HowlHaunter's Workshop

Tree Skull

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I wanted a skull that would light up on the middle of a tree limb near the street in my front yard. I wanted it to run on battery so I wouldn't have to run a electrical cord over the grass in the yard. I had a extra cheap plastic skull head that I had purchased. Nothing special about it except that it had really bad glow-in-the-dark paint smeared where the eyes and nose were. The head was a awful tan color, so I decided to paint it bright white and then added black paint to the eyes and nose. I also added some lines around the teeth and blacked some out..and made a few of them jagged. There...that's much better. The white paint will really make it stand out when lighted up.

Now, time to make the eyes really stand out. I found these really great "glass diamonds" at WalMart for $3 (pack of 20) in the Crafts department... that diffuse the light in a very eerie way.

I had a leftover little blue LED circuit taken from a $5 "glowing hand" that I purchased. It had six high intensity blue LEDs that glowed and then faded..and then glowed again. This runs on two AA batteries. I decided to tape three of the LEDs together for each eye. I epoxied two small PVC section (3/4") to the back of the glass diamonds...when they dried I cut out holes in the middle of the eyes to accept the tubes. A little more epoxy around the back of the glass diamonds..and when that dried, I stuck the LED "clumps" right up against the back of the glass diamonds from inside the skull. The tubes keep the LEDs facing to the front of the eyes.

I put the battery box holding the 2 AA batteries into a small Radio Shack project box..with the circuit board that drive the 6 LEDs.

Well, that's great...but it wasn't good enough for something that will be very unique and be a real Halloween scare prop! I added one more high intensity blue LED to the front of a piece of cedar board...that I had painted black. I mounted the skull head to the board with screws through the bottom..and more epoxy. I found that pointing the blue LED directly at the skull face gave a "spotlight effect" and I wanted more of a diffused "floodlight" effect. So, I screwed in a bent small piece of plastic to the front of the board...with some wood pieces to hide the LED from the side.
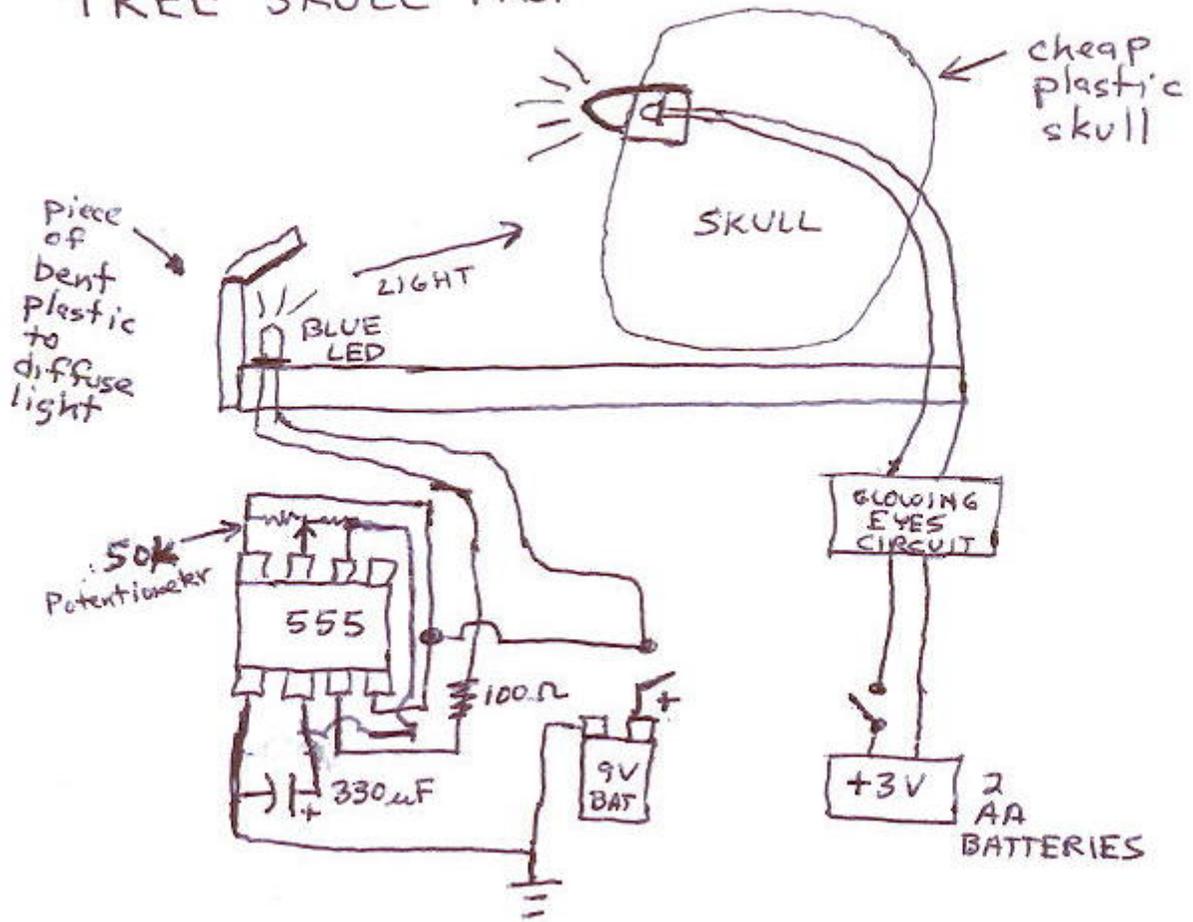
Now we're talking!

I set up a 555 timer with a about a 10 second cycle on it so it would leave the LED on for a few seconds. The effect of this LED...while the eyes are glowing and fading on and off...is quite awesome.

Here's the schematic and layout of the whole prop for those who want to build it. You can adjust the LED on/off cycle time with the 50K trim pot shown. The 555 and all the components went on a small perf board. It's so small, I just put some tape around it to insulate it and stuff it into the Project box. Then, I connected a on/off DPDT switch to switch both the +3V and +9V circuit. Then, closed the box with the screws and a taped around the seam to keep the water out. I liked how I set my skull up so that the eyes fade in and out..while the other blue LED lights up the face. Sometimes, it all eyes, all face, and both the eyes glowing and face lit up together.

Here's the schematic/layout:

TREE SKULL PROP

cheap plastic skull

SKULL

Piece of bent Plastic to diffuse light

LIGHT

BLUE LED

GLOWING EYES CIRCUIT

50k Potentiometer

555

100 Ω

330 µF

9V BAT

+3V

2 AA BATTERIES