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The Enemy Within:

Lessons on Insider Threats from Investigations and Programs

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Inject 1: Disgruntled Insider and IP Exfiltration

A senior engineer at a technology company has recently been passed over for promotion. There are some competitor companies that covet the engineer's knowledge, and information access. Over several weeks, the engineer begins downloading large volumes of proprietary design documents outside of normal working hours. The engineer uses approved cloud storage and AI-assisted coding tools to reorganize and summarize content, blending illicit activity into otherwise legitimate workflows. The activity is initially flagged by security tooling but deprioritized due to the employee's seniority and historical trust.

Inject 2: Remote Worker with Hidden Allegiances

An organization rapidly expands its remote workforce using third-party staffing firms. One productive contractor consistently delivers good results. Months later, intelligence emerges suggesting the individual may be using a false identity. After interviewing the contractor's supervisor, a longtime company employee, the supervisor says the contractor had his laptop rerouted when joining, but otherwise nothing abnormal. System logs later reveal an unapproved remote access tool, though no confirmed data exfiltration or clearly unauthorized access is identified.

Inject 3: The Careless Insider and Accidental Data Exposure

A well-meaning employee uses an unapproved AI tool that has some capabilities the approved suite of AI tools does not, to summarize sensitive customer data for a presentation.

Unaware of the tool's data retention policies, they upload unredacted information containing personal and confidential data. Weeks later, other users of the AI tool start getting output that indicates ties to the employee's company. Investigation reveals no malicious intent, but it results in regulatory exposure and reputational damage.

Inject 4: The Trusted Partner Turned Threat Vector

An IT services vendor has broad access to Acme Company's internal systems to support infrastructure operations. One subcontractor embedded within the vendor's team uses the team's shared credentials to collect certain business sensitive information (e.g., non-public financial information), but no personal data, secret sauce, etc. The activity goes unnoticed because some of the shared account users would have a reason to have this data, vendor personnel changes, and unclear ownership between IT security and vendor management. The issue is discovered after another company that uses the vendor finds some of Acme Company's data in its system.

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