

Final Fantasy VII No Materia/No Items FAQ/Walkthrough

by Thundaka

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FINAL FANTASY VII: NO MATERIA/NO ITEMS CHALLENGE

By Thundaka (thundaka@yahoo.com)

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VERSION HISTORY

v1.00: Completed and posted the challenge for the first time. Any corrections or suggestions to improve this guide are most welcome.

v1.10: Made a whole lot of corrections. Removed level 4 limit breaks from my strategies, modified boss strategies based on new information from Terence, and added strategies for obtaining the Ice Ring.

v2.00: Made a major update. Reformatted the FAQ to include a section on optional bosses, established Vincent's place in the party, and updated numerous boss strategies.

v2.01: Corrected a few typos.

v2.02: Corrected a few more typos.

INTRODUCTION

This challenge is a variant of the No Materia challenge first proposed by Maxx_Power. Its rules are simple:

1. You may never equip materia on your weapons or armors.
2. On the two occasions the game forces you to fight with materia--Lightning and Ice on Cloud in the Sector 1 reactor and Fire, All, and Sense on Red XIII when fighting Sample: H0512--you must not use the abilities these materia grant. Once it is possible to remove the materia, you must do so immediately and dispose of them.
3. You may never use the Item command in battle.
4. With the exception of the Save Crystal in the Northern Crater, you may never use the Item submenu under the field menu. (This includes the manuals for your level 4 limit breaks. You aren't going to be plowing through the bosses with Omnislash or Catastrophe.)

As you might guess, these rules greatly constrict the player. All spells and command abilities require materia, and materia is also used to enhance your characters' stats and give them other special abilities. The standard No Materia challenge relies heavily on items: healing items like Antidotes and Phoenix Downs, attack items like Swift Bolts and S-Mines, and occasionally status-casting items like Lunar Curtains. How, you might ask, can a player survive all FFVII's bosses without either of the two?

Limit breaks, and strategic use of armor and accessories, are the key. Aeris' and Yuffie's healing limit breaks are most important. They allow your characters to stay alive long enough to finish the bosses and survive between save points. Other limit breaks--Cloud's Cross Slash, Barret's Mind Blow, and Red XIII's Lunatic High most significantly--have various special effects which can turn the tide of a battle. The Fury status effect is extremely important: it doubles the rate at which you get limit breaks, allowing Aeris' and Yuffie's limits to fully heal the party. It also can be useful for your other characters, though you must keep in mind that Fury causes your attacks to miss much more often than usual. On the other hand, Sadness removes Fury and reduces your limit gains to half their normal rate; you'll generally want to avoid it, whether by equipping a Peace Ring or Ribbon or by avoiding areas where monsters use the status effect. Although it substantially reduces physical and magical damage, making it useful in the final battles, in general Sadness is a very bad status effect.

There are several things you should keep in mind. First, KO'd characters can only be revived by resting at an inn or by Aeris' Pulse of Life limit break. If a character falls in most battles, he or she is lost for the remainder of the battle and possibly for a long time afterwards; thus, you cannot allow your characters to be killed even once. Second, be very careful when you rest. Using a bed, staying overnight at an inn, or any other action which restores your party's HP and MP also removes Fury and Sadness. This occasionally will happen at certain key points in the story; it makes the battles upon exiting and reentering Midgar particularly hazardous. Third, Poison is almost as dangerous as Sadness, as it damages your healers without refilling their limit gauges. Keep Star Pendants or Ribbons on your healers whenever possible.

Though the equipment and accessory setups I recommend often include equipment that increases your attack power--the most powerful weapon available, Gigas Armllet, Power Wrist, and Wizard Bracelet (for Vincent)--in general defensive measures have a higher priority than offensive one. If you feel confident that you can make it through an area or defeat a boss without status protection, for example, feel free to substitute your Ribbons for Power Wrists. Just be careful about it; you have very little to protect you beyond the equipment you wear, and if you screw up you often will have no choice but to return to your last saved game.

CHARACTERS

Cloud Strife: Like it or not, you're require to have him in your party. Cloud naturally has high Strength and HP, along with some pretty effective limit breaks. Cross Slash does the best damage of any Level 1 limit break, and also paralyzes an enemy. Blade Beam hurts all enemies and usually kills its main target. Meteorain performs six hits, each of which does 150% the damage of a normal attack. And Finishing Touch will instantly win most random encounters, killing any enemy not immune to Death. His only real disadvantage is his lack of long range weapons, though with the Gigas Armllet he can do damage from the back row that is comparable to the true long range characters.

Barret Wallace: He's your only long range character until you get Yuffie, and one of only two until at least Wutai. His limit breaks do strong damage, though they aren't quite as powerful as Cloud's. Grenade Bomb hits all enemies for medium damage, Satellite Beam hits all enemies for large damage, and Ungarmax will probably do over 10,000 damage by the time you learn it. And he has Mindblow, which will instantly destroy the MP of Rapps and most random encounter enemies. (Because it is gravity-based, it will not work on

most bosses.) An all-around powerhouse; he is my usual third party member after the Temple of the Ancients.

Tifa Lockheart: Sadly, Tifa is nearly useless in a NMNI party. Her stats are disappointingly weak, her limit breaks even more so. Red XIII, Barret, or Vincent is nearly always a better choice.

Aeris Gainsborough: The second best character in this challenge. There is no way you're going to get out of Midgar without heavy use of Healing Wind, and Seal Evil's status effects are an effective way of neutralizing many early enemies. These two limit breaks will carry you until the Temple of Ancients, where you'll need Pulse of Life to survive. She would have been the best hands down, but she just had to leave the party at the end of Disc 1.

Red XIII: He's nothing special. Lunatic High will put the party under Haste and increase evasion, while Blood Fang allows him to restore some HP on his own. (Contrary to appearances, Blood Fang does not drain MP. The same goes for Cid's Dragon.) His damage-dealing limit breaks are inferior to Cloud's and Barret's, and the single long range weapon he has is pretty weak compared to those of your natural long range characters.

Yuffie Kisaragi: Who'd have thought? The materia thief is the single best character in the NMNI challenge. Clear Tranquil, her 1-2 limit, heals the party in the same manner as Healing Wind. Unlike Aeris, though, she stays with you for the entire game. Just as importantly, she has the Conformer; this weapon does enormous amounts of damage to bosses, and is required for the final battles. I used either Yuffie or Aeris, or preferably both, in any battle that I could.

Cait Sith: At low levels, his Dice is the most damaging attack you have. He also has good Strength and HP, and if you're good at manipulating the Slots he can be a very effective healer. He has some severe drawbacks, though: he lacks a long range weapon, his limit breaks depend heavily on luck, and as the game progresses his limits become progressively weaker relative to the rest of the party. I never used him voluntarily, though he can be useful given the right circumstances.

Cid Highwind: His limit breaks and stats are largely equivalent to Barret's, but he lacks a long range weapon. Since you'll probably spend a while developing Barret before you reach Rocket Town, he's not really worth bothering with beyond the times you're forced to use him on Disc 2.

Vincent Valentine: Vincent is a long range character with good stats. His transformation limit breaks give him big stat boosts, and incidentally also fully restore his HP. He is the only character who is able to employ magical attacks, or (in his Hellmasker form) to inflict a number of status effects including Silence, Mini, and Poison. And his ultimate weapon, the Death Penalty, can rival the Conformer in power once he has enough kills. When used properly Vincent can be an enormous asset. However, he is problematic in a number of ways. To obtain him you must first beat Lost Number, a powerful boss who will not be taken down by an unprepared party. And unless you've killed enough enemies to learn Death Gigas, or you equip him with a Fury Ring to bypass his limit breaks, he cannot be used against Materia Keeper, Red Dragon, or Jenova-DEATH (all of whom absorb Fire); his random attacks are a severe liability when fighting Schizo and Carry Armor. If you decide to put him in your party, do so with caution.

*****DISC ONE*****

I. Midgar - Sector 1 and Sector 7

Watch the pretty opening FMV. Then take control of Cloud. Run forward to encounter your first battle: a forced encounter with two MPs. Attack each of them once to kill them.

Run on to the next screen, and assign names to Cloud and Barret. Put Barret in the back row. You could try killing the random enemies for EXP, but for now I recommend just escaping from all battles. (To escape a battle, hold down the L1 and R1 buttons simultaneously.) You could probably win a few random battles with no problem; just remember that you have no way to heal while in the reactor, and you need enough HP to survive Guard Scorpion and the random battles that follow. Head down to the save point, then cross the bridge.

BOSS: Guard Scorpion
800 HP

This should be easy, but even this early in the game things could become dangerous if he decides to attack one character over and over. Just use physical attacks and limit breaks as you get them. Bolt and Ice are strictly off-limits. There is really only one piece of strategy involved: once he uses his second attack after Search Scope, stop attacking. He will raise his tail, and if he is hit he will damage both Cloud and Barret with Tail Laser. DO NOT let him use Tail Laser.

Guard Scorpion will drop an Assault Gun for Barret. Equip it as soon as you gain control of him. Don't worry about the ten-minute timer; I managed to go all the way to the top, back down to rescue Jessie, and return to the top while winning every random battle along the way, and still had two and a half minutes to spare.

After the reactor explodes, Cloud's HP is restored. Be nice and buy a flower from Aeris--she's going to be doing a lot for you over the next several hours. When you walk forward you'll meet another group of MPs. You can run, but since they're so easy you might as well gain a little more EXP and use a few more Bravers before you go. Anyway, you'll eventually wind up back in Sector 7 and Tifa's Bar. Some stuff happens, you get to rest, Barret gives you 1500 gil, and you'll be on your way to the Sector 5 reactor. At this point you should be able to un-equip Cloud's materia; do so. Don't buy anything here.

II. Midgar - Sectors 5 and 6

Don't get caught on the train. The more random encounters you have, the lower your HP will be when you reach the boss. I recommend putting Cloud, Tifa, and Barret in the back row, and having them escape from all battles; to reduce damage further, defend while you're escaping. Go north, climb down the chute, enter the main area, and climb up the middle ladder. Press the button at the same time as Tifa and Barret. Make sure to take advantage of the save point.

BOSS: Air Buster
1200 HP

Two or three limit breaks to his weak side will finish him. Unlike most enemies, Air Buster's weak side is not determined by which way he's facing; instead, whichever side he did not target with his last attack is his weak side. (If he just used Rear Gunner, for example, you need to attack his front side; if he just turned around, attack his back side.) Don't delay, as his counterattacks can do substantial damage.

When you gain control of Cloud again, you'll be in Aeris' church. Be sure to give the Titan Bangle he drops to Cloud, and to move him back to the front row. Talk to Aeris a few times, name her, and soon you'll help her escape from Reno. Put her in the front row as soon as she is in your party. Tell her to "Run!" from the first guard, "Hold on" for the second (push the top barrel), and "Run!" again from the final guard. Leave the church and make your way to Aeris' house. Rest up and save there, then make your way to Wall Market.

Before you start the Don Corneo mission, you must learn Cross Slash and Seal Evil. Buy a Mythril Rod and Metal Knuckle from the Wall Market weapon shop, and equip the Mythril Rod on Aeris. Then walk through the empty part of Sector 6 and allow Whole Eater and Hell House to refill your limit gauges repeatedly. When your HP gets precariously low, rest at Aeris' house or the Wall Market inn. Use Braver and Healing Wind 8 times each to learn the second limit breaks. Note that you must win the battles for these uses to count toward the total. Refill your limit gauges once more and save.

You need to make sure Cloud is the one chosen for Don Corneo's date. (I found this out the hard way. Corneo's goons reduced Cloud to 50 HP and made him empty his limit gauge, and as a result the only survivor of the Aps battle was Aeris under Sadness.) To ensure this, you must do the following:

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.

So to recap, you need four items: Silk Dress, Blonde Wig, Sexy Cologne, and Diamond Tiara. With these, Cloud is guaranteed to be chosen. Go back to the clothes shop to try on your new clothes. Then save once more, and enter Don Corneo's lair.

Go up the stairs and to the left to enter the room Tifa is in. You will then be summoned to Don Corneo, who will hopefully pick "this healthy-looking girl" as his date. (One wonders how good Corneo's eyesight is.)

Some dialogue with story significance occurs, and the trio falls into the sewers. Equip Tifa's Metal Knuckle, move her to the front row, and reduce the battle speed to the slowest setting.

BOSS: Aps
1800 HP

Use both Cross Slash and Seal Evil at the beginning of battle, and he will be immobilized for a long while. Proceed to melee him to death; by the time he starts moving he will only have a few hundred HP left. Chances are good he'll kill himself with Sewer Tsunami.

Hopefully you survived that battle with most of your health. Head toward the vent on the far right, and climb the ladder on the next screen. Save when you reach the Train Graveyard. Climb over the trains, use the first lighted train to push another train out of the way, and move the second lighted train forward to form a path out of the Train Graveyard. You can engage in a few random battles if you want, but be warned: Ghost's Fire and Drain can be painful at your low levels.

Upon reaching the Sector 7 pillar, your health is automatically restored. Put Cloud and Tifa in the back row and save. Run up the stairs, escaping from all random battles. When you meet up with Barret, put Cloud and Tifa in the front row.

BOSS: Reno
1000 HP

The only thing he has going for him is Pyramid, which a physical attack will easily break. You'll beat him before anyone falls below half health.

IV. Midgar - Sectors 5 and 6

When you gain control of Cloud, send him south a bit. Hopefully he won't get into a random encounter before Barret and Tifa catch up to him. With all three characters, you should be able to win a few random encounters before healing at Aeris' house.

Go back to Wall Market, resting at the inn if necessary. Buy two Mythril Armlets; these are the best armors available prior to the world map, and could be helpful while escaping Midgar. Then buy the Batteries from the weapon shop, and climb the wire to the Shinra tower.

V. Midgar - Assault on Shinra HQ

Save outside the building. You have two choices: you can take the staircase up 59 flights, or you can assault the Shinra head-on and take the elevator from the lobby. The stairs are boring and hard on your thumbs, but they allow you to fight just one forced battle. Taking the direct route saves time, but also leads to several more forced battles: one in the lobby, several in the elevator, and most likely two random encounters. (All battles in the Shinra building are forced prior to receiving Keycards 63-65.) I went with the direct route. In addition to the battles listed above, I also messed up the floor 60 sneaking exercise once and had to fight two Mighty Grunts attacking

from both sides. My characters reached floor 61 with about 90 HP.

Talk to a man wandering around floor 61 for Keycard 62. Then talk to Mayor Domino, and simply guess every option until he gives you Keycards 63-65. On floor 63, go to the monitor to open the minigame. Go to the top of the screen and unlock the door to your left. Keep going as far left as you can, then stop; now open the door directly below you. Walk into the room to your lower left, pick up the A coupon, and climb through the ventilation duct. Go down into the middle vent and pick up the B coupon. Finally, go out the door; open the door to your left and grab the final C coupon. Climb back up the ventilation duct, dropping down through the vent in the monitor room. You can exchange the coupons for an All materia, Star Pendant, and Four Slots.

On floor 64 you can rest and save your game. Floor 65 is simple enough: open the suitcases, place the Midgar Parts on the model, and take Keycard 66 from the suitcase near the stairs. You can encounter Sword Dance on this floor, the first enemy to inflict Fury. It won't do you much good now, though; continue on. Some stuff happens, and you must follow Hojo to floor 67. Equip the Star Pendant on Cloud, put him in the back row, and reduce the battle speed to the lowest level. Then save and go up the elevator. When prompted, have Tifa take Aeris away.

BOSS: Sample: H0512
1000 HP

Opening the battle with Cross Slash will keep him from using Shady Breath for a while, preventing a substantial amount of poison damage. Move Red XIII to the back row, and focus all your attacks on the Sample. You can probably kill him before anyone dies. Don't use Fire or Sense.

After the fight, immediately unequip Red XIII's materia. Make your party Cloud, Barret, and Aeris. Due to the random encounters you've run from, you need to spend some time leveling up on the 65th or 67th floor. Level 13 for Aeris will be high enough to face the bosses that follow. (In theory you could beat Motor Ball with Aeris as low as Level 11, but it would require her to avoid taking any damage at all in the motorcycle minigame. Even at Level 12, it's hard to keep Aeris adequately protected.)

Try to get Sword Dance to use Slap on Aeris, since under Fury she should be able to fully heal the damage the party receives. Sword Dance has 160 HP; Slap is used on the character who reduces him below 80 HP. In any case, you can still rest on Floor 64. Fill up Cloud's and Aeris' limit gauges and rest; then enter the elevator, and become captured by the Turks.

VI. Midgar - Escape from Shinra HQ

After some more talking, you'll wake up to find the guard incapacitated. Follow the trail of blood to floor 69. Take off Cloud's Star Pendant, give him the Four Slots, and save. Note that you can still fight some easy battles on floor 65; this is your last chance to level up before facing two of the hardest bosses in the challenge.

Don't bother trying to put Aeris under Fury; it is removed, and the party's HP restored, when you discover President Shinra's body. Make sure Cloud's Star Pendant is removed. To save time in case you die, go downstairs and have Cloud save before meeting Rufus. When you get control of Aeris, equip the Guard Stick and Star Pendant on Aeris and Mythril Armlets on all your current

characters. Lower the battle speed to the lowest possible setting. Then take the elevator.

BOSS: Hundred Gunner and Heli Gunner
1600 HP and 1000 HP

Without Fury, Healing Wind cannot keep the party alive indefinitely. Because only Barret (and Red XIII with Sled Fang) can hit these bosses, you'll have to hope that Healing Wind holds out for long enough and that Aeris is targetted often enough. Only have Aeris and Red defend when one more attack will fill their limit gauges; it is important that they use their limit breaks to make this fight as short as possible. Barret, meanwhile, should do nothing but attack the Gunners.

Hundred Gunner only deals raw damage. Initially, he hits one target at a time for about 40 damage. As his HP drops, he first uses Main Artillery every turn (30 damage to all) and then Wave Artillery every three turns (50 damage to all).

Heli Gunner is much nastier. In addition to dealing the same damage as Hundred, Heli also uses status effects: AB Cannon inflicts Sleep, C Cannon inflicts Poison, and Firing Line can inflict both on all characters. Poison is bad; it saps away more HP the longer the battle lasts, and if Barret is poisoned it's quite possible he'll die before you can do enough damage to finish him. (You will probably need to use Healing Wind three times.) If Barret is put to sleep, have Aeris or Red attack to wake him up; the longer the battle drags on, the harder it is to survive. At low HP Heli Gunner stops using status effects and starts using Spinning Bodyblow and Flying Drill instead; Flying Drill does almost 100 damage even in the back row. With a little luck, Barret can finish him before he kills anybody.

Shift to the rooftop, and equip your new Mythril Armlet. I hope you have Cross Slash ready.

BOSS: Rufus and Dark Nation
500 HP and 140 HP

Begin by using Cross Slash on the Dark Nation. If you're lucky, it will be dead before it can put a Barrier on Rufus. If not, you'll still kill it in one hit. Attack Rufus until you gain a second limit break; use another Cross Slash to paralyze him for several turns. This is a pretty easy battle, and you should win on your first try.

After defeating Rufus, head downstairs and save before talking to Tifa. You really don't want to do all that again if you lose to Motor Ball.

When in control of Aeris, have her head toward the front doors to trigger the cutscene. (Where'd he get that motorcycle, anyway?) You are now able to change characters and remove equipment PHS-style. Put Cloud, Barret, and Aeris in your active party; give all three of them Mythril Armlets, Cloud the Protect Vest, and Aeris the Mythril Rod and Talisman. All three should be in the front row. When you're ready, press Start to initiate the motorcycle minigame. Your HP for the Motor Ball battle is tied to how much damage you take in the minigame. You need at least 320 HP remaining to win.

BOSS: Motor Ball
2600 HP

On his opening move, Motor Ball will attack the party from behind. Since you are now in the back row, his wheel attack will be reduced to 20 damage. He will attack your highest-HP character (probably Cloud) with Arm Attack on his first two turns, then transform into the compact form to use Twin Burner. He will skip a turn, hit the whole party with his wheel attack once again, skip another turn, and change to his upright form. Then he will use Rolling Fire, a devastating attack that does 200 damage to your entire party.

Since Aeris will almost certainly not get Healing Wind before Rolling Fire is used, she must have enough HP to survive it. Have Aeris move forward on her first turn, Cloud on his second turn. Have everyone pummel him until after Twin Burner, at which point Aeris should defend to reduce damage from his wheel attack. Continue attacking until he changes into the upright form, at which point Cloud should move to the back row. Have Aeris, Cloud, and Barret attack in that order during the Rolling Fire animation; this will allow you to activate Healing Wind and Cross Slash before Motor Ball attacks again. From there, it's just a matter of surviving long enough to deal the killing blow. Move Cloud to the front again after the second Arm Attack, and hope you do enough damage to kill him before the next Rolling Fire.

It is now safe to raise the battle speed as high as you want. Say goodbye to polluted, cramped Midgar and hello to the world map!

VII. Midgar and Junon Areas

Make your party Cloud, Barret, and Aeris. Go to Kalm and make the obligatory detour through Cloud's past. Buy a Full Metal Staff and Mythril Saber at the weapon shop, then leave town.

Levrikon, found in the grassland around the Chocobo Farm, will occasionally inflict Fury with his Flaming Peck. If Aeris is under Fury, you shouldn't need to rest at an inn for quite some time. But watch out for Elfadunk, whose Shower inflicts Sadness; I advise fleeing whenever you meet one.

Now it is time to cross the Midgar Marshes, home of the infamous Midgar Zolom. The No Materia rule prevents you from catching a chocobo to outrace the Zolom, and you clearly can't beat it in battle. So how do we solve this dilemma? There are two ways. First, you can walk to where the grass extends farthest into the marsh, change the view to perspective mode, and wait until you see the Zolom head for the southeast corner of the swamp. You can sometimes get all the way across in one try this way.

Second, you can simply keep crossing until you see the Zolom approach you from the edge of the map. If you are quick you can open the menu, save your game, and soft-reset before the Zolom reaches you. When you reload the game you will be at the same position, but the Zolom will be miles away. This is the method I generally use; it usually takes me three reloads to get across the swamp.

After crossing the swamp, you must pass through the Mythril Mines. There's nothing here, except perhaps an enlightening cutscene. Exit the Mythril Mines, rest at Fort Condor if necessary (you must agree to help them first), and make your way west to Junon.

Before you get to Junon, however, there is an important task you must

complete. Walk around in one of the two forest areas on this side of the continent until you encounter the Mystery Ninja. Defeat her in battle--she's not that hard--and offer the following answers *without* opening the menu:

"Not interested."
"...petrified."
"Wait a second!"
"...That's right."
"...Let's hurry on."

Congratulations, you've just won a brand new Yuffie! She comes equipped with a long range weapon and a Carbon Bangle, the best armor you're going to get for a while. Remember to unequip her Throw materia immediately.

Now comes the formidable task of learning her 1-2 limit break. In order to use Clear Tranquil, Yuffie must first use Greased Lightning eight times. The forest area near the river is good for building limit breaks, though it also can be somewhat dangerous for Aeris. Don't be surprised if several rest stops at Fort Condor are required.

Once both Yuffie and Aeris have healing limit breaks, you can fight for as long as you want without the risk of death--provided the enemies aren't able to overwhelm the whole party at once or incapacitate the healers. Which, unfortunately, is a good description of the next boss...

VIII. Junon

Save on the world map after watching the cutscene in Junon. Make your party Cloud, Barret, and Yuffie. If possible, let Flaming Peck put Yuffie under Fury. Put all characters in the back row.

BOSS: Bottomswell
2500 HP

He's like a bigger, nastier version of Reno, whose Pyramid is unbreakable and gradually kills its target and whose attacks don't suck. In other words, nothing like Reno at all. Next to Arm Grab and possibly Whirlsand, Bottomswell's Waterpolo is the cheapest move in the game.

How difficult this battle is depends completely on when he uses Waterpolo and on whom. You can't break the Waterpolos, since magic materia are not allowed, and you can't revive their victims with Phoenix Downs; once a character is imprisoned, he or she is a lost cause. Barret and Yuffie can hit Bottomswell with their normal attacks, and Cloud can hit him with his limit breaks. He MUST NOT use Waterpolo on Yuffie, except possibly near the end of battle; if he does, Barret must not be targetted and must have enough HP to survive a few Big Waves. No matter who gets targetted, you will almost certainly win the battle with one or two dead characters.

His normal attacks are nothing to write home about. His regular physical attack does around 100 damage, Big Wave a bit less.

Once Bottomswell is finally defeated, Cloud will be forced to perform CPR on Priscilla. Breathe in five full lungfuls of air, and she should wake up. Go out to the world map and save just in case. Then rest inside the house near the entrance of town. When you awake, Cloud will be by himself. Go up to talk to Priscilla, then down to the water so Mr. Dolphin can help get you into

upper Junon. Press Square twice without moving to reach the tower.

Once on top, you will have to participate in the Junon march. There's no real requirement to get a high rating, and I don't have a strategy for getting one. If you insist on winning the best prizes, look at GarlandG's Low Level/No Materia FAQ. Anyway, once you've been properly disciplined for your failure you are free to go shopping. Follow Rude into the alley with the blinking blue button, and buy a Striking Staff. While you're at it, buy two Silver Glasses for Wutai; you can sell your unequipped weapons if you're short on gil. That's all for Junon. When performing for Rufus, try to score 100 points or more. This will earn you the Force Stealer, Cloud's best weapon until Cosmo Canyon.

IX. Shinra Boat

Not much to see here. Talk with Aeris, Tifa, and Red. Then talk to Barret twice to trigger a plot event, and form a party with Cloud, Yuffie, and Aeris. Before examining the body of the soldier, climb the ladder to your left and walk around. The chest contains a Wind Slash for Yuffie. Equip your characters with their new weapons, give Cloud the Power Wrist from Bottomswell, and put everyone in the back row.

BOSS: Jenova-BIRTH

4000 HP

With both Yuffie's and Aeris' healing limits at work, Jenova cannot kill you. Simply hack away with physical attacks and the occasional Cross Slash, and allow Stop to wear off after she casts it.

X. Costa del Sol and Corel Areas

There is one particularly important item in the Costa del Sol. As you leave the harbor, walk into the house directly in front of you. In the basement is a chest containing a Fire Ring; you're going to need it later on. Barret now needs to kill 80 enemies in order to learn Grenade Bomb. (You may wish to have Cloud, Yuffie, and Aeris walk through the Corel Mountains first to pick up the W Machine Gun.) The Costa del Sol is a good place to do this, as you'll meet a Grangalan in each encounter. Attack it three times, and it spawns a Grangalan Jr.; attack the Grangalan Jr. three times, and it spawns three Grangalan Jr. Jr.'s. The Grangalan has 550 HP, Grangalan Jr. has 330 HP, and Grangalan Jr. Jr. has 110 HP. Take out Grangalan Jr. first, as its Triclops (used only after a Grangalan Jr. Jr. has been killed) inflicts Sadness and Slow-Numb.

Once he learns Grenade Bomb, set Barret's limits to level 2 and refill his limit gauge. Then rest in the Costa del Sol, put Yuffie and Aeris in your party, and head through Corel. Travel through the mountain pass to the west, then pass through the Corel Mountains. Feel free to fight as many random battles as you want, but beware of Cockatolis' Petrify Smog and Bagnadrana's Poison Breath. Pick up the W Machine Gun in the chest. When the train tracks collapse under you the first time, DO NOT jump over; allow yourself to fall through, and tap Circle while holding the right direction button to get a Star Pendant. You can jump over the collapsing tracks after that. Rest at the Corel inn, remove Yuffie's Carbon Bangle, save on the world map, and enter the Gold Saucer.

When prompted, put either Yuffie or Aeris in your party. Meet and name Cait Sith. Remove the Manipulate and Transform materia and his Silver Armlet, then visit the Battle Arena. You will only have one healer in the Desert Prison, and Bandits may steal a valuable piece of equipment, so you're best off running away from all random battles. Go down to the cabin, talk to Barret, and put Yuffie or Aeris in your party. Equip the W Machine Gun, Silver Armlet, and Power Wrist on Barret, and put everyone except your healer in the back row. Now go up two screens and to the right to trigger a boss fight. Don't worry about Barret's HP; it will be automatically restored during the cutscene.

BOSS: Dyne
1200 HP

Since Barret can't heal, you simply have to try and remove all Dyne's HP before he kills you. Two Grenade Bombs plus several physical attacks should do the job.

After you win, you'll have to race a chocobo. It's no Gold, but its stamina is more than enough to beat out the competitors. At the beginning of the race, switch to Manual mode. Tap the square button repeatedly to increase your chocobo's speed while you hold R1+R2 to save stamina. If you have enough stamina at the end, press Circle to sprint the home stretch. You'll be rewarded by being able to leave this place, and by receiving a Buggy.

XI. Gongaga and Cosmo Areas

When you return to the world map, equip the Power Wrist and the Silver Armlet from Dyne on Cloud, and form a party with Aeris and Yuffie; put all three in the front row. Cross the river to your south. If you want a new weapon for Aeris, or you just feel like having another fight, go south to Gongaga and fight the Turks. Have Aeris or Yuffie wear the White Cape, as Touch Me loves to inflict Toad. (For the strategy, see the Optional Bosses section.)

Equip the Fairy Tale. If you want, you can venture into Gongaga Village. There is a White M-Phone inside the house to the upper left, and the accessory shop sells White Capes and Fury Rings. The Fury Ring puts a character under Berserk, greatly boosting their attack strength. While this can be useful for your non-healer characters, and it grants them automatic immunity to Confusion, it has the disadvantage that you cannot use limit breaks while it is equipped. (This can sometimes work in your favor if you equip it on Vincent, but on any other character you will lose out on a major source of damage.) Also, the character wearing it attacks enemies indiscriminately, and is as likely to hit back row enemies as those in front. As always, use your discretion.

After forests filled with Toad- and Slow-Numb-inflicting nasties, you will arrive in the relative sanctuary of Cosmo Canyon. I love this area, simply because this is the first time in the game that it is easy to get Fury. Skeeskees come in groups of three, and when below half HP they inflict Fury with Rage Bomber. Put Cloud, Red XIII, and Yuffie under Fury, and save before entering Cosmo Canyon.

Go to the very top of Cosmo Canyon to speak with Bugenhagen. Then go down the ladder, talk to Cait Sith in the room on your right, and pick two party members to accompany Cloud. Your choice does not particularly matter. Head back down to the Cosmo Candle and talk to Tifa, Barret, Aeris, and finally Red

XVIII. You will be forced to form a party; make your third member Aeris, and save. Buy the Butterfly Edge, Heavy Vulcan, Prism Staff, Silver Barrette, Pinwheel, and a Silver Armlet from the weapon shop. Equip Cloud with the Butterfly Edge, Red XIII with the Silver Barrette, Aeris with the Prism Staff, giving everyone Silver Armlets and Star Pendants.

The Cave of the Gi is a nasty area. Two enemies inflict Paralysis, two use Death Sentence, and Heg can poison you. In addition, you are require to fight two Stingers.

BOSS: Stinger
2200 HP

Put all your characters in the back row. His regular physical attack does about 60 damage, and Rabbit Gouge does 120. Sting Bomb cuts a character's HP by 75%; he will use this as an automatic counterattack twice per battle, once when he falls below 1100 HP and again when he falls below 550 HP, and can also use it on his turn. (Fortunately, he only has the MP to use it three times.) If Aeris has a ready limit break and everyone is at fairly high HP, she can use Seal Evil to prevent Sting Bomb and freeze Stinger for a few rounds. Otherwise, just hope that Aeris is the target or is able to heal the target before he is killed.

Before facing the second Stinger, go to your left and then down. There is a hidden path leading to a Fairy Ring; take it. Now leave the cave, remove Aeris' equipment, and talk to Yuffie to put her in your party. Give her the Pinwheel, Silver Armlet, and Star Pendant, then save. If anyone was killed, rest at the inn and go outside to put Yuffie under Fury again. Now return to the cave. Before approaching the statue, put all characters in the back row and give the Fire Ring to Cloud, the Protect Vest to Red XIII, and the Power Wrist to Yuffie.

BOSS: Gi Nattak
5500 HP

A single X-Potion is enough to kill him. Unfortunately, you can't use X-Potions or any other items in this challenge, so you just have to duke it out. The Soul Fires can inflict a surprising amount of damage; don't be surprised if Red XIII dies early on. After ten castings of Fire2 their MP will be exhausted; the rest of the battle will mostly consist of Gi Nattak casting Drain on your characters and occasionally spearing them for 200+ damage. You could win this with Yuffie alone if you had to, but try to keep your other characters alive for the EXP.

After the cutscene with Seto, form a party of Cloud, Aeris, and Yuffie. Have Skeeskee put everyone under Fury, and take the buggy north across the river to Nibelheim.

XII. Nibelheim and Rocket Town Areas

The only thing of interest in the town itself is Lost Number. He is released when you enter the proper combination into the safe in the Shinra Mansion. Defeat him, and you will be able to recruit Vincent Valentine into your party. However, you are probably not ready to fight him now; wait at least until you are ready for Materia Keeper.

To beat Materia Keeper, you will either need to level up substantially--I would recommend Level 25 if you use the brute force strategy--or will need to collect a few Bolt Rings. To get the Bolt Rings, ride the buggy into the Costa del Sol. Bribe the sailor at the dock to ride the cargo ship, then ride the air force helicopter out of Junon. Now take the buggy to the forests north of Fort Condor, and cross the river to reach a cave. There is a sleeping man inside, who randomly spouts out game statistics in his sleep. If the last two digits of the number of battles you've fought are the same and even (166, 188, and so on; double zeros don't count), he will give you a Bolt Ring. You can gain up to three Bolt Rings this way, granting your entire party immunity to Lightning attacks.

In any event, return to Nibelheim once you are prepared for Materia Keeper. (To get back into Junon, bribe the elevator guard 10 gil.) Save outside the mountains, put everyone in the back row, give Cloud the Fire Ring, and run from every random encounter. The first chest contains a Rune Blade for Cloud; pick it up if you want, but ignore all the other chests. Slide down pipe 3, then make a beeline for the save point. Equip Silver Armllets on everyone. If you have Bolt Rings, equip them (Cloud has top priority); otherwise equip the Talisman on Cloud, the Protect Vest on Aeris, and the Power Wrist on Yuffie. Save your game and talk to Materia Keeper to initiate the fight.

BOSS: Materia Keeper
8400 HP

He mostly relies on physical attacks; his claw attack and Big Horn both do 250, while Hell Combo does 400. But unless Hell Combo goes critical at a particularly bad moment, his physical attacks shouldn't kill anyone. If Aeris has a full limit break and everyone is at relatively high health, use Seal Evil instead of Healing Wind; this will freeze him for a good while. (You could also use Cross Slash, though I prefer Climhazard for its high damage.)

Once you've damaged him a fair bit, Materia Keeper will heal himself for 1000 HP with Cure2 and then hit the party with Trine. This is annoying, but it fills your limit breaks pretty fast, and he can only do this six times before his MP runs out. (Obviously, Trine will not damage anyone who wears a Bolt Ring.) This is a long battle; Yuffie and Climhazard will probably account for most of your damage.

Materia Keeper drops a Jem Ring, one of the better status protection accessories. Follow the path Materia Keeper had been blocking to the world map, then go north to Rocket Town. The weapon shop here sells Power Wrists, Protect Vests, Talismans, and Gold Armllets. You could buy some stuff here if you want, but I recommend saving your gil for now. Talk to the old man looking at the rocket, and he will give you a Yoshiyuki for Cloud. Equip it. Then check out the Tiny Bronco, meet and name Cid, talk to Shera again, and move your characters to the front row before checking out the Tiny Bronco once more.

BOSS: Palmer
6000 HP

Easy, easy, easy. His only attack is Mako Gun, which will quickly fill up your healers' limit gauges. He is susceptible to Cross Slash and Seal Evil, and on half his turns he won't even attack.

Congratulations, Cid is now in the party. You'll probably only use him in a few battles, but he's still good for entertainment.

XIII. Wutai

Now that the Tiny Bronco is yours, you have some business to complete on the world map. First and foremost is to complete the Wutai sidequest. You must do this, and you must do it while Aeris is still in the party. First, though, go all the way north to Bone Village and buy three Diamond Bangles.

Land the Tiny Bronco on the beach in Wutai. Take Yuffie out of the party and replace her with Barret. Equip the Yoshiyuki and Fairy Ring on Cloud, the Heavy Vulcan and Silver Glasses on Barret, and the Fairy Tale and Silver Glasses on Aeris; give Diamond Bangles to all three. Set Barret's limit breaks to level 1.

When you go north, you will fight a forced battle with some Shinra soldiers. With Darkness protection, they're not particularly bad. I advise running from most random battles at the moment. The Thunder Kisses can hit your whole party for 400 damage with Lightning, and you may encounter as many as five of them in one battle.

Make your way to the town and begin chasing Yuffie. (Buy the Aurora Rod from the weapon shop as you enter.) First, go to the screen with the pagoda and enter the building to your right. Enter the room on your left as you enter, but do not rest. Examine the wall to open a secret passageway containing a Magic Shuriken. Exit this room and go right to the next screen. Enter the first room on this screen, open the secret passageway, and go right to obtain the Hairpin, Red XIII's long range weapon. Finally, talk to the man on the ground four times to make Yuffie appear.

Go back the way you came, and enter the bar on the bottom left corner of the main screen. Talk to the Turks, then leave them to their drinks. A new chest is now accessible at the item shop; open it, and your new MP Absorb materia will be immediately stolen. (As if it would have done any good even if you were using materia.) Now enter the house next to the entrance, and fold back the fabric. Once again, Cloud's slow reflexes fail you. From there, it should be pretty obvious: hit the pot three times. A few short cutscenes and one cheap trick later, you'll find yourself in Yuffie's basement.

Go back to the screen with the pagoda. Go left to the bell, and examine it to ring it and open a secret door. Down below, Yuffie gets her just desserts. Follow the Don, and a few incompetent Shinra grunts will run straight into you. It's the same as the first battle, except there is one more of them. Now head out, and talk to Reno to clear the way for the boss battle. Equip Star Pendants on all three characters, put your characters in the back row, and save.

BOSS: Rapps
6000 HP

The only way you're likely to get a Game Over is if Rapps casts Aero3 on Aeris or Barret as his opening move. It will inevitably kill its target; you need Barret to prevent future uses of Aero3, and without Healing Wind no one is going to survive for very long. If they do not die, use Mindblow to remove all his MP. He now only uses a normal attack and Scorpion's Tail, both of which do 200 damage in the back row. As long as he doesn't ignore Aeris for a long time, you should be fine.

Scarcely two minutes later, Don Corneo becomes a squashed tomatoes. As part of your booty, you receive the Peace Ring. This accessory prevents Berserk, Confusion, and Sadness, making it one of the best in the game. If anyone has died, rest in the room which held the Magic Shuriken. Razor Weed's Spaz Voice counter will put you back under Fury. And of course, remember to put Yuffie back in the party.

While you're here, it would be wise to fight the bosses in the pagoda. Chekhov drops an Ice Ring; though not mandatory, this accessory will make Schizo and the Glacier area significantly easier. See the optional boss section for advice on defeating the pagoda bosses.

XIV. Stuff to Do On the World Map

With that out of the way, continue with the story. Return to the Tiny Bronco, then take it to the river that runs across the western continent. Get off near the Gold Saucer desert, go north to Corel, and take the tram up to the Gold Saucer.

Buy a ticket for 3000 gil. (A lifetime pass would be a waste, since you're never going to visit the Gold Saucer again.) Go to the Battle Arena, and head off to the right to see the Keystone in Dio's showroom. He challenges Cloud to a Battle Arena match. Obviously, with no healer you won't last long; but he gives you the Keystone regardless. Unfortunately you are stranded in the Gold Saucer, and a certain little snitch decides to give away the Keystone. When prompted to form a party, make Yuffie your third character.

Before heading to the Temple of the Ancients, Aeris must learn Pulse of Life. First she must kill 160 enemies to learn Planet Protector. (The Mythril Mines are ideal for this, as long as Aeris has Darkness protection.) Then she must use Planet Protector six times in battle. The dirt areas of Wutai work well; Thunder Kiss' Lightning does 400 damage.

Put Aeris and Yuffie back under Fury with Razor Weed's Spaz Voice. (There is no need to go all the way north to fight them; they appear in a patch of grass just south of the Wutai beach.) Put the Peace Ring on Aeris. Now take the Tiny Bronco south of the Junon area. The Temple of the Ancients is located on a large forested island. Beware of Slaps in the forest, whose Bug Needle inflicts Sadness and Poison.

XV. The Temple of the Ancients

Give Cloud the White Cape, Aeris the Star Pendant, and Yuffie the Fairy Ring. Pick up the Rocket Punch in a chest near the lower left corner of the first area. No matter what you do, DO NOT ask the Ancient to restore your HP/MP, since it will remove Fury and screw you for the battles that follow. Pick up the Rocket Punch along the way. This will greatly increase Barret's attack power, though unfortunately it is not a long range weapon.

After getting past the two sets of rolling rocks and watching the cutscene, save and enter the clock room. No matter where else you go, visits Rooms IV and V first. IV contains the Princess Guard. This is Aeris' most powerful weapon, and it has a nice damage bonus: it does double damage when one character is dead, triple damage when two are dead. V contains a Ribbon; for obvious reasons, you cannot do without it. After collecting both, you should equip the Ice Ring on Cloud, save, and allow the second hand to knock you into the room below. You will be forced to fight two Ancient Dragons in an ambush.

After defeating them, open the chest for a Nail Bat, Cloud's best weapon for a long time.

Go to room VI and track down the Ancient. After he runs away, jump down to the second level and enter the second door from the right to catch him. Then jump down to the bottom level, get the Work Glove in the chest, and enter the far right door to return to the upper level. Exit to the clock room and reenter (this will save you some trouble if Red Dragon ends up killing you), equip the Nail Bat and Fire Ring on Cloud, put all your characters in the back row, and save your game. Enter the now unlocked door.

BOSS: Red Dragon
6800 HP

As long as Aeris has more than 800 HP, you can't lose. Pulse of Life restores the party to full health and revives KO'd party members.

A cutscene follows. The next battle will be your last with Aeris; whatever armor you equip on her will be lost forever. Give her the Princess Guard, a Diamond Bangle, and the Jem Ring. Equip the Dragon Armlet and Ribbon on Yuffie and a Diamond Bangle and the Ice Ring on Cloud. (If you don't have the Ice Ring, give the Dragon Armlet and a Protect Vest to Cloud.) Save, and return to the clock room. There is now only one path you can follow. Go north.

BOSS: Demons Gate
10,000 HP

There are exactly two ways you can get a Game Over here. Demons Gate will sometimes drop two rocks (700 damage to one target) on the same turn; if both land on Aeris, or a rock drop goes critical on her, you're probably dead. Otherwise, Pulse of Life will ensure your survival. He can also inflict Slow-Numb on Cloud with Petrif-Eye, but there is a very small chance of that happening.

Demons Gate drops the Gigas Armlet, a good defensive armor which also adds 30 to your Strength. Together with the Power Wrist and a good weapon, it is a true armor of mass destruction.

XVI. Finding Aeris

No sooner have you escaped the temple and won the Black Materia than you end up losing it and Aeris. Yes, all the work you've put into your primary healer has vanished. From now on, Yuffie will be responsible for all your healing. When you come to your senses and return to the world map, put Barret and Yuffie in your party.

Board the Tiny Bronco, and take the river to the other end of the continent. Along the way, buy two Power Wrists in Rocket Town. Go along the northern edge of the water, and search for a beach. A short distance to the north is Bone Village. To get through the Sleeping Forest ahead, you'll need the Lunar Harp; you can usually find it behind the smoke on the upper level. Detonate the bomb, set the search location there, and check the box the following morning.

Head north until you arrive at a screen with a large log. Go underneath the

log, and open the chest for a Water Ring. Don't bother with the random battles here; Malldancer's Dance hits all characters with Darkness and Slow, and Hungry can cast Mini on your characters to remove them from battle with Eat. Climb up, cross through the log, and go north into the City of the Ancients.

As you enter, take the left path. Ignore the buildings and keep walking until you reach an indoor area. Go down the stairs and pick up the Aurora Armlet in a chest; you will need this later. Now go back toward the entrance, this time taking the right path. Enter the second building you see, and rest to trigger a cutscene.

You could put Yuffie under Fury if you wish, but it's probably not worth it. Equip the Yoshiyuki, Gigas Armlet, and Water Ring on Cloud, the Rocket Punch and Power Wrist on Barret, and the Power Wrist on Yuffie, and put everyone in the front row. Head down the center path. Enter the building on the small pond, go down the glowing blue path, and save.

BOSS: Jenova-LIFE
10,000 HP

All Jenova's attacks are water-based; with the Water Ring, they will all heal Cloud. Just start meleeing her. Expect everyone besides Cloud to be wiped out by Aqualung; it does 1500 damage, more than the HP of most party members. If that happens, the Yoshiyuki's special damage properties will allow Cloud to finish Jenova in a few hits.

So sad. Say goodbye to Aeris, the faithful healer who got you through Midgar and the Temple of the Ancients. Then save your game, and switch to Disc 2.

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

XVII. Icicle Area and Great Glacier

If anyone was killed by Jenova, you will need to rest and put Yuffie under Fury again. Backtrack through the Ancient Forest and Bone Village to the Tiny Bronco; then return to Wutai, and have Razor Weed put you under Fury once again. Go back, and save outside the City of the Ancients.

Take the right path again, and follow the path you saw Sephiroth take. Hop up on the spiral staircase of spikes, then enter the cave on top of the screen. Go into the second crack from the right, and climb up. Jump off on the left side, and walk left until you reach the next crack. Climb up, jump off, and reenter the crack. Now climb up, and open the chest containing a Bolt Armlet. Ignore the other chests, and climb the cracks until you reach the ladder. Climb up, and exit the cave into the Icicle region.

Head west until the mountains no longer block your way north; then go north to Icicle Village. Buy a Lariat (if you are using Vincent) and a Micro Laser from the weapon shop. Approach the back exit, and Elena will show up and try to punch Cloud. Hold the left and up direction buttons and the cancel button to make her miss and roll all the way down the hill. Pick up the map in the house on the far right, and the snowboard in the center house. Take the back

exit out of town, and the snowboard minigame commences. When you land in the Great Glacier, equip the Nail Bat, Gigas Armllet, and Ice Ring on Cloud, the Magic Shuriken, Dragon Armllet, and Ribbon on Yuffie, and the Microlaser, Aurora Armllet, and Peace Ring on Barret.

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 going northeast. (You can buy as many Safety Bits as you want after obtaining the Highwind.) Head right on the screen with the lone tree, and from there just keep going north.

When you reach the snowfield, 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 will help to point you in the right direction. You will walk past an igloo in the middle of the snow field; if you enter and exit the igloo, the screen will be oriented with north on top again.

Should you wander too long, Holzhoff will take you to his cabin and force you to rest. If this happens, all is not lost; the Headbombers on Gaea's Cliff can inflict Fury with Extreme Bomber, though this also does a lot of damage. If you manage to get to the cabin without collapsing, use the save point and head north to Gaea's Cliff.

XVIII. Gaea's Cliff and Whirlwind Maze

Should your body temperature falls below 30 degrees out here, you will collapse and end up back at Holzhoff's Cabin. Raise your body temperature by holding the Square button, and try not to spend too long climbing between platforms; just climb straight up to the cave entrance. The Ribbon is necessary in case Malboro attacks you with his Bad Breath, and also protects you against Zolokalter. I really don't advise fighting any battle involving Zolokalter, as Toxic Barf quickly creates problems. (If you do, give everyone--especially Yuffie--protection against Poison.)

Once inside the cave, switch Yuffie's Dragon Armllet for the Bolt Armllet; this will provide adequate protection against Stilva's Magic Breath. Head north to the next screen and enter the door to your left. Go down and then to the right. Keep going right, and you will pass through a tunnel in the wall to the second Ribbon. Give it to Barret right away. After collecting the Ribbon, continue north. Open the chest with the Javelin, go to the top, and push the rock to destroy the stalagmites that were blocking your way. Go back the way you came, and exit the cave to the outside. Re-equip your Ice protection. Go up until you reach the third platform, then go right, and continue up to the top. Remember to hold the Square button if your body temperature drops too much.

Inside the next cave, there is a save point. (Finally!) If Vincent is in your party, this would be an excellent place to employ Galian Beast. Go out the door to your right, following the path around to the top. You will have to fight three battles against an Icicle and some Evilheads to continue. Before you do, put your characters in the back row and pick up the Fire Armllet in the chest on your right. Equip Cloud with the Nail Bat and Gigas Armllet, Yuffie with the Magic Shuriken and Aurora Armllet, Vincent with the Lariat and Wizard Bracelet, and everyone with Power Wrists. If you don't have Vincent, continue using Barret and ignore the last part of this strategy.

BOSS: Icicle, Evilhead x4
3000 HP, 700 HP each

Though the Icicle itself can only counterattack, the Evilheads make each of these battles tougher than some storyline bosses. There are five targets, rendering multi-hitting limit breaks almost worthless, and all physical attacks (including limit breaks) have a 25% chance of automatically missing them. Worse, they can use Ultrasound four times per round for almost 300 damage per hit; if they repeatedly target your non-healer characters, they will die and Yuffie will be thoroughly screwed. It doesn't help that they can steal back 100 HP per turn with Blood Suck, either.

Concentrate on killing the Evilheads one by one first. Once they are all dead, you can start attacking the Icicle. It will randomly counterattack with Icicle Drop, dealing 300 damage in the back row. Note that Cloud's Blade Beam will instantly kill the Icicle, along with any Evilheads that do not dodge the secondary attack. Grenade Bomb or Satellite Beam can also kill the Evilheads in one shot, but as with all limits there's no guarantee that they won't dodge.

Vincent is uniquely useful in this battle, because of his limit break. Beast Flare both instantly kills the Icicle (since it is weak against Fire) and is guarantee to kill all the Evilheads (since it is magical rather than physical). It doesn't hurt that Vincent's HP is fully restored when he transforms. However, between the long charge time required for Galian Beast and the mere 25% chance of Beast Flare being used, it's likely that you'll get as many kills from Cloud as from Vincent.

You can jump down and save if you feel at all uneasy about fighting more than one Icicle battle in a row. I recommended trying them back-to-back first; if worse comes to worse, you can always run away. Once three Icicles have been defeated, you can follow the newly formed path all the way into Schizo's lair. You can revive any fallen allies at the healing spring, so long as you remember to put Yuffie back under Fury. Equip the Aurora Armlet and Fire Ring on Cloud, the Fire Armlet and Ice Ring on Barret, and the Dragon Armlet and Talisman on Yuffie. This boss doesn't use physical attacks, so feel free to put Cloud in the front row. Do not use Vincent under any circumstances, even if he knows Death Gigas.

BOSS: Schizo (Right) and Schizo (Left)
18,000 HP each

On their turns Schizo's two heads can hit a target with their individual breath attacks for 1000 damage, or Double Breath for 1700 damage. The right head's attack is Fire elemental, the left head's is Ice elemental, and Double Breath is neutralized by both Fire and Ice protection. Each head counters with an Earth attack that hits the party for 600 damage, and when it dies it releases a Lightning-based attack for 1200 damage to all characters.

You have two options. The first is to simply wait for both heads to exhaust their MP on breath attacks. These cannot harm Cloud or Barret at all, and Yuffie will only take half damage from them. This completely eliminates concerns about the Earth counterattack and the need to count your attacks, so only the final attacks are a real concern. Unfortunately, this takes a long time; each head has enough MP for more than 40 breath attacks, so you could be sitting around for a while.

If you choose not to wait, things become a bit more difficult. The Earth-based counterattack is activated every fifth time a head is damaged. Everyone will take the full damage, as you have no way to protect against Earth; if Yuffie takes too much damage from the breath attacks that follow, she is dead. Make sure Yuffie always has 1000 HP or more before the fifth hit against either head, and be prepared to activate Clear Tranquil immediately after the counterattack is triggered. Even more importantly, make sure that you do not activate both heads' counterattacks on the same turn. Not only will this almost definitely kill Yuffie, but it puts even Cloud's and Barret's lives directly at risk. Keep a careful running total of how many times each head has been hit, and be even more careful when using a hit-all limit break like Blade Beam. Patience is extremely important while both heads are alive; do not be afraid to wait in order to let a breath attack heal Cloud/Barret or charge up Clear Tranquil at a critical moment. The final attack will do pretty severe damage to Cloud and Barret, but Yuffie will take the same damage as from the regular counterattack. Unless both the final attack and a counterattack are activated by the same limit break, highly improbable at best, the final attacks are not especially dangerous.

Once Schizo is down to one head, staying alive is much simpler. You must still keep Yuffie's HP fairly high, but with just one attack per round and no Double Breath this should be quite easy. Once again, make sure that Cloud and Barret have enough HP to survive the final attack.

Tifa will be forced to join the party soon. Go back to the save point, remove the Fire Ring and Ice Ring, and switch Barret for Tifa. Equip Tifa with the Work Glove and Cloud and Yuffie with Ribbons.

Go past the save point in the Whirlwind Maze to watch the cutscene. Then save, and proceed onto the next screen. You need to cross while the wind is weak. If you don't, you will have to fight a forced battle with Wind Wing; like Rapps, he casts the deadly Aero3. Ignore the chest on the next screen. You will come to a second passage; in addition to avoiding the wind, you must avoid the cyclones which periodically cross the screen. The moment you reach the next screen, equip the Fire Armband on Cloud, the Fire Ring on Tifa, and the Dragon Armband on Yuffie.

BOSS: Jenova-DEATH
25,000 HP

Like Jenova-LIFE, your equipment guarantees your survival. Unlike Jenova-LIFE, it is easy for more than one character to survive this battle. She has no attack which is nearly as powerful as Aqualung, and all three characters can be protected against Fire.

Unequip the Fire Armband. Pick up the Poison Ring on this screen. Then save your game, and try to pass by the next screen. This time you have three things to avoid: the wind, the cyclones, and lightning strikes. For your own convenience, I advise unequipping your accessories and armor after you cross.

XIX. Escaping Junon

After a long series of cutscenes, you'll end up in control of Tifa. Don't bother equipping any accessories or good armors; you're never going to use her again. Talk to Barret now. When the cutscene ends, you'll be handcuffed and

on your way to the execution chamber. Be sure to save on the way there, and equip a Ribbon on Barret.

Once Sapphire Weapon comes to the rescue, you will engage in a battle. Simply escape from this battle; do the same for every battle until you reach the Highwind. After being locked out of the execution room, head to the right and run down the path until you catch up with Yuffie. Though you have a healer again, there is no way to put her into Fury; keep running from all battles until you reach the Highwind.

Hit X, X, Triangle, X+Triangle, Circle+Triangle, Circle, Circle to free Tifa from the chair, then deactivate the switch on your left. Give Scarlet a good whacking, then make it a break for it. You are the owner of a brand new airship!

XX. Mideel, Corel, and Fort Condor

Head straight to Mideel. Before triggering the event with Cloud, you should go shopping in the weapon and accessory stores. Buy the AM Cannon, Crystal Cross, Crystal Sword, and Partisan, in order of importance, from the weapon shop. Before fighting Ultimate Weapon, you also should buy a Fire Ring from the maid in the house on the upper left; she also sells Bolt Rings (you should have at least one if you plan to fight Ultimate Weapon), Ice Rings, and various less useful accessories.

After the cutscene, Tifa will be out of the party and Cid will be the new leader. The Huge Materia quest now commences. If you want to, now would be the time to go shopping. You can buy Power Wrists and Safety Bits in Rocket Town. Gongaga sells Fury Rings; if you're using a character who doesn't have a valuable limit break, this could help you end your battles more quickly. Remove Yuffie's Ribbon/Peace Ring if she's wearing one, reequip the 4-Point Shuriken, and set down in Wutai. Get into a battle with Razor Weed, then attack to put Yuffie under Fury. Now bring Barret into the party. Equip Ribbons on Yuffie and Barret and the Fairy Ring on Cid; equip all three elemental armors and the new weapons from Mideel. Now set the airship down near Corel, and walk all the way through the mountains back to the reactor. Put your characters in the back row.

Since this is a No Materia game, there is no need to win Corel's Huge Materia (or any of the Huge Materia, for that matter). But even so, you may wish to win just to show up the Shinra. If so, here are some tips for the enemies on the train:

-Gas Ducter/Gas Ducter x2 (3000 HP): No real problem, as long as you have accessories that protect against Poison and Darkness. They'll still put Cid under Sadness, but Boost Jump isn't a very good limit break anyway.

-Wolfmeister (10,000 HP): You may wish to replace your status protection with Power Wrists at this point. In addition to some powerful attacks--Big Sword does 600 damage, Atomic Ray almost 1000--Wolfmeister can slow you down with Big Guard. Probably the most annoying enemy on the train.

-Eagle Gun (17,000 HP): He has two single-target attacks and a full-party attack, both of which do 600 damage. Wail on him with physical attacks and Barret's limit breaks, and he should fall quickly enough.

Defeat the lone soldier at the front of the train. Push the levers up in unison, then down, then down again to stop the train. Whether you succeed or not, you'll be forced to sleep in the inn.

Remove Yuffie's Ribbon, go back to Wutai, and have Razor Weed Fury you once more. Reequip the Ribbon, and head to Fort Condor. Don't bother placing any units; it's a waste of gil, and you don't get a reward for winning the strategy battle. Instead, allow the enemy units to reach the top and fight Commander Grand Horn. He's incredibly easy as long as you're protected against Poison. Defeating him nets you an Imperial Guard, the highest-Defense armor available in this challenge. Talk to the man at the table downstairs for the Huge Materia, then exit Fort Condor.

XXI. Mideel

Make sure your characters enter with more than 2000 HP. Equip the Reflect Ring on either Cid or Barret; put all your characters in the back row, and save. It is imperative that you buy at least one Fire Ring, and any other accessories you may want, before talking to Tifa. (You can still buy weapons even after the town is destroyed; take the left path up from the ruins, and talk to the woman chasing a chocobo.)

BOSS: Ultimate Weapon

Don't even bother attacking, as he'll automatically fly away after three rounds. He opens with a full-party Quake2; the character with the Reflect Ring will suffer no damage, while the other two will take almost 2000 damage. Heal with Clear Tranquil. His second move will be a physical attack for 1000 damage. Finally, he will use Ultima Beam for 2000 damage and leave. Everyone except the character he used the physical attack on will survive.

If you're having trouble surviving Ultima Beam, consider going to the beaches near the chocobo farm and letting Elfadunk put Cid and Barret under Sadness. This will reduce the attack to a more manageable 1350 damage.

XXII. Junon

Wade through the long series of cutscenes until you're in control of Cloud again. It's time to face a particularly nasty boss in Junon. But first, go back to Wutai and put Yuffie under Fury again. Give the Ribbons to Cloud and Yuffie and the Peace Ring to Barret. Don't forget to equip the Crystal Sword. Now enter upper Junon, and head down the hallway into the elevator. You will be forced to fight some Shinra guards.

Make your way down to the underwater reactor, killing the Shinra guards as you go. Keep going until you see the Huge Materia being pulled out of the reactor, then loaded into the sub. Whatever you do, DO NOT walk up to Reno now. Instead, return to the second passageway after the elevator from the main tunnel. To beat Carry Armor, Yuffie needs to be Level 50; this hallway is the best leveling-up spot currently available to you. To maximize your EXP gain, wait for the Guard Systems to bring out their defense systems before you kill them.

Once Yuffie is at Level 50, I advise you to run from every random encounter from now on. Yuffie's HP must be low enough at the end of the game for Sephiroth's Deen to activate Clear Tranquil; if your level is too high, he becomes much harder. Return to the underwater reactor save point, set Cloud's limits to level 2 and Barret's to level 1, equip Power Wrists on everyone and the Gigas Armllet on Cloud, and save. Before you talk to Reno, try to have

everyone enter with as close to full HP as possible.

BOSS: Carry Armor, Left Arm, Right Arm
24,000 HP; 10,000 HP each

This robot is infamous for screwing challenges like this up. Though he will spend most turns attacking physically for 300 damage, he has two very dangerous attacks: Arm Grab and Lapis Laser. Arm Grab imprisons a character, so they are incapacitated and counted as dead, and hits them for 500 damage each time one of Carry Armor's parts is damaged. Though killing an arm will release the character it imprisons, in most cases the victim of Arm Grab will be dead for the duration of this mission. If Yuffie is ever grabbed, a Game Over is certain.

Because of this, I recommend attacking each arm once and leaving them alone for the duration of the battle. Initially, each arm has a 1 in 16 chance of using Arm Grab on any given turn. After being targeted once (to show it you mean business) it has less than a 1% chance of using Arm Grab, making it a negligible risk for the remainder of the battle. Just be extremely careful not to damage them. When the arm falls below 7500 HP, the chance of Arm Grab quadruples. It quadruples again below 5000 HP, and by the time it hits critical HP it has a 50% chance of using Arm Grab on any turn. Believe me, killing them is not worth it.

That leaves Lapis Laser. It takes off 1650 HP, just enough for Clear Tranquil to heal back. Initially it is used sporadically, though he will occasionally use it automatically at the beginning of battle. If he gets the Lapis Laser sneak attack, then uses it on his turn before you can activate Clear Tranquil, your party is most likely dead. Assuming that doesn't happen, Yuffie should keep you at nearly full HP. (As long as you stay in the back row, the damage from Carry Armor's physical attacks should be insignificant.) As his HP becomes lower he uses Lapis Laser more and more often, until below 6000 HP he uses it every turn. Fortunately, that phase shouldn't last long; Lapis Laser will quickly fill Barret's and Cloud's limits, and with his current equipment Cloud's Climhazzard can do as much as 6000 damage.

That machine was way tougher than Reno ever was. Once you've reassured yourself that you actually beat him this time, reequip the Ribbons and head forward. Pick up the Scimitar, in the chest next to the submarine, but ignore the other chests. After killing two groups of soldiers, Cloud will jump into the submarine and be forced into an attack from both sides. Save once you win that battle, then win the sub minigame. It's extremely easy as long as you keep the red sub in your sights; I usually win it in about 10 to 20 seconds.

XXIII. The Ocean Floor and Rocket Town

Save on the world map, then return to the ocean floor. Take care to avoid Emerald Weapon down here. If you won the Huge Materia, approach the red sub near the southwest corner of the ocean. Since you're already down here, you might as well get the Key to the Ancients to save yourself trouble later. Go to the northwest part of the ocean, and enter a trench there. At the end of the trench will be a partially concealed tunnel, leading to a room with the Key to the Ancients. (A strange design for a continental landmass, methinks.)

Your main goal, though, is the Sunken Gelnika. It is located at the bottom of a trench near the Gold Saucer desert, on the west side of the ocean. As you enter the Gelnika from the ladder, there will be a chest containing the Heaven's Cloud. Equip it, along with any Lightning, Poison, and Confusion

protection you possess, then save and enter the next room. The Escort Guard is near the stairs, ideal protection against the vicious Unknowns here in the Gelnika. And in the upper left corner, in a chest hidden by the walkway above it, is Yuffie's Conformer. Without a doubt, this is the most superb weapon of the challenge. To see why, test it against Reno and Rude. (For a Turks strategy, see the Optional Bosses section.)

Once you've cleared out the Turks, you can go through the doorway behind them to the Gelnika's cargo room. At the far right end of the catwalk is the Spirit Lance, a powerful weapon for Cid. One of the chests at the bottom of the stairs contains the Outsider. Unless you either defeat Ultimate Weapon (to reach the Supershot ST in the Ancient Forest) or defeat close to 1000 enemies to power up the Death Penalty, the Outsider is the most powerful weapon Vincent is going to get.

Return to the surface, board the airship, and save outside Rocket Town. Replace Barret with Cid; give him the Spirit Lance, Escort Guard, and Fairy Ring. Fight your way past the guards, and you'll meet a familiar face once again.

BOSS: Rude
9000 HP

Eliminate the Shinra guards first. This Rude's shoulder attack does less damage from the front row than the one in the Gelnika did in the back row, though he does compensate somewhat by being able to use three Grand Sparks in a single combo. Not a difficult fight at your levels.

One more dead guard, and you're in space. To get at the Huge Materia, enter the following combination: Circle, Square, X, X. The Huge Materia quest is officially complete.

XXIV. The World Map

Head back to Cosmo Canyon to admire your prizes. Then set the airship down just outside the City of the Ancients, take the left path to reach the fountain, and watch the next cutscene. (If you didn't get the Key to the Ancients earlier, do so now.)

When you attempt to board the airship, one of the cooler scenes in the game commences: a cutscene on the World map. Before you face the Weapon, put everyone under Fury and fill their limit gauges. Equip the Fire Armet and two Fire Rings on your characters. Set down outside of Midgar, and walk into him.

BOSS: Diamond Weapon
30,000 HP

Diamond has three attacks: a foot stamp for about 1000 damage, a Fire-based projectile attack, and Diamond Flash. Diamond Flash tears off 93% of your party's HP and inflicts Silence.

Begin the battle by using three limit breaks. After a certain number of limit breaks have been used (three initially, two when his HP is low), Diamond begins the countdown to Diamond Flash. When that happens, he temporarily loses both his foot stamp and his immunity to physical attacks. Each Diamond

Flash will fully refill your Limit gauges; simply use Clear Tranquil and another Limit Break to start the next countdown. So long as you are protected against fire and use your limit breaks as soon as you get them, it is impossible for him to kill you.

XXV. The Raid on Midgar

Board the airship again, and head toward the North Crater. When you reach it you'll get a cutscene, and the party will be summoned back to Midgar. Fly the Highwind over Midgar to initiate the next mission.

Unfortunately, for some reason the party's HP/MP is restored and Fury removed when you drop into Midgar. Save once you land in the city, and climb down the ladder. There are two items you should get before leaving this area. Go left as you enter, then down a ladder to reach another screen, and immediately head for the ladder in the upper left corner of the area. Open the chest for the Aegis Armllet. (This armor gives you 50% magical evasion. Until you get a Mystile, this is the best armor in your inventory.) Head down from this ladder, and head right past the first ladder to make the floor collapse. Walk to the left to climb into a pipe leading to the other side. Now climb down the ladder, jump into the pipe on the right side of the screen, and climb up to get the Max Ray. This is Barret's best weapon, hands down.

Eventually you'll leave this area and end up in the tunnels. Almost immediately the Turks will come to challenge you. Since Yuffie isn't under Fury, and there's no available monster which inflicts Fury, Yuffie's healing won't be able to keep up with three strong enemies. This is where Wutai comes in. Because you saved Elena, the Turks will allow you to go free. Press onward, taking the right path at the next fork. Then take the left path, and climb the ladder.

You will be at the Shinra building again. Enter the elevator in the lobby and take it to Floor 64. Rest and save your game. Unequip Yuffie's Ribbon/Peace Ring, and give her an armor with a Def% of zero. (The Edincoat will work.) The next part is a little tedious: before facing Proud Clod, you must put Yuffie under Fury status. The only way to do this is by letting Sword Dance attack you with Slap on Floor 65. Unfortunately, it is only used as an opening attack and once his HP has fallen below 50%; and even with starting weapons, your attacks will kill it in one hit. You'll have to wait for Sword Dance to open with Slap on Yuffie and successfully inflict Fury; this took me a good two hours.

When Yuffie finally succumbs to Fury, save without resting. Leave the Shinra building and return to the second-to-last fork in the tunnels. This time head left. Equip the Heaven's Cloud, Imperial Guard, and Power Wrist on Cloud, the Max Ray, Aegis Armllet, and Power Wrist on Barret, and the Conformer, Gigas Armllet, and Power Wrist on Yuffie before heading toward the Sister Ray.

BOSS: Proud Clod and Jamar Armor
60,000 HP and 20,000 HP

Jamar Armor has only purpose: to divert half of Meteorain's/Ungarmax's hits away from Proud Clod. Concentrate your physical attacks on Jamar Armor first. Proud Clod's attacks are all pretty weak--only the machine gun and Beam Cannon break 1000 damage--but he can often use two in a single combo. Yuffie will need to heal the party pretty often. Not hard at all, just long.

After battle, Proud Clod drops the Ragnarok. Unless you plan on killing Ultimate Weapon, this is the best sword Cloud is going to get; equip it now. Run up to the save point, move your party to the back row, raise the battle speed to the highest setting (if it isn't there already), and save. Equip Ribbons on Yuffie and Cloud and the Fairy Ring on Barret.

Before you head up, get the Mystile. I repeat, GET THE MYSTILE. It is in a chest just south of the stairs that lead to Hojo. This area has some of the nastiest random encounters in the game. Grossspanzers do 2400 damage (600 if you're defending in the back row), and SOLDIERS First Class like to attack you from both sides; Sword of Doom does 3000 damage to a character with his back turned. If anyone dies, or you're hurt too badly, reset and try again. It took me three attempts to get to Hojo without anyone dying. Do not pick up the Missing Score, and for God's sake don't equip it; it is pathetically weak in a No Materia game.

BOSS: Hojo
13,000 HP

Ignore the Bad Rap and Poodler samples, and attack Hojo. Eventually, he transforms into...

BOSS: Helletic Hojo, Left Arm, and Right Arm
26,000 HP, 24,000 HP, and 5000 HP

Focus your attacks on the Right Arm right away. The Conformer will take it out in two hits at most. Killing it will prevent Pile Banger and Bio Gas (Helletic Hojo's only damage-dealing attacks) as well as Confu. Then attack the Left Arm until the Right Arm regenerates, and repeat. Since killing both arms will kill Helletic Hojo, and the Left Arm has less HP, you should ignore the body. If Barret succumbs to Confu or Sleepel, an attack from the Conformer will cure him up without doing any damage. Upon death, this annoying form will change to...

BOSS: Lifeform-Hojo N
30,000 HP

Hojo has three attacks in this form: a fairly weak single-target magic attack, Slow, and Combo. Unfortunately, Ribbons don't protect against Slow. You just have to hope Hojo doesn't cast it on Yuffie, or if he does that she'll be able to use Clear Tranquil fast enough after her gauge fills. Combo does 800 damage in the back row, and if Barret is the target he will be put to sleep. If you're having trouble surviving the damage from repeated Combos, take into account the fact that Combo is usually used on the character who attacked Hojo last. Simply have Yuffie attack immediately after the others, and you should have no trouble healing. The battle probably won't last long enough to be a problem anyway, since the Conformer and Gigas Armlet allow Yuffie to do more than 6000 damage per hit.

Once you beat Hojo, there is nothing more you can do until you change discs. Dive into the North Crater, and prepare for one of the toughest battles you'll ever face.

XXVI. The North Crater

Before descending into the North Crater to face Sephiroth, take the airship back to Wutai. Remove Yuffie's Ribbon and Gigas Armllet, give her the 4-Point Shuriken, and have Razor Weed put her under Fury once again. Now replace Barret with Red XIII, and set his limits to level 1. Give the Mystile and Star Pendant to Cloud, the Aegis Armllet and Ribbon to Yuffie, and the Imperial Guard and Poison Ring to Red XIII. Save your game, and take the airship back into the North Crater. Pick up the Save Crystal as you enter, then run from every random encounter. Allow Parasite (or Allemagne, via his Teardrop counter) to put Cloud and Red XIII under Sadness; this is extremely important for the final battles.

There is something you absolutely must do here if you want to beat Safer Sephiroth. When it's time for the party to split in two, send Tifa to the right and everyone else to the left. Your other choices don't matter. Walk down until you reach the screen marked Bottom of the Northern Crater (the music will stop), create and use a save point there via the Save Crystal, and walk up until you return to the split point. This time follow the path Tifa took. Walk to the end of the spiral path and hop down; the first chest here contains another Mystile. There is a Tetra Elemental accessory somewhere in the Dragon Graveyard, but you don't really need it. Walk down the dragon bones to return to the bottom of the crater, then head toward the lower left to collect your party members. Now talk to Tifa to receive the third and final Mystile. (Had you talked to her right away, the Mystile in the chest would have disappeared.) It would be wise to fill Red XIII's limit gauge now. Equip Cloud with a Ribbon and Yuffie with a Mystile, remove Red XIII's armor and accessory, and make your final save.

Expect to reload your game numerous times before you finish this challenge. When you feel ready, hop down the stepping stones of death. Replace Red XIII with Barret, and give him the Mystile and Poison Ring. Unless you stick around long enough for Iron Man's sword or Dragon Zombie's Shadow Flare to kill you, you should have no problem surviving to meet the final Jenova.

BOSS: Jenova-SYNTHESIS A, B, and C
60,000 HP, 10,000 HP, and 8,000 HP

Concentrate your attacks on Jenova-SYNTHESIS B (the arm to the player's right) first, to prevent its deadly Stop spell and Fury-inducing slap. Though you may be tempted to kill the other arm as well to immobilize Jenova, I advise against it. Killing Jenova isn't difficult with the Conformer in play, but the EXP she grants will cause Yuffie to gain at least two levels; once she gets to Level 56 and beyond, beating Sephiroth becomes a much more difficult task.

Since you clearly can't survive the final Ultima, and even with Mystiles you can't be sure to dodge it, the only way to avoid the EXP is to wait until she no longer has the MP to cast it. Cure3 is the most efficient way to do this; simply sit tight and wait until Jenova casts it 8 times. Then continue attacking the body until the countdown triggers, taking out the arms with the Conformer as they appear. When the count reaches zero, the message "Jenova-SYNTHESIS A's skill power is used up" will appear, and the party moves on without leveling up.

After the cutscene, first form a party of Cloud, Yuffie, and Barret again. Remove Barret's Mystile, then exit the menu and select, "Just one more time!"

This time form a party of Cloud, Yuffie, and Red XIII. Equip Cloud with the Buster Sword and Red XIII with the Mythril Clip, Mystile, and Reflect Ring. Increase the battle speed to the maximum setting, choose, "Let's go, everyone," and get ready to fight for your life.

BOSS: Bizarro Sephiroth, Head, Right Magic, Left Magic, Core
40,000 HP, 2000 HP, 4000 HP, 4000 HP, 10,000 HP

Bizarro Sephiroth has several dangerous moves, all of which can potentially screw up the Safer battle. When the part scheduled to act on a turn is dead, you will generally see Sephiroth Shock, a fairly harmless physical attack that does about 700 damage. Left Magic and Right Magic cast level 3 elemental spells, each of which will kill Yuffie in one hit and Cloud or Red in two. Bizarro's Stigma inflicts 1800 damage as well as Poison and Slow on the party, Heartless Angel reduces everyone to 1 HP, and Aurora Fence nullifies Fury and Sadness. Aurora Fence is the deadliest of the three full-party attacks, since Yuffie can't keep the party alive if Clear Tranquil isn't activated. But Stigma and Heartless Angel are dangerous as well: Stigma's Poison is likely to kill Red XIII, and if you are hit by Heartless Angel it will be difficult to keep the party's HP high enough for Safer.

Fortunately, there is a way to avoid seeing anything but Sephiroth Shock. Bizarro always attacks in the following order (thanks to Terence for the list):

1. Sephiroth Shock (if the Head is alive) or Aurora Fence
 2. Bolt3 (if Right Magic is alive) or Sephiroth Shock
 3. Quake3 (if Left Magic is alive) or Sephiroth Shock
 4. Stigma (if both the Head and Core are alive), Heartless Angel (if the Head is alive but the Core is dead), or Sephiroth Shock (if both are dead)
 5. Do nothing
 6. Do nothing
 7. Ice3 (if Right Magic is alive) or Sephiroth Shock
 8. Fire3 (if Left Magic is alive) or Sephiroth Shock
- Repeat from turn 1

Note that when the Head is killed, Bizarro will revive it anywhere between the second and fourth turns after it has been killed. Sephiroth Shock will not be used on these turns, but any of the full-party moves can be used on the same turn. Because of this, and the turns on which he does nothing except reviving the head, counting Bizarro's turns will probably only confuse you. Instead, have Yuffie attack his parts in the following order, making sure to activate the Attack command as quickly as possible. (The numbers below refer to the turn before she attacks. If Yuffie's turn comes before Bizarro has moved at all, wait for him to attack once.)

1. Right Magic (the arm on the player's left)
2. Left Magic
3. Head
4. Core
5. Core
6. Core
7. Body
8. Body

9. Body
10. Body
11. *Head*
12. Body

13. Body

14. Body

15. Body

16. Body

Repeat from turn 9

The Conformer will do a bit over 4000 damage, instantly killing the Head and arms and destroying the Core in three hits. Have both Cloud and Red defend all the time. If you follow the order of attack listed above, Bizarro should be dead before the twentieth round. Sephiroth will start rumbling, and transform into your worst nightmare.

BOSS: Safer Sephiroth

80,000 HP

He always begins the battle by casting Wall. If Yuffie gets a turn before he casts it, consider yourself blessed; the Conformer deals 8000 damage when Barrier is not in the way. Activate Lunatic High now, and Meteorain if Wall has not yet been cast. Quickly identify the character with the highest HP, and have them defend. Yes, even if it's Yuffie.

Safer's second attack is Shadow Flare. This is one of two places where the strategy can come undone. If he targets Yuffie and connects, the battle is over; it will kill her for sure, and Yuffie has both the only means of healing and the only weapon which does good damage against him. If he targets Barret and connects, you'll still probably lose; that gives you one fewer target to divert Sephiroth's attacks away from Yuffie. You just have to hope that the Mystiles evade the spell, or you get lucky and he casts it on Red XIII. Have your highest-HP character defend at this time.

Next comes his wing attack. He always uses it on the character with the highest HP. This does 1000 damage to Cloud and Red if they are defending (1500 to Yuffie), though it will sometimes go critical for 2000 damage. Assuming you survived this as well, have Yuffie attack him until just after Pale Horse. After the wing attack, Safer rises out of reach of Cloud's sword. His next attack will be Pale Horse. This will do about 2000 damage to its target; if it is Red XIII, Frog and Mini will be inflicted as well. (If he targets Cloud or Red XIII with both the wing attack and Pale Horse, his target has a fair chance of dying even at full HP. Though Pale Horse makes Red XIII harmless if Supernova confuses him, it also seals away Lunatic High.)

His next move is Supernova. It's a nasty one: it cuts the party's HP by 93%, and has a chance of inflicting Confusion (on Red XIII) and Slow as well. Use Clear Tranquil IMMEDIATELY. If you see the speech bubble indicating Silence over Red's head when the damage is inflicted, and he is not in Frog status, have him defend and Cloud remove Confusion with a physical attack right after Clear Tranquil. Though the Conformer will not damage him, you cannot afford to use it; Yuffie must spend every turn attacking Safer.

The turn after Supernova is the other place where the strategy can come apart, as he will now use Break. Like Shadow Flare, it is powerful enough to kill Cloud or Yuffie in one hit. Assuming you've been using the highest speed, Safer's Wall will be gone now (or within the next few turns if you're using Wait mode) and the Conformer will do full damage.

Safer won't attack for two more rounds, though if Yuffie is Slowed she will probably only get one attack during this. First he flies down, then uses DeSpell to heal Slow. (How nice of him.) If Red XIII is alive and able to

use it, cast Lunatic High now. Now he uses Deen, hitting the men for 1000 damage and Yuffie for 1500. If you heeded my earlier advice and kept your levels low enough, this will instantly recharge Yuffie's limit gauge. If not, you must get lucky again and hope she is not targetted by Pale Horse.

Safer will follow up with another wing attack, again on the character with the highest HP. Since Cloud has more HP than Yuffie and took less damage from Deen, it will almost certainly be him. Have him defend. If Yuffie is still alive at this point, you've almost certainly won: Safer's Wall status is gone, and he uses nothing more powerful than Pale Horse for the next six rounds. If you've gotten this far, you will almost certainly finish him before he recasts Wall.

BOSS: Sephiroth
1 HP

Sephiroth attacks. Maybe. Either way, you win.

Congratulate yourself. You've just completed one of the hardest challenges Final Fantasy VII has to offer.

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OPTIONAL BOSS STRATEGIES

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With the exception of the Turks in Midgar, Emerald Weapon, and Ruby Weapon, every boss in Final Fantasy VII can be defeated with a No Materia/No Items party. Listed below are strategies for all the optional bosses that are possible within the confines of this challenge, along with tips for preparation and related material such as the combination for Lost Number's safe.

1) TURKS: GONGAGA

Simply enter the Gongaga woods any time before the Temple of the Ancients to find them near the entrance. Equip Cloud with the Force Stealer and Fire Ring, Aeris with the Striking Staff and Talisman, and Yuffie with the Wind Slash and Power Wrist. Obviously, equip stronger weapons if you're not fighting them at the first opportunity.

BOSS: Reno and Rude
2000 HP each

With two healers, you shouldn't be able to lose this battle. Defeating either Turk will cause the other to run away; focus all your attacks on Reno, so you can be sure you'll win the Fairy Tale.

2) LOST NUMBER

In order to get Vincent in your party, you must first get the Key to the Basement by defeating this boss. Do not attempt to fight him unless your

party is strong enough to take on Materia Keeper. Make your party Cloud, Aeris, and Yuffie, equipping your best weapons and putting everyone under Fury beforehand. Lower the battle speed to the slowest setting, put everyone in the front row, and set Cloud's and Aeris' limit breaks to level 1. If you have a Bolt Ring, give it to Cloud. Save on the world map.

Lost Number's safe is on the second floor of the Shinra Mansion, in the left wing. To unlock him, you must enter the following combination before the 20 second timer runs out: Right 36, Left 10, Right 59, Right 97. If you overshoot a number, the combination will automatically fail. Once you successfully unlock the safe, big ugly himself will pop out.

BOSS: Lost Number
7000 HP

Initially, Lost Number is like most other bosses: assault him with physical attacks and Cloud's limits, and heal with Clear Tranquil and Healing Wind as they come. His punch does 300 damage, while Bolt2 does 500--nothing serious, especially if Cloud is immune to Lightning.

However, at 3500 HP and below he becomes very dangerous. Upon falling below half health, Lost Number changes forms. His new form has extremely high Defense, so your attacks do barely a fourth of their normal damage. Worse, he becomes much more powerful: his punches do 400 damage in the back row, and the deadly Lost Blow does 1200 damage. The latter is certain death at your current levels. If you attempt a bum rush, he will eliminate your characters one by one with Lost Blow.

In order to beat him before moving on to Mt. Nibel, you have to take advantage of Lost Number's vulnerability to Paralysis and Stop. He cannot transform while under these statuses, but must wait until someone attacks him while able to move in order to change forms. Once you think he's close to 3500 HP (using a calculator might be wise), stop attacking until the next Cross Slash or Seal Evil. Cross Slash is always used immediately, while Seal Evil is only used when you're sure that Clear Tranquil will be enough to keep the party alive. Once Paralysis or Stop is inflicted, you can use regular attacks as long as Lost Number remains frozen. If you screw up once, the party is done for. If you manage it perfectly, this method is actually faster than the standard brute force method due to the first form's far lower Defense.

Alternatively, if the above method seems like too much trouble you could simply wait until later, when Aeris learns Pulse of Life. Pulse of Life revives and fully heals the party, reducing the threat from Lost Blow; as long as Aeris defends when she has less than 1200 HP, and activates Pulse of Life immediately, he should not be able to kill you. You could also fight him after getting the Highwind, though at that point Lost Blow will no longer be a serious threat. A single high-level Meteorain will easily send Lost Number straight to hell.

**3) WUTAI PAGODA BOSSES

After completing the Wutai materia sidequest, Yuffie can challenge the five guardians of the Pagoda. I strongly recommend beating the first three bosses, since Chekov drops the highly useful Ice Ring. None of the other items they give you are of any use in a NMNI game, though the 8600 EXP from defeating both Staniv and Godo will go a long way on Gaea's Cliff. The preparations for each battle are listed in the individual strategies.

BOSS: Gorkii

3000 HP

Equip the Magic Shuriken and Power Wrist, and set the battle speed to the highest setting. Gorkii can cast Regen, Barrier, and Reflect on himself, frustrating your attempts to damage him. He can also cast Demi2, and uses a dive kick that takes off 25% of Yuffie's maximum HP. Fortunately, he doesn't have a lot of MP; after a few Demi2's he will no longer be able to cast anything, and his Regen and Barrier status should wear off quickly. Simply wait until Regen wears off, healing with Clear Tranquil as needed. Once he's out of MP, he's a cinch to kill; heal with Clear Tranquil after every other dive kick, and otherwise attack until he's dead.

BOSS: Shake

4000 HP

Yuffie must have more than 1000 HP for this battle. The higher her HP, the easier it will be. Equip the Magic Shuriken, Diamond Bangle, and Protect Vest. The first half of the battle is easy; Shake's beak attack does a bit over 200 damage, requiring only infrequent use of Clear Tranquil.

Once he falls below 2000 HP (this will probably happen after the sixth or seventh hit), Shake will counter every hit with the powerful Rage Bomber. It does almost 600 damage, and the animation lasts long enough that he will get another attack before you can activate Clear Tranquil. In order to survive, Yuffie must only attack if Clear Tranquil has just restored her to full HP; Shake will use his beak attack both before and after Rage Bomber, leaving her with very little HP.

This part of the battle gets tedious. Two beak attacks will recharge Clear Tranquil, allowing Yuffie to heal back a bit more than the 450 damage Shake deals. The greater her maximum HP, the faster she can recover. Wait until she is once again restored to full HP before your next attack. In most cases a critical hit will kill Yuffie; a critical Rage Bomber is always certain death.

BOSS: Chekov

5000 HP

Set the battle speed to 75% of its maximum value, so it is midway between the left end of the gauge and the default setting. This is what will win the battle for you. Equip the Magic Shuriken, Diamond Bangle, and Power Wrist. (If you've completed the Temple of the Ancients, equip the Gigas Armlet instead. It makes this battle so much easier.) Chekov may occasionally open the battle by inflicting Paralysis, but not to worry; it is only used once, and he won't attack you for a while yet. Chekov just stands there until he falls below half health, at which point he damages you and heals himself for 250 HP with Absorb. Yuffie can deal more damage than he can heal back--between 325 and 400 per hit, depending on her level--but only if she attacks every turn.

Here is where the battle speed comes in. After every second Absorb, Yuffie's limit break will charge. Command Yuffie to attack during the Absorb animation; she will spend three or four seconds attacking, and thanks to the newly charged limit she will be able to heal with Clear Tranquil before Chekov gets to move again. If the battle speed is too low, Yuffie will not be able

to attack again before the limit gauge fills. If it is too high, Chekov will get another turn before you are able to use Clear Tranquil. As it is, you should be able to damage him just fine. Keep attacking in this fashion--the net damage you deal is rather low, so it will take a while to reduce his HP to zero--and eventually the Ice Ring will be yours.

BOSS: Staniv
6000 HP

Equip Yuffie with the Magic Shuriken, Diamond Bangle, and Peace Ring. His regular attack does about 300 damage, while War Cry (which inflicts Sadness) does nothing. He has a 50% chance of countering with the powerful Iron Attack the moment he falls below 875 HP. Iron Attack does about the same damage as Rage Bomber; you can either deal with this the same way you dealt with Shake, or simply hope that he doesn't use it. Either way, there's no reason not to beat him before leaving Wutai.

BOSS: Godo
10,000 HP

In order to beat Godo, Yuffie needs both a Ribbon and an armor that protects against Lightning. You get the first of both in the Temple of the Ancients, as well as some much needed EXP to boost Yuffie's HP. Equip the Magic Shuriken, Dragon Armlet, and Ribbon.

Thanks to the Ribbon, many of Godo's attacks will be rendered harmless. Sleepel and Mini will have no effect, and both the poison and damage from Bio2 will be avoided. But Beast Sword, Demi3, and Trine will still hurt you. Trine is most dangerous; it deals 1000 damage unprotected, which is why you need Lightning protection to survive.

Actually finishing Godo can be a bit of an ordeal. When his HP falls too low Godo will counter with Cure2, healing 1200 HP. Since you obviously cannot keep up with this healing, you must allow him to use up his MP. This will take a while, since he starts with 1000 MP, but after enough Demi3's, Cure2's, and status spells he will eventually run low. At that point he will only use Drain, stealing around 150 HP to heal himself, and Beast Sword. There should be no problem dealing enough damage to finish him.

4) TURKS: SUNKEN GELNIKA

Reno and Rude are in the room to the left of the Gelnika's save point, blocking the way to the cargo room containing the Spirit Lance and Outsider. Equip the Heaven's Cloud, Bolt Armlet, and Ribbon on Cloud, the AM Cannon, Escort Guard, and Peace Ring on Barret, and the Conformer, Dragon Armlet, and Ribbon on Yuffie before the battle.

BOSS: Reno and Rude
15,000 HP and 20,000 HP

A surprisingly easy battle. Reno will waste most of his turns attempting to confuse you with Neo Turk Light, though occasionally he will use the powerful Electroprod 2. Fortunately it's a Lightning attack; Cloud and Barret will not be damaged, while Yuffie will only take 600 damage. Rude's shoulder attack is

pretty powerful, dealing almost 1000 damage in the back row. But due to a programming bug, once he casts a spell Rude will be unable to move at all.

Target Reno first, then finish Rude once he's gone. The Conformer does 3000 per hit against these guys, ending the battle quickly.

5) ULTIMATE WEAPON

Ultimate Weapon appears on the world map after you defeat Diamond Weapon, floating above the recently formed crater near Junon. To fight him, ram the airship into him. For all battles, except possibly the last one, I recommend equipping Cloud with the Ragnarok (Heaven's Cloud if you want to kill him on Disc 2), Bolt Armlet, and Power Wrist, Barret with the AM Cannon/Max Ray, Escort Guard, and Power Wrist, and Yuffie with the Conformer, Gigas Armlet, and Bolt Ring.

BOSS: Ultimate Weapon
100,000 HP

The random battles with Ultimate Weapon fall under two categories: air battles and land battles. In both cases he will attack three times, then flee. He uses Ultima Beam, a full-party Quake2, and a physical attack in the land battles, while in the sky battles he uses Ultima Beam and a lightning-based magic attack. Note that in the air battles, Cloud's sword cannot reach Ultimate Weapon.

In order to shorten this ordeal, you want to deal as much damage as possible in the time you're given. Always have Yuffie attack first, so she has time to both attack and use Clear Tranquil after Ultima Beam and Quake2. The Conformer will do 5000-6000 damage per hit, while Meteorain and Ungarmax will likely do over 10,000.

Once he flees from battle, the irritating part begins. To trigger the next battle, you have to ram Ultimate Weapon several times with the airship. Do your best to keep him on the screen, or it will take you forever to find him again. Eventually Ultimate will start to travel in a straight line, coming to rest over a random location. Once he does, set down on the world map and save. (NOTE: Ultimate Weapon can appear over both the Northern Crater and Midgar. If you want to defeat him on Disc 2, he cannot be allowed to settle over both locations; otherwise you will be forced into the Midgar mission.) If the party is not near full health, use Clear Tranquil in a random encounter. Then get back into the airship, and fly into him to initiate the next battle. Once he flees again, repeat the process. Since he always flies back to the Junon crater first, it would be wise to position the airship so that after the battle you can immediately fly in the direction of the crater by pressing X.

When he falls below 20,000 HP Ultimate will immediately warp to Cosmo Canyon, where the final battle will take place. You now have a choice to make. Ultimate gives 35,000 EXP, enough for Yuffie to gain two levels. As the walkthrough mentions, the final battles become significantly more difficult if Yuffie is higher than Level 55. If you can live with Yuffie's higher level, equip the Reflect Ring on Cloud. Otherwise, leave your equipment as it is. Save your game, and knock Ultimate out of the sky.

BOSS: Ultimate Weapon
~20,000 HP

This battle is the same as the other sky battles until Ultimate dies. At that point, he retaliates by casting Shadow Flare on the character who killed him, wiping them out for sure. If you do not want Yuffie to level up, have her deal the killing blow with the Conformer. (Only use physical attacks and Finishing Touch/Satellite Beam if you are following this strategy; the multi-hitting limits will most likely kill him in one shot.) Shadow Flare kills Yuffie, while Cloud and Barret survive to take the spoils.

If you wish everyone to survive, attack him once or twice with the Conformer and finish him with Meteorain. The Reflect Ring will cause Shadow Flare to bounce back for 8000 damage, in effect killing him twice.

Ultimate drops the Ultima Weapon, Cloud's ultimate sword. (At full HP, his physical attacks do triple damage with this sword; it's a good weapon to have around.) And in the explosion that follows his death, Ultimate blows open a gap in the mountains near Cosmo Canyon. You can now walk from Cosmo Canyon to the Ancient Forest. The Ancient Forest contains the Supershot ST, Vincent's most powerful weapon by far (unless you spend an eternity killing enemies to power up the Death Penalty), and the Minerva Band, a women's armor that nullifies Fire, Ice, and Gravity.

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