

# 30 Year Game

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# Who Plays a 30 Year Game?

When I started thinking about how to approach this, One of the things that immediately jumped out as especially challenging for me, is that, in my mind, without players, games aren't really anything at all, so any game I make, it has to be something that could and would actually be played for 30 years.

And once I imagined what it would be like to play something for that long I had to come to terms with the fact that no decision I make as a designer is going to be more meaningful to a player's experience than their decision to spend 30 years on something.

# Poker

+1 night a year

+\$100 buy-in

+30 years

== Awesome!

Here's an example. If I play Poker with my friends sometimes, that's a great game, but if I play Poker with my friends \*one night a year, with a \*\$100 buy-in, and we continue that ritual for \*30 years, it's going to turn it into a \*brilliant game, and probably be one of the most meaningful play experiences of our lives.

To a player, these two games are vastly different, and the 30 year rule is an incredibly substantial change.

And yet, paradoxically, as the designer, despite having added the key rule of 30 years I feel like I haven't really made a meaningful contribution. I mean, I added some structure, made it ritualizeable, but from my standpoint all the meaning came from the base game of poker.

# Poker

+1 night a year

+\$100 buy-in

+30 years

== Poker. :/

So how do I thread this needle? How do I feel like a meaningful designer, but still incorporate the player-experience-overwhelming 30 year rule? What if I add one more rule that reacts to the 30 years?

# Poker

+1 night a year

+\$100 buy-in

+30 years

+legacy rules

== Still Mostly Poker. :/

Ok what if at the end of each night of poker, we'll take a card off the top of the deck and rip it in half, and we'll play with the same deck every year\*. Ok now this is starting to sound pretty cool, but still\*, my designer brain is uncomfortable. How much of this is really me and how much is just poker and the time period? I think this game just sort of starts to look like the majority of folk game mods.

How do I use 30 years meaningfully?  
How do I get people to actually play for 30 years?  
(and how do I get you guys to believe me?)

How do I push further than this? How do I as a designer leverage 30 years in a way more meaningful than an arbitrary rule? And how do I make the resulting game feel like it's mine?\*

So that was my first challenge.

My second challenge was how do I make something that will actually be engaged with for 30 years? If nobody plays it, it's not really a game, so how do I keep people involved?\*

\*On top of that, I don't get to have the 30 years to prove that people play my game to you, I have only the presentation to convince you that someone might play it for that amount of time.

# A Folk-Game?

The folk-game answer to this question is easy: just start with a game that everyone already loves, like Poker! But that feels like a cop-out to my designer-sensibilities. I want to make something wholly new.

So what do I do?

Well here's an out - what if I instead of making a 30 year long game, I just make a really good 10 minute long game, that you'll play for 30 years.

# A Short Game?

Well, but, how could I really even know that my game is quite that caliber? And even if I did somehow come up with a game the quality of Tetris, how big a jerk would I look standing here on a stage telling you that? So that's out, the game has to actually last 30 years.



# A Long Game.

But how will I know my 30 year game is good? How long does it take to play-test a 30 year game? does it take 10 years? more? That's certainly not the kind of time I had for this.

So I have to make a game that lasts 30 years, but I also need to be able to roughly play-test it in a few weeks. Thanks Eric.

So I settled on two approaches.

- Make Many Games
- Minimal Interaction

1- make as many things as I can, that way I can hope that something will catch on\*.

2- focus on building meaningful games that require minimal player action, that way they're easier to imagine playing over 30 years, and easier for me to play-test.\*

# Single Player AI Chess

## Email Text Adventure Relationship

([ellory@lazertricks.com](mailto:ellory@lazertricks.com))

So I made a lot of prototypes, and threw a lot of prototypes out:

First I tried making a single-player chess-like game designed to be played by AIs that players coded. I built it, but it sucked\*. Then I tried putting together a longform text game played over email in collaboration with Davey Wreden, which I actually think we created some interesting interactions in, but I ultimately felt like wasn't conceived quite well enough mechanically to justify the amount of work it would be.\*

(That said, if you want to check it out, try emailing [Ellory@lazertricks.com](mailto:Ellory@lazertricks.com), and don't forget to introduce yourself)\*

Then, finally, I kind of hit my stride,

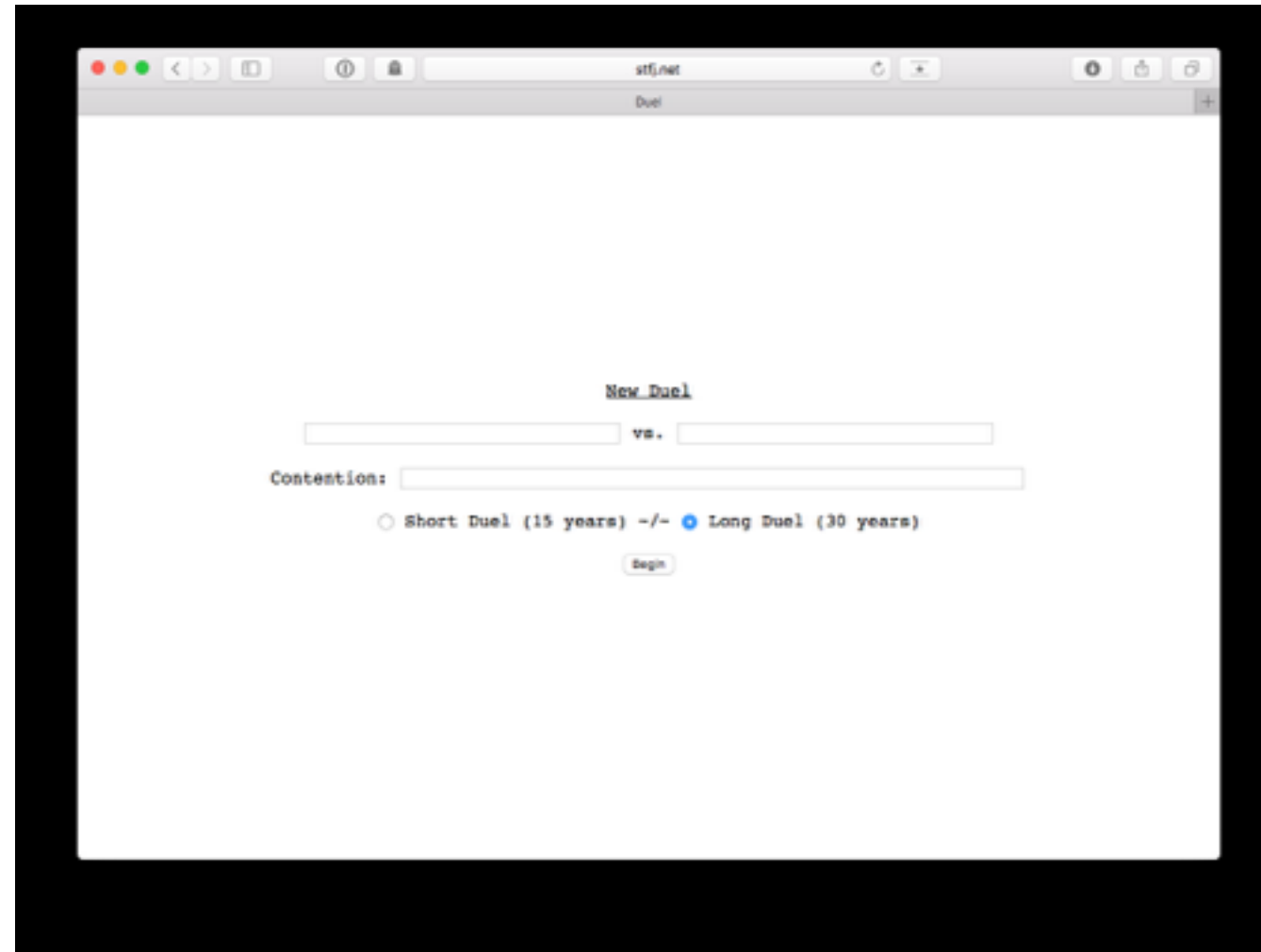
So here are the three games that survived

# Duel

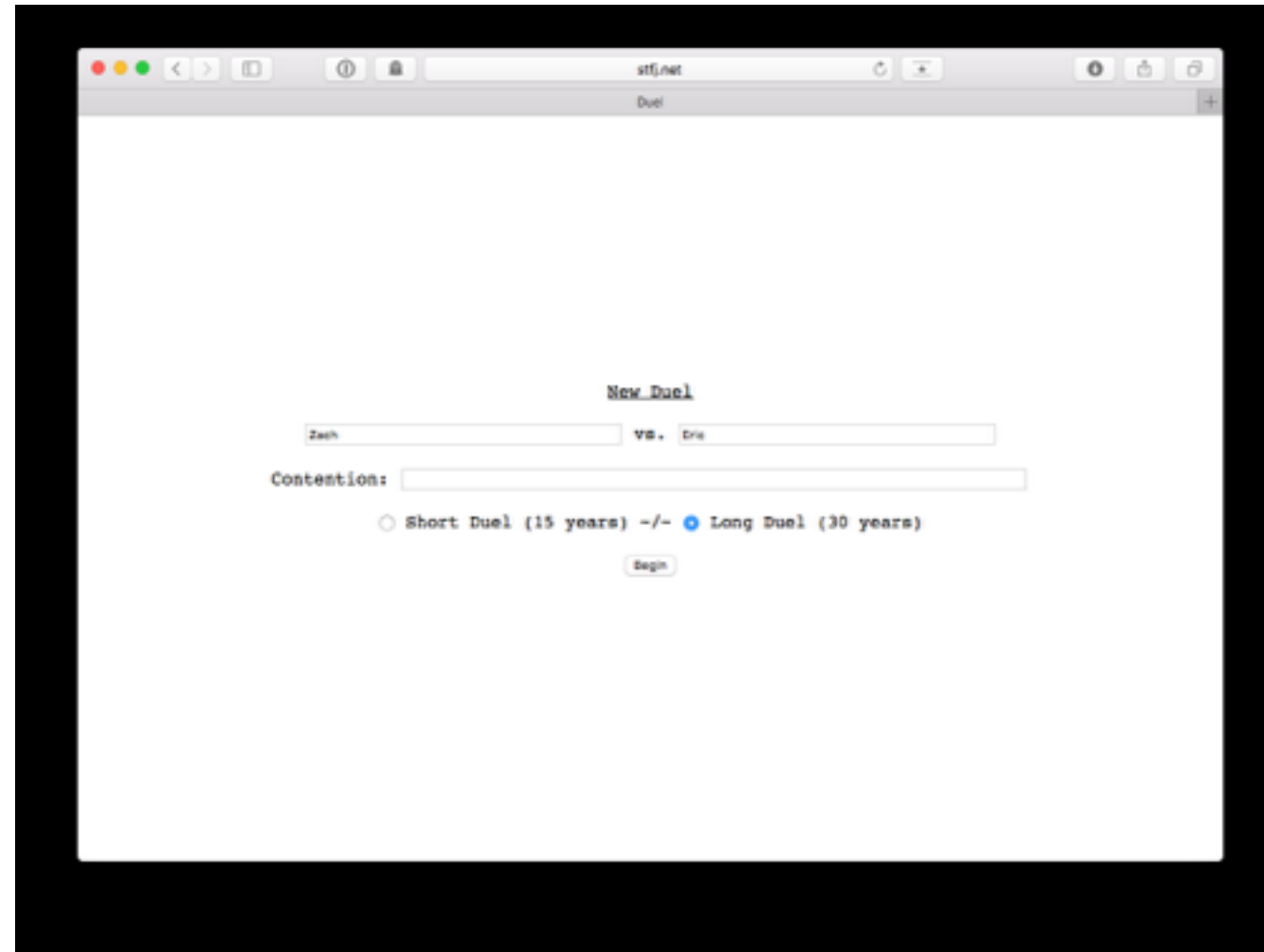
[www.STFJ.net/duel](http://www.STFJ.net/duel)

The first game I want to show you is called Duel. You can play it here:

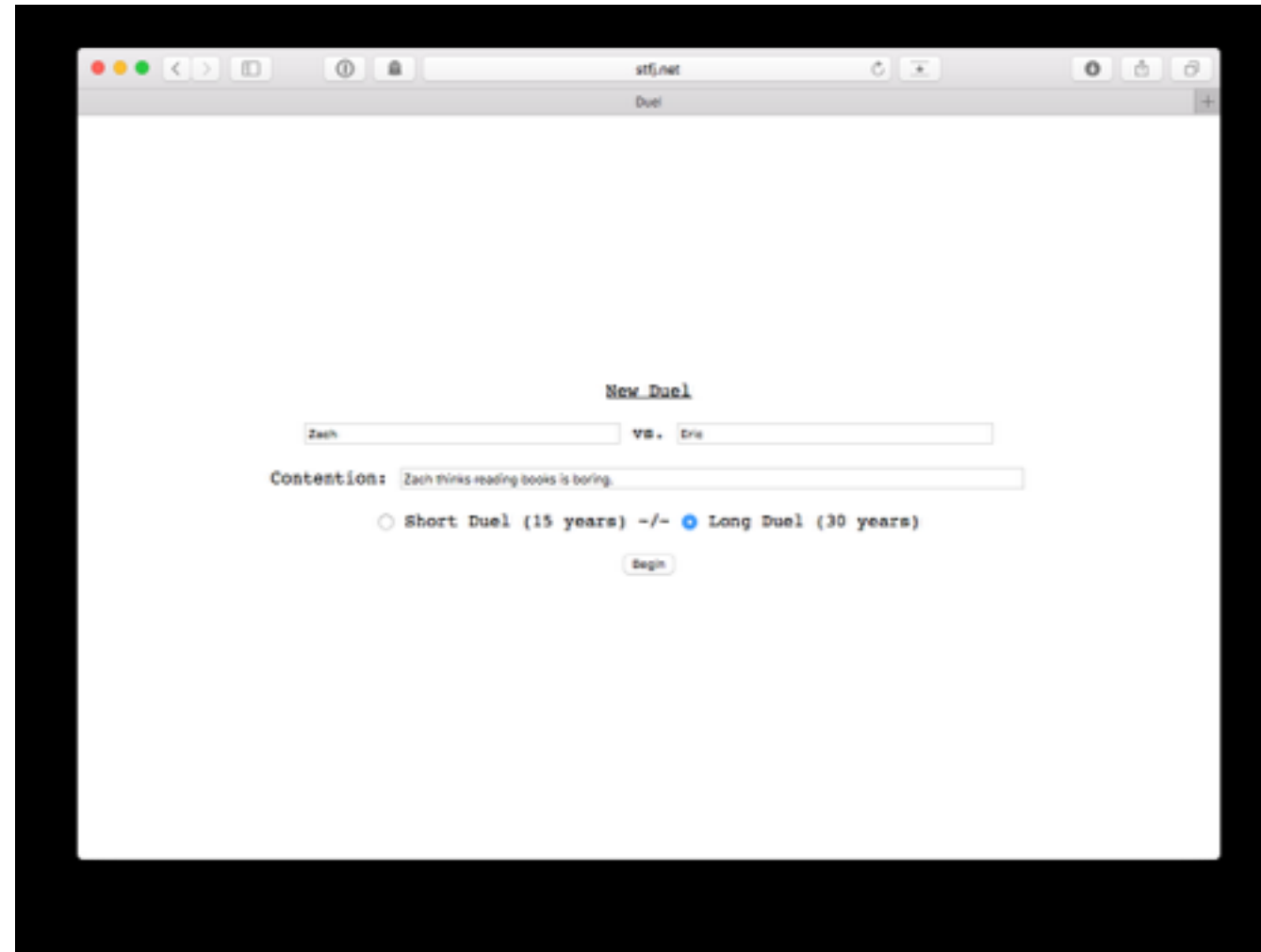




To play, simply type in your name and the name of the person that you're dueling with.

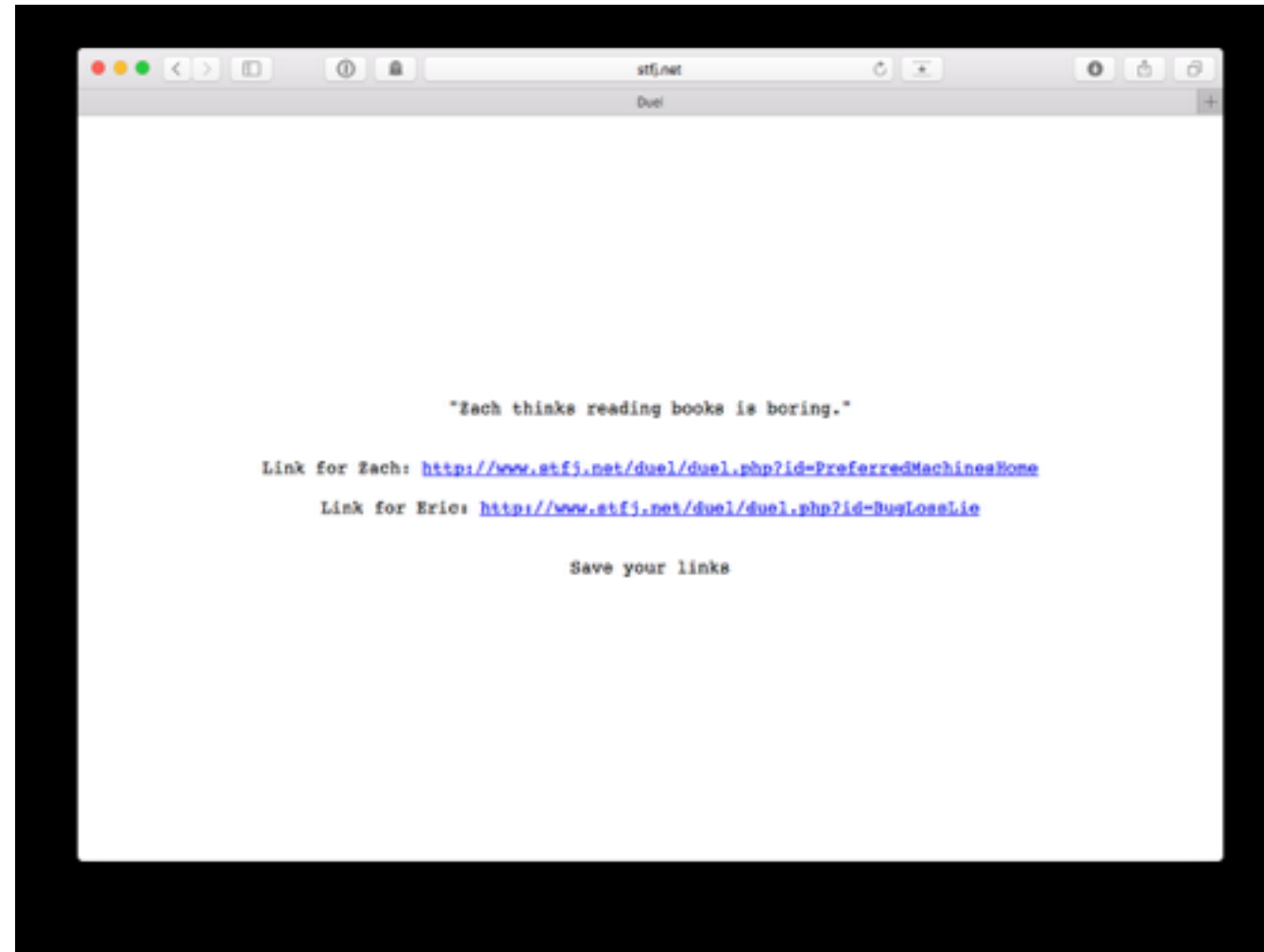


Then type in your complaint.

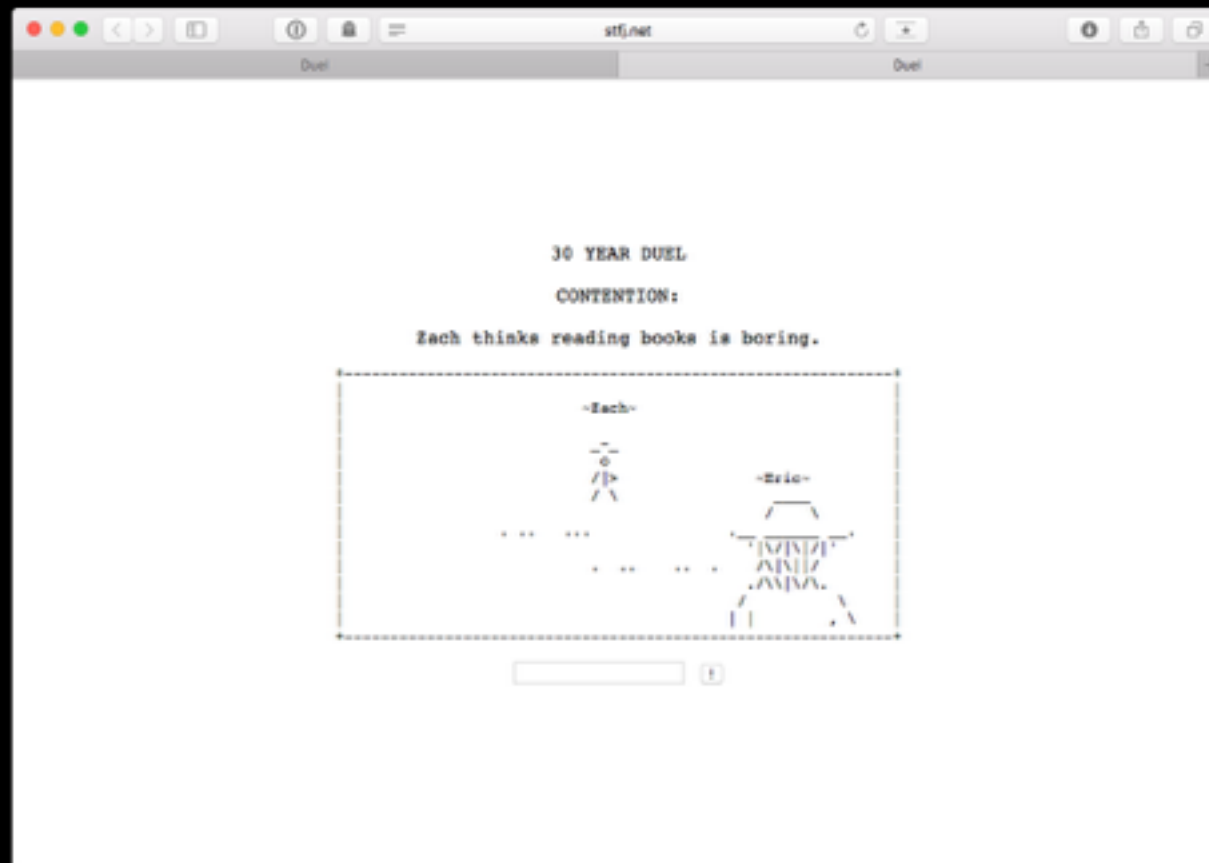


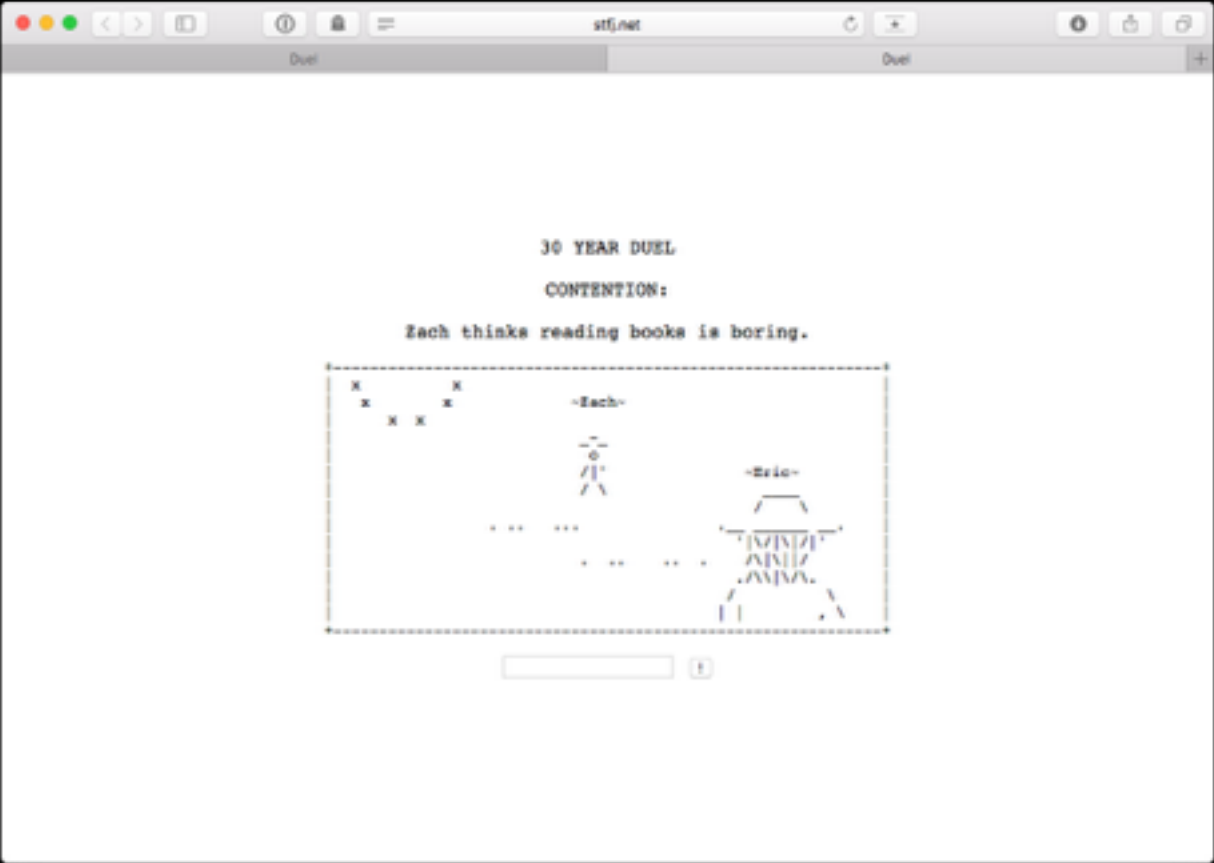
then pick a short duel or a long duel (short duels are 15 years, and long duels are 30 years). And then hit "Begin".



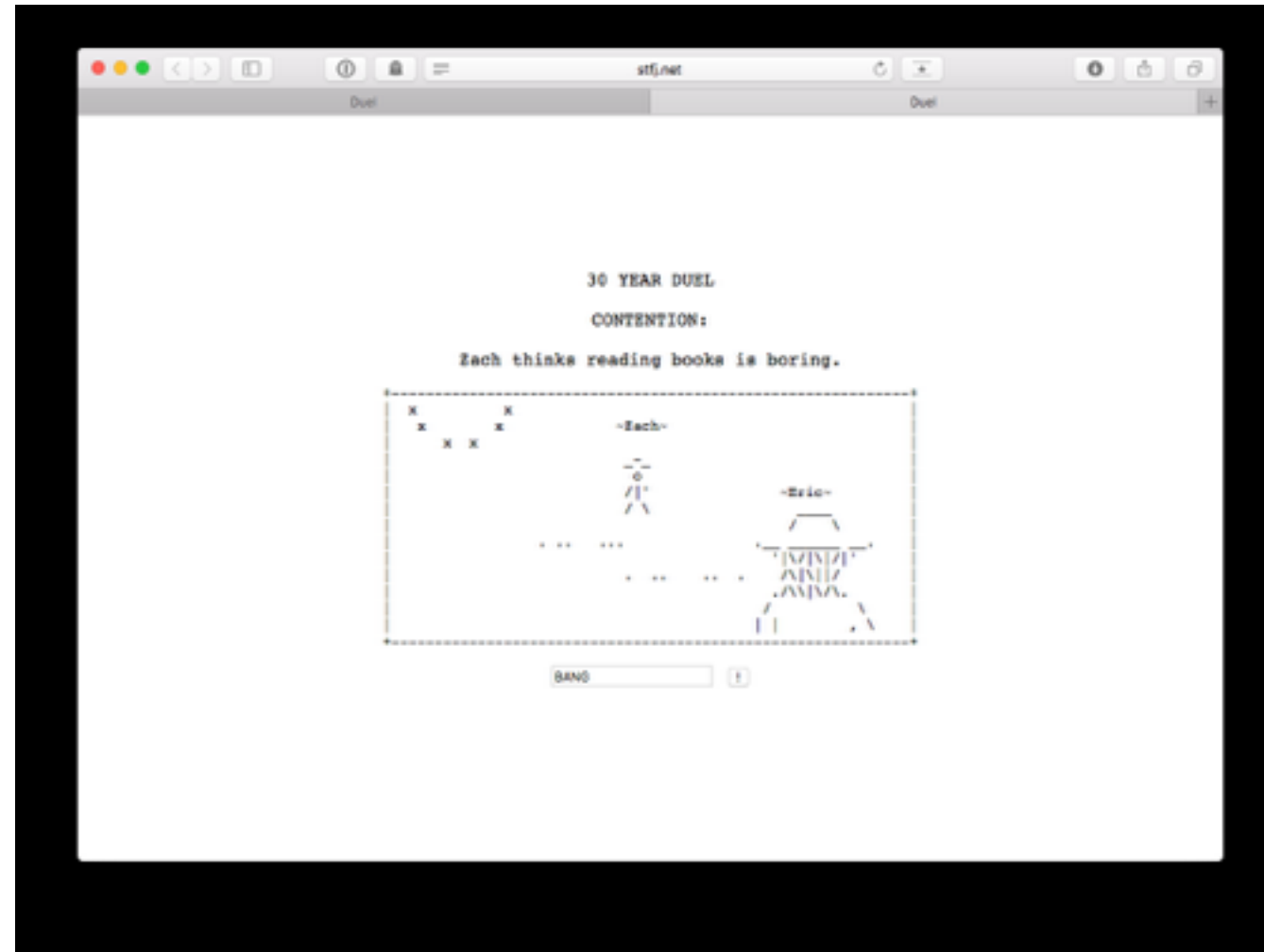


The game gives you and your opponent a link, and it's very important to save those links because the way you win Duel is by being the first person to return





after the allotted time period,



and type "bang" into the textbox.



# The Password Game

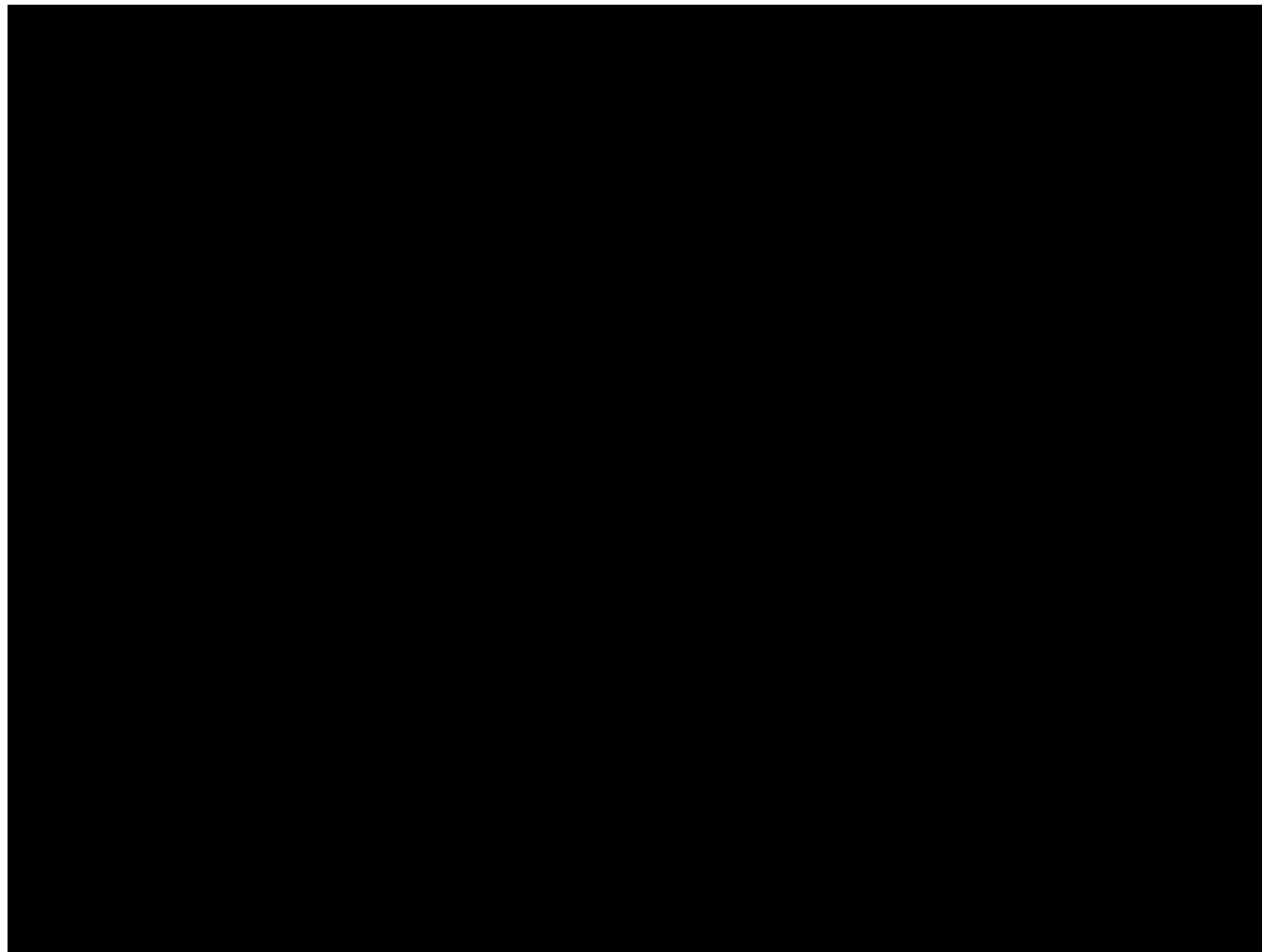
So for the second game I'm presenting, I took an entirely different approach. It's called the Password Game, here it is:



So here, aside from possibly running afoul of Eric's "no future technology rule", although, to be honest, Eric, I think there's a case to be made if we have time-travel, "future", "past", and "present" all basically mean the same thing?

Anyway, what I wanted to say about The Password Game is that I tried to move away from the strict arbitrary time and instead thought about what it would mean to design a game meant to be played over a long time, and how that changes the kinds of constraints we can apply to the player and the ruleset.

And again, were it just a thing I had made, I'd feel very good about it, but for this competition, it seemed too small to bring on it's own.



For the last game I'm presenting I tried to take lessons learned from Duel and The Password Game and combine them.

From Duel I realized that the 30 year time-period cannot be arbitrary, and that there must be some kind of simple hook to keep players involved and returning.

From the Password Game I learned that there are ways to bring the theme into the game in a natural way, not just as a supporting mechanic to some other exercise. In fact, in the password game the theme is so abstractly applied that you can't even recognize it.

So I took a step back and thought about what 30 years really means. What's actually special about that specific time-period.



What's special about  
30 years?

You get, at best, three  
30-year blocks.

It took talking to my friend Mike Roush to really drill down to the bottom of what's so meaningful about a 30 year block of time.

What he said that really hit home with me, is that that you get three 30 year blocks, at best.\* Being able to look back over 30 years as a human is fairly astonishing. 30 Years ago I was less than a year old, there was no internet, there were barely computers. I was basically not even a person yet. In 30 more years who knows where we'll be, who even knows how many of us will still be around when we get there.

If we get, at best, three 30 year blocks in our lives, then to be totally honest, i'm not sure there's anything more meaningful to the actual person playing my game than just betting that they'll still be here, and winning that bet. When they look back over 30 years of playing my game, my game will be (if i'm lucky) an interesting side-note, set alongside the majesty of real life.

What's special about  
30 years?

You get, at best, three  
30-year blocks.

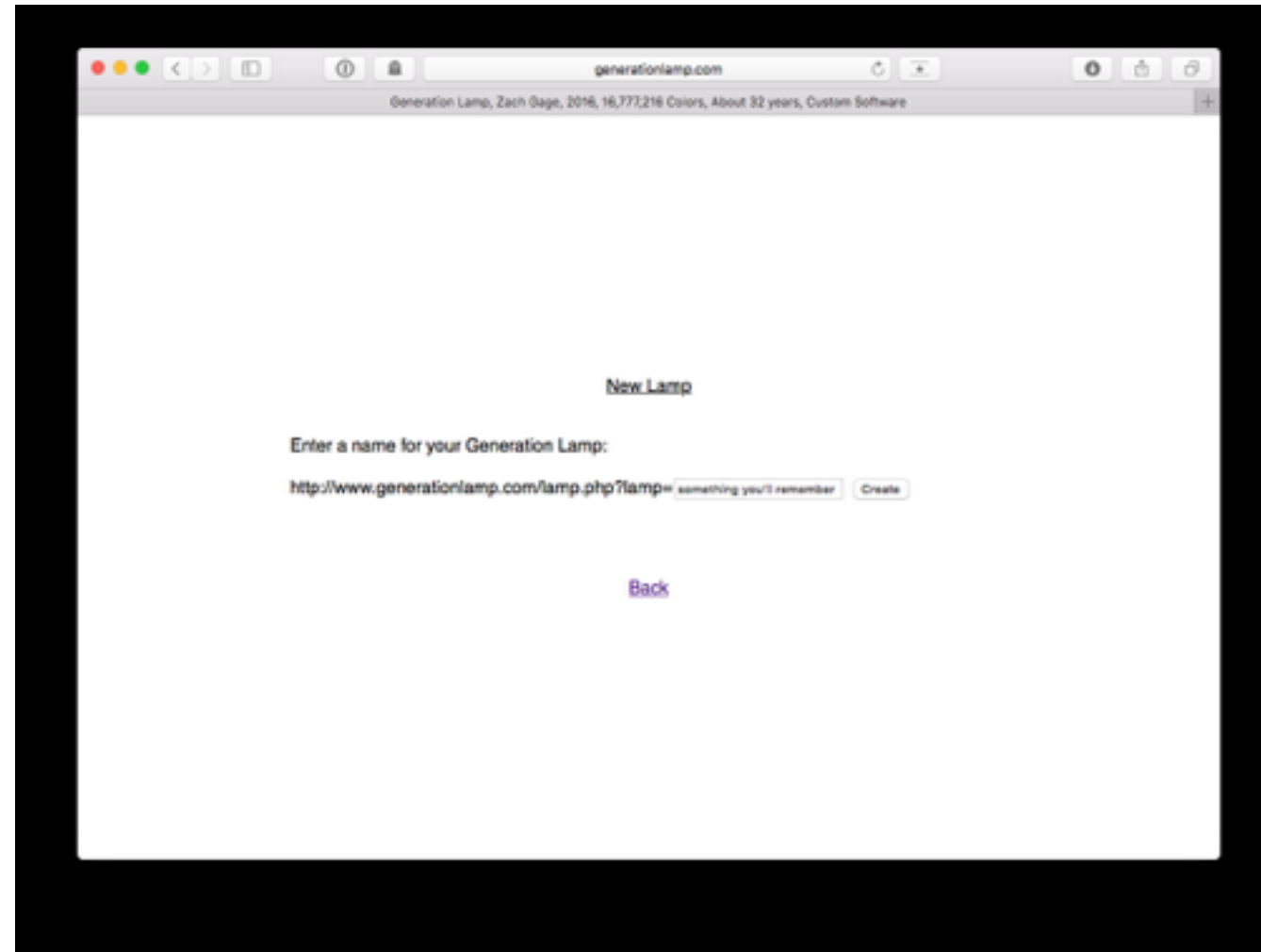
So if the thing that is ultimately meaningful about a 30 year game is the 30 years you played it, why not then just celebrate that? Why struggle? Why not make the game a celebration of that time, and it's place within your life?

So obviously then, the solution was to make my last game a lamp

# Generation Lamp



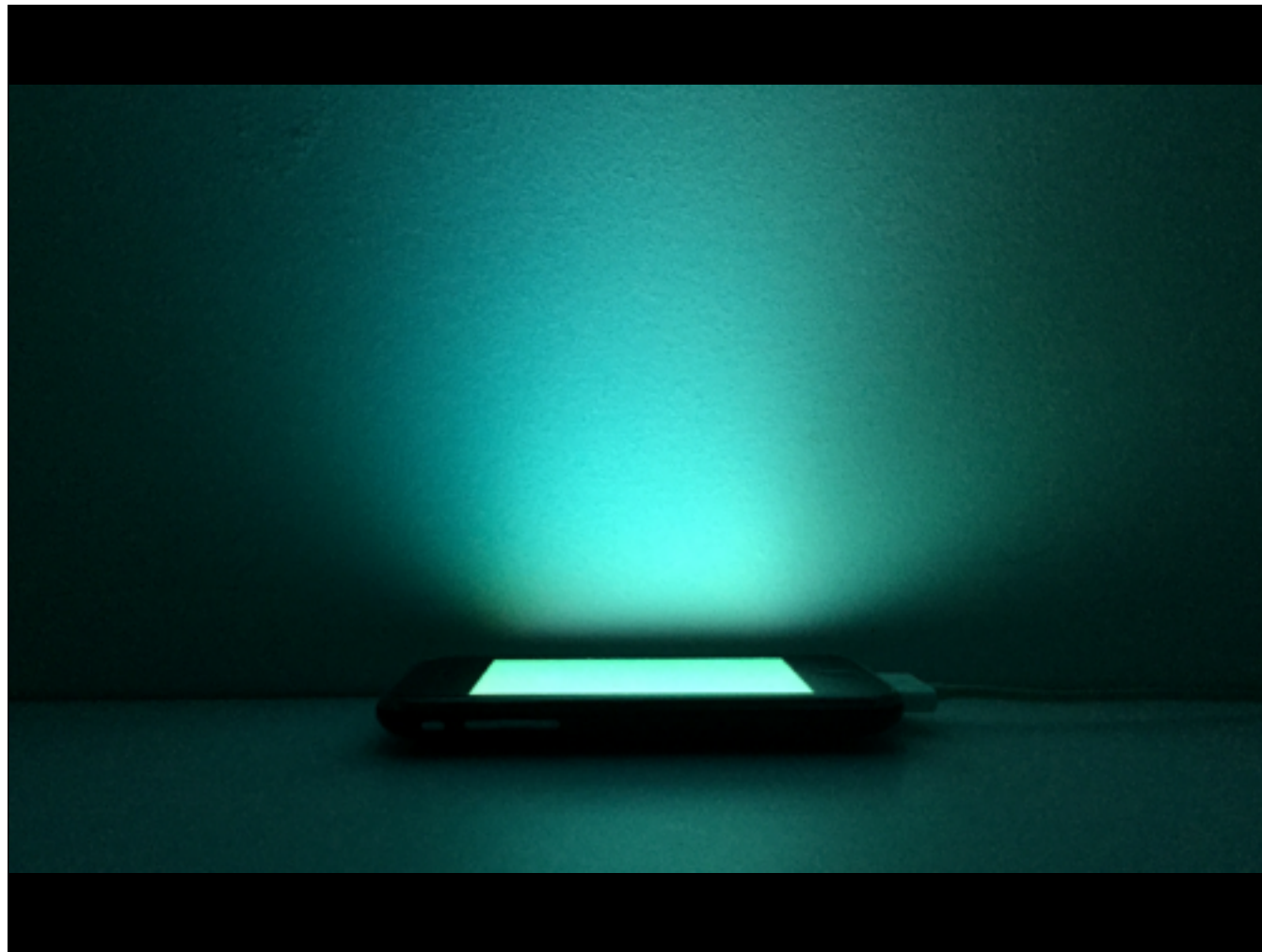
It's called Generation Lamp and it's made out of your old smart-devices.



If you want to play it you can go to [generationlamp.com](http://generationlamp.com), click on new lamp, and name it. Then pull out any old smart device, turn the brightness to high, turn off the auto-lock, plug it in, and point it to your custom link.

Over its lifetime, your Lamp will flip through all 16,777,216 possible colors in the RGB hexadecimal spectrum (#FFFFFF to #000000), at the rate of 1 per minute.

Over its 32 year lifetime, your Lamp will flip through all 16,777,216 possible colors in the RGB hexadecimal spectrum (#FFFFFF to #000000), at the rate of 1 per minute, for the next 32 years. It's about celebrating and marking your time.



It runs in short cycles of color every 4 hours, and those cycles shift over time, so you see recurring changes whenever you look at it, but you also see permanent larger changes as more significant amounts of time pass.

When you start, you'll see a lot of whites and blues, then eventually more yellows, then greens, and onward. And because it's living on a server, you don't have to worry about losing it. As you live, as you move, as your devices presenting it die out, you can plug in new devices and point them to the same link, and continue living with your lamp, until you, or it dies.

Thanks!