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The Best Business

By James Pickford

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Business books are never strong candidates for the Christmas gift list - they are hardly in the spirit of seasonal indulgence. Yet the best of this year's crop may prove more seductive - and rewarding - with lively writing, strong narratives and a sense of the wider significance of the subject matter.

Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat* (Allen Lane £20) was a big hit - and winner of the inaugural FT and Goldman Sachs Business Book of the Year Award. The New York Times columnist argues that globalisation is now so fast-paced and so profound that governments are struggling to manage its effects. Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner bring the "dismal science" to life in *Freakonomics* (Allen Lane £20), applying economic analysis to social questions: do Sumo wrestlers cheat?

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Why do drug dealers live with their mothers?

Another economist, Pietra Rivoli, explores world trade in *Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy* (Wiley £19.99), tracking how one simple product - a plain T-shirt - is brought to market. From Texas to China and Africa, Rivoli reveals what happens when the free market clashes with protectionism.

The supply chain - and how to defend it against business shocks - is also at the heart of Yossi Sheffi's *The Resilient Enterprise* (MIT £19.95), as Sheffi shows managers how to build flexibility into all areas of their businesses. In *Made in China* (Harvard Business School Press, £19.99), Donald Sull, an associate professor at London Business School, draws entrepreneurial lessons from some of China's best-known businesses, shedding light on a little understood market.

Thomas Davenport, too, puts the focus on the individual in *Thinking for a Living* (Harvard Business School £16.99), suggesting that a new style of management is necessary for the 21st century independent and motivated "knowledge worker".

In the marketing sphere, Mark Hughes' *Buzzmarketing* (Portfolio £14.99) argues that, in an ad-saturated world, companies can make an impression by generating media and "word-of-mouth" attention.

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Books that deal with the darker side of business can disturb and entertain in equal measure. In *Capitalism's Achilles Heel* (Wiley £16.99), Raymond Baker reveals the methods by which corrupt governments and crooked executives - as well as terrorists - move money through the global financial system. The book even includes a "Dirty Money User Guide" - alas more appealing to aspiring fraudsters than reforming policymakers.

James Pickford is the FT's Business Life editor.



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