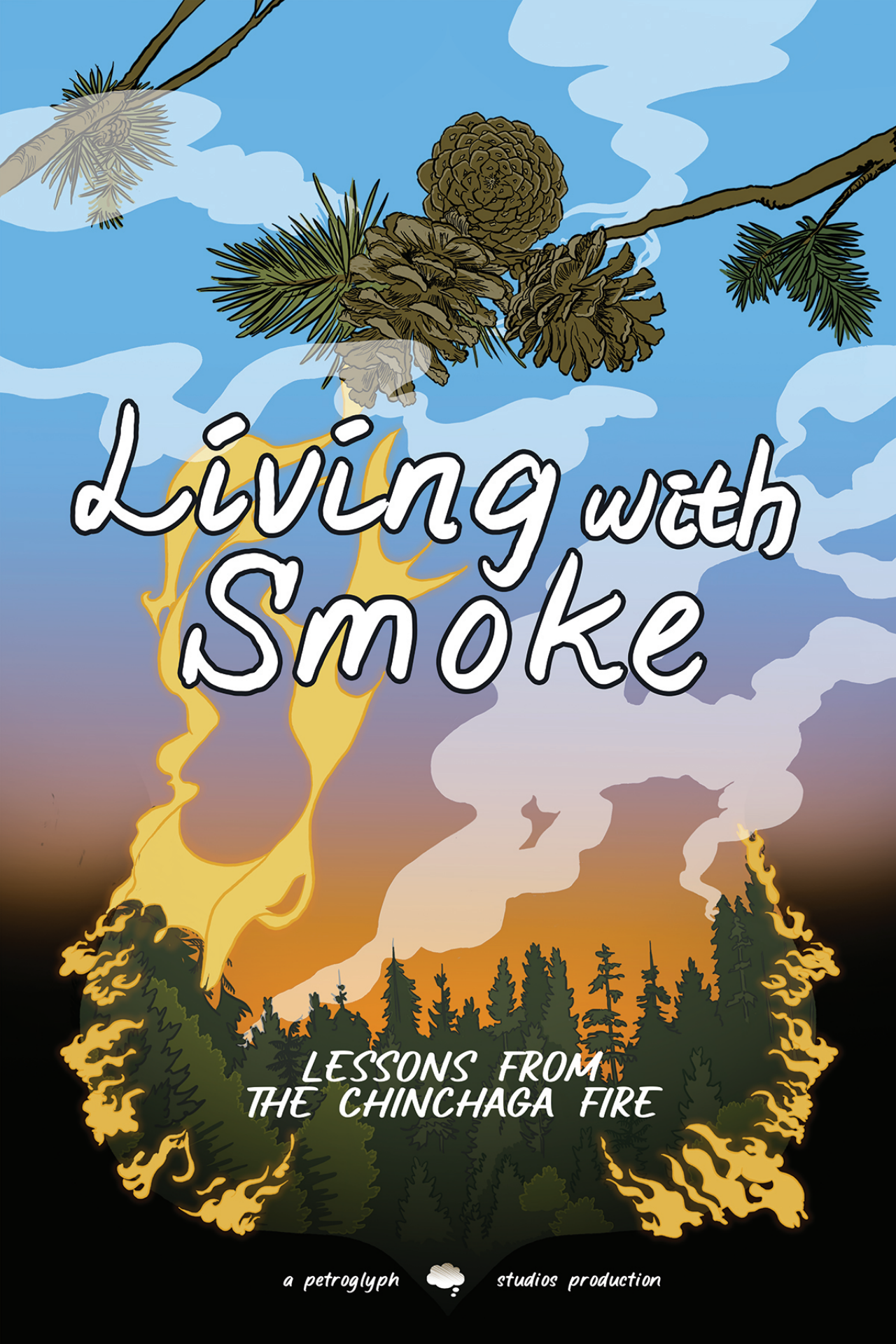
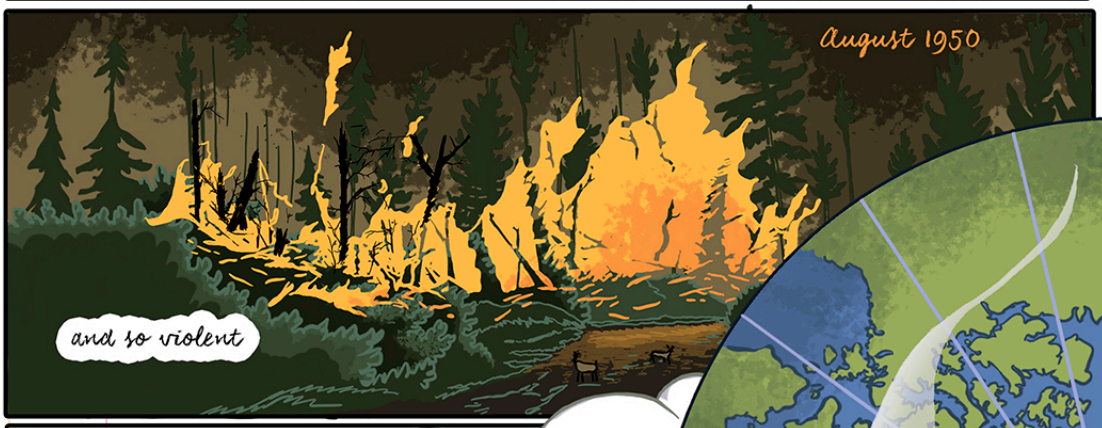
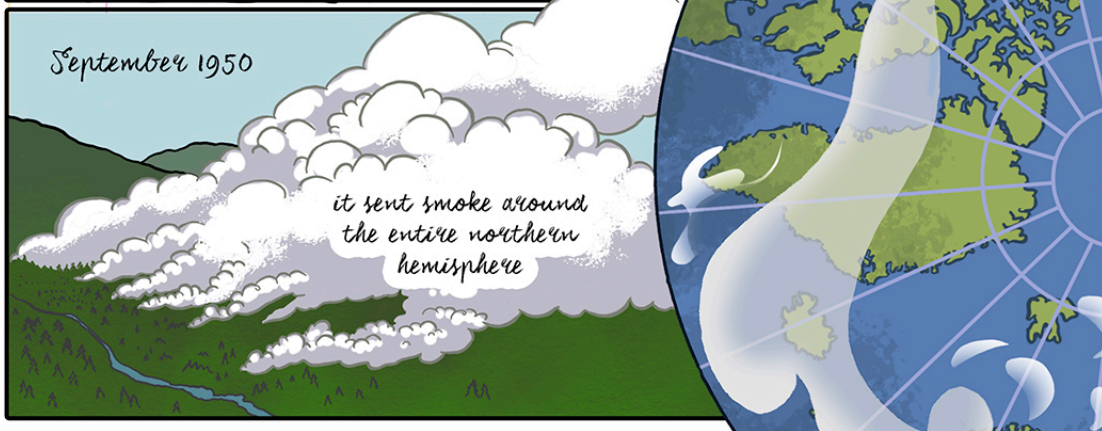

Living with Smoke
LESSONS FROM THE CHINCHAGA FIRE
a petroglyph studios production


This is the story of the Chinchaga firestorm
June 1950

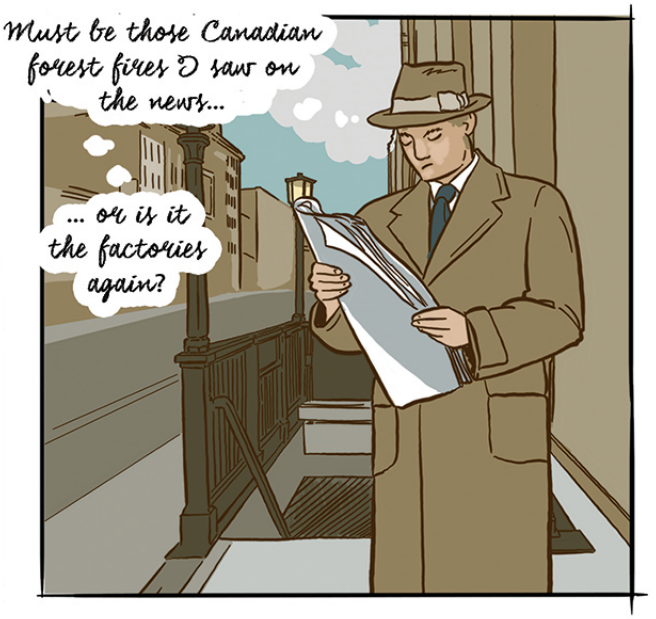

July 1950
a burn so big


August 1950
and so violent


September 1950
it sent smoke around the entire northern hemisphere

In the past, people used smoke to make sense of what was happening on the land — to read the environment.

But in 1950, the smoke plume was so big and travelled so far that no one knew what to make of it.




In Hamburg, Germany, people saw Chinchaga's smoke and thought:
It's pollution from West German coal mines...
In Stockholm, Sweden:
TUNNELBANA
It could be from dust from a volcanic eruption in Japan.
In Norway:
It's ice crystals in the atmosphere...
Eventually, the world learned the real reason for the strange smoke:
The 15 million Hectare wildfire burning in Northern Canada
In those days, fires like Chinchaga were rare.


These days we get smoke like Chinchaga every year.
The world is on fire!
Why? Climate change is making forests hotter and dryer
FIRE!
And for almost a century we have worked hard to eliminate smoke from our daily lives
In general breathing less smoke has made our communities healthier
But in the forest
total suppression of forest fires created a tinderbox
which interrupted the natural fire disturbance regimes and became more and more explosive


In the future we are going to have to live with smoke. The question is: How much?
Before suppression, we lived with a lot of small smokes
which were important for both ecological...
...and cultural health.
Many small smokes
created food for people and animals
...and kept invasive species in check.


It also meant less fuel for wildfires to burn.


I LOVE THE SMELL OF FALL!


There is a lesson from the past.
If we can learn to see small smokes as a sign of a healthy environment, we can make events like Chinchaga rare again.

The unprecedented scale and frequency of wildfire in the northern hemisphere has made smoke a seasonal occurrence in skies around the world. Over the last decade, ash regularly drifted from fires in Canada into northern Europe, altering forecasts on both continents, settling in Antarctic ice, and accelerating glacial melt rates. Although climate change has exacerbated smoke events in the twenty-first century, smoke seasons lie within a longer history of human-smoke interaction (wild and domestic) stretching back into deep time. This comic is part of a 2 year research project examining the history of transient wildfire smoke in the northern hemisphere as part of past and continuing environmental change.

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Find out more at

micajorgenson.com/forest-fire