Play as normal until after defeating Rogue Tomato and returning to Rabanastre. Once back, stop by the Sandsea on the way to Dalan’s to turn in Rogue Tomato and get Thextera before continuing. Although Dustia 1 takes you right by Thextera, it will go faster and easier when in the area for Dustia 2. Garamsythe Waterway and Rabanastre Palace are mostly the same *except* that you should make sure to spawn and kill Razorfin and avoid the Elixir chest (going for the Mage Masher chest is also actually a good idea – give it to Vaan if you get it). In Nalbina dungeons feel free to grab some of the Knots of Rust as you will eventually want a charged Dark Matter (use the Knots as convenient and keep track as normal), and avoid the Zodiac Spear chest in the Confiscatory (if not confident you remember which one is the Tourmaline Ring, save first).

In Barheim you can buy Thunder in addition to Blizzard if you want (if you want to use Dark against the Judges, wait), but make sure you kill the Zombie that spawns near the first Battery Mimic. The next deviation isn’t until the second Battery Mimic in the switch room; leave that one alive so that it drains power, and also spare the one just before the save crystal. Ideally you will have less than 50% charge (or close to). Chain 40 Skeletons, leaving the Mimic alive, then kill the Battery Mimic and two (or more) more Mimics in the room while getting chests (optional: kill the Battery Mimic before the save crystal now to eliminate undead spawns in the penultimate room). Clear the entire next room except perhaps for that one Suriander that’s way out of the way, the chest by it has good gil, a PD or an Oaken Pole (sells for 650).

Outside in the Estersand run instead to South Bank Villiage, sell loot, buy PD’s for Dustia 2 (75+) and teleport to Rabanastre. Thextera can be killed either before or after Dustia 2, but after is likely faster. For Dustia 2 (the additional kills put an added premium on chain level – feel free to wait until you get one [or a flashing number] to start grabbing loot) get Bascg and turn in Thextera and get Flowering Cactoid in the Sandsea. Moogling to Eastgate, go get the hunt, kill the thing and turn the hunt in (make sure Dantro tells you what to do with the Cactus Flower) before going to Nalbina and teleporting back to Rabanastre. Continue the storyline, but if Aerieel shows up on the way through Lhusu then whack it (if it shows up while Ba’Gamnan is chasing you it might show up again after the chase ends – I haven’t been able to test this), and finally make sure you also buy Shell and Blind on the Leviathan. (NOTE: Aero suicide does not rob you of Ghis’s entry)

Once the game puts you in the Westersand, teleport back to Rabanastre, get and do the Wraith hunt (manual Thunder from Vaan, tertiary Foe: Party Leader: Thunder gambtis). Make sure to turn it in (forgetting it is actually bad), then get the next two from the Sandsea and accept Wyvern Lord. Now teleport back to the Westersand kill and steal from the first few Alraunes (use the Tertiary gambits again, but with Dark) for their Bestiary entry and more loot. In Nam Yensa, hit the Teleport Crystal along the way and Immobilize Balthier or Fran before heading to Simoon Bluff to kill Wyvern Lord (Immobilize trick to get rid of Bagolies in the area, full health reflected Darks from Vaan/Ashe/Pen), a Bagoly and an Axebeak. Notable chests in Simoon Bluff are the two in the “wide” area before WL (potential Windbreaker and Ether/Reflectga Mote) and a ~60% chance for Foe:Flying gambit at the south end of the northern bluff where WL is. Proceed through Raithwall’s Tomb, but in addition to the normal shopping get a second set of Wizard’s equipment, and Silence and make sure to touch the TP crystal on the way out.

Back in Rabanastre, stop by the Clan Hall to get the Cluckatrice and Rocktoise hunts (and rewards for bosses killed and clan ranks achieved), then run to the Technick shop to get Traveler, Libra and Numerology, and finally get the remaining hunts from the Sandsea and turn in Wyvern Lord. Note that only the Garif Adventurer that spawns in The Greensnake gives you the Garif Bestiary entry, so don’t bother killing any others. The run continues largely as normal until after Tiamat, except that you should buy Infuse, 6 Golden Amulets (equip them immediately), a couple Gysahl Greens, and don’t sell the Cypress Poles. Instead of doing Jellies 1 after getting Lente’s Tear, TP to the Estersand. Turn in the Cactus Flower, zone out then back in, reunite the Cactoid family and get the Semclam Shell quest. While gathering the shells outside make a counterclockwise loop around the area, killing everything but the Cactites; once complete, Greeden should have spawned, so whack it (Cypress Poles) before you turn in the Shells. On the way to the Nebralim is a good time to complete a couple Bestiary entries, so kill Cockatrices in Sand-swept Naze to spawn Nekhbet (Cypress Poles) and Cactites in Yardang Labyrinth to spawn Ripe Rampager (ezpz). Killing a few extra enemies along the way is a good idea, so long as you don’t spend too much time doing so. After you get the Nebralim head toward Rabanastre, but pause to reflect Aero on the Wild Saurian to get its entry too. TP back to the Estersand, turn in the Nebralim, then take the boat to the northern shore and go get the Valeblossom Dew (you may as well whack the rocks in the area too). TP back via the crystal in the Mosphoran Highwaste and turn in the Dew. Finally, zone out and back in, get the Barheim key and TP back to Henne for Jellies.

The upside of doing all the extra stuff so far is that you should have enough LP for Vaan and Ashe to have Staves 2, Fira and Headsman. After finishing Jellies 1 you should teleport to Bhujerba, instead of back to Eruyt, do and turn in Nidhogg and Rocktoise (reflected Aero from V/A/P for both) and sell loot along the way (NOT the Valeblossom Dew!). Before going back to Henne, TP to Rabanastre to do and turn in the Croakadile hunt (Fira; chocobo is a waste of gil), whack the Wooly Gator either on the way there or the way back (Cypress Poles) and hit the withered trees you pass. After Jellies 2 TP to Rabanastre, as it should now be the dry in Giza. Go to the villiage via the area Cluckatrice is in and clear it along the way before accepting and completing the hunt (use Jellies setup but turn off Basch’s gambits). Run through the Feywood as normal, but kill the Slaven Warder in Icebound Flow on the way to Bur Omisace (any reflected spell). Once there, buy two Thunder Staves (equip on V/A), and Raise in addition to the normal purchases, but skip the Jackboots (you got a pair from the Cluckatrice hunt); get a set of Thieves’ Cuffs instead. (Elder Wyrm is very doable now, but faster and easier later)

On the way to the Stillshrine, get off the chocobo as soon as you hit the area after the blue save crystal. In this area kill the Twintania, as well as the Emperor Aevis and Yeti in the next (Thundara for all). In the Stillshrine kill a Miriam Guardian and Miriam Facer (Aero for both) in the room with the second pedestal. Also toss a PD on a Zombie Warrior and a Ghoul after rotating the first statue (Ghouls spawn in the room with the petrification trap in the middle). Before rotating the second statue, there is a Facer (Aero) and three Balloons (Blizzara or Thundara) – kill them too. Proceed through the Mateus fight (no need to set up Traveler anymore). After getting the Sword of Kings, enter the secret area with (Foe: Nearest -> Thundara) gambits and Storm Staves on the casters, cast Decoy on Basch and use a Float Mote as soon as you hit the point where the stairs double back. Kill Oilings as you go, and keep spawning and killing Oilings (it may take multiple trips) until Matriarch Bomb shows up (Thundara). In the final part of the secret area you will get either a Shell Shield or Dark Matter (50/50 – and both are useful). Then return to Ward of the Sword King (recast Decoy before entering) and clear it entirely (Aero works for everything but the Darkmare takes more from other spells and has return damage). Once it’s clear, exit and reenter the area (via the secret passage if you haven’t killed Matriarch Bomb yet) to check for Negalmuur. Allow it to spawn a single Ghast before tossing a PD on each of them. The Bergan fight can be done either by using Spellbreaker or setting up Traveler against an enemy in Ward of the Sword King (ideally before Negalmuur). While setting up Traveler is likely to be unwieldy, the Life Crystal is a decent fallback if you’re dead set on using it, though you’ll have to burn a lot of steps before Bergan.

After Bergan and Bur Omisace shopping, TP to Rabanastre and get the Atomos hunt, then Nalbina to buy spells and accept Atomos, and finally to the Mosphoran Highwaste. In Trail of Sky Flung Stone, whack the boulder that gives you access to Rays of Ashen Light. In Northern Skirts flee until the Humbabas stop following you, give Basch the licenses for WM 4-5 and the casters GM3. Decoy Basch, crit and reflect the casters and approach. Have Basch hit Atomos with Dispel to get rid of shell, then have the casters put him to sleep so you can reflect Bio with no danger (keep Basch away from them while Atomos is awake). Once Atomos is down, enter the Salikawood. During the Salikawood Moogles quest, kill a Pumpkin Head and a Sprinter (Blizzara both), and don’t get the last two huts until after you take a quick detour to hit the teleport crystal by King Bomb. Also hit the crystal and check the quest board at the Phon Coast camp, but don’t buy Ruby Rings yet. There’s no need to set up Traveler for Cid, but otherwise complete Sochen Cave Palace as normal and be sure to hit the crystal before entering Old Archades. In Old Archades buy three Embroidered Tippets then proceed as normal until you get to the crystal in Tsenoble.

Jellies are nearly the fastest way to grind levels at this point, and they have the added benefit of being much more profitable than the alternatives. Do four rounds with Embroidered Tippets equipped. At the end of the grind, set up Traveler on the last bat on the way out then go to Archades and complete Draklor as normal.

Instead of returning to Bur Omisace after beating Cid, go to Eruyt to accept the Vorpal Bunny hunt and buy up to about 50 PD’s. Head to Rustling Chapel and crit and Reflect the casters. Blizzara any Coeurls that get in your way, switch to Golden Amulets (not vital) and Decoy Basch before you get the rabbit to pop out. Once you do, Berserk it before it runs away or you will have to run around killing things and reapplying Decoy until you can find it again. Once it’s Berserked, Blind it as well before killing it with Bio. Reequip Embroidered Tippets on the party and clear the area of all foes (Blizzara for Coeurls, Aeroga for everything else). When the area is clear, Dark Skeletons will start spawning. Hit each one with a PD as soon as it pops up (don’t set up PD gambits for more than one character, as they will all throw PD’s on the same enemy more often than not). At 22+ chain Grave Lord will spawn in the center; toss a PD on it. At this point, leave for the Feywood to kill a Deadly Nightshade and a Mu on the way to Rafflesia. It is also recommended to remove party members temporarily while killing Dark Skeletons to even out their experience a bit and make managing a level 49 Zalera fight easier.

Continue as normal all the way to Shemhazai (use Penelo against Tyrant and Shem instead of Basch – she can underflow Tyrant and NihoRem Shem), then return to Balfonheim, buy two Defenders, the three Elemental -aga spells and Curaja and get new hunts (accept Vyraal while in the bar), but don’t get Reddas. Also stop by Rabanastre to buy a Nihopalaoa.

TP to Phon Coast, ask to join and go kill Thalassinon. The turtle is weak to sleep and wind, so have your Niho user hit it with an Alarm Clock before reflecting Aeroga to kill it.

Go to Jahara next. Accept the Enkelados, Ixtab and Mindflayer hunts, and check your game timer. Killbug spawns in the Switchback if it’s between 10 and 39 minutes. It takes about a minute to get to it, so if the time is in that range, go there right away and kill it (Aeroga) along with the nearby Mesmenir and do the ENKELADOS section. Otherwise do the IXTAB section first.

IXTAB: Teleport to Henne Mines and head towards Ixtab and Mindflayer via where you fought Tiamat. Doing Mindflayer first is recommended (Ixtab can Annul, even if it’s unlikely), so head there. Kill any enemies that might follow you into the battle (make sure you get at least one Nightmare), Decoy Basch, Reflect the casters, then approach. Dispel with Basch then have the casters Berserk it. Once it’s Berserking you can Blind it if you wish, but it isn’t necessary because Bio finishes it off quickly. Head back to the switch room and reapply Decoy and Reflect before hitting the switch and heading to Ixtab. Flee up to Ixtab and start the battle by casting the -ara spell of your choice on any bats that have joined the fray before reflecting it on Ixtab. If at this point you have already completed the ENKELADOS section, TP to Rabanastre. Otherwise, exit the mine normally, grab a chocobo and do the ENKELADOS section.

ENKELADOS: First off, check your timer. The goals here are first to spawn Killbug (if you haven’t already, see above) and second to enter a specific area within the correct gameplay minute to find Hybrid Gator (any spell), which spawns in The Switchback from 0 through 14 minutes, Dagan Flats from 15 through 29, Field of Light Winds from 30 through 44 and the Greensnake from 45 through 59. Once you get to the target area, get off the chocobo and kill whichever enemy you went for; if it was Killbug, proceed to wherever Hybrid Gator is. Also bear in mind that in Dagan Flats or the Switchback are other enemies to kill: in the Switchback is a Mesmenir (Ice) and in Dagan Flats a Zaghnal and a Zu (Dagan Flats also puts the Mesmenir on the way to Enkelados) – otherwise they can wait until later. At this point check again for Killbug’s spawn and kill it if the timer is in the range (if necessary) before heading to the Shred via the Greensnake and exit and enter the area a few times to (hopefully) spawn Bull Croc. If it isn’t there try again until it shows up. Once it’s there, take out any Wus along the way to it before putting up Reflect. Kill it with Blizzara, wait for Aeros to show up and do the same to it before finishing off any remaining Wus. Exit and reenter to take care of Enkelados, which is a pushover with Aeroga (Dispel first). This is the last point in the section to find Killbug, so check again if necessary. If somehow you still need to kill a little time, kill any of the remaining enemies in Ozmone that you haven’t already (Zaghnal, Zu, Mesmenir, Viper and Black Chocobo). Once Killbug and the previous list of enemies are all accounted for, head back to Jahara. If you already did the IXTAB section, move on, otherwise TP into Henne.

It’s about time to get some powerful things, including the Zodiac Spear, but first stop by the Mosphoran Highwaste to activate the Braegh hunt before teleporting to the Salikawood (optional: TP to Rabanastre to get Bubble first). To kill King Bomb go in with full health and a party of the Niho user and the casters (Faith on them?). Start with NihoRem along with Bio from both casters (Bio kills the small Bombs) before switching Basch in and reflecting Bio to finish it. Then run to just outside the Necrohol, Niho-Rem Braegh and hit it with Blizzaga until it dies (if it tries to invert the Niho user, and they are under Reflect, it will put itself conveniently near death to begin with). After it dies, buff up your main party (Protect, Shell, Vanish, Libra/Float and Bubble if you got it), go get the spear, but on the way back to the Salikawood crystal stop by the Baknamy Merchant for three Magepower Shishaks and Maximillians, and Telekinesis if you can afford it.

Before continuing, TP to Bur Omisace for the Feral Retriever hunt (NihoRem, Bio – no need to crit. Casters). Take a chocobo there to save a little time. Bravery should now be unlocked at the Clan Provisioner in Rabanastre, so go there to grab it, along with Faith and Bubble (the spell, not the belt).

Barheim is the next main area, but that depends on which grinding strats are used to get within striking distance of level 49. Regardless, before entering make sure the White Mousse and Orthros hunts have been accepted (both in Rabanastre), and accept the Bloodwing hunt in the South Bank Village before heading in.