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## Secure messenger to guard against totalitarian governments

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By **Staff Writer**  
21 July, 2006


Aged geeks should remember the Cult of the Dead Cow (CDC) well. The hacker group was particularly famous for its easy-to-use Back Orifice spyware trojan released in 1998, which was as good for corporate espionage as it was for humorous office pranks. So it's with some irony that CDC has released an open source client that secures your instant messenger communications over the Internet.

Since 2000, CDC has been a proponent of what it calls "hacktivism" - hacking for what it feels is a just cause. In this case, the secure instant messenger, called [ScatterChat](#), is designed for "non-technical human rights activists and political dissidents operating behind oppressive national firewalls," according to the press release. The solution comes from a division of the CDC dubbed [Hacktivismo](#), "an international group of hackers, human rights workers, lawyers, and computer security experts".

"The anonymity and encryption that ScatterChat provides ensures that both the identities and messages of activists remain a mystery, even to well-funded totalitarian governments," says lead developer J Salvatore Testa II.

The instant messenger client is based on the [Gaim](#) IM client, but uses the anonymous [Tor network](#) and offers end-to-end encryption for both chat and file transfers. According to the site, "ScatterChat uses 2048-bit ElGamal and 1024-bit DSA for encryption setup and authentication. For each new conversation, ScatterChat generates a new 256-bit AES message key, a 256-bit SHA-1 HMAC key, a 256-bit nonce, and a 256-bit AES file transfer key. It is immune to replay attacks, supports Perfect Forward Secrecy, and features limited message deniability properties."

It is available for Windows and Linux, with a Mac OSX version expected soon.



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