they will have 2500 and 2000 HP respectively; three Aqualungs are enough to kill them again, removing the need to heal or cast Big Guard. Hope that the left arm's slap doesn't inflict Fury, as this will cause Aqualung to miss frequently. If Cloud is under Fury when the battle ends, this could create problems in the next battle.

Once Jenova falls below 15,000 HP she stops attacking and begins the countdown to Ultima. Have Cloud top off his MP with Magic Hammer while his allies heal him, then have everyone use Magic Hammer to ensure Ultima can't be cast. If Cloud still doesn't have full MP, steal some from his allies. With Haste, you should have plenty of time to do this. The countdown ends, Jenova doesn't cast Ultima, and you avoid her massive EXP award.

After some more cutscenes, you will need to select two new characters for Sephiroth. Cid and Cait Sith are the obvious choices because of their equipment. All three characters need Enemy Skill, one needs Destruct, and one needs Added Effect=Hades in his armor. That is enough. Stay at the slowest battle speed.

BOSS: Bizarro Sephiroth, Head, Left Magic, Right Magic, Core

40,000 HP, 2000 HP, 4000 HP, 4000 HP, 10,000 HP

At the beginning of every turn, the MP for each of Bizarro Sephiroth's parts is automatically replenished. This means that in practice Bizarro has infinite MP, and you can steal as much as you want with Magic Hammer.

In order to kill Bizarro, you have to get rid of the Core. The Core starts the battle immune to all damage, and keeps this immunity until both Left Magic and Right Magic are dead. Left Magic and Right Magic cast Bolt3/Ice3 and

Quake3/Fire3, respectively, and absorb the elements that they cast. Fortunately, neither absorbs Aqualung; five castings will be sufficient to kill them. You have to be careful not to kill the Head too quickly, though. While both the Head and the Core are alive Bizarro will use Stigma, which inflicts 2000 damage plus Poison and Slow to the entire party; you have no hope of surviving it without Big Guard, and even then it will severely slow you down.

Cast Aqualung twice, then wait two rounds. Bizarro will kill two characters with Bolt3 and Quake3; revive them via Angel Whisper, and recover your MP with Magic Hammer. Immediately after Quake3 cast another Aqualung to finish off the head, just in time to prevent Stigma. Also cast Big Guard at this time, and if necessary replenish your MP with Magic Hammer. (Had you killed the Head immediately, Bizarro would have been able to revive it and cast Stigma on the same turn.) He will then use a physical attack, giving you plenty of time to kill Left Magic and Right Magic with two Aqualungs. You now have six rounds to kill the Core with 11 Aqualungs, before he is able to use Stigma again. Haste makes a huge difference here, believe me.

Once the Core is dead, the battle becomes very easy--almost boring. Cast either Trine or Aqualung at Bizarro (I prefer Trine because of the lower MP cost) and draw MP from the body as needed. There's little point in healing your characters; Bizarro can only kill one character at a time from now on, and Heartless Angel will reduce everyone to 1 HP anyway. Casting Angel Whisper after he kills a character will provide all the healing you need. When he dies you'll hear a loud rumbling sound, and the transition to THE final boss will commence.

BOSS: Safer Sephiroth
80,000 HP

Like Bizarro, Safer has "infinite" MP. For such a formidable-looking boss, he is disappointingly easy. He always performs his attacks in the following order:

1. Wall
2. Shadow Flare
3. Wing attack
4. <Rises into the air>
5. Pale Horse
6. Super Nova
7. Break OR Heartless Angel
8. <Comes down>
9. DeSpell
10. Deen
11. Wing attack
12. <Rises into the air>
13. Pale Horse
14. Super Nova
15. Break OR Heartless Angel
16. <Comes down>

Break is replaced with Heartless Angel when Safer has 20,000 HP or less remaining. Of the moves listed above, the only one capable of killing all characters at once is Deen. Shadow Flare, the wing attack, Pale Horse, and Break only hit one character, so Angel Whisper will take care of them. Super Nova and Heartless Angel do severe proportional damage, but can't actually kill you. And when ascending, descending, or casting Wall or DeSpell, Safer

cannot hurt anyone at all.

To take advantage of a helpful quirk in Safer's AI, summon Hades immediately after the first Shadow Flare. If he is afflicted with Slow before rising into the air, he reacts by DeSpelling himself and casting Shadow Flare on a random character. Assuming that they don't hit the same character, you will have two Enemy Skill materia with Shadow Flare before the first Deen. Shadow Flare is the single most powerful spell in the game; it costs only 25 MP more than Magic Breath, but does almost twice as much damage. Since you most likely can only summon Hades once, this is really more useful for learning Shadow Flare earlier than anything else. Don't forget to remove Safer's Wall with DeBarrier before you start casting spells at him.

As soon as he uses Pale Horse, revive the fallen character with Angel Whisper while the second survivor does nothing. (In addition to reviving KO'd characters, Angel Whisper also removes Frog--a rather useful feature here.) The next phase is crucial. Super Nova has a chance of inflicting Confusion and Silence on everyone except the character with Added Effect=Hades. If your Confused characters attack those not affected, they will die and you will have no chance of survival. Have the character with Added Effect=Hades cast White Wind ASAP, and any Confused characters defend. (If a character's Magic and E. Skill commands are locked out, have them defend immediately--Silence and Confusion are always inflicted together. You can also find out who is affected by selecting Poisons and attempting to target your party.) Wait mode makes this much easier; if the second character stays in the menu while Angel Whisper is being cast, everyone will be able to act immediately after Super Nova. White Wind also cures Slow, definitely helpful at the lowest battle speed.

After every second Pale Horse/Super Nova/Break sequence, Safer will come down to cast DeSpell and Deen. Since the target of Break will be revived with full HP, have them cast White Wind to fully heal the party. If he uses Heartless Angel instead of Break, just cast Angel Whisper on a random character and have that character cast White Wind. Wait for Safer to cast DeSpell, then put up a Big Guard. Everyone should survive Deen and get limit breaks.

That's basically how the battle goes. Shadow Flare will account for most of your damage, though I don't advise casting it when you have less than 160 MP. Also, don't cast Shadow Flare twice in the same round; you need at least two characters with high MP at any time so you can cast Angel Whisper as needed. Your magic, including Magic Hammer, has an irritating tendency to miss Safer. This will be a long battle, though probably not an especially difficult one.

Sephiroth
1 HP

Omnislash him, or let your counterattack kill him. Your choice.

Way to go! You've finished the LLNIIENA challenge. Fun, wasn't it?

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