

# Wounded hero revived

Lessons learned from porting M2Crypto to Py3k

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## Origins

- Mitch Kapor sold Lotus to IBM and decided to perpetrate good. One of his projects was [Chandler](#).
- Project is [gone](#) The only remainder of the project is [M2Crypto](#), full Python binding for OpenSSL.

Once upon a time, one Mitch Kapor, who sold Lotus to IBM, and with money he got decided to perpetrate good. He did many truly good things for the computer world, was co-founder of EFF, helped with Mozilla Foundation, but he also founded rather unsuccessful project, a Python-based universal PIM, called [Chandler](#).

Subversion of the project has been mirrored couple of times, one by me.

## M2Crypto

- M2Crypto was maintained by [Heikki Toivonen](#) few years after Chandler folded, but his last release 0.21.1 was from 2011.
- Maintanened in Red Hat by [Miloslav Trmač](#).
- I took over the project in May 2015.

Maintanened in Red Hat by [Miloslav Trmač](#), who collected all patches in RHEL package.

I took over the project in May 2015 with the intention just to publish all patches and be a point of contact for any issue reports. I haven't expected much activity, because package was very silent in RHEL.

## Strengths and weaknesses

- Backed up by stable C library
- Rather large coverage of OpenSSL API
- Surprisingly widespread use
- Large test suite

- Unknown issues
- Python 3
- M2Crypto API copies OpenSSL too closely
- Support for Mac OS X and Windows (not mentioning \*BSD) was broken.

Backed by ... comparing to PyCrypto and other horrors.

## Opportunities & Threats

- Satisfying current user base
- Replacing horrors like PyCrypto
- Goal of maintenance is to maintain API
- Extend support on non-Linux platforms
- Python `ssl` module
- Python [cryptography](#)

Distribution bug tracker (especially an enterprise one) is not a good measure of the real state of use and quality of package.

There are apparently many programmers for custom software, who use M2Crypto (still it is one of the most complete bindings for OpenSSL).

Threats as a “competing” projects, which may replace M2Crypto.

## Unicode

- The biggest problem of all Python 2 programs: complete confusion between `py2k str` means `py3k str` and when bytes.
- There are numerous uses of both in M2Crypto, because of course both strings and binary data are present in all functions of OpenSSL.

## Strategy

- Type Hints
- CI
- Extension of platform support

## Type Hints

- [PEP 484](#) providing **optional** type annotations. Quite controversial, but clearly very useful for libraries
- Native for Python >= 3.5, but supports py2k compatible syntax:

```
def sum(x, y):  
    # type: (int, int) -> int  
    return x + y
```

- Especially useful for our situation: marking types helps us to analyze what individual py2k str actually mean.

## C API

- All Unicode/bytes translation happens on C level as well
- Based on swig, which fortunately natively supports --py3.
- Also need to support two versions of OpenSSL API, 1.1 and older.
- Minimize use of `#ifdef`s and rather use included shims for missing functions.

## C shims of missing functions

- For OpenSSL < 1.1
- For Python 2
  - `PyLong_FromLong()` and `PyUnicode_AsUTF8()` just simple `#define`s.
  - All Pythons >= 2.6 contain whole set of Py3k function stubs in `bytesobject.h`.
- For Python 3
  - `PyFile_AsFile()` I have no idea, why it was removed from py3k API