

Zero to Hero 101 - on Palafin ex in the PTCG

A 'Wave Crash' Course in a non-meta deck by Nicholas Frank

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Getting Your Feet Wet - Non-Meta Decks and Me

I can't imagine playing a Tier 0 deck at this point and time in the meta. There is no greater time than now to innovate with some of the funnest combinations we have - single prize decks like Alakazam, utilizing new strong mega attackers like Lopunny and Lucario, or even planting down a Grand Tree and letting Greninja ex go to town with Ignition Energy.

Granted, I'm not the best person to talk in that regard. I played Tsareena ex when Charizard ex was the meta, and it was hard to say goodbye post-rotation as Hisuian Sneasler and Shaymin V left the format. Copperajah ex was my main deck the past few months, a return from when I played it with the Bronzong from Battle Styles and Radiant Heatran with Luminous energy - this time around with Munkidori. I played Regidrago VSTAR, mainly due to how much it reminded me of my beloved first deck of Mewtwo & Mew GX, but for the most part, off-meta decks are my specialty - especially one shot decks.

While I liked my Incineroar ex deck before the release of Mega Evolution's base set, the HP is getting too high to reliably OHKO. Magmortar from Journey Together allows for knockouts with burn that prevent Fezandipiti ex from activating, and while that's awesome, Buddy-Buddy Poffin doesn't work with Magmar and the Litten line doesn't help with draw - Pidgeot ex is usually a requirement, and it's never fun to have 2 Stage 2 lines and multiple copies of the Stage 1 line of Magmortar. Also, it's Budew's world and we're just living in it. While I played Tsareena ex, I loathed Rare Candy. It was my least favorite card in the deck by miles, especially when Budew was unleashed in Prismatic Evolutions.

With that said, I decided to look for an off-meta Stage 1, maybe with similar properties to Copperajah. Hard to OHKO, able to do massive damage...and then it hit me. They wouldn't give a Special Illustration Rare to just any Pokemon, right? Prismatic Evolutions gave us Fist of the North Star artist Tetsuo Hara's Palafin ex, a masterpiece. With so much effort in order to get such a great artist, Creatures must have a hope for this card, right?

I then remembered Great Tusk and Iron Treads ex, every Paldean starter ex, Eiscue ex and Revavroom ex, basically every Pokemon 151 ex and Black Bolt/White Flare ex, Dachsbun ex, Golisopod ex, and too many Supporter cards to even name - but this is a card in special set, and unlike the Eeveelutions, it was not introduced in this set, so it must be different. That said,

do not talk to me about Sandy Shocks ex and why it got a new artwork in Prismatic Evolutions, as I cannot explain that one.

Palafin is a very strange deck for sure - there's a lot of moving parts, and I mean that literally. Switching your Pokemon in and out is an absolute must for this deck - thankfully, Snorlax from Pokemon GO has rotated out of our format, so retreating is much more reliable. I think after a while of playing this deck both online and in-person, I'm ready to be a decent introducer to this deck that has very little results, but as I see it, much potential.

Cards and Decklist



After hours and hours, this is the list I have come up with. I don't think that this will be my Toronto list, as I change decklists extremely often, but this one has been very consistent recently. There are many cards in this list that are abnormal to see in any decklist, and that isn't just the Pokemon in that category. Practice Studio and Larry's Skill stick out like sore thumbs,

while staples like Boss's Orders and Night Stretcher have only a single card of the sixty. Let's see why.

Pokemon *Dolphins*

Firstly, we have **Finizen TWM 59**, the basic Pokemon with explosive potential. This Pokemon has a retreat cost of 1, and for a single Water energy, swings for 30 and cannot attack next turn.

Let's get this out of the way now - **"can't attack next turn" is absolutely bogus and should never matter in any case for this deck.** You will always, hopefully, be switching out of the active spot or evolving, which entirely nullifies that effect of the card. Palafin ex has a similar attack, and if there was no easy way to switch out of the active or that ruling was different, this deck would be garbage. Now with that out of the way, this 70 HP Finizen is actually kind of ideal. 70 HP means you can use Buddy-Buddy Poffin to put it on bench, and 30 HP on a basic for a single energy isn't as useless as it sounds. The everpresent, obnoxious Budew has 30 HP and gets taken out in a single Aqua Slash. 30 is also pretty good chip damage, so be sure to utilize this card well. 1 Retreat Cost is also really good for switching out in dire situations, so this is the Finizen you'll be using most often.

However, this isn't the only Finizen in the deck - **Finizen OBF 60** is a one-of. Not to be confused with its setmate, *Finizen OBF 61* with 90 HP, this card has a mere 50 HP whilst sharing a retreat cost of 2. Yes, that means this card has a higher retreat cost, less HP, and 20 less damage on its attack. With that logic, this would be unusable bulk, right? Well, there's a reason this is only a single copy - it just isn't as good as its Twilight Masquerade counterpart.

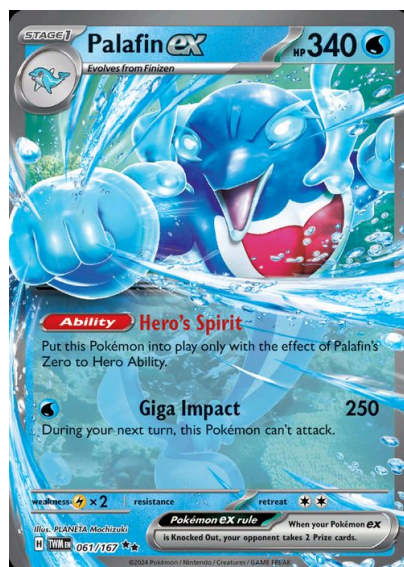
Dusclops can Cursed Blast it before it even has a chance to evolve - yes, Dusclops, not Dusknor. Dragapult obliterates this card whilst benched and still has an extra damage counter it can place on your 70 HP Finizen to set itself up for a second Phantom Dive knockout. However, what it lacks in, well, everything, it makes up in its first attack, Valiant Evolution. This switches it back to the bench and **then** evolves it - importantly, in that order. This maneuver is likely best with the Obsidian Flames Palafin, which for 2 Water energy, can swing for 210 damage but crucially,



needs to have gone from bench to active that turn. That Palafin is not in this deck, but I will talk about it later. The reason why that matters in this deck is because sometimes you don't have the evolution in hand or any card to draw it, especially during item lock. This is more of a last resort card, and shouldn't see play in every match, especially those with Dusclops possibly being played. Razor Fin is, for the most part, useless and should never be used over Valiant Evolution.



Next up is the first of 3 cards with Palafin in its name, and the third of five in its evolution line (despite the fact that this is Zero Form Palafin and looks nearly identical to Finizen), **Palafin TWM 60**. This Pokémon has 100 HP, 1 retreat cost, and for 1 Water and 1 Colorless, swings for...30 HP again, but at a higher cost than its pre-evolution? That's correct - functionally, Finizen is swinging for the same amount as its evolution for *less energy*. Obviously, there's a reason for this, and it is what I like to call the Wall of Text - otherwise known as **Zero to Hero**. To summarize, the Wall of Text states that when this card goes from the Active to the Bench, it is **swapped** with another card in the deck, namely the great and powerful **Palafin ex TWM 61**, meaning that the 100 HP Stage 1 goes back into the deck and can be re-used. 100 HP isn't bad, and for a single retreat cost, you become a 340 HP Stage 1 ex. No other Stage 1 comes close to Palafin ex's HP except for Mega Evolution Pokémon, and those give up an entire extra prize card. Palafin ex has a retreat cost of 2, but as we will get to later, that should never really matter. Its ability is very simple and honestly does nothing except make it worse - it cannot be placed in any way that is not the aforementioned Zero to Hero ability. Sorry, Kingdra ex, no cheating this onto the field.



For a single Water energy, Giga Impact swings for a whopping 250 damage - remember, this is a Stage 1 that you'll be able to get into play on your second turn, going first. Besides a select few Pokémon like Bloodmoon Ursaluna and Team Rocket's Mewtwo, you're taking the first prize, and unless you're facing down a Gholdengo ex or Raging Bolt ex, you're very likely

to survive an incoming attack with a whopping 340 HP. The downside to Giga Impact is that you cannot attack next turn - but again, that should be meaningless here for reasons that will be discussed later.

Unfortunately, this game isn't as simple as that. In some games you will not be able to maneuver your Finizen and Palafin at your leisure, and unlike cards like Gholdengo ex, you can't just place the ex down in the active and start Making it Rain. Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex and Mimikyu take no damage from Palafin ex (yet another reason why its ability is a hindrance, unlike most other ex Pokemon that aren't named Slaking ex).

While for other decks those two spell disaster, Palafin has an answer in **Palafin TEF 49**. This single prize Palafin is unlike the single prize Palafin we talked about earlier, having 50 more HP putting it out of the range of cards like Dusknor, and more importantly, a uniquely good attack. Two retreat isn't the greatest, but it really shouldn't impact anything because it doesn't have the drawback of Giga Impact and can stay swinging in the Active. Double Hit is way too expensive for this deck at a 3 energy cost, and is extremely unreliable, dealing 90 damage 50% of the time, and if not, it does an okay 180 damage or a pathetic 0 damage - just not worth the risk. Vanguard Punch is where it's at, doing 130 for a single Water energy on a Stage 1 single prize Pokemon - knocking out evolving basics, some evolving Stage 1 Pokemon, and multiple meta staples like Munkidori, Tatsugiri, Shaymin, Psyduck, Frillish. It can even swing for weakness for a one-shot on some ex cards, such as Oricorio ex and Ethan's Ho-Oh ex. Of course, this wouldn't be a Palafin card without a drawback. Vanguard Punch has a secondary effect in which it doubles its own damage counters - for example, if you were hit by Itchy Pollen for 10 damage, you'll take another 10 damage when you attack. Furthermore, if you have 80 damage or more, you'll be knocking yourself out with Vanguard Punch. A common target for this Palafin, Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon thankfully swings for 140, leaving you with 10 HP. If you attack it, then it attacks you, you can nobly sacrifice your Palafin for 2 prizes while they only take 1 - just be careful about what you bring in next, because it will be attacked before you have the chance to attack with it.



Staples

Yes, this deck has **Budew PRE 4**. No, I'm not jazzed about that fact, and I wish that was not the case. However, a free retreat card that enables item lock for no energy cost is just too good to pass up in this deck, in my opinion. Spoiler for later on - this deck wants to go first. If you go second, Budew gives you an option to slow down your opponents gameplan, especially on Stage 2 decks where they cannot use Rare Candy to evolve directly into cards like Charizard ex or Dusknor. Budew isn't really a last ditch effort, but usually if you're going second, you want to use Itchy Pollen or the 50 HP Finizen to use Valiant Evolution - 75% of the time though, Itchy Pollen is the way to go about it. Believe it or not, your opponent isn't the only one who wants to see your Budew knocked out - you do, too. This allows you to place Finizen in the active on your next turn, evolve it into Palafin, and either switch out to become Palafin ex or swing with Vanguard Punch. Also, while it doesn't happen every game, that 10 damage might fix some math that allows Palafin ex to score a game winning knockout.



As with so many decks in the current format, **Fezandipiti ex SFA 38** is part of this deck for a multitude of reasons. Firstly, when an Air Balloon is attached, this becomes a Dark type



with free retreat - a necessity in the deck that will be touched upon soon. Other than that, never expect to use Cruel Arrow as an attack, as that would require using half the energy in the deck. 1 retreat isn't bad though. Flip the Script is a very useful ability for games in which you need to draw cards in dire situations - for example, if you lose a Pokémon very early on and are in panic mode, Fezandipiti ex has your back.

Sometimes. Sometimes it's a complete Liability ex instead. Sadly, I think this card has so much use I can't seem to play without it. Those panic moments are absolutely vital, and this card can decide if your game continues or ends abruptly at

times. This isn't just a Palafin problem, and if it wasn't as useful as it is, you wouldn't see it in top decks all the time.

Gimmicks

Pecharunt ex SFA 39 has no way to attack in this deck. There is no Binding Mochi in this deck, nor does the status of Poison help at all. All that said, good luck piloting this deck without it - Subjugating Chains makes Palafin ex the deck it is, believe it or not. Once per turn, this ability allows you to bring a Dark type into the Active, benching whatever is in the Active - is it coming together? Yes, that Active Pokemon is indeed going to be Palafin. Wall of Text Palafin and Palafin ex both greatly benefit from the switching ability of Pecharunt ex. As mentioned with other cards, 1 retreat cost is nice, but isn't too relevant. Unfortunately, 190 HP blatantly sucks to have on an ex that gives up 2 prize cards - that's a Dusknoir and a Phantom Dive while you're on bench. This card is solely for utility, but it is absolutely vital to pivoting in a way that Palafin requires.



In effect, Pecharunt ex is...underwhelming here, isn't it? While it is not a Binding Mochi activator for Mega Sharpedo ex do deal massive damage, that doesn't mean it should be a loathed card in the deck. In essence, you can use this card to entirely avoid the effect of attacks like Yveltal's Clutch or Maractus' Corner by bringing up a free retreat Dark type and retreating back into your Palafin. Now that we've gone over Subjugating Chains and the power it possesses, let's go over a couple of 1-1 lines that turn this deck from just an off-meta pick into a more consistent and terrifying deck to face.

Sneasel PRE 61 is a strange case. There was no Weavile card in Prismatic Evolutions, and it does a mere 20 damage for a single Darkness energy. The reason for it existing is because, from what I understand, it is part of the Generation 2 based deck from the Starter Decks Generations released in Japan. Honestly, that...still really doesn't explain anything. Sorry. What matters here is that this is the only *naturally* free retreat Dark type in the deck, while everything else is 1 or 2 retreat. Don't worry, there's 2 Air Balloon cards in the Deck alongside 2 Switch cards, so it isn't like if Sneasel gets prized,



everything is over. That said, this is one of the most delicate cards in the deck. Sure, Dusclops can't Cursed Blast it like Budew and the 50 HP Palafin, but that doesn't mean 2 Munkidori or a Dragapult don't love to see 60 HP. If this was just to get a free retreat dark type, there would be a couple other considerations higher on my list - Marnie's Morpeko has 70 HP (and, yes, theoretically could be grabbed by an opponent's Spikemuth Gym). The Morpeko from Paradox Rift used to be in this deck due to the ability that grants free retreat with no energy attached - but with Klefki and Flutter Mane still around, it isn't ideal. Lastly, there's the aforementioned Yveltal



from Mega Evolution's base set with that Clutch attack and 110 HP, but it can't be grabbed from Buddy-Buddy Poffin. Of course, none of them can do what Sneasel can do - evolve. Forgotten by many, just an uncommon card from the second Scarlet and Violet block set, **Weavile PAL 134** is an agent of chaos that can flip a game on its head with a single use of Subjugating Chains. Slashing Claw, once again, is not usable in this deck, but 70 HP isn't what Weavile wants to deal - it aims for psychic damage directly to the opponent with an unexpected Assaulting Hunt. Contrasting to the Wall of Text, this ability activates upon the exact opposite condition - when this card

goes from the Bench to the Active Spot, you have the option to bring one of your opponent's Benched **Basic** Pokemon to the Active Spot, gusting away the Active Pokemon.

This has a ton of use cases. For example, you can bring up a high retreat cost Pokemon and retreat into Budew, potentially causing your opponent to slow down and let you build your bench, or you can move away a Pokemon that your Palafin ex is just out of range of knocking out to hit a weaker target. While those are good uses, the best is clear - take Fezandipiti ex from your opponents bench and make them wish they never played it. With Air Balloon or a single energy in tow, Weavile can be unleashed through Subjugating Chains, retreat into Palafin, and watch from the bench as you take 2 prizes from a knockout on Mew ex, Fezandipiti ex, any of the Masked ex cards, the entirety of the Pokemon ex in the Raging Bolt deck, and if Maximum Belt is equipped, let Mega Absol ex or Mega Kangashkan ex know who's boss and take 3 prize cards. I like to call it *Infinite Boss*, despite the fact that it is very conditional.

110 HP isn't the best, assuredly - Dusknor takes it down, and 4 Munkidori uses puts it and Sneasel in discard. Sometimes, this just isn't the right duo to play, and that's fine. Not all decks are heavy on Basic ex Pokemon anyway, and they leave Weavile useless, unless you really want to KO a benched Solrock or Lunatone for your opponent to immediately recover via Night Stretcher. I went to a League Cup recently and got obliterated, even with a 2-2 line of Sneasel and Weavile. Frillish and Budew were everywhere I turned, and item lock completely shut me down because of my lack of draw that isn't named Fezandipiti ex - and conditional draw just doesn't cut it. What this deck needed was a Dark type with a maximum retreat cost of 2 that can assist with draw power in some way. Thankfully, as a callback to the GX from Shining Legends, **N's Zorua JTG 97** evolves into **N's Zoroark ex JTG 98**, retaining the Trade



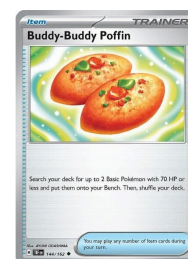
ability which for the cost of discarding one card from your hand, allows you to draw 2 more. While 2 cards isn't an absurd amount of draw, it's 2 more than you'd be able to draw without it. With a retreat cost of 1 and 2 respectively, Air Balloon allows for a swift exit once brought up with Subjugating Chains, allowing for Wall of Text Palafin to evolve and for Palafin ex to avoid the drawback of Giga Impact's prevention of subsequent attacks. While N's Zorua really doesn't have many upsides besides a retreat cost of 1 and 70 HP for Buddy-Buddy Poffin usage, remember to place it down if you expect to evolve it up

during the match as unlike Fezandipiti ex, it can't start drawing cards the turn it gets played. Also, just think for a second about how flabbergasted your opponent would be if you placed down N's Zorua and Pecharunt ex to start, expecting some Darumaka and Reshiram to be placed down, and then you just Buddy-Buddy Poffin a couple of dolphins on the bench. The surprise factor is a genuine reason to play this deck, honestly.

Trainers

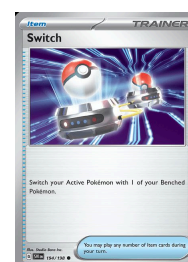
Items

Buddy-Buddy Poffin is a meta staple for any non-basic decks. N's Zorua, Budew, Sneasel, and every Finizen in the deck can be placed down via this incredible item card - 2 per usage. With 3 copies in the deck, this is a card that is great to see on Turn 1, usually setting you up with an extra Finizen in case one gets donked. Expect to use this early game, but be mindful to maybe keep one around for Ultra Ball fodder or grabbing a late-game Sneasel if an Air Balloon equipped Dark type just got knocked out.



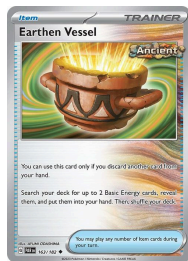
Speaking of **Ultra Ball**, there's three of them here. Not much to explain once more - I can't think of any deck that isn't running these right now besides maybe Raging Bolt ex, but most of them are running Noctowl anyway to my knowledge and want some energy cards in discard for Professor Sada's Vitality, so that's probably not even the case. **Nest Ball** has two copies in the deck as Fezandipiti ex and Pecharunt ex are better with a way to hit the bench directly without needing to discard anything - and of course, all the 70 HP or less Pokemon can be grabbed this way as well.

"But Nick," you may ask, "why do we need 2 copies of **Switch** if this whole deck relies on free retreat and Subjugating Chains?" Good question, theoretical person. Switch is a way to replace Subjugating Chains in a case scenario where there is no Pecharunt ex or no Dark type Pokemon with free retreat, as not every match is perfect. Sometimes there's an N's Zoroark ex in the active brought up by Pecharunt ex, but no Air Balloon - sometimes there's an Air Balloon on a Weavile, but no Pecharunt ex to bring it active - in awful occasions, sometimes all you can do is Switch Palafin ex into N's Zoroark ex and use the second Switch to put Palafin ex back in the active. However, neither of those are the most important usages - that is reserved for bringing a Palafin with the Wall of Text into the active, using Pecharunt ex to take it out of the active and swapping it with Palafin ex, and then retreating into the Palafin ex. Yes, you can retreat, Switch, and use Subjugating Chains all in one



turn. Granted, it's a lot of movement, but it is legal. Test it out and see what wacky combinations you can create - you can even use Switch to make 2 Palafin into Palafin ex in one turn!

There is a copy of **Pokégear 3.0** in the deck as well - incredibly useful in a pinch if you don't have Supporters in hand, but I'll elaborate more on the Supporter cards you might want to grab with it after the Item cards are done. Just know that it's not a guaranteed Supporter, so try to thin the deck of Pokemon or energy before use to increase your odds.



Speaking of thinning your energy, a copy of **Earthen Vessel** is your main source of item-based energy search. As the deck contains no energy acceleration as all the (useful) attacks require a single Water energy, this allows you to power up one of your dolphins while giving you a second energy card to either power up a second dolphin or give a Dark type the ability to retreat without an Air Balloon. I often find myself discarding Water energy to get 2 more, just because there's no real need to have 3 in hand.

While not a factor in every match, **Tool Scrapper** can be the deciding factor in your match. This deck lacks the ability to hit the bench nor move around damage counters unfortunately, so unless you play down a stadium that lowers HP or remove a stadium that increases HP, there's very little you can do to get multiple knockouts in one turn. That said, is there any greater joy than removing a Tool from a Drifloon or a Scream Tail and watching it pop, bringing a poor soul into the Active Spot that was never intended to be the victim of a Giga Impact? The answer is yes - that's for taking a Bravery Charm off a Mega Absol that you attacked with Maximum Belt equipped, and then using Weavile to bring up a second Mega Absol to grant you a six prize turn. Sure, it doesn't happen every match, but this is an OHKO deck - Hero's Cape is just a hindrance. This is very dependent on the deck of course, so don't expect Dragapult decks to quiver in fear - they're running Jamming Tower anyway.



Night Stretcher and **Super Rod** are the last 2 Item cards in the deck, both only a one-of. I'll go into this later, but this is the only form of recovery from the discard pile the deck has, so use these very carefully - especially Super Rod. Palafin ex can be recovered with Night Stretcher, but it would do nothing

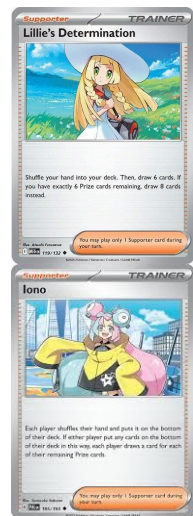




good for you as you need it in the deck to activate Zero to Hero. Use Night Stretcher for discarded Water energy in a pinch or to bring a Finizen back that got donked in the early game, but save your Super Rod to make sure you have a Palafin ex in deck to swap with your Wall of Text Palafin - the worst thing you can do in this deck is activate Zero to Hero just to find there's no ex to replace your 100 HP Palafin with, and you're stuck swinging with two energy for 30 damage - often an immediate game loss.

Supporters

I'm going to be honest - I don't like using **Lillie's Determination** in this deck. It doesn't feel too consistent, but it's miles better than Professor's Research. If you have a Palafin ex in hand that you want to return to deck, Professor's Research can't do much to help you where Lillie's Determination lets you shuffle it back into deck - just hope you don't draw it right back. **Iono**, on the other hand, not only disrupts your opponent but assures that you will not draw a Palafin ex that was in your hand before using Iono. Lillie's Determination does let you draw more a majority of the time, especially in the late game, so it isn't like you should remove it entirely in favor of Iono. Both cards have 3 copies in the deck as it's more than necessary to have some sort of consistency.



Every Supporter in this list has either 3 copies or 1 copy, and there's only one more card with 3 copies - **Arven**. Fittingly, there are a total of 3 Tool cards in the deck, so Arven will allow you to pick up one alongside the array of aforementioned Item cards. Nothing too fancy here, Arven is just a card that helps with the situation at hand. Earthen Vessel for energy, Super Rod for recovery, Ultra Bal for Pokemon search - the early game is where Arven shines. In late game when you don't need Arven as much, you can always Trade it away.



The other Supporter cards from here on are all single copies, and there's no Pal Pad in the list, so beware - when you discard or play this card, it's not coming back. By now, you may have noticed there is only a single copy of **Boss's Orders**, and no item based gusting. With no ability to damage your opponents Benched Pokemon, this may seem strange - every competitive deck runs multiple Boss's Orders and even some copies of Counter Catcher, so what gives? The

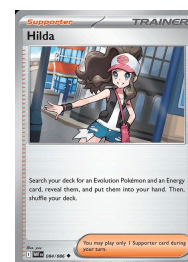
answer is simply... Weavile. When you have the ability to gust without an Item card or a



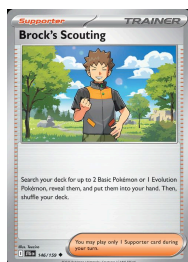
Supporter card, why do it any other way? Of course, Weavile is limited and cannot bring Stage 1 and Stage 2 Pokemon into the Active Spot, so getting a game winning knockout on a damaged Gardevoir ex isn't something that can be done with a simple Subjugating Chains. I'll also admit - I'm fallible! This may not be the correct decision after all, and maybe I should look into adding gusting options via hand into the deck. Consistency is key more than anything, though,

so I think draw support should be prioritized over gusting here.

Item lock sucks - but it's really strong. If it wasn't, Budew wouldn't be anywhere near the decklist. In this meta, it's powerful due to how early it can start, and with cards like Jellicent ex, it can last entire games. There are 3 Supporter cards in this list with item lock in mind. The first of three of these is **Hilda**. Being able to get energy in a pinch is fantastic, especially when Earthen Vessel and Night Stretcher cannot be utilized. Furthermore, Hilda acts as an Ultra Ball for evolution without the discard and without the usage of an Item card. This can be used for either single prize Palafin or for the evolved Dark types to activate gusting or draw. Sure, it isn't great all the time, but to draw Hilda on your second turn going first after an item lock makes the incoming Vanguard Punch all the sweeter.



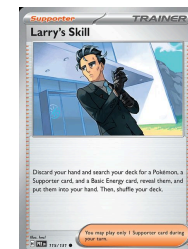
Second on the list of item lock prevention Supporter cards is a card I think doesn't see



enough play in a metagame where Budew is in every other deck - **Brock's Scouting**. Not only can it act like Hilda and grant you an evolution Pokemon without using an item, but it can also act as if it was a Battle VIP Pass from Fusion Strike, except better because it draws to hand. While Buddy-Buddy Poffin can't give you a combination like Pecharunt and Sneasel to instantly activate Subjugating Chains into free retreat, Brock's Scouting can do exactly

that, even during item lock.

Last, but certainly not least, we have one of the most eye-catching cards in the decklist that does not often make Day 2 - **Larry's Skill**. No, I'm not throwing the game by adding this card into the deck. Sure, it isn't the most useful option all the time because using your Supporter card to get a Supporter card is never a great option - but even sometimes you need to Arven for Pokegear 3.0 to



get something else while picking up the Air Balloon or Maximum Belt that you need. What Larry's Skill does is very similar to the previous cards, as it gets you an energy card like Hilda and a Pokemon (evolution or not) like Brock's Scouting. Unfortunately, this is at the cost of your entire hand - but at least you can grab Lillie's Determination to draw 6 or 8 next turn, as long as you don't use this against a powered up Mega Absol ex that'll Claw of Darkness your sole Supporter into the discard pile. Use this card wisely to grab the last piece of the Palafin puzzle or even grab an N's Zoroark ex to evolve N's Zorua and use Trade on the energy card to start drawing cards again. Just try not to throw away all of your Palafin ex in the process.

Unless you're up against a Slowing deck, you usually don't have to worry about Kyurem knocking out 3 of your Pokemon at once - but if they do have Kyurem, maybe don't use **Colress's Tenacity**. In the other 99.95% of matches, feel free to use it to grab one of the 3 Stadium cards in deck, which will be discussed shortly, so I'll expound on which one to grab then. Again, grabbing an energy card off a Supporter card is never a terrible thing and with only 6 in deck, this might be the card you need in a dire situation.



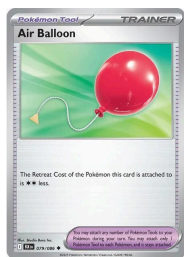
Lastly comes a card with two functionalities - **Kieran**. Solely by mentioning it, you might realize that it has great functionality in this deck. Firstly, it enables you to switch your Pokemon akin to Switch, but at the cost of a Supporter card instead of an item - great for item lock. On the other hand, it also allows you to take knockouts that you couldn't take without it, as it can add 30 damage to your attacks on ex Pokemon. This lets the 150 HP Palafin hit Mew ex for knockout at 180 HP, lets Palafin ex hit Pidgeot ex for knockout at 280 HP, and with Maximum Belt equipped, knocks out meta mainstays like Charizard ex, Dragapult ex, and Gardevoir ex. While there's no way to specifically draw this card outside of Pokegear 3.0, try not to use it as discard fodder if you see yourself getting a game winning knockout with Kieran's assistance.



Tools

There are only 3 Tool cards in the deck, and only 2 unique ones - and they've both been mentioned at length already. There are two copies of **Air Balloon**, and it cannot be understated how important this card is. As mentioned plenty of times already, one of the most important parts

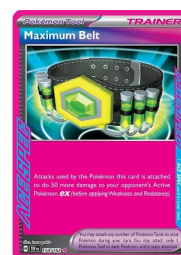
of Palafin ex setup is having a free retreat Dark type, and unless you're planning to rock with the frail 60 HP Sneasel for the entire duration of the game, you're going to want to put Air Balloon



onto your designated free retreat Dark type for the game. While there are situations where you can put it on one of the dolphins, it's not something I recommend doing every game. Yes, theoretically you can get 2 Palafin ex up, give them both Air Balloons, and just retreat back and forth every turn without the help of any Dark type, it's not advised. Also, don't make the mistake I've made 5 dozen times - if Jamming Tower is the current Stadium, you're going to

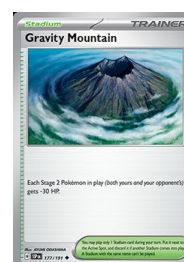
need to bump it or retreat with energy - so don't bring up N's Zoroark ex, as that has a retreat cost of 2.

The ACE SPEC of the deck is included in this category, **Maximum Belt**, which is unfortunately the best choice for this deck. I would personally love for it to be Prime Catcher, as it would act as a switch and a gusting option as an Item card. Unfair Stamp has disruptive potential, but getting a knockout you'd otherwise miss is way more impactful. Lastly, Hero's Cape is the only other option that makes sense as far as I see it, but if Palafin ex is getting knocked out in one hit by something like Gholdengo ex, you're still in range of knockout. Tool Scrapper also exists in the hands of other players, and while it would suck to lose Maximum Belt, it would *REALLY* suck to lose your damaged Palafin ex and have to bring something else into the active to get knocked out next. Also, you can deal a whopping 120 with Budew if you hit for weakness on Charizard ex or Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex at the same time you proc item lock. 50 extra damage just works here too well to be replaced, especially with Gravity Mountain in the Stadium spot letting you hit Stage 2 Pokemon for an effective 330 HP.



Stadiums

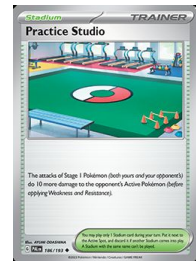
Yes, I just mentioned **Gravity Mountain** - and there's not much to elaborate on. Taking 30 HP away from Stage 2 Pokemon makes too much sense in a meta defined by strong Stage 2 Pokemon that, while Gravity Mountain is in play, get taken out in one Maximum Belt boosted Giga Impact. This deck runs no Stage 2 Pokemon, so the worst thing playing this Stadium card can do is bump another Stadium and thin your hand/deck. Some single prize Pokemon



even feel the brunt from this Stadium - for example, Alakazam from Mega Evolution decreases to a measly 110 HP, allowing Vanguard Punch to knock it out.

Stage 1 Pokemon like Palafin ex aren't impacted by Gravity Mountain - and that isn't always a good thing. Gholdengo ex has 10 HP too much, and won't go down to a Giga Impact under Gravity Mountain's effect unless you have a Maximum Belt. If that wasn't obnoxious enough, that deck runs Tool Scrapper in many lists, so Maximum Belt might end up going into discard too soon. Subsequently, the threat of Jamming Tower being played to bump your second Gravity Mountain is enough to warrant a third Stadium card (which in turn makes Colress's Tenacity more useful to have I'm deck).

The final Trainer card in the deck is the rarely seen **Practice Studio** - so be prepared for your opponent to pick it up to see what it does. While this Stadium card is in play, all Stage 1 Pokemon do 10 more damage. Yes, that's a single damage counter more - the least amount of extra damage a card can possibly boost. As pointless as this is, it allows Palafin ex to pick up the knockout on Gholdengo ex and Bloodmoon Ursaluna ex where it would otherwise miss by the tiniest margin. It also allows for Vanguard Punch to knock out Alakazam from Mega Evolution - meaning as long as one of your Stadium cards is in play, Alakazam players need to watch for your single prize Palafin.



With Maximum Belt, you also hit 310 damage, which will take out cards such as Gardevoir ex and Greninja ex in one hit. Technically, with the combination of Practice Studio, Maximum Belt, and Kieran, you can hit for the largest damage possible without accounting for weakness at 340 damage - enough to knock out every non-Mega ex in the game, alongside one of your largest threats in Mega Lucario ex. The only two Pokémon currently in the format that will not be knocked out by such an attack are Mega Gengar ex, Mega Gardevoir ex (the previous two would be knocked out if you replaced Practice Studio with Gravity Mountain), Mega Abomasnow ex, and Mega Venusaur ex. Truthfully, I can't figure out what to do against Mega Abomasnow ex - thankfully it takes up a fraction of a fraction of the metashare.

Energy

Water

There are 6 Basic Water Energy in the deck. This is...not exciting, honestly. It's all Basic energy, so you can use Earthen Vessel and Night Stretcher. Sure, you *could* use Luminous Energy to allow for some other Pokemon that can't attack to have new functionality, and you'd be able to add Munkidori, but it honestly hurts consistency more than it adds capabilities. 6 is the magic number in my opinion - not too few that you'll miss it constantly and end up in a drought, but not too many that it'll flood your hand when you need a single Supporter card and draw nothing but energy.



Considerations

Time for a rapid firing of cards that might work for you but didn't for me- sorry, no images for these.

- **Finizen OBF 61** - With 90 HP, this Pokemon will end up surviving more attacks - but besides Fan Rotom and the extremely uncommon Pecharunt poison donk, survivability doesn't outweigh the fact that Buddy-Buddy Poffin can't grab it. Maybe as a single copy in the deck, this card can live a Phantom Dive bench attack even after Hawlucha - but at that stage in the game, maybe Finizen should have evolved.
- **Palafin OBF 62** - Genuinely, I recommend you try this card before you put it back in the bulk pile - maybe I just couldn't get it working. 210 damage is fantastic on a single prize Pokemon, and it deals with Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex with ease. That said, the stipulation that you need to bring it from Bench to Active is...too much for a reliable, second turn attacker. The Temporal Forces single prize Palafin succeeds in this role because all you need to get it swinging on your second turn is Hilda - no Pecharunt ex, or any Dark type, or any Benched Pokemon at all for that matter. Also, 2 energy is a lot,

believe it or not. This means you need to put 2 turns into powering up **only** this card - no giving cards energy for retreat or powering up your Palafin ex. Also, 30 damage plus 30 damage to the bench can knock out the occasional Budew, but that Budew is usually in the Active Spot anyway.

- **Morpeko PAR 121** - As mentioned, a nice free retreat card with an ability - that ability is exactly why you should **not** play it. It allows Froslass to stack on it and for Flutter Mane and Klefki to turn the ability off entirely.
- **Genesect SFA 40** - Genesect is one of my favorite Scarlet and Violet era cards - a shame it just...falls flat here. When your opponent uses Secret Box before you can set up the Genesect with an Air Balloon, it hurts bad, especially when you started with it in the Active Spot against your will. I really pushed for this inclusion, but after I removed Vitality Band in favor of Practice Studio, Genesect was taken out of the list and put back into my Cynthia's Garchomp ex list, where I swear it works. Trust me.
- **Marnie's Morpeko DRI 137** - I can't in good faith say this is a bad choice. Other successful Palafin players have used this card, so it isn't entirely baseless - and it seems like great humor to be able to grab it off an opponent's Spikemuth Gym. That said, unlike N's Zorua and Sneasel, it can't evolve and increase its low HP of 70.
- **Yveltal MEG 88** - Clutch is fantastic, but I really want to run just basic Water energy here. Free retreat is also a benefit, but unlike the other options, this Dark type needs to be grabbed through Ultra Ball or Nest Ball. 110 HP gives more bulk, but without the ability to use Buddy-Buddy Poffin, it isn't worth the trouble for a Pokemon that cannot evolve.
- **Psyduck MEP 7** - Just don't hit Dusknair, simple. But, if you do succeed in that, you have a dead card in the deck that does nothing. I just think there's too many useful cards available to put in place of a Psyduck at the moment.
- **Miriam** - In theory, a great idea and a nice way to both draw cards and recover Palafin ex back into the deck. In practice, you draw it on your first turn and can't discard anything and it is entirely useless. Also, draw 2 might be good for N's Zoroark ex, but drawing 1 more for your Supporter for turn just isn't reliable enough.
- **Lt. Surge's Treaty** - I love a fun card here and there - Larry's Skill isn't just there because it works, it's also because it's funny. Unlike Lt. Surge's Treaty, Larry's Skill allows you to choose what to grab in a pinch. Draw 4 is great, but 90% of matches,

you're going to end up taking a prize card. That isn't the worst thing in the world, especially with this deck that doesn't really allow for you to knock out single prize Pokemon on your opponents bench, unlike decks with Dusknoir and Munkidori. In practice, it isn't a great feeling to use the only Supporter for your turn to not only help your opponent out a bit, but also to draw only one card, often a useless one, being an energy when you already attached for turn or a Supporter that you wished you used that turn *instead* of Lt. Surge's Treaty. Great card, just doesn't work here. I'm as bummed as you are.

- **Professor Turo's Scenario** - Palafin ex doesn't get knocked out in one hit very often, so why is this only a consideration? Decks that share the 340 HP threshold like Mega Lucario ex run multiple copies to fully heal, and with only needing a single Water energy Palafin ex can strike back instantly! The answer is simple, actually - it is **one of the worst things that could happen** for Palafin ex. If you pick up the Finizen and Palafin ex, you can place the Finizen back down just fine - but Hero's Spirit still exists, preventing you from placing it onto another Finizen unlike how Mega Lucario ex can just be placed on a Riolu that's been benched for a turn. In fact, your Palafin with Zero to Hero isn't even in your hand - you shuffled it back into the deck, and you're left with a dead card in hand instead. Bummer.
- **Kofu** - Sure, that's one way to put Palafin ex from hand back into the deck - and drawing 4 cards isn't anything to snuff at. I just don't think there's any room in this 60 for an unreliable draw card with the ability to fail if your hand is too small. Sorry, Kofu.
- **Vitality Band** - This was in the deck for a while, and gave Gholdengo ex a harder time than the less easy to grab Practice Studio. However, with Colress's Tenacity, you can bump Jamming Tower, and you can swing for 340 (in theory). With Vitality Band...you can't do anything with a Jamming Tower up. However, don't just take my word for it - consider it for sure. With Vitality Band, Finizen picks up a knockout on any Charmander in format, potentially for a donk on your first turn or a huge setback. Budew with Vitality Band is also important if you want to win a 'Budew War,' so keep that in mind.
- **Surfing Beach** - With the release of Mega Evolution's base set, a common thought is that this card is a guarantee in this deck. After all, it's a free switch from a Water type to a Water type - why even use the Dark lines? I can't say it's a bad idea, and it's going to be

very tempting post-rotation, but I'm not sure this deck should be so Stadium reliant. If there were other Water types that synergized well with Palafin (that aren't just other types of Palafin), maybe this would be the move. The Staryu line from Pokemon 151 is available currently, and can help with math (and that pesky Pikachu ex), but with Starmie being put in the discard pile after use, I'm not too jazzed about it.

Why Isn't Palafin A Meta Deck?

Now that you know the ins and outs of the Palafin ex deck...why is this deck not just low in the metashare, but virtually nonexistent? It has answers for seemingly everything, and gives that surprise factor that not even Team Rocket's Mewtwo ex can fathom!

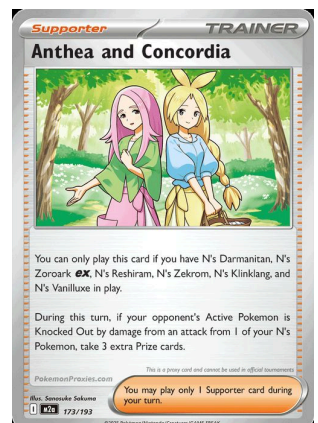
The Reason Most People Think

Simple - it has no results. Limitless TCG currently has **two** Day 2 finishes for Palafin ex. One uses the Dudunsparce engine for draw and disappears from the Active Spot to allow for Giga Impact repetition, and the other runs Toedscruel somehow. Both use Munkidori. Frankly, I'm in no place to say that those are bad ideas, because they reached Day 2 and I haven't come close to it yet.

Also, 250 damage is nice, but Gholdengo ex can hit absurdly higher numbers, Dragapult can unleash havoc on the bench, Charizard pops Cursed Blasts every other turn and scales its own damage to above 300, and Gardevoir ex...does...things that I really don't have the brain for. Props to Gardevoir ex players for thinking 7 turns ahead - I'll stick with my OHKO beatstick strategies. How can Palafin ex compete in this absurdly stacked meta?

The Reason Smart People Think

Simple - it's too gimmicky. Gholdengo ex can stay in the Active Spot, doesn't need to switch back and forth constantly (but it can to chain Coin Bonus), and it has a built in draw engine! Marnie's Grimmsnarl might be a Stage 2, but it accelerates its own energy, and synergizes perfectly with Munkidori and Froslass. Noctowl and Pidgeot ex can just grab whatever they feel like with their respective abilities. Palafin, on the other hand, is fittingly comparable to a dolphin at SeaWorld that needs to jump through flaming hoops



to get rewarded - it makes **Anthea and Concordia** seem like a novel idea (Yes, that says take 3 extra prize cards, no, it isn't taking the Japanese meta by storm - not yet, at least.).

The Reason Veteran Palafin Players Think

I'm using the term Veteran Palafin Player very loosely here, considering it is just me who is writing this, but I can assure you, there is a worse problem than the 'Reason Smart People Think,' which I've dubbed the *SeaWorld Dilemma*. The real issue is something different, as far as I see it - something I've dubbed *The Zero's Dilemma*.

In a deck like Charizard, sometimes it's the best feeling in the world to draw that Charizard ex from your deck as your turn begins, and everything falls into place. Dragapult decks might use Fezandipiti ex and get the Dragapult ex they need to pull off a six prize turn. Even decks with very consistent draw like Gholdengo ex might get the Stage 1 from a Lunar Cycle, and use that extra 1 card drawn from Coin Bonus to recover 4 energy from the discard pile for a game winning knockout.

If you're playing Palafin ex on the other hand, and you draw your Palafin ex, that is literally the worst thing that could have happened. Not only is that card useless in hand, but you effectively wasted a draw that could have been a Supporter or Stadium you needed. In a lot of cases, extra ex cards can be used as Ultra Ball fodder - but Palafin ex isn't something you can just use Trade on and move on with your game in good conscience. Recovering it through Night Stretcher doesn't work like it would when a Gardevoir ex gets knocked out, and then recovered to be placed on a waiting Kirlia. No, if Palafin ex is in the discard, it comes back with Super Rod or it doesn't come back at all. Speaking of Gardevoir ex, that deck runs one of the most disruptive cards in format, and that's tenfold as disruptive for Palafin - TM Devolution. This is a common tactic of disruption and for cheap knockouts in tandem with cards like Munkidori that can rack up damage on a high HP Pokemon, just to activate this TM and wreck your boardstate, as when the Pokemon are devolved, they suddenly have more damage than HP. While this is usually the use case, a smart user of this Tool card might see through a glaring weakness of Palafin ex and use it to disrupt your game tremendously - by putting Palafin ex back into your hand, even without knocking out the Finizen it is removed from, Hero's Spirit is a major detriment once again. After a successful activation of TM Devolution on a Palafin ex, not only

will you have a dead card in hand, you shuffled the Zero to Hero Palafin back into your deck upon transformation and now have to search for it again if you want to return to your ex state. Hopefully there are other Palafin ex in deck, as you have one in hand that cannot be evolved into. If you see your opponent discard TM Devolution, count your blessings and hope they don't run more than just one

Furthermore, you have to be very careful when you Flip the Script or Trade - if you end up drawing into Palafin ex before you evolve the Wall of Text Palafin, you might've just taken the last Palafin ex out of your deck - effectively crushing your hopes, and maybe losing you the game. Unless you really want to evolve into Weavile before you use Subjugating Chains, make sure to prioritize activating Zero to Hero over your draw options.

Why Play Palafin In That Case?

To quote the British wordsmith Chris Martin - Everything's Not Lost. You still have cards like Arven to grab Super Rod, which can put the discarded Palafin ex cards back into the deck. You might even find yourself purposely discarding up to two Palafin ex at once via Ultra Ball, and then immediately using Super Rod to put them back in the deck. Lillie's Determination is an unreliable way to shuffle the Palafin ex back into the deck from hand, but there's always the possibility of drawing them right back. Iono prevents this due to you placing your hand at the bottom of the deck, at the cost of drawing fewer cards than Lillie's Determination.

The Zero's Dilemma is a problem, and for the experienced player, worse than the SeaWorld Dilemma. That said, if you're new to the deck, the SeaWorld Dilemma is the hardest thing to overcome as Palafin is a very unique archetype that you've likely never experienced before.

It wouldn't be a good reason to play this deck if all it had going for it was that you can overcome how obnoxious it seems. The surprise factor is definitely a huge part in any off-meta deck, and this one is no different. When your opponent sees the massive 340 HP on Palafin ex, they might struggle to fathom how to take it out - even after a Cursed Blast from Dusknair, a

direct hit from Phantom Dive leaves you at 10 HP. Without assistance, Charizard ex can swing with Burning Darkness at the peak of 330 HP, and Palafin will have just enough health to get another swing in. Single prize decks also need to watch out for your single prize Palafin, as 130 damage isn't easy for them to take.

Also, Water isn't that terrible of a type to have right now. There aren't *too* many Lightning attackers in format present, and even Iron Hands ex needs a Future Booster Energy Capsule to OHKO you with Arm Press. Also, most attacking Lightning types are Basic ex Pokemon with less than 250 HP. On the flipside, you're hitting a decent weakness. Cerulede ex and Flareon ex don't just go down to Giga Impact, but also to a Maximum Belt boosted or a Practice Studio boosted Vanguard Punch. While the release of the small set of Phantasmal Flames doesn't give this deck a single card, it does introduce Mega Charizard X ex - a 3 prize Pokemon that goes down to Giga Impact without any boosts necessary.

Now that we've gone over the deck at length, let's start talking gameplay.

Starting the Game

Setup

Like every other player in the game, you're not in control of your prizes nor your starting hand, so you're going to need to adapt to the hand you've been dealt.

What you are in control of approximately 50% of the time, however, is if you're going first or second. Unless you know the matchup ahead of time and going first would be a death sentence, you're usually going to ask to play first for reasons discussed below.

First Turn, Going First

Pick a Finizen, any Finizen

If you're going first, you've already made a step in the right direction, and your goal is relatively simple for this turn - get Finizen in play. If you started with Finizen - great! You're already there, but try to get another Finizen on the bench if you think you're going to get knocked out by your opponent on turn 1. Attach an energy if you have it, and if you're sure you're not

going to be donked, get Finizen in the Active Spot so you can prepare to evolve it and switch it out, transforming it into Palafin ex on your second turn.

If you started with Sneasel, it could be worse. At least you have free retreat, so if you can get Finizen on the bench, just retreat into it. If you start with N's Zorua or Fezandipiti ex, it's the same deal, but this time you need an energy attachment or an Air Balloon. If you started Budew, it's the same deal as Sneasel except kinda worse because you can't attack with it, and you often won't if you're going first, making it a wasted bench space and an easy Munkidori target. If you do think it will get knocked out this turn, keep it active - let a Finizen on bench take its place at the start of turn 2, allowing it to evolve in the Active Spot and retreat to transform.

Pecharunt ex on turn 1 is really good, especially combined with a Buddy-Buddy Poffin. Use it to bench Sneasel and a Finizen, activate Subjugating Chains, and retreat into Finizen - as long as you think you'll survive the turn or if you have another Finizen benched.

First Turn, Going Second

Itchy Pollen (as a Sensible Choice)

It doesn't always work out that you'll be going first, but with so many users of TM Evolution and Itchy Pollen, you have a decent shot that they'll want to go second if they win the coin flip. There will be matches where you don't go first though, and this is not an instant game loss by any means. The same thing as previously mentioned is still just as necessary - get a Finizen on the board. Without turn 2 Palafin, whether it be the ex or not, you do not want a slow start. Prioritize cards like Arven to grab Buddy-Buddy Poffin over cards like Iono or Lillie's Determination that might whiff what you want to grab, even though you end up drawing more cards that can help. Brock's Scouting is a good option too, as it acts as a Buddy-Buddy Poffin that isn't HP restricted. I recommend getting a Budew into the Active whether that be using an energy to retreat or free retreat, and using Itchy Pollen for 10 damage. Hopefully, the Budew doesn't survive the next turn, and you can bring up a Finizen to evolve it while it's in the Active Spot or use Flip The Script for necessary draw.

Valiant Evolution (as a Radical Choice)

Budew is great to use to lock your opponent out of items, but prioritize getting Finizen on board. If you think your Finizen on bench might get knocked out with some form of gusting, it's best to Buddy-Buddy Poffin for 2 Finizen instead of grabbing 1 Finizen and 1 Budew. Also, Budew has a chance to be prized. In these cases, your best bet is often to use Valiant Evolution turn 1 going second - evolving Finizen into the Palafin you think will be more relevant, and bringing it to the bench for safety. Best case scenario, you bring in another Finizen upon switch so it can evolve next turn in the Active Spot.

In a last ditch effort, Aqua Slash damage adds up. Don't be afraid to swing with Finizen if you have backup Finizen, but try your hardest to make sure you have a Finizen going into your next turn.

Second Turn, Going First

Vanguard Punch

The most simple thing you can do with Finizen is evolve it into the Temporal Forces Palafin and swing 130, which knocks out all evolving basic Pokemon. No switching shenanigans are needed for this, so it's like every other deck - a welcome simplicity in this chaotic deck.

Giga Impact

This is the true strength of the deck.

Turn 2, going first, you want Finizen in the Active Spot. There's multiple ways to make this happen, ranging from using Switch, bringing one up after a knockout, or just having one from your previous turn stay in the Active Spot while your opponent sets up on turn 1.

Use your Supporters as wisely as possible here, and aim to get Pecharunt ex and a Dark type that can retreat on bench. Evolve Finizen into the great Wall of Text, and attach energy to it if you didn't last turn. Now, using Subjugating Chains to bring it to bench, transform into Palafin ex and use your Dark type to retreat - then swing for a whopping 250 damage on your second turn, before your opponent even gets the chance to evolve their Active Pokemon. Unless it's a Mega Evolution, you're very likely to take the first prize(s) this way. Also, best of luck to your

opponent on knocking out a 340 HP Pokemon on their second turn after they lost their Active Pokemon.

Itchy Pollen and Valiant Evolution

If this deck could confirm Giga Impact or at least Vanguard Punch every second turn going first, it would be unstoppable. Unfortunately, it isn't.

In situations where you couldn't get a Finizen out turn 1, it's better late than never to use a Supporter or Item to get some Finizen active. In this case, act as if it's a first turn going second - Itchy Pollen, and if you can't, aim for Valiant Evolution. If that fails, Aqua Slash isn't terrible, but it's a last resort.

Second Turn, Going Second

Status Check

Similarly to your second turn going first, this should be the turn where you can Valiant Punch or hopefully Giga Impact - but make sure to assess the field now that your opponent has played 2 turns of the game. Hopefully, whatever you did last turn screwed with their plan, and they're further behind than they'd like to be.

Midgame Maneuvering

Before I go into detail on specific matchups, let's talk about common scenarios that happen regardless of what you're up against.

Prize Checking

This isn't a groundbreaking revelation - make sure to prize check, at least a little. Here's some cards you should be on the lookout for when you get to look at your deck for the first time.

- ☐ Palafin ex - make sure there's at least one in there if you're going to use your Zero to Hero ability.
- ☐ Pecharunt ex - without it, you'll need to pivot to using Switch and Kieran until you pick one up.

- ☐ Sneasel - it's your only free retreat Dark type, so don't rely on it and then realize it isn't even an option.
- ☐ N's Zoroark ex - it would be silly to play N's Zorua without it instead of Sneasel.
- ☐ Maximum Belt - this should be easy because it is bright pink.
- ☐ Super Rod - if this is prized, using your Palafin ex as discard fodder is dangerously permanent, so beware.

Dark Necessities

Utilize your Dark types to the best of their abilities in order to make this deck shine. Without them, Palafin has no legs to stand on. Side note: have you ever noticed that Palafin **literally** doesn't have legs to stand on? It's just standing on its fluke, which while I'm not a marine biologist, looks probably really painful and bad for their spines. Just look at any official animation of Palafin - it just hops, it doesn't even walk. Sure takes it in stride though, so who am I to judge.

Subjugating Chains

By now, you should have a fundamental understanding of Subjugating Chains - just be aware that even if you have both Pecharunt ex on board, you can only use this ability one time per turn. Klefki will entirely turn off this ability, so if you see that key ring, be wise about how you plan to maneuver.

Flip the Script

As mentioned earlier, the order of operations of this deck is vital. Use this ability *after* activating Zero to Hero or else you risk drawing into copies of Palafin ex, making them useless. Also, Fezandipiti ex can be an easy knockout, so if you're facing a deck like Charizard Pidgeot, remember how easy it is for them to gust it up - they might not be able to swing 340, but 210 is pretty easy for them.

Assaulting Hunt

There's many games where I attach an Air Balloon to Sneasel, even though it has free retreat. This is to prevent an Iono from taking it out of my hand, and assuring that when it becomes Weavile, it becomes a great target for Subjugating Chains.

Note: this ability activates **BEFORE** Zero to Hero, so don't Assaulting Hunt up a Latias ex and then search the deck to realize there's no Palafin ex to transform into - that would be embarrassing.

Trade

As the most recent addition to the deck, I can't tell you the best way to use this ability with confidence, but I'm pretty sure you want to Flip the Script first, especially if you're looking for a Supporter card, because you have higher odds of getting one when you draw 3 instead of 2 - go figure.

The Discard Pile

Super Rod is a lifeline - try not to discard it without playing it, unless it's for something really important, such as needing to use Ultra Ball on turn 1 to get a Finizen in the case that you wouldn't have any otherwise.

Also, remember when I said I usually use an Earthen Vessel to discard energy? That isn't just because you rarely need 3 Water energy in hand - but it gives Night Stretcher the ability to be an energy source if you prize your Earthen Vessel or if you have already played it.

Matchups

Gardevoir

The Tier 0 deck that just can't lose - if you're hard countered by Gardevoir, you should probably choose a different deck until rotation. Thankfully, while it isn't favorable, Palafin can hold its own against Gardevoir.

You're going to still want to go first, even though yes, they're likely going to use TM Evolution on 2 Ralts on their first turn. Sneasel might seem really bad here - 2 Munkidori bring it to the discard pile, and you don't need to deal damage to their board in order for them to rack up

self-damage through Psychic Embrace. That said, if you risk it, the payoff is pretty good through Weavile being able to gust Munkidori with Darkness energy attached, effectively taking away their attachment for turn. Be smart with cards like the Vanguard Punch Palafin, because they love using single prize Pokemon like Drifloon and Scream Tail to knock out your Pokemon ex, and that Palafin can take them down - no need to Giga Impact a Drifloon with 10 HP left for 250 damage. In fact, consider using Aqua Slash on Finizen if they're at 30 HP left or less.

Cards like Mega Diancie ex combined with Munkidori can bring down Palafin ex - but if they place down Mega Diancie ex before they've got game confirmed, they've made a very risky decision - Palafin ex with a Maximum Belt knocks it out in one hit, despite Diamond Coat's damage reduction, providing you 3 prizes in one go.

There's 2 cards that I don't recommend discarding until you use them - Boss's Orders and Tool Scrapper. Weavile can't bring Gardevoir ex into the Active Spot, but Boss's Orders doesn't have that restriction. And sure, 310 HP requires a combination of Stadium and Maximum Belt, but 90% of the time, that Gardevoir ex has at least 10 damage on it because it's using Psychic Embrace on itself to give Munkidori damage to fling. Tool Scrapper is almost even more important, as using it correctly timed on a Drifloon or Scream Tail using a Bravery Charm and having heavy damage applied through Psychic Embrace, you can take multiple knockouts in one turn. Tool Scrapper may or may not solely be in this deck because of Gardevoir decks.

Jellicent Variants

Sometimes I wish Black Bolt and White Flare were never released, but without Air Balloon, this deck would be in trouble. If you see a Frillish hit the board on setup, I highly recommend playing N's Zorua and Sneasel both. While this isn't ideal all the time, it's your best case for avoiding the downfall of being item locked into oblivion - shout-out to Ryan G. for Oceanic Gloomer me so brutally that I had no choice but to make a massive overhaul to this deck. No hard feelings.

Those Dark type basics aren't just there to stay basic - they're meant to evolve. Cards like Larry's Skill, Hilda, and Brock's Scouting can lead you into an evolution Pokemon without needing an item. Weavile exists to not only take Frillish out of the Active Spot, but to gust away Jellicent ex and remove the lock effect of Oceanic Curse without using your Supporter for turn - most decks need to use Boss's Orders or struggle to knock it out. If only I had N's Zoroark ex

against Ryan G., I wouldn't have had to struggle with drawing only once per turn - it would theoretically have tripled my draw power, and my odds of escape would've tripled.

Gardevoir is good - don't be discouraged if you struggle against it at first. Last thing - Mew ex can Giga Impact you right back, but unlike Palafin ex, Mew ex cannot withstand a Giga Impact. Lillie's Clefairy ex is also your prime target for an Assaulting Hunt if they were either unlucky enough to start with it or not knowledgeable enough to realize that it shouldn't be played in this matchup.

Lastly, this deck isn't the only one to run this item, but I should bring this up now - TM Devolution is really, really obnoxious as mentioned earlier, so try to watch out for it even though you can't really do too much to prevent it besides hope they use it as Secret Box fodder.

Charizard

Charizard just won't go away, will it? The unofficial mascot of the TCG since Base Set, Charizard just had to show up on Obsidian Flames and contort the meta. While it sounds simple enough for a Water type, for the first time since it was a Delta Species many years ago, Charizard ex doesn't have a Water weakness, replacing it with the uncommonly played Grass type due to its Dark type Terastallization. Thankfully, even despite this, Charizard ex can still fall victim to the great Giga Impact OHKO - Maximum Belt required.

The beginning of this match is vital to how the rest of the match will play out, especially with the absurd Infernal Reign ability that allows for acceleration from the deck without much effort. Going first against this deck is not as dangerous as some other decks, as they (normally) can't knock out a Finizen going second on turn 1. Budew is an occasional threat but it is not a guarantee in Charizard decks. Usually, Weavile puts in more work against Charizard ex decks than N's Zoroark ex, as they aren't disrupting you as much as they are playing aggressively with TM Evolution or using Tatsugiri to get a Supporter card. Vanguard Punch takes out all the non-ex basics in the deck, and the evolving Stage 1 Pokemon like Pidgeotto and Charmeleon, so as long as you have a Finizen on board or a Palafin ex at the ready, start the prize trade safe by using your single prize Palafin to attack at the start.

If you're going second, you have a plethora of options. As this deck runs multiple Rare Candy in order to evolve up quickly, Budew shines in this matchup. The 60 HP Charmander is not anywhere near as common as the 70 HP and new 80 HP variants, so don't expect to get one-shot kills with Aqua Slash unless you've decided to slot in Vitality Band. Don't think Aqua Slash is unimportant in this match, as an early 60 damage against Charmander makes it so Charizard ex is only at 270 HP upon evolving. With Gravity Mountain or Maximum Belt, a damaged Charizard ex goes down to Giga Impact. In a similar vein, while not always the correct option, a Maximum Belt equipped Budew will hit Charizard ex for a ridiculous 120 HP, putting it in range of a Giga Impact - just expect your Maximum Belt to immediately be discarded as Budew doesn't survive in this situation very long. Valiant Evolution is there in cases where neither of those options work, but try to switch into a second Finizen to either sacrifice it or, in the case of it surviving, being able to evolve in the Active Spot and going from there.

It isn't the end of the world if you don't do damage on your first turn - Gravity Mountain and Maximum Belt equipped on a Palafin ex let Giga Impact hit Charizard ex for 300, knocking it out. Kieran can also replace Gravity Mountain if you can manage to grab it from the deck. It still isn't the end of the world if you can't knock out Charizard ex in one hit - they're going to have trouble knocking you out in one hit, too. Charizard ex occasionally runs Maximum Belt, and it's power scales depending on prizes taken, so if you have only a couple prizes left, watch out for that Tool card as it's going to be dealing 350 or more damage. If Maximum Belt isn't a factor, either through your use of Tool Scrapper or them playing Secret Box or Unfair Stamp, that Charizard has no way to knock you out in one hit without assistance. Even at its strongest, an unaided Burning Darkness deals 330 damage, allowing Palafin to swing again before it's brought down.

As aforementioned, Phantasmal Flames adds zero cards to the Palafin deck. Usually, this would be unfortunate, as cards like Dawn and Mega Lopunny really give other decks an edge they didn't have before. It isn't all negative, though - in fact, I'd still say it's a plus for Palafin, and that's through the release of new tech for Charizard ex decks that help against high HP decks - that being the combination of Oricorio ex and a card with a ridiculous damage cap, Mega Charizard X ex. This might seem counterintuitive, as it sounds like it would blatantly hurt Palafin ex as it now can be taken out in one hit more reliably. This would be the case if not for one glaring weakness - Weakness. Both those ex cards are weak to Water, which means Giga

Impact is an easy knockout on the 360 HP Mega Pokemon, even if there was a Hero's Cape attached to it. Charizard players have to play carefully, as while they can get immediate knockout power, they might as well hand you 3 prize cards if they use Inferno X, leaving them extremely vulnerable - that is, if they can get 4 energy to get the knockout. With Oricorio ex, this should be simple to do, but against Palafin, it's going to be difficult to activate Excited Turbo to accelerate Fire energy.

I recommend Weavile over N's Zoroark ex for a couple of reasons - the first being the commonly used Fezandipiti ex in Charizard decks, an easy knockout for Palafin ex. Secondly, if you're close to winning off prizes but can't reach that crucial threshold to defeat the active Charizard ex, there's often some Pokemon that started the game that haven't been dealt with yet - namely Chi-Yu, Tatsugiri, Moltres, and sometimes Duskull that haven't evolved yet. The last reason is specifically for Oricorio ex, a Basic Pokemon with a Water weakness and a measly 190 HP, a threshold so low that Vanguard Punch deals enough to knock it out with ease - a favorable prize trade, even if that Palafin gets knocked out on the next turn.

Pidgeot

Making a grand return from the Ruby and Sapphire era that honestly, I don't think anybody asked for, Pidgeot ex has Quick Search like it's single prize counterpart from EX Fire Red & Leaf Green. This was surely a choice made by someone. While I don't like that Pidgeot ex is in format, it isn't the worst Normal type offender that can grab cards from the deck and is a brown bird - oddly specific, sure, but if Noctowl was never printed in Stellar Crown, I think I'd be better off.

What I *do* like about Pidgeot ex is that it has extremely low HP for a Stage 2 ex at only 280 HP - Palafin ex has 60 HP more as a Stage 1. This allows for Gravity Mountain, Kieran, or Maximum Belt to allow for a OHKO. Importantly, notice that I said **or** and not **and** - any of those three damage modifiers allow for an easy Giga Impact knockout.

Better yet, if you can knock out Pidgex or Pidgeotto before it can Quick Search upon evolving, you're in better shape. Weavile can only bring up Pidgex though, so you can only use your single copy of Boss's Orders to get Pidgeotto or Pidgeot ex in the Active Spot. Honestly, I wouldn't even consider trying to Assaulting Hunt for Pidgex in the early game, as there's usually bigger fish to fry if you want to win.

Cursed Blast

This is the 'bigger fish' I just mentioned. If you've slotted Psyduck in the deck over something else, watch out for Klefki, but mostly this will not apply. In the case you stuck to the decklist and don't have a Damp Pokemon in deck, you're going to want to be really careful when the Duskull line gets played onto bench.

Even if you risk being knocked out by taking a Charizard ex out of the Active Spot and bringing in a harmless Duskull, you might just be making a game-winning play. Burning Darkness can't OHKO Palafin ex if unassisted, but Dusclops and especially Dusknoir are just the support it needs. I advise against playing your 50 HP Finizen into Charizard unless you can evolve it nearly instantly, as Dusclops places enough damage counters on it for the knockout. However, Dusknoir is scarier to face down, as 13 damage counters can claim a prize on Stage 1 Pokemon like your Zero to Hero Palafin and Weavile. Vanguard Punch narrowly avoids knockout, but it prevents it from attacking again on account of self-damage bringing it down - a trade-off that might work if you play your cards right, but definitely not the best case scenario. While these cards aren't even every Charizard list, it's best to be prepared for them when you see Charmander hit the board.

I didn't realize how successful this variant was, but seeing it Top 8 in Aichi and take victory in Stuttgart, I might as well bring it up. While I don't like Noctowl at all, 75% of the time I prefer to face this deck compared to one that relies more on the Cursed Blast ability. The reason for the other 25% lies with Fan Rotom, a card which I think is one of the strongest early game cards in the entire format. Not only will Fan Rotom help acquire cards from the Pidgeot line, the Noctowl line, and even the occasional Ditto, it's rounded out with a 70 damage attack that requires a single Colorless energy on the stipulation that a Stadium card is in play - not the most ridiculous ask. This won't just knock out your Budew, but it can lay waste to both Finizen, Sneasel, and N's Zorua as early as turn 1 if they go second. With an active Fan Rotom, you might want to put Fezandipiti ex or Pecharunt ex in the Active Spot before they can attack. While it might disrupt your start, nothing disrupts your gameplan more than not having any Finizen. Lastly, the Stuttgart list ran Charizard ex, Pidgeot ex, the Duskull line, Noctowl, *and* Terapagos ex - so be prepared for everything.

Dragapult

While I believe Palafin can still exist as a deck post-rotation, neither Charizard ex nor Gardevoir ex will be around when the J Block enters the format. As all of the new cards that were printed in Twilight Masquerade will stay in format, only one of the major 4 top decks will be staying around - Dragapult. Charizard, Gardevoir, and Gholdengo all lose the main attacking Pokemon, but Dragapult only loses some Trainers and tech Pokemon.

Dragapult ex is the star of the Dragapult deck, but unlike other Stage 2 decks such as Charizard/Pidgeot, there's usually only one or occasionally zero Rare Candy in the decklist. This is mainly due to the powerful draw engine that Drakloak can do once per turn per Drakloak, allowing them to look at 2 cards and choose 1 to put in hand. Not only does this limit Budew's impact on your opponents setup, but they'll be using Budew themselves to slow you down as they use Recon Directive to stockpile everything they need to deal massive damage to your entire board. Dragapult ex swings for 200 damage with Phantom Dive, which isn't much on its own, but grants the opponent 6 damage to put on your bench however they please. This brings down the 50 HP Finizen and the 60 HP Sneasel, so be wary about playing them in this matchup. Weavile is a bit of a liability here outside of gusting Fezandipiti ex, so I recommend using N's Zoroark ex here to fight against item lock.

At 320 HP, Dragapult ex falls to a Giga Impact under the effect of Gravity Mountain and Maximum Belt. Obviously, Kieran can replace Gravity Mountain here. Although Practice Studio doesn't really make any specific math allow for knockouts, it should be saved to bump their Stadium, which I'll talk about shortly, so conserve your Colress's Tenacity and Stadium cards wisely. When you reach the end game, be prepared to see Bloodmoon Ursaluna ex, so if you have a Practice Studio, Kieran, or Maximum Belt outside of the discard pile, you're in good hands, as it struggles to knock you out in one hit.

Cursed Blast, but Dragapult

The ghosts from Shrouded Fable are a pain to deal with without Psyduck, but I just can't seem to make the Duck Pokemon work in Palafin. Dragapult is a deck that relies on making math work in the player's favor, and unfortunately, the Palafin decklist, like many others, can fall victim to clever calculations. The 50 HP Finizen will get knocked out by Dusclops, Weavile and the 100 HP Palafin are taken out in a single Dusknoir usage, and combining a Dusknoir and the

Phantom Dive damage counters allows them to take a KO on a benched Pecharunt ex. Be warned that while it may seem advantageous for you to be winning the prize trade, N's Zoroark is a little harder to take out, but a Phantom Dive plus Dusknoir will do the trick. Thankfully, Palafin ex is bulky enough to take a Phantom Dive and a Dusknoir, scraping by with 10 HP - as long as you weren't hit by Budew in the early game.

Jamming Tower, Hawlucha, and Munkidori

Speaking of 10 HP, that's exactly how much that a Hawlucha will deal upon being placed on bench from hand to two of your Benched Pokemon. This is very dangerous despite how small it seems, bringing Fezandipiti ex into range of a Phantom Dive, and bringing the 70 HP basics down enough that the damage counters from Phantom Dive can claim a strong multiknockout turn. To make matters worse, the usual Dragapult list runs Luminous Energy with Munkidori, so while it doesn't sound like great advice, try to knock out your opponents Pokemon in a single hit so they can't use your attack against you.

Both of those suck, but the way I see it, neither of them suck as bad as Jamming Tower, which sees two copies often put in Dragapult. While this makes Maximum Belt miss knockouts on the titular ex of the deck, it's even worse for Air Balloon. In these cases, only Sneasel has free retreat, but a 60 HP Pokemon on bench against Dragapult ex is just asking for trouble. If you have spare energy during the match, don't be afraid to put it on N's Zorua, Weavile, or Fezandipiti ex so you still have a Dark type that can retreat.

Gholdengo

As I write this, Limitless TCG puts the metashare for Gholdengo at over 26%. I think there are two factors to this; the first being that it can deal damage ranging from just enough to KO an evolving Basic to enough damage to knock out a Mega Venusaur ex without breaking a sweat. The second reason is more opinionated - Gholdengo ex gives a lot of reward for little effort. The gameplan of building your hand through the **multiple** draw engines built into the deck, getting quick KO's in the early game by discarding energy with its plethora of ways to draw it, and then grabbing a Superior Energy Retrieval to do it all over again - it might be controversial, and I'm no Gholdengo player so I have no horse in this race, but I'm often infuriated against this deck, as I often feel like my fate is sealed upon the second turn. All this is

to say that you will theoretically be in this matchup even more often than every 1 in 4 games, so get used to it.

Gholdengo is a relatively simple deck to face, but that doesn't mean it's easy or favorable, as it is neither. In the early game, Budew isn't even as helpful as it would like - it does 0 damage to Metal type Pokemon due to resistance, and cards like Genesect ex allow for a combination of deck thinning and search for two copies of Gholdengo ex. Make It Rain needs a total of 7 energy cards in hand to OHKO a Palafin ex, and that's not that many - the average list runs 11 energy, which while they need to get most of them to cleanly knockout a 340 HP Pokemon, they have multiple Earthen Vessel, Superior Energy Retrieval, Fighting Gong, and depending on the player, tech cards like Lana's Aid, CIPHERMANIAC's Codebreaking, or Levincia. With options like Lunar Cycle, Coin Bonus, and Flip the Script, it's honestly expected that they will lay waste to you in one fell swoop.

What makes matters even worse than they already are, Palafin ex doesn't even get the KO on Gholdengo ex without some help. Your options in the deck are Maximum Belt, Practice Studio, or Kieran - Gravity Mountain is unhelpful outside of bouncing their Artazon or Levincia. The average Gholdengo ex will run a copy of Fezandipti ex and a copy of Genesect ex - both two prize Pokemon that Weavile can Assaulting Hunt up in a pinch if you can't KO the Gholdengo ex you're facing down.

Rocks

As if it wasn't bad enough already, Gholdengo switched gears in Mega Evolution's base set. Scizor and Togekiss were put back in the binder in favor of Solrock and Lunatone, and the energy makeup switched from a Metal majority to a Fighting majority. Gholdengo ex doesn't care what energy it discards, as it has many ways to retrieve it, and each Basic Energy card does 50 damage just the same.

I don't think I'd be as displeased with the combination of the two and the strong Lunar Cycle engine if it wasn't for the Solrock doing 70 damage for a single Fighting energy as long as Lunatone is benched, which claims knockout on all Finizen in the Active Spot, just trying to evolve next turn. Even if they don't start with the Solrock in the Active Spot, they run a couple copies of Air Balloon for quick switches for extra cards from Coin Bonus that they can repurpose to make Solrock dangerous in the early game - they've even replaced their iconic ACE SPEC of

Energy Search Pro as well, usually for Prime Catcher, giving them a third option with additional gusting.

Accepting Defeat, but Praying For Blunders

I'll be honest - this is a terrible matchup for Palafin. Your early game setup is vital, and you need to be actively getting prizes immediately to keep up with Gholdengo decks. Vanguard Punch is a good option to take out Gimmighouls and the rock duo, as you usually only give up the one prize, but with the amount Palafin ex needs to do to setup as mentioned in the SeaWorld Dilemma, Gholdengo absolutely tramples you before you pass GO a lot of the time. It isn't an insta-loss, but it's very unfortunate that this takes up the highest amount of the metashare.

Unlike Gholdengo, you do have the element of surprise on your side though, so try to take advantage of the fact that they probably haven't seen Weavile use Assaulting Hunt in a long time (if ever). While there's no way to secure this, it's best to get multiple Finizen on the first turn in case of Solrock doing what it does best. If you know you're up against Gholdengo, or it's a Best of 3 and you choose who goes when, it's often best to go second to not only be able to use a Supporter like Arven to get Buddy-Buddy Poffin, you'll be able to prevent them from getting a turn 1 knockout that would swing the prize trade in their favor. As a bonus, you can use Budew to lock them out of item usage, hopefully slowing down their energy search. Also, keep an eye on your Iono, as while they have a great draw engine, it can really disrupt them if they have energy search or energy retrieval cards in hand.

Raging Bolt

If you're up against Raging Bolt ex, you're already in a much better situation than you could have been - why people play this deck while Gholdengo ex does a way better job as a deck reliant on energy discard is beyond me, considering there doesn't need to be attached energy on the board. The argument for Raging Bolt over it isn't baseless though - it's a Basic Pokemon that relies on other Basic Pokemon, making Pokemon search that much easier, and it does 20 more damage per energy discarded.

Accepting Free Wins

As far as legitimate decks with over 1% of the metashare go, this is as free as it comes. Every single Pokemon in this deck goes down to Giga Impact in one hit. The only caveat is the

extremely uncommon Bravery Charm or Ancient Booster Energy Capsule, both removable with Tool Scrapper and irrelevant with Maximum Belt.

As every Pokemon in this deck are Basic Pokemon except for Noctowl, there's no better matchup for you to play Weavile. There's usually always an ex on the bench or in the Active Spot, so all that's needed is 3 Giga Impact uses for the game - it's possible to take all your prizes on the 4th turn. Use Weavile to aim at specific targets like Raging Bolt ex or Teal Mask Ogerpon ex that have multiple energy attached to them, or aim for Fezandipiti ex to debilitate their draw power.

This does not mean that you are unbeatable though, so don't get overconfident. Raging Bolt ex is a strong Pokemon with OHKO capability on Palafin ex for 5 energy, and Professor Sada's Vitality acts as energy recovery and draw. If the Noctowl engine is being used, and there are multiple Teal Dance uses on a single turn, it's very possible that the tables can turn on you if you didn't have a great setup turn.

Tera Box and Joltik Box

Speaking of decks that utilize Area Zero Underdepths, let's cover both boxes in one go. Tera Box and Raging Bolt have some decent similarities - they rely on Noctowl and Basic Tera Pokemon in order to win. A major difference, however, is that Wellspring Mask Ogerpon ex can not only Sob Lock, but it can hit the bench with Torrential Pump as early as Turn 1 with Crispin and Sparkling Crystal, strong enough to take down an Active Zero to Hero Palafin and a benched Weavile in one go. It's very important to avoid getting donked by this deck, so fill your bench or place down a Pokemon ex that can't be taken down that easily. While you may think Tool Scrapper is a great way to remove a Sparkling Crystal, there's a better way most of the time - just knock out whoever it's attached to. Weavile is extremely versatile here, allowing for gusting of Hoothoot to prevent Jewel Seeker use or by grabbing cards like Wellspring Mask Ogerpon ex or Fezandipiti ex and putting them right in front of a Giga Impact. Be alert for Fan Rotom as well, especially as the game starts.

Joltik Box might seem like a bad matchup, with Palafin being weak to Lightning attacks, but it could be worse. Alike Tera Box, it relies on basic Pokemon ex to deal damage depending on the opponents typing - cards like Iron Leaves ex and Lillie's Clefairy ex are options, but don't

expect those easy targets to be played if your opponent has half a brain. Energy Switch is also common in both decks, so be aware of that as an option.

Setup for a Joltik Box player relies heavily on using...Joltik. As long as there's no Bravery Charm, even an Aqua Slash takes a knockout. Miraidon ex can be powered up by Joltik, and although it's easy to one-shot, Photon Blaster takes down every card in the deck except for N's Zoroark ex. Mostly, thankfully, it's being used as a utility card with Tandem Unit to unleash the main attackers. While surely threatening, Iron Hands ex hitting for weakness shows just how it's meant as a threat to single prize Pokemon compared - even with Future Booster Energy Capsule equipped, Amp You Very Much can't defeat Palafin ex at full HP. Arm Press would do the job, but *only* if it has the Future Booster Energy Capsule attached - otherwise, even that fails to take the knockout.

Avoiding that Pikachu

Tera Box and Joltik Box do share a common attacker, even though one is powered with Crispin and Sparkling Crystal and the other with Joltik and Powerglass. This attacker is none other than Pikachu ex, which for a Grass, Lightning, and Metal energy, does a whopping 300 damage, and doubles to an absurd 600 damage on every Water type in my decklist. The amount doesn't really matter, as Miraidon ex would be just as effective, and only uses Lightning energy with 20 more HP. The problem doesn't lie with the attack though, but with the ability of Resolute Heart, preventing any attack that would bring it from full HP to no HP and instead, leaving Pikachu ex at 10 HP. This isn't an issue for a lot of decks - Dragapult does bench damage, Charizard has Cursed Blast users, and Gardevoir has Munkidori - all which nullify the ability. Unfortunately, as this deck is made for one hit knockouts, there's not really a way to sufficiently break Resolute Heart except for using 2 hits, even if one is an Itchy Pollen.

Seemingly, this should be Palafin's biggest counter - a Pokemon that can take Palafin ex out in one hit and can't be knocked out in one hit by Palafin ex. If this was a Pikachu ex only deck, this would obviously be an issue - but that isn't the case for these decks. They rely on support cards like Latias ex, Fezandipiti ex, and Mew ex - all Basic Pokemon ex that go down to a Giga Impact. The similarity to Raging Bolt is uncanny - Weavile turns this deck on its head. Cards like Iono and Tool Scrapper will slow down Pikachu ex's energy acceleration, and Weavile allows you to entirely ignore Pikachu ex and just aim down sights on other Pokemon ex that are

more susceptible to a Giga Impact. In dire situations, Itchy Pollen can always break the effect of Resolute Heart, but just like many other problems, ignoring it also works just fine.

Marnie's Grimmsnarl

Fine, I guess I'll start talking about actual meta-relevant decks. This one sucks and I hate it, hence the name of the upcoming subtitle.

Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex is really good for a deck that can't seem to win a major tournament. As a Stage 2 deck, it's susceptible to Budew's item locking capability - but I'm not too sure about using it here, even though you hit for weakness on the Impidimp line. This is because Munkidori is the most common card in this deck, and can fling 30 damage at Budew for knockout whenever it wants to take all six prizes in one turn, effectively leaving it as a dead slot that can be taken care of anytime. Even though Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex is a Stage 2, there's usually only a single Rare Candy in the deck for them to use. Furthermore, they usually use a Stadium card for Pokemon search - either Artazon for Munkidori or Snorunt, or Spikemuth Gym for whatever stage of the Impidimp line they need. While Munkidori is dangerous in a deck that runs only Dark energy, and 180 damage on Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex's attack brings down a Palafin ex in 2 hits while dealing significant damage to the bench, if you see Snorunt and can bring it active, make it regret it was ever placed on the board. If you don't, it will evolve, and...

I Would Wring The Neck Of A Froslass in an Instant if it Wasn't A Ghost Type

Now that every Scarlet and Violet set has been released, I think it's without question that Twilight Masquerade is the most playable set in the era. First of all, Palafin ex was introduced here, and you wouldn't be at the 43rd page of a ridiculously long document that I highly doubt a single person will ever read in full if it was never released. Other notable released cards are Teal Mask Ogerpon ex, Wellspring Mask Ogerpon ex, and Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex, all with notable successes. Sorry, Hearthflame Mask Ogerpon ex, at least you're good in VGC. Iron Thorns ex, the unexpected victor of Worlds 2024, was here as well. Additionally, the meta-defining Drakloak and Dragapult ex are in this set, alongside Conkeldurr, Festival Lead,

Greninja ex, the splashable Bloodmoon Ursaluna ex, Okidogi, Tatsugiri, a whole slew of amazing Supporter cards, ACE SPEC cards, Jamming Tower, and even the infamous Munkidori.

Unfortunately for people who like to have fun and enjoy playing the trading card game with other people, this was also the expansion that released Frosslass. The creative minds at Creatures Inc. even released a prerelease promo *and* an illustration rare alongside the holo rare in the set, knowing that there would be people across the world that not only had hate in their heart, but wanted to Max Rarity their deck. How nice.

Frosslass activates during Pokemon Checkup with Freezing Shroud, placing a single damage counter on every (non-Frosslass) Pokemon with an ability for every Frosslass in play. This gives Munkidori damage on itself that it can use as ammunition with Adrena-Brain, all while your own Pokemon start to rack up damage like crazy. A lot of the cards in the Palafin decklist are negatively impacted by this, and unfortunately, Hero's Spirit once again is a massive detriment as it is an ability, even though it's a hindrance. Pecharunt ex and Fezandipiti ex also rack up damage, and Zero to Hero counts as well. Weavile is in the worst situation even though you want to use it in this match to bring Snorunt and Munkidori down ASAP. The Pokemon that is impacted the least by Frosslass is the Vanguard Punch Palafin, as it has no ability. An intelligent Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex player will take note that if Munkidori flings damage onto it, Palafin won't be able to attack without doubling its damage, and they can take advantage of that.

There's one major takeaway from playing this matchup - win fast or you won't win at all. Frosslass is obviously an important target to take out, but if you only aim at them, Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex will wreak havoc. Most decks only run a couple Frosslass, so if you take them out early enough as Snorunts, you can focus on the Pokemon ex.

There's two saving graces to this matchup - the first being a card that other decks may struggle with, Yveltal. Yveltal's Clutch prevents retreat, but as brought up before, that's irrelevant against this deck with Subjugating Chains undoing the lock. The second one involves making light of a bad situation - in this case, using Frosslass to your benefit. With Maximum Belt equipped, Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex would usually survive a Giga Impact with 20 HP. However, if there is even a single Frosslass on the board when they attack you, they'll take 10 damage during checkup, meaning after you use Giga Impact, they take *another* 10 HP, knocking them out during Pokemon Checkup. The same goes for a common finisher in this deck, Bloodmoon Ursaluna ex, as you'll be dealing 250 damage in addition to the 10 HP that Frosslass puts on the bear.

I do not personally like this matchup, as the opponent is in total control of your HP - there's no Professor Turo's Scenario or Penny in the deck, nor a Munkidori, so you need to place down your Pokemon with precision. As the typical Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex deck only runs Dark energy and few Rare Candy, it is extremely unlikely that you will get knocked out in the first two turns, so only play cards like Fezandipiti ex and Pecharunt ex when needed, and keep Sneasel and N's Zorua unevolved until Munkidori proves worrisome or it would greatly benefit you.

Lastly, this deck usually runs a copy of TM Devolution. I hope you understand why I hate this deck so much, and specifically Frosslass. At least it can't get worse.

Frosslass Munkidori Standalone

It got worse.

At least when Palafin takes a knockout on Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex, you take two prizes, speeding up the game. Now, imagine instead of being able to take two prizes, you had to deal with item lock instead - awesome, right? No? That's what I thought. While I put this deck under the Marnie's Grimmsnarl deck category, be warned that Frosslass Munkidori can exist as its own deck, usually with **multiple** copies of Budew, even **more** copies of Frosslass and Snorunt, and **another** TM Devolution copy most of the time.

This matchup requires Vanguard Punch, as it succeeds against Munkidori with Vanguard Punch (as long as there's no Bravery Charm), and it doesn't take damage counters from Freezing Shroud. It will likely get knocked out through Munkidori, so be sure to keep your Night Stretcher and Super Rod safe so you can bring it back. Palafin ex is okay here, but it's very dangerous for Pecharunt ex and Fezandipiti ex, so it's best to focus on using Vanguard Punch so you don't need to switch in and out of the Active Spot.

Expect cards like Maractus and Yveltal to lock you in the Active Spot, in which case, you may need to use Pecharunt ex. Maractus is especially annoying to hit with Vanguard Punch, as while you land a knockout, it deals 6 damage counters worth of retaliation - combine that with the 20 damage from Corner, and the next time Palafin swings with Vanguard Punch, you're guaranteed to go down. Bloodmoon Ursaluna ex is a common finisher, but once again, remember that with a Frosslass on board, Palafin ex can take it down easily. That said, your Palafin ex has likely racked up enough damage counters through Freezing Shroud that Blood Moon will shred through the dolphin. Honestly, this matchup sucks, especially with an endgame TM Devolution -

nothing worse than receiving Palafin ex in hand as a dead card while your damaged Finizen gets discarded and your opponent takes their prize - often multiple at once.

At least they aren't buffing Froslass any time soon - except for the Mega Froslass ex from Ascended Heroes that does 50 damage for every card the user's opponent has in hand. I'm less than enthused about the idea of Snorunt getting an extra 10 HP too - I'm really not sure that Froslass needed help.

Mega Absol Box

A Dark type deck that uses Munkidori, Yveltal, and the occasional Bloodmoon Ursaluna ex - where have I seen this before? Thankfully, I don't believe people are putting Froslass into Mega Absol Box - at least not yet. While this and Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex are currently the 5th and 6th most played decks in the meta respectively, seeing Mega Absol ex hit the board gives a sense of hope where seeing a Snorunt makes me want to scoop, just to avoid the headache.

This is probably the best deck in format that relies on Basic Pokemon, and definitely the most played. This should trigger a thought in your head - is Weavile the answer? Most certainly, Weavile is important against Mega Absol Box, so try to get it in play if you're able. That said, I would try to *also* slot N's Zorua onto bench to evolve into N's Zoroark ex, as while Claw of Darkness won't knock out Palafin ex in one shot, the disruption caused by your opponent looking at your hand and removing a card, usually the best one, is obnoxious and can entirely end your game if it was your only Supporter card. Trade brings at least a smidge of draw power back from the setback, so while it is less than ideal, it's better than nothing.

Your opponent will likely be using TM Turbo Energize in order to power themselves up, which means a turn 1 knockout is extremely unlikely. 99% of the time, it's downright impossible for them to, so keeping a Finizen in the Active Spot to prepare for a Zero to Hero activation is your best case scenario. You'll want to try to have Vanguard Punch as a backup in case they're running the usual single copy of Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex.

Munkidori is an amazing card that makes a lot of sense in Gardevoir decks, and makes decks with Froslass a hell on Earth, but without self-damage, why is it in this deck? Simply put, some of the top decks in format are going to be leaving damage on board somehow - Charizard/Dusknoir might use Cursed Blast, Gardevoir can use their own Munkidori, and Dragapult is required to place 6 damage counters on the bench. For a lot of decks, they won't be

taking down the ridiculously bulky Mega Kangaskhan - a great form of draw for Mega Absol Box, alongside being a flippy but consistent attacker that, every 1 in 8 attacks, can bring down a full HP Palafin ex - otherwise, it's a guaranteed 2HKO.

If Mega Absol ex is the one attacking, Claw of Darkness is great, but it has a way to take Palafin ex down with Terminal Period - any Pokemon in the Active Spot with 60 damage on it is immediately knocked out. That's only 2 Munkidori uses, so if you don't OHKO the Mega Absol ex or Mega Kangaskhan ex in a single hit, you're probably going to regret swinging with Giga Impact. Sure, Weavile can bring up Fezandipiti ex or Latias ex for a clean 2 prize knockout, but there's a more efficient way to win - potentially on your third turn, going first.

Maximum Belt

Palafin ex swings for a respectable 250 damage, boosted to a massive 300 damage if you have Maximum Belt attached. Practice Studio and Gravity Mountain really don't help much here except for bumping away the bothersome Lively Stadium, which is best to remove. Without that Stadium and with Maximum Belt, and if the 2 copies of Bravery Charm aren't being used on the opponent's Active Pokemon, Giga Impact brings down both the main Mega Pokemon ex in Mega Absol Box, giving you a whopping 3 prizes and a huge advantage - all while leaving no crumbs for Munkidori to fling back at you. While Lively Stadium and Bravery Charm are detriments, they're removable through other Stadium cards, Tool Scrapper, and Kieran can help knock out a Mega Absol ex, even without a Maximum Belt. While this is a very dangerous and disruptive deck, you can take 3 prizes as early as your second turn and leave your opponent scrambling for some way to retaliate, especially when Yveltal lock doesn't even work against you. This is a relatively favorable matchup, but it's not a shoe-in for sure.

Mega Kangaskhan

Mega Kangaskhan isn't only seen with Mega Absol, but despite how inconsistent Rapid-Fire Combo is, it doesn't prevent Run Errand from drawing 2 cards as if it was Gholdengo ex. In fact, even if a Gholdengo deck ran Full Metal Lab and a Rigid Band, it couldn't dream to have the bulk that Mega Kangaskhan ex can acquire.

With 2 Bouffalant on your opponent's board, all Colorless Pokemon take 60 less damage. Combining that with Lively Stadium gives Mega Kangaskhan ex 30 more health, but we can go further with Bravery Charm, giving it 50 more health. In total, a fully kitted Mega Kangaskhan ex would have 380 HP with 60 damage reduction - also, it's a **Basic Pokemon** with those stats. Sure, it gives up 3 prizes, but besides a fringe case with Frenzied Gouging, I don't see anything knocking out Mega Kangaskhan ex in one hit. Palafin ex is no exception to the rule - but it just squeaks by a 2HKO. With damage reduction, Giga Impact does 190 damage, meaning 2 swings deal 380 damage exactly. This is very unlike Mega Absol Box, in which a Maximum Belt spells disaster for Mega Kangaskhan ex.

Of course, if it were a 2HKO, things would be simple. Obviously, because this is the Pokemon Trading Card Game, things can't just be that simple. A single use of Adrena-Brain makes Maximum Belt a requirement for the 2HKO, and there's between 2 and 3 copies of Munkidori in the deck. Certainly, that's still bypassable, right? Wrong - I haven't mentioned the ice cream. Jumbo Ice Cream is absurd - how can you give someone ice cream stacked that high? Also, it has an absurd effect of healing 80 HP from a Pokemon with 3 energy attached or more - and in order to use Rapid-Fire Combo, 3 energy are needed, meaning a powered up Mega Kangaskhan ex is the ideal target for Jumbo Ice Cream.

Unfortunately, this matchup is a war of attrition if you don't come out swinging. The earlier you get powered up, the quicker you can take knockouts, the more energy they waste for attachments for turn. Even worse, it's luck based - even though there's a $\frac{1}{8}$ chance that Rapid-Fire Combo does 350+ damage, it's ridiculous how common that is to occur.

Fire Type Decks

If you thought Mega Absol Box seemed favorable, here's 4 decks that Palafin hits for Water weakness - and not all of them are rogue, rare decks. In fact, the next one was recently buffed through Solrock and Lunatone.

Ceruledge

One of my favorite decks currently in format is Ceruledge - as a Stage 1 ex that only needs a single energy to attack, it has more similarity to Gholdengo than Palafin, in part due to it requiring energy discard to scale attacks - though, Ceruledge doesn't need Superior Energy

Retrieval to repeat huge attacks. The Pokemon Trading Card Game equivalent to the Erosion Joker in Balatro, Ceruledge ex swings for 30 damage but scales with plus 20 damage for every energy that's been discarded - Basic or Special.

With Fighting Gong and the rock duo, Lunar Cycle acts like Radiant Greninja's Concealed Cards ability, but requires a Fighting energy and provides an extra card. With cards like Squawkabilly ex, Carmine, Earthen Vessel, Ultra Ball, and even the niche Dig Dig Dig Drillbur, your opponent can discard over a dozen energy on their first turn - going first. If they discard 16 energy, Palafin ex goes down in a single hit to an Abyssal Flames, making Ceruledge ex a formidable foe. Unfortunately for Ceruledge players, Palafin ex will always take knockout with Giga Impact, dealing more than enough damage due to its Water weakness. In fact, if you utilize Maximum Belt or Practice Studio, even a Vanguard Punch brings down Ceruledge ex, turning the prize trade on its head. Similarly to Marnie's Grimmsnarl ex, it's best to end this match as soon as possible, especially as with 19 to 20 energy in the deck, they'll likely have some prized, gaining more ~~Mult~~ damage over time. Lastly, they're likely running Legacy Energy in order to skew your prize trade, so don't hesitate to Assaulting Hunt cards like Squawkabilly ex or Fezandipiti ex if they haven't been picked up with Professor Turo's Scenario.

Eevee Box/Flareon

For the most part, I consider Eevee Box as a Fire deck, mainly due to the inclusion of Flareon ex being present in 99.9% of decklists that include Eevee - I'll be using Eevee Box interchangeably with the Flareon deck to label this deck, even though someone out there will probably be upset with that - maybe just because I don't want to call it Flareon/Noctowl due to my distaste for the owl.

Love it or hate it, there's usually a 4-4 line of Hoothoot and Noctowl in this deck, and it includes the dreaded turn 1 attacker, Fan Rotom. Fan Rotom doesn't just bring the owls to the table, but also some Eevee, including the versatile Boosted Evolution one which can also attack on the first turn using Crispin or Sparkling Crystal. Not only is Burning Charge a respectable 130 damage for a first turn attack, but it's a great form of energy acceleration. Two of **any** energy on **any** Pokemon in play is ridiculous, especially with strong attackers like Terapagos ex under Area Zero Underdepths, Wellspring Mask Ogerpon ex with Torrential Pump for spread damage, or onto other Eeveelutions like Leafeon ex. It can self accelerate for a powerful 280 damage

Carnelian attack, or onto one of the most disruptive cards in the game, Sylveon ex - if you thought TM Devolution was a setback, try having everything put back in the deck with Angelite.

While Leafreon ex and Sylveon ex require a Maximum Belt to take out, all the other Pokemon in Eevee Box go down to a single Giga Impact, and just like Ceruleon ex, you can use Practice Studio, Maximum Belt, or Kieran to use Vanguard Punch for an OHKO on Flareon ex. As long as you make it through your setup phase, you're probably in an advantageous situation, especially as Palafin ex doesn't get knocked out in one hit by any of your opponents attacks.

Ethan's Typhlosion

Fire decks, for the most part, hate to see Palafin ex, and not just because they have no clue what it does. Ethan's Typhlosion, on the other hand, sees it as a challenge - a single prize Pokemon that aims to take down much larger foes. With 4 Ethan's Adventure in the discard pile, an unboosted Buddy Blast does 280 damage - further enhanced by Brave Bangle, it can deal 310 damage at once. If they have Black Belt's Training, they're able to take Palafin ex down in one hit - but that's not very easy for them. More likely, they'll have attacked with Ethan's Cyndaquil for 30 damage or Ethan's Quilava for 40 damage earlier in the game, which would be just enough for the knockout. Unfortunately for Ethan's Typhlosion, a mere Vanguard Punch does more than enough for the knockout, meaning if you use Super Rod and Night Stretcher correctly, you'll be able to win the prize trade, even if your Palafin ex gets knocked out. Just be aware that they have plenty of gusting options, so even if they can't knock out Palafin ex, there's N's Zoroark ex, Pecharunt ex, and Fezandipiti ex all within reach.

Armarouge and Ho-Oh

Yes, I'm reaching a bit with these 'viable' Fire decks, but this one definitely exists. Another deck that relies greatly on Basic Pokemon besides Armarouge, this is a perfect storm for Weavile and Palafin ex. This deck requires Charcadet to evolve, so if you have the chance, knock out the lone Charcadet to bring their plan to a screeching halt. You can also knock out Ethan's Ho-Oh, but it can just be brought back with Night Stretcher and activated again - though you do take 2 prizes from it. Truth be told, this is not a deck to worry about. Besides Roaring Moon ex and a late game attack from Reshiram ex (which can be taken out by an unboosted Vanguard

Punch, just like Ethan's Ho-Oh), Palafin ex will be tanking any hits it takes. Roaring Moon ex's Frenzied Gouging has the incredible drawback of dealing 200 self damage, leaving it with a mere 30 HP - enough that a Finizen you place on the turn right after Frenzied Gouging can use Aqua Slash for two prizes. I don't see a scenario, excluding terrible prizing or having all 3 Palafin ex in hand, that this match ends in a loss.

Single Prize Decks

There's two single prize decks that are currently doing relatively well in the current meta, and I'll start with the better of the two first. These two are really, really annoying unfortunately, and while I think decks like Ethan's Typhlosion and Conkeldurr are formidable single prize decks that just haven't found their best pilot, I groan at these two.

Alakazam

Once again, they gave the annoying card an illustration rare (ETB Promo) and a prerelease promo. Players of Alakazam decks have the goal of playing Reverse UNO, and getting as many Draw 4 cards played on them as possible. This is a stupid analogy for a stupid deck.

Alakazam does more damage with more cards in hand, and uses the Dudunsparce engine most of the time in tandem with Enriching Energy, allowing for recycling into the deck with consistency. With 17 (Yes, 17) cards in deck, Alakazam gets a one hit knockout on Palafin ex. The stupidest part about this deck isn't that absurd hand size, but rather, it's how effortlessly easy it is to acquire that number. Kadabra and Alakazam both draw cards upon evolution, Dudunsparce can be used multiple times a turn depending on how many Dunsparce were on the bench last turn, Ciphermaniac's Codebreaking allows for players to draw whatever they desire, Tulip can bring back 4 Psychic energy or Psychic Pokemon - it's decently consistent because the amount of draw means that there's a very high likelihood the card they need for the game-winning gust or such is in hand.

Use Palafin ex in the early game when Alakazam can't OHKO it, but when you're able to, pivot to Vanguard Punch as a method of knockout. At 140 HP, you will need a Stadium in play to knock out Alakazam with Vanguard Punch, but thankfully both Practice Studio and Gravity Mountain are sufficient in this specific situation.

I definitely lose to this deck more than I win to it, but maybe it's because I'm never drawing any of the three copies of Iono in deck - a well timed Iono means that the Alakazam player has to rebuild their hand size as their deck-sized hand shrinks to 6 cards or less. Using Budew in the early game is definitely an option to prevent Rare Candy, so keep that in mind.

Crustle

While the Alakazam match is bettered by Vanguard Punch, Crustle doesn't even give you the option to use Giga Impact at all. Honestly, this deck has a very low metashare right now, and that's a good thing - there's really not many ways to deal with this deck. Vanguard Punch is literally the only solution outside of some Itchy Pollens or Aqua Slashes. This deck runs Munkidori a majority of the time, so I recommend Weavile heavily. At 150 HP, there's no way that Vanguard Punch can OHKO a Crustle, and if it swings at Palafin, Vanguard Punch will spell its own end. Cards like Jumbo Ice Cream and Munkidori even heal the Crustle, and without Tool Scrapper, Luxurious Cape moves the goalpost even further away. This is a spectacularly bad matchup, but with less than 1% of the metashare, swapping out cards to deal with it would more likely harm other matchups than assist with this one.

The Mirror

I have never fought the Palafin mirror. Frankly, I hope to never fight the Palafin mirror. What am I supposed to do against a Stage 1 that has 340 HP? Practice Studio, Maximum Belt, and Kieran? What if they do that to me?

Genuine answer - you're best off using Weavile because of Palafin ex's reliance on Pecharunt ex. Just hope they don't think of that first.

Mega Manectric

330 HP on a Stage 1 is at least more attainable than 340 HP for the Palafin mirror - and that gives up another prize card. Electrike swinging for 30 damage in the early game is a bit dangerous - not just for Budew, but also for the 50 HP Finizen that is hit for weakness by it. This obviously isn't a fantastic matchup, but the metashare is so low that it isn't even on the Limitless TCG SVI-PFL page. That said, it can always pop-up, and with Miraidon ex and Iron Hands ex, it's the same as Joltik box - they can be one-shot, so bring them up with Weavile before it's too late. Eelektrik combined with Electric Generator is unreliable but potentially strong energy

acceleration, so when you get a knockout, expect a Mega Manectric ex ready to swing right back at you. I really don't think I should lump this deck with the meta decks, but there's a reason why - and it's aptly explained by this header below.

On Having A Lightning Weakness and How It Really Doesn't Matter

Yeah, it isn't the best, but Lightning is a relatively good weakness to have right now. Even with it, Mega Manectric ex's Flash Ray not only doesn't impact you as a Stage 1 attacker, nor does it clinch a knockout on Palafin ex, but it can be avoided through using Assaulting Hunt - which is the best strategy to face this deck, similarly to Pikachu ex. If they benched supporting Pokemon ex such as Fezandipiti ex or Latias ex, they're easy Giga Impact targets. This goes for other attackers too, like Iron Hands ex or Zekrom ex. If there was a single prize meta deck that used Lightning attackers, then there would be a problem - but thankfully, decks like Iono's Bellibolt ex are so far flung from meta relevance, you'd have more luck finding a Palafin to mirror at a Regional.

Mega Stage 1 Decks

I've been dreading this part - fighting Stage 1 Mega Pokemon ex can be a real pain. Basic Pokemon usually can be knocked out with Maximum Belt at the highest HP, and at least Stage 2 Pokemon can be weakened through the use of Gravity Mountain - Stage 1 Pokemon don't have any specific way to be weakened. On the contrary, you might unintentionally power up your opponent through your Practice Studio. For a lot of the upcoming Pokemon, unless you can manage to find Kieran (and occasionally, Practice Studio too), you'll need to settle for a 2HKO with Giga Impact. Don't worry too much though, because a majority of the time, they're going to have to settle for a 2HKO on Palafin ex as well. Be careful though and keep some Iono available, because you might want to disrupt them - just like how you have ways to clutch a OHKO in the best cases, so do each of these decks, technically.

Mega Lucario

Mega Lucario ex has the highest HP of the Mega Stage 1 Pokemon ex on this list at 340 HP, tying Palafin ex. Critically, that means that getting a OHKO on Mega Lucario ex is something you not only need to look for 3 cards for that are single copies in the deck, being

Practice Studio, Kieran, and Maximum Belt - and they have to be in use all at the same time. Because this is virtually impossible without some exceptionally good draw and a lot of luck, don't count on this as your win condition.

Obviously, Mega Lucario ex is the deck's main attacker, but I'll quickly go over the utility cards it uses that can also pack a punch. The rock duo of Solrock and Lunatone return once again, as some decks will even add Fighting energy just to use it, so for an attacker that uses Fighting energy naturally, it's an easy duo to slot in. That stated, not only does Solrock threaten 70 damage in the early game, but Premium Power Pro means that your 100 HP Palafin isn't safe in the Active Spot, even without Riolu in sight. Accelerating Stab on that same Riolu can also take down both the 50 HP Finizen and 70 HP Finizen if they have the respective amount of Premium Power Pro in hand, which is a card they very likely run 4 of in their decklist.

While very different in nature, Palafin and Mega Lucario decks aren't too different. They both use a Stage 1 Pokemon with 340 HP, and aim to OHKO everything using damage modifiers. In fact, they even use a single prize Stage 1 Pokemon for gusting purposes - Hariyama. Unlike Weavile's Assaulting Hunt, Hariyama's Heave-Ho Catcher only activates upon evolution, and cannot be used again unless Hariyama is removed from play. While a single use gust and a lost bench slot, it may seem like an endgame last resort, but it has some major benefits in comparison to Weavile. The major advantage in comparison to Assaulting Hunt is that Heave-Ho Catcher does not check for if it is a Basic Pokemon, only if it is a Benched Pokemon, and can gust it to the Active Spot. In addition to that, it synergizes really well with Mega Lucario ex's first, less powerful attack, Aura Jab. At 130 damage, Aura Jab isn't easy to shrug off - Fezandipiti ex and Pecharunt ex go down to it due to the usually unimportant Fighting weakness. In fact, we've now gone over 50 pages without mentioning a single Fighting type attacker - neither Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex nor Solrock count, as they both don't even count Resistance or Weakness in their damage calculations. Hitting weakness is not all Aura Jab can offer, as its secondary effect attaches up to 3 Basic Fighting energy (that were probably discarded through Lunar Cycle) onto your Benched Pokemon in any way. Not only does this power up other Mega Lucario ex, but fittingly enough, Hariyama has an attack for 3 Fighting energy that deals 210 damage and 70 damage to itself. A single prize attacker dealing 210 damage is nothing to scoff at, especially when your Palafin ex was already damaged by an Aura Jab - combining the attacks is exactly

enough to KO a Palafin ex. If being gusted would be game ending, try to gust them first with Weavile.

Mega Lucario ex isn't as much of a threat until it attaches a second Fighting energy, allowing it to use Mega Brave for 270 at the cost of not being able to use it next turn. That drawback means virtually nothing, because not only can it switch out of the Active Spot in the same way that Giga Impact can be used consecutively, but nothing in the format except for the bulkiest and most boosted Pokemon ex can survive the combination of a Mega Brave and Aura Jab, and that's without boosts on Mega Lucario ex. Mega Brave can OHKO Palafin ex under multiple conditions - 3 Premium Power Pro being used by your opponent in one turn isn't likely, but never count it out. Using 2 Premium Power and having Practice Studio in the Stadium spot is easier for your opponent to pull off, and while they don't often run Practice Studio, Palafin does, so only place that Stadium down as a last ditch effort or if you can secure the OHKO with Kieran and Maximum Belt. The deck similarities continue, as Mega Lucario decks also run the Gravity Mountain and Maximum Belt combo. With Maximum Belt attached, all Mega Lucario ex needs is 1 Premium Power Pro or the aforementioned Practice Studio in play to knock out Palafin ex, and if you can't claim knockout on the card with Maximum Belt attached, try to use Tool Scrapper on it at minimum, because it's very possible it can claim multiple OHKO attacks on multiple Palafin ex.

Don't fear using a Vanguard Punch or even an Aqua Slash to get Mega Lucario ex in range of a Giga Impact knockout, especially if the prize trade isn't in your favor and you need to slow their prize pickup. Of course, this already unfavorable matchup has a very bad potential scenario - specifically, Professor Turo's Scenario. With two copies in most decks, missing knockout but dealing massive damage to a Mega Lucario ex is basically asking for them to pick up the damaged Pokemon, entirely nullifying your last turn, all while placing the Mega Lucario ex back on a Riolu that's been around for at least a turn. If you have the chance and can't get knockout on Mega Lucario ex, using Assaulting Hunt to bring up Riolu and swinging with Vanguard Punch isn't a bad idea. In regards to using Vanguard Punch, be wary of a Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex appearance, as Mega Lucario decks are already playing with Fighting energy.

Mega Lopunny

The last real “meta” deck on the list despite it being this far in the document, Mega Lopunny is listed by Limitless TCG as the 7th most popular deck in the metashare. Once again, this deck is extremely reliant on using Cursed Blast users, often running 4 Duskull for the sake of consistency. While Psyduck users have to be on the lookout for an occasional slotted in Klefki, they're much better off against Mega Lopunny decks if they can keep it safe, so this should be much easier if you tweaked the Palafin decklist to include Psyduck. As I haven't done that myself, I find this matchup challenging - but at least it isn't as difficult as Mega Lucario.

I don't need to go over what Dusknoir can do for the umpteenth time in this document, but using Mega Lopunny ex's Gale Thrust in tandem with a Cursed Blast knocks Palafin ex out with damage to spare. While normally I would mention that Gale Thrust is a base 60 damage attack that can only *conditionally* do 170 bonus damage, and without that it can't even knock out most of your Finizen, your opponent will need to be doing this intentionally or have the worst prizes in history in order to whiff the extra damage, but still manage to hit for 60. All Mega Lopunny ex needs to do is go from the Bench to the Active Spot on the turn - the same stipulation as the Obsidian Flames Palafin, but for less energy and more damage. For this, they usually run 2 Switch, have Latias ex in deck to allow Basic Pokemon to retreat for free into Mega Lopunny ex, and only have a retreat cost of 1, meaning as long as they have another energy, they can retreat into Dusclops or Dusknoir, used Cursed Blast, and return to the Active Spot with the bonus damage on Gale Thrust active.

To a Palafin player such as myself, I feel like Mega Lopunny ex is a teensy bit unfair in comparison. While we're both Stage 1 Pokemon ex that swing for nearly the same amount (230 on Gale Thrust, 250 on Giga Impact) and have nearly the same HP (330 on Mega Lopunny ex, 340 on Palafin ex), they not only have a second attack they can use in dire situations or to avoid cards like Sylveon and Mimikyu with Safeguard, but they don't have an ability that acts as a detriment, and most unfairly, they can use Jet Energy to not only bring a Benched Pokemon into the Active Spot, but they can attack using that same Jet Energy for 230. Just imagine a Water Jet Energy - I wouldn't have had to write this document because everyone else would've written a thesis on the Tier 0 Palafin deck by now.

In all seriousness, Mega Lopunny ex isn't as strong as our dolphin hero, and needs assistance to deal damage from the Duskull line in order to take big knockouts. If this deck were

only Lopunny and Dusknoir, it would seem hard to find any win condition outside of using Maximum Belt and Kieran simultaneously, which you can do. Thankfully for Palafin, the Mega Lopunny deck needs utility and draw in order to not brick. Not only do they run Latias ex and occasionally Fezandipiti ex, both which can be obliterated by a Giga Impact with no HP boosts in their deck, but they also run Mega Kangaskhan ex for use of Run Errand and free retreat with Latias ex on the card tied for the most HP ever printed on a Basic Pokemon. While a Mega Lopunny player expects Mega Kangaskhan ex to be a tank that sits on bench, and only wants it to enter the Active Spot after a Pokemon faints in order to draw 2 cards and then retreat into Mega Lopunny ex, Palafin can subvert their expectations. Using a combination of Weavile's Assaulting Hunt and Maximum Belt, you can not only knock their Mega Kangaskhan ex's block off to discard their draw engine, but you get 3 prize cards on top of that.

That's all I got, really. This isn't a super fun deck to face with the threat of Cursed Blast looming at virtually all times after the first turn, especially when Weavile is both very important and very susceptible to a Dusknoir usage. Similarly to the Stage 1 Mega Pokemon ex, Mega Manectric ex, sometimes aiming around it is key, especially because they're going to be giving you a prize card with every Cursed Blast, meaning taking 3 prizes from Mega Kangaskhan ex is very dangerous for them.

Mega Sharpedo

Less successful than the Mega Lopunny deck, but also released in the most recent expansion (as of writing this), Phantasmal Flames, Mega Sharpedo might be my favorite archetype of the Mega Evolution era so far, and I think it has potential. Regrettably, this deck is currently not using Grimsley's Move, a card that I think has immense potential, so I'll be keeping an eye on it. That aside, there's plenty to like about Mega Sharpedo - a single energy attack for 70 that also draws cards, Munkidori synergy, a great use for the new Toxtricity Dark engine, and an incredibly strong second attack that does up to 270 damage before boosts.

Like Mega Lopunny ex, Mega Sharpedo ex has 330 HP, but it's rare to see it at full HP, especially if it wants to attack your Active Pokemon for decent damage. It needs at least 1 damage counter on it in order to swing for 270 damage with 2 Dark energy, or else it swings for a pathetic 120 as a three prize Pokemon. It's relatively easy for Mega Sharpedo decks to inflict self damage through Toxtricity's Sinister Surge, dealing 20 damage to any Dark type Pokemon on

bench, as long as they have a Dark energy in deck that they can attach to it as compensation for the damages. This means that a Maximum Belt and Practice Studio are usually enough for the knockout, but in a lot of cases where it already has 3 or more damage counters due to the energy acceleration, all you need is a Maximum Belt. Be extremely careful if you decide to place down Practice Studio, as they can capitalize off of it - for example, if it happens to run Maximum Belt, that extra 10 HP is just what they need for the OHKO on Palafin ex. There's no clear correct way to fight Mega Sharpedo ex from the beginning - you need to adapt to their playstyle and what they do, and utilize cards like Weavile, Kieran, and Maximum Belt.

What they will almost certainly do is play Munkidori alongside their Dark energy, and while they can't use Sinister Surge on it, they have other ways to acquire Dark energy in hand to attach it for their turn. Other cards to watch out for are Pecharunt ex (which unlike in Palafin's deck, can attack for massive damage) and Yveltal (which is absolutely irrelevant and a wasted bench slot for them). Pecharunt ex allows for the activation of Binding Mochi, allowing them to deal an immense 320 damage. While yes, Palafin ex does survive this attack even with the boost, make sure to get the knockout back this turn (which, as they're poisoned, should be easier) unless you want Munkidori to fling some of the damage on its side of the board right back onto Palafin ex. If Munkidori and Toxtricity are benched, you will likely lose Palafin ex on your next turn regardless due to how easy it is for Sinister Surge to deal the 20 damage they need for knockout - granted, you take more prizes than they do. Keep that prize trade in your favor, and this matchup should favor you because it's easier for you to get the OHKO than it is for them.

While very rare to show up, but more likely to be found in this deck than any other deck, I'm devoting these 2 paragraphs to Mega Gengar ex, a 350 HP behemoth with an extremely obnoxious ability that can be placed down as early as turn 2 with Rare Candy or Grimsley's Move. Whenever Mega Gengar ex is in play until the moment after you take prizes for it being Knocked Out, Shadowy Concealment lowers the amount of prizes you take from Dark type Pokemon by 1 if the KO was delivered by damage from a Pokemon ex. This means that if you manage to knock out Mega Gengar ex with Giga Impact, you only get 2 prizes. If you bring a Pecharunt ex into the Active Spot and use Giga Impact, you only take 1 prize. If you knock out Carvahna with Giga Impact, you get nothing but the satisfaction of a discarded piranha, which isn't really that satisfying at all.

The easy thing to say is “knock out the Mega Gengar ex,” but that’s easier said than done. It usually just sits on the bench, and Weavile can’t bring it into the Active Spot. Worse, at 350 HP, the Maximum Belt + Practice Studio + Kieran combo doesn’t even do enough for an OHKO - you have to replace Practice Studio with Gravity Mountain for that. Thankfully, there are two caveats available. With the help of Weavile, you can Assaulting Hunt for an opposing Benched Pokemon such as Tatsugiri or Munkidori, neither of which are Dark type, meaning Shadowy Concealment doesn’t do anything. If you do want to knock out a Dark type and take the amount of prize cards you deserve, use Vanguard Punch, as it doesn’t apply unless you use a Pokemon ex to claim knockout - a Giga Impact into a Vanguard Punch is enough to bring down Mega Sharpedo ex for 3 prizes, even if a Mega Gengar ex doesn’t want you to take that many.

Off-Meta Decks

Speed round! Let’s go over all the other decks on the Limitless TCG page until we cover all 25 placing decks in the SVI-PFL format!

Greninja

Greninja ex has a reasonable 310 HP, meaning Maximum Belt combined with any of your Stadium cards is enough for the Giga Impact OHKO. Approach this deck the same way you approach Charizard ex with Pidgeot ex and Dusknoir - mainly because Greninja ex usually runs Pidgeot ex and Dusknoir. The big gimmick of 90% of Greninja decks is the ACE SPEC of Grand Tree, allowing Basic Pokemon to go through their whole evolution cycle without using Pokemon search Item cards or Supporter cards. This limits Budew’s usage here, so I’m not sure it’s the best choice.

As I’ve gone over Pidgeot ex before and I’m getting sick and tired of Dusknoir, I’m just going to go over Greninja ex here. Mirage Barrage is more attainable to use than ever with Ignition Energy. Greninja ex launching 120 damage to 2 of your Pokemon whether active or not, this is not the time to use Weavile. Assaulting Hunt doesn’t really do anything here, especially as Grand Tree lets Stage 2 Pokemon hit the field in an instant, and Dusknoir and Greninja ex both have ways to send a Benched Weavile packing. Moving to the first attack, 170 is just an unfortunate number for Greninja ex to be dealing - Palafin ex gets 2HKO’d by just the right amount, and both Pecharunt ex and Fezandipiti ex get hit for their Fighting weaknesses, meaning

they get knocked out instantly. This would be annoying as is, but to the benefit of Greninja players, they can get any card they want as a reward for the daunting task of attacking for a single energy. They already have Pidgeot ex - they could just Quick Search, but I guess they're just lazy.

Be glad this deck has low usage, because like every Dusknor deck, it's annoying to go up against, especially if you have a poor start. The saving grace here is the aforementioned ACE SPEC choice, Grand Tree. Not only can you utilize Grand Tree to save on using a Hilda/Ultra Ball, as you can evolve up into a Stage 1 and then stop, but that means if you bump their Stadium card with any of your three cards, they lose their ACE SPEC capability **and** are now in range of a Maximum Belt boosted Giga Impact.

N's Zoroark

When you see your opponent start with N's Zorua, the average person's first thought is that they're playing N's Zoroark ex as their main attacker. My mind has been corrupted deeply enough through my gameplay that I get nervous that I'm facing the Palafin mirror.

To get it out of the way, the biggest threat by far is N's Zoroark ex copying N's Reshiram - without N's Reshiram on bench, this deck is a pretty favorable matchup. However, sparing terrible prize by your opponent, there's more than likely multiple copies of the Dragon type in the deck with multiple ways to recover it. Not only is Virtuous Flame an exact 2HKO as it's another 170 damage attack, but if you miss your knockout on N's Zoroark ex with a Giga Impact, expect a Powerful Rage to make mincemeat out of whatever you have that happens to be in the Active Spot. Most of the time, you just shouldn't swing at N's Zoroark ex at all unless you're knocking it out or doing minimal damage with attacks like Aqua Slash or Itchy Pollen - the prior which puts N's Zoroark ex in range of a Giga Impact knockout. Every little bit of chip damage you deal matters here, especially if they're using Binding Mochi because they'll be poisoning themselves for 20 damage - 10 after they attack, and 10 more after you attack. Practice Studio can help in this situation, but Maximum Belt confirms knockout whenever Giga Impact lands - unless they're using their ACE SPEC too, which is usually a 50/50 split between Secret Box and Hero's Cape. There's nothing you can do about Secret Box, but that's less of a detriment to Palafin in comparison to Hero's Cape. There's no way to swing for an OHKO on their attacker

with Hero's Cape attached, so instead of fearing the mirror when you see N's Zorua, try to avoid discarding Tool Scrapper until you see the ACE SPEC get played.

N's Darmanitan isn't in every N's Zoroark deck, but it's in some, so it's worth the mention. Dealing 90 damage to the Active and to a Benched Pokemon, unless you've only taken a single turn and it's being copied by Night Joker, there's really not much to worry about. Weavile has 110 HP, and every Pokemon ex or Stage 1 in the deck has higher HP, so it's not doing massive damage to your board when it swings, discarding all of its attached energy. While Vanguard Punch would normally just miss by 10 HP, you don't even have to use Practice Studio - it has weakness to Water, meaning you do more than enough damage.

This deck has increasingly become uncommon to use, but with N's Zekrom coming in Ascended Heroes, it might pick up again - not that they can use it to OHKO Palafin ex, even with the Binding Mochi active. Okidogi ex plays as a no ability attacker in the deck for swinging at cards like Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex, but at 250 HP on a Basic Pokemon with an attack that doesn't break the 300 damage threshold, the Weavile and Palafin ex combination actively wants to see an Okidogi ex in play. Watch for Munkidori or Mega Absol ex as they may show up, and Yveltal with Clutch is once again, a non-issue.

Slaking

Honestly, I'm shocked that there's been Slaking decks that have done decently well, and I've never really faced one. I'm only bringing it up due to some recent Day 2 placements, and truth be told, the only consistent thing I see about Slaking decks is unsurprisingly, the use of Slaking ex. Pidgeot ex also seems to be a mainstay, which makes some sense, but genuinely nothing else is consistent, including the Special Energy - there's Ignition, Boomerang, Mist, and Jet as Colorless energy options.

That said, I have no real ways to beat this deck in my head because I've never faced it, but using Gravity Mountain/Practice Studio plus Maximum Belt *and* Kieran is the only way I can really see here. On the other hand, they really can't knock you out in one hit if they aren't running the Dusknoir line. This is likely the last time I mention Cursed Blast in this document, and I'm very grateful. Otherwise, good luck.

Pidgeot Control

Though still around until rotation, Pidgeot Control decks have fallen off hard in the past year, so this would be a rare find. You don't have to worry about being locked in the Active Spot through Ethan's Sudowoodo or Maractus, all thanks to Subjugating Chains. The biggest problem this deck faces is the incredibly obnoxious Handheld Fan and Elygem combo. You only have only 6 energy, so make sure that you don't lose all of it by Elygem placing it on a free retreat Pokemon, giving you effectively no way to use that energy for the rest of the game, unless they somehow knock it out - something Pidgeot Control doesn't do.

A large majority of their deck isn't built to counter Palafin, so you're in the clear there. Feel free to use the Sneasel line, as the low HP it has doesn't matter in a match where your opponent doesn't plan on doing any damage, but decking you out instead. Also, Xerosic's Machinations and Eri might pop out of seemingly nowhere due to Quick Search capabilities on Pidgeot ex, so be vigilant in remembering those cards exist. You're also less likely to get your Maximum Belt removed via Tool Scrapper than having a Genesect with a Tool card placed down, preventing all ACE SPEC cards from being played from hand - you can use your own Tool Scrapper to remove it and place down your Maximum Belt, if push comes to shove.

Cynthia's Garchomp

Speaking of Tool Scrapper, pray you don't prize one against Cynthia decks, because at 400 HP, a Cynthia's Garchomp with a Cynthia's Power Weight attached cannot be OHKO'd by any means at all. At its normal HP of 330, a Gravity Mountain and Maximum Belt combo will be fine. Using Giga Impact and barely missing the knockout is normally not the right idea, unfortunately, as Cynthia's Spiritomb does 10 damage for every damage counter on all of the Benched Cynthia's Pokemon your opponent has, allowing for easy knockouts on Fezandipiti ex and, if you've swung at multiple Cynthia's Garchomp ex, it might even be swinging for twice the damage of an average Giga Impact right at your Active Spot.

This is another rare example of a Fighting type attacker, so Pecharunt ex is easy fodder for a Corkscrew Dive, dealing 200 damage and letting them draw up to 6 cards in hand - very similar to Greninja ex, and how it can draw any card with a weaker Fighting type attack. The name of the game for this deck is damage modifiers, and it has more than just Premium Power Pro at its disposal. Cynthia's Roserade buffs all of Cynthia's Pokemon for an impressive 30

damage, stacking another 30 for each additional benched copy. Cynthia's Spiritomb doesn't get any help from Premium Power Pro, but it does receive the Cheer On to Glory buff. Lastly, try to get rid of their Town Store as soon as you can, but grab what you need from it first.

Slowking, Conkeldurr, Okidogi

Here's an insanely fast speed round of three niche decks that I don't have too much to say about due to lack of playtime against them.

Slowking has two cards to be very concerned about that it can copy - Kyurem in the early game to wipe your board of all evolving basic Pokemon alongside Zero to Hero Palafin and Weavile, and Annihilape, which does not care about your HP whatsoever, knocking you (and the Slowking copying it) out instantly. They will very likely be running ways to grab their vital Stadium Card, Academy at Night, which allows them to put whatever they want on top of their deck for a Seek Inspiration use. Only play a Stadium card if you are using it to bump one of the Academy at Night copies - otherwise, keep it very safe as it is a necessary lifeline to slow them down.

Conkeldurr is one of the more dangerous niche decks, as the Fighting type hits Fezandipiti ex and Pecharunt ex for double damage. Even more dangerous than that is the potential to lose the game instantly upon starting it - the common Pecharunt in this deck is capable of doing instant massive Poison damage, combined with Brute Bonnet and Perilous Jungle. Try to go first in this matchup, like most others, and bench at least one Pokemon, if you can. The combination between a Conkeldurr with Binding Mochi attacking for no energy and Brute Bonnet poison with a Perilous Jungle in play is often enough to entirely take out Palafin ex. There is no way to recover an Ancient Booster Energy Capsule, so maybe consider Weavile usage to get Brute Bonnet knockouts over and over - that is, unless you can use their Latias ex as a way to get 2 prizes in one hit, as most of that deck is single prize Pokemon.

The Okidogi with Adrena-Brain might have a lot of HP and deal a fair amount when it attacks as long as it has Dark/Luminous/Prism energy attached, but it usually can't even come close to a Palafin ex OHKO. Palafin ex, on the other hand, does more than enough to knock it out, even with the boost. Without the boost, a Vanguard Punch should be enough as well, but keep Vanguard Punch around in case of a Cornerstone Mask Ogerpon ex appearance.

Hydreigon

While I don't know how legitimate this deck is, it's definitely... a thing to someone, probably, so I'll go over it. Hydreigon ex's Obsidian attack is the main concern, and while 130 to a Palafin ex means it will still survive a Crashing Headbutt, it's the bench that takes the brunt with two more Pokemon getting hit for 130 damage, which knocks out Weavile, Zero to Hero Palafin, and all the evolving Basic Pokemon in the deck. Some of these decks use Pidgeot ex for Quick Search, but more recent editions feature Teal Mask Ogerpon ex, Energy Switch, and the Noctowl engine.

This isn't a matchup I have tested very much, but at 330 HP, Palafin can reach OHKO potential with Maximum Belt and Gravity Mountain. Be careful with Weavile, as while it can be hit with Obsidian while on the bench, it can also be vital in bringing up the Teal Mask Ogerpon ex being used for draw and energy supply. Watch for Counter Gain, as that will allow the Hydreigon ex to attack in a pinch if you're leading the prize trade.

Team Rocket Decks

Uncommon as they are, Team Rocket decks might end up getting better as rotation happens due to the loss of many counters and entire decks. Thankfully, most of them that utilize Team Rocket's Spidops and Team Rocket's Mewtwo ex are not very threatening to Palafin ex. At 280 on a Basic Pokemon, Weavile can bring it up from the bench and Palafin ex can swing for 300 damage with a Maximum Belt attached. The biggest threat in that entire deck isn't even the titular Mewtwo, but the Team Rocket's Sneasel, which can double a Benched Pokemon's damage amount from the Active Spot.

In the extremely rare chance you hit the Team Rocket's Porygon deck, count your blessings, because beating this deck is very difficult if they set up correctly and can utilize whatever Supporter cards they did not already discard. Team Rocket's Porygon-Z has 140 HP, meaning Vanguard Punch is perfect as long as you have a Stadium out - but only use that after your first Palafin ex goes down. As the game starts, they will likely hit Palafin ex and not get it knocked out in one shot, and you need all the turns they whiff as you can get. Team Rocket's Giovanni is extremely obnoxious here, as this gives them a ton of gusting options. I'm not sure how to fight this deck optimally, but thankfully, it is rarely built for Regional play than it is for play on PTCG Live.

Conclusion

Palafin is very versatile, and is a deck that acts nothing like so many of the other decks in format, as it can utilize Subjugating Chains to consistently hit hard, and with amazing abilities like Trade and Assaulting Hunt included, it becomes formidable. After a lot of play at locals to the point where the surprise factor faded, it still is consistent enough for me to recommend.

Thank you for reading this far if you did, and if you see any errors in this document (because I'm not perfect), reach out to PacInBlac on Discord.

Also, this entire thing is flawed - use 2 Lillie's Determination and 4 Iono instead of 3 and 3. Bonus tip for those who scrolled all the way to the bottom, read it or not.

Fins up!