

From *Infinite Jest* by David Foster Wallace

YEAR OF THE DEPEND ADULT UNDERGARMENT

An enrolled student-athlete's use of alcohol or illicit chemicals is cause for immediate expulsion, according to E.T.A.'s admissions catalogue. But the E.T.A. staff tends to have a lot more important stuff on its plate than policing kids who've already given themselves away to an ambitious competitive pursuit. The administrative attitude under first James Incandenza and then Charles Tavis is, like, why would anybody who wanted to compromise his faculties chemically even come here, to E.T.A., where the whole point is to stress and stretch your faculties along multiple vectors.¹ And since it's the alumni prorectors who have the most direct supervisory contact with the kids, and since most of the prorectors themselves are depressed or traumatized about not making it into the Show and having to come back to E.T.A. and live in decent but subterranean rooms off the tunnels and work as assistant coaches and teach laughable elective classes—which is what the eight E.T.A. prorectors do, when they're not off playing Satellite tournaments or trying to make it through the qualifying rounds of some serious-money event—and so they're morose and low on morale, and feel bad about themselves, often, as a rule, and so also not all that surprisingly tend to get high now and then themselves, though in a less covert or exuberant fashion than the hardcore students' chemical cadre, but so given all this it's not hard to see why internal drug-enforcement at E.T.A. tends to be flaccid.

The other nice thing about the Pump Room is the way it's connected by tunnel to the prorectors' rows of housing units, which means men's rooms, which means Hal can crawl, hunch, and tiptoe into an unoccupied men's room and brush his teeth with his portable Oral-B and wash his face and apply eyedrops and Old Spice and a plug of wintergreen Kodiak and then saunter back to the sauna area and ascend to ground level looking and smelling right as rain, because when he gets high he develops a powerful obsession with having nobody—not even the neurochemical cadre—know he's high. This obsession is almost irresistible in its force. The amount of organization and toiletry-lugging he has to do to get secretly high in front of a subterranean outtake vent in the pre-supper gap would make a lesser man quail. Hal has no idea why this is, or whence, this obsession with the secrecy of it. He broods on it abstractly sometimes, when high: this No-One-Must-Know thing. It's not fear per se, fear of discovery. Beyond that it all gets too abstract and twined up to lead to anything, Hal's brooding. Like most North Americans of his generation, Hal tends to know way less about why he feels certain ways about the objects and pursuits he's devoted to than he does about the objects and pursuits themselves. It's hard to say for sure whether this is even exceptionally bad, this tendency.

¹Like most sports academies, E.T.A. maintains the gentle fiction that 100% of its students are enrolled at their own ambitious volition and not that of, say for instance, their parents, some of whom (tennis-parents, like the stage-mothers of Hollywood legend) are bad news indeed.