

# Future Chock

by Mel Banks



I woke late to a throbbing headache. The Sierra sky was already bright through a haze of smoke and suspended dust, and I had to squint. I sat up and looked around groggily, rubbing little chunks of yellow crust out of the corners of my eyes. The Pits

was like a battlefield. Zonked bodies lay everywhere in the dirt, some in sleeping bags, others sprawled grotesquely where they'd passed out. Scattered wine bottles and beer cans dully reflected the embers of dying, dismally smoking bonfires. A ragged dog prowled listlessly, sniffing at backpacks and dirty pots, tail between its legs. Here and there a dusty, beat-up tent, symbol of affluence in the Pits, sagged from limp guylines. I staggered to my feet, brushed the sand off my clothes and shouldered my tattered rucksack.

The Yosemite Pits. One thing about the Valley, you could always count on a place to bag down. If, that is, you weren't too choosy about your neighbors. The Pits had been the Park Service's final answer to people pollution — a vast, bulldozed tract, lifeless and barren, with free and unlimited camping. Created under the NPS Revision Act of 1996, it had become the park's overflow dumping ground for all the punks and dopies from the cities, the outlaw bikers, the bums and winos. Not to mention the down and out climbers like myself, who, lacking tourist credentials, were not allowed in the other campgrounds. Not that I could have afforded it, anyway.

I plodded out across the flat expanse of the Pits toward a distant line of pines, kicking up dust as I wove my way around snoring bodies, toppled motorcycles, a shattered conga drum, a couple of empty half-kegs. The smell of vomit and urine was overpowering as the sun began to bake the odors out of the dry, sandy dirt. At the end of the season, I knew, big, yellow government dozers would come through, scrape the surface clean and then spread fresh fill dirt over it all. Good as new.

The dog that I'd seen prowling snarled at me as I passed and snapped weakly at my leg. I kicked it aside and walked on, the pine woods growing larger, looming ahead of me like a spiritual oasis. What the hell, I was getting out, going home. I'd had all I could take for a while.

Out at the loop road I hitched a ride with a tourist heading into the Lodge complex. Touries don't usually pick up the non-tour climbers, but this one had a "Climbers Do It In Slings" bumper sticker on his truck camper and sported a chrome plated bolt hanger for a key ring. He took me all the way to Inner Fringe Parking, activating

the automatic gatepost with his plastic Golden Tourcard. I got out and nodded thanks. The tourie stepped over into a shuttlebus line, Tourcard clutched in his hand. I started hiking the remaining half mile to the Lodge.

The Yosemite Lodge was a marvel that never failed to impress me. Approaching along the asphalt walkway from the parking lot, I could see several of the huge hotel turrets in the distance, rising above the treetops like outsized silos. The turrets were all capped by observation domes that glittered on their tops like giant soap bubbles. You could, it was said, sit in a restaurant under one of those airy bubbles at night, 200 feet off the deck, and nibble prime filet while gazing out at a spectacular 360 degree view of the moonlit Valley. Giddy catwalks connected the hotel turrets with each other and with other taller, more slender lookout spires, forming an intricate structure of great strength and beauty. The entire complex gleamed dully white in the brilliant California sun. It was Plastic Oz, the Magic Kingdom and the Pearly Gates.

I slunk through an entry arcade into the spacious courtyard in the center of the complex. Swarms of tourists with cameras dangling and screaming children in tow bustled everywhere. Lines of people in shiny, bright-colored outfits sprouted out of buildings into the courtyard, waiting patiently to be seated in restaurants or be admitted to the shops. A bevy of pre-teen girls, wearing green vinyl Junior Wilderness Scout uniforms, saw me enter and giggled.

Glancing around self-consciously, I spotted Yale Thermit in the cafeteria queue about 75th from the door, next to a huge potted fern. Yale and I'd had some good times back when we were both beginners, sharing a cookpot in the Pits and thrashing up the 5.10 training solos. But then Yale had made it, in a minor way at least, by kissing ass and doing tawdry little climbs for the amusement of certain wealthy socialites with odd tendencies. Not that I could really blame him. Here he was in the Lodge cafeteria line, Tourcard tucked snugly in the hip pocket of his fashionable, nylon taffeta climber's whites, while I was still groveling in the Pits. I walked over to him in the line, ignoring the politely disgusted glances from the people around him.

"Yale," I said.

"Hey, old buddy," he said coolly, extending a manicured hand. "What brings you here? still sleeping in the good old Pits, I see."

I glanced down at my disheveled clothes. "Yeah," I admitted. "the good old Pits. Well, you know how it is..." I shrugged. "Man, you should have been there last night, though. The Lost Arrows came in and threw a really wild one, must have been 40 bikes." I winked knowingly. "You remember what their chickies are like, eh?" I added, nudging him in the side with my elbow. Actually, I had washed down a couple of phenobarbs with some Koolaid and grain and zonked out. I hated the Pits and everyone in them. "But anyway," I continued, "I'm clearing out. Know any rides back to the Coast?"

Yale looked at me in amazement. "You're leaving?" he asked incredulously. "You can't be serious, not when everyone else is just getting here. Don't you even know who's here?"

Shamefully I wagged my head "no."

"Harold DeMegalo is who, that's all." He sounded almost pitying. "Man, for somebody who's supposedly trying to make it, you sure don't seem to know what's happening. I'm auditioning, myself."

DeMegalo. That was big news, indeed. Harold DeMegalo was the biggest producer of climbing adventure tapes in the country. His very first production, "Duel on the Rock," had sold over a million video cassettes and had made overnight stars of both featured soloists. Low on art, maybe, but high on bucks. Someone like DeMegalo could very well be my ticket out of the Pits, if I could only somehow get to him.

"You say you're auditioning?" I said to Yale. "How'd you swing that? Where's he staying?"

"He's staying right here at the Lodge, of course, *but forget it*, old Pits chum." He smiled smugly, and I hated him. "You'll just have to get out on the rock like everyone else and hope you get noticed."

I was about to press him for more, but a plastic-booted Cruddy Co. guard had spotted me and was bearing down fast. I bid goodbye to Yale, asked him to put in a good word for me with DeMegalo, and hurried over to a nearby public vending plaza. Non-tourists were allowed in the Lodge complex only if engaged in a legitimate business transaction.

I flopped my rucksack down, pulled a couple of rumbled twos from the the flap pouch and ran them through the changer for a handful of aluminum Cruddycoins. The guard strode up to the edge of the plaza, folded a pair of thick arms across his brown naugahyde tunic and glared. I fed the tokens rapidly into an autofeeder and punched in my order. A preheated can of chili clunked out of the slot. I popped the lid off and began eating with the little white spoon that had dropped out with it. The guard sauntered up to me and peered in my face as I chewed. He did not look friendly.

"What do you think you're doing here, toad?" he snarled. His right hand went instinctively to the shiny black butt of the holstered pelpistol at his waist.

Fear tweaked at my guts. Although I knew that by federal ruling the concessionaire guards could use only non-lethal rubber pels in their automatic weapons, the Cruddy Co. had managed to get permission for a particularly painful type of rapidfire cartridge on account of the climbers, who were notoriously pain resistant. I did not care to give the guard an excuse to use it.

I smiled blandly. "Officer," I said politely, "I'm sure you'll find me to be in full compliance with NPS Reg 175, Section 3c as revised 1996, which allows that 'persons with non-tourist status shall have full use of all open-air facilities within concessionaire operated compounds, so long as said non-tourist persons...'"

"Yeah, yeah," the guard interrupted, "...and long as said non-tour scum is engaged in a legitimate activity and blah, blah, blah." He misquoted the reg but he had the general idea. I held up my chili can and spoon and rolled my eyes up at the open sky above the courtyard to emphasize my point. The Tourist-Cruddy Co. Establishment despised us non-tours, but that didn't stop them from greedily gobbling up our small bills.

"You wise-ass non-tourist punks make me sick!" the guard went on, working himself up. "Why don't you shave your chests and wear plastic clothes like everybody else?" He gestured to my filthy, patched cotton whites. "Those pants look like you barfed on them." I had, in fact, three days before. "Just finish that grot you're eating and clear out. Stinking Pits zombie."

I needed time to think. Somehow I had to get to DeMegalo. I ate slowly, chewing each mouthful of the synthetic orange slop for as long as I could hold it in my mouth without gagging. The guard's eyes followed my hand from can to mouth and back with a look of utter revulsion. He was losing patience.

A bold idea occurred to me. It was still early in the day. If DeMegalo was indeed staying at the Lodge, he was very likely there right that minute, perhaps in the New Seasons finishing up a leisurely breakfast with his entourage, or high above in one of the turret bubbles lingering over imported champagne and croissants. The central courtyard where I stood was visible from just about anywhere in the Lodge complex, so chances were that any commotion in the courtyard would come to DeMegalo's attention, wherever he was. And being human, he would look. No one, not even Harold DeMegalo, could resist a riot.

I glanced up at the imposing wall rising behind the autofeeder machine next to me. The vending plaza was tucked against the base of one of the great hotel turrets. The vast sweep of the turret's cylindrical flank soared smoothly 22 stories above the courtyard. This particular turret, I knew, was capped by the bubble dome of the swank Winnebago Room, one of the lushest and most exclusive eateries in the Valley.

Briefly I studied the turret's structure. It was like a towering stack of monster checkers, each checker representing one story. At the junction of each story a small lip, formed by the floor joint, ran around the circumference of the tower. A line of tall, narrow slit windows, probably delineating an emergency stairwell, ran straight up the turret through rows of normal sized picture windows. I would go, I decided, right up that line of slit windows. It was dead vertical and smooth, though, and it would be long, hard and chancy. I might slip out of one of those slit windows 200 feet up and tomato back to the pebbly concrete at the feet of the guard. On the other hand, if I made it to the top, DeMegalo might see me, offer me a contract, and I'd be fated to glory. In between...well, I'd never set foot in the Valley again, that much was certain.

I made up my mind. Looking directly at the guard, I said in a loud, arrogant voice, "You know, I'm get-

ting sick and tired of you standing there staring at me like that." His heavy features twitched with a mixture of puzzlement and alarm. "It doesn't help my digestion much to have an ape slobbering at me while I eat. Didn't they feed you yet?" I sneered. "Here, eat this." I up-ended the chili can and shook it. The contents splattered onto the pavement and over the guard's immaculate, buffed boots.

There was a stunned moment of shock as the guard stood slack-jawed taking this in. The thousand faces of the milling crowd turned toward us. I glimpsed Yale Thermit's smug face contorted in amazement and disbelief. He was probably mortified that he'd been seen talking to me. I felt that exhilarating rush of irrevocability that comes when you finally decide to go for it.

"Why, you lousy stinking chalkhead!" the guard screamed. He lunged for me with outstretched hands. I was ready. I whirled deftly, reached high and placed a hand on top of the bulky auto-feeder and executed a graceful one-armed mantle to a standing position on top. The guard groped wildly for my foot. I lunged off the top of the machine for the turret's nearest slit window, which was about 10 feet to the side and a little above my head. I caught the sill with one hand and swung crazily. For a horrible moment I thought I was going to lose it and drop back down to the enraged guard, but the slippery grip held. I wished I had my chalk bag.

The guard was unsnapping his chunky pelpistol from its holster, cursing steadily. I relaxed my mind, focused all my energies on the immediate climbing problem and started up. The guard had his gun out and was aiming it directly at my head. I mantled up into the narrow window slot, squirmed an arm and shoulder into it and locked myself in. The guard fired a long, full-auto burst. He was a good shot. I winced in agony as the barrage of pels slammed into my ear and cheek, knocking my head sideways. Blood trickled down my neck from painful welts. I thrutched frantically up the slot until I could reach the small lip running along the outside of the floor joint. Getting both hands on it, I pulled up hard, keeping a heeltoe in the window slot below, and lunged for the sill of the next window. I made it, completing the first of the repetitive cycle of moves that would take me to

the top. If, that is, my strength held.

The guard was now directly below me firing straight up. Burst after burst zipped up my legs and into my crotch, many of the pels burning directly up inside my pant legs. My lower body was seared with pain. I moved up another story. More guards were converging below, loping toward the base of the turret shouting and madly waving pel pistols. One was lugging a bulky automatic pel rifle on a tripod.

The crowd was in an uproar, just as I'd hoped. Horrified tourists ran back and forth below like stampeding rabbits, screaming and gawking up at me. I only hoped DeMegalo was seeing this.

I slipped into the strenuous rhythm of the climb, moving up floor by floor through the biting hail of pels. Reaching the eighth floor, I cleared the tops of the surrounding buildings and the Valley opened up around me. The majestic Upper Yosemite Falls came into view, the stark gray finger of the Lost Arrow to its right.

Between them was the huge, neon "CLIMB" sign, inviting the tourists to let themselves be led up the cliffs by smiling, nylon-clad Cruddy Co.

guides. It blinked dully pink against the gray wall, urging me upward.

By the 19th floor I began to have serious misgivings. My arms ached, my head pounded and my hands were greased. My pants, shredded by continual pel blasts, flapped loosely around my bloody, lacerated legs. Red smears marked the trail of my ascent up the clean white surface of the tower. My legs began to shake, and visions of myself plunging helplessly downward into the frenzied pack of guards floated through my fatigued brain.

Suddenly an awed murmur arose from the crowd and the pel guns went strangely silent. The crowd, I saw, was staring not at me but at a point beyond, higher up the turret. I looked up. A figure had appeared on one of the catwalks connected to the top of my turret. It was the figure of a large man, imposing and resplendent in fashionable red Gortex Lederhosen and tanned, hairless chest. A seductive girl in tight halter and ski-tight slacks clung to his shoulder, one hand toying suggestively with his suspender.

DeMegalo! I would recognize him anywhere. His picture had certainly appeared in *Rock Tripe* often enough. Harold DeMegalo leaned over the rail-

ing of the catwalk and surveyed the scene below him with cool, regal amusement. The girl gaped down wide-eyed, her bosoms hanging over the rail like two grapefruits in a belay seat. I hung there for a micro-eternity staring up at them. Finally DeMegalo's eyes met mine and he broke into wolfish grin. 'Damn good show, kid,' he said. "I liked it. I admire guts. Now get your ass up here and join me in the Winnebago Room."

With that he turned from the railing and swept into the turret, the girl trailing behind clinging to a suspender. I was left stunned. I could scarcely believe what had happened, even though it had been my plan all along. Tears welled out and mixed with the sweat that was already stinging my eyes.

I recovered from my shock and started moving up again. Fresh, bright energy surged through me, making the moves seem effortless as I swarmed smoothly up the remaining floors to the top. DeMegalo had noticed me, and I was on my way. Goodbye Pits. Hello Winnebago Room. By God, I'd made it!

# GALIBIER

because you climb on your feet

the SUPER GUIDE features:

highest grade, single piece, double tanned, full grain leather upper. A full length, fluted, spoon-shaped, tempered steel shank. An integral folding bellows tongue with a separate, padded inner tongue. Hand-stitched, narrow Norwegian welt. Patented Galibier Makalu sole, lace grippers and much more. In and out of crampons, on or off the rock, the SUPER GUIDE allows you to front-point or edge and climb with precision and comfort all day or all week. The SUPER GUIDE will provide seasons of sure-footed access to the alpine world.

**R** for information and the address of your nearest dealer write to:

## ROBBINS

MOUNTAIN PARAPHERNALIA  
BOX 4536 MODESTO CA 95352

### SUPER GUIDE

