

# Curious stories – metal ions in history, movies, and literature

By *Lars Öhrström*



*Lars Öhrström is a Swedish chemist and chemical engineer who has also worked in France, Botswana, Switzerland, and the US. Educated at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm (PhD 1993) he is currently professor of inorganic chemistry at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg and Head of the Chemical Engineering programme.*

*Since 2007, he has been engaged in the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) where he currently serves as the President of the Inorganic Chemistry division. He is also Assistant Director for Scandinavia and Africa - Berkeley Global Science Institute.*

His group conducts research on Metal-Organic Frameworks and the use of network topology analysis in solid-state chemistry. Most recent publication on this topic : J. Am. Chem. Soc. 2020, **142**, 20, 9471–9481.

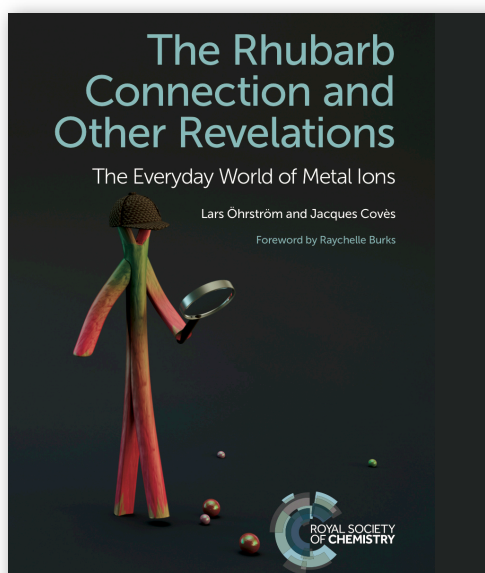
He is a member of the Swedish National Committee for Chemistry and a regular contributor to Chemistry World's (Royal Society of Chemistry) popular science podcasts, which you can listen to here:

<https://www.chemistryworld.com/lars-öhrström/1649.bio>. He also nurtures an interest in the role of chemistry in history, art, literature and film and his popular science book *The Last Alchemist in Paris* (OUP, 2013) has been translated into several languages.



His latest book *The Rhubarb Connection* (RSC, 2018, with Jacques Covès) explores the everyday, and not so everyday, stories of metal ions and their interactions with us humans. See:

<https://pubs.rsc.org/en/content/ebook/978-1-78801-094-8>



Pink warships that vanish at dusk, urinary maladies of an emperor, and a gold test for cocaine – behold the chemistry of metal ions as never before.

In this book you will learn about the sarcophagus molecule, the Chen-Kao test, and how murderers can be caught blue-handed with the wonders of glowing luminol. You will also meet the hidden chemistry of metal ions in everyday life, from the clever modern devices that measure blood-sugar levels, to the leather on your shoes and chewing gum stuck to their soles.

Expect to encounter a fair share of heroes and villains, real and fictional, scientist and layperson. Such characters include an ex-MI5 employee running a hospital ward in London amid falling German V1 rockets, a notorious racing cyclist, a proud butler and the lady who first proposed nuclear fission (it's not who you think it is).

With engaging, humorous and intelligent prose, the reader will discover the fascinating back-stories of chemical discoveries and inventions where metal ions have played a major role.

"This book is quirky and fascinating in equal measure – a treat for the chemistry enthusiast"

Mark Miodownik, University College London, UK

"Engaging, entertaining, charming, insightful and scientifically accurate. I love it!" Omar M. Yaghi, University of California, Berkeley, USA

"A great addition to the library of science-loving and chemistry-curious readers, this is a fascinating book by Öhrström and Covès"

Matthew Hartings, American University, Washington DC, USA

"This book is a fascinating meander through the lore and legend of some of the most important components of the living world, metal ions, the inorganic parts of biology that do so much of the enabling and heavy lifting in the mystery we call Life."

Andrea Sella, University College London, UK