

BACKGAMMON

(Sugoroku)

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A priest who loved to play Backgammon before he took the tonsure goes to visit a famed Backgammon player named Kurozo in the Kanto area. When he arrives, he finds that Kurozo has died, so he offers prayers for his soul. Then Kurozo's ghost appears to expresses his gratitude, and they discuss the history and the playing of backgammon.

Ghost of Kurozo (Shite)

Traveling Priest (Waki)

Person of the Place (Ai)

PRIEST (Singing.)

Leaving my old dice behind me, I go on my way,

Leaving my old dice behind me, I go on my way,

Straight across the Six Point Lands, onward I go.

(Speaking.) I am a priest from Koga County in the Land of Omi. Before I took the tonsure and became a priest, I was fond of backgammon, and I would travel from place to place to play it. But finally I found the mundane world to be devoid of hope, and it is for this reason that I became a priest. Recently I heard that there is a man named Kurozo in the

Kanto Area who is very skilled at backgammon. And I have made up my mind to pay him a visit. (Singing.)

Setting out from my home in Koga I go,

Setting out from my home in Koga I go,

Following my wandering feet where ever they go

Following my wandering feet where ever they go

I now approach a village that I do not know.

(Speaking.) As I have made my way with haste, I have now arrived in the Kanto Area. This stupa I see standing here bears an inscription that says, Kurozo has taken the tonsure and retired from the fate of this world. This is a most strange thing indeed. I think that I will question some person of this place about it. Is there a person of this place about?

PERSON Who is it who calls out for a person of this place?

PRIEST Whose are the remains that lie within this mound?

PERSON Well, you see, there was one who lived in this place named Kurozo who was highly skilled at backgammon. His love for the game was so very great that he played so much that he finally died of it. Feeling pity for him, the people of this place buried him in this mound. Even though you may not have any special love for backgammon that would place any obligation upon you to do so, please take some time to offer prayers for his soul before you proceed upon your way.

PRIEST Please accept my heartfelt gratitude for taking the trouble to relate to me this tale. As you suggest, I will indeed pause here for a time and offer prayers for his soul's repose.

PERSON If there is any way I can be of further service, please do not hesitate to call on me.

PRIEST I will call on you indeed.

PERSON And I will respond with all my heart. (He exits.)

PRIEST So this is all that remains of Kurozo. My reason for traveling here from a far away land was to visit this same man. (Singing)

Oh, how pitiful!

His body has now returned to the dust of the earth,

Oh, what pity it is that only his name remains.

Praise to the holy Buddha of the game of Backgammon!

KUROZO (Singing.)

Playing Backgammon,

I shook the cup to long and missed my turn and lost,

Expecting others to wait for me, a transient hope.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Oh, how very strange!

Standing before this old mound,

Suddenly I an apparition see come forth,

Rising up before my eyes, from the depths of the old mound.

Tell me now, I demand of you, who you truly are.

KUROZO Why do you ask who I may be? Was it not to visit me you came here? In gratitude for your thoughtful prayers, I, the Ghost of Kurozo, appear now before you.

PRIEST If you are indeed the Ghost of that Kurozo who used to play backgammon, relate to me the tale of your relentless obsession with that game. Then I will offer prayers for your soul's repose.

KUROZO In that case, I now reveal to you the tale of my past life. After I finish, I beg you, to offer prayers for me.

PRIEST (Speaking.) I will, with all my heart.

KUROZO (Singing.)

They say that the history
Of the game of Backgammon can be traced

CHORUS (Singing.)

Back to the time of Hsuan Tsung, and his love Yang Kuei-fei.

They say that Backgammon was created in their time.

KUROZO (Speaking.) The separation into twelve triangles on the board, is meant to symbolize the twelve months of the year. And the number of thirty for the stones stands for the number of days in a month.

CHORUS (Singing.)

And the black and white of the stones
Are the hues of night and day.

Also the two dice stand for the days and months.
And it is further said the cup resembles Mount Sumi.

KUROZO (Speaking.) Now, a truly skillful player is one
who never fails to rattle his stones before he throws his dice.

PRIEST (Singing.)

This being the case, it is said that shaking
The dice is a thing of utmost importance.

KUROZO (Speaking.) No matter how often one shakes
before rolling,

PRIEST (Singing.)

Before long the game becomes an allout quarrel.

KUROZO (Speaking.) Both put their hands to the swords
that hang at their hips.

PRIEST (Singing.)

Quickly as a lightning flash,

KUROZO (Speaking.) Their swords are drawn.

CHORUS (Singing.)

They face each other as fiercely

As when playing backgammon,
They face each other as fiercely
As when playing backgammon,
Then the opponent uses a skillful thrust of the hand,
Circling each other, our sword blades begin flashing,
Suddenly I find myself knocked to the ground face downward,
Then I am beaten to a pulp, beaten without any mercy,
With a sharp hardwood pole of five inches in thickness.
There I lie still, moving no more, as dead as four and two,
There I lie still, moving no more, as dead as four and two,
Now the place I live is hades, worse than four and three.
Oh, Backgammon Priest, pray that I will roll a lucky five.
Pleading thus the apparition fades into the mist.