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The Sign J. David Stevens

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J. David Stevens

THE SIGN

Wishing immortality, he built a sign bearing his name in the mountains of Montana. The sign stood over thirty feet tall, on four steel pylons sunk into concrete beds. The name itself was made from small pieces of colored glass which he spent several months soldering carefully into place.

His hopes for the sign were great. After he died, he imagined, an unsuspecting hunter would stumble across the sign and throw the switch that ignited the several rows of alternating, multi-colored lights. Stunned by its beauty, the hunter would report back to people in town, who would spread the word to family and friends. Soon the sign would become a tourist spot. New roads would lead to its feet—or, far into the future, people would approach by hovercraft and wonder at the name emblazoned in crystal and light. Stories would circulate. The sign would become myth. And after the first representatives of the Zarnax Empire landed on Earth, they would carry across the galaxy stories of a learned people who had seen the name of their god written in the hills and thus been saved.

But things didn't work out quite that way. After his death, the few hunters who happened by took pot shots at the sign, destroying whole sections of the intricately arranged glass. A new freeway drew travelers to the south, making area roads obsolete. And even the Zarnaxians never landed, deciding that Earth was worth neither friendship nor conquest.

Not that the sign went completely forgotten. Every now and then, on a crisp autumn night, a teenage boy would take his date into the hills to see the sign that his drunken uncle had once recalled on a hunting trip. He would throw the switch, and the rows of light would shine like a beacon, reflecting off the piecemeal shards of glass. There the boy and girl would share their first kiss, or something else. And eventually they would marry and move east to cities like Grand Forks or St. Paul, west to Boise or Seattle.

And years later, when people would ask how they came to choose one another, he would recall a drunken uncle who told legends about signs in the hills. And she would remember mesmerizing rows of splendid light, spreading beyond the mountains, beyond all spans of time

and distance. The light, they agreed, symbolized their love—a jagged ember lodged intractably in their hearts, a surrender written in color for all eternity.