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 LoveBuzz, and since I market them with those names, other people call them that too.

LoveBuzz 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 LoveBuzz. 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, LoveBuzz can supplement your feelings, which, let’s face it, can flag from time to time. If you’re not in love with someone, LoveBuzz can give you the being-in-love feeling. Many successful career-focused singles use LoveBuzz 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 LoveBuzz 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 LoveBuzz 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.

Wednesday January 4, 2145

“Joshie, the LoveBuzz 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 seven people. I point at their faces on the wall, and call up their names in glowy green text beside them. They are Nina, Jeffrey, 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 LoveBuzz 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.

Sunday January 8, 2145

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

Ismail: The reason we’re here and 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 LoveBuzz. 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, LoveBuzz 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.

Monday January 9, 2145

I first synthesized Stim when I was 18. We each get a growing facility assigned to us. We can grow what we like. It’s mostly a market system. The council taxes us for oxygen consumption and pays us a rate for oxygen production from our facilities. There’s also an automated system that taxes us on pollution. Though what constitutes pollution is a subjective question, and changes based on who’s on council. Do the aromatics from lilacs count as pollution? They do, because a petty-minded councilor didn’t like a lady who had a plot of HyperLilacCrabappleBurst trees. Sensors get deployed, and taxes are levied and bonuses disbursed based on their readings. We also have shared lands, which you’re not supposed to alter for private enjoyment. I hew scrupulously to that. All of my drug growing happens in my facility or in other people’s facilities. I’m not stealing anything from anybody. I pay people for the work they do, or for the use of their growing facilities. I pay my bills on time. I’ve never stiffed anybody. Seriously. How many businesses can say that?

I’m watching Michael on the VeloTrack; the image is projected on my wall, audio played using the LocalEchoEnhancedRealitySoundSystem we have. Biking is a common activity for people withdrawing from LoveBuzz. You get going, and there’s wind in your face, and nobody notices there are tears streaming down them, and if they do, it’s socially acceptable, because you’re biking and there’s wind in your face. He pushes out a couple of little cries when he thinks nobody’s going to be paying attention. A-hunnn! A-hunnn! I smirk a bit. He’s brought it on himself. He’ll be back.

Wednesday January 11, 2145

Alana and I are watching the LoveBuzz Addiction support group meeting. Six people, same ones as last week, except Dirk is absent. Alana says: “It’s hard to look dignified when sitting on a cheap-ass chair, and none of them are pulling it off.“ I demur: The chairs are working against them, dignity-wise.

Nina speaks up. “OK, let’s go round the group. How much consumption last week? I’m at 150 mg a day, pretty steady. I haven’t cut back at all, numerically speaking. It just doesn’t seem like a good time.”

Jeffrey says: “All over the map. It was a pretty good week, except for on Saturday, I drank a whole bunch. I hated myself for it the next day.”

Zhang speaks next. “It is a struggle. Self-discipline only goes so far. I’m always able to rationalize taking the LoveBuzz, even though I know it’s not good for me, even though I know I’m a slave to it. The fact is, my consumption level is 100 mg a day, same as last week. Realistically, next week will be similar.”

Thank you for explaining my business model, Zhang. Right on the obvious, as always. Even your consumption level of 100 mg is a dull cliché. Pills, because you’ve never had a taste for wine. You are the least interesting man in outer space.

Michael says: “My last usage was on Friday. I’m in a lot of pain. More than I think I can bear, it seems like. I can’t concentrate mentally on anything. It feels like all the hope has gone out of my life. I can’t see any prospect of experiencing joy again.” Matter-of-factly.

Shelley says: “Still at zero, I’m happy to report. If I can do it, so can any of you. It’s hard, it really is. But you’ll be free at the end of it. Not entirely free, but way more free than you are now.”

Benjamin’s turn. “I’m getting closer to freedom. I’m averaging 55 mg a day this past week, down from 62 mg a day the previous week. I’m doing fine.”

“That’s not even a habit and not worth talking about.” I say loudly. Alana turns off the feed, and projects some erotica onto the wall. She straddles me and says “Let’s get it on.” We do.

--------------------