Test report Case 1: Narrative Impact On Gameplay

The report is in interview format. I chose this format because gameplay is a difficult thing to describe, and I thought it'd be a lot of added value if I could improvise follow-up questions on the go in case a test subject has difficulty describing an experience.

Session 1: Paul Veer
Spent slightly more effort on level 1 than level 2.

Q: Did you feel any difference between the two levels?
A: Not really to be honest. They looked different but that's it.

Q: Did one level take notably longer or more tries than the other?
A: The first took me more tries, but mostly because I wasn't used to the jump distance. Got the hang of it halfway through the first level and that made the second level easier I guess.

Q: Do you think there might be differences in the variables of the two versions, however small?
A: Nah, it felt exactly the same, to be honest. At first I was like "Oh, ice-level! Must be slippery" but I didn't notice any difference.

Q: Is there any chance you had thought there to be a difference if you had a pause of an hour or so between the two versions?
A: Yeah, probably. Because then it wouldn't be fresh in my mind.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?
A: Maybe test it with gamers. I'm a developer myself so I can see through these kinds of things I guess.

Session 2: Jukio Kallio
Spent relatively much effort on the first level.

Q: Did you feel any difference between the two levels?
A: The first one seemed to be harder. I wasn't sure about the jump distance so probably that's why. Took about 15 seconds longer to finish it and I died two more times.

Q: Do you think there are differences in the variables pertaining to jump distance, deceleration or such?
A: Don't know. Maybe the second one felt a bit faster but otherwise nothing.
Q: As in walking speed?
A: Yeah it felt a bit more responsive. Not faster.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?
A: The walking sound looped annoyingly when walked to walls.
Q: Thanks.

Conclusions:
The most likely reason the first level was 'harder' is the learning curve. The player goes through a baptism of fire by having their first actions in the game logged. A solution for this problem is to have a control environment, like a tutorial level.

Having the two versions follow eachother with no interruption allows the player to draw a closer comparison, which is not what you want when you want the narrative to impact the gameplay. A solution for this would be to have a pause or a 'diversion' of different gameplay inbetween as to not have the first experience 'taint' the other.

Speculation: the two versions are too much alike. Avatar sprites are exactly the same size and the animation is identical. A different gestalt could heavily influence the player experience. Additionally, if the level were longer it wouldn't be as fresh in the player's memory and probably make for a more accurate result.

The logging of player performance was useless, as the logs were practically replaced by the interview. There was also little useful information to log,as this test was mainly about the player experience, something very hard if not impossible to record.

I was unable to attribute the more responsive feeling of the second level in session 2 to any certain element, but my hunch is that it is because of the lighter walking sound.

This test has proven that, at least in this prototype, the narrative has little to no impact on the gameplay.

Next time: As much as I'm inclined to fashion the test and prototype in such a way that it may prove that the narrative has impact on the gameplay, that would perhaps make the test biased. I am convinced however that after witnessing the tests, this prototype is not detailed enough to do the subject justice. The question is whether visual feedback is a part of gameplay, though asking that question might already be the answer to this test case.

Rapid Prototyping: was of almost no added value. I found myself heavily relying on previously written code, leaving little extra work.