

Jock Elliott

# Stalking the Wiley Balloon

*Our quarry was in sight. We could hear it rustling slightly in the wind. My hunting partner gave me a knowing look. I nodded, signaling him to take the first shot. He drew the Bullseye recurve, anchored, and loosed. The shaft flashed briefly in the sunlight, then buried itself in our prey. Pierced through to the heart, it expired with a pop.*

haps two or three inches in diameter. Or reverse the game: the winner is not the person who pops the balloon, but the one who comes closest without popping it.

If balloons start to lose their appeal, try something else. Half-gallon milk cartons work well, as do one-gallon plastic milk jugs. You can even decorate them with the face of your favorite tyrannical despot. One day when our target was

## Family Archery

I drew my Viper longbow and let fly. The shaft landed so close that it was touching my intended victim. Close, but no cigar.

“You killed yours, Mac,” I said.

“And you frightened yours very badly,” my son replied with what has now come to be a standard joke with us.

You see, we had both been stalking the wily balloon, hunting a bag of party balloons that we had been blowing up and fastening to our Eternity target with masking tape.

Kids, I’ve discovered, can get bored with just shooting targets. In an age when Nintendo, Playstation, and the lure of Yu-Gi-Oh cards beckon, sometimes you have to create a little excitement to catch their interest. So when Mac decided archery was maybe becoming a little hohum, I suggested we go “kill” a few balloons.

It worked, and we’ve found there are virtually endless variations on the game. You can start with five balloons on an Eternity target – one for each bullseye printed on the face. After you wipe out the first five balloons, put up four and take a few steps back. Then three and more steps back . . . then two . . . then one.

If your kid is having virtually zero success hitting the balloons, blow them up really big. Or if he or she is an ace, reduce the targets to per-



sitting on the ground, I stacked two half-gallon milk cartons in front of it, then placed a plastic gallon jug on the top. My first pierced the milk jug and suspended it on the face of the target. "Gee, Dad, you hung it!" was Mac's comment.



shock when it launches an arrow, and I love the simplicity of shooting off the shelf. In all, I found using this bow was like eating salted peanuts – I didn't want to stop. My first session with it, I must have shot close to 100 arrows and couldn't wait to get back out there

During our adventures with "alternative targets," Mac and I discovered a couple of terrific family bows. The first is the AIM *Bullseye*. This take-down recurve is a favorite of archery programs around the country and is available either right- or left-handed in 48, 54, 62, and 66 inch lengths, with weights ranging from 15 to 38 pounds. The fit and finish on the handsome laminated riser are excellent, and the interchangeable limbs mean that this bow can grow with your child. This versatile bow has fittings for sights, plunger, and stabilizer.

Mac has a 62" model with 20 lb. limbs, and it is currently his favorite bow. (When he first saw it, his eyes nearly popped out of his head. "Wow, cool!") I don't know why (perhaps because he "believes" in this bow), but the accuracy of his shooting – barebow, no less – has taken a surge upward with the *Bullseye*. On our first outing with it, he put six arrows in the center bull, something he hadn't done before. If this keeps up Simon Fairweather better not give up his day job!

Did I mention the best part? The 62" *Bullseye* costs less than \$90 from discounters.

***"When he first saw his new Bullseye bow, his eyes nearly popped out of his head. "Wow, cool!""***

For my part, I "discovered" the AIM *Viper* longbow. This 68" laminated bow is available in both right and left handed versions in weights from 30-60#. The *Viper* is beautifully made, and one of my archery buddies (who has had more custom longbows than some Hollywood producers have had wives) has declared that the fiberglass work is as good as any he has ever seen.

I started with a 30 lb. right handed *Viper*. The chunky grip feels great in my hand, and laces on the leather grip make it easy to position my fingertips properly. The draw is smooth; there is no punishing hand

the next day.

My re-entry into archery has been marred by some injuries (some due to archery, some not). As a result, I've learned to shoot ambidextrously. The upshot is that I decided that one *Viper* wasn't enough. I now have acquired two: one right handed and one left handed. My typical shooting sessions now involve shooting three dozens arrows from each side. The *Viper* is very affordable: less than US\$160 dollars from discounters. For more information, visit [www.aimarchery.com](http://www.aimarchery.com) or call 860.423.8609

Both the *Bullseye* and *Viper* will benefit from lighter strings than come furnished with the bows. I can highly recommend Rob DiStefano's Custom Endless Bowstrings. He'll make up strings that will bring the best out of both these fine bows. You can reach him through <http://www.rfd.cc/bowstrings>.

When it comes to having fun with family archery, good equipment helps a lot. So does a good imagination. One day we were going to shoot when I discovered that we were down to two balloons. I flipped the Eternity target around to the side that shows the targets with the red centers. "Look, Mac, it's a five-eyed monster! Oh my goodness, it's going to get us!" He quickly decides that we had to shoot in each of its five eyes to escape from danger.

It was tough, demanding our best marksmanship, but thanks to the *Bullseye* and the *Viper*, we slew the beast.

**Jock Elliott** and his son took up the bow and arrow because "it is high fun, low noise, and the ammunition is reusable." They soon fell in love with the twang of the bowstring and the beauty of the arrow in flight. Elliott, based in Troy, NY, is a fulltime freelance writer, competes in air gun matches, and writes about air guns and two-way radio for various publications as well as high technology for industrial clients.

