

Eric vs Cancer

The Ultimate Challenge

Written and Illustrated by Beau Kittredge



Eric vs Cancer: The Ultimate Challenge
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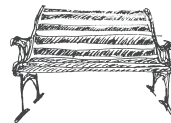
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to all those who have been or will be affected by cancer

“What do you want to do, Eric?” asked Krich, a slight frown hanging from his lean face. “This snow is ridiculous, I can’t feel my hands, we’re down five... Can we just call the game? Ultimate is not meant to be played in these conditions.”

Eric gazed up at the flurry-filled sky that had come out of nowhere, then down to the shivering, exposed legs of his teammates, their cleats now completely hidden beneath the snow. He was one of the youngest members of the team, but his passion and strength had earned him the role of captain. Recently, however, his body hadn’t been acting quite right and his normally high energy had fled, leaving passion to do all the work.

“Bring it in,” Eric began. Usually he would stand in the center of the huddle, rallying the team around him, but today he had to put his arms over the shoulders of his two closest teammates to steady his balance. The weakness of needing help from the huddle really annoyed him.

“Yeah, this storm was unexpected,” Eric continued, unhooking his arms from the huddle to pick up the disc with a numb hand. “Yeah, I hate the cold, and yeah it stinks that we can’t really see the white disc against the white sky.” He knocked snow from disc and placed it into his duffle bag. “But let’s take



those excuses and turn them into opportunity!” He pulled out a bright orange disc, and using every bit of his remaining energy, flashed a dazzling white smile. “Let’s show that team and this snow that we won’t go down without a fight!”

Eric’s smile was contagious. Krich’s frown rose to a grin, and the whole team cheered as the game resumed with the orange disc standing out vividly against the snow-filled sky. Although the rest of the game was a sluggish struggle for Eric, he was able to summon all his remaining focus to leap up and catch the game-winning goal for the comeback victory.

When Eric got home, he found his good friend Kemo waiting at the front door, tail wagging. Kemo was a black and white mutt whose paws and snout had forgotten to stop growing. Although she couldn’t play the sport of ultimate, she did enjoy catching the disc, so she expectantly bounded past him and out the door.

“Sorry girl, not today. I’m not doing so well.” Closing the front door, he dragged himself to the dining room, where his mom offered a hug and a hot cocoa with marshmallows. “No, thanks,” Eric mumbled.

“What? You never say no to hot chocolate! What’s wrong?”

“Well it feels like my muscles are made of sloths, my



energy is a beached whale, my stomach is a gym for piranhas, and ummmm....” Eric trailed off with an embarrassed blush.

“Speak up kiddo, it takes strength to talk about one’s weaknesses.”

Eric sighed sheepishly before whispering, “I’m having trouble going to the bathroom.”

His mother inhaled sharply, and time seemed to double its pace. When it slowed back down, Eric sat at a sterile table in a hospital.

“Hey kiddo....” His mother began before trailing off, forcing his father to take over.

“They found cancer, son. We...” His father’s voice joined his mother’s in silence, and they both had trouble looking at him.

“Cancer.” Eric slowly repeated the word as if he were learning a foreign language. He had never seen his parents act so defeated, and it scared him.

“Yes, Eric, it’s non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma,” said a doctor as he stepped forward. “It’s in your abdomen.” He paused, then continued, “One terrible thing about cancer is that many people wait to report their symptoms. You were very intelligent to tell your parents, because now your chances of beating this cancer monster are greatly increased. We have been talking with



your parents and we think it would be best if we started your treatment immediately... it is up to you though. What do you want to do, Eric?”

The silence that followed sapped his strength till he remembered that he had been asked that exact question earlier that day. “Well,” he began, “as I told my teammates when we were down by five in a blizzard, a great challenge is a great opportunity.” He punctuated his thoughts with his famous smile and got the result he wanted. His parents and doctor joined him with grins of their own.

“Excellent,” the doctor continued. “We will be starting you on chemotherapy. You’re going to have to be strong, Eric. This will be difficult, and there will be a lot of uncomfortable side effects.”

That night, a rumbling from the closet put Kemo to growling, and a shadow of odd proportions seeped into the room with a hiss. Instincts and adrenaline took over as Eric pulled the bright orange disc from his duffle bag and sent his hardest backhand throw whizzing through the air straight through the uninvited intruder. The nasty shadow split in two, and the top half sputtered around the room getting smaller and smaller like a deflating balloon, until Kemo caught it in her mouth and swallowed it whole.



“You cut Myelo in half!” another mangled figure said as it stepped from the closet into the moonlight. It had all the necessary ingredients for terrifying: multiple appendages with sharp edges everywhere, steaming boils rising like mini volcanoes from its dark, gnarled skin, three tilted eyes, and two offset mouths that took turns speaking with sharp arrogance. “But that’s all right.” The creature scooped up the other half of Myelo and swallowed it.

“What are you?” demanded Eric in his bravest voice. “And what are you doing in my room?”

“I’m Burkitt, the king of cancer. I am here for your succulent abdomen.”

“Well you can’t have it,” growled Eric, his fear displaced by anger. “Kemo, fetch my disc.” With three bounds, Kemo delivered the orange disc back to Eric. “That first throw was my backhand--you don’t want to see my flick.” Eric held the disc out to his right side, the moonlight making it shimmer.

“What is a flick?” asked the creature, wrinkling his disgusting forehead and squinting two of his three eyes inquisitively.

“It is a throw used in the sport of ultimate. All it takes is a snap of the wrist. Now, do you want me to demonstrate or do you want to leave?” Eric cocked the disc back slightly.

“I will go. I don’t like fighting strong people,” Burkitt



said dryly. “But I shall return when you are too weak to throw anything.”

“I will always be strong enough to beat you at ultimate.”

“Is that so? What are the rules to this ultimate you speak so arrogantly about?”

Eric smiled inwardly. Burkitt had taken the bait. If he could get his cancer to be just another opponent on the ultimate field, it wouldn't seem quite so scary. “Here,” he said, tossing Burkitt the rulebook he carried in his duffle bag. Catching the book in his mouth, Burkitt swallowed it whole. Eric could hear the gurgling as he digested it.

“Alright Eric, I read the rules. I like the game. When I return, we will play for your abdomen: you win, you keep it; we win, we eat it. Deal?”

Eric stared at the extended hand that resembled a mutilated buzzard, and shook it. “Alright, deal.” Burkitt retreated back into the closet without another word, closing the door silently.

The next day, everyone acted overly nice while whispers of his ailment followed Eric wherever he went. It bothered him a bit, but all he could really think about was his upcoming ultimate game against cancer. However, when night time came, Burkitt did not show. The next night, more of the same. This



continued for over three months, and his initial bravery began to fade as chemotherapy took a terrible toll. Hooked up to all kinds of wires and tubes, he felt like a marionette, with cancer as his cruel puppeteer. Friends, parents, doctors, and, of course, Kemo, tried to keep his spirits up, but he felt more alone than ever. His weight fell like the fall leaves, and soon his brown hair did too.

Finally one night, as a cold rain swept the window pane, Burkitt slipped from the closet. “I am ready,” he said, then disappeared back into the dark closet.

Rubbing the sloppy sleep from his eyes, Eric looked at Kemo, who wore her quizzical, slight-head-tilt, one-ear-up face that always made him laugh. “You ready, girl?” Eric asked. Kemo responded as she always did by tilting her head to the other side and letting her speckled tongue roll out. “Well, let’s not keep them waiting.”

Slipping into his cleats, it took everything he had to tie them tight. Picking up the orange disc, Eric put on his jersey and strode across the bedroom with Kemo at his heels. The sight in the mirror halted him: pale, hairless, and skinny. Cancer had cleverly waited for weakness to whittle him down. Strength, however, did return as he pushed through the closet, past his old jerseys, and remembered all the hard work put into previous



games, workouts, and practices.

The closet turned into a dark tube that became squishy and smelly before opening into a black, wrinkly cavernous stadium that stretched farther than he could see. Every seat was filled, with each creature uglier than the last. Squawks and caws bombarded him from every direction, and the sheer ruckus stopped him. Kemo's wet nose against his hand gave him a jolt and he made his way to the middle of the squishy field full of dead, black grass, long thorns, and wicked, arched weeds.

"Welcome, Eric!" Burkitt yelled with a sprawling sweep of an odd arm. The crowd fell silent. "Welcome to Stomach Stadium! This place used to be a putrid pink color, full of food, before we did some redecorating. Anyway, I will be coaching and here is my starting seven." A group of huge shapes loomed from the opposing tube: they had at least three arms each and were all twice as tall as Eric, with legs and eyes to spare. They hissed and spat with each step, clenching clawed hands and contorting carnivorous mouths. "Look, Eric," Burkitt said, resting his buzzard hand on Eric's shoulder, "no one would blame you for giving up now. There have been plenty of strong people who have lost to us; I promise to make these guys go gentle if you just give up."

With one more gulp and one more glance at Kemo, who



nodded, Eric spoke with grit. “No, we want to play it out.”

“How funny,” cooed Burkitt. “You do realize that Kemo can’t throw, so unless that mangy mutt catches it in the end zone, she is useless. You really think you can beat us all alone?”

Silence reigned as Eric realized his dilemma.

“He’s not alone,” said a firm voice from the tunnel, and a murmur spread through the stadium. Out of the tunnel emerged his mother, father, his friend Krich, his doctors, and his teammates, holding hands to form a chain. “We are all here, kiddo,” said his mother. “We always have been. All you have to do is let us play.”

Eric’s famous smile slowly returned, and he flashed it about with a renewed happiness. He wasn’t alone. He could beat cancer after all!

“We will start on offense,” said the sour Burkitt as his cancer squad took the field. Stomach Stadium filled with jeers and heckles, but Eric didn’t notice any of it. The support and smiles surrounding him were all he could see and feel.

“Thanks for coming, everyone,” he began. “This game is going to be hard. Cancer may try to abuse the rules by cheating and disregarding the spirit of the game. We will not lower ourselves to that level. We will stick to our game. It is what separates us from these monsters. Now, we are starting on



defense. Let's get seven players on the line!"

Eric, his mother, father, Krich, a slender doctor and two of Eric's more athletic teammates walked onto the field, and with crescendoing cheer, they pulled the disc, throwing it the length of the field to the eagerly awaiting Cancers, and the game was underway.

The first point was a monster backhand from a long-armed cancer creature that went right over Eric's best full extension layout into the triple-handed catch of a jumping Cancer player in the end zone.

1 - 0, Cancer.

As Eric's team received the disc on offense, the Cancers set up a trapping zone defense that left them vulnerable to quick passes. Recognizing this, Team Eric worked the disc up the rough field with a quick, yet patient approach that the Cancers apparently hadn't practiced for. Eric threw a curving flick to his mother for the score as she dashed across the back of the end zone.

Tied 1-1.

And that was how the game went; the Cancer crew threw long shots to tall receivers, while Eric's team worked together with patience and precision. Eric's dad proved to be an exceptional thrower, his mother a quick receiver, and the



doctors masterfully handled every aspect of the game, carving apart the Cancer defense with pinpoint passes. Yet for all their effort, the score was tied 14-14 after two grueling hours. Double game point. Whoever scored next would win, and Cancer was starting on offense.

“We need to stop them,” Eric said firmly during their last timeout, though he was a little unsure how they were going to do it. He was panting hard, his bald head gleaming with sweat, and his eyes were bloodshot.

“But how? They are just too tall and they throw it too high,” his father chimed in.

“Snake in the grass,” Kemo spoke with a bold, kind voice. “Or, in this case, ‘dog in the weeds.’”

“What is that?” asked his mother, staring at Kemo as if a talking dog was less surprising than the strategy Kemo had proposed.

“Well, you all race down and get in front of your matchup, except for me. I lay down in the weeds near the sideline. Eric, you let their receiver go deep — act like you messed up. Cancer will think they have an easy throw to the end zone, so they won’t put it too high. I will rush out to block the low pass. Then we just need to score.”

Eric blinked a few times, pondering the situation and the talking dog’s plan. “Alright Kemo, I trust you.” They subbed in



Kemo, did a cheer, and walked to the line.

Eric placed a beautiful flick pull into the back of the end zone and acted out stumbling and falling as his matchup took off, wide open, towards the end zone. Taking the bait, Cancer threw to the wide open receiver. Kemo sprinted from the weeds, and it was good thing her nose had grown so big for she barely got the tip on the edge of the disc. Gasps of disbelief came from every monster in the stadium as the disc hit the gnarly playing field.

Turnover.

Krich picked up the disc, and the Cancers surrounded him like a towering log cabin built of monstrous limbs while the weeds came alive and encircled his feet, binding him to the ground so that pivoting was impossible. With one second left in the stall count, he threw a 50-yard pass known as the hammer, aiming for the center of the end zone. It was a terrible throw, and it floated back down to earth with the ambition of a lazy leaf. Every cancer creature on the field had time to get under it, and they all erupted upward in a greenish volcano to intercept the disc. But from the middle of the monstrous mass a skinny, pale wrist rose to snag the orange disc with a resounding thunk before disappearing back below. When the monsters parted, Eric resembled a squashed bug — yet he held the disc firmly in hand and wore his famous smile on his face.



“I caught it! We beat Cancer!”

Everyone from Eric’s life erupted into cheers, until a haunting word brought everyone to a hush.

“Travel.”

“My player calls ‘travel,’” Burkitt repeated with disdain. “Your player’s pivot foot moved when he threw that. The disc goes back to the thrower. It’s called ‘self-officiating.’ It’s in the rule book.” All the other monsters stood around, juggling laughter, pointing at Eric’s beaten body and repeating the call.

“Yup. Travel.”

“Yup. Travel.”

“There’s no way!” Eric sputtered. “Krich’s feet were bound by weeds! I saw them. How can you make that call?!” Eric struggled to rise but found he could only get to his knees.


“What are we waiting for? Let’s end this!” yelled Burkitt, walking onto the field, taking the disc and throwing it back to Krich. There was no use arguing. If Team Eric wanted to win, they’d have to prove it, and score the point again. The disc got checked in and the Cancers circled around Krich again, leaving only one open throw backwards to Kemo.

“Sorry, Kemo, you’re our only option,” whispered Krich as he threw the disc to the dog.

Hopping up, Kemo caught the disc in her mouth. The Cancers happily surrounded Kemo, thinking they could force a stall 10 turnover, their terrible grins rising as the stall count* climbed.

**stall count: the length of time a player is allowed to hold the disc before it results in a turn over. Usually 10 seconds and counted aloud by the opposing player.*



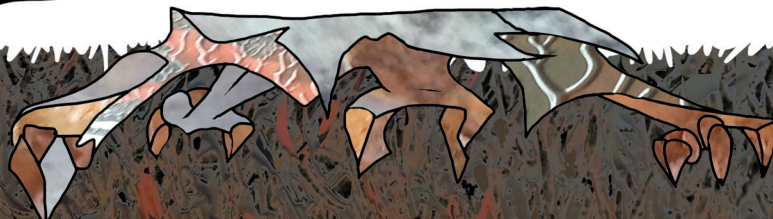


“Stalling 5, stalling 6...” And still Kemo stood on all fours, disc in mouth, gazing at the wall of cancers that surrounded her. “Stalling 8...” As the count reached nine, Kemo rose up on her hind legs, dropped the disc into her right paw, and stepped out with the disc in an odd, thumbless flick grip, bushy tail keeping balance. Seeing what was about to happen, the creatures of Cancer leapt to foul Kemo before she could get the throw off.

They engulfed her, like a large hat on a small head.



The sound of ripping reverberated throughout Stomach Stadium as the orange disc came flying out of the pile of Cancer, splitting everything in its path.





Cancer creatures that tried to block it were torn apart, creating a trail of destruction until the disc reached



Eric, who, without even looking, snagged the very edge of the orange disc.



Silence.

Kemo sat on her haunches, her speckled tongue hanging from the side of her grinning mouth. Burkitt stood in shock, all three eyes following the path of the disc, over his team that lay in pieces till they came to rest on Eric, holding the game-winning catch. Everyone else stared at Burkitt.

“Fine.” he grumbled. “You win...this time, Eric.”

A celebration began as Team Eric proceeded back up the tunnel, until Eric heard the slimy voice of Burkitt from behind him. “You may get to keep your stomach, but we will be back. There are plenty of other body parts still up for grabs, and plenty of other bodies.” Stopping, Eric turned to face the sore loser. “That’s fine. I’m going to tell everyone how to spot you coming a mile away, and I am going to tell the whole world that you can be beat! You no longer scare me. Come after me again and you will lose.”

By the time Eric pushed through the last piece of clothing in his closet, he stood by himself in his empty bedroom with a silent Kemo grinning up at him, tail wagging. It was the middle of the afternoon.

Downstairs, he found his parents, who were surprised to see him. “Where did you come from? We checked your room.



Your ultimate team is playing in the finals today, but we told them you needed to rest.”

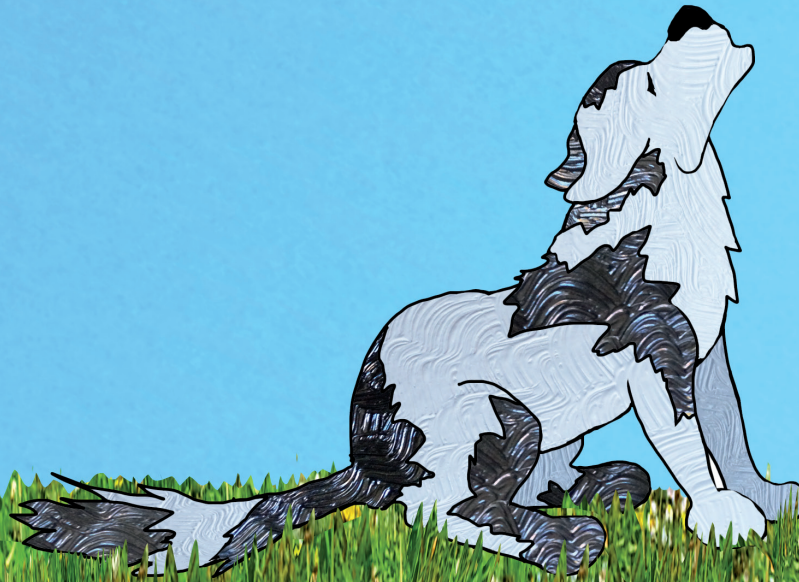
Eric responded with big hugs. “Thank you both, but I feel better now. I want to go help my team.”

It was halftime when they got to the field, with Eric’s team down by three points. Glee greeted him as he made his way towards his team’s halftime huddle.

“Thanks, guys,” Eric began. He knew he couldn’t contribute physically but he had an idea. “Let’s make a huddle on the sideline with our friends and family.” His team did as he asked, leaving the playing field to form a giant huddle that included their sideline supporters.

“I used to think it weak to need the people in this huddle to help me stand. Now I see that I was foolish. There is strength in a huddle, for no single person can fall. Just as in life, the people we surround ourselves with are the people that will hold us up when adversity wants to knock us down. Right now, we are down by three, but the strength we need to avoid falling is right here: you can feel it in the arms around your shoulders, you can see it in the eyes across the way, and you can hear it in the breaths of your neighbors. When you step onto the field in the second half, know that you take everyone in this huddle out there with you, and know that this huddle will be there to support you no matter the outcome of this game.”

A cheer exploded from everyone while Kemo joined in with a howl, and Eric was sure he could hear cancer everywhere trembling in fear.



25 YDS

70 YDS

END ZONE

how to play ULTIMATE

- 1 The Field: A rectangular shape with end zones at each end. A regulation field is 70 yards by 40 yards, with end zones 25 yards deep.
- 2 Initiate Play: Each point begins with both teams lining up on the front of their respective end zone line. The defense throws (“pulls”) the disc to the offense. A regulation game has seven players per team.
- 3 Scoring: Each time the offense completes a pass in the defense’s end zone, the offense scores a point. Play is initiated after each score.
- 4 Movement of the Disc: The disc may be advanced in any direction by completing a pass to a teammate. Players may not run with the disc. The person with the disc (“thrower”) has ten seconds to throw the disc. The defender guarding the thrower (“marker”) counts out the stall count.
- 5 Change of Possession: When a pass is not completed (e.g. out of bounds, drop, block, interception), the defense immediately takes possession of the disc and becomes the offense.

in 10 simple rules

6 Substitutions: Players not in the game may replace players in the game after a score and during an injury timeout.

7 Non-contact: No physical contact is allowed between players. Picks and screens are also prohibited. A foul occurs when contact is made.

8 Fouls: When a player initiates contact on another player a foul occurs. When a foul disrupts possession, the play resumes as if the possession was retained. If the player committing the foul disagrees with the foul call, the play is redone.

9 Self-Officiating: Players are responsible for their own foul and line calls. Players resolve their own disputes.

10 Spirit of the Game: Ultimate stresses sportsmanship and fair play. Competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of respect between players, adherence to the rules, and the basic joy of play.

25 YDS

END ZONE

40 YDS

To find out more about the sport of Ultimate, check out www.usultimate.org

Play... play Ultimate, play anything... use your body and stay active and healthy.

Be Body Aware... know your habits, be aware of changes, listen to your body.

Speak Up! Tell Someone! Tell an adult or medical professional when something is not right with your body. Never be too shy to Speak Up! In Ultimate, we do this very thing when we call our own fouls and self-regulate our play.

Never Give Up. Be a good sport. Compete with Spirit of the Game. Be supportive of your teammates, friends and family.

