

blade and drawing it quickly to her. In one fluid flick of the wrist, she cleanly beheaded the man who had taken her family. She turned to the astonished guard and flung her yo-yo at the disarmed samurai. It coiled around his neck like a snake and, within half a minute, the man was dead.

To this date, the legend of Yoshimi Yoyo still lives on in the hearts of the many children who play with the devious, spinning toys.

YOSHIMI YOYO

The yo-yo—toy, household annoyance, complex tool of death—was invented by a 13-year-old female ninja. In 1527, eight-year-old Yoshimi Yoyo watched from a treetop as her parents were brutally slaughtered by a band of samurai sent by a ruthless shogun named Takami. After murdering everybody she loved, the samurai warriors set fire to the village and rode off into the moonlight. Yoshimi, a brash and impetuous child, followed them in secret all the way to Kyoto.

The next morning she prostrated herself in front of Shogun Takami's palace. When asked, she informed the servants that her parents were dead and she had no place to live. Taking pity on the poor, young girl, the staff invited her into the palace and hid her from the powerful lord.

For years she worked the palace grounds and buried her desire for vengeance against Takami. She, after all, was not allowed to touch any weapons and her target. How would she overpower Lord Takami and his bodyguards?

Four years later, while toiling in the sewing room, Yoshimi invented a yo-yo by looping thread around an iron cloth weight. She became proficient at difficult tricks like "walking the dog," "skinning the cat," "splitting the bamboo" and "assassinating the lay person." Assuming it was a game, the shogun's bodyguards permitted Yoshimi to practice, even in the presence of the shogun.

One day, she noticed the strolling shogun flanked by only one guard instead of his normal 15. Springing into action, she flung her yo-yo at the sword of the younger guard, ensnaring the sheathed