

# From Academia To Zetamania

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When *WW* called Zetaman on Dec. 23, he was walking a mile to work through the snow, with [TriMet](#) buses paralyzed and his 1998 Ford minivan broken down at home.

Tough day for the local [superhero](#), who gained a measure of fame after going public this year to reveal his identity in a *WW* [cover story](#).

Illya King, 30, of [Beaverton](#) isn't blessed with superpowers. But patrolling Portland twice a month to help the homeless—and hyping his exploits [online](#)—he's part of a growing trend of [real-life superheroes](#) living out their comic-book fantasies on the street and on the Web.

Life since the *WW* cover story, Zetaman says, has been a “bizarre, bizarre ride.” He says the public rarely recognizes him in costume or out. But the coverage brought notoriety in the media—local television station [KATU](#) and even [CNN](#) picked up the story. That, in turn, brought strings of negative comments from anonymous writers online at [wweek.com](#) and elsewhere, calling Zetaman an “attention whore” and a “jackass.”

But Zetaman persevered, continuing to spend his nights in costume handing out food and clothing to the homeless. After headlining a fundraiser for the Portland Rescue Mission at Someday Lounge on April 9 with local folk bands, he followed up a couple weeks ago by raising \$1,000 in cash and toys for foster kids at a Dec. 13 benefit concert in Kirkland, Wash.

He's also ramped up his superhero outreach, heading to California and Washington to patrol with fellow superheroes.

His night in Anaheim on April 30 with costumed avenger [Ragensi](#), who dresses in a black ninja suit, was uneventful. That's surprising given Ragensi's more hardcore image and his previous violent run-in with a costumed villain, as reported in *WW*'s cover story.

“He, like, looks scary, but he's the biggest sweetheart,” Zetaman says.

His July 4 evening patrolling Seattle with [Black Knight](#) was also quiet. But even without action-packed adventure, Zetaman continued his efforts to unite his superhero friends under one banner.

There are two reasons. First is what Zetaman calls continued bad behavior by some other superheroes—including his archenemy, a New Jersey avenger named [Tothian](#), who has tangled with Zetaman in online chatrooms and still picks on other superheroes, Zetaman says.

Second is negative publicity from [Rolling Stone](#), which ran a Dec. 12 story on superheroes that profiled Florida hero [Master Legend](#) as a slob living in a run-down shack who uses his alter ego to escape reality.

Now Zetaman and others have vetted people they consider to be examples of true real-life superheroes from around the world. They're assembled in a new online collective Zetaman helped design at [therlsh.com](#).

“We’re trying to get more of a positive message out there that we’re not a bunch of drunks,” Zetaman says. “Or guys just living in our basement and stuff.” —*James Pitkin*