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Who are all these people, and why are they out to get me?

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When I was a freshman in college, I had a poster on my dormitory room wall that simply read, "just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you."

On the other hand, it's sometimes hard to distinguish whether or not I'm letting my imagination run away with itself, as opposed to having a realistic concern about what might otherwise be thought of as paranoia.

I know somebody out there can tell where I am every second of my life, just because I have a cell phone with recent technology. And I still can't help wondering what the letters "GPS" on the gadget in my car really means. I know somehow, somebody, somewhere knows more about where I'm supposed to be going than I do. Then, if I miss a turn, it makes me feel stupid. The little GPS says, in a very condescending tone, "recalculating," which I learned in GPS language means, "You screwed up. Again."

I can't help but wonder if there is some type of conspiracy wherein people are taking pity on my inability to find the shortest route. Maybe they are monitoring my progress as I travel, and there is some kind of radio transmission back and forth to some central command unit, where they just decide they ought to help me out.

Even more troubling is the fact that I am constantly getting e-mails from people I have never met in my life who know an awful lot about me. They want to warn me about breaches of security on bank accounts that I don't even own. I'm sure they must have the right intent, but it still bothers me.

Others seem to know exactly what software I have, because they keep offering me new upgrades or downloads or sideloads or whatever they are, even though I haven't asked them to write to me and I have no idea who they are. Sometimes they write to me in broken English, leave out words, or say things in such a way that makes me certain they are intoxicated or, far worse, living in a foreign country and pretending to be my friend.

My concern only heightens when I call a U.S. corporation for help, and wind up talking to somebody who speaks in the very

same way. Their name is usually "Greg" or "Susan," but they really don't sound like a "Greg" or "Susan." This bothers me. It heightens my suspicion, because I wonder why the people who answer customer assistance lines from my friendly neighboring U.S. corporation are lying to me. If I'm polite, after a while they usually admit to me that they don't really live here, and eventually they tell me their real names so, again, maybe it's just being paranoid, but it isn't a good feeling.

Even worse, I get e-mails from strangers who claim to know things about me that are very personal and quite embarrassing. It only increases the likelihood that these are all the same people, and there are some groups of strangers somewhere around the world talking to each other about me.

How did I become so interesting? I'm not quite sure what they're saying to each other, but they all seem to feel that I have a number of problems, which I didn't really think I had. They are willing to sell me things to help out, however. Some of these problems are so personal that I can't even write about them in this column. Some of them are accusing me of inadequacies that, if they are real, only my wife should know about them.

Even if I don't think it's true, I wonder why all these other people think it's true. Where are they getting their information? And why are they talking about me? Then I start to worry that if that many people around the world think it is true, maybe it is!

My biggest fear is that, if I pay a lot of money to some high tech people to trace them, they will come back with a report that says, as I feared, it isn't "Greg" or "Susan" but, in reality, they were written by my wife!

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