

# Bouldering with Socrates

by John Ewbank ©

## CHARACTERS

**SOCRATES:** In his sixties, but still in very good health. His academy is on the brink of financial collapse and he is desperately in need of money.

**EROTICUS:** A young dandy and professional student at the academy.

**ERECTICUS:** A champion gymnast and one of Socrates' best students. Very fit and muscular, and something of a showoff, constantly flexing his muscles, shadow boxing, stretching etc.

**TESTOSTERONE:** A sailor, a wanderer and a raconteur. Recently returned from visiting The Sodden Isle.

**KALEPH THE MONKEY MAN:** An eighty-year old Keltoi, an escaped slave and a celebrated Keltoid Rock God. Visiting Athens on his annual pilgrimage to mourn the death of his son, Benzene, who had been murdered there fifty years earlier.

## NOTES ON THE TEXT:

**Bouldering:** Climbing jargon: The act of climbing small cliffs or boulders that are not so high as to need a rope for safety, but which may be exceedingly difficult to climb, despite their lack of height.

**The Sodden Isle:** England.

**Keltoi:** Ancient Greek for Celt.

**Chalk bag:** Modern rock climbers and boulderers often carry a small bag, made from a stiff synthetic material, tied to a cord around their waist. The bag is just large enough to dip their fingers into, and it is filled with fine powdered white gymnast's chalk. The chalk improves their ability to grip the rock.

**Historical Note:** Archaeologists have recently unearthed artifacts that show that in the glory days of Keltoi boulder worship these chalk bags were skillfully crafted from soft calve's skin or other animal hide, and decorated with sea shells and starfish. It has been estimated that so much chalk was used during the so called "golden age" of Keltoi bouldering (which flourished for almost two centuries), that it would have taken the entire output of a huge Keltoid chalk quarry which was worked solely to this purpose. The remains of this quarry can still be seen just east of what is now Dover.

**Bivi ledge:** A ledge large enough to sleep on.

**Rappelling:** A technique for sliding down a rope in a controlled manner. Often used as a means of descending a cliff.

## THE PLAY

**SETTING:** A neglected garden, a few miles out of Athens. A plinth of rock, ideally about fourteen feet high, dominates center stage. The top of it is flat and just large enough for a person to sit on. The sides are overhanging for the most part. This pillar is made of plywood that has been made to look like stone, and it must be impossible to climb, though there are enough tiny holds on the lower section to encourage attempts.

It is late afternoon on a hot summer's day. We hear rapidly approaching footsteps.

**ENTER SOCRATES.** He is breathing heavily and after recovering for a moment he notices a sundial, mounted on a pedestal. He checks the time and then looks up into the sky, shading his eyes, as if trying to verify the accuracy of the reading. He checks his heart rate, and then, obviously pleased with himself he smiles and sits down on an old bench as he wipes the sweat from his forehead.

A few moments later we hear more footsteps.

**ENTER EROTICUS.** He is dressed in a short white tunic, held around his waist with a thin cord, to which several chalk bags are attached. They are made from leather and filled with white powdered gymnast's chalk. He is virtually covered from head to foot in chalk dust, as if he has been dipped in a sack of flour. He is hot and disoriented and carrying a goatskin filled with wine.

**Eroticus:** By the power of piss, Socrates, look at me! I'm ruined! This lot didn't help, but I couldn't have kept up anyway! What's your secret?

**Socrates:** My secret, Eroticus, is the shortcut through the olive grove. It avoids the big hill completely. You've got to use your kidneys.

**Eroticus:** You cheating old bastard. It'll serve you right if cheating is all you're remembered for.

**Socrates:** It would be ironic if I were to be remembered at all after what the bastards in this city have put me through. I couldn't care less what I'm remembered for; all I care about is making some money; being a great thinker with an empty belly is as much fun as...

**Eroticus:** Talking about what you'll be remembered for; did you hear the one about Heroteus?

**Socrates:** I don't think so.

**Eroticus:** (Offering gourd to Socrates) Wine? Heroteus was lying on his deathbed, going over the facts of his life and explaining to the young nurse who was attending him that –

when he'd been a young man himself, he'd spent years overseeing the construction of the system of aqueducts that serviced the city. It had been hailed as an engineering masterpiece. 'But,' he asked the nurse ruefully; 'When my name comes up today, do they say: "*Heroteus? That engineer?*"'

Then he explained he'd been commissioned to build a bridge across a great ravine, and his cantilevered reverse ballast structure was greeted as a brilliant solution. 'But' he asked the nurse indignantly, 'When my name comes up today, do they say: "*Heroteus? That bridge builder?*"'

The final great work of his life had been the construction of a new harbor. It gained the approval of the entire city and he was feted as a genius. 'But' he asked angrily; 'When my name comes up today, do they say: "*Heroteus? That harbor maker?*" But. (PAUSE) You get caught, just once, having sex with your mother ..."

**Socrates:** You know what they say: show me a Hero and I'll write you a tragedy...

**Eroticus:** Ain't it the truth! (INDICATING THE CHALKBAGS) What are these for?

BEFORE SOCRATES CAN ANSWER ERECTICUS ENTERS, FLEXING HIS MUSCLES AND CARRYING WATER GOURD.

**Socrates:** Erecticus! What took you so long!

**Erecticus:** Long? Give me a break! I stopped at the gym to do some training on the way. I'd have been here thirty minutes ago if I'd tried! (LOOKING AROUND) Why here anyway? Who won?

**Eroticus:** He did!

**Socrates:** With a little help from a shortcut through the olive grove. Why here? My dear Erecticus, I have an idea for making some money, that's "why here" my muscle-bound bag of walnuts.

EROTICUS AND ERECTICUS EXCHANGE GLANCES.

**Erecticus:** And?

**Socrates:** Enough to save the academy and keep me out of jail.

**Eroticus:** Yes but - why did you want to meet here?

**Socrates:** Well. (PAUSE) Let me tell you; this old estate is where the Syrian Circus used to set up every year when I was a kid. INDICATES THE ROCK. And this, this is the very rock where Kaleph the Monkey Man used to do his act, the most amazing act I ever saw.

**Eroticus:** Kaleph the Monkey Man! By the power of piss I remember my grandma talking about Kaleph the Monkey Man, did someone get murdered?

**Socrates:** (GESTURES EROTICUS TO BE QUIET) Kaleph had the classic looks of the ancient Keltoi; skin as white as prime octopus meat and eyes the same pale blue as the Aegean at dawn; His hair and his beard were a great tangle of orange flames. He seldom smiled, and when he did it was only at his son. Even when he smiled at Benzene he looked as if he were suffering a pain that had been part of his soul for so long that his lips and his eyes were as empty of joy as the wind that whips Olympus every winter.

**Erecticus:** (FACETIOUSLY) A manly man!

**Socrates:** (POINTEDLY IGNORING HIM) The circus would set up all around this grove, but Kaleph's act was the best of them all. He'd do a few magic tricks to attract a crowd and then, when he had everybody's attention he'd bring out his assistant, an albino chimpanzee, and keeping a perfectly straight face, he'd introduce it as his son, Benzene! He'd tell the chimp to say hello and everyone would start to laugh of course, but, the next thing you knew, the chimp was walking around introducing himself, shaking hands and saying, "Pleased to meet you, I'm Benzene!"

**Erecticus:** Bullshit!

**Socrates:** I shit you not! He'd taught the freaking monkey to speak! He'd settle the crowd and ask if they thought anyone could climb this rock. Most of them would just shout "No" but without fail at least one person would shout back the answer he was fishing for: "Maybe by your son!" (SOCRATES PAUSES, LOOKS AT THE ROCK AND THEN AT ERECTICUS AND EROTICUS) Why don't you look at the rock for yourselves? (THEY HESITATE) Don't be shy, it won't bite!

THEY CHECK IT OUT, MARVELING AT HOW SMOOTH IT IS.

**Socrates:** (RHETORICALLY) Well? Could you climb it?

**Eroticus** No Way.

**Erecticus:** (HIS USUAL BELIGERENT AND MOST COMPETITIVE SELF) If I got on top of Eroticus I could probably make it...

**Eroticus:** (WITH OBVIOUS SEXUAL INNUENDO) If you ever got on top of me Erecticus I'd make sure you made it...

**Socrates:** That doesn't count! One man, alone, no ladders, no ropes, no scaffolds, no ramps, no cairns, no catapults, just your bare hands. (TO ERECTICUS) What about you Mr Muscles?

**Erecticus:** (FLEXING HIS MUSCLES AND TRYING THE FIRST MOVES AND LOOKING A BIT PEEVED BY SOCRATES JIBES) Well it looks pretty hard...

**Socrates:** (INTERUPTING HIM AND GOING BACK TO HIS STORY) Kaleph would reach inside his cloak and pull out five bananas and start juggling, a few basic tricks, and then he'd throw the bananas high into the air, one after another in a graceful arc, and land them all, just like that, on top of the pillar! The crowd, pardon the pun but I can't resist, would go bananas!

They'd think it was the end of the show and start reaching into their pockets but Kaleph would raise a hand. He'd lean forward, head cocked to one side, eyebrows raised, one hand cupped behind his ear – as if the better to hear their response – and repeat the question he's asked earlier: Could the pillar be climbed? “Maybe by that son of yours!” more people would now reply – joining in with what they had come to believe was the spirit of the thing and thinking that Kaleph had thrown the bananas on top to lure the chimp to climb up.

**Eroticus:** By the Power of Piss, it's coming back to me, there was a scandal, some woman, Estrogen Oxygen, that's it, I...

**Socrates:** (GETTING ANNOYED) Stop interrupting! Kaleph would turn to the chimpanzee. “Go for it my son!” he'd command and Benzene would stretch to his full height and try to pull himself up with the help of the invisible, or at best, the microscopic irregularities that an observer might fancy the chimp's fingertips to be touching. From more than a few feet away it was impossible to know if these possibilities of progress were figments of Benzene's imagination or if they existed in reality. In any case, from any distance, it soon became pretty obvious that the monkey had the same chance of climbing the pillar as a jellyfish running a marathon. He'd start gibbering and get crazier and finish up just standing there, banging his head against the rock and swearing in Turkish!

**Erecticus:** Very funny but if this is another one of your allegories about contradictions I'm not interested.

**Socrates:** Nothing to do with allegory my bumpy muscled mannequin; this is history; calm your muscles for a minute and listen. The people would laugh so hard they'd pee themselves, and just keep right on laughing while the pee ran down their legs. Kaleph would take his collection dish through the crowd and lift Benzene into his arms. “Ladies and Gentlemen” he'd say; “We're glad you enjoyed the show but this,” he'd gesture to the dish with disdain, “this means nothing to Benzene. As you can see, what my son craves is not gold or silver. What Benzene wants,” and Kaleph would glance up to the top of the pillar to give his words greater emphasis, “is one of those Egyptian bananas!” People in the crowd would start to murmur and...

**Eroticus:** (INTERRUPTING AGAIN) I remember now! Somebody was killed...

**Socrates:** (GROWING MORE ANNOYED) Eroticus! People would begin to murmur and some would feel sorry for the chimp, whose antics couldn't fail to touch the tender part of the human heart. Kaleph was a master showman, I shit you not. He'd have the crowd in the palm of his hand and move in for the kill. "You've seen what my son will do for a banana," Kaleph would say, "Now let me show you what a father will do for his son!" He'd look the chimp in the eye and ask: "Would you like daddy-waddy to climb the rocky-wocky and get you a banana-wana?" "Yes please Dad!" the chimp would reply, speaking Greek again, and the crowd would fall silent in disbelief.

"Ladies and Gentlemen" Kaleph would ask, "If I can climb up and get Benzene a banana will you fill a second pot for me?" Before they even had a chance to think about it he'd make an offer they couldn't refuse: "I'll tell you what," he'd say, as if the idea had just occurred to him, "How about we play double or nothing?" and the crowd would soon be shouting their agreement, united by their greed and relishing the pandemonium.

SOCRATES TAKES ANOTHER DRINK AND IS JUST ABOUT TO CONTINUE HIS STORY WHEN AN EXASPERATED VOICE IS HEARD COMING FROM OFFSTAGE. IT IS TESTOSTERONE, WHO IS LOST IN THE OVERGROWN GARDENS.

**Testosterone:** (SHOUTING FROM OFFSTAGE, SOUNDING DISTANT) Socrates! Hello?

EROTICUS AND ERECTICUS LOOK AT EACH OTHER QUIZZICALLY.

**Eroticus:** (TO SOCRATES) You didn't tell us anyone else was coming.

**Socrates:** (SOCRATES STRAINS TO FIGURE WHERE THE VOICE IS COMING FROM). Yes, someone I'm anxious for you to meet...

**Eroticus:** Who?

**Socrates:** (CUPPING HIS HANDS AND SHOUTING) Testosterone!

**Testosterone:** (SHOUTING. SOUNDING CLOSER): Hello? Socrates!

**Socrates:** Someone I want you to meet... (SHOUTS AGAIN, INTO THE WINGS) Testosterone!

**Testosterone:** (SHOUTING. NOW LOUD AND CLEAR) Socrates!

**Socrates:** (TURNS TOWARD WHERE THE VOICE IS COMING FROM, CUPS HIS HANDS TO HIS MOUTH AND SHOUTS AGAIN) Testosterone! Over here.

ENTER TESTOSTERONE, CARRYING A ROLLED UP DRAWING AND A GUITAR.

**Testosterone:** (BREAKING THROUGH THE ARBOR AND ENTERING THE CLEARING): Socrates! You said, “gardens!” This is a jungle!

**Socrates:** It’s different now with the passing of all the years; I’m sorry you got lost...

**Testosterone:** I went right past it! You said six miles! It’s only about three!

**Socrates:** You know how childhood memories exaggerate things...  
(INTRODUCES EVERYONE) Eroticus; Testosterone! Testosterone; Eroticus! Erecticus;  
Testosterone! Testosterone; Erecticus!

(SOCRATES OFFERS TESTOSTERONE A SEAT ON THE BENCH.  
TESTOSTERONE LOOKS AROUND AND ALMOST JUMPS WHEN HE SEES THE  
PILLAR).

**Testosterone:** (STARING AT THE PILLAR) That’s amazing!

**Socrates:** (LOOKING VERY PLEASED). Yes! My memory didn’t exaggerate that at least! Is it similar to the ones in the Soddan Isle?

**Testosterone:** (INCREDULOUS) Yes, a bit smaller than some, but it’s the same idea...

**Socrates:** I thought so... I’ve impressed myself...it must be fifty years since I was here!

**Testosterone:** (CONTINUING TO STARE AT THE PILLAR) Incredible!

**Erecticus:** (EXASPERATED) What’s incredible?

**Socrates:** (TO TESTOSTERONE, IGNORING ERECTICUS) I was telling them about Kaleph...

**Eroticus:** (TO TESTOSTERONE) Wine?

PASSES THE GOATSKIN TO TESTOSTERONE. HE DRINKS DEEPLY AND PASSES IT ON TO SOCRATES.

**Socrates:** Thanks. (DRINKS) Excellent! (PAUSE) Where was I? Ah! Yes. “Let’s play for double or nothing Kaleph would say to the crowd” and they, filled with the excitement of the moment would accept. Kaleph would hand the pot of money to his son and then he’d step to the pillar and throw off his cloak. His physique was so phenomenal that the crowd would gasp with amazement. Every inch was so sculpted and shaped, so pumped and so ripped, so – so – so how do you say it down at the gymnasium Erecticus? (PAUSE) So cut! So buff! So shredded! So totally awesome, that he made Adonis look like a barrel of lard! His only flaw was a slight limp, but you only noticed it when he was walking; His body was nothing but snakes of tendon and muscle.

He'd milk this moment for all it for all it was worth flexing and posing and winking at the girls and then suddenly, the next thing you knew, he'd be suspended from the rock with every vein in his body fit to burst as he concentrated himself. I say 'concentrated himself' because apart from concentration, there was nothing else to support him.

He'd start to climb the pillar, and look as if he was about to fall off with every single move, but he did that on purpose so the people would think he was just getting up by the skin of his teeth and gamble more money next time! In fact every slip and gasp was choreographed purely for suspense. What a showman! When he reached the top he'd yell out a great cry of victory and then throw the bananas down and climb down himself and hold Benzene's hand as the two of them took a bow before going around with a second collection dish. Pardon the pun again, but the crowd would go absolutely apeshit!

**Eroticus:** (Interjecting) Grandma said he was the star attraction of the entire circus but he only performed..

**Socrates:** (Clipping Eroticus on the head). Will you shut it? He only performed a few times, I'm lucky to have ever seen him at all.

**Erecticus:** Why?

**Socrates:** Jealousy; The other acts were going broke while he was raking in all the loot and then going out on the town every night with Estrogen Oxygen, the most beautiful women in Athens, Kaleph flaunting his muscles and Estrogen flaunting her perfect breasts and her outrageous beauty. The sight of them together enflamed a lot of jealousy, and one night Kaleph was attacked. Both his arms were broken. The monkey was found dead in the olive grove the next day, a poisoned banana milkshake still in his hand.

**Erecticus:** Who did it?

**Socrates:** Some thought the Elephant Man, but there was no evidence. The chimpanzee was buried and the circus left town, but Kaleph stayed on with Estrogen. His arms mended but he was never the same. Every day he'd get drunk and wander the streets singing Keltoid dirges and shouting Benzene's name at the top of his lungs. He became obsessed with the idea of having the chimp dug up and given a human burial. He swore that at night when the moon was full he could hear Benzene calling out. It went on for about a year and then one day the house was empty. They vanished; they were never seen again.

**Eroticus:** Some story!

**Socrates:** (TO TESTOSTERONE) Yes. Some story. Testosterone, why don't you tell my two young friends about the Sodden Isle?

**Testosterone:** I just got back from an island that lays far to the north and far to the west. It's a place where the weather is so atrocious that staying alive is a full time job in itself. In autumn, when the almost constant summer rain finally stops, the snow begins to fall, and in springtime, when the winter snow finally melts, the summer rain returns. The climate's so grim that most of people go from birth to death without a smile ever crossing their faces. It's a wonder the people don't have webbed feet. The only thing that seems to take their mind off the weather is by drinking huge quantities of the worst beer I've ever tasted and indulging in the weirdest sport you've ever seen. It's a national obsession over there. I was so amazed I did a drawing of it – here. (HE HANDS A ROLLED UP DRAWING TO SOCRATES.)

**Erecticus:** (REACHING FOR THE DRAWING) What sport do they do? Running?

**Socrates:** (PULLING THE DRAWING AWAY) No, not running. (AFFRONTED): There's nothing weird about running.

**Erecticus:** Jumping as far as you can?

**Socrates:** Don't be ridiculous!

**Erecticus:** (FACETIOUSLY) Jumping as high as you can?

**Socrates:** Please!

**Erecticus:** Swimming as fast as you can?

**Socrates:** Be serious. (TO TESTOSTERONE) Testosterone, please enlighten these two sad sacks of innocence.

**Testosterone:** In the Soddan Isles they're mad about climbing rocks.

EROTICUS AND ERECTICUS LOOK AT HIM IN BEWILDERMENT. PAUSE.

**Erecticus:** What?

**Testosterone:** Climbing rocks.

**Erecticus:** Climbing rocks?

**Testosterone:** Yes, rocks.

**Erecticus:** (INDIGNANTLY) You mean they climb rocks or there's climbing rocks? Rocks that could climb would be interesting - but every shepherd in Greece climbs over rocks all day long; It's not something an intelligent human would call a sport; It sounds like a pursuit for those who've been touched by the moon...

**Testosterone:** This is different; they have climbing contests on these huge rocks arranged in circles. Sometimes they move these rocks for hundreds of miles. It can take a year to move a single rock to its place in the circle! And each of these circles can have many huge stones. Socrates, show him the picture. This is at a place they call Stonehenge, where they have what they call ‘Bouldering Competitions’

(SOCRATES HANDS THE DRAWING TO EROTICUS)

**Eroticus:** (LOOKS AT THE DRAWING FOR A MOMENT AND STARTS LAUGHING). ‘Bouldering competitions?’ By the power of piss! HE HANDS THE DRAWING TO ERECTICUS WHO LOOKS AT IT AND STARTS TO SNIGGER.

**Testosterone:** (IGNORES THEM) After they’ve hauled a new rock to the circle they stand it up and build a scaffold around it. They knock all the sharp edges off and then the Keltoi children join in for the shaping and the polishing, which can keep the tribe unified for another few months. When it’s all finally done the scaffold is taken down and piled into a bonfire. The climbers are given red magic mushrooms and pretty soon they’re throwing off their clothes and doing cartwheels and pushups, each trying to outdo the other. They get themselves into a total frenzy, put a few bags of chalk powder round their waist, dip their hands in for a better grip and then start trying to climb the new rock.

**Erecticus:** (TO TESTOSTERONE, AND SUDDENLY SOUNDING VERY INTERESTED SINCE HEARING ABOUT THE MUSHROOMS) Magic Mushrooms? Like the ones on Olympus? I once took some before a wrestling tournament and I beat every bastard on the mat. (ERECTICUS WALKS OVER TO THE ROCK AND BEGINS CHECKING IT OUT).

**Testosterone:** The climbers go at it for weeks on end – sometimes months - depending on how the shapers and polishers did their job - gradually piecing together move after move. Whoever is first to the top is hailed as the new rock god.

**Erecticus:** (FLEXING HIS MUSCLES AND SOUNDING VERY COMPETITIVE) How do they train their bodies? Do they have gymnasiums in the Soddan Isles?

**Testosterone:** Gymnasiums! (LAUGHS) In the Soddan Isles? Don’t make me laugh! They’re still shitting in holes in the ground and eating dead seagulls, never mind gymnasiums! No, they learn to do it by doing it.

**Erecticus:** That’s ridiculous for a start. You can’t practice to do something that you can’t do by doing it.

**Testosterone:** That’s where the mushrooms come in handy. In fact, that’s one of the Keltois mottoes: “Just do it! They even have their own Coat of Arms, a picture of a bull, balancing on it’s own balls on a bubble of air, with the moon impaled on one horn and the sun impaled on the other, with bats and birds and bees and butterflies flying out of the bulls arse. Whenever a new rock is climbed the Rock Climbing Federation engraves this

picture on it, with the name of the first climber to reach the top. Then they do the same thing when a new climber finds a new way to the top. Some of the older boulders have an entire frieze of bulls and balls, bats and butterflies, birds and bees stretching all the way around them – and twenty or thirty different names as well.

**Socrates:** (VICTORIOUSLY) And didn't you tell me that one particular name is on virtually every boulder in The Soddan Isle, sometimes time after time, even on the same boulder?

**Testosterone:** That's right.

**Socrates:** (RHETORICALLY) And what name is that, my dear Testosterone?

**Testosterone:** Kaleph the Monkey Man.

EROTICUS AND ERECTICUS REACT WITH DISBELIEF.

**Eroticus:** (GOING OVER TO THE ROCK AND EXAMINING IT) By the Power of Piss! Bullshit with Wings!

**Testosterone:** Compared to Stonehenge this is what the Keltoi kids practice on.

**Eroticus:** But there's nothing to hang onto...

**Socrates:** That's to our advantage...

**Eroticus:** How do you mean?

**Socrates:** We fool them into believing it's unclimbable, just like Kaleph did in the old days and then...

**Eroticus:** Fool who?

**Socrates:** The audience at our show.

**Eroticus:** What show?

**Socrates:** The Return of Kaleph the Monkey Man! We'll start the rumor that he's come back to Athens! Everyone will think he's too old and sick to climb the pillar and then, after they've placed their bets, up he goes! We can even carry him on in a stretcher.

**Eroticus:** But he's probably dead! You don't even know if he's...

**Socrates:** Of course he's dead by now, you olive pit; That's where Erecticus comes in! We'll get you a mask to make you look as wrinkled as a hundred-year-old turtle; your eyes will be sunk so deep there'll be no way of knowing the closest they've ever been to

blue is looking at the sky. You'll have an orange wig and from the neck down we'll paint you a deep Keltoi blue; when it dries and cracks you'll look as ancient as a piece of dried fish.

**Eroticus:** This is the most ridiculous scheme I've ever heard. If this is about the money again, why don't we move? We can rent an entire villa in Marathon for the same as a single room in Athens.

**Socrates:** What? Leave town with my tail between my legs? I don't know if Eroticus here ever told you the one about Heroteus and the way a man is remembered, but I'll tell you this: I'd rather drink hemlock than run.

**Testosterone:** Erecticus! Listen! The Diana festival is coming! In three weeks' time Athens will be mobbed with the baby boomers and geriatric draft dodgers from the Trojan wars. Their grandparents will still remember what a sensation Kaleph created all those years ago; They'll want to see the old fart climb the rock – but at the same time they'll want him to fall off so they can make money! You know what this generation is like! All they care about is business and money and trying to stay young. Kaleph would be about eighty years old now if he were still alive - they'll probably gamble as high as ten to one. Erecticus - what do you say? (SLYLY - PLAYING ON ERECTICUS'S COMPETITIVE NATURE AND TO HIS VANITY): If a Keltoi yobbo from the Sodden Isle could climb this thing fifty years ago surely you can? They say you're the greatest gymnast in all of Greece! Think of the glory!

**Erecticus:** (SULLEN AND BELLIGERENT) What fucking glory? No one will know it's me, you silly old bugger! I'm going to look like a dried up blue turd with arms and legs.

**Socrates:** (INDIGNANTLY) We'll know it's you. The admiration of a select few is worth more than the slobbering adulation of the ignorant masses. (PAUSE) Besides, think of the money!

**Erecticus:** (AGITATED) I don't know...how long have I got to train - three weeks? This is as much about madness as about gymnastics! (PAUSE) Maybe if I had some of those mushrooms.

**Testosterone:** (SHARES A QUICK SLY SMILE WITH SOCRATES) Funny you should say that! (REACHES INTO HIS POCKET AND PULLS OUT A HANDFUL OF BRIGHT RED MUSHROOMS): Did you say mushrooms?

**Erecticus:** (INSPECTS THEM CLOSELY). Just like the ones on Olympus!

**Socrates:** (SEIZING THE MOMENT) Indeed they are. The true ambrosia of the Gods, right in your hand, and there's plenty more where they came from. Eroticus; give the man the finest chalk bag! Come on, down the hatch!

(ERECTICUS TAKES THE MUSHROOMS AND DRINKS SOME WINE AND THEN REMOVES HIS SANDALS AND ROBE. ALL HE IS WEARING UNDERNEATH IS A LOINCLOTH. HE IS LEAN AND MUSCULAR. EROTICUS TIES A CHALK BAG AROUND HIS WAIST AND SLAPS HIM ON THE BACKSIDE.

**Eroticus:** By the Power of Piss! The buns of the Gods!

ERECTICUS

**Testosterone:** What do you think?

**Erecticus:** (INSPECTING THE ROCK). I suppose you could say this scratch here is something...

**Eroticus:** (LAUGHING) P of P! Get real!

**Erecticus:** (HOPEFULLY) And there's a slight bump here. (PAUSE) I think, and...

(THE WINE PASSES AROUND AGAIN AS THE MEN SHOW SIGNS OF STARTING TO GET HAPPILY DRUNK).

**Eroticus:** (FEELING THE BUMP) Smaller than a eunuchs dick!

**Erecticus:** I suppose this is sort of a fingerhold?

**Testosterone:** A rock god would call that a bivi ledge.

**Erecticus:** I guess it's relative.

**Socrates:** Of course it is.

**Erecticus:** When I was training on the rings I could do ten one-arm chin-ups with a discus in the other hand and a javelin between my teeth.

**Testosterone:** Socrates told me about your prowess in the gym. They say you're the greatest Athlete the city every produced...

**Erecticus:** (FLEXING) I'm not bragging, I'm just saying...

**Testosterone:** I know...

**Erecticus:** Once you got started the upward momentum would actually help. If you were moving quickly enough...

**Testosterone:** That's right.

**Erecticus:** (STRIKING A POSE) It's basic physics.

**Socrates:** Now you're talking.

**Erecticus:** (Scratching his balls) Strength to weight ratio.

**Testosterone:** An ant is stronger than an ox.

**Erecticus:** (FEELING HIS OWN BICEPS) I love a good challenge.

**Socrates:** Nothing ventured nothing gained!

**Erecticus:** (Smelling his own armpit) Application and dedication!

**Testosterone:** Imagination and realization!

**Erecticus:** (THE MUSHROOMS TAKING EFFECT. DOING PUSH-UPS) Levitation versus gravitation!

**Socrates:** That's the spirit!

**Erecticus:** (Banging his forehead against the rock) Right against wrong!

**Testosterone:** Good against evil!

**Erecticus:** (Bashing the rock with the side of his fist) Up against down!

**Socrates:** It's definitely climbable!

**Erecticus:** (BREATHING IN, PUFFING OUT HIS CHEST) You're right!

**Testosterone:** Go on, give it a try!

**Erecticus:** Why not!

**Socrates:** Now you're talking!

**Erecticus:** (SLICKING BACK HIS HAIR) It doesn't look all that hard...

**Testosterone:** You know what the Keltois say...

**SOCRATES and TESTOSTETTRONE :** No pain, no gain!

**Socrates:** Testosterone, how about that song you told me about?

**Testosterone:** The Boulderer's Lament? They sing it at all the major contests.

(STRUMS THE GUITAR AS HE SINGS. A PUNK ROCK RHYTHM WOULD BE GOOD, OR A VERY UP TEMPO VERSION OF GREENSLEEVES, DONE PERHAPS IN THE STYLE OF THE POGUES OR SIMILAR)

A boulderer's life is a life of pain

You train in the snow and you train in the rain

You pull and you strain and you pull down again

You fall on your head and you shatter your brain.

**SOCRATES JOINS IN AS TESTOSTERONE REPEATS THE LAST LINE - CONDUCTING EROTICUS TO DO LIKEWISE)**

**Testosterone, SOCRATES AND EROTICUS:** You fall on your head and you shatter your brain.

**Testosterone:** (SECOND VERSE)

A boulderer's goal is to be a Rock God

To be built like a spear or a fishing rod

To be the top dog in the bouldering squad

And to burn off every other poor sod.

**Testosterone EROTICUS AND SOCRATES:**

To burn off every other poor sod.

**Testosterone:** (THIRD VERSE)

A boulderer diets and stays on his toes

To save weight he'll cut off his dick and his nose

If it's no good for gripping – out it goes

It's all about power to weight ratios!

**Testosterone EROTICUS AND SOCRATES:**

It's all about power to weight ratios!

(THE STAGE LIGHTS START TO DIM. SOCRATES LIGHTS A FEW CANDLES. IT IS DUSK. BY THE TIME SOCRATES AND EROTICUS EXIT, THE STAGE WILL BE IN DARKNESS, EXCEPT FOR THE CANDLIGHT.

**Eroticus:** (TO ERECTICUS) How you feeling?

**Erecticus:** Let's get it on!

ERECTICUS WALKS AROUND THE PILLAR. HE BEGINS HYPERVENTILATING, SHAKING OUT, STRETCHING ETC.

**Testosterone:** How's the mushrooms?

**Erecticus:** Good, good. Feeling good. (HE POSITIONS HIMSELF FOR AN ATTEMPT).

**Testosterone:** Just do it! No pain no gain. Do it for The Goddess of Victory, for Nike herself!

ERECTICUS STRAINS MIGHTILY, HOLDS ONTO THE ROCK, VEINS STICK OUT FIT TO BURST. THE OTHERS WATCH HIM TRY TO GET OFF THE GROUND. HE LIFTS ONE LEG AND THEN, AFTER A LOT OF SHUFFLING AND REPOSITIONING, HE GETS THE OTHER OFF THE GROUND AS WELL. THE ACTION AND DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE PLAYERS IS AD LIBBED. THE AUDIENCE REACTION ETC. HE FINALLY PIECES TOGETHER A FEW MOVES. WHILE THIS IS GOING ON THE STAGE LIGHTS DIM FURTHER. SOCRATES LIGHTS A CANDLE. THE STAGE LIGHTS ARE VERY DIM.

**Socrates:** You can do it Erecticus. We'll make a fortune.

**Testosterone:** Time is the essence. Five shows a day through the festival and you'll make enough for your own building. Remember, it's tax-free.

**Socrates:** Erecticus, are you in?

**Erecticus:** On my honor.

**Testosterone:** Eroticus, you'll make the posters. Put one in every steam room and gymnasium: 'It's a miracle! Fifty years on! The Return of Kaleph the Monkey Man! Can he still do it?' That sort of thing. Erecticus, you'll do nothing but train. Socrates, you'll be the schil. I'll be Master of Ceremonies.

**Socrates:** Erecticus always remember: the muscle memory never forgets what the muscle memory never learned. Come on Eroticus, I'll show you the shortcut.

SOCRATES AND EROTICUS EXIT, SOCRATES LIGHTING THE WAY WITH THE CANDLE. ERECTICUS BEGINS TO FOLLOW THEM BUT TESTOSTERONE STOPS HIM.

**Testosterone:** Not you; you start training.

THE STAGE IS LEFT IN DARKNESS. SOUND OF BODY BUMPING HARD AGAINST THE PILLAR.

**Erecticus:** I can't climb in the dark.

**Testosterone:** They do in the Sodden Isle; in the rain, with a bag of ferrets on their backs, in sandals, dead drunk, in winter,

SOCRATES JOINS THE AUDIENCE, IN THE FRONT ROW.

TESTOSTERONE GOES BACK ON STAGE. HE WORKS THE AUDIENCE DIRECTLY AND IN A VERY CONFRONTATIONAL STYLE, IN THE MANNER OF A STAND-UP COMIC HUSTLING TO KEEP THE CROWDS ATTENTION; HE TELLS A FEW JOKES AND ENGAGES THE AUDIENCE DIRECTLY WITH TYPICAL QUESTION AND WISE-ASS RESPONSE ROUTINES. (I.E. Where are you from? Nice place, I spent a year there one night, etc). INSULTS (I.E. How long have you been making your own clothes? etc). HE ENCOURAGES HECKLERS SO HE CAN USE SOME COMEBACK LINES. (I.E. The last time I saw a mouth like yours it had a hook in it. etc). TESTOSTERONE AND SOCRATES PRETEND TO NOT KNOW EACH OTHER. SOCRATES STARTS GIVING TESTOSTERONE THE SLOW CLAP.

**Testosterone:** Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome! We're glad you came, we're glad you're here! We're gladiolas! Do you get it? We're gladiators! Do you get it? It's a play on words! Should I send a messenger? Are you an audience or an oil painting? Any pensioners in the audience, anyone preparing to be placed into the peaceful permafrost of perennial sleep? Anyone so old that you remember when Kaleph performed fifty years ago?

**Socrates:** I was and he only just made it then. I'll bet a thousand zorbas he'll never make it now.

**Testosterone:** Ah! The gentleman who was giving me the clap! Let's have a look at you Sir! Come on, stand up! Who do we have here? Is this the infamous Socrates, the riveting and radical raconteur, renowned for his repartee? I was told for every answer you have a question and for every question you have an answer. Is that true?

**Socrates:** How should I know?

**Testosterone:** It is! It's Socrates! Ladies and genitals, give him a big hand, he's only got small ones.

**Socrates:** Get on with the show.

**Testosterone:** Was that an example of the clever Socratic dialogue I've heard so much about - or are you still learning the language?

**Socrates:** Don't start a battle of wits when you've got no weapons.

**Testosterone:** We've got about a minute until show time; why don't you tell us everything you know?

**SOCRATES:** Did your mother have any children that lived?

(TESTOSTERONE STARTS TO CLAP, BUT WITH A SOUR LOOK ON HIS FACE)

**Socrates:** Never clap on your own, someone might throw you a fish.

**Testosterone:** Ladies and (GESTURES TO SOCRATES) germs: A self-made man who worships his own creator. If his brain goes to his head he'll be dangerous.

**SOCRATES:** I could walk through your deepest thoughts without getting my ankles wet. (TURNING TO THE AUDIENCE): We're here to see Kaleph, to place some bets, right my friends? We didn't come to listen to you, you snot rag. (BEGINS TO CHANT EXHORTING THE AUDIENCE TO JOIN IN): We want Kaleph! We want Kaleph! We want Kaleph!

**Testosterone:** Fellow fanatical followers of fantastic feats of phenomenal fortitude: feast your eyes on the fabulous Kaleph! (LOOKS INTO WINGS TO SEE IF KALEPH IS READY). He's still getting ready! Growing old is a magical journey, a time of expanding maturity...

**Socrates:** Put a sandal in it! Are you taking bets or what?

**Testosterone:**...as we celebrate the endless cycle of life and the renewal of dreams as we grow wiser in our years and...here he is!

ENTER ERECTICUS, SUPPORTED BY EROTICUS. ERECTICUS IS PAINTED BLUE AND WEARING A WILD WIG OF RED HAIR. HE IS HAVING SOME DIFFICULTY WALKING.

**Testosterone:** Kaleph the Monkey Man!

**Eroticus:** He's under the weather. (SOTO VOCE) Kaleph! Show time. (TO AUDIENCE) Wait 'til you see this guy on the rock; The human barnacle!

**Erecticus:** (GROANS)

**Eroticus:**A touch of food poisoning! Show time! Wait 'til you see this guy; The human fly!

**Erecticus:** (GROANS)

**Eroticus:** Come on Kaleph! Show time! Just wait! The human gecko!

**Erecticus:** (GROANS)

**Eroticus:** Kaleph! Show time! Like a human spider!

**Erecticus:** (GROANS)

**Testosterone:** I'll hold the fort. What's written on the top of a Trojan ladder? Stop! Socrates, here's one for you: How do you keep an idiot in suspense?

**Socrates:** How?

**Testosterone:** I'll tell you later! (TO AUDIENCE): Did you hear the one about Heroteus and the way a man is remembered? Heroteus was lying...

**Socrates:** (INTERRUPTING) We want Kaleph!

**Testosterone:** This is Kaleph!

**Socrates:** Prove it.

**Testosterone:** How?

**Socrates:** Let's see him climb it. Ten to one he can't.

**Testosterone:** He's sick.

**Socrates:** So what? I've got a thousand zorbas to say he can't.

**Testosterone:** Would anyone like to try it while we wait? I have a thousand zorbas for anyone who reaches the top! This is not a bet ladies and gentrification, it's a gift! Here it is: get to the top and you get the lot!

AUDIENCE MEMBERS COME ONSTAGE AND TRY TO CLIMB THE PILLAR FOR AS LONG AS IT IS ENTERTAINING. THE PILLAR IS BUILT SO IT BECOMES PROGRESSIVELY MORE DIFFICULT AND SO IT LOOKS AS IF IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO MAKE IT TO THE TOP, BUT IT IS UNCLIMBABLE. AFTER AUDIENCE IS ALL SEATED AGAIN:

**Testosterone:** Who's placing a bet then? Kaleph can or Kaleph can't! We're paying ten to one! Watch him fall and win it all!!

**Kaleph:** (CALLS OUT FROM THE BACK OF AUDIENCE): I'll try it!

**Testosterone:** OK Sir, step right up. Give it a try, touch the sky.

KALEPH IS WEARING A LONG ROBE AND HOOD, HIS FACE AND HAIR ARE HIDDEN. HE HAS A 'HOOK' FIXED TO THE PALM OF EACH HAND. IT IS ATTACHED TO A WRIST LOOP, SAME AS THE LEASH ON AN ICE TOOL. THE LOOPS AND HOOKS ARE SECURED TO SIT OUT FROM THE CENTER OF HIS PALM WITH SPORTS TAPE. THE 'HOOKS' STICK OUT ABOUT 1" AND ARE MADE FROM STEEL ROD. THEY CAN BE SLIPPED INTO THE INWARD SLOPING HOLES THAT HAVE BEEN DRILLED IN THE PILLAR. THE HOOKS, LOOPS ETC. ARE HIDDEN BY HIS SLEEVES AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE. THEY ALLOW HIM TO CLIMB THE PILLAR WITH THE ILLUSION THAT HE IS

MAGICALLY ADHERING TO THE SURFACE WITH HIS FINGERTIPS. HE WALKS ONSTAGE WITH A LIMP AND STARTS EXPLORING THE ROCK FOR HOLDS.

**Testosterone:** In town for the festival Sir?

**Kaleph:** MUTTERS TO HIMSELF.

**Testosterone:** Visiting from out of town Sir?

KALEPH SLOTS HIS HOOKS INTO THE HOLES IN READINESS.

**Testosterone:** Let's hope he's better at climbing than talking! It's all yours sir. Take it away and give it hell! In town to celebrate Diana Sir?

**Kaleph:** No, I'm in town to mourn my son...

KALEPH MAKES THE FIRST MOVES AND HUMS THE BOULDERER'S LAMENT

...and tonight I'll stand in the olive grove and weep into the dirt that separates his world from mine.

KALEPH MAKES ANOTHER MOVE THEN STOPS, MOTIONLESS.

Under the second-hand light of the sun I'll raise my face to the sky and howl like a wolf at the unbearable beauty and loneliness of this God forsaken world.

LOOKS DOWN WITH UTTER CONTEMPT AT TESTOSTERONE.

Diana means dick to me.

**Testosterone:** Did you say to mourn your son?

**Kaleph:** Yes, to mourn my son! You can fuck Diana seven ways to Sunday. (HE THROWS OFF THE HOOD, REVEALING HIS WILD, FLAMING RED HAIR THEN SCREAMS AT THE TOP OF HIS VOICE): Benzene!

**ERECTICUS:** (SITS UP IN HIS STRETCHER AND REVEALS HIS RED HAIR. HE LOOKS AS SIMILAR TO KALEPH POSSIBLE. HE SILENTLY STANDS UP BESIDE THE STRETCHER, HIS JAW OPEN WIDE.)

**Kaleph:** (KALEPH STUDIOUSLY MAKES ANOTHER MOVE BEFORE LOOKING DOWN TO CONTINUE BERATING TESTOSTERONE).

Dull as dust and thick as a battering ram. Do you even know what grief is? The years do nothing to lessen it; it mounts up like sand in the desert. (HE NOTICES ERECTICUS) Who the fuck are you?

ERECTICUS STANDS THERE, TOTALLY SPEECHLESS

**Eroticus:** This is Erecticus. Champion gymnast of Greece!

**Kaleph:** “Champion gymnast of Greece is it”? Erecticus is it? Benzene had more muscles in his dick than you have in your entire body! (SCREAMS) Benzene!  
(TALKING REGULAR VOICE AGAIN) Dead at the age of ten. My son! (SLIPS AND SAVES HIMSELF) Gravity is nothing but a sexpot with a bad temper.

KALEPH CLIMBS THE FINAL MOVE TO THE TOP AND SITS FACING THE AUDIENCE.

From the moment I saw him, I lost all hope of grandchildren. Very few women want to fuck a chimp.

(LOOKS AT EROTICUS) Even you can understand that.

(TO AUDIENCE) As a chimp he was cute, but as a child? He was the ugliest thing you ever saw. We were doomed but loved him nonetheless, the truth is I loved him more; we’d boulder together and every time he breathed life into a new problem I felt like an immortal grandchild had been born! It sounds ridiculous but at least it’s the truth...

It seems like only yesterday; I was captured and taken to Rome and put to work shoveling shit in the zoo; not bad for a slave; better than being a gladiator, and when the gorilla died they promoted me to impersonating him until they could get another one. They had him skinned and I was sewn inside his hide and all day long I would be Kaleph the King of the Jungle! The years went by, but no replacement was found. I’d swing from the topmost branches of the trees, hanging on with one hand and beating my chest with the other. That’s how I spent my days: I’d do complete revolutions on one arm, spinning faster and faster and then letting go and doing somersaults as I flew in a great arc from one branch to another, changing arms in midair. “More!” the kids would shout, “Higher!” they’d scream. “Faster!” they’d demand. “Why not” I’d say to myself– “it’s better than shoveling shit” – but one day I lost my concentration and flew into the lion’s den.

I lay there as the meanest looking lion headed straight for me. I tried to get up and run; I nearly blacked out from the pain - my leg was broken. The lion kept coming and I tried to rip off the gorilla suit and started screaming for help: “Help me” I cried. “I’m a man. I’m not a gorilla; please help me!” I shit myself with fear as the lion knocked me over and pinned me down. “Shut up” it whispered; “do you want us all to get the sack?”

KALEPH STANDS UP AND TAKES IN THE VIEW.

(PAUSE. REFLECTIVELY) When my leg healed and I escaped back to the Sudden Isle, so strong from playing the gorilla that becoming a Rock God seemed possible, and after a few years of training I took my first title. Life was good, I was in love with Maxine the bouldering machine and soon she was pregnant, but then disaster struck.

You see, even before he was born, Benzene was already a climber, and strong as a , even inside the womb; No matter how hard Francine pushed down, he pulled up. The struggle continued for days; my dear wife determined to bring the child into this world, and my dear son equally determined to stay out of it. Finally, just before dawn on the fourth day she died.

Her body grew cold in the darkness but then, just as the blood red sun began lifting itself from the greedy black body of sea the boy finally came into the world; blind, terrified and gibbering, rappelling headfirst down his own umbilical cord, completely covered, nose to toes, in thick white hair.

We'd brought it on ourselves; mushrooms, barnacles, beef and beer. Beer, barnacles, beef and mushrooms, and chin-ups and pushups and push-ups and chin-ups, dawn 'til dusk, seven days a week. Fucking and training, climbing and sleeping; it's all we did. Fuck and train, fuck and train.

The Sodden Isle was stale and wet; When the Syrian Circus came to town it was like the sun breaking through. The Elephant woman was crazy about me and every monkey in the circus was wild about Benzene – what did we have to lose? We said goodbye to the Stonehenge mafia and hit the road; life was sweet again - but then – Athens... (FALLS INTO SILENCE, THEN SUDDENLY ERUPTS INTO HYSTERICS AGAIN) They murdered him! They smashed my arms! They buried him like you'd bury a dog, in the olive grove, by the wall, in the common dirt. No one was brought to justice. Benzene, my son!

SHORT BLACKOUT.

A LIFE-SIZED WHITE TOY CHIMPANZEE IS PASSED UP TO KALEPH. (A POLE WILL BE USEFUL TO HELP ACCOMPLISH THIS QUICKLY AND QUIETLY.) KALEPH SITS THE CHIMP ON TOP OF THE PILLAR, FACING THE AUDIENCE, AND THEN HE LOWERS HIMSELF DOWN THE BACK OF THE PILLAR WITH A ROPE WHICH WAS HIDDEN ON THE TOP OF THE PILLAR. WHEN HE GETS DOWN THE VOICE OF A YOUNG BOY IS HEARD, CALLING OUT, WITH GREAT LOSS AND LONGING: Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!

THE STAGE LIGHTS COME BACK UP TO REVEAL A TABLEAU OF THE ENTIRE CAST STANDING AROUND THE PILLAR AND GAZING UP AT THE CHIMPANZEE. EACH MAN IS HOLDING A BANANA TO HIS MOUTH, AS IF HE IS JUST ABOUT TO TAKE A BITE.

**The End**