Tri- and tetra-nuclear polypyridyl ruthenium(II) complexes as antimicrobial agents

Anil K. Gorle, a Marshall Feterl, b,c Jeffrey M. Warner, b,c Lynne Wallace, a F. Richard Keene* c,d,e and J. Grant Collins* a

A series of inert tri- and tetra-nuclear polypyridylruthenium(II) complexes that are linked by the bis[4(4′-methyl-2,2′-bipyridyl)]-1,n-alkane ligand (‘bbn’ for n = 10, 12 and 16) have been synthesised and their potential as antimicrobial agents examined. Due to the modular nature of the synthesis of the oligonuclear complexes, it was possible to make both linear and non-linear tetranuclear ruthenium species. The minimum inhibitory concentrations (MIC) of the ruthenium(II) complexes were determined against four strains of bacteria – Gram positive Staphylococcus aureus (S. aureus) and methicillin-resistant S. aureus (MRSA), and Gram negative Escherichia coli (E. coli) and Pseudomonas aeruginosa (P. aeruginosa). In order to gain an understanding of the relative antimicrobial activities, the cellular uptake and water–octanol partition coefficients (log P) were determined for a selection of the ruthenium complexes. Although the trinuclear complexes were the most lipophilic based upon log P values and showed the greatest cellular uptake, the linear tetranuclear complexes were generally more active, with MIC values <1 μM against the Gram positive bacteria. Similarly, although the non-linear tetranuclear complexes were slightly more lipophilic and were taken up to a greater extent by the bacteria, they were consistently less active than their linear counterparts. Of particular note, the cellular accumulation of the oligonuclear ruthenium complexes was greater in the Gram negative strains compared to that in the Gram positive S. aureus and MRSA. The results demonstrate that the lower antimicrobial activity of polypyridylruthenium(II) complexes towards Gram negative bacteria, particularly P. aeruginosa, is not strongly correlated to the cellular accumulation but rather to a lower intrinsic ability to kill the Gram negative cells.

Introduction

Infectious diseases remain a leading cause of death worldwide, and as there is also an increasing emergence of drug-resistant bacteria it is clear that there is a need for new antimicrobial agents. Based upon the versatile nature of transition metal complexes and their recent success as anticancer agents, there has been growing interest in their use as antimicrobial agents, and in particular ruthenium complexes have been widely examined. Dwyer and his co-workers first reported the antimicrobial potential of mononuclear iron and ruthenium complexes containing polypyridyl ligands. However, while these complexes exhibited excellent activity against drug-sensitive strains, they were significantly less active against current drug-resistant strains. In an attempt to increase the activity of inert polypyridylruthenium complexes against drug-resistant bacteria, we have examined the antimicrobial properties of inert and chlorido-containing dinuclear ruthenium and iridium metal analogues. The inert dinuclear polypyridylruthenium(II) complexes [{Ru(phen)}2(bb12)4]+ (“Rubb12”; where phen = 1,10-phenanthroline; bb12 = bis[4(4′-methyl-2,2′-bipyridyl)]-1,6-alkane for n = 5, 7, 10, 12 and 16) showed excellent activity, with minimum inhibitory concentrations (MIC) of 1 and 2 μg mL−1 for the Rubb12 and Rubb16 complexes against a range of Gram positive and Gram negative bacterial strains, and they maintained the activity against drug-resistant strains such as methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (denoted as MRSA). Furthermore, preliminary toxicity assays against human red blood cells and a human monocytic leukemia cell line (THP-1) indicated that the Rubb complexes were not significantly toxic to human cells.

The inert dinuclear Rubb complexes with an overall charge of 4+ can interact reversibly with various intra-cellular recep-
tors such as proteins and nucleic acids to stop bacterial cell replication. Rubb\(_{16}\) was shown to condense ribosomes when they existed as polysomes, and it was postulated that the condensation of polysomes would halt protein production and thereby inhibit bacterial growth.\(^{16}\) Although it would be expected that complexes which have a higher positive charge would condense polysomes more efficiently, cellular uptake experiments with mononuclear and dinuclear polypyridyl-iridium(III) complexes (3+ and 6+ respectively) demonstrated that they could not easily cross the cellular membrane, and hence they showed no antimicrobial activity.\(^{15,17}\) An alternative approach of increasing the charge of the dinuclear ruthenium complexes is to synthesise tri- and tetra-nuclear species. While the tri- and tetra-nuclear ruthenium complexes will be more positively charged – 6+ and 8+ respectively – they will also be more lipophilic than the dinuclear counterparts due to the additional non-polar linking ligands. Preliminary experiments with the tri- and tetra-nuclear complexes of Rubb demonstrated the potential of this approach.\(^{13}\) The Rubb-\(\text{tri}\) and Rubb-\(\text{tetra}\) were 2–4 times more active against a range of bacteria than the corresponding dinuclear Rubb\(_7\).

Over the last decade there has been considerable interest in developing inert dinuclear ruthenium(II) complexes as nucleic acid binding probes, anticancer agents and cellular imaging agents.\(^{18-27}\) More recently, there has been increasing interest in using higher nuclearity ruthenium complexes as anticancer agents.\(^{28-30}\) Predominantly, research has focused on ruthenium clusters or cages, as these bulky complexes may preferentially accumulate in tumours due to the enhanced permeability and retention effect.\(^{28-30}\) Alternatively, while several tri- and tetra-nuclear copper(II) complexes with modest antimicrobial activities have been reported,\(^{31,32}\) there have been very few studies on the potential of tri- or tetra-nuclear ruthenium complexes as anticancer agents. In the present study, we aimed to synthesise the tri- and tetra-nuclear analogues of the most active dinuclear complexes, Rubb\(_{12}\) and Rubb\(_{16}\) and examine their antimicrobial activities, log \(P\) values and cellular uptake. Additionally, due to the modular nature of the synthesis of these complexes, it was possible to synthesise both linear and non-linear tetranuclear complexes. The structures of the multinuclear complexes and the important precursors were synthesised by reacting the mononuclear complex, Rubb\(_n\)-mono, with \([\text{phenH}]_2\text{[Ru(phen)Cl]}_2\) in DMF at reflux temperature. The characterisation of the chlorido complexes was carried out by NMR spectroscopy and they were used as precursors for the synthesis of the tri- and tetra-nuclear complexes.

The trinuclear and tetraneural (both linear and non-linear) complexes were characterised by microanalysis, NMR (\(^{1}\)H and \(^{13}\)C) and high resolution electrospray ionisation mass spectrometry methods. Consistent with the observations previously reported for Rubb-\(\text{tetra}\),\(^{33}\) satisfactory ESI-MS could not be obtained for the linear tetranuclear complexes when they were dissolved in acetonitrile. However, good mass spectra could be obtained using acetone as the solvent. The synthesis of non-linear complexes was achieved by the reaction between the mononuclear complex, Rubb\(_n\)-mono, and cis-[\text{Ru(DMSO)}\(_2\)Cl\(_2\)]. The reaction was carried out in ethanol–water at reflux temperatures for 5–6 hours, whereupon all the DMSO and chlorido ligands were replaced by the free ‘2,2′-bpy’ entities of Rubb\(_n\)-mono complexes. All the inert complexes (tri, tetra, tetra-nl species) were purified by cation exchange on an SP Sephadex C-25 column, whereas the chlorido-containing complexes (Rubb\(_n\)-Cl\(_2\)) were purified by size exclusion on a Sephadex LH-20 column.

It is noted that geometric isomers will exist for the oligonuclear complexes in this study. In the bridging ligands bb\(_n\) the 2,2′-bipyridine coordinating moieties are unsymmetrically substituted – one pyridine entity with a methyl group in the 4-position and the other with the bridging methylene chain. Accordingly, for cases where there are two bb\(_n\) ligands attached to one metal centre – as is the case for the central ruthenium in the trinuclear complexes and the two central ruthenium centres in the linear tetranuclear species – the chain-bearing pyridine entities may bear either relative ‘trans’ or one of two possible ‘cis’ orientations (one symmetrical in the sense that the centre will have \(C_2\) point group symmetry – denoted \(s\)-cis and the other has \(C_1\) point group symmetry – denoted \(u\)-cis). For the trinuclear case (Rubb\(_n\)-tri) there are three isomers possible based on the central metal centre (\(trans\), \(s\)-cis and \(u\)-cis), and six isomers based on the two internal metal centres (\(trans\), \(trans\); \(s\)-cis, \(s\)-cis; \(u\)-cis, \(u\)-cis; \(trans\), \(s\)-cis; \(trans\), \(u\)-cis; \(s\)-cis, \(u\)-cis) for the linear tetranuclear case (Rubb\(_n\)-tetra). For the dinuclear Rubb\(_n\)-Cl\(_2\) complexes the two chlorido ligands may bear either a \(cis\), \(cis\) or a \(cis\), \(trans\) relationship to the chain-bearing pyridine entity, so that there are two isomers. Finally, in the case of the non-linear tetranuclear complexes, Rubb\(_n\)-tetra-nl, the central Ru centre has three bb\(_n\) ligands attached so that the chain-bearing pyridine entities may bear either a facial or meridional orientation to one another – giving rise to two isomers (\(fac\) and \(mer\)). In the case of \(fac\)/\(mer\) geometric isomerism, the \(mer\) isomer is thermodynamically preferred for statistical reasons (3/1) but the \(mer/fac\) ratio is often considerably greater than that because of steric congestion in the \(fac\) form.\(^{34}\) In the present case for the tetra-nl species, 2D NMR studies (COSY and ROESY – not reported) indicated the existence of both isomers with the \(fac\) isomer comprising about 5% (\(mer/fac =\) 

**Results**

**Synthesis**

The synthesis of flexibly-linked dinuclear (Rubb\(_n\)-Cl\(_2\)) trinuclear (Rubb\(_n\)-tri), tetraneural (Rubb\(_n\)-tetra) and non-linear tetraneural (Rubb\(_n\)-tetra-nl) ruthenium complexes incorporating bis[4-(4-methyl-2,2′-bipyridyl)-1,1-alkane bridging ligands (bb\(_n\)) has been achieved in good yield, as shown in Schemes 1 and 2. The chlorido-containing dinuclear species (Rubb\(_n\)-Cl\(_2\))
The separation of possible geometrical isomers was not attempted for any of the complex systems in this study at this stage, and would represent a significant challenge in a number of these cases.

In agreement with previous studies, the Rubb$_n$-Cl$_2$ complexes hydrolysed when they were dissolved in water. The aromatic region of the $^1$H NMR spectrum of a Rubb$_n$-Cl$_2$ complex dissolved in water was extremely complicated suggesting a mixture of [Rubb$_n$(OH$_2$)Cl]$^+$ and [Rubb$_n$(OH$_2$)$_2$]$^{2+}$ species, as has been previously observed for the hydrolysis of cis-[Ru(bpy)$_2$Cl$_2$]. Consistent with this proposal, the addition of AgNO$_3$ to a Rubb$_n$-Cl$_2$ complex that had been in an aqueous solution for two days did induce some changes in the NMR spectrum. However, even after the addition of AgNO$_3$, the aromatic region in the NMR spectrum was still very complex. This could indicate that both the cis- and trans-diaqua species were formed, as has been noted in the acid hydrolysis of [Ru(CO)$_3$-(bpy)$_2$].

**Electrochemistry**

Cyclic voltammetry was used to determine the redox potentials for the multinuclear complexes with $n = 12$ (Table 1). All complexes showed a single, reversible Ru(II/III) oxidation peak at $\approx +1.27$ V vs. Ag/AgCl, and a series of ligand-based reductions, consistent with the well-established behaviour of tris(bidentate) polypyridylruthenium complexes. It was thought that differences might be discernible in the potentials, particularly the reduction patterns, given the subtle structural variations in the different metal centres in the multinuclear complexes. For example it has been established that in the homoleptic
Scheme 1

**Rubb$_n$-mono**

2-methoxy ethanol, ethylene glycol, H$_2$O, 115 °C, 6 h

**Rubb$_n$-Cl$_2$**

LCl, DMF, 150 °C, 8 h

**Rubb$_n$-Cl$_2$** + Rubb$_n$-mono + ethanol, H$_2$O

reflux, 4 h

**Rubb$_n$-tri**

0.5 bb$_n$, ethanol, H$_2$O

reflux, 4 h

**Rubb$_n$-tetra**

Scheme 1

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**Scheme 2**

3 Rubb$_n$-mono + cis-[Ru$_2$(DMSO)$_4$Cl$_2$]

ethanol, H$_2$O

reflux, 6 h

**Rubb$_n$-tetra-nl**
complexes [Ru(phen)$_2$]$^{2+}$ and [Ru(Me$_2$bpy)$_2$]$^{2+}$, the Me$_2$bpy ligand is slightly more difficult to reduce than phen due to the electron-donating effect of the methyl groups, and this also translates to an effect on the Ru(II) centre, which undergoes oxidation more readily. Any terminal of the bb$_{12}$ ligand could be expected to mimic a Me$_2$bpy ligand, as has been observed for the complex [([bpy]$_2$)Ru$_2$(bb$_{12}$)]$^{4+}$, which shows very similar redox potentials to the mononuclear complex [Ru(bpy)$_2$(Me$_2$bpy)]$^{2+}$. In the present case, no significant differences were observed in the oxidation potentials of the complexes, even for the non-linear tetranuclear complex, in which the central ruthenium differs somewhat more from the others. The reduction patterns were also quite similar, with each complex showing two closely-spaced reductions. A third clear reduction peak was observed for Rubb$_{12}$, though this was distorted by adsorption. This three-reduction set is consistent with the pattern reported for both mononuclear [Ru(L)$_2$](Me$_2$bpy)$^{2+}$ (L = bpy, phen) and dinuclear [[Ru(bpy)$_2$]$_2$(bb$_n$)]$^{2+}$ ($n = 2,3$). For the tri- and tetra-nuclear complexes only a small peak was evident at potentials where a third reduction might be expected, and a desorption peak was generally observed in the re-oxidation scan. Adsorption of reduction products has previously been noted for other multinuclear ruthenium bipyridyl complexes. The results indicate that redox differences between the complexes are negligible and unlikely to underpin any differences in biological activity.

**Antimicrobial activity**

The minimum inhibitory concentrations (MIC) for the di-, tri- and tetra-nuclear ruthenium complexes against four bacterial strains (Staphylococcus aureus (S. aureus), methicillin-resistant S. aureus (MRSA), Escherichia coli (E. coli) and Pseudomonas aeruginosa (P. aeruginosa)) have been determined and the results are summarised in Table 2. The results demonstrate that some of the ruthenium(n) complexes in the present study have significant antimicrobial activity against both classes of bacteria, and most of the complexes are more active against Gram positive bacteria than the Gram negative strains. Of particular note, the inert tri- and tetra-nuclear ruthenium complexes showed better antimicrobial activity than the corresponding dinuclear ruthenium(n) complexes (Rubb$_n$), particularly when the MIC values are given on a molar basis. Interestingly, the non-linear tetranuclear ruthenium(n) complexes (Rubb$_n$-tetra-nl) were two-fold less active than the dinuclear Rubb$_n$ complexes. Of all the complexes, Rubb$_{12}$-tri, Rubb$_{16}$-tri, Rubb$_{12}$-tetra and Rubb$_{16}$-tetra are the most active compounds, and are up to four-times more active than the dinuclear counterparts against Gram positive and slightly more active against the Gram negative strains. Furthermore, Rubb$_{12}$-tri, Rubb$_{16}$-tri, Rubb$_{12}$-tetra and Rubb$_{16}$-tetra are 4–8 times more active than the previously reported Rubb–tri and Rubb–tetra complexes. Even though the overall charge of the linear and non-linear version of the tetranuclear complexes is the same (8+), the non-linear tetranuclear ruthenium complexes (Rubb$_n$-tetra-nl) are less active when compared to the corresponding linear species, suggesting that the linearity could play an important role in inhibiting bacterial growth. The dinuclear ruthenium(n) complexes with two chlorido ligands (Rubb$_{12}$-Cl$_2$) also showed good activity, but are fractionally less active than the tri- and tetra-nuclear complexes. In general, complexes with the bb$_{12}$ linking ligand were the most active against S. aureus, MRSA, and E. coli, with the complexes having the shortest (bb$_{10}$) and longest (bb$_{16}$) linking chain being the least active. However, against P. aeruginosa, complexes with the bb$_{18}$ linking ligand showed better activity.

Due to their greater lipophilicity (see below), it was considered that the antimicrobial activity of the tri- and tetra-nuclear complexes could decrease to a greater extent with longer incubation times than would the dinuclear complexes. Table 3 summarises the MIC values for the ruthenium complexes when the assays were carried out over a 20–22 hour timeframe. The MIC values for the tri- and tetra-nuclear complexes increased by as much as four-fold for some of the complexes when compared to the 16–18 hour values. Alternatively, the dinuclear complexes Rubb$_{12}$ and Rubb$_{16}$ only exhibited a maximum two-fold decrease in activity across the four bacteria. These observations suggest that the tri- and tetra-nuclear complexes rapidly accumulate within the bacteria, thereby decreasing the concentration in the incubation broth. However, even

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**Table 1** Electrode potentials for Ru(II) complexes in CH$_3$CN (in V vs. Ag/AgCl)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complex</th>
<th>Oxidation ${E_{1/2}$ Ru(II/III)$}$</th>
<th>Reductions $(E_{pc})^a$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>$-1.33, -1.52, -1.92$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$-tri</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>$-1.32, -1.49, -1.85^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$-tetra</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>$-1.33, -1.50, -1.84^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$-tetra-nl</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>$-1.32, -1.49, -1.85^b$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Irreversible/semi-reversible; cathodic peak given. $^b$ Weak.

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**Table 2** MIC values (µM) for the ruthenium complexes after 16–18 hours of incubation against Gram positive and Gram negative bacterial strains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compounds</th>
<th>Gram positive</th>
<th>Gram negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S. aureus</td>
<td>MRSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{16}$</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$-tri</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$-tetra</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{16}$-tri</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{16}$-tetra</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$-tetra</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{16}$-tetra</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$-tetra-nl</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{16}$-tetra-nl</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{10}$-Cl$_2$</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{12}$-Cl$_2$</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb$_{16}$-Cl$_2$</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ampicillin</td>
<td>&lt;0.7</td>
<td>183.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gentamicin</td>
<td>&lt;0.5</td>
<td>66.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
at the longer incubation time Rubb₁₂-tetra and Rubb₁₆-tetra are the most active of all the ruthenium complexes tested.

The minimum bactericidal concentrations (MBC) of a selection of the ruthenium complexes were determined after the MIC values were obtained for the 20–22 hour incubation experiment. The results are summarised in Table 4. As the MBC values are generally ≤2 × MIC for the 20–22 hour incubation, it can be concluded that the tri- and tetra-nuclear complexes are bactericidal rather than bacteriostatic.

### Log \( P \)

Lipophilicity is a significant factor that affects the biological activity of any metal complex, as it is generally correlated to the capacity of the drug to penetrate through the cell membrane. The standard octanol-water partition coefficient (log \( P \)) was determined for the mononuclear species \([\text{Ru(phen)}_2\text{(Me}_2\text{bpy})]^2+\) and Rubb₆ (as control experiments), Rubb₃-tri, Rubb₆-tetra and Rubb₆-tetra-nl complexes, and the results are summarised in Table 5. From the results, the trinuclear ruthenium complexes are more lipophilic than the tetratomic ruthenium complexes. For the dinuclear Rubb₉ complexes, the antimicrobial activity was directly related to the log \( P \), with activity increasing with increasing lipophilicity. However, although the trinuclear complexes were more lipophilic than their corresponding linear tetratomic complexes, they were less active. This suggests lipophilicity is an important determinant of activity, but only to the level that allows the ruthenium complex to easily diffuse across the cellular membrane.

### Cellular accumulation

The cellular accumulations of the tri- and tetratomic ruthenium complexes in \(S. aureus\), MRSA, \(E. coli\), and \(P. aeruginosa\) were determined by measuring the concentration of the complex remaining in the culture supernatant after removing the bacteria by centrifugation. The concentration of the ruthenium complex in the supernatant was calculated from an absorbance calibration curve obtained by adding known concentrations of the ruthenium complex to a blank supernatant. As the absorbance of the ruthenium complexes varied with the different broths and supernatants for each bacterial strain, a calibration curve was determined for each complex in the supernatant of each bacterial strain. The uptake of complexes into bacterial strains was measured at various incubation time points, however the uptake did not significantly change with incubation time after 30 minutes. Fig. 2 shows the uptake of the ruthenium complexes into the bacteria after 30 minutes. Surprisingly, the uptake of the complexes is slightly higher for the Gram negative bacteria than the Gram positive. The

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compound</th>
<th>Gram positive</th>
<th>Gram negative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(S. aureus)</td>
<td>MRSA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tri</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tri</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tetra</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tetra-nl</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4 MIC values (\(\mu\)M) for a selection of the ruthenium complexes against Gram positive and Gram negative bacterial strains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metal complex</th>
<th>Charge</th>
<th>(\log P)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>([\text{Ru(phen)}_2\text{(Me}_2\text{bpy})]^2+)</td>
<td>+2</td>
<td>–2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>–2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₆</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>–1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₀-tri</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>–1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tri</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>–1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₀-tetra</td>
<td>+6</td>
<td>–0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tetra</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>–1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tetra-nl</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>–1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₀-tetra-nl</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>–0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tetra-nl</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>–1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₀-tetra-nl</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>–1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubb₁₂-tetra-nl</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>–1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2 Cellular uptake of the ruthenium complexes into four bacteria after a 30 minute incubation.
accumulation of Rubb$_{16}$-tri was the highest in both Gram positive and Gram negative bacteria. For all the complexes lower levels of accumulation were observed for S. aureus, compared to the other bacteria. For both the Gram positive and Gram negative bacteria, the cellular accumulation of the tetruclear metal complexes was slightly lower than with the trinuclear counterparts. Surprisingly, the uptake of Rubb$_{12}$-tetra-nl is greater than Rubb$_{12}$-tetra and Rubb$_{12}$-tri.

**Discussion**

We have previously shown that dinuclear ruthenium(II) complexes (Rubb$_n$) exhibit excellent antimicrobial properties in terms of MIC values, cellular uptake, time-kill curves and show low toxicity towards human cells. In order to further improve the antimicrobial properties, we have synthesised the tri- and tetracuclear ruthenium(II) analogues of the most active dinuclear complexes, Rubb$_{12}$ and Rubb$_{16}$, and examined their in vitro susceptibility, lipophilicity and cellular accumulation. The results of the MIC assays indicate that the linear tetracuclear complexes, Rubb$_{n}$-tetra, are consistently more active across the four bacteria used in this study than Rubb$_{12}$ and Rubb$_{16}$. Alternatively, the trinuclear analogues of Rubb$_{12}$ and Rubb$_{16}$ are slightly more active against some bacteria than the corresponding dinuclear complexes, but slightly less active in others. In a similar manner to Rubb$_{12}$ and Rubb$_{16}$, the tri- and tetracuclear linear complexes maintain their activity against MRSA compared to S. aureus, and are bactericidal. The non-linear tetracuclear complexes, Rubb$_{n}$-tetra-nl, are consistently less active than their linear counterparts and Rubb$_{12}$ and Rubb$_{16}$. Significantly, whereas Rubb$_{10}$-tri was generally more active than Rubb$_{14}$-tetra, the activity of Rubb$_{12}$-tetra was greater than Rubb$_{n}$-tri for $n = 12$ and 16 over the four bacterial strains used in the study.

The lipophilicity of the ruthenium complexes, as determined by log $P$, increased in the order Rubb$_n$-tetra < Rubb$_{n}$-tetra < Rubb$_{n}$-tri, with all tri- and tetracuclear complexes being significantly more lipophilic than Rubb$_{16}$. As the ruthenium complexes enter bacterial cells by passive diffusion, it is not surprising that the cellular accumulation experiments demonstrated that the tri- and tetracuclear complexes rapidly accumulate to high concentrations within the bacteria. However, the extent of the cellular accumulation of the tri- and tetracuclear complexes in the Gram negative bacteria, particularly P. aeruginosa, is surprising. The results of this study demonstrate that the lower toxicity of the dinuclear complexes towards P. aeruginosa is probably not strongly correlated to the cellular accumulation – as we previously concluded – but rather to a lower intrinsic ability to kill P. aeruginosa cells. Preliminary pharmacokinetic experiments with mice have indicated that Rubb$_{12}$ and Rubb$_{16}$ are rapidly cleared from the blood; consequently, the greater lipophilicity and greater cellular uptake may be advantageous for in vivo antimicrobial studies.

Interestingly, the one non-linear tetracuclear complex examined in cellular accumulation experiments, Rubb$_{12}$-tetra-nl, showed greater accumulation than the corresponding linear complex Rubb$_{12}$-tetra. Despite Rubb$_{12}$-tetra-nl being slightly more lipophilic than Rubb$_{12}$-tetra, it would be expected that the linear complex would cross a cell membrane more easily than a non-linear complex. However, as the ruthenium complexes enter bacterial cells by passive diffusion, the level of the cellular accumulation is a function of the binding of the ruthenium complex to intra-cellular receptors, such as nucleic acids and proteins. Despite the relatively greater accumulation of Rubb$_{12}$-tetra-nl compared to Rubb$_{12}$-tetra, the linear complex exhibited greater activity. Previous studies have shown that because of the flexibility of the alkane chain in the bb$_n$ ligand, both ruthenium metal centres in the Rubb$_n$ complexes can closely associate with the DNA minor groove. Similarly, the linear tetracuclear complexes could also follow the curvature of the DNA groove allowing close association of the four ruthenium centres with the DNA backbone. Alternatively, due to the three-dimensional shape of the non-linear tetracuclear complexes, the interactions with DNA would be substantially different and a different biological response would be expected.

There has been increasing interest in tetracuclear and higher nuclearity ruthenium complexes as anticancer agents. However, there have been very few studies on the potential of tri- or tetracuclear ruthenium complexes as antimicrobial agents. The present study indicates that these multinuclear complexes are highly active antimicrobial agents. Consequently, using the Rubb$_n$ scaffold as a starting point, oligonuclear ruthenium complexes can be synthesised which vary by almost two orders of magnitude in lipophilicity, but contain a higher charge and remain water-soluble. Furthermore, the higher nuclearity complexes would be expected to display different nucleic acid binding or condensation potential and exhibit different pharmacokinetic profiles. Given the rapid uptake and high level of accumulation of the tetracuclear complexes in bacteria, it is unlikely that pentanuclear or higher nuclearity complexes would be more effective antimicrobial agents.

**Experimental**

**Physical measurements**

$^1$H NMR and $^{13}$C NMR spectra were recorded on a Varian Advance 400 MHz spectrometer at room temperature in D$_2$O (99.9%, Cambridge Isotope Laboratories (CIL)), CDCl$_3$ (99.8%, CIL), or CD$_3$CN (>99.8%, Aldrich), or CD$_3$OD (>99.8%, Aldrich). UV absorbance was measured on a Jenway 6300 spectrophotometer. Microanalyses were performed by the Microanalytical Unit, Research School of Chemistry, Australian National University, Canberra. High-resolution mass spectral measurements were made using a Waters LCT mass spectrometer (Research School of Chemistry, Australian National University).
Materials and methods

Tetraethylammonium chloride, 2-methoxyethanol, lithium chloride, potassium hexafluorophosphate (KPF₆) and ammonium hexafluorophosphate (NH₄PF₆) were purchased from Aldrich and used as supplied; Amberlite® IRA-402 (chloride form) anion-exchange resin, SP-Sephadex C-25 cation exchanger and Sephadex® LH-20 were obtained from GE Health Care Bioscience. Cation-adjusted Mueller-Hinton broth (CAMHB) was purchased from Fluka, Gillingham, UK; the control antibiotics gentamicin and ampicillin were purchased from Oxoid, Australia. The syntheses of ligands bbₙ (n = 10, 12 and 16) and [Ru(phen)₂(py)₂]Cl₂, (phenH⁺)[Ru(phen)Cl₄], cis-[Ru(DMSO)₆Cl₂] were performed according to reported literature methods.

Bacterial strains

All bacterial strains are classified as C2 risk group and must be handled within a PC2 laboratory. Two Staphylococcus aureus (Gram positive) isolates, a methicillin-susceptible S. aureus strain (ATCC 25923), a clinical multidrug-resistant MRSA strain (a wild clinical strain from the JCU culture collection) and two Gram negative isolates Escherichia coli (ATCC 25922) and Pseudomonas aeruginosa (ATCC 27853) were used for in vitro antimicrobial studies.

MIC and MBC determination

The MIC tests were conducted by the broth micro-dilution method as outlined in the CLSI guidelines. The MBC tests were performed in duplicate according to the standard microbiological techniques protocol. The bacteria were grown on Mueller-Hinton agar and suspended in growth medium CAMHB. Bacterial inocula were adjusted to a turbidity equivalent to that of a 0.5 McFarland standard and diluted to a final concentration of 4–8 × 10⁵ cfu mL⁻¹. Compounds tested were dissolved and serially diluted in cation-adjusted Mueller-Hinton broth (CAMHB; Fluka, Gillingham, UK) in sterile 96-well flat-bottom plates to a final volume of 100 µL in each well. An equal volume of inocula was added to each well, making a final concentration range of the compounds tested, including the control antibiotics gentamicin and ampicillin (Oxoid, Australia), of between 0.25 and 128 mg L⁻¹. MICs were recorded as the MBC.

Cellular uptake

The cellular uptake of the ruthenium complexes was measured by monitoring the UV absorbance of the complexes remaining in the supernatant of the cultures after incubation for various periods of time. Bacterial inocula in log phase were adjusted to a cell concentration from 1–5 × 10⁷ cfu mL⁻¹. Aliquots (2 mL) of the adjusted inocula were placed in glass culture tubes and 50 µL of stock solution (330 mg L⁻¹) of the ruthenium complex was added to give a final concentration of 8 mg L⁻¹. Control flasks containing 50 mL of each bacterial suspension were set up as blank samples to obtain UV calibration curves for each complex. Culture tubes and control flasks were incubated with agitation at 150 rpm at 37 °C for 0.5, 1, 1.5 or 2 h. At the end of incubation, the culture tubes were centrifuged (S. aureus and MRSA at 6000g; E. coli and P. aeruginosa at 17 000g) at 4 °C for 10 min. Supernatants (1.6 mL) were carefully transferred to 2 mL tubes and the UV absorbance of the remaining ruthenium complex was measured at λ = 488 nm. Volumes (10, 30, 40, 50 and 65 µL) of a stock solution (330 mg L⁻¹) of each complex were added to 2 mL aliquots of the supernatant from each control bacterial suspension (untreated with drug) to acquire a UV-concentration linear correlation chart for calibration. The uptake of the complexes was calculated by using the calibration curve obtained from control bacterial aliquots.

Lipophilicity (log P) determination

The partition coefficients (log P) were measured using the shake-flask technique: each ruthenium complex (at 0.1 mM) was dissolved in the water phase and an equal volume of n-octanol was added. The two phases were mutually saturated by shaking overnight at ambient temperature and then were allowed to separate on standing. The concentration of the metal complex in each phase was determined spectrophotometrically at λ = 450 nm.

Electrochemistry

Cyclic voltammetry was carried out using an eDAQ EA161 potentiostat operated via an eDAQ ED401 e-corder. A glassy carbon working electrode, platinum wire counter electrode and Ag/AgCl reference electrode were used. Ferrocene was used as an internal reference check. HPLC grade acetonitrile was used as solvent and the supporting electrolyte was 0.1 M tetra-n-butylammonium tetrafluoroborate.

Synthesis of metal complexes

[Ru(phen)₂(bbₙ)][PF₆]₂ (Rubbₙ-mono). The mononuclear ruthenium(n) complexes Rubₙ-mono were synthesised as previously described (n = 7 and 16), with typical yields being 50–60%. The ¹H NMR spectrum of Rub₁₆-mono was consistent with that previously reported. [Ru(phen)₂(bb₁₂)][PF₆]₂·2H₂O Anal. Calcd for C₅₈H₆₈N₄F₁₂O₂P₂Ru: C, 53.8%; H, 4.83%; N, 8.7%. Found: C, 53.9%; H, 4.80%; N, 8.5%. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CD₃CN): δ 8.63 (d, J = 8.0 Hz, 2H); 8.52 (dd, J₁ = 8.2 Hz, 3.3 Hz, 2H); 8.40 (s, 2H); 8.35 (s, 2H); 8.26–8.17 (m, 8H); 7.88–7.85 (m, 2H); 7.78 (dd, J = 8.1 Hz, 5.1 Hz, 2H); 7.56–7.51 (m, 2H); 7.22–7.17 (m, 2H); 7.10 (t, J = 9.0 Hz, 2H); 2.76 (t, J = 7.6 Hz, 2H); 2.67 (t, J = 7.2 Hz, 2H); 2.51 (s, 3H); 2.41 (s, 3H); 1.70–1.56 (m, 4H); 1.35–1.17 (m, 16H). [Ru(phen)₂(bb₁₀)][PF₆]₂·3H₂O Anal. Calcd for C₅₆H₆₁N₄F₁₁O₂P₂Ru: C, 52.4%; H, 4.71%; N, 8.7%. Found: C, 52.2%; H, 4.47%; N, 8.5%. ¹H NMR (400 MHz, CD₃CN): δ 8.63...
(d, J = 8.0 Hz, 2H); 8.48 (dd, J = 10.6 Hz, 4.7 Hz, 2H); 8.40 (s, 2H); 8.35 (s, 2H); 8.27–8.16 (m, 8H); 7.87 (d, J = 4.8 Hz, 2H); 7.81–7.75 (m, 2H); 7.57–7.51 (m, 2H); 7.48 (t, J = 6.4 Hz, 2H); 7.22–7.17 (m, 2H); 7.12–7.08 (m, 2H); 7.26 (t, J = 7.4 Hz, 2H); 2.68 (t, J = 7.5 Hz, 2H); 2.50 (s, 3H); 2.41 (s, 3H); 1.70–1.59 (m, 4H); 1.36–1.24 (m, 12H).

\( [\text{Ru}(\text{phen})_2(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})\text{Ru(phen)}\text{Cl}_2]\)PF_6·2CH_2Cl_2Cl_2. The PF_6^- salts were converted to chloride salts with Amberlite IRA-402 (chloride form) anion-exchange resin. The PF_6^- salt of the complex was taken up in methanol (25 mL) and resin added and the mixture stirred at room temperature for 1–2 h until the solution was clear, the resin was then filtered and methanol was evaporated and the resultant solid dried in an oven at 70 °C for 16 h to obtain a dark brownish-orange solid of \([\text{Ru}(\text{phen})_2(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})\text{Ru(phen)}\text{Cl}_2]\)PF_6·2CH_2Cl_2Cl_2, typical yields were 60–65%, based on the synthetic starting material [Ru(phen)_2(phen)_2]PF_6·2.

\( [\text{Ru}(\text{phen})_2(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})\text{Ru(phen)}(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})(\text{phen})\text{Cl}_2]PF_6_2. \) In a typical reaction, both the starting materials \([\text{Ru}(\text{phen})_2(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})\text{Ru(phen)}\text{Cl}_2]\)PF_6·2 (125 mg, 0.075 mmol) and \([\text{Ru}(\text{phen})_2(\text{phen})\text{Cl}_2]\)PF_6·2 (98 mg, 0.075 mmol) were dissolved in ethanol–water (1:1, 60 mL) and the mixture refluxed at 80 °C in the dark under a nitrogen atmosphere for 4 h. The colour of the reaction mixture slowly turned from dark brown to dark red during the course of the reaction. The reaction mixture was cooled to room temperature and the solvent was evaporated under reduced pressure to obtain a dark orange solid, the resulting solid was converted to chloride salt by stirring it in methanol using Amberlite IRA-402 (chloride form) anion-exchange resin for 1–2 h, after filtration of the resin, methanol was evaporated and the resultant chloride salt was dissolved in water (10 mL) and loaded onto an SP Sephadex C-25 cation exchange column (2 cm diam. × 25 cm), the column was washed with water and eluted with 0.6 M and then 0.8 M NaCl solutions to remove mono- and di-nuclear impurities. The desired trimuclear complex was eluted with 1 M NaCl solution containing 20% acetone. After removing the acetone, solid KPF_6 was added to the eluate and the complex was extracted into dichloromethane (2 × 30 mL). The organic layer was washed with water (20 mL), dried over anhydrous Na_2SO_4, and evaporated to dryness to obtain PF_6^- salt of the complex. The complex was further purified on Sephadex LH-20 (2 cm diam. × 30 cm) using acetonitrile as the eluent. The major first orange band was collected and the acetonitrile removed and the product crystallised using acetonitrile–toluene to obtain a bright red-orange solid of \([\text{Ru}(\text{phen})_2(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})\text{Ru(phen)}(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})(\text{phen})\text{Cl}_2]\)PF_6·2. Anal. Calc. for C_{136}H_{140}N_{18}O_{32}P_{36}R_{u_2} C, 51.0%; H, 4.41%; N, 7.9%. Found: C, 51.2%; H, 4.29%; N, 7.8%. 1H NMR (400 MHz, CD_3CN): δ 8.67–8.60 (m, 5H); 8.57–8.49 (m, 5H); 8.43–8.34 (m, 8H); 8.29–8.17 (m, 18H); 7.88 (m, 5H); 7.82–7.76 (m, 5H); 7.59–7.51 (m, 8H); 7.48 (m, 5H); 7.14–7.07 (m, 5H); 2.51 (s, 3H); 2.47 (s, 3H); 1.39–1.17 (m, 48H).

\( [\text{Ru}(\text{phen})_2(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})\text{Ru(phen)}(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})(\text{phen})\text{Cl}_2]PF_6·2. \) Anal. Calc. for C_{136}H_{140}N_{18}O_{32}P_{36}R_{u_2} C, 51.0%; H, 4.41%; N, 7.9%. Found: C, 51.2%; H, 4.29%; N, 7.8%. 1H NMR (400 MHz, CD_3CN): δ 8.67–8.60 (m, 5H); 8.57–8.49 (m, 5H); 8.43–8.34 (m, 8H); 8.29–8.17 (m, 18H); 7.88 (m, 5H); 7.82–7.76 (m, 5H); 7.59–7.51 (m, 8H); 7.48 (m, 5H); 7.14–7.07 (m, 5H); 2.52–2.72 (m, 4H); 2.51 (s, 3H); 2.47 (s, 3H); 1.39–1.17 (m, 48H).

\( [\text{Ru}(\text{phen})_2(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})\text{Ru(phen)}(\mu-\text{bb}_{12})(\text{phen})\text{Cl}_2]PF_6·2. \) Anal. Calc. for C_{136}H_{140}N_{18}O_{32}P_{36}R_{u_2} C, 51.0%; H, 4.41%; N, 7.9%. Found: C, 51.2%; H, 4.29%; N, 7.8%. 1H NMR (400 MHz, CD_3CN): δ 8.67–8.60 (m, 5H); 8.57–8.49 (m, 5H); 8.43–8.34 (m, 8H); 8.29–8.17 (m, 18H); 7.88 (m, 5H); 7.82–7.76 (m, 5H); 7.59–7.51 (m, 8H); 7.48 (m, 5H); 7.14–7.07 (m, 5H); 2.52–2.72 (m, 4H); 2.51 (s, 3H); 2.47 (s, 3H); 1.39–1.17 (m, 48H).
The chloride salts were obtained by stirring the PF$_6^-$ salts in methanol with Amberlite IRA-402 (chloride form) anion-exchange resin for 1–2 h until the solution was clear. The resin was removed by filtration, and the orange-red solution was evaporated and the solid dried in an oven at 70 °C for 16 h to obtain dark red solid of $[{\text{[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}[\text{Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}]}]^{PF_6^-$}. 13C NMR (CD$_3$CN): δ 157.8, 157.7, 157.5, 155.8, 154.9, 153.6, 153.5, 153.3, 152.3, 151.2, 148.8, 148.5, 137.5, 137.4, 131.8, 129.0, 128.9, 128.6, 126.7, 125.7, 124.9, 35.6, 30.9, 30.7, 30.4, 30.2, 30.1, 30.0, 29.8, 28.9, 21.1 and 20.8. TOF MS (ESI+): most abundant ion found for [M − 4PF$_6^-$]$^{+}$, $m/z$ 626.91. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{12}$H$_{16}$N$_{18}$][PF$_6^-$]$^{4+}$, $m/z$ 626.91; most abundant ion found for [M − 3PF$_6^-$]$^{+}$, $m/z$ 884.21. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{12}$H$_{24}$N$_{18}$]$^{3+}$, $m/z$ 884.21; most abundant ion found for [M − 2PF$_6^-$]$^{+}$, $m/z$ 1399.78. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{12}$H$_{16}$N$_{18}$][PF$_6^-$]$^{3+}$, $m/z$ 1399.30. $[{\text{[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}[\text{Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}]}]^{PF_6^-$}. Anal. Calcd for C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$F$_{48}$P$_8$Ru$_4$: C, 51.5%; H, 4.61%; N, 7.8%. Found: C, 51.4%; H, 4.42%; N, 7.8%. $^1$H NMR (400 MHz, CD$_3$CN): δ 8.66–8.52 (m, 16H); 8.82–8.74 (m, 10H); 7.91–7.86 (m, 8H); 7.82–7.74 (m, 7H); 7.11 (m, 11H); 2.76 (m, 12H); 2.51 (s, 3H); 1.37–1.28 (m, 24H). $^{13}$C NMR (CD$_3$CN): δ 157.8, 157.7, 157.5, 155.8, 154.9, 135.6, 153.5, 153.3, 152.3, 151.2, 148.8, 148.5, 137.5, 137.4, 131.8, 129.0, 128.9, 128.6, 126.7, 125.7, 124.9, 35.6, 30.9, 30.7, 30.4, 30.2, 30.1, 30.0, 29.9, 29.6, 21.1 and 20.9. TOF MS (ESI+): most abundant ion found for [M − 4PF$_6^-$]$^{+}$, $m/z$ 577.36. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{16}$H$_{18}$N$_{24}$]PF$_6^-$, $m/z$ 577.33; most abundant ion found for [M − 4PF$_6^-$]$^{+}$, $m/z$ 938.55. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{16}$H$_{18}$N$_{24}$]PF$_6^-$, $m/z$ 938.48; most abundant ion found for [M − 3PF$_6^-$]$^{+}$, $m/z$ 1299.40. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{16}$H$_{18}$N$_{24}$]PF$_6^-$, $m/z$ 1299.63. $[{\text{[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}[\text{Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}]}]^{PF_6^-$}. Anal. Calcd for C$_{174}$H$_{174}$N$_{24}$F$_{48}$P$_8$Ru$_4$: C, 50.2%; H, 4.21%; N, 8.1%. Found: C, 50.2%; H, 4.35%; N, 8.0%. $^1$H NMR (400 MHz, CD$_3$CN): δ 8.68–8.50 (m, 16H); 8.43–8.33 (m, 10H); 8.29–8.22 (m, 10H); 8.21–8.16 (m, 8H); 7.88 (m, 8H); 7.82–7.75 (m, 8H); 7.59–7.52 (m, 12H); 7.14–1.18 (m, 12H); 1.43–1.22 (m, 24H). $^{13}$C NMR (CD$_3$CN): δ 157.8, 157.7, 157.6, 155.8, 154.9, 135.6, 153.5, 153.3, 152.3, 151.2, 148.8, 148.5, 137.5, 137.4, 131.8, 129.0, 128.9, 128.6, 126.7, 125.7, 124.9, 35.6, 30.9, 30.8, 30.7, 30.3, 30.2, 30.1, 29.9, 29.6, 21.1 and 20.9. TOF MS (ESI+): most abundant ion found for [M − 5PF$_6^-$]$^{+}$, $m/z$ 628.17. $[{\text{[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}[\text{Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}]}]^{PF_6^-$}. 13C NMR (CD$_3$CN): δ 157.7, 157.6, 155.6, 154.9, 135.6, 153.5, 153.2, 152.9, 152.7, 148.8, 148.5, 137.5, 137.4, 131.8, 129.0, 128.9, 128.6, 126.7, 125.7, 124.9, 35.6, 30.8, 30.7, 30.4, 30.3, 30.2, 30.1, 29.9, 29.6, 21.1 and 20.9. TOF MS (ESI+): most abundant ion found for [M − 4PF$_6^-$]$^{+}$, $m/z$ 896.73. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{16}$H$_{18}$N$_{24}$]PF$_6^-$, $m/z$ 896.40. $[{\text{[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}[\text{Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_6$]}]}]^{PF_6^-$}. Anal. Calcd for C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$F$_{48}$P$_8$Ru$_4$: C, 49.4%; H, 4.00%; N, 8.2%. Found: C, 49.4%; H, 3.92%; N,
desired non-linear tetranuclear complex was eluted with a 1 M solution of methanol, the solid was dissolved in water (10 mL) under the nitrogen atmosphere. The reaction mixture was concentrated to dryness to obtain the PF$_6^-$ salt.

8.44–8.33 (m, 10H); 8.28–8.22 (m, 10H); 8.21–8.18 (m, 8H); 7.92–7.84 (m, 8H); 7.82–7.76 (m, 8H); 7.58–7.52 (m, 12H); 7.49–7.45 (m, 6H); 7.14–7.07 (m, 6H); 2.74 (m, 12H); 2.64 (s, 3H); 2.54 (s, 12H); 2.44 (s, 3H); 1.73–1.57 (m, 12H); 1.44–1.16 (m, 72H).

The chloride salts were obtained by stirring the PF$_6^-$ salts in methanol with Amberlite IRA-402 (chloride form) anion-exchange resin. The resin was removed by filtration, and the orange-red solution was evaporated and dried in oven at 70 °C for 16 h to obtain dark red [[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_3$]PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 671.40. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$]$^+$, m/z 671.29; most abundant ion found for [M – 4PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 875.77. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$$^+$, m/z 875.36; most abundant ion found for [M – 3PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 1215.32. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$$^+$, m/z 1215.47.

The chloride salts were obtained by stirring the PF$_6^-$ salts in methanol with Amberlite IRA-402 (chloride form) anion-exchange resin. The resin was removed by filtration, and the orange-red solution was evaporated and dried in oven at 70 °C for 16 h to obtain dark red [[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_3$]PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 671.40. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$]$^+$, m/z 671.29; most abundant ion found for [M – 4PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 875.77. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$$^+$, m/z 875.36; most abundant ion found for [M – 3PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 1215.32. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$$^+$, m/z 1215.47.

The chloride salts were obtained by stirring the PF$_6^-$ salts in methanol with Amberlite IRA-402 (chloride form) anion-exchange resin. The resin was removed by filtration, and the orange-red solution was evaporated and dried in oven at 70 °C for 16 h to obtain dark red [[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_3$]PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 671.40. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$]$^+$, m/z 671.29; most abundant ion found for [M – 4PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 875.77. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$$^+$, m/z 875.36; most abundant ion found for [M – 3PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 1215.32. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$$^+$, m/z 1215.47.

8.44–8.33 (m, 10H); 8.28–8.22 (m, 10H); 8.21–8.18 (m, 8H); 7.92–7.84 (m, 8H); 7.82–7.76 (m, 8H); 7.58–7.52 (m, 12H); 7.49–7.45 (m, 6H); 7.14–7.07 (m, 6H); 2.74 (m, 12H); 2.64 (s, 3H); 2.54 (s, 12H); 2.44 (s, 3H); 1.73–1.57 (m, 12H); 1.44–1.16 (m, 72H).

The chloride salts were obtained by stirring the PF$_6^-$ salts in methanol with Amberlite IRA-402 (chloride form) anion-exchange resin. The resin was removed by filtration, and the orange-red solution was evaporated and dried in oven at 70 °C for 16 h to obtain dark red [[Ru(phen)$_2$(µ-bb)$_3$]PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 671.40. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$]$^+$, m/z 671.29; most abundant ion found for [M – 4PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 875.77. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$$^+$, m/z 875.36; most abundant ion found for [M – 3PF$_6$]$^+$, m/z 1215.32. Calc. for Ru$_4$[C$_{168}$H$_{162}$N$_{24}$](PF$_6$)$_3$$^+$, m/z 1215.47.

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