

veteran superhero of nine years' standing Dark Guardian—were America's most famous RLSHs. But these days the media don't really want to know them.

They put a bulletproof vest on me and the night's maneuvers begin. The plan is to confront the pot dealers in Washington Square Park, those men who sell to the students at the adjacent New York University.

We enter the park at 11:00 p.m. It is all very quick and efficient. A dealer is standing alone, looking incredibly startled and upset to see ten frightening men rushing toward him.

"Are you the police?" he says, in a small voice.

The superheroes surround him, shining torches in his face, screaming, "This is a drug-free park! A drug-free park! People, not drugs!"

They look like a pack of dogs chasing a fox. The dealer practically chokes with fright.

"You don't know anything about me," he shouts, running away onto the Manhattan streets.

Even though the operation seemed to me to unfold with a textbook precision, an embarrassed-looking Zero asks to speak to me quietly.

"It was a disorganized clusterfuck," he says, evidently furious with himself, like a virtuoso opera singer who does a flawless performance and then beats himself up. "Please don't write about how disorganized we were. If the dealers read it they'll think they can take us . . ."

My night with the NYI leaves a bad taste in my mouth. These men just seemed menacing, with no fun to them. I don't want my superheroes to be bullies. I want goofy charm. When Phoenix Jones walks down the street passersby point and laugh and gasp. Whereas all the NYI seem to get are anxious sideways glances. I agree with Zero: there's nothing superheroish about them at all.

Seattle. Saturday night. Phoenix Jones is in a bad way. He's still sick from the stabbing and the baseball bat incidents and has now developed a fever of 102.5.

"I found out this morning I have tetanus," he tells me.