

**Media:**  
**How is suspense created in different film genres?**

We humans demand a lot nowadays where a film is concerned. No longer do we want simple, traditional storylines (well at least I don't!), but instead we expect big explosions, top-notch special effects and quality acting. Film directors have a tough task keeping its audience happy; however the more suspense they create in their films, the more appreciative we will be of it. A classic horror or an intense thriller tends to leave us all on the edge of our seats and this is how suspense affects viewers; what will happen next? This is the only question we want to know the outcome of.

I have decided to study three different genres for this article: an animation, a sci-fi thriller and a late western. All three have many elements of suspense in them, some more obvious than others and are portrayed under these ideas:

- Chicken Run- The Escape
- The Matrix- The Chase
- Unforgiven- The Shoot-Out

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'Chicken Run' is a witty parody which takes the clear set of conventions from 'The Great Escape,' but uses them to form comical moments and to keep the young audience glued to their sets! Directed by Nick Park, the plot is set at a repressive chicken farm, where Ginger and her friends decide to rebel against the evil Mr. and Mrs Tweedy, in order to escape from certain death.

The very first scene immediately introduces symbolism. You see the image of the moon as symbolising freedom and hope, but as the camera pans down you sense the contrast and harsh reality of the chicken world. An image of barbed wire comes into focus encapsulating ideas of imprisonment and enclosure. We see Mr Tweedy's hand securing a padlock and chain, to ensure all the chickens remain confined. This tyrannical behaviour rather instantly makes us realise the cruelty of the Tweedy regime and how it affects the poor, helpless chickens. The severe setting and the fact that its night-time, adds to the suspense and melodrama of the scene. One point worth noting in this opening sequence is of the soundtrack; it's of a frantic and regimental style, re-inforcing the ideas about this particular setting.

Ginger however, is a wily-ol' character and has cunning plans to destroy the Tweedy's long term dreams in business. The following shot of interest is mainly shrouded in darkness. We partly see Ginger's foot, sensing that she is up to something. The suspense in this is that we are being denied information or an outcome caused by Ginger's actions. Low and behold Ginger is again trying to escape, this time by crawling under the barbed wire, with the humour being that it was just via the help of a metal spoon and not some of the members of her clueless crew. Ginger tries really hard to free herself, but every time she ends up in the coal bin.

The last time we see Ginger there in the opening sequence, is built up full of suspense. Parallel editing becomes a real feature now and so much tension is created in the semi-chase scene between Ginger and Mr Tweedy, plus two of his most vicious dogs! The constant switches of one character to another, really is a technique to draw the audience in and to develop the scene further effectively. Once Ginger becomes cornered by the predatory carnivores, we are introduced to a point-of-view shot, which gives us an insight to her feelings. Point-of-view shots are particularly good at

capturing suspense, especially at the climax of scenes and we are aware of how terrified Ginger is here.

A bright light shining on Ginger appears to give her a glimmer of hope, but once we see the tilting shot of Mrs Tweedy, we begin to understand how intimidating and domineering her figure seems from Ginger's perspective. The suspense is that Ginger has danger coming from all angles and the audience are wary as to whether she will survive this.

Just another kid's film, you say? Well after seeing 'Chicken Run' you won't be disappointed; an animated thriller packed with many moments of tension and action. You will not only laugh, yet be transfixed by this masterpiece which is full of suspense throughout. If you haven't seen this film (why on earth not?) then hurry up and do so, because I can genuinely guarantee that you will enjoy it.

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'The Matrix' is predominantly set amongst the computer world, which establishes the main contrast between ordinary people's lives and that of the supernatural creatures shown here. This rather clever film directed by the Wachowski brothers, is somewhat aided by computer-generated graphics, which make it similar to an animation, yet this time humans are involved and not your regular cartoon characters.

How is this all done? Well the film crew use a special mechanism to take split-second shots in sequence applied by a line of single-lensed cameras. The images taken are put into a laser-guided tracking system, mapping out the movements in that specific scene. In this case 40 to 50 camera shots can efficiently manipulate these movements in time, either by slow-motion to freeze frame or by speeding it up supernaturally, so that it looks as though that person is overcoming a force of evil. Modern technology is good, isn't it?!

The Matrix is undeniably 'out of this world' as a sci-fi thriller, because it captures us humans into a virtual simulation, going further than many other films to amaze us with skills such as dodging bullets. Trinity and her so-called good guys are on a mission to stop their rivals (the agents) from destroying the Matrix to expose the lie, which to us is life. In an existence where robotic creatures are more commonplace, Trinity in particular endangers herself to triumph in this encounter.

The opening scene of 'The Matrix' immediately draws our attention onto something unusual. We are being shown the inner workings of the film, by the columns of numbers which have been entered into a computer. This striking image quickly establishes the film genre of a sci-fi. The soundtrack is also strange as we don't really have a clue what's going on at that moment. There is a possible love interest as we hear voices of a man and a woman talking, the woman we can guess is Trinity. The camera shot turns our concentration to the single digit '0' that gradually turns to a close-up, which makes us believe we are travelling into the Matrix world. The '0' of the computer screen is contrasted with the reality of a torch beam, held by an incompetent cop.

The lightning throughout the film is of a grey-green pasty type, spooky in a way. Trinity, very striking in her leather is sitting at the computer from the start, when the police officers begin their raid. When they go to attack, Trinity holds her hands up with signs of no hope and vulnerability. As we suspected, she does not lie down in a difficult situation and manages to overcome this supernaturally. This is when the film crew uses bullet-time photography to slow down and speed up the action in a fight scene. Trinity's moves are extremely well-choreographed managing to see-off so many cops, yet the suspense was still how she would ultimately escape. Parallel

editing is also effective here in cutting from one scene with Trinity to another, when we are introduced to the agents.

Once Trinity had seen off all the cops, she retreated to the roof with the agents hot on her heels. The soundtrack at this point definitely enhances the suspense already created on the imminent chase scene. There is a variety of shots involved in the chase; the tracking shots which follow Trinity when she runs up the slopes of the roof, again showing her extraordinary qualities, using the bullet time photography to speed up the action. Also a lot of the characters chasing Trinity run into the camera, effective in bringing menace across to the audience.

Notice the fantastic tilt shot when Trinity jumps from building to building. For us humans we feel giddy at the height she is jumping at, but this further emphasises the superhuman attributes she has, defying the laws of gravity in the process. Anyone normal would call this feat impossible, so much so the cops come to a halt. Still feeling the pressure of getting caught, Trinity expertly performs a superman-like dive into a window, which has to be the best shot of the sequence. She rolls down a flight of stars, waiting for the enemy very nervously. A point-of-view shot is used here, with Trinity looking up the stairs with total apprehension, all she hears is the howling of the wind and creaking of the floorboards, creating more uneasy suspense in an airy atmosphere.

Trinity's final act of brilliance is saved for when she is trapped in a telephone box. With an onrushing lorry ready to end her life with devastating effect, the audience are left thinking: 'that's the end of her then.' However, once again she eclipses human powers by transporting herself down the phone line and lives to tell the tale.

Although they are two completely different films, 'Chicken Run' and 'The Matrix' display a variety of shots, all in a bid to leave its audience on the edge of their seats from creating sustained suspense. If you didn't think it was possible to do supernatural things such as jumping over buildings at great heights, back-flipping up walls whilst landing blows on your enemy and be transmitted down a phone line, then 'The Matrix' is definitely for you! The impossible can happen and this film is the answer to that.

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Out of the three films I have reviewed for you, 'Unforgiven' the western is most likely to be the film you have not seen. It is similar however to 'Chicken Run' and 'The Matrix,' because it contains the same amount of suspense-filled moments, but they are displayed quite differently. 'Unforgiven' is classed as a late-western, yet it is the opposite to the more conventional genre of a western; old westerns had no suspense at all because of predictable outcomes all the time.

W.W.Beauchamp the writer for this film, is responsible for demythologising the post-war favourite genre in Hollywood. 'Unforgiven' unveils a de-construction to the western movies, not showing the heroic qualities a John Wayne had; drinking whisky is a big theme here in this film! It also goes against the morality that the good guys wore the white hats and the baddies wore black hats. There is a strange kind of violence in the film, where a woman prostitute becomes a victim by being questioned for laughing at a male's manhood. This is far from a conventional idea in westerns and 'Unforgiven' involves many issues of gender, with the certain posture of the cowboys proving their masculinity.

'Unforgiven' marks a literal farewell for Clint Eastwood, the man who single-handedly inherited the genre's mantle from John Wayne. Eastwood takes on the role of William Munny in the film, who is 'a known thief, murderer, a man of notoriously

vicious and in temperate disposition.' Munny is far from a hero, he is a very violent man. He uses too much insulting language when he speaks and seriously harms woman and children. My study of 'Unforgiven' is the climax billed as 'the shoot-out,' or 'the final showdown.' In this Munny goes after Little Bill (Gene Hackman) in order for justice to be done, so he can earn the 'bounty money' through killing.

Munny arrives on the scene of Big Whiskey, a small yet typical western bar at a night setting. The weather in particular makes the scene far more dramatic than it already is (mis-en-scene); with the soundtrack of the thunder and lightning lets you know that something big will happen. Two more features that create even more suspense: we cannot see Munny's eyes at this point, therefore we cannot determine his intent; the scene gradually builds up tension as Munny makes his way to the bar.

Inside Big Whiskey the lighting is very eerie and the soundtrack changes to become more sombre and downbeat- rather matching the mood. The brutality that follows shocks the fellow citizens in the bar, who wait more in hope than anticipation. The action of this scene is slowed down, delaying an ultimate act by anyone so timing appears pivotal.

Different camera aspects particularly of Munny are crucial into capturing the moment of the film and creating more suspense. A noticeable tilt shot gives him a sense of power in the conflict, or at least that's the message we get out from it! A point of view shot from Munny's perspective with a shot gun ready placed, is effective in the way that we can see his one and only purpose- to kill in order to achieve his goal. The distinct irony now is that Little Bill talks up Munny's intentions and ultimately pays the price. Munny is not the goody from this sequence, yet he's the one who profits the most.

Admittedly, 'Unforgiven' wasn't the best film I've ever seen, but what it did do is give me more insight to the western genre and how suspense in turn could be incorporated into that sort of movie. I would recommend it as 'worth watching,' but I'm much more a fan of 'Chicken Run,' 'The Matrix,' or of a really intense thriller/horror.

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What cannot be ignored is that the three segments of films I have studied, all create a high amount of suspense with the types of suspense between the films being similar and also different. Chicken Run mainly focuses on the variety of shots available in an animation, with the odd bit of parallel editing; The Matrix focuses on lighting and also bullet time photography to maximise the action in an intense scene by manipulating time, either by slowing it down or speeding it up; Unforgiven focuses heavily on setting and characters in order to build up its suspense. As far as I'm concerned 'The Matrix' is the most effective at this, as it totally left me on the edge of my seat at the first time of watching it. 'Chicken Run' is more light-hearted therefore allowing its audience to relax a little bit more, which is why it's aimed at children. 'Unforgiven' just does not leave me feeling as edgy as the other two do, yet I feel it has many good points in building up its suspense.