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ART OF BLOCKCHAIN THREAT INTELLIGENCE BRIEFING · UPDATED OCTOBER 2026

The Zero-Trust Job Hunt: How Scammers Target Web3 Advisors

Social engineering, corporate impersonation and OpSec for blockchain executives

NEW IN THIS EDITION

Field Note #2: "The CEO Is Free in 30 Minutes." A fake "Head of Recruitment" landed in our founder's own LinkedIn inbox. We break down the full conversation, the five tells, and the one step the scammer skipped that most checklists rely on.

Also new: the booking-link payload, two new rows in the Executive Defense Protocol, a follow-up line for recruiters who dodge, and a one-minute pre-call checklist.

The Shifting Target: Why Executives Are Under Fire

For years, the primary targets of Web3 recruitment scams were blockchain developers. Threat actors, including state-sponsored groups like the Lazarus Group, lured engineers into downloading malicious repositories to push compromised code. The attack surface has since shifted.

Today, attackers are targeting **founders, business advisors, chief strategy officers and operations executives**. Why? Executives hold high-level network access, direct relationships with institutional capital, operational credentials and, frequently, control over multi-sig treasury wallets.

Those attacks arrive in two very different forms. This edition documents one of each.

FIELD NOTE #1 · THE PRECISION LURE

A Real-World $240k Advisor Lure

A highly targeted attack impersonated a well-funded, top-tier Web3 gaming studio. A "recruiter" reached out on LinkedIn offering a **$210,000–$240,000 USD** annualised role as a Strategic Business Advisor, with a job description that mirrored the target's background almost exactly.

The forensic flaw: a copy-paste error left the header compensation at "$210k–$240k" while the footer read "$150k–$220k." Small inconsistencies like this, left behind when attackers reuse templates, are a high-confidence sign of a scam.

This briefing breaks down the social engineering funnel used in high-value Web3 advisory scams, and gives executives the OpSec frameworks to verify opportunities without compromising their digital sovereignty.

FIELD NOTE #2 · OCTOBER 2026 · THE SPRAY LURE

“The CEO Is Free in 30 Minutes”: A Scam in Our Founder’s Own Inbox

We publish this briefing. We run a Web3 careers community. And this still landed in our founder’s LinkedIn inbox. That’s the point: these messages are built to reach people who know better, on a busy day.

A 1st-degree connection, presenting as **“Head of Recruitment” at a well-known Layer-1 blockchain company**, sent a cold DM. Names and identifying details are withheld below. The identity on the profile may belong to a real person or a hijacked account, and the company being impersonated is a victim too.

The conversation

Day 1, evening **The opener**	*“I saw your profile and I was stuck on your background in several companies. I think you are capable to work on an important role of my company.”* ↳ We asked: **which role?**
Day 2, 2:19 AM **The deflection + the push**	*“Just dead busy having a lot of booked call meetings… let us talk on a call meeting.” Then: “I am on meeting with CEO now… I will reschedule the meeting with another candidate and make the next meeting vacant for you,” followed by a free booking-page link for a “VIP meeting.”* ↳ We asked again: **which role, and what stood out in my profile?**
Day 6, night **The title drop**	*“Head of Web3 Talent Ecosystem & Partnerships. It is your role.” Then the same “dead busy” paragraph, word for word, and another push to a call.* ↳ No JD. No pay range. No company email. Still no answer to the second question.

Quotes are reproduced as sent, including errors. We did not open the booking link, so we report the pattern, not the payload behind it.

The five tells

TELL	WHAT IT LOOKED LIKE
1. Profile URL mismatch	The profile’s web address used an unrelated digital-agency name, not the recruiter’s. That usually means a renamed, bought or hijacked account.
2. Spray-and-pray opener	No role, no skill, nothing specific about the founder. A template that could go to 500 people with the name swapped in.
3. Dodged questions	Asked twice which role. Got “too busy, let’s talk on a call” both times, and a bare title only days later. A real recruiter sends a JD in one message.
4. Manufactured urgency	“I’m with the CEO now,” “I’ll cancel another candidate for you.” A cold DM does not get you a same-hour call with a CEO.
5. Booking link as the payload	A free scheduling page with the brand’s name in the URL. Anyone can create one. You book the trap yourself.

What didn't happen, and why it matters

There was **no push to Telegram or WhatsApp**. The conversation went straight from LinkedIn to a booking link. Many scam checklists lean heavily on platform hopping as the giveaway. If that's the only thing you're watching for, this one sails past you.

Precision lure vs. spray lure

The two field notes look nothing alike, and that's the lesson. Your defence has to catch both.

	PRECISION LURE (FIELD NOTE #1)	SPRAY LURE (FIELD NOTE #2)
Effort	High. JD tailored to your exact background.	Low. Generic template, broken English.
Bait	Big, specific pay range ($210k–$240k).	Big, vague title. No pay, no JD.
Delivery	Google Doc with embedded redirects.	Self-booked scheduling link.
Who it fools	Careful people impressed by detail.	Busy people who click to save time.
Giveaway	Inconsistent details across the template.	Refuses to answer simple questions.

THE ONE RULE FROM THIS FIELD NOTE

The booking link is the trap, not the interview. Never book a call before you have a job description from the company's own email domain.

The Social Engineering Playbook

High-level Web3 recruitment scams rarely begin with an obvious malware link. They are multi-stage operations designed to build trust before the trap is sprung. Recognising the funnel is the first line of defence.

1 The Burner Profile

Scammers use newly created, renamed or hijacked LinkedIn profiles. A "Verified" badge only proves the person passed a basic automated ID check, not that they work where they claim. **Red flags:** a profile created a month ago with fewer than 150 connections, or a profile URL that doesn't match the person's name.

2 The Delivery Mechanism

Instead of an official corporate ATS, attackers send Google Doc links or booking links straight into your DMs. Documents are impeccably formatted but contain fake "architecture specifications" that redirect to credential-harvesting sign-in pages. Booking links lead to fake meeting rooms.

3 **Platform Hopping (optional)**

To dodge security filters and moderation, many "recruiters" push the conversation to Telegram, WhatsApp or Signal. **But not all of them.** Field Note #2 skipped this step entirely and went straight from LinkedIn to a booking link. Don't treat "they stayed on LinkedIn" as a sign of safety.

4 **Manufactured Urgency**

The final push before the payload: "the CEO is free right now," "I've cleared a slot just for you," "book the earliest time." Urgency exists to make you act before you verify.

Threat Actor Tradecraft: "Contagious Interview"

Security researchers track related campaigns under names like *Contagious Interview*, a known tactic of state-sponsored groups such as the Lazarus Group. The precision variety uses job descriptions that are not hastily written spam; some appear to be scraped from real corporate planning documents.

The Psychological Hook

Remote-first, flexible advisory roles with large compensation packages, tailored to your background, exploit ambition. Add a ticking clock and the urge to respond quickly overrides ordinary verification.

The Payload: Execution Through Innocent Media

The Google Doc, Telegram message or booking link is only the delivery vehicle. The danger is in how the exploit runs through media that looks harmless. Senior executives rarely fall for a raw `.exe` file, so attackers disguise the payload:

- **The embedded redirect:** a well-formatted Google Doc links to a "V2 Architecture Diagram." Clicking it opens a fake Microsoft or Google sign-in page designed to capture session cookies and 2FA codes.
- **The fake interview portal (ClickFix):** a special site for the "video interview" claims your microphone or camera is broken and tells you to paste a terminal command to "fix" it. The command installs a backdoor.
- **Poisoned calendar invites:** the attacker sends a Google Calendar invite whose meeting link runs malicious scripts or redirects to a malware download.
- **Booking-page lures NEW:** a free scheduling page (for example, `calendly.com/brandname-vip`) that anyone can set up with a company's name in it. Because you pick the slot yourself, it feels like your decision. Security researchers documented a 2026 campaign against Web3 professionals where the booking page redirected to a fake Zoom page carrying a ClickFix command for both macOS and Windows.

PART 2: DEVELOPER THREAT MATRIX

The Workstation & Code-Level Payload

This briefing covers Part 1: the executive infiltration layer. When threat actors target engineers, they skip the phishing links and feed developers malicious code repositories (trojanised npm scripts, hidden info-stealers like BeaverTail) built to steal SSH keys and drain local wallets.

Download the Developer OpSec Guide on ArtofBlockchain.club to spot these code-level traps and build a five-layer workstation defence.

Whether you're auditing a smart contract or reviewing a business proposal, the golden rule of Web3 operations stays the same: *trust is a vulnerability. Verify everything.*

CRITICAL PRECAUTIONS

The Executive Defense Protocol

Use these zero-trust checks to vet inbound advisory and executive opportunities without risking your digital assets, reputation or corporate access.

PRECAUTION AREA	THE RED FLAG	THE SAFE PROTOCOL
Identity Authentication	Profile under 6 months old, few connections, a URL that doesn't match the name, or nothing but a generic verification badge.	**The Two-Channel Rule:** never trust a single platform. If approached on LinkedIn, verify the person through the company's official website, X account or general contact email.
Communication Channels	Proposals sent as raw Google Doc links or zip files, or a sudden push to Telegram or WhatsApp.	Insist on all documents by formal email from the exact, verified corporate domain (e.g., `@topweb3studio.com`).
Domain Spoofing	Lookalike or hyphenated domains (e.g., `@topweb3studio-inc.com`, `@topweb3careers.com`).	Type the company's official URL into your browser yourself and compare domains. Reject every variation.
Scheduling Links NEW	Pressure to self-book on a free booking page with the brand in the URL, before any JD exists.	**No JD, no call.** Accept invites only from the company's own domain. Never install an app, paste a command or sign in again to join an interview.
Urgency NEW	"The CEO is free now," "I've cleared a slot for you," "book the earliest time."	**The 24-Hour Rule:** a real executive hire survives a one-day delay. If the offer can't wait while you verify, it isn't real.
Asset Isolation	Requests to download a proprietary viewer, sign a smart contract or connect a wallet for an "advisory retainer."	**The Sandbox Rule:** never open recruitment files on the machine that holds your main crypto wallets. If a transaction test is required, use only a brand-new, empty wallet.

The “Scam-Killer” Verification Script

To filter out state-sponsored actors and time-wasters, copy and paste this response to any suspicious recruiter DM:

> “Thank you for reaching out. Due to strict personal OpSec policies, please send this JD directly from your verified corporate email domain, and include a link to the official ATS requisition ID so my security team can clear the document.”

If they dodge NEW

Field Note #2 shows the dodge: “too busy, let’s just get on a call.” Hold the line with one sentence, then stop replying:

> “Happy to speak once I’ve received the JD from your company email. Until then, I won’t be booking a call.”

The One-Minute Pre-Call Checklist

Run this before you book, join or click anything a recruiter sends. One “no” means stop.

- ☐ Do I have a job description, sent from the company’s own email domain?
- ☐ Can I find this role on the company’s official careers page or ATS?
- ☐ Have I confirmed the recruiter works there through a second channel I found myself?
- ☐ Does the meeting invite come from the company’s domain, not a free booking page?
- ☐ Will I join without installing anything, pasting any command or signing in again?

Championing Proof-Based Hiring

The Web3 industry is built on cryptographic truth, yet hiring still relies on fragile social trust. Legitimate companies, especially well-funded tier-one teams, use established ATS platforms, transparent communication and verifiable document sharing. They don’t recruit for six-figure executive roles through anonymous Google Docs and free booking links on LinkedIn.

> **Seen a suspicious recruiter DM?**
> Share it with the ArtofBlockchain community, with names blurred. Every real case we document makes the next field note sharper and the next scam easier to spot. **artofblockchain.club**