

Arbitrage – Review

— Written by [John Parrot](#) On 1st March 2013

Where has Richard Gere been recently? He's been off looking after *Hachi the Dog*, doing the razzle dazzle in *Chicago* and hopping the freight train as a Billy the Kid/Bob Dylan in *I'm Not There*. Well, now he's back in town as the Robert Miller, billionaire, husband, father and man standing on the brink of disaster.



In *Arbitrage* Gere goes back to his roots as a man whose moral compass has trouble finding magnetic north. It was roles like these early on in his career that got him known as someone capable of edgy performances; an ability he has somewhat neglected of late. But there is more than just Gere to like about this film. The rest of the performances are impressive, the plot twists and turns sufficiently (just about) and the characters inhabit a world that feels authentic.

A while back Honda had a TV ad about how their engineers spent ages working on perfecting the sound their car doors made when slammed shut until, they finally got a 'clunk' that spoke of quality and reliability. If the world that Robert Miller lives in was a car, its door would emit a soft murmur of luxury and privilege. His carpets are thick, tumblers crystal and his suits tailored. Amazingly, director Nicholas Jarecki and his team created this rarefied environment on a relatively low budget, with some help from calling in a whole pile of favours.

The world of *Arbitrage* plays a crucial part in a film where a man is defined by his environment as much as his actions. Although Richard Miller is the quintessential financier right down to his solid silver cufflinks, he's also been a naughty chap. He's been papering over a huge hole in the books in order to sell the company. Then things take another turn for the worse after an accident, and suddenly all that slick confidence is the only thing that will save him from a meltdown.

What makes Gere's performance so compelling, is that despite his moral compromises and cavalier attitude with others, we still engage with him. When [we spoke to Jarecki last week](#), he said the character was borne from a love of the anti-heroes found in 1970s New Hollywood films. Popeye Doyle, Bonnie and Clyde and even Paul

Newman's Butch Cassidy had "something driving them, there's a humanity driving them beneath all the layers that won't die." He went on to say that Gere's ability to play a "double man" meant he was ideal for the role.

The rest of the cast are equally well drawn, and equally compromised. Mrs Miller is played by the ever reliable Susan Sarandon – we're never entirely sure how much she knows about what her husband is up to. Rising indie star Brit Marling is an utterly believable Brooke Miller, his brainy daughter and the heir to the throne. Tim Roth fans will be pleased to see his unshowy performance as Detective Michael Bryer who's just a bit too keen to get his man. Possibly the most likeable character is Jimmy Grant played with real humanity by Nate Parker, a young black man who reluctantly gets drawn into Miller's dubious world.

As mentioned earlier, the story itself is just about twisty and turny enough. If it doesn't rattle along at a lightning pace, this is because *Arbitrage* is not that kind of film. Jarecki puts his faith in characterisation, and the pleasures of seeing the house of cards quiver and tremble as it gradually descends to the floor. Still, this is an assured first feature from Jarecki and a treat for all of us.