

JOBS THAT CAN KILL YOU!

The window cleaner

Falling off really tall things is an occupational hazard for Max Lorimer

MAX'S job isn't the safest around. "If I'm knocked unconscious and left hanging in my harness for any longer than four minutes, the harness will cut off circulation at the femoral artery and I will die very quickly," he explains.

See, Max isn't just any window cleaner. The 23-year-old is a "rope access specialist", which means, among other things, that he cleans windows – really high-up ones. "I also do stand-by rescue jobs, communication rigging and water-ingress building maintenance," he adds.

Remember the dudes who wrote "NO WAR" on the Sydney Opera House? Max was one of the crew called in to scrape it off.

"I've been doing this for four years. The training course is approximately three

days. We learn the theory of abseiling, vertical mobility, rope competence, buddy rescues, flying foxes ... To do this you have to be fearless. Fearless, switched on, agile – and have a lot of common sense. You are taking a risk because your life involves hanging off the side of a building.

"About a month ago I was doing a stand-by rescue over a 350m lift shaft at Tumut One power station in the Snowy Mountains. It's the biggest abseil in Australia. They were running an 11-kilovolt power cable down the stairwell next to the lift shaft. Twelve people have died in the shaft over the years. It was really dark – I couldn't see the top or the bottom. It was sweet."

Max has mates who work at supermarkets and servos, but he always knew that sort of gig wasn't for him. "I wrote in the Year 12 log book that I wanted to cap oil fires in Iraq. But it's a pretty hard industry to get into, so I do this instead," he says.

"It's an average of 3m per floor; 27 floors is the biggest building I've done window cleaning, so that's nearly 100m. If you fell off from there you'd be strawberry jam. Pretty much every time you pull your ropes up you run your fingers over them to check

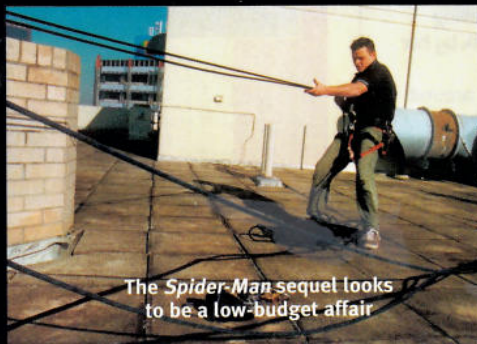
for nicks and inconsistencies. The riskiest part is being two metres from the edge of the building, connecting onto your ropes and climbing into your chair to get over there."

Max says he doesn't get paid enough for the risks he takes – mainly because other firms are taking bigger risks.

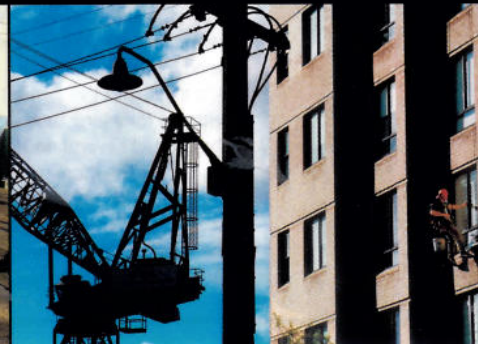
"There are a lot of companies out there, and they're undercutting everyone else. Safety is the number-one way they cut back.

"I've worked with people who don't wear helmets, barricades, chest harnesses ... A couple of years ago there was a guy who didn't tie a knot in the end of his rope and came off the end of it. He broke his ankles, his calves, thighs, hips ... Every time I go over, I take a self-rescue kit."

Ivan Smith



The Spider-Man sequel looks to be a low-budget affair



Max (left) does a little bit of "over" time

