

Real-Life Superheroes Strive for the Greater Good

By [Joshua Philipp](#) On June 25, 2012 @ 2:43 am In [National News](#) | [1 Comment](#)



Dark Guardian, a Real-Life Superhero, patrols the streets of Brooklyn. (Courtesy of Dark Guardian)

Dark Guardian patrols the parks in Brooklyn after the sun sets. He targets drug dealers peddling their goods where kids play. His approach is simple: He finds people selling drugs and tells them to leave—usually along the lines of “I know what you’re doing here. Get out, or I’m calling the police.” And they often do, grumbling and cursing as they go.

Things don’t always go so smoothly though, and Dark Guardian knows the people he’s dealing with. Sometimes shouts turn to threats, and at those moments, courage becomes a necessity. As a martial arts instructor by day, he knows how to defend himself, but punches and kicks can do little against bullets and knives.

“I’ve dealt with a whole bunch out there,” Dark Guardian said, but to him it’s worth the risk. He remembers the impact comic books had when he was growing up, and wants

to pass the feeling on.

“I think it’s good for kids to look up and say, ‘This is someone who stands up for what is right. This is someone who helps others,’” he said.

Dark Guardian isn’t alone. There are hundreds of other Real-Life Superheroes across the country, although not all of them fight crime. Their roles range from bringing food, blankets, and clothing to homeless people; to visiting children’s hospitals so kids can meet a real superhero; to patrolling streets at night.

“I believe in the idea that every person has the potential to be Superman,” said Zetaman, a Real-Life Superhero who patrols in downtown Portland. “Despite any situation or financial woes, or anything else, it doesn’t exclude you from wanting to be a better person,” he said.

And he says that from his heart. As Zetaman admits, “I’m not exactly rich,” but he often buys food and supplies for homeless people. He and a team of other Real-Life Superheroes also held “Operation Treehouse” to buy toys for foster kids.

Zetaman is known for his blue costume—painted riot gear with a large white “Z” on the front. He goes out without a mask, which he believes makes his actions a bit easier for others to understand

Becoming Superman

Just like in the realm of fictional superheroes, Real-Life Superheroes are defined by their costumes. Dark Guardian is more discreet, wearing what looks like leather biker clothes—only with a bulletproof vest with stab plating underneath. Costumes typically have utility belts to top it off, often with first-aid kits and pepper spray.

Their costumes get mixed reactions. This ranges from news anchors giggling about the guy wearing tights and a cape, to homeless people who had a visiting superhero help them stay warm through the winter.

But the costumes are important to what they do.

“The persona that you present is a tool,” said Night Owl, who often patrols with Zetaman. Night Owl said that while you can still do respectable and heroic things wearing a tee shirt, when you put on a costume, “It’s to draw attention to your actions.”

“What we’re trying to accomplish, outside tangible results, is to create a larger shift in the mindset in not only America, but the world—toward taking up the mission and the cause of saying we are responsible for our home, where we live, and the people around us,” he said.

Night Owl is a trained EMT and works as a firefighter, and spent time in Iraq working as a firefighter contractor.

He said that being a Real-Life Superhero isn’t nearly as exciting as being overseas. “The truth is, it’s actually kind of boring,” he said, noting that it’s not very often someone witnesses a crime taking place. When he and his team go out, they often research ahead of time where there are homeless people or where citizen patrols are needed.

People often ask him why he doesn’t just join law enforcement, which makes him laugh, since he already works in the field. “This was a way to raise the bar,” he said, noting that “you don’t have to go out there and become a professional law enforcement officer to do something that is good for your community.”

Night Owl said that with Real-Life Superheroes as a whole, “At a deeper level, what rests behind their masks and bulletproof vests is a belief that people can become something more.”

Uniting the Superheroes



Life (right) and Cameraman, founders of Superhero Anonymous, hold a workshop for Real-Life Superheroes. (Courtesy of Superheroes Anonymous)

Bringing the community together is Life—the Real-Life Superhero equivalent of Nick Fury, head of the fictional superhero group, The Avengers. Life and his friend, Cameraman, founded Superheroes Anonymous in 2007. The nonprofit organization finds and unites Real-Life Superheroes around the world. The two joined the movement when they were film students making a film about Real-Life

Superheroes.

“What I saw was a bunch of great people who were very dispersed throughout America and the world. They never had one gathering or meeting to inspire or support one-another,” said Life, who often holds Real-Life Superhero workshops in Brooklyn.

He noted that Real-Life Superheroes usually only get recognized by the press and police as individuals, “and they would kind of write it off as ‘and here’s a guy who thinks he’s a superhero.’” They needed a face, and a way of showing there are many like them.

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Although it wasn’t his intention, Life has become the face of the movement—and he does this well. He’s one of the more dapper fellows of the bunch. He typically wears dress clothes with

a tie, vest, and fedora; and with a domino mask to top it off. His superhero name is based off his real name, Chaim, which is derived from “L’Chaim,” a Hebrew toast meaning “to life.”

Being a nonprofit enables the group to get donations when they go to help homeless people or raise money to donate toys to kids, and he notes, “People are actually recognizing Real-Life Superheroes as a movement.”

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