

# Pilfering Quark: A Media Archaeology of Indie Queer Comics and Desktop Publishing

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## Abstract:

This paper considers the rise of the desktop computer and desktop publishing software and their influence on DIY culture and self-publishing in comics and zines from the early years of the AIDS epidemic. In 1987, Quark, a Denver-based software company, introduced QuarkXpress, one of the first readily available desktop publishing platforms for the consumer market. The launch of QuarkXpress, and parallel releases of early Adobe products including Photoshop (also developed in 1987), revolutionized design and publishing. This software, then distributed on easily-copied floppy disks, was quickly co-opted by the counterculture. Software pirated from day jobs, photocopiers, and other resources were used to produce zines and underground comics, enabling queer comics and zine makers to seize the means of production for materials that reflected their community’s needs and identity. This proto-punk ethos of theft of materials, technology, and methods of distribution has been part of queer community building since the Second World War when the *Friends of Dorothy* newsletter was mimeographed on the sly in Army communications offices. In this paper, I examine the zine *Diseased Pariah News* which featured Captain Condom, an HIV-positive safer-sex super hero, as a case study for how desktop publishing technology facilitated the democratization of comics production, and allowed creators from a marginalized and critically at risk community space for self-representation and empowerment.