



THE \$610M RETURN

070 / 10 AUG 2021 / POLY NETWORK / UNCOMMON

THE STOLEN FORTUNE RETURNS.

On 10 August 2021, an attacker exploited Poly Network, a protocol for moving assets between blockchains. More than \$610 million in crypto assets was taken across Ethereum, Binance Smart Chain and Polygon. The date on this card marks the attack; the return of the stolen assets unfolded over the following weeks.

Security researchers at SlowMist traced the attack to weaknesses in how cross-chain contract calls were checked. The attacker changed the authority trusted to approve transfers and then moved assets out. This was a failure in the bridge's contracts, not evidence that the underlying blockchains' consensus systems had been broken.

Poly Network opened communication with the attacker and worked with exchanges, security teams and token issuers. Returns began on 11 August. Recovery continued in stages, including assets held in a multi-signature wallet; a promise to return funds was not the same as users having all their assets restored.

On 25 August, Tether released 33,431,200 USDT that it had frozen after the attack. Poly Network announced full asset recovery on 26 August, while service restoration continued separately. The \$610M in the title is the reported scale of the incident, not an exact value represented by the illustrated coins.

A fictional pirate pushes a treasure chest toward a startled recipient, turning that unusual return into a visible scene. The chest and two pouches carry emblems for the three affected networks. Neither character identifies a real participant or establishes the attacker's motives. THE STOLEN FORTUNE RETURNS. is editorial wording, not a historical quotation.

DETAILS IN THE ART

01 THE ETHEREUM CHEST

The large chest bears Ethereum's diamond emblem. It points to one of the three affected networks. The gold treasure is a visual shorthand for varied crypto assets, not a measured pile of ETH.

02 THE BSC POUCH

The left-hand pouch carries the Binance emblem, referencing Binance Smart Chain, the network's name in 2021. This is one part of a cross-chain incident, not a claim that Binance's exchange was hacked.

03 THE POLYGON POUCH

The right-hand pouch bears Polygon's linked emblem. Together with the chest and BSC pouch, it makes the three-chain reach visible. Poly Network and Polygon are distinct projects.

04 THE UNEXPECTED HANDOVER

The pirate's gloved hands guide the open chest toward the surprised recipient. The handover symbolises recovery over time. Both people and the ship's cabin are invented; the pirate is neither an identified attacker nor a claim of heroism.

SOURCE & ART NOTE

Sources: Poly Network: incident retrospective, 2 September 2021; Poly Network: Asset Recovery Complete, 26 August 2021; SlowMist: analysis of the Poly Network attack, 11 August 2021. The attack, first returns and full-recovery announcement are different milestones: 10, 11 and 26 August 2021. Recovery is reported by Poly Network; service restoration was separate. Network emblems are factual clues; people, treasure, handover and cabin are symbolic. No real attacker identity, motive or endorsement is asserted. The caption is editorial. Commercial rights and physical print acceptance remain separate.