Encounters with Conspiracy Theorists

The train careened through the dawn mist of the Welsh countryside as the sun began its climb into the sky. From my window seat I could see steam clouds puffing from the cooling towers of a nuclear power plant in the distance. I'd spent the night before on a ferry crossing the Irish Sea and was dog tired. The morning already had a surreal feel to it, but turned decidedly stranger when a self-proclaimed “old-age pensioner” sat down next to me and began talking about Armageddon. “You know about the Trilateral Commission and the multinational banks, don’t you?” she asked. “If you’re ever going to fight anything, fight a one-world monetary system. That will be the end.”

She quoted from the Book of Revelations and insisted that computers were the beginning of the end. At one point, she instructed me to look at my bank cards and examine bar codes. “A lot have ‘666’ on them—the sign of the devil,” she said. “Coincidence?”

Great, I thought. No sleep, and now I’ve got Mrs. Nostradamus sitting next to me. Truth be told, the whole scene smacked of craziness. After all, there I was—bleary-eyed, exhausted, and not exactly functioning at optimal brain power. And here was this woman, jabbering in my ear about the apocalypse as the sky took on an eerie glow and the nuclear power plant loomed more ominous in my mind. Fortunately for me, the woman soon slipped off the train. “We can’t win,” she said while departing. “We’re doomed.”

At first I had hoped the experience was just a sleep-deprivation-induced hallucination. Then, as my imagination stretched, I wondered: “Was that woman for real—or some kind of sign from the Almighty above?”

Nope, just another conspiracy theorist spreading gospel from the tattered fringes of civilization, I figured.