

Connor Sibley

## Tartarus

“Good morning, Albuquerque, and welcome to Channel 12 News. I’m your host, Doug Pluto! Without wasting another minute, lets jump straight into the news. YouTube influencer, Virgil Collins, is currently lost in the famous Lechugilla Cave at Carlsbad National Park. The 1600 feet deep cave is also one of the ten largest in the world, making it extra difficult for Collins’s location to be accurately identified. From what we’ve gathered, Collins and his girlfriend Theia Geller were planning to traverse as far as they could into the cave and come back after a day or two. The couple both have extensive experience in spelunking as Geller is a speleologist, a scientist who studies caves, and Collins has accompanied her on many of her trips. However, during the descent, Collins's rope was severed causing him to fall deeper into the cave. The rescue team believes they will have Collins out in about a week, but the vastness of the cave makes it difficult to say for certain. We have attempted to reach out to Collins’s family; however, they were unavailable for comment. Tonight, at eight, we will have an interview with Theia Geller about the situation, so be sure to tune in. Now to Natalie Lethe for the weather.”

18.11.2017 13:47

Okay, I think we’re recording now. Alright, yep. What’s up guys! No, no, no, way too normal. Hello internet. Too geeky. Hey. My name’s Virgil, I’ve been trapped in the deepest cave in the United States for a few days now, and I figured I’d make these recordings just in case I don’t make it. Sorry for getting dark on you, but that’s just how it is down here.

I should be fine, I can probably ration my food out for a few weeks, although protein bars and tuna salad are not my ideal source of food, and there's enough water down here that I should be able to refill my filtered bottle, so that's always nice. My headlamp did break when I fell, I'll get back to that in a minute, I still have my backup flashlight, but I'm not sure how long it will last, and my phone is down to about 40% at this point; don't worry its already on low power mode. Theia had the camera though, so I'm stuck with my hand recorder. I'm not as worried about food and water, but I don't know if my sanity will be able to handle the darkness when all my tech dies. It's kind of crazy down here, without lights I mean. My eyes won't ever adjust to the darkness, it will always be black as space down here. It's the darkness that seeps into everything, you can really just feel it almost.

There I go getting down on you again, sorry. Anyway, I should probably address the whole fall thing, so here we go. My girlfriend and I were spelunking- I know, weird thing to do for a date, but to be fair, this isn't exactly our first rodeo. During one of our descents down the narrow cave shafts, my harness rope broke; I can only assume it rubbed too much against a jagged rock or something. I smacked my head against the cavern walls a few times, which shattered my head lamp, but I was saved from a head injury thanks to the hard hat. It felt like ages in that moment, nine days seems like an all too fitting reference, but I eventually landed with a nice loud crunch. I could briefly hear Theia screaming for me, but her voice was absorbed by the cave walls, and she faded away as I fell. Most people think caves are super echoey and stuff, but caves are formed from ground water and are super damp, so instead of echoing, most sound is just absorbed by all that moisture, which gives a sort of underwater screaming effect. That's what Theia's told me anyways. I digress, sorry, I felt a soft throbbing in my left leg, but I was more focused on holding my breath since I knew there could be toxic natural gases or stale

air or something equally lung-hating in this part of the cave. My lungs burned and eventually I broke, and the cool cavern air rushed into my lungs. I appear to be fine now, so I think it's safe to assume toxic gas won't be my cause of death.

Picture this, you're sitting there, completely alone, you can't see anything except the never ending nothing: the void. You have no clue where anything is and you're groping around trying to make sure you won't fall. Well, that was me. I managed to fish my phone out of my pocket and turned it on, revealing my new residency for the next few days, hopefully. I tried to stand, but thousands of daggers shot up my left leg and I collapsed back to the murky puddle. My leg was bent awkwardly and I'm pretty confident it is broken, so there goes walking around, much less climbing out of here. I tried my best to splint my leg using the supplies from the med kit Theia made me pack, she's always right I suppose. I'm not much of a medical expert, so I can only hope that it will be enough to prevent clotting.

I seem to be in a hallway like cavern with tall beige-brown walls extending as far to the sides as the eye can't see, and the floor has about an inch deep ground water running from my right to left. Looking up, I can see the shaft I must have fallen through to end up here. I have no way of scaling this wall without my harness rope, but it might be for the best to have a look around, so long as I can figure out how to move without doing more damage to my leg.

So, that's where I'm at now: a broken leg, enough food and water, but probably not enough light. Wish me luck, and hopefully you'll be listening to this while I'm still alive.

Cheers!

20.11.2017 19:40

It was nerve-wracking the first time I drank all my water. I felt almost certain the ground water would give way when I tried to scoop it up with my bottle. Luckily, my punishment isn't that of Tantalus, so my water supply should be fine. The filter does its job, the murky brown water tastes fine after it goes through, leaving a sand-like residue at the bottom. The hardest part is getting myself to drink from a bottle full of mud water, it just doesn't feel right. I suppose everything about this place feels unnatural, even if it might have never been touched by humans before, meaning it literally is natural. Perhaps it's the lack of life that makes this place so unnerving.

Sometimes, I close my eyes and just listen. The cave inhales and exhales, circulating the air. It's almost like secondhand smoking, but I need the smoke to survive, that made more sense in my head. Anyways, I think I'm starting to get used to it down here, the respiration of the caverns has become white noise and the constant dripping water, the metronome to my life.

I've tried my best to get comfortable, despite everything. I've disposed of my sopping wet shoes and socks, removed my helmet, and taken my backpack off. I might try to find another spot to rest at that isn't 90% water. The water of the cave floor has turned my feet into raisins, so a break from the dampness would be much welcomed. I'm not sure how I'll move around yet given the whole broken leg thing; I might have to crawl or scoot or something, none of which sounds very comfortable. I can handle some temporary suffering now, if it means more comfortability later.

I believe these recordings are helping out my mental a lot. They're kind of like having another person around to talk to, even though you can't really talk back, pretty much the definition of being a YouTuber. I hope you're doing well. I know, that's something strange to say

in my current position, but just because I'm trapped down here doesn't mean that the rest of the world has to stop turning.

“Thanks Doug. I'm on the scene at the rescue team's camp, where they're planning on how they're going to try to rescue Mr. Collins from the cave. They say they've been stalled in the rescue process due to the cave's protection as a part of Carlsbad National Park. They have also sent down many spelunkers to try and search for Collins themselves, however they are struggling to find volunteers. So far, no one has made it to the depths that Mr. Collins and Ms. Geller were able to get to and many come back shaking and exhausted. One of the volunteers reports that they witnessed a cave-in, which forced them to turn around and come back to the surface. It's unknown what exactly caused the cave-in, but experts believe it is due to the high traffic caused by volunteers entering the cave and thus causing disturbances. They say all it could take is a few heavy footsteps or shouting to upset the structure of the cave. It takes a lot of experience and fortitude to make it through these caves and so far, none of the volunteers have been up to the task. The rescue team fears that Mr. Collins could now be buried by the cave-in and that it could be even more difficult to reach his position on foot. Currently, the rescue team is trying to work with the National Park to figure out the best way to potentially tunnel to Mr. Collins without harming too much of the natural cave system. This has been Jason, back to you, Doug.”

21.11.2017 06:13

I'm so stupid! I shouldn't have taken off my helmet. Ugh! So, I tried scooching around a bit, I thought I could maybe find a spot in the cave that wasn't partially underwater. I was tired

of always being wet. Anyways, after I moved a bit away from my gear, the ceiling gave away; a wall of stone crushed my gear, and one of the falling rocks struck me unconscious. I woke up a bit later with a large welt on my head, the dirty ground water rolling down my throat. I got up as quickly as I could and threw up dirt water, granola bar, and tuna salad everywhere. Why was a damn granola bar my last meal? I can only hope now that I'm rescued from this hell hole before my 3-week timer runs out. Luckily, I still have my water bottle and my flashlight, but my phone's battery is running dry, only 7% left now. I dread the moment when they run out of power, and the void consumes me. A part of me hopes that moment kills me, I think I would go insane otherwise.

22.11.2017 21:56

Everything hurts, I have a never-ending headache from the cave in, my leg feels like there's a spike driven through it. My stomach feels like it's been flipped inside-out. I'm pretty sure I've vomited half of my organs out. I'm trying to drink as much water as I can, so I don't become too dehydrated. The cave has taken on a smell of rotting garbage; I'm pretty sure that's just me smelling bad. I've turned this place into my own personal sewer. Even hell finds ways of making your stay worse.

"Good evening, Albuquerque, and welcome to Channel 12 News. I'm your host Jason Manes and I will be subbing in for Doug as he is currently spending time with his family for the holiday. We have some important news regarding Virgil Collins, the man lost in the cave. The rescue team has successfully pinpointed Collins's location in the cave. They sent three drones

down into the cave and a day later one of the drones was able to pick up Collins's voice. While they were unable to make contact with Collins, the audio recording is enough for them to approximate his location. The team hopes this is enough to convince the Carlsbad National Park to allow them to drill to his location, since the path to Collins is too treacherous to carry him out, especially since they don't what condition he is in. We've tried to reach out to Collins's family; however, they continue to be unavailable to make any remarks. Collins's girlfriend, Theia Geller, is glad that they have finally found his location, but still worries about Collins's safety and health, stating that she believes he should run out of food soon. Now to Natalie Lethe for the weather."

25.11.2017 13:21

I was going to propose. That was the point of our date anyways. I should have chosen something safer, but no, I had to go all out. I bought this ring- I still have it on me amazingly- it's a silver ring adorned with an amethyst crystal: her birth stone. I figured it would be more memorable if I proposed in the deepest cave in America, but I wish I had just gotten a plane to spell it out in the blue sky. Now, I don't know if I'll ever see the sky again. I don't have any food and my strength is draining away. I wonder how Hope feels being locked up in Pandora's box for so long, I wonder if she wants to be released. I mean she's been trapped for so long, but we're too greedy to let her go. Maybe the jar broke and she's free. I hope she's free.

25.11.2017 15:56

My parents won't miss me, I'm a disgrace. They never saw being an influencer as a real job. "Why can't you just be successful like your siblings: a doctor, lawyer, or a botanist". I really haven't spoken to any of them in ages either, I hope they miss me. I was originally going to be an archeologist, specializing in Greco-Roman ruins and artifacts, I always loved all the old myths, but that's not who I am now. I found loads of success making videos on YouTube, so I decided to go full time, and that's how I met Theia. She wasn't a viewer of mine, but she was just a friend of someone I met through YouTube, and he was nice enough to set us up. If you're wondering I did get my degree, a good ol' BS in archeology from Johns Hopkins University, and it's just that: a load of BS. My parents had already disowned me by the point when we started dating, so I never bothered to tell them about Theia, I'm not sure they would even be proud of me for proposing. I wonder if this is why I'm in hell, for disgracing my parents. All this seems like forever ago; it's like all I've ever known is this cave. I don't feel like I've disgraced myself, I was going to have a good life, it was just getting started.

I wonder if my subscribers will even wonder why VirgilTheGreat323 has stopped uploading videos. They'll probably move on, never even giving that name a second thought. This all seems ridiculous I'm sure, but I founded that community, they're almost family to me, all 350,000 of them. But they'll move on quickly, abandon me just like my family. I wonder if Theia will do the same. It's probably for the best, she shouldn't have to suffer just because I am. Perhaps she'll find someone new who can make her happy or maybe I will escape from this hell, just to find she has found someone new: the fate of Agamemnon. Perhaps he is watching me from the dark, trying to warn me. No. That's ridiculous. This place really scrambles my brain.



I've heard stories about eyeless fish living in cave waters. I think I could eat just about anything at this point. Sometimes even the rocks look appetizing, and I catch myself before I start shoveling them into my mouth. I'm trying to drink as much water as I can, but I don't think water will satiate my hunger. How could life survive in this nothingness? It's like space down here, except there are no stars to twinkle at you. I'd rather have the stars there to mock me, than sit here staring into the unending void.

Also, my phone is dead. It ran out of power about an hour ago, so I just have the flashlight left. I've spent most of the time down here scrolling through me and Theia's past text messages, of course there's no cell service down here; believe me I'd have called 911 at the first chance I got. I also tried listening to a bit of music, but the caves just make Beethoven sound like he's drowning. I don't know how much battery life my flashlight has. I have thought about taking the battery out of this recorder and using them for the flashlight but triple As don't work in place of double As unfortunately. I suppose if I had some wiring, I could maybe make it work, but no such luck. I feel like I'm grasping at straws at this point, just looking for anything that can help, but all I can truly do is wait. I'm running out of everything now; I suppose it's just a matter of time before the water drains from this cave. At least then I wouldn't have to wait 3 weeks to die. Every time I try to sleep, I wonder if this will be the time I don't wake up. I suppose I'm already buried. What's the difference between 6 feet and 600 feet?

“Welcome back. America has been absorbed by the ongoing rescue of Virgil Collins, and we are happy to tell our audience that the rescue team has begun drilling down to his location. They finally got permission after days of coming to terms with Carlsbad National Park and began drilling at 7:30 this morning. As part of the agreement, they will have to fill in the 640-

foot-long tunnel to Collins after he has been successfully extracted. In order to raise money to help the rescue team, Theia Geller has rallied Collins's YouTube fanbase together by hosting charity livestream on Collins's friend's channels. So far, they have raised nearly 10,000 dollars to help both in the rescue efforts, as well as to donate to the Carlsbad National Park. Now to Jason Manes at the State Farm Stadium."

28.11.2017 08:03

Every now and then, the caverns start to spin. I'm pretty sure it's just the concussion or the hunger, but another part of me knows I must be losing it. The endless beige will twist and stretch, making the ceiling seem like it's miles away. Sometimes I'll see things moving in the shadows of my flashlight. I've tried turning it off to make the shadows go away, but even in the darkness I can watch them bend and curve. Usually when the light comes back on, they disappear. It's become a bit of a game, keeping the shadows away. Occasionally I can make out faces, Theia, my parents, my mother, my siblings, the one kid who asked for a photo.

29.11.2017 15:04

My flashlight died. It's pitch black now. The faces are gone at least. I barely have enough energy to think. I can't even feel the pain anymore.

30.11.2017 08:03

I think I'm dead. I've been here for too long not to be. Too much has gone wrong for me to be alive. Maybe I died after my fall, maybe I died during the cave in, maybe I died of starvation or thirst, or I suffocated on my own stomach acid, or I went insane and my mind shut down. Can that even happen? All I know for sure is that I am in hell. My stomach is trying to rip free from my body, if I'm not dead yet, I will be soon.

I keep waiving my hand in front of my face, wondering if by some miracle I'll be able to see it again. Sometimes I'll hold up a number with my fingers and try to guess it, but I already know it, so that doesn't work; I spend more time trying to picture my hand than actually guess what number I'm holding up. What is the purpose of all these symbols, if you can't see them? A five is no more significant than the letter V.

This is by far the worst punishment hell has to offer. Ixion, Sisyphus, Tantalus, they all had it easy. Nothing is worse than being in a perpetual state of death. I would honestly be relieved whether I die or live. Anything to escape. Anything to end the suffering.

“Thank you, Natalie. At 9:43 this morning, 26-year-old Virgil Collins was finally pulled from Lechuguilla Cave, the deepest cave in the United States. According to the medics on the scene, Collins will most likely survive his 2 week-long entrapment. The young man suffers from malnourishment, a concussion, and a broken leg. Collins' girlfriend, Theia Geller, was key to his recovery as thanks to her geology experience, she was able to assist authorities both in identifying Collins' approximate location and the best way to reach him. The rescue team was finally able to locate Collins a week prior to his rescue, but the dangers of the cavern required the crew to tunnel down to him to ensure everyone's safety. The drilling took 4 days to make the

640-foot journey, where they were then able to hoist Collins out in only a matter of minutes. No comment from Collins' family, but we can only assume they are relieved to have him back.

Coming up, how a viral internet challenge has teens daring each other to eat Tide pods, and how a 9-year-old's operatic voice netted her a win on *America's Got Talent*. Stay tuned, and we'll catch you after the break"