Melanie Lamp

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Final Essay

The Weighted Companion Cube

Although the Portal franchise is full of games that are intricate challenging puzzles and can be seen as fun and innocent, there are some secrets and dark aspects of the game that are often times overlooked by players. Specifically, the Weighted Companion Cube. It’s an inanimate object that became popular and the friend of most Portal franchise fans. Looking at its white exterior with its cute heart prints, it’s not expected to be a part of anything associated with the term, horrific, or gruesome. Though rumors and conspiracies have surfaced about the idea of there being dead and dying humans stored within the Weighted Companion Cube. These ideas can be seen by the substantial amount of evidence associated with this theory being true. This evidence includes, the Fratricide Achievement, the cubes cry for help, the sentience of the cubes, Doug Rattmann and his comics, the Material Emancipation Grill, the conspiracy of the broken Material Emancipation Grill and the repetitious false advice and words given to the player by GLaDOS.

According to Valve, both Portal games “sold over 3 million copies” ("Portal 2 Has Sold More Than 3 Million Copies.") making it one of the second most popular games in April of 2011. One of the games main iconic symbols is the Weighted Companion Cube. It is described as being a cube with a small heart shape on each of its sides. It is one of the most beloved objects in the game. This can be determined by the franchises products sold to fans. These products can include pillows, shaped ice cube trays and even panties that are all designed to look like the Weighted Companion Cube. Another reason this cube has become so popular amongst its fans was that in the game it becomes a sort of friend to the main character, or Chell. This was while Chell was endlessly stuck in the infinite amount of testing chambers in Aperture Science Laboratories. These testing chambers consist of puzzles Chell has to complete using a portal gun in order to advance to the next chamber. A portal gun is a device that when strapped to the arm of the main character, emits two portals. One of which is orange, while the other is blue. These two portals are used in the game to get from point A to point B. What makes these Companion Cubes in the game so special though is that they are also used as part of the puzzles and are required in order to complete them. GLaDOS or Genetic Lifeform and Disk Operating System, was a former Aperture employee. Her name was Caroline and she worked as a secretary for Cave Johnson, the CEO of Aperture Science. Before Cave Johnson’s death, he recorded himself on tape with his final wish, “I will say this, and I’m gonna say it on tape so everyone hears it 100 times a day: If I die before you people can pour me into a computer, I want Caroline to run this place. Now she’ll argue, she’ll say she can’t-she’s modest like that. But you make her! Hell, put her in my computer, I don’t care” (*Portal 2).* After being forced into the mainframe of Aperture, several cores or system personalities were attached onto her to control her temper and emotions; rendering her into the complex artificial intelligence system used to maintain the Enrichment Centers central control computer.

In the first *Portal* the player is given a Weighted Companion Cube in one of the many testing chambers. While in the process of completing this task the player is given advice from GLaDOS about the nature of the cube, “The Enrichment Center reminds you that the Weighted Companion Cube will never threaten to stab you and in fact cannot speak. In the event that the Weighted Companion Cube does speak, the Enrichment Center urges you to disregard its advice. If it could talk, and the Enrichment Center takes this opportunity to remind you that it cannot, it would tell you to go on without it, because it would rather die in a fire than become a burden to you” (*Portal*). GLaDOS is viewed as the antagonist of this game who ultimately tries to kill the protagonist, Chell, after she completes the entirety of the set of puzzles given to her throughout the first game. Because GLaDOS who often times throughout the first game lies to Chell, it can be determined that her advice isn’t exactly accurate and should in fact be ignored or thought of as the exact opposite. Will all these hints that GLaDOS gives away with the Companion Cubes being able to speak, there are some things about them that can be questioned. The repetition of the Companion Cube being able to speak being one of them. Another was taking its advice. There have been theories lingering about by many fans that if one were to say ignore GLaDOS and listen to the cube, they may be able to escape from Aperture Laboratories. Evidence of this can be found in the portal comics, *Portal 2: Lab Rat,* where a former Aperture employee, Doug Rattmann speaks to his Weighted Companion Cube. Throughout Rattmanns journey to escape the Aperture Laboratories, he brings along with him his Weighted Companion Cube. Along his journey the Companion Cube gives Rattmann key advice on how to escape and ultimately saves his life more than a few times. It gave him helpful tips like, “You can patch her cryo-unit into the reserve grid” (Oeming, Michael Avon). Other helpful tips included turret locations and different medications that either should or shouldn’t be consumed. Examples like these only give greater suspicions to the cubes containing humans.

There are a couple testing chambers in the first Portal game with secret rooms that contain walls full of schizophrenic looking scribble drawings. Along with these drawings are pictures of Doug Rattmann’s fellow co-workers. They are seen with Weighted Companion Cubes covering each of their faces with hearts surrounding them and the letters, RIP below each picture. The Companion Cubes on each of their faces are meant to show what has become of his beloved friends and their final resting places. Below that is the quote, “The Weighted Companion Cube does speak… I’m not hallucinating. You are.” (*Portal*). Although some could question to whether this was just a schizophrenic outburst by Rattmann, an insane man obsessed with his co-workers and Companion Cubes, the evidence and cohesion towards these statements being truthful are rather irrefutable.

One allusion to the Companion Cube in *Portal 2* is after GLaDOS incinerates one particular Weighted Companion Cube she responds by saying, “I think that one was about to say, I love you. They are sentient of course. We just have a lot of them” (*Portal 2*). Stating that a Companion Cube has “Sentience” means that it has human qualities such as feeling or thought. A literal definition of the word, “Sentience” is, “A feeling or sensation as distinguished from perception and thought” ("Sentience."). This would ultimately imply that the Companion Cube has feeling unlike that other machines or objects. This dis-similarity between the Companion Cube and other objects like the Reflector Cube or turret for instance also gives way to the idea that humans are associated with the existence of the Weighted Companion Cube. Meaning that these cubes could quite possibly be made from living humans.

Another piece of evidence to consider is the way GLaDOS refers to humans and Companion Cubes. In both Portal games when GLaDOS is referring to Chell she uses words like, “Worthless” and “Useless”. At one point through one of the many testing chambers she makes a sly remark, “Remember before when I was talking about the smelly garbage standing around being useless? That was a metaphor. I was actually talking about you” (*Portal 2*). This proves that GLaDOS does in fact not care for the value of human life. Another instance of this would be after she incinerates another Weighted Companion Cube, she goes on to say, “Oh well, we have warehouses full of the things; absolutely worthless. I’m happy to get rid of them” (*Portal 2*). This shows that GLaDOS regards humans the same way she regards these Weighted Companion Cubes. It can also be viewed with more suspicion as evidence to be added onto the list to determine whether there are in fact dead and dying humans inside of these Weighted Companion Cubes.

The “Material Emancipation Grill” has another conspiracy behind it in, *Portal 2.* Throughout most of the testing chambers it is the last doorway the player exits at the completion of a puzzle. It is meant to stop any object from leaving the testing area such as: radios, turrets, reflector cubes, and all other non-organic objects. If the player was to sneak any of these objects through the doorway, the Material Emancipation Grill will disintegrate the objects. One major idea to note about this is that although these Material Emancipation Grills are at the end of every puzzle, there is one specific room that does not end with a working one. This one testing chamber is in fact the only testing chamber in the game that requires the player to complete the puzzle using a Weighted Companion Cube. Although some might consider this to be a coincidence, the evidence is right there. It’s theorized by many fans that if in fact there was a Material Emancipation Grill working correctly in that testing chamber along with the objective to complete the puzzle using a Weighted Companion Cube, that when passed through the doorway would incinerate the shell of the Companion Cube, leaving behind the organic flesh of a human. To stop this from happening, it is believed by many conspirators that GLaDOS sabotaged that particular Material Emancipation Grill to stop this event from taking place.

The name “Weighted Companion Cube” in itself sounds suspicious due to its name having the word, “Companion” added to it. That along with the comment from GLaDOS, “Here’s a new cube to project your deranged loneliness onto” (*Portal*) implies that friendship with this inanimate object is to be expected and adhered to. This wouldn’t be unusual as stated by much of the conclusive evidence as explained by the psychological studies done in the 1950’s by Donald Hebb. He experimented on volunteers by isolating them in small empty rooms without any social or sensory input for days on end. It concluded that without any social interactions, humans could quite possibly go insane. One of these volunteers claimed they were, “Unable to think clearly about anything for any length of time” ("What Extreme Isolation Does to Your Mind."). So the possibility that this cube could become their friend was quite possible if it weren’t for its unfortunate demise at the end of every test chamber. In *Portal,* after the player is first introduced to the Weighted Companion Cube, they are then ordered to discard of it in a furnace before moving onto the next level. After obeying this order and burning the Companion Cube, the player is given an achievement called, “Fratricide”. The literal definition of the word, “Fratricide” is, “One that murders or kills his or her own brother or sister or individual with a relationship like that of a brother or sister” ("Fratricide."). This can either be viewed as a metaphor for a best friend, or in a literal sense, that the main character, Chell, actually killed someone they knew. Looking back on what evidence has been gathered on this matter it can be concluded as the literal sense. In *Portal 2,* the main character is first seen in a container or box made up to look like a bedroom. Once the building starts to collapse the player is given a glimpse of what lies beyond their box. One thing that’s noticed about this are the array of other containers that all probably have the same purpose as the main characters; to test whoever lives in them. Based on the idea that there are humans inside the Weighted Companion Cubes and that there are in fact warehouses full of them, there can only be one explanation for where all the humans would be kept and “processed” and that would lead to these containers. It would be where the humans are stored before going off to be tested and then “recycled” back into the system as Weighted Companion Cubes. The fact that there are so many other containers can conclude that Chell, probably did have friends and maybe even family who became “processed” which led to the Fratricide achievement. This then leads to the death of the Weighted Companion Cube. Upon the death sequence of a Weighted Companion Cube it emits a clunky sound followed by a faint whisper of the words, “heeelp mee” (*Portal 2*). This is the only time during the entire game that the Companion Cube actually speaks, and because the voice is so faint, not many people can recognize it at first. This discovery then leads back to GLaDOS and her false reminders of the cubes inability to speak which makes this bit of evidence so strong. This can then lead to those believing that there are in fact dead and dying humans packed inside the Weighted Companion Cubes.

The Weighted Companion Cube, although at first is seen as being the needed social aspect of friendship that is derived from the loneliness, can instead be seen as the exact opposite and taken to harsh extremes like those of death and fratricide. The idea of dead and dying humans inside of these companion cubes was to be a secret kept from the test subjects at Aperture so as not to disturb their testing abilities. The instances of evidence that were reviewed ranged from the Fratricide Achievement, the cubes cry for help, the sentience of the cubes, Doug Rattmann and his comics, the Material Emancipation Grill, the conspiracy of the broken Material Emancipation Grill and the repetitious false advice and words given to the player by GLaDOS. Along with all this evidence it clearly states that the Weighted Companion Cubes do in fact contain organic flesh from dead and dying human beings.

Melanie,

This was a pretty interesting paper, and with the exception of some awkward diction towards the beginning it was quite well written. You also managed to write a paper about a subject that I know absolutely nothing about, go very in depth into the subject, and provide just enough information (not too much, not too little) for me to follow the paper. Very well done. Have a great summer.

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