Greed still makes sense on a star-building spaceship. You want to ensure that you can live the life you want, do what you want, and not have to worry about constraints on your resources. If you’re personally generous, people’s gratitude goes in your direction, regardless of how the resources you’re being generous with came into your hands. The kids with the coolest toys are more popular. People who have been both rich and poor agree: rich is better.

I am greedy. Some people would say I’m exploitative and selfish. Alana said that once, but that was because she felt I was being insufficiently generous to her. She sure as fuck wasn’t saying that I should pull in less money on ethical grounds and expressing a desire for a more modest lifestyle. She’s way greedier than me, but because I do the dirty work, I get called names. Life is unfair that way.

My name is Joshua Mizuno. Born on Earth, boarded the fleet with my parents when I was 3 years old. I produce and sell a couple of drugs. I call them Stim and Love Buzz, and since I market them with those names, other people call them that too.

Love Buzz gives you the falling-and-being-in-love feeling. Like when you have a crush on somebody, and contemplating them makes you happy, and seeing them makes your heart go chunk-chunk. Depending on the dosage, that’s what you feel when you ingest Love Buzz. It doesn’t make you fall in love with anybody, it’s just the being-in-love feeling.

If you’re already in love with somebody, Love Buzz can supplement your feelings, which, let’s face it, can flag from time to time. If you’re not in love with someone, Love Buzz can give you the being-in-love feeling. Many successful career-focused singles use Love Buzz for that full-heart feeling without all the hassles of dealing with a whole other person with all the conflict and inconvenience and loss of autonomy and trials of your patience. All the upside of love with none of the downside, available in pill or drink format at whatever dosage level is right for you.

Withdrawal feels like heartbreak. Scratch that, it is heartbreak. Exact same set of neural pathways as when you contemplate your future without somebody who you are absolutely in love with. Some people use Love Buzz recreationally and can stop anytime they like, but they’re a minority.

People generally prefer drinks to pills. Pills are used wherever the trappings of medicine are called for, or you need your Love Buzz in a conveniently portable format. I sell most of it in a rich red merlot in glass bottles, available in both alcoholic and non-alcoholic varieties. Marketing genius on my part, I think – people associate red wine with romance. I’m a pill man myself.

“Joshie, the Love Buzz Addiction support group is meeting now.”

“Coming!”

I set down the puzzle I’m playing with, and sit down on the bench next to Alana. She’s already got the video stream projecting on the wall. I put my arm around her shoulder, and she leans into me and squirms contentedly.

The people on the screen are all faces I recognize. Seeing some of my best repeat customers denounce my product is always interesting and sometimes amusing. I need to remain detached, so I don’t take the criticism personally. But that’s how you evolve and improve your product line, you look at what the dissatisfied customers have to say.

The group consists of eight people. I point at their faces on the wall, and call up their names in glowy green text beside them. They are Nina, Jeffrey, José, Zhang, Dirk, Shelley, Benjamin and Michael. They are sitting in a circle on nasty cheap-ass chairs. Michael, a relative newcomer speaks first.

“My name is Michael and I’m a Love Buzz addict. Still consuming.”

“That’s an important realization, Michael” says Zhang. He exudes sincerity. He says obvious things a lot, at great length. I smirk.

“I’m going to quit. As of tomorrow. Cold turkey.”

Sure you will, Michael. You’re just low on money, looking to cut expenses. You’re not going anywhere. You might cut back a bit though.

Shelley’s the only one in the group who has actually quit, so far as I can tell. She never had that big a habit – about 80 mg a day, which is a couple glasses of my non-alcoholic merlot. People in the group respect her. Benjamin is trying to get with her, I think that’s his motivation in attending the meetings. Not gonna happen. After a bit, she speaks.

“It’s hard Michael. I think you know the withdrawal symptoms. I think you know how readily available it is. We’re here to support you. “

“My family’s very supportive. They don’t like that I’m a slave to the drug. My wife is going to monitor me carefully. She’ll know if I slip.”

“She might, Michael. But as addicts, we’ve become very good at lying. To ourselves and the people around us. As I was trying to quit, I slipped back quite a few times. The people around me didn’t generally know it.”

Zhang feels the need to add: “Having a family who aren’t users: that’s important.”

It’s always a shame to see a heavy user quit. Michael averages 300 mg a day. More on weekends, and then his intake is more regimented on weekdays and he spends Monday and Tuesday looking pretty glum. Slight lump in the throat. I know the feeling.

Alana says: “He’s not quitting. You heard it here first.”

Statistics suggest that she’s right.

January 8, 2145

Present: Councillor Mustafa Ismail, Dr. Cynthia Wong, Joshua Mizuno

Ismail: What sticks in my craw is that this drug is designed to be addictive. You went to a lot of trouble to give it painful withdrawal symptoms.

Mizuno: I wouldn’t put it that way.

Ismail: But I did. What you’re doing here is keeping people using your product by making it hard to quit.

Mizuno: Obviously. Withdrawal symptoms play a role in customer retention. Doesn’t any business try to retain its customers? Have you ever tried cancelling a gym membership?

Ismail: So we have a bunch of people addicted to Love Buzz. Am I the only one who has a problem with this?

Wong: The drug itself doesn’t have any physiologically harmful effects, apart from dependency and addiction.

Ismail: And then there’s the withdrawal symptoms. I’ve had people tell me it’s the worst pain in their lives, coming off of it. There have been suicides.

Mizuno: With respect, Love Buzz doesn’t make anybody commit suicide, or even hurt anybody. What those people who are in pain ought to do is take their medicine, instead of quitting their usage of a drug which is clearly helping them cope and isn’t hurting them in any way.

Wong: Economically, that’s not an option for everybody.

Mizuno: If the council wants to provide maintenance doses for people who need it, I’d be willing to provide a supply at a reasonable price. It would take about 3 months to ramp up production. Make me an offer.

Ismail: That’s really rich. You create the disease, and then you try to sell the cure to taxpayers. I don’t think so. That’s not going to fly.

Mizuno: I’m proposing a sensible solution to the problem. I’m sure we can work out a deal. You don’t even have to go with me; you can try to make the drug yourself, or find another supplier. I think you’ll find that I can do it faster better and more cheaply than any other option. As I said, make me an offer.

Ismail: We will meet again a week from now. I’m not going to let this rest. We’re going to solve our drug problem. That’s a promise. Joshua, your attendance is required.

Mizuno: I look forward to working with the committee to make people’s lives better.