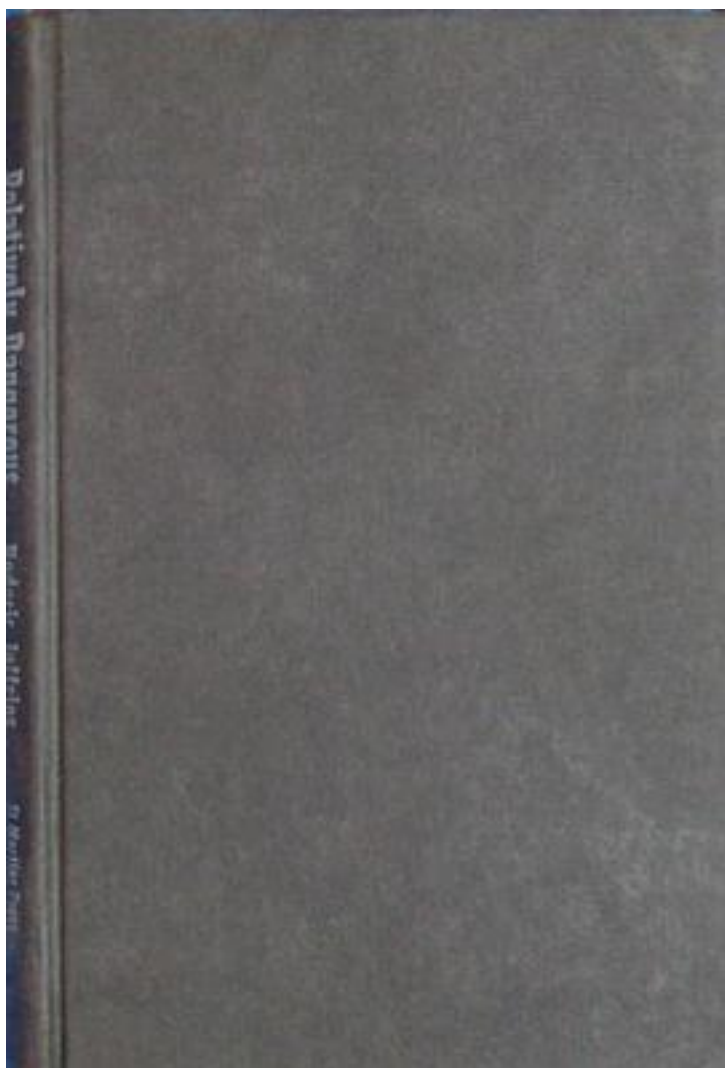


Relatively Dangerous



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CHAPTER 1
The lower slopes on either side of the deep twisting valley were covered with pines; there was also the occasional evergreen oak standing proudly tall. The upper slopes were bare and on them grew only the occasional clump of weed grass wild thyme rock cistus or thistle; in parts their nearly sheer faces had been striated by the weather so that it looked as if in some past age they had been worked by man. At the bed of the valley there ran a torrent normally dry but very occasionally carrying roaring flood water. A road ran along the west side of the valley for a couple of kilometres; then in a succession of sharp-angled bends it wound down to a bridge which spanned the torrent. This road was unfenced throughout its length even though at a couple of points the drop beyond was as much as thirty metres. Nervous drivers stuck nervously to the middle of the road preferring the risk of meeting an oncoming vehicle head-on rather than approaching too close to the dangerous edge. For some years there had been a plan to erect barriers at the most dangerous spots but this had low priority since thousands of the millions of tourists ventured so far away from the sand and the sea. Tim Ford Fiesta rounded one very sharp bend with scrabbling tyres and raced down towards the next one; its speed in such circumstances was so dangerous that it suggested either mechanical trouble or an incapacitated driver. Near the second bend violent braking made the tyres squeal and the car entered into an incipient skid and the back wheels slid within a metre of the edge of the road just past the apex. A driver with even a vestigial sense of self-protection would have backed right off as he sent a brief prayer of

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