THE LOCKER

Eddie Davis is a Fort Walton Beach, Florida native who began airbrushing professionally in the late 1980's. Self-taught, but mentored under Don Ashwood and Terry Hill, Davis began painting T-shirts professionally during the summer of 1989. Three seasons later, he travelled to England and worked with Bert Geurts and Weil Ritterbeeks for three years painting large scale carnival attractions in Heinsberg, Germany, Holland, Belgium, and Switzerland.

T-SHIRT TACTICS

By Eddie Davis

"Growing up in the 1970's and 1980's, my main influences came from *Heavy Metal*, *Creepy*, *Eerie*, and *Thrasher* Skateboarding magazines, and *The Savage Sword of Conan* art. There was such a wealth of amazing work being done at that time in adult illustrated fantasy magazines that I ignored most comics. My sense of proportion and dynamic lighting came from trying to emulate great artists such as Richard Corben, Bernie Wrightson, Tim Vigil, and Pushead. I always admired how they could use dark subject matter to convey emotion and a sense of presence and tension. For me the most profound and fun part of the whole artistic process is when you get to that place where the painting tells you what it wants, and you're just adding color and keeping the gun moving."

Currently, Eddie paints at Airbrush Headquarters in Destin, Florida, and lives in nearby Shalimar with his wife and two children.
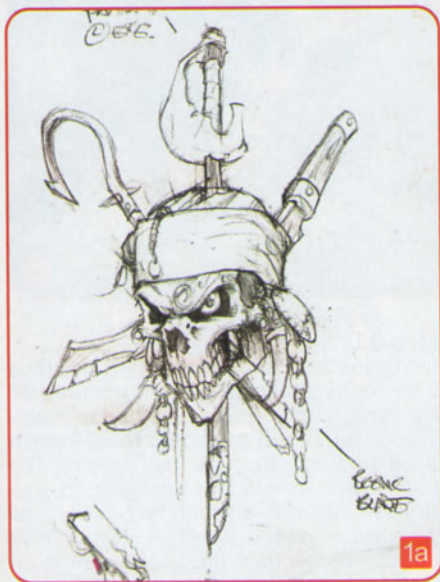
Preparation

I started with a pencil sketch that originally began as a doodle, and refined it just enough to like the overall look and be projectable on my opaque projector. I had an idea of where I wanted to end up with this painting; being underwater and having a dynamic light source. So, where do you get light at 10,000 feet? I did a bit of research and came up with a composite drawing of three different types of fish that inhabit the bathypelagic zone (depths to 13,000 feet.) Basically, I made up this fish using the head of a viperfish, or Sloan's viperfish, the thoracic lighting of a lantern-fish, and the body of a deep-sea dragon-fish.

Step 2

After stretching the T-shirt onto the board, I sprayed the shirt liberally with Wicked Extender from top to bottom. I let this air-dry for about 5 to 10 minutes and then I heat-pressed it in a HIX premiere N840 heat press, section by section. Heat-setting flattens any fuzz the T-shirt may have and provides a nice surface for drawing on and painting. For me, there's nothing more frustrating than drawing while projecting and snagging the shirt. I used a Sharpie marker to draw the image onto the T-shirt, and while this might seem like a caveman approach, it's a non-issue because I knew I'd use a lot of Wicked Black to model and establish texture. You won't even see it at completion.

Step 3

Using Wicked Black reduced 3:1 (three parts Wicked Black to one part Wicked Reducer,) for super-smooth performance, an Iwata Eclipse with an HP-C Fluid Nozzle and Fluid Needle—operating at 60 PSI—and a freehand shield, I began around the cheekbone and established how the bone will look, trying to get a good growth-plate texture. I used the freehand shield liberally around the edges and to define depth in concert with the freehand work.

Step 4

At this point I'm happy with the detail in the jewelry and other textures and began airbrushing some shadows. Because I rely heavily on imagination, I do bend some rules about reflectivity and how light interacts with certain surfaces. The blade is an approximation of a Damascus Blade and the jewelry is going to reflect a lot of ambient light. Because of the amount of light I'm going to use in concert with the details of this piece, I started dark and built my white to establish how the light hits the skull and other elements. This is where the Wicked White comes in.

Step 5

Using straight Wicked White and a blow-dryer, I elected to start at the nose because of its closeness to the light source of the Viperfish. At this point I can really define bright and dark areas and compliment the structure I laid out with the Wicked Black. In addition, Wicked White provides an excellent base on which I can lay down vibrant color later. Working from the center outward, always mindful of my light-source, I brought everything up to value and added detail as needed. The detail really shows here, and by having a good foundation, the Wicked White really shines.

Step 6

Switching to Wicked Pthalo Green, I began dusting color in the darker, more shadowed sections to tint the affected area. Then, I dusted the more lighted areas with Createx Fluorescent Green. These two colors on top of the Wicked White really have a nice sinister glow, which is what I wanted since the setting for this painting is deep in the ocean.

Step 7

Using Wicked Laguna Blue, I dusted over the greens where needed to get a nice teal patina. Here is where I started to think about the warmer colors that I'll use. With Wicked Violet, I started to build the bandana and by gradually building up color I can get a nice graduation of light and shadow. Using Violet and Laguna Blue I shaped and shadowed the eye and set values to give it a wet look. Wicked Red and Orange defined the eye color, and will also be used later as ambient light all over this piece.

Step 8

Continuing with the Wicked Orange I added tone to areas that will reflect that color, and I made the transition to darker color areas with Wicked Red.

Step 9

Wicked Orange was used to enhance and shape the areas that will pick up light under the nose and cheek. I used a blow dryer throughout for quick drying and

to arrive at a nice vibrant orange on the blue-green areas. When satisfied with the orange glow, I used Wicked White again to define the high areas that will pick up and reflect Wicked Golden Yellow in the next step.

Step 10

Here, I strove to really get a hot glow from the Wicked Golden Yellow by going slow and achieving a good build. Because of the intensity of the light coming from the Viperfish, I really slowed down here to get it just right.

Step 11

Using the method I mentioned in steps 8 through 10, I colored the remainder of the foreground subject trying to maintain continuity in my color triad—which is carried out through the jewelry, the sword handle, and the background jewelry—which will ultimately be part of the glow from the viperfish. Notice that I used orange over the blue-green from Step 6 to really give it an unearthly look.

However, be careful that you slow down here because blue and orange can turn brown. I can get away with this because I blew-dried the orange as I painted it on the shirt.

Step 12

I heat-pressed the shirt again in preparation for the masking of the foreground subjects to paint the background. Then, I sprayed sheets of wax paper with 3M Super77 Spray adhesive and applied them, sticky-side down, while the shirt-board was still warm—this helps with adhesion. Using a new X-Acto razor knife, I carefully—repeat, carefully—cut around my foreground subject, never pressing the blade down any harder than I must to cut the wax-paper. I've ruined other projects at this stage by cutting through to the fabric. I break off the very tip of the #11 blades I use for this method.

Step 13

To paint the background on this, I used a $40 Kobalt Detailing Gun from Lowes. This gun is built fairly well, has decent control, and for the price you can't beat it.

Step 14

In reality the background would be black, but I deemed it cooler to use color; Wicked Blue, Deep Blue, and Createx Opaque Aqua to achieve a deep-water sunray background, while still being dark enough for light to really do some dynamic things. Starting with Deep Blue, I gradually built the deep dark blue and gradient upward. I then used a long straight-edge with Opaque Aqua to draw long, shimmering rays in the Deep Blue. The blow dryer was used here so that I could build the Opaque Aqua toward the surface. Next, I switched to Wicked Blue and tinted the Aqua at the deepest parts and added some shape. Coming back with the Opaque Aqua over the Blue and building the most sunlit part at the top of the painting, I got it as even as I could.

Step 15

I personally enjoy the moment when you can peel the masking away and inspect how it's coming together. After removing the wax paper, I pressed the shirt again and used Opaque Blue and detailed the top side surfaces that will be lit by dim sunlight. Opaque Blue here works really well against the warmer colors that make up the shine from the viperfish.

Step 16

Using Wicked Black, again reduced 1:3, I moved on to the face and mouth with the goal to make it look like semi-opaque gray jelly. To this end I used the structures here to airbrush a back-lit light behind the gills and a glow from the mouth. With the fins and scales, I roughed in the shape of the body first to look like a flat whip-like tail, approximated the shadows and bright areas, and slowly and meticulously rendered each course of scales.

Step 17
To make the viperfish bioluminescent, I used Wicked White again, and painted the highlights on the scales and directional light. I freehanded the photophores, or lights, in the body and also detailed the fins. I used the blow-dryer again for high-build because almost all of the white will be tinted. Using the shadow on the skull's jaw, I established light on the tail and began to paint the illicium and esca, or the fishing pole and lure. I made certain to really brighten up the water around the tip of the lure and added a light silhouette of white for a glow.

Step 18
I began coloring the viperfish with Wicked Red and used concentrated strokes to build vibrant color. I followed this with a combination of Wicked Orange, Pthalo Green, and Golden Yellow. Once I established the desired glow, I came back with Wicked White for final highlights and fine-tuned everything.

After stepping back and studying the piece, I thought the upper edges of the water needed something. So, I re-masked the top half of my subject using the method described in Step 12, added some sun rays with Wicked White, and dusted over the white with Createx Flourescent Green. I liked this much better. Finally, for the sake of balance in this composition, I added a dying pirate bleeding out and slowly sinking into the depths, and did a little more tweaking with the surface glow by dusting Createx Fluorescent Yellow. I enjoyed sharing this piece, and thank you for taking a peek inside my head. ∎