INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING
Security Command Center
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AI-Accelerated npm Supply Chain Attacks Exploit 48-72 Hour Detection Gap

SECURITY ANALYSIS | **HIGH** | CVSS 8.1

SCC Item ID	SCC-STY-2026-0244
Type	Security Analysis
Severity	HIGH
CVSS Base Score	8.1
Affected Products	npm ecosystem packages (e.g., axios, TanStack); organizations with open-source software supply chains
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Discovery Source	Gemini

Executive Summary

Threat actors are weaponizing AI tools to manufacture convincing counterfeit npm packages at scale, exploiting a structural 48-72 hour gap between malicious publication and ecosystem detection. Recent campaigns, including a compromise of the widely-deployed axios HTTP client package and a self-spreading attack chain dubbed Mini Shai-Hulud targeting TanStack dependencies, demonstrate that attackers can exfiltrate secrets, establish persistence, and deliver secondary payloads before defenders respond. This pattern signals a permanent shift in open-source supply chain risk: the volume and polish of malicious packages will increase faster than manual review processes can scale.

Technical Analysis

The npm supply chain attack surface has expanded significantly with AI-assisted tooling lowering the craft barrier for typosquatting and dependency confusion campaigns. Historically, such attacks required manual effort to mimic legitimate package metadata, READMEs, and version histories convincingly enough to avoid immediate suspicion. AI code generation changes that calculus: adversaries can produce functionally plausible package wrappers that pass cursory review and replicate the documentation quality of legitimate libraries at scale.

The axios compromise, documented by Huntress, illustrates the core playbook: a malicious version was published to an existing, high-trust package namespace. Defenders who rely solely on package name reputation rather than content integrity are exposed during the window between publication and flagging. The Mini Shai-Hulud campaign, analyzed by StepSecurity, introduced a self-spreading mechanism targeting TanStack

ecosystem packages, a significant tactical evolution. Rather than waiting for a developer to install a poisoned package, the attack propagates laterally through dependency relationships, expanding its blast radius without additional adversary interaction.

Unit 42's monitoring of the npm threat landscape identifies three primary objectives across active campaigns: credential and secret exfiltration from CI/CD environment variables, persistence establishment on developer workstations, and dropper delivery for secondary payloads. Trend Micro's reporting corroborates that attackers increasingly target the CI/CD pipeline itself, recognizing that a compromise at the dependency ingestion stage bypasses endpoint detection entirely. Splunk's detection analysis highlights the behavioral signatures available: anomalous outbound network connections initiated at install time (install scripts making HTTP requests), unexpected process spawning from node or npm parent processes, and environment variable enumeration behavior in postinstall hooks.

The 48-72 hour detection gap is not a flaw in any single product; it reflects the structural latency of crowdsourced and automated scanning systems that power npm's security response. MITRE ATT&CK techniques T1195.001 (Compromise Software Supply Chain), T1059.007 (Command and Scripting: JavaScript), T1567.001 (Exfiltration to Code Repository), and T1204.002 (Malicious File execution via user action) map the full kill chain from initial implant to exfiltration. CWE-494 (Download of Code Without Integrity Check), CWE-426 (Untrusted Search Path), and CWE-829 (Inclusion of Functionality from Untrusted Control Sphere) describe the underlying weaknesses that make this class of attack structurally repeatable.

The defensive gap is most acute for organizations that consume open-source packages without enforcing lockfile integrity, package provenance verification, or install-time behavioral controls. The absence of mandatory code signing in npm's default trust model means that publication access, whether obtained through credential theft, maintainer account compromise, or fresh registration of a typosquatted namespace, is sufficient to reach millions of downstream consumers.

Action Checklist

1. Step 1: Assess exposure, audit your organization's direct and transitive npm dependency graph; identify any use of axios, TanStack packages, or other widely-deployed HTTP client and UI framework libraries flagged in recent campaigns; map which CI/CD pipelines and developer environments consume npm packages without lockfile enforcement.
2. Step 2: Review controls, enforce lockfile integrity (package-lock.json or yarn.lock committed and verified on every install) to prevent silent version drift; enable npm audit in CI/CD pipelines; restrict postinstall script execution for packages outside a verified allowlist; implement network segmentation and egress filtering (NIST SC-7, Boundary Protection) to limit which systems can initiate outbound connections from build environments; apply NIST AC-3 (Access Enforcement) to restrict which CI/CD service accounts have permission to modify dependency configurations; verify CIS 2.1 (Software Inventory) and CIS 2.2 (Ensure Authorized Software is Currently Supported) coverage includes open-source dependencies, not just licensed commercial software.
3. Step 3: Update threat model, register AI-accelerated supply chain package injection as an active threat pattern; map T1195.001 and T1059.007 to your detection stack; add dependency confusion and typosquatting vectors to your threat register alongside traditional malware delivery chains; note that self-spreading mechanisms (Mini Shai-Hulud pattern) change the blast radius model, a single compromised transitive dependency can propagate without developer action.

4. Step 4: Communicate findings, brief engineering leadership and application security teams on the specific risk to build pipelines; quantify the number of npm packages consumed across your software portfolio; frame the 48-72 hour detection gap explicitly so leadership understands that registry-level scanning is insufficient as a sole control; coordinate with procurement or vendor management if third-party software delivered via npm is in scope.

5. Step 5: Monitor developments, track StepSecurity, Huntress, Unit 42, and Splunk advisories for updated IOCs and newly identified malicious packages; watch npm security advisories (https://www.npmjs.com/advisories) for flagged packages; monitor for follow-up disclosures on the axios and TanStack campaigns; assign ownership for ongoing dependency monitoring as a standing operational task, not a one-time response.

IR / Forensic Enrichment

Triage Priority	URGENT
Escalation Criteria	Escalate to immediate incident response if forensic review of CI/CD pipeline logs confirms a postinstall script from a counterfeit axios or TanStack package executed and established an outbound connection, indicating active secret exfiltration and potential credential compromise requiring breach notification assessment under applicable data protection regulations.
Recovery Notes	After removing malicious package versions and enforcing lockfile integrity via `npm ci --ignore-scripts`, rotate all secrets, API keys, and tokens accessible from affected build environments — assume anything reachable by a postinstall script during the exposure window is compromised. Rebuild CI/CD pipeline containers from a clean image rather than patching in place, and re-run all pipelines from a known-clean lockfile state to ensure no secondary payloads persist in cached node_modules layers. Monitor egress from build agents and developer workstations for at least 30 days post-remediation for any beaconing consistent with the Mini Shai-Hulud self-spreading pattern — specifically outbound connections to non-registry npm CDN endpoints initiated by the node process.
Forensic Artifacts	npm install/ci execution logs from CI/CD pipeline runners (typically ~/.npm/_logs/*.log on Linux or %APPDATA%\npm-cache_logs*.log on Windows) — these capture the exact resolved package versions downloaded during the 48–72 hour exposure window and any postinstall script stdout/stderr output | node_modules/.package-lock.json and committed package-lock.json files from affected repositories — these record the resolved integrity hash (SHA-512) of each installed package; compare against the known-good registry hash to detect substitution of a counterfeit axios or TanStack package | Build agent process creation logs — Sysmon Event ID 1 or Linux auditd execve syscall records — filtered for node.exe or /usr/bin/node spawning child processes (sh, bash, cmd.exe, powershell, curl, wget) during pipeline execution windows; this is the primary execution artifact from postinstall script delivery | Outbound network connection logs from build agents during pipeline execution — capture destination IPs, domains, and ports initiated by the node process; counterfeit packages in the axios and Mini Shai-Hulud campaigns beacon to attacker-controlled infrastructure distinct from registry.npmjs.org or cdn.jsdelivr.net | Environment variable snapshots from CI/CD pipeline runtime — counterfeit npm packages targeting build environments specifically harvest CI_* and GITHUB_* environment variables containing tokens and secrets; pipeline execution environment dumps (e.g., GitHub Actions debug logs with ACTIONS_STEP_DEBUG=true) can confirm what secrets were in scope during a compromised postinstall execution

Per-Action IR Details

Step 1: Assess exposure — audit your organization's direct and transitive npm dependency graph; identify any use of axios, TanStack packages, or other widely-deployed HTTP client and UI framework libraries flagged in recent campaigns; map which CI/CD pipelines and developer environments consume npm packages without lockfile enforcement.

NIST Phase: Detection Analysis

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.2 — Detection and Analysis: scope and impact assessment of potentially adverse events

Controls: CIS 1.1 (Establish and Maintain Detailed Enterprise Asset Inventory), CIS 2.1 (Establish and Maintain a Software Inventory), CIS 7.1 (Establish and Maintain a Vulnerability Management Process)

Compensating: Run `npm ls --all --json 2>/dev/null | jq '.' > dep-tree.json` in each project root to dump the full transitive dependency graph; pipe through `grep -E 'axios|tanstack|query-core'` to surface affected packages immediately. Cross-reference against the npm advisory feed using `npx better-npm-audit audit --json`. A 2-person team can script this across all repos with a one-line `find . -name package.json -not -path '*/node_modules/*' -exec npm ls --prefix $(dirname {}) --json \; > all-deps.json`.

Evidence: Before any remediation action, capture the current installed package manifest state: copy all `node_modules/.package-lock.json` and `package-lock.json` files from affected build hosts; run `npm ls --all --json` and preserve the output as a timestamped artifact. These files record the exact resolved versions present at time of discovery — overwriting them during remediation destroys the forensic baseline for determining which malicious version was actually executed in CI/CD pipelines.

Step 2: Review controls — enforce lockfile integrity (package-lock.json or yarn.lock committed and verified on every install) and use `npm ci` instead of `npm install`; enable npm audit in CI/CD pipelines; restrict postinstall script execution for packages outside a verified allowlist; implement NIST AC-3 (Access Enforcement) to limit which systems can initiate outbound connections from build environments; verify CIS 2.1 (Software Inventory) and CIS 2.2 (Ensure Authorized Software is Currently Supported) coverage includes open-source dependencies, not just licensed commercial software.

NIST Phase: Containment

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §3.3 — Containment Strategy: selecting and implementing containment measures to limit further damage

Controls: NIST AC-3 (Access Enforcement), NIST AC-4 (Information Flow Enforcement), CIS 2.1 (Establish and Maintain a Software Inventory), CIS 2.2 (Ensure Authorized Software is Currently Supported), CIS 4.4 (Implement and Manage a Firewall on Servers)

Compensating: Enforce `npm ci --ignore-scripts` in all pipeline runners to block postinstall script execution — the primary delivery mechanism used in the axios and Mini Shai-Hulud campaigns. Add a host-based egress rule on build agents using `iptables -A OUTPUT -m owner --uid-owner ci-runner -j LOG --log-prefix 'CI-EGRESS:'` followed by a DROP rule for non-allowlisted destinations; review `/var/log/syslog` or `journalctl` for the CI-EGRESS log prefix to surface exfiltration attempts. Use `npm config set ignore-scripts true` globally on developer workstations as an interim control.

Evidence: Before enforcing `--ignore-scripts` or modifying firewall rules on a CI/CD host where a suspicious package has already been installed and executed: capture all outbound network connections from the build agent with `ss -tunap` or `netstat -ano`; collect any spawned child processes via `ps auxf` and `/proc/[pid]/cmdline` snapshots; preserve `/tmp`, `$HOME/.npm/_logs/`, and any files created during the last pipeline run timestamped within the 48–72 hour detection window. These captures establish whether a postinstall script from a counterfeit axios or TanStack package already beaconed out or dropped a secondary payload before containment was applied.

Step 3: Update threat model — register AI-accelerated supply chain package injection as an active threat pattern; map T1195.001 and T1059.007 to your detection stack; add dependency confusion and typosquatting vectors to your threat register alongside traditional malware delivery chains; note that self-spreading mechanisms (Mini Shai-Hulud pattern) change the blast radius model — a single compromised transitive dependency can propagate without developer action.

NIST Phase: Post Incident

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §4 — Post-Incident Activity: lessons learned, threat model updates, and detection improvement

Controls: CIS 7.1 (Establish and Maintain a Vulnerability Management Process)

Compensating: Document the Mini Shai-Hulud self-spreading pattern in your threat register with a concrete blast-radius scenario: a single compromised transitive dependency of `@tanstack/query-core` can propagate to all projects consuming any TanStack package without a developer explicitly installing a malicious package. Create a Sigma rule targeting process creation events where `node` spawns `curl`, `wget`, `powershell`, or encodes base64 strings during CI pipeline execution — detectable via Sysmon Event ID 1 (Process Creation) with ParentImage matching `node.exe` or `/usr/bin/node`.

Evidence: No live-state alteration occurs in this step; no volatile pre-capture is required. However, reference the dependency graph snapshots and pipeline execution logs captured in Steps 1 and 2 as the empirical basis for the updated threat model — specifically, document which transitive dependency chains would have allowed Mini Shai-Hulud-style propagation across your portfolio without any direct developer action.

Step 4: Communicate findings — brief engineering leadership and application security teams on the specific risk to build pipelines; quantify the number of npm packages consumed across your software portfolio; frame the 48-72 hour detection gap explicitly so leadership understands that registry-level scanning is insufficient as a sole control; coordinate with procurement or vendor management if third-party software delivered via npm is in scope.

NIST Phase: Post Incident

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §4 — Post-Incident Activity: reporting findings and communicating lessons learned to stakeholders

Controls: NIST AC-1 (Policy and Procedures)

Compensating: Build a one-page briefing artifact using the `dep-tree.json` output from Step 1 as evidence: report total unique package count, count of packages with postinstall scripts, and count of packages last published within the past 7 days (a high-risk freshness signal). Use `jq '[.. | objects | select(.version) | .resolved] | length'` against the lockfile to produce a defensible package count for the leadership slide. Frame the 48–72 hour gap using the axios campaign timeline as a concrete anchor: the malicious version was live and downloadable before registry detection flagged it.

Evidence: No live host state is altered in this step; no volatile pre-capture is required. Attach the package inventory outputs, pipeline egress logs, and any confirmed-malicious package install timestamps from CI/CD build logs (typically stored at `~/.npm/_logs/` on Linux build agents or `%APPDATA%\npm-cache\_logs\` on Windows) as supporting documentation for the leadership briefing.

Step 5: Monitor developments — track StepSecurity, Huntress, Unit 42, and Splunk advisories for updated IOCs and newly identified malicious packages; watch npm security advisories (https://www.npmjs.com/advisories) for flagged packages; monitor for follow-up disclosures on the axios and TanStack campaigns; assign ownership for ongoing dependency monitoring as a standing operational task, not a one-time response.

NIST Phase: Preparation

Reference: NIST 800-61r3 §2 — Preparation: establishing ongoing monitoring capability and maintaining IR readiness against known active threat patterns

Controls: CIS 7.1 (Establish and Maintain a Vulnerability Management Process), CIS 7.2 (Establish and Maintain a Remediation Process), NIST AU-6 (Audit Record Review, Analysis, and Reporting)

Compensating: Schedule a weekly cron job that runs `npm audit --json | jq '.vulnerabilities | to_entries[] | select(.value.severity == "high" or .value.severity == "critical")' > weekly-audit-$(date +%F).json` across all projects and emails results to the assigned dependency owner. Subscribe to the npm security advisories RSS feed (`https://www.npmjs.com/advisories/feed`) parsed via a free RSS-to-email service or a simple Python `feedparser` script run daily. Create a saved GitHub search for `'axios' OR 'tanstack' language:JSON path:package.json` to surface new internal repos adopting these packages. Note: the npm advisories URL above is from the action step as written —

validate it resolves correctly before operationalizing; search-retrieved URLs should be verified by a team member before use in automated pipelines.

Evidence: This is a preparation/monitoring step and does not alter live host state; no volatile pre-capture is required. However, establish a log retention baseline now: ensure CI/CD pipeline execution logs, `npm install` stdout/stderr, and build agent network connection logs are retained for a minimum of 90 days to support retrospective analysis if a newly disclosed IOC matches a package installed during the current 48–72 hour detection gap window.

Detection Guidance

Detection opportunities exist at three layers: install-time behavior, network telemetry, and CI/CD pipeline audit logs.

Install-time behavioral signals: Monitor for npm or node processes that spawn unexpected child processes (cmd.exe, sh, curl, wget, powershell) during package installation. Postinstall and preinstall script execution should be logged and alerted when observed for packages not on an internal allowlist. Process tree analysis showing node.exe as a parent of network-initiating processes is a high-fidelity signal. Reference NIST AU-2 (Event Logging) to ensure these events are captured; AU-12 (Audit Record Generation) to confirm build system logs feed your SIEM.

Network telemetry: Outbound HTTP/HTTPS connections originating from CI/CD agents or developer workstations at package install time warrant investigation, particularly to domains registered recently or not associated with known CDNs or registries. DNS lookups to unusual TLDs during build jobs are a secondary indicator. Environment variable exfiltration frequently targets known secret-hosting endpoints (e.g., webhook services, paste sites, attacker-controlled domains). NIST SC-7 (Boundary Protection) should extend to build system network telemetry, ensuring egress filtering and monitoring are in place.

CI/CD pipeline audit logs: Verify that lockfile changes trigger review gates. Unexpected additions or version bumps to transitive dependencies between pipeline runs should generate alerts. Compare installed package hashes against known-good values stored at last verified build. CIS 8.2 (Collect Audit Logs) should extend to build system logs, not only infrastructure and endpoint logs.

D3FEND countermeasures applicable to this threat pattern: D3-SFA (System File Analysis), monitor package manifest files and lockfiles for unauthorized modification; D3-UAP (User Account Permissions), restrict which CI/CD service accounts have npm publish rights or can modify dependency configurations; D3-LAM (Local Account Monitoring), detect anomalous developer account activity consistent with credential theft that enabled the axios maintainer compromise pattern.

For IOC-level hunting, refer to StepSecurity's published indicators for Mini Shai-Hulud and Huntress's axios compromise report for specific package names, versions, and hashes associated with malicious publishes.

Indicators of Compromise

Type	Value	Context	Confidence
URL	`Pending — refer to StepSecurity Mini Shai-Hulud report for published indicators`	Malicious npm package names, versions, and associated C2 or exfiltration endpoints identified in the Mini Shai-Hulud self-spreading supply chain campaign targeting TanStack ecosystem packages	LOW
URL	`Pending — refer to Huntress axios npm compromise report for published indicators`	Specific malicious package version identifiers, hashes, and exfiltration infrastructure associated with the axios npm namespace compromise campaign	LOW
TOOL	`npm postinstall scripts`	npm lifecycle hooks (postinstall, preinstall) leveraged at package installation time to execute JavaScript payloads performing environment variable enumeration and outbound secret exfiltration before CI/CD pipeline security controls trigger	HIGH

Framework Mappings

MITRE-ATTACK

- **T1059.007** — JavaScript
- **T1567.001** — Exfiltration to Code Repository
- **T1204.002** — Malicious File
- **T1195.001** — Compromise Software Dependencies and Development Tools

OWASP-TOP10-2021

- **A08:2021** — Software and Data Integrity Failures

NIST-800-53R5

- **SI-7** — Software, Firmware, and Information Integrity
- **CM-3** — Configuration Change Control
- **SR-2** — Supply Chain Risk Management Plan
- **SI-4** — System Monitoring

CIS-V8

- **2.5** — Allowlist Authorized Software
- **2.6** — Allowlist Authorized Libraries
- **15.1** — Establish and Maintain an Inventory of Service Providers
- **8.2** — Collect Audit Logs

NIST-CSF-2

- **GV.SC-01** — Cybersecurity supply chain risk management program

- **DE.CM-01** — Networks and network services are monitored

ISO-27001-2022

- **A.5.21** — Managing information security in the ICT supply chain

SOC2-TSC

- **CC9.2** — Manages risks associated with vendors and business partners

MITRE ATT&CK Mapping

Technique ID	Technique Name	Tactic
T1059.007	JavaScript	Execution
T1567.001	Exfiltration to Code Repository	Exfiltration
T1204.002	Malicious File	Execution
T1195.001	Compromise Software Dependencies and Development Tools	Initial-Access

Sources

Source	URL	Tier
A Self-Spreading Supply Chain Attack Compromises TanStack npm ...	https://www.stepsecurity.io/blog/mini-shai-hulud-is-back-a-self-spr...	T3
Tradecraft Tuesday Recap: axios npm Supply Chain Compromise	https://www.huntress.com/blog/axios-npm-compromise	T3
The npm Threat Landscape: Attack Surface and Mitigations ... - Unit 42	https://unit42.paloaltonetworks.com/monitoring-npm-supply-chain-att...	T3
What We Know About the NPM Supply Chain Attack | Trend Micro (US)	https://www.trendmicro.com/en_us/research/25/i/npm-supply-chain-att...	T3
Defending Against npm Supply Chain Attacks - Splunk	https://www.splunk.com/en_us/blog/security/npm-supply-chain-attack-...	T3

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