

The Mystery of ‘Jia Tan,’ the XZ Backdoor Mastermind

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The thwarted XZ Utils supply chain attack was years in the making. Now, clues suggest nation-state hackers were behind the persona that inserted the malicious code.



Photograph: Henrik Sorensen/Getty Images

The scourge of software [supply chain attacks](#)—an increasingly common hacking technique that hides malicious code in a widely used legitimate program—can take many forms. Hackers can penetrate an update server to seed out their malware, or even break into the network where the software was developed to corrupt it at the source. Or, in the case of one particularly insidious software supply chain attacker known as Jia Tan, they can spend two years politely and enthusiastically volunteering to help.

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