

Human possibilities



GENETICIST: Your extracted eggs... *(noting the couple's names from data along the edge of the screen)* Maria, have been fertilized with... Antonio's sperm and we have performed an analysis of the resulting pre-embryos. After screening we're left with two healthy boys and two healthy girls. Naturally, no critical pre-dispositions to any of the major inheritable diseases. All that remains is to select the most compatible candidate.

Maria and Antonio exchange a nervous smile.

10 **GENETICIST:** First, we may as well decide on gender.

Have you given it any thought?

MARIA *(referring to the toddler on her knee):* We would like Vincent to have a brother... you know, to play with.

The geneticist nods. He scans the data around the edge of the screen.

15 **GENETICIST:** You've already specified blue eyes, dark hair and fair skin. I have taken the liberty of eradicating any potentially prejudicial conditions – premature baldness, myopia, alcoholism and addictive susceptibility, propensity for violence and obesity –

MARIA *(interrupting, anxious):* We didn't want – diseases, yes.

20 **ANTONIO** *(more diplomatic):* We were wondering if we should leave some things to chance. **GENETICIST** *(reassuring):* You want to give your child the best possible start. Believe me, we have enough imperfection built-in already. Your child doesn't need any additional burdens. And keep in mind, this child is still you, simply the best of you. You could conceive naturally a thousand times and never get such a result.

ANTONIO *(squeezing Maria's hand):* He's right, Maria. That's right.

25 *Maria is only half-convinced, but the geneticist swiftly moves on.*

GENETICIST: Is there any reason you'd want a left-handed child?

ANTONIO *(blank):* Er, no...

GENETICIST *(explaining):* Some believe it is associated with creativity, although there's no evidence. Also for sports like baseball it can be an advantage.

ANTONIO *(shrugs):* I like football.

GENETICIST *(injecting a note of levity):* I have to warn you, Mr Freeman, he's going to be at least a head taller than you. Prepare for a crick in the neck² in sixteen years time.

Antonio beams proudly.

GENETICIST *(scanning the data on the screen):* Anything I've forgotten?

MARIA *(hesitant about broaching the subject):* We want him – we were hoping he would get married and have children. We'd like grandchildren.

GENETICIST *(conspiratorial smile):* I understand. That's already been taken care of. *(an afterthought)* Now you appreciate I can only work with the raw material I have at my disposal but for a little extra... I could also attempt to insert sequences associated with enhanced mathematical or musical ability. **MARIA** *(suddenly enthused):* Antonio, the choir...

GENETICIST *(interjecting, covering himself):* I have to caution you it's not fool-proof. With multi-gene traits there can be no guarantees.

ANTONIO: How much extra?

GENETICIST: It would be five thousand more.

Antonio's face falls.

ANTONIO: I'm sorry, there's no way we can.

GENETICIST: Don't worry. You'll probably do just as well singing to him in the womb. *(rising to end the appointment)* We can implant the most successful pre-embryo tomorrow afternoon.

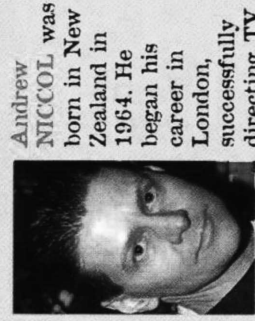
Maria is staring at the four magnified clumps³ on the screen.

MARIA: What will happen to the others?

GENETICIST *(reassuring):* They are not babies, Maria, merely "human possibilities" ... smaller than a grain of sand.

Andrew NICCOL, *Gattaca* (1997)

1. levity: *légèreté* – 2. crick in the neck: *torticollis* – 3. clump: *amas*.



Andrew NICCOL was born in New Zealand in 1964. He began his career in London, successfully directing TV commercials before moving to Los Angeles. He actually made his screenwriting and directing debut with *Gattaca*, a sci-fi movie that raised issues of genetic engineering in a totalitarian environment.