[TITLE]

Hello, everybody. Thanks for taking time out of your evening to join me today, I’ll try not to bum you out too hard.

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So, for most of recorded history, humans have been surrounding themselves with a potent neurotoxin known as…

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Lead! Now, lead has a lot of great properties that made it a hot choice for metal workers and craftspeople for tens of thousands of years. It’s abundant in nature, it’s soft, malleable, very slow to rust, it has a low melting point, but maybe most importantly: it’s easy to extract.

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And we really have been at it for tens of thousands of years. That classic smokey eye look we see in ancient Egyptian art is called “Kohl,” and it was made by grinding up chunks of lead sulfide. Imagine putting that much lead so close to your eye, right? Kohl makeup is still really popular in the middle east, and modern kohl is made from much safer materials, but there wasn’t really a concerted effort to get the lead out until the early 90s.

And here on the right, we have a couple of ritual drinking cauldrons from the Ding dynasty, which was around the 10th and 11th century BC. And these were made from a bronze alloy that was comprised of copper, tin, and lead. That’s another great thing about lead, you can add it to alloys to lower their melting point and make them easier to work with.

But royals would drink this highly acidic wine that would leech incredible amounts of lead, like highly toxic amounts into the rest of the drink. There was this one princess-general named Fu Hao that would famously get these visions and hallucinations, and historians nowadays believe that it was just lead poisoning.

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And of course, we all know about the lead piping used by the ancient Romans.