

BLOOD TEST

The Many Shades of Bookshelves and Blood

I recently got a call from the scenic department. The director, on a new show, wants to paint the blue/grey bookcases tan because he thinks the blood effect will show up better. But the set designer wants to keep the room in cool tones, and scenic asked if there is anything we in props can do to help.

I ask my young and wise assistant, Alex Wyle, 'Do you understand the reasons why they don't want to paint a metal shelf from blue/grey to tan?' Alex rolls his eyes and smiles, knowing that he is going to have to suffer a story by Old Professor Duckworth in order to get the answer. 'No, I don't, but if I like it or not, you're going to tell me, I bet.'

We always need to know the WHY before we jump into any kind of problem solving. This particular show needs to lull people into a false sense of security. When in the narrative the blood splatter hits the bookcase it has to have a great visual impact. Which is why the director wants to paint the metal bookcase tan and not keep them blue/grey.

So why doesn't the set designer want to let the scenic charge artist just paint it tan? Well it's all about the study of color psychology. The reason the designer wants to keep everything in cool colors is because blues are the most calming colors. It makes people feel serenity and calm. There was a study by the University of Sussex that also found that cooler colors like blues slowed heart rate and breathing, and increased concentration.

The other reason is because the shelves will need to be cleaned every night and it's more than likely the paint will start rubbing off or discolor within two-weeks of the run. So, the best option would be to send the bookcase to a professional who could powder coat and bake on the paint, like you would do to a car, but that would be cost prohibitive, as the folks above my pay-grade say.

I suggest we go out to the shop and mix up some blood so we can do some tests, take pictures, and send them out to the director and set designer just to let them know we have it covered and they have nothing to worry about. We mixed up two old reliable blood potions that we knew would clean up easily: one was a washable tempera paint—just add a little no-tears shampoo and water. The other one

was a concoction of Tide Free & Gentle, red food coloring, and Hershey's chocolate syrup. We also tried Nick Dudman Blood by UK-based Pigs Might Fly South. It's the blood used in the *Harry Potter* films; it's realistic, completely washable, safe, and non-toxic.

Then we asked the lighting department to install the lighting that they would have on the set into one of the shelves of the bookcase. Once the different bloods are mixed and the blue/grey bookshelf is lit, we invited sets and lighting to join us for the test.

Alex filled up three large 50ml syringes that we had left over from *Hamlet*. We also put a couple of washers behind the shelf to create a little space between the back of the unit and the shelf. This is because the director asked to be able to see blood dripping down the back from shelf to shelf.

As you can see from the pictures the darkest one on the left was the Dudman's. It looked way too dark and it beaded up and went away too fast for our liking and needs in this production. The pinkish one in the middle was the tempera paint which was way too viscous, and the color just wasn't right. The third one, all the way to the right, is the Tide/Hershey mix which turned out to be the best. The color looked great under the light, and it stayed in place while slowly dripping down the back without losing much from the original spray on the wall. Since we are using food color, we can always adjust the color to make it a little lighter if that need arises.

After the test, I was very pleased that we got the visual impact and the right consistency. I look at the test dripping down the bookshelf and think, 'Scenic will be happy, there is no need to paint the bookshelf.' Just then our lighting guy perks up and says, 'Why didn't you just paint it tan?' **S**

