

Roberts, Russell. The price of everything: a parable of possibility and prosperity. Princeton, 2008. 203p bibl afp ISBN 9780691135090, \$24.95 This book is the third foray into the world of economic fiction for Roberts (economics, George Mason Univ.). In terms of prose and content, it is also his best effort. William Breit and Kenneth Elzinga, writing under the pen name "Marshall Jevons," launched this genre 30 years ago with *Murder at the Margin* (1978), followed by *The Fatal Equilibrium* (1986), and finally *A Deadly Indifference* (1995). These three volumes attempted to communicate various principles to undergraduates or anyone else simply wanting to learn some economics in an enjoyable, painless way--via a compelling narrative, solid applications, and perhaps even a murder to solve along the way. By contrast, Roberts' approach has been to hone in on one single theme each time. In *The Choice* (1994) it was international trade and protectionism; in *The Invisible Heart* (CH, Jun'01, 38-5691) the topic was environmental economics. In this new book, set on and around the Stanford University campus, Roberts bundles several clever insights about everyday economics with the overriding theme of prosperity and economic growth, and pulls it all off with warmth and plenty of heart. Roberts also provides an annotated list of sources and suggestions for additional reading. Summing Up: Recommended. All levels of undergraduate students and general readers as well as practitioners.
-- A. R. Sanderson, University of Chicago