

# Study Guide to GATTACA



Director: Andrew Niccol  
Screenplay: Andrew Niccol  
Release date: 20 March 1998  
Running time: 106 minutes

Starring: Ethan Hawke, Jude Law, Uma Thurman, Gore Vidal

## Key Concept

Genetics, genetic engineering, determinism, freedom, identity, discrimination

## Summary

As soon as Vincent (Ethan Hawke) is born, his DNA is analyzed and his future capabilities are predicted—including the fact that he has a 99% chance of dying of a heart disorder when he is 30 years old. As a result, he is doomed to a life of menial

labor.

However, he is determined to get to Gattaca Space Academy and join space missions. Through his sheer determination—and the use of someone else's very superior DNA which he buys illegally—he manages to achieve his ambition. The film ends with him taking off in a rocket for Titan: he has overcome his genetic limitations and is free.

**Advertising Taglines:** "How do you hide when you are running from yourself?"  
"There is no gene for the human spirit."

## Cultural significance

Hardly a week passes without claims by scientists that they have isolated the gene for some particular disease or trait. Increasingly we are told that mental and emotional characteristics can be attributed to our DNA. Insurance companies want to increase genetic testing in order to identify high-risk applicants for life insurance. More and more we are being defined by our genetic make-up. Gattaca explores these issues.

## Biographical background

Gattaca is New Zealander Andrew Niccol's second major screenplay and was his debut as a director. He says, "My genes made me do it. I don't know when I first thought of it, but you can open a newspaper today, and I'm certain that you'll read something about a new gene, and it became inescapable for me as a story idea." He had earlier written the screenplay for The Truman Show.

## Overview

The film opens with a text from the Bible - Ecclesiastes 7:13 "Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked?" It continues to tell how our civilization may, in the not too distant future, attempt to do this.

This is a world in which women take swabs of their lips to catch the saliva from a potential husband's kiss in order to have the DNA analyzed - to assess their positive and negative attributes. It is a world in which pianists are genetically engineered so that they can play pieces "that can only be played with 12 fingers". It is a world in which police and security checks are carried out by immediate DNA analysis from blood samples.

Vincent, the main character, was conceived by a young couple in love - in the back of a car rather than in a laboratory. Thus he was destined to be a second class citizen along with others born in the same way - and called "faith births" or "degenerates" or "invalids". Within seconds of his birth his DNA was analyzed and

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## **Table of Contents Gattaca Study Guide Answers**

1. Understanding the eBook Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Personalized Recommendations

- Gattaca Study Guide Answers User Reviews and Ratings
- Gattaca Study Guide Answers and Bestseller Lists
- 5. Accessing Gattaca Study Guide Answers Free and Paid eBooks
  - Gattaca Study Guide Answers Public Domain eBooks
  - Gattaca Study Guide Answers eBook Subscription Services
  - Gattaca Study Guide Answers Budget-Friendly Options
- 6. Navigating Gattaca Study Guide Answers eBook Formats
  - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
  - Gattaca Study Guide Answers Compatibility with Devices
  - Gattaca Study Guide Answers Enhanced eBook Features
- 7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
  - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Highlighting and Note-Taking Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Interactive Elements Gattaca Study Guide Answers
- 8. Staying Engaged with Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Joining Online Reading Communities
  - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
  - Following Authors and Publishers Gattaca Study Guide Answers
- 9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Benefits of a Digital Library
  - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Gattaca Study Guide Answers
- 10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
  - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
  - Minimizing Distractions
  - Managing Screen Time
- 11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Setting Reading Goals Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
- 12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Gattaca Study Guide Answers
  - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Gattaca Study Guide Answers

- Distinguishing Credible Sources
- 13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
  - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
  - Exploring Educational eBooks
- 14. Embracing eBook Trends
  - Integration of Multimedia Elements
  - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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