

FEAR OF LOSS

WITH THIBAUT GUIGNES

- Luca Malaguti : [00:08](#) Hello everybody and welcome to the Alchemy Podcast. My name is Luca Malaguti and I'm gonna be your host for today's episode. It is my pleasure to introduce today our guest, and it is none other than French freediver Thibault Guignes. Thibault is a specialist in the free immersion technique, having done up to 120 meters of depth on one breath and is also excellent at doing deep hangs. Having done hangs up to a hundred meters deep to train both depth adaptation, and one of his fortes, the mind, the mental training aspect of approaching depth. He is also excellent with bifins, having done 110 meters in bifins, of course, wearing his favorite Alchemy bifins. As always in this podcast, we skip over the small little issues. We skip over the small little details. We don't talk about mouth fill or anything like that. We go straight into it. And I sat down with Thibault, we grabbed the beer and I asked him about the hard stuff. I asked him about what he's been through in freediving, what he's seen his friends go through. There's not always the beautiful upside that we see on Instagram. There's a lot of pain. There's a lot of suffering. There's a lot of loss in this sport, like any professional sport at the top, top elite level.
- Luca Malaguti : [01:33](#) And so without further ado, let us start this podcast and let us invite Mr. Thibault Guignes onboard to answer some of our questions.
- New Speaker: [01:54](#) Well, I guess, first of all, welcome Thibault, this is, I think our fourth, the fourth recording I'm doing now for the Alchemy podcast, and it's a pleasure to have you here.
- Thibault Guigne...: [02:09](#) Thank you for welcoming me. It was nice to have, uh, interesting talks about freediving.
- Luca Malaguti : [02:15](#) Yeah, we're taking it easy. We're just chilling here and we're just gonna talk about something that I think is super important that nobody likes to talk about. We've been talking about so many difficult subjects with so many people up to now, and I think something that's very important is loss and suffering and those terms have different meanings to different people, loss and suffering and sacrifice in freediving. Because when we, when we put ourselves out there, we see a lot of things, we're exposed to

a lot of different events and it affects us very, very internally. And with you, I want to know, I'd love to ask you some questions and know what has been your experience in this past year, that you've gone through an amazing year, and it was a difficult year. And it would be amazing to chat about that.

- Thibault Guigne...: [03:11](#) I think there is a little issue, like you've presented as about loss .
- Luca Malaguti : [03:18](#) Yes.
- Thibault Guigne...: [03:18](#) And suffering.
- Luca Malaguti : [03:19](#) Yes.
- Thibault Guigne...: [03:20](#) But I didn't lose anything. I didn't really suffer in a way, maybe I had issues, but the way, the way it's presented now, feels like I have nothing to say about loss. I didn't lose anyone, you know?
- Luca Malaguti : [03:33](#) True, true, true. And, and he can edit out whatever he wants and ...
- Thibault Guigne...: [03:38](#) Maybe it's about fear and loss because...
- Luca Malaguti : [03:42](#) Fear and loss...
- Thibault Guigne...: [03:43](#) That was more than like the topic.
- Luca Malaguti : [03:46](#) There you go. Absolutely fear and loss, as an athlete.
- Thibault Guigne...: [03:51](#) Maybe even fear of loss, in a way...
- Luca Malaguti : [03:54](#) Fear of loss, yes.
- Thibault Guigne...: [03:55](#) Yeah, I had a...
- Luca Malaguti : [03:58](#) What do you mean by that by fear of loss? Like you lost maybe a potential amazing year in your career?
- Thibault Guigne...: [04:03](#) No, no, no, is more like fear of losing someone or fear of fear of, yeah. Lost in with a big L uh, as you said, I had a bit of a rough year. Like I was, how to say, involved or I was diving with somebody and two times in less than a year, I had to handle like freediving accidents. And yeah, it messed up with my mind a lot throughout the year. Even though in the end, everyone ended up recovering well and, and was okay. Yeah, it scared me a lot. And you know, again, sometimes you just practice, you think you are aware of the risk and it's suddenly when you confronted like, directly to it that you realize, "oh yes, someone could die if things happen". And even if you are very careful about what you do, just life happens sometimes and you need to be ready to deal with the consequences.

Luca Malaguti : [05:28](#) Yeah.

Thibault Guigne...: [05:29](#) And I'm still on this process, but I think, it took me a while throughout this year, but now I'm, I feel I'm ready to deal with the consequences of what could happen to me or to someone. I became a top athlete pretty late in my life. And before I was always watching, you know, those TV shows with like sky divers or people doing extreme things, or like with Alex Honnold, freesolo, and you have a whole pound where you see people, uh, that die, um, that died doing this. And you're like, yeah, "how do they deal with this"? And came climbing when one of the friends had something and sometimes from outside, it can look a bit shocking how fast they recover.

Luca Malaguti : [06:34](#) Yes, yes.

Thibault Guigne...: [06:34](#) How fast people, uh, dive again after losing someone or climb again and yeah, like me again, I didn't lose anyone, but just almost did that two times.

Luca Malaguti : [06:50](#) Twice, yeah.

Thibault Guigne...: [06:50](#) It really questioned, "okay, do I really want to do this anymore"? And yeah, it took me a little while to figure out the answer is yes. And as heartless as it can sound now I feel like if something would happen, like if in the same circumstances and, but with different outcome, I would be ready to deal with the consequences. The fact that if everything has been handled properly and still something happened. Yeah. It's part of the thing after that doesn't mean, I feel I put my life on the line each time I go for a deep dive.

Luca Malaguti : [07:36](#) Obviously, yeah.

Thibault Guigne...: [07:38](#) But yeah. Now I know it can happen, before maybe it's a bit of arrogance as well. You know, when you are still new, you do lot of impressive things and everything goes well all the time. And so you are, and sometimes you witness from very far away an incident or an accident. And you're like "oh, this will never happen to me" because me, I do this this way, this way, this way and this way. And, and of course we think that what we do is the best, otherwise we would do differently. So we are convinced, "okay, I'm doing the best I can". And again, maybe a bit arrogance. I'm not being aware enough. I was still in the mindset of it's never gonna happen to me or to someone diving with me.

Luca Malaguti : [08:32](#) Yeah.

Thibault Guigne...: [08:34](#) And actually I had an accident myself couple of years ago, pretty serious. And this didn't mess with my mind at all. Two months

later, I was competing doing new PBs, new national records, diving deeper than ever in my life. And like doing amazing dives, enjoying them, not being scared at all, but witnessing someone else, that was another deal. Both times I really did the rescues and everything thinking I was doing it on someone who was dead and yeah. After it was a bit tough to start diving again and to find some motivation, to go deeper, I would still enjoy diving and even diving deep, but always in my comfort zone or at least in my former comfort zone. But with this mindset, my comfort zone became shallower and shallower kind of naturally, because I was not in the right place anymore in my mind. Um, and now that I think that I made peace with this in a way I'm starting to enjoy my water sessions a lot again, and to perform much better again, without any expectations, but just finding a bit my older me as a freediver, let's say.

Luca Malaguti : [10:09](#)

Do you think your connection with your friends in the water, your buddies, your safeties, do you think the way you see those connections has changed? And I say this because I have a good friend named Tim, professional climber, when you come to Canada, you'll meet him, we'll go climbing with him. He used to be a base jumper.

Thibault Guigne...: [10:30](#)

Oh!

Luca Malaguti : [10:31](#)

And he stopped base jumping when his son was born, because 10 more than 10, something like 10 to 12 of his very good friends had just already died from base jumping, cause in base jumping it's 50-50. And he told me that it started to get to the point where it was hard to connect with other base jumpers, because the mind was almost protecting itself, like, "man, I don't want to let you in, I don't wanna let you in, because I don't know if something's gonna happen to you". Do you think that could be something in freediving or something that maybe you felt?

Thibault Guigne...: [11:06](#)

Definitely, and I handled it differently both times because the second time I had more experience about how to handle it, but the first time, yeah, I had to take distance with my buddy who had the accident, not because I was angry or mad at the person, it's just, I needed to put some distance and to dive with other people, maybe the people I had dived with for many years always safely. And, and I'm not saying that this person wasn't safe or anything, it's just, I needed to put some distance. The second time was a bit different and also was not my training buddy was a very dear friend but we were not training together. I happened to be there and to, to help in the process. But, so I didn't have to put this distance or anything because it was not like, "okay, next week we go diving together again". But yeah, first I needed distance and then life happened. I needed to work

as well and stuff. So it was a good timing to start teaching, this would keep the contact with the water, but without having to, to sink it through yet. And after I stopped a bit teaching in the winter, I started going back in the water for myself slowly and, but still with a bit of apprehension. And just when I was starting to, to get a bit confident again, the second one happened. So, and like 10 days before the world championship. So it was like, those world championships in Kas for me were like three very long weeks. I was a bit counting the days. I was doing my best to try to keep a bit of energy and hope in the training thinking, "okay, maybe you can still do something at least okay, compared with what you can do". And it didn't really work out. So I had a nice experience and that doesn't mean it was torture to be there, because I had a lot of friends there and a lot of people to spend time with, but in terms of freediving, yeah, it was very long wait. I was just waiting for it to end so that I could go back, think it through, and yes. Now I think I made peace with both at the same time, finally. Let's see, future will tell, but like I've been diving consistently enough or from almost a couple of months since back from the world championships and I'm starting to feel very good and confident again in the water.

Luca Malaguti : [14:16](#)

It took a while and getting back into it.

Thibault Guigne...: [14:22](#)

Yeah, it took a while. I had trained a lot before the season thinking, "okay, this season is gonna be great for me". It wasn't that bad, but it was a bit disappointing. Maybe I had too many expectations. Maybe those accidents didn't help. It was probably a mix of many things, like always in those situations. But, yeah. What is it? It's one year, one season and I still progressed as a freediver mentally, obviously. Yeah, exactly what doesn't kill you, make you stronger in this case. So, I'm looking forward to the next season and I'm really happy now to do some base training with a lot of cross training to keep it fun until water gets warmer here in Dahab.

Luca Malaguti : [15:17](#)

Exactly. It's really interesting cuz we've made the parallel because we're both climbers, we both love the mountains as well. And we've talked about a lot, the common between the two worlds, you know, and it's interesting, you mentioned that because people have experience and have said the same things and we've read those books, Enter Thin Air and all those other mountaineering books about people having the same experience with the mountains. They feel something happens and then they can't even connect with that space anymore.

Thibault Guigne...: [15:46](#)

Yeah. True. And the thing is I was a climber, but I was mostly a boulderer. So I wasn't the one doing the extreme things. I had some friends doing it and I lost a couple of friends who were doing alpinism or ice climbing or, but I couldn't really relate to

what they were experiencing and what they were doing. Here with freediving, okay, I know I experienced it myself. I was there when it happened as well. So for me it was really different from those experiences. You are more of an alpinist, so probably you experienced it a bit more for yourself. What can happen up there. I have no idea. Just from what I saw and documentaries and talking with friends. So for me it was really new experience, like, uh, thinking, "okay, something could happen to my body". And I even have an interesting talk with my coach who told me, "you know, Thibault, if you want to be top athlete, now stop doing safety for people., you're gonna traumatize yourself, you should have people doing safety for you". But a big part of what makes me happy when I freedive is when I freedive with my friends. Even when it's about progressing and going deeper, what makes me strong is when I feel safe with my friends. And that's also why you create bonds very quickly with the safety divers and competition, you know, like sometimes you don't know them at all before the competition and you feel like really connected by the end of the competition because you end up really trusting them and feeling safe with them. And so, yeah, maybe not doing safety anymore, at least for other top athletes or people going really deep, could be a, a good calculation so that I don't end up in a situation that mess with my mind. But I feel also there is another path, learning to deal with it, which might be longer that maybe I didn't master yet. I hope, I'm working on it and we'll see. And I really hope nothing will happen before a long time like this. You know, sometimes if the first one I felt like, okay, I did the rescue of my life. This will not happen anymore in my career, you know? Because when you teach in a school, usually you also teach people that dive less deep. My former freediving school, we were not like a center with a platform for very deep divers. We still had a few deep divers including myself, but it wasn't our main specialty kind of. But training with other top athletes, of course, you expose yourself more to something potentially happening as well. The deeper you go, more risky, even if you have a good approach. You know, it's just statistics.

Luca Malaguti :

[19:08](#)

Exactly what I wanted to lead up to after, consequence probability and risk, good point bringing that up, statistics. But before I wanted to ask you that, I want to ask you, a hard or tricky visualization question. Okay. What if one of your friends, your really close friends in freediving just became obsessed with going for the no limits world, record, and there's no convincing him or her of otherwise, they're going for it, whether with you involved or without you involved. So you'd be compelled to help them as much as you can to keep them safe as they go on this journey. Would you find yourself being disconnected in a certain way in order to do your job right? The same way a surgeon has to disconnect the emotions in order to perform properly?

Thibault Guigne...: [20:00](#) I wouldn't do it.

Luca Malaguti : [20:03](#) You wouldn't do it.

Thibault Guigne...: [20:05](#) I wouldn't do it. I would support him from outside, but I wouldn't be the one in the water with him. First I have a very good excuse, I'm not experienced enough in no limits,

Luca Malaguti : [20:14](#) You could be were though.

Thibault Guigne...: [20:15](#) I could be there from the beginning of his journey and learn with him and saying, okay, with my experience, plus what I'm gonna learn, plus other people who are gonna do the best safety ever for him also, I would make sure of course to help him as much as I can, choosing the team to help him and stuff. And there are some real good specialists of it, you know? So I'd prefer him to be in the hands of people that practice this, but I wouldn't want to be in the water.

Luca Malaguti : [20:49](#) On a personal level as well, it would be also.

Thibault Guigne...: [20:53](#) Yeah. And it depends if like he is gonna do it with or without me, and that's fine, or he absolutely wants me to be there, but I think it would be better for me not to be there. You know, you also need, and that's what people who do that kind of records, the one I know cannot talk for everyone, say you need to have the people who are with you and the attempt having on only like the confident vibes and stuff.

Luca Malaguti : [21:25](#) Yes.

Thibault Guigne...: [21:25](#) If I'm there and calculating in my head, everything that can happen to be like in this way, I'm not sure it's gonna bring the good vibes that the athletes needs, as well. So, no, I made peace with what happened and what could happen in my regular practice and without what I wanna do, but I wouldn't expose myself to something more risky like no limits is. I know that for example in Sharm at the end of the year, there are like two world records in valuable weight.

Luca Malaguti : [22:01](#) Exactly, yes.

Thibault Guigne...: [22:01](#) I know them both. I wish them well. I support them when I see them. And I'm happy to talk a bit about what they do, but I will not be there. They have an amazing team anyway, so they absolutely don't need me. But as a spectator, I won't go.

Luca Malaguti : [22:19](#) That's amazing. Exactly. Yeah.

Thibault Guigne...: [22:21](#) I won't go.

Luca Malaguti : [22:22](#) And the reason I brought this up is, again, we both seen the movie Free Solo. You actually gave it to me in the Philippines. So I became obsessed with this whole parallel between climbing world and freediving. Maybe we can learn...

Thibault Guigne...: [22:35](#) The first time I had trouble watching it, when I knew he was surviving at the end, you know, so... I always still had issues watching it. Sometimes I would look away, you know?

Luca Malaguti : [22:50](#) And the people in the film, the people close to him, you see them disconnecting, you see them almost projecting his death as it's gonna happen. It's just a matter of when.

Thibault Guigne...: [23:01](#) To their credit is doing something way more risky than what we do.

Luca Malaguti : [23:05](#) True, true. But some people have said that like the future, or some people have said, I've discussed with some people, let's put it that way, that the, I really believe that the future records of freediving as we progress deeper and deeper might come close to something as amazing as Free Solo on El Capitan. If we were sitting here with Alex Honnold and we showed him you going down to 120 meters in free immersion, he would think you are insane. He would think that you are missing...

Thibault Guigne...: [23:35](#) But what I mean is, as experience shows, you can still do quite a few mistakes in freediving, even on very deep dive and survive.

Luca Malaguti : [23:45](#) Yes.

New Speaker: [23:46](#) In free solo at those heights, at one point, any mistake...

Luca Malaguti : [23:53](#) Is done.

Thibault Guigne...: [23:54](#) You're dead.

Luca Malaguti : [23:55](#) Yes.

Thibault Guigne...: [23:56](#) That in this that I say it's more extreme. The severity is almost systematically the highest death when you free solo. Sometimes maybe like, but it's, the probability is tiny that you will survive. And the probability of this happening it's way higher than the one in freediving.

Luca Malaguti : [24:21](#) Okay. So thought experiment, let's equalize them, if we can. Very stupid, I can't even believe I'm gonna say this as an instructor and a competitor, but, free soiling, El Capitan might be similar to going for the free immersion world record. And you only get surface safety and no lanyard.

- Thibault Guigne...: [24:40](#) No, not even this, not even this. I mean, if you are trained for it, you know? The probability that you end up, normally, unless something unexpected happens, if you have a squeeze, proper squeeze. You black out very close to the surface or at the surface, or you don't black out at all, and you're perfectly fine, you know. Now, blacking out deep enough so that no one can catch you. There is still a probability and we see it happening. But, strangely we don't see it so much on such deep dives.
- Luca Malaguti : [25:28](#) That's true.
- Thibault Guigne...: [25:29](#) Not strangely is like, it's real to get this deep, world record deep, pushing like crazy and going with like, not knowing if you're gonna make it or not, you know, like, when Alexey or William or anyone goes for world record, usually it's, they go for one more meter and it's not like suddenly they decide to "oh, let's add 10 meters and see how it goes. And maybe I'm black out, maybe not". Uh, and I'm not saying it's like this in free solo, you see them working for years on it before actually attempting it. So still I find the probability a bit higher in this scale.
- Luca Malaguti : [26:19](#) Last question. Speaking of probability, after everything you went through this year and the fear you were exposed to, the suffering you had and the things you learned from a probability or consequence, what changed your perspective now? Is it that the probability of these accidents can happen? Or is it the consequence that changed that you were more exposed to the fact that "oh, the consequence is higher, higher than I used to even imagine"? Or is it odd? The probability now is more likely that these things happen. How do you, what is your perspective now on the two incidents that you were involved in and witnessed?
- Thibault Guigne...: [27:05](#) It's more like, what a bit shocked me the first time was like, it can happen on a regular dive. And not like necessarily on a PB, on a very strong dive or anything. It can happen to someone who was comfortable on this dive for quite a while and doing it regularly.
- Luca Malaguti : [27:30](#) Being an instructor trainer and someone that teaches a lot, do you really think that like, students should, are actually start incorporating that mentality of risk analysis, you know, like think and discuss the probabilities, the consequences of those. And I bring this up, cause I know you have a background in engineering, and so do I, and we've been trained to be analytical about these things, but maybe other people aren't.
- Thibault Guigne...: [27:54](#) I don't think it's really relevant when you do recreational freediving, like in competitive freediving, if there are courses in some agencies that then they talk about risks and stuff. But in

recreational freediving, when someone comes and do food football training and starts football, you don't tell him "oh, careful, you overdo it, you might break your leg, or get paralytic". And there is a tiny probability that it will happen, but come on. Like same with all the right safety measures and the good instructors and the good equipment and as a recreational sport, freediving is very, very safe in my opinion.

Luca Malaguti : [28:48](#)

Absolutely.

Thibault Guigne...: [28:50](#)

And the probability is like even tiny.

Luca Malaguti : [28:56](#)

Fantastic. Thank you. Thank you for discussing these topics. You know, a lot of people don't wanna open up about fear. They don't want to talk about their experiences. And I think, you know, we all know that you're a, yeah, you're a leader. And then people look up to you in this space, in this small community, someone even said today, a global community. And I think these issues should be discussed more and there's nothing wrong with discussing the fears we have and how we approach this sport and what's holding us back. So I think your experiences, I know that I've talked to many people about them and just having your point of view as well. And your experiences is incredible. The fact that you were involved in these things and, and what you can pass on to other people.

Thibault Guigne...: [29:48](#)

Well, thank you very much. Like usually what I publish or what I talk about in different podcast, I don't really have taboo subjects because I feel like it's okay to share those things. Maybe I wouldn't have shared about it so openly a few months ago, because I needed also to work it out for myself first, but it's always nice to share experience if that can help, or if people are interested. So thank you. And definitely people, definitely people want to hear these kind of things. Thank you Thibault.