

Vibrant plainlands surrounded them. Rolling hills and luscious blades of grass glistened with remnants of morning dew. Farmlands and various primitive silos and mills could be seen in the faraway distance, where Aquatids and Insectids alike collected their harvests with their cheerful kin.

Minor forests dotted the landscape, and eventually combined into a central woodland where a river ran through. They followed the shimmering stream which flowed with water so clearly that Frost's [Cleanse] had no effect on it. She leaned out from Snap's back and dipped her hand into the cool water, sipping onto the delicious liquid.

It was sweet, and so utterly refreshing. She wondered if it was because this was one of the few times she had drank water in this world. Blood, bodily substances, and other egregious liquids were a part of her regular diet for as long as she could remember.

The inland sea spanned westwards and continued north past another evergreen barrier of tall trees. Beyond that was H5; a Sector known for its music and was the homeland of a few of their friends.

Namely Hellen, and her daughter Alice.

She wondered if they'd get to meet again.

Aside from the Adventures, farmers, travelers, and themselves – Slimes and other forms of wildlife thrived in these plains they called home. Boars, wild dogs, horses, and many species of birds grazed, hunted or were at the pointy end of an Adventurer's weapon.

The more passive animals like the horses were left alone, but the aggressive ones were taken down and stripped of their pelts. Those that couldn't ask other parties for help or alternatively hauled the entire carcass back with them.

There was one minor settlement out in these rural lands, and it contained an outdoor Guild. Apparently hunting grounds, as they called these places, usually had a Guild nearby for ease of access.

Only a few dozen people were present, each minding their own affairs. They still politely hailed Frost and her companions as they passed by, and they pleasantly greeted them back with waves and smiles.

Snap was once again the main star of the attraction, gathering many eyes from both Adventurers and wildlife alike. One would think that Snap's appearance would be frightening to the animals. While it was true to the predators, the birds cozied up onto Snap's head.

"Like a bird on the head of a crocodile. Hey! Slimes should be right ahead. You know, I'm kind of sad that pipsqueak version of you couldn't come along." Cer said, referencing the Little Frost.

Both Alter Frosts were ordered to look after Stella, Ponea, Sana and a slumbering Aster. With the Hired Arm containing a quarter of her stats; she was easily the second strongest being in the Golden Index, right behind Carpalis.

As for the Little Frost? She was there for moral support. And... well, the ex-slaves, who still hadn't come up with a single name for themselves, had taken too much of a liking to her.

But who could blame them?

They eventually arrived over the slope and were greeted with caldera-like steep filled to the brim with swaths of green, blue, and red slimes.

"W-Wow... There's so many." Frost was instantly taken aback by the insane number of slimes that bounced around the landscape, each in their colored herds. "Any reason they're all packed down there?"

"Maybe they can't get over the cliffs." Jury said as Snap crawled around the edge of the small cliff face. Beneath them was the joyous lands where only a handful of parties found themselves in.

"There's a path that leads down there. Slimes just clump up wherever they want at the lowest, flattest land above sea level." Res gave a simplistic explanation. "If there's a slope that leads lower down, then they'll bounce there. Couldn't tell you why. Oh, and don't mind the red ones if they start sucking on your skin or butting into you."

"Why's that?" Jury wondered.

"They're aggressive." Ber answered as Snap found a gorge that separated the hidden world from the outside, travelling through the narrow, steep walls until they finally reached the slime haven.

Ignis looked over at Ber and pointed at herself.

"You seriously consider yourself a slime? Weren't you a Demi-human?" Ber blurted out. "Never mind. You're just kidding... Hehe. Not bad, kid." She ended up smiling at Ignis.

Frost was happy that the group was growing closer by the day. Ignis never really used to interact with the group, so seeing her joke like that with Ber warmed her heart. Also, Jury used to always leave the talking to Frost, but now she was much more active and finally carried a voice of her own in their group.

Things weren't perfect of course, but the only way from here was up.

"Let's see. 15 slimes." Frost pulled out a parchment of paper from her Dimensional Storage.

The golden-tinted leaflet carried hidden engravings naked to all but Jury and Frost since they both possessed the same eyes. It was essentially a mark of confirmation or authenticity. The Golden Index personnel were able to communicate over significant distances in short, code-like forms.

This code would be relayed to a Golden Index personnel by a Golden Thumb member to be authenticated. It was one of a few measures the Golden Index took against counterfeit and forgery.

“Any slimes?” Jury asked, eager to test out her Beholder-esque skills, although those took a considerable amount of Nex to use.

1 million Nex for what was considered to be a simple attack that dealt 4 million damage in total. Frost only had around 300,000 Nex spare, and 100,000 with Jury. But her other two skills, [Localized Entropy] and [Doppler Strike] each required only 250,000 Nex.

The Moons were willing to spare Jury some of their millions of rewarded Nex, but of course:

“That giant beam is out of the question.” Res firmly warned. “That beam is bound to hit something.”

“But those other two skills? Yeah, sure. Go for it. Show us what you’re made of –!” Cer was instantly cut off by Res.

“Please double – triple check if they’ll devastate everything around us.”

“It’s ok. They’re mostly localized from what I can tell. Much weaker than [Retrocausality].” Jury assured. “But I’m not going to test it here. I’m not that crazy~”

“Crazy is an understatement... That’s the first time any of us have seen a Beholder go all out. A Junior Beholder...” Res trailed off as they disembarked from Snap, watching blue and green slimes cozy up to their feet. “It’s a miracle we haven’t been killed by any of them yet.”

“You think they have something against us?” Cer questioned.

“Yes. No thanks to you two. 15 slimes. Doesn’t matter what color. Just take them on. What are you going to try out, Frost?” Res inquired.

One of the other reasons as to why they were out here was for Frost to test out her newfound skills, as well as the Dream Shatterer. It was overkill on slimes, but the clear lands provided the much-needed space in case her skills were truly destructive.

The caldera-esque landscape they found themselves in was easily multiple kilometers across, and there wasn’t any party close enough to be caught in the crossfire. But there was one thing that made Frost hesitate.

“... can I just take the red ones out?” Frost asked, scooping up a playful, jiggling slime which had eyes in the form of a line and an invisible mouth. They were the size of giant cats, with some growing up to twice the size of a human.

“What’s the matter with you? They’re just gelatinous blobs waiting for natural causes to take over.” Cer argued. “Don’t tell me you’re one of those slime-empathizers?” She pointed to another far away group that cloud watched with several sleeping slimes.

“I don’t know why, but I feel like I’d be committing a terrible crime if I killed them.” Frost said, utilizing Scrutiny to check for their intentions. She needed a way to justify killing them. Interestingly enough, the slimes carried intention, which meant that they possibly possessed a brain or some level of sentience.

They're somewhat transparent. But they do have a small core in the center. That's probably where their brain is if I had to guess.

The slime in her hand trembled and bounced away when it was free from the bone-chilling effects of her gaze, which was in reality just her staring a little too hard.

That being said, Frost approached an overly aggressive red slime which pounced in her direction.

Red Slime

LEVEL : 25 ORIGIN : Slime HP : 300 RESIST : 50 AGI : 4

And then, she casually punched it.

A black cloud similar to that of the Heart of Ours [Shattered Dreams] formed and *devoured* the slime. The acrid cloud remained precisely where her fist ended for a minute, gobbling up even the air itself.

Not a single trace of the slime was left.

"That's insanely effective." Frost commented, baffled by the unlisted side-effect of her gloves.

She then punched the air a couple more times, creating multiple clouds that combined into a thick smog. From what she could tell, the clouds only formed if the thing she hit was instantly killed or if she punched the air.

Hitting the rockface did nothing, although small sparks of the black cloud did form with each impact that easily carved into the walls. It was kind of like an upgraded version of Omnipresent Maw, except it served as mostly a finishing move.

Still, she foresaw great things ahead with this weapon.

Then, she tried [Double Punch], and to her surprise, the cloud appeared at the end of the second magical punch, increasing the range. It was only 10 centimeters, but, surprisingly enough, it worked on the rockfaces.

So while the surface appeared normal, a cavity was slowly being torn apart from within thanks to the [Dream Shatterer]. Under the right circumstances she could see it excelling against targets that were vulnerable behind a thick layer of armor.

Such was the unfairness of a Woe of the Fallen Star-classed weapon.

In the meantime, the others took this time to immerse themselves with nature. Ignis was awkwardly fond of the slimes, and even the red ones gathered by her like she was their master.

Amongst them was one slime that was afflicted by the Badge of Fragmented Aspirations. It allowed Frost to essentially impose her heart onto it, which caused it to fight other nasty red slimes before it snapped out of it when it took more than 10% of its total health.

The effect had two outcomes depending on the target. If they were not an enemy, then they would essentially wander around, quivering as if being internally torn apart by an effect similar to [Aspirating Aspiration]. If they were an enemy, then they were converted into an ally.

However, this all depended on them having less than 100 RESIST.

Jury ended up laying down on the grass, napping with her tail coiled around her like a nest as the Triplets watched over Frost with Snap's company.

Then, Frost turned her attention to [Armor Piercing].

< ACTIVE: Armor Piercing >

< EFFECT: Cause your punches to create highly localized and penetrative impacts. ATT increased by 25% against armor. 75% reduction against flesh >

This essentially stopped her punches from outright shattering walls, and instead, focused her tremendous power into a small section that instantly pulverized a fist-sized hole into the rockface.

This was basically a superior version of Punch. Against armor, that is.

Next up was [Magnitude].

< ACTIVE: Magnitude >

< EFFECT: Cause your punches to dissipate energy onto your target, greatly increasing the area of effect. 5-meter radius. ATT reduced to 20% of total ATT >

What this allowed her to do was cleanly sheer off a section of the cliff face in a single punch. Her monumental amount of power was spread thinly across a 5 radius. It was sort of like the Triplet's electric field, except this was caused by pure kinetic power.

Brawler had shaped itself into something incredible.

And now, she was left with her final combat-focused Profession; Conflagrator.

< ACTIVE: Inferno >

< **EFFECT:** Conjure a controlled firestorm. Deal 2,000 Damage, and 100 Cinder Stacks to those caught within the blaze >

< Cost: 1,500 MP per second >

Frost ensured that no one was within her vicinity as she wondered what the difference between Burn and Cinder stacks was.

“Unknown. Cinder is not a known stack. It should be Burn.”

Weird. You think it has something to do with my past?

“Certainly. The Archivist also believes so... and she’s curious. Cinder is a very fond word to her.”

Frost, ironically, caused a flaming trail to shoot from her palms. The resulting flames were controlled like another limb, and they spiraled around her like a serpent. Even the grass that caught alight were dictated by her will, rather than the rushing winds, and when she merely ceased controlling them –

– The flames disappeared all at once.

“... I have never seen that before. That’s not fire. That can’t be fire.” Res stated.

Apparently, flames could not be quenched that easily, especially if they were not physically connected with the user. Never mind the stray flames they created elsewhere. The flames were therefore described as near sentient in a way.

What was even stranger was that not only did the heat disappear entirely, but so did the plumes of smoke.

Frost made a mental note of this, and Nav had a field day with the ‘Frost and fire’ puns as she prepared to use the next two Active Skills from Conflatorator.