Write Modern Web Apps with the MEAN Stack
Mongo, Express, AngularJS, and Node.js

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To Mom and Dad,
for sometimes allowing me to sit inside all day on that computer
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CONTENTS

Preface ................................................................. ix
Introduction .......................................................... x

CHAPTER 1  HOW MODERN WEB ARCHITECTURE IS CHANGING ........... 2
The Rise of the Static App ............................................ 4
Enter the Thick Client ................................................ 6

CHAPTER 2  WHY JAVASCRIPT IS A GOOD CHOICE FOR MODERN APPS ... 8
What Is Angular.js? .................................................. 10
What Is Node.js? ..................................................... 13
What Is Express? ..................................................... 20
What Is MongoDB? .................................................. 22

CHAPTER 3  INTRODUCING THE SOCIAL NETWORKING PROJECT ......... 28
Creating a Static Mockup of the Recent Posts Page ................. 30
Angularizing the Page ................................................. 31
Adding New Posts .................................................... 34
Next Steps ............................................................ 38

CHAPTER 4  BUILDING A NODE.JS API .................................... 40
The Stock Endpoint .................................................. 42
Creating Posts via the API ........................................... 44
MongoDB Models with Mongoose ................................... 45
Using Mongoose Models with the POST Endpoint ................. 46
Next Steps ............................................................ 49

CHAPTER 5  INTEGRATING NODE WITH ANGULAR ......................... 50
$http ................................................................. 52
Reading Posts from the API with $http .............................. 53
Serving posts.html Through Node ................................... 55
Saving Posts to the API with $http .................................. 56
Fixing the Post Ordering ............................................. 57
Cleaning Up server.js ................................................ 58
Cleaning Up Angular .................................................. 63
Next Steps ............................................................ 67
### CONTENTS

**CHAPTER 10**  PERFORMING END-TO-END TESTING .............................................. 142
- Setting Up Protractor ........................................ 144
- JavaScript Testing Frameworks ................................. 145
- Writing a Basic Protractor Test ................................. 146
- Protractor Expectations ......................................... 156
- chai-as-promised ................................................ 159
- When to Use End-to-End Tests .................................. 160
- Next Steps ....................................................... 161

**CHAPTER 11**  TESTING THE NODE SERVER .............................................. 162
- Not Quite Unit Testing ........................................... 164
- Mocha for Node .................................................. 165
- Post Controller ................................................... 167
- SuperTest ......................................................... 168
- Base Router ....................................................... 169
- Using the Base Router with SuperTest ......................... 170
- Models in Controller Tests ....................................... 171
- Testing Controllers with Authentication ......................... 173
- Code Coverage .................................................... 175
- The npm test Command .......................................... 177
- JSHint ............................................................. 178
- Next Steps ....................................................... 179

**CHAPTER 12**  TESTING ANGULAR.JS ..................................................... 180
- Using Karma ...................................................... 182
- Using Bower ...................................................... 183
- Setting Up Karma ................................................ 185
- Basic Karma Service Test ....................................... 187
- HTTP Testing with Karma ...................................... 189
- Karma Controller Test ......................................... 192
- Testing Spies ..................................................... 197
- Next Steps ....................................................... 199
## Chapter 13: Deploying to Heroku
- Platform-as-a-Service
- How Heroku Works
- Twelve-Factor Apps
- Deploying an Application to Heroku
- MongoDB on Heroku
- Redis on Heroku
- Compiling Assets
- Node Cluster
- Next Steps

## Chapter 14: Deploying to Digital Ocean
- What Is Digital Ocean?
- Single-Server vs. Multiserver Architecture
- Fedora 20
- Creating a Server
- Installing Node
- Installing MongoDB
- Installing Redis
- Running the Social App
- Running Social App Under systemd
- Zero-Downtime Deploys
- Multiserver Migration
- Next Steps
- Conclusion

Index
WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

This book is for web developers wanting to learn how building web applications has changed. The book assumes a basic knowledge of JavaScript. Knowledge of Node or Angular is helpful as well but not required.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I've been a web developer since 2004 and have professionally worked with most of the major web platforms. I love to seek out new technology that helps me write my applications better.

Applications built with an MVC framework such as Angular has been the largest paradigm shift that I've seen in the web community. Frameworks and tools have come and gone, but client-side MVC applications are fundamentally different.

I've been impressed with the quality of applications that I've shipped with Angular and Node. The tools are simple—sometimes a bit naïve—but this simplicity comes with the fantastic ability to iterate on features and maintain a codebase.

Applications such as those built with the MEAN stack are becoming more popular, but many development teams still feel comfortable with server-generated pages and relational databases.

I've had such good luck with MEAN applications that I want to share my knowledge of how to build them with you.

I hope you'll enjoy exploring this new method of building applications with me. I love discussing these topics, so feel free to reach out to me on Twitter to continue the conversation.

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August 2014
INTRODUCTION

The JavaScript community has a strong belief in the power of composability when architecting software. This is in line with the Unix philosophy of simple components that can be used together to quickly build applications.

By no means is this methodology the only one that exists. Ruby on Rails, for example, uses an opinionated framework to make decisions for you about what your application should look like. Opinionated frameworks offer the advantage of being able to quickly learn an application because out of the box it works—you just need to fill in the gaps. Opinionated frameworks are also easier to learn because there is usually a “right” way to do something. The downside is that you’re limited to building applications that the framework was made for, and moving outside of the use cases the framework was made for can be difficult.

By contrast, the composition methodology is more flexible. Composing simple pieces together has a clear advantage of allowing you to build anything you want. These frameworks provide you with building blocks, and it’s up to you to decide how to put them together. The downside is mostly in the learning phase. It’s difficult to know what is a good idea and what is a bad idea without having experience doing both.

For this reason, it’s useful to read up on opinionated guides for how to build JavaScript applications. These opinions provide one person’s viewpoint on good and bad decisions and give you a road map to what an application should look like.

This book shows you how to build your own MEAN application following my opinions of what a good application should look like. These opinions come from my experience developing applications. While I have a good amount of experience, it’s unlikely it will fit perfectly with any other one person. For this reason, I find books such as this are useful to learn not just the “how” of using a tool set but the “why” as well.

In other words, it’s useful to know how to use promises in Node but not very useful if you don’t understand why they’re useful.

The application you will build is called simply Social App (see Figure I.1). You can see an example of it running at https://mean-sample.herokuapp.com as well as the code at https://github.com/dickeyxxx/mean-sample.

The application is similar to Twitter. Users can create an account and add posts. The feature count is not large but does consist of some neat solutions such as WebSockets that immediately display new posts to all users viewing the application. I’ll also go over compiling the CSS and JavaScript assets with Gulp, deploying the application to both Heroku and Digital Ocean, building a clean, maintainable API and more.

Having a “newsfeed” that displays live, updating content is a pattern that I see on just about every project I work on. I chose this as an example because it is complicated enough to incorporate many different tools but not so complex that you will become bogged down in the minutiae of this specific application.
This application is also easily extensible. I encourage you while reading this book to take the time to not only implement the application as I have done but to build features of your own. It’s relatively easy to follow along and build the same application, but you know that’s not how software is actually written.

Learning a new skill is tough. As a teacher, I’ve witnessed many people learning something for the first time and been able to witness their progress. One facet of that I’ve noticed is that learning doesn’t feel like anything. You can’t tell whether you’re learning something when you’re learning it—in fact, learning feels a lot more like frustration.

What I’ve learned is that during this period of frustration is actually when people improve the most, and their improvements are usually obvious to an outsider. If you feel frustrated while trying to understand these new concepts, try to remember that it might not feel like it, but you’re probably rapidly expanding your knowledge.

With that, join me in Chapter 1 while you learn a bit about the history of the Web’s surprising relationship with JavaScript, how it’s changed the way we think of applications, and where the MEAN stack fits in.
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CHAPTER 4
Building a Node.js API
In the previous chapter, you built a fully functioning Angular app for posting status updates. In this chapter, you will build an API for it to get a list of all the posts and to make a new post. The endpoints will be as follows:

- **GET /api/posts** returns a JSON array of all the posts. This is similar to what you had in `$scope.posts`.
- **POST /api/posts** expects a JSON document containing a username and post body. It will save that post in MongoDB.
THE STOCK ENDPOINT

To start, you'll use Node.js and Express to build a stock /api/posts endpoint. First, inside a new folder, create a package.json file like the following:

```json
{
    "name": "socialapp"
}
```

The name can be anything you want, but try to ensure it doesn't conflict with an existing package. The package.json file is the only thing you need to make a directory a node project.

Now that you have this, you can add express and body-parser as dependencies:

```bash
$ cd <path-to-project-folder>
$ npm install --save express
$ npm install --save body-parser
```

body-parser is used for express to read in JSON on POST requests automatically.

The --save flag saves the dependency to the package.json file so you know what versions of what packages the app was built with (and therefore depends on). In fact, if you open your package.json, you'll see something similar to this:

```json
{
    "name": "socialapp",
    "dependencies": {
        "body-parser": "^1.4.3",
        "express": "^4.4.4"
    }
}
```

Now that you've done this, you can require('express') to include it in a node script.
Create a server.js file with the following contents:

```javascript
var express = require('express')
var bodyParser = require('body-parser')

var app = express()
app.use(bodyParser.json())

app.get('/api/posts', function (req, res) {
    res.json([{
        username: 'dickeyxxx',
        body: 'node rocks!'  
    }])
})

app.listen(3000, function () {
    console.log('Server listening on', 3000)
})
```

Try running this file:

```
$ node server.js
```

You can access it in your browser at `http://localhost:3000/api/posts`. You should see that your stubbed JSON comes back.

You now have the basic Node request in place, so you need to add the POST endpoint for adding posts and back it against MongoDB.
CREATING POSTS VIA THE API

Now let’s build the POST endpoint for creating posts. Add this endpoint to server.js:

```javascript
app.post('/api/posts', function (req, res) {
    console.log('post received!')
    console.log(req.body.username)
    console.log(req.body.body)
    res.send(201)
})
```

This is just a request that checks to see whether you’re reading the data properly. The client would receive only the HTTP status code 201 (created). It’s good to build a lot of these stubbed-out sorts of logic to check to see whether your plumbing is in order when building MEAN applications. Because you can’t test a POST request using the browser, you should check to see whether it is working using curl:

```
curl -v -H "Content-Type: application/json" -XPOST --data "{"username":"dickeyxxx", "body":"node rules!"}" localhost:3000/api/posts
```

If you are unfamiliar with curl, this says “Make a POST request to localhost:3000/api/posts. Be verbose.” Setting your Content-Type header to json includes the JSON document as the body.

The Content-Type header is necessary to be able to parse this content into the friendly req.body.username objects from the JSON.

If the command line isn’t your thing, you can do this same thing using the great Postman app for Chrome to test APIs. Regardless of what method you use, it is crucial you test your APIs using stub clients like this rather than building your app in lockstep.
To interact with MongoDB, you will be using the Mongoose ODM. It’s a light layer on top of the Mongo driver. To add the npm package, do this:

```
$ npm install --save mongoose
```

It’ll be good to keep this code modularized so your server.js file doesn’t get huge. Let’s add a db.js file with some of the base database connection logic:

```javascript
var mongoose = require('mongoose')
mongoose.connect('mongodb://localhost/social', function () {
    console.log('mongodb connected')
})
module.exports = mongoose
```

You can get access to this mongoose instance by using the require function. Now let’s create a mongoose model to store the posts. Place this code in models/post.js:

```javascript
var db = require('../db')
var Post = db.model('Post', {
    username: { type: String, required: true },
    body: { type: String, required: true },
    date: { type: Date, required: true, default: Date.now }
})
module.exports = Post
```

Now you have a model you can get with require. You can use it to interact with the database.
USING MONGOOSE MODELS WITH THE POST ENDPOINT

Now requiring this module will give you the Post model, which you can use inside of your endpoint to create posts.

In server.js, change your `app.post('/api/posts')` endpoint to the following:

```javascript
var Post = require('./models/post')
app.post('/api/posts', function (req, res, next) {
    var post = new Post({
        username: req.body.username,
        body: req.body.body
    })
    post.save(function (err, post) {
        if (err) { return next(err) }
        res.json(201, post)
    })
})
```

First, you require the Post model. When a request comes in, you build up a new instance of the Post model with `new Post()`. Then, you save that Post model and return a JSON representation of the model to the user with status code 201.

While it isn’t totally necessary to return the JSON here, I like for my create API actions to do so. The client can sometimes make use of it. It might be able to use the `_id` field or show data that the server generated (such as the date field, for example).

Note the `err` line. In Node, it’s common for code to return callbacks like this that start with an error argument, and then the data is returned. It’s your responsibility to check whether there is an error message and do something about it. In this case, you call the `next()` callback with an argument, which triggers a 500 in Express. An error in this case would typically mean the database was having issues. Other programming languages use exceptions to handle errors like this, but Node.js made the design decision to go with error objects because of its asynchronous nature. It’s simply not possible to bubble up an exception with evented code like Node.js.

Go ahead and hit this endpoint again with curl or Postman. (Make sure you first restart your server. Later you’ll see how to automatically restart it with nodemon.)

```bash
$ curl -v -H "Content-Type: application/json" -XPOST --data
  "{"username": "dickeyxxx", "body": "node rules!"}"
  localhost:3000/api/posts
```
You should see a response like the following (make sure you’ve started your Mongo server):

```
> POST /api/posts HTTP/1.1
> User-Agent: curl/7.30.0
> Host: localhost:3000
> Accept: */*
> Content-Type: application/json
> Content-Length: 46
>
> * upload completely sent off: 46 out of 46 bytes
< HTTP/1.1 201 Created
< X-Powered-By: Express
< Content-Type: application/json; charset=utf-8
< Content-Length: 120
< Date: Sun, 22 Jun 2014 00:41:55 GMT
< Connection: keep-alive
<

* Connection #0 to host localhost left intact

{"__v":0,"username":"dickeyxxx","body":"node rules!","_id":
  "53a62653fa305e5ddb318c1b","date":"2014-06-22T00:41:55.040Z"}
```

Since you see an _id field coming back, I’m pretty sure it’s working. Just to be sure, though, let’s check the database directly with the mongo command:

```
$ mongo social
MongoDB shell version: 2.6.1
connecting to social
> db.posts.find()
{ "_id" : ObjectId("53a62653fa305e5ddb318c1b"), "username" : "dickeyxxx", 
  "body" : "node rules!", "date" : ISODate("2014-06-22T00:41:55.040Z"), 
  "__v" : 0 }
```

Looks like it made it into the database!

Now, let’s update the GET request to read from the database:

```
app.get('/api/posts', function (req, res, next) {
    Post.find(function(err, posts) {
        if (err) { return next(err) }
        res.json(posts)
    })
})
```
This one is similar to the last one. Call `find` on the `Post` model; then, when the request returns, render out the posts as JSON (so long as no error was returned). Go back to your web browser and reload `http://localhost:3000/api/posts` to see it in action.

You now have a full API you can read and write from in order to support your Angular app.

Here is the final `server.js`:

```javascript
var express = require('express')
var bodyParser = require('body-parser')
var Post = require('./models/post')

var app = express()
app.use(bodyParser.json())

app.get('/api/posts', function (req, res, next) {
  Post.find(function(err, posts) {
    if (err) { return next(err) }
    res.json(posts)
  })
})

app.post('/api/posts', function (req, res, next) {
  var post = new Post({
    username: req.body.username,
    body: req.body.body
  })
  post.save(function (err, post) {
    if (err) { return next(err) }
    res.json(201, post)
  })
})

app.listen(3000, function () {
  console.log('Server listening on', 3000)
})
```
NEXT STEPS

You've now built the full API for you to use with the Angular app. In the next chapter, you'll integrate the API into Angular and serve the Angular app via Node. You'll also take some time to clean up your code a little by breaking it into modules.
INDEX

NUMBER
12-factor apps. See Heroku 12-factor apps

A
Ajax-empowered JavaScript, 4
AMQP (RabbitMQ) message broker, 137
Angular applications
  cookie-based authentication, 88
  token-based authentication, 88
Angular code modules, 31
Angular.js. See also Node integration with Angular
  benefits, 12
  breaking into services, 64–66
  creating logical sections, 64–66
  events, 114–115
  vs. jQuery, 10–12
JSON, 12
  overview, 10
recent posts page, 31–33
serving static assets, 63–64
“Unknown provider” error, 75
use with MEAN stack, 12
WebSockets in, 133–134
Angular.js testing. See also testing frameworks
  Karma controller, 192–196
  Karma service test, 187–188
  setting up Karma, 185–186
  spies, 197–198
application process, traditional, 4
asynchronous code, writing with promises, 52
authenticating social posts, 116–117
authentication in Express, 110–113
authentication in Node.js. See also Node.js
  BCrypt, 94–96
  JWT (JSON Web Token), 89–93
  with MongoDB, 97–100
  tokens, 88
automating builds. See Gulp

B
back end, 6
base router
  accessing for Node-server testing, 169
  using with SuperTest, 170
BCrypt hashing algorithm, 94–96
boot.js script, 229–231
Bootstrap styling, using with login form, 107
Bower, using with Angular, 183–184
BSON data storage, using with MongoDB, 23–24
callbacks, 16–17
Chai assertion, performing in Protractor, 157
client authentication. See authentication
client-server communication. See WebSockets
cloud server. See Digital Ocean cloud server
CommonJS spec, 17
“concurrency,” handling, 15–16
connecting to ws websocket, 129–130
controller tests, models in, 171–173
controllers
  declaring with Angular.js, 31–32
testing, 192–196
controllers with authentication, testing,
  173–174
cookie-based authentication, 88
CSS, building with Gulp, 80–81

data, loading with WebSockets, 128
databases. See MongoDB document
database
Digital Ocean cloud server
  architecture, 217
  centralized databases, 235
  creating account with, 219
  creating droplets, 219–221
  Fedora 20, 218, 220
  installing Redis, 225–226
  load balancer, 234–235
  MongoDB, 223–224
  multiserver migration, 234–235
  overview, 216
  private networking, 235
  running social app, 227
  social app under systemd, 228
  SSH key, 219, 221
  zero-downtime deploys, 229–233
documents
  inserting in MongoDB, 26
  querying in MongoDB, 26
droplets, creating on Digital Ocean, 219–221

e2e directory, using in Protractor test, 146
derend-to-end testing
  JavaScript testing frameworks, 145
  Protractor setup, 144
  using, 160
testing, 192–196
event architecture, 15–16
events
  Angular.js, 114–115
  broadcasting in WebSockets, 131
events from clients, publishing, 139
  expectations in Protractor, 156–158
Express NPM package
  authentication, 110–113
  databases for Node.js, 20
Express NPM package (continued)
installing, 20
JWT with, 90–91
stock endpoint, 42–43
external modules, declaring, 17

F
Fedora 20, 218, 220
foreign keys for users, 122
function calls, testing for, 197–198

G
Git, integrating for Heroku, 205
Grunt and Gulp, 70
Gulp
angular.module() method, 72
building CSS, 80–81
building JavaScript, 72–79
getters and setters, 72
and Grunt, 70
“Hello World,” 71
rebuilding upon file changes, 77
source maps, 78–79
Uglifier, 74–77
gulp-autoprefixer plug-in, 84
gulp-concat plugin, installing, 72
gulp-imagemin plug-in, 84
gulp-jshint plug-in, 84
gulp-livereload plug-in, 84
gulp.-.nodemon, Uglifier minification tool, 82–83
gulp-rev plug-in, 84
gulp- rimraf plug-in, 84
gulp.watch, 77

H
hashing algorithms, using with passwords, 94
“Hello World”
Gulp, 71
Node.js, 19
Heroku 12-factor apps
admin processes, 204
backing services, 204
build, release, run, 204
codebase, 204
concurrency, 204
config, 204
dependencies, 204
dev/prod parity, 204
disposable, 204
logs, 204
port binding, 204
processes, 204
Heroku PaaS
compiling assets, 210–211
deploying applications to, 205–206
error page, 206
function of, 203
hosting UNIX processes, 203
integrating Git for, 205
MongoDB on, 207
Node Cluster, 212
overview, 202
Redis on, 208–209
$http
reading posts from API with, 53–54
saving posts to API, 56
HTML5 pushstate, enabling, 118, 121
HTTP calls, performing in Angular, 52
HTTP module, using with Node.js, 19
HTTP proxy, node-http-proxy, 234–235
HTTP testing with Karma, 189–191

I
installing
Express NPM package, 20
gulp-concat plugin, 72
MongoDB document database, 25
MongoDB for Digital Ocean, 223–224
Node.js, 18
Redis for Digital Ocean, 225
Uglifier minification tool, 72
I/O, handling by JavaScript, 16

J
Jasmine testing framework, 145
JavaScript
Ajax-empowered, 4
design of, 16
maintenance, 5
sharing code on Web, 17
testing frameworks, 145
jQuery vs. Angular.js, 10–12
JSHint, using with Node, 178
JSON
recent posts page, 32
use with Angular.js, 12
JWT (JSON Web Token)
creating tokens, 89
with Express, 90–91
password validation, 91–93
server.js, 90

K
Karma controller test, 192–196
Karma test runner
services, 187–188
setting up, 185–186
using with Angular, 182

L
languages, rise and fall, 14
libraries, handling concurrency, 16
logged-in user, showing, 114–115
login form
Bootstrap styling, 107
creating, 107–109
in Protractor, 153–154
updating nav bar, 114
updating URL, 108
.login() function, calling, 108
logout, 120

M
message brokers
AMQP (RabbitMQ), 137
Redis’s pubsub, 137–138
ZeroMQ, 137
messages, passing as strings, 127
minification tool, Uglifier, 74–77
mobile APIs, 5
Mocha testing framework
default reporter, 165
described, 145
for Node, 165–166
Nyan Cat reporter, 166
using with Protractor, 147–148
modularity, 6
modules
declaring controller, 31
and NPM, 17–18
mongod daemon, starting, 25
MongoDB document database
authentication, 97–100
auto-sharding, 24
BSON data storage, 23–24
Collection in hierarchy, 25
collections, 22
Database in hierarchy, 25
Document in hierarchy, 25
document-oriented, 22–23
documents, 22
ensureIndex command, 24
on Heroku, 207
hierarchy of data, 25
horizontal scaling, 24
inserting documents, 26
installing, 25
installing for Digital Ocean, 223–224
Mongoose ODM, 45
overview, 22
playground database, 25
querying, 23
querying documents, 26
schemaless, 24
tables, 22
test database, 25
user and roles, 22
using, 25
Mongoose ODM with Post endpoint, 46–48

N
namespace routers, 61
nav bar, updating in login form, 114
ng-annotate tool, using with Uglifier, 76
ng-route, 104–106
ng/websockets.js file, creating, 133
Node Cluster, using with Heroku, 212
Node integration with Angular. See also
Angular.js
$http, 52
addPost() method, 56
cleaning up server.js, 58–62
post ordering, 57
promises, 52
reading posts with $http, 53–54
saving posts with $http, 56
serving posts.html, 55
Node stack, writing tests for, 164
node-http-proxy, 234–235
Node.js. See also authentication in Node.js
booting inside Protractor, 149–151
databases for Express, 20
in enterprise, 14
“Hello World” server, 19
HTTP module, 19
installing, 18
modules and NPM, 17–18
ORMs (object related mappers), 20
overview, 13
performance, 15
startup vs. enterprise, 13
Walmart, 15
web server, 19
Node.js API
creating posts, 44
Mongoose ODM, 45
Mongoose with Post endpoint, 46–48
server.js, 48
stock endpoint, 42–43
Node-server testing. See also tests
base router, 169
code coverage, 175–176
controllers with authentication, 173–174
GET action, 167
JSHint, 178
Mocha, 165–166
models in controller tests, 171–173
npm package, 175
npm test command, 177
POST /api/posts endpoint, 173
post controller, 167
SuperTest, 168
NPM and modules, 17–18
NPM package, Express, 20–21
npm package, using with Node, 175
npm test command, 177
O
open source environment, 13
ORMs (object related mappers), 26
P
PaaS (platform-as a service), Heroku, 202
package manager, NPM, 17
pages. See recent posts page
password validation in JWT, 91–93
passwords, using hashing algorithms, 94
PayPal in enterprise, 14
performance
as benefit of Web architecture, 6
Node.js, 15
POST /api/posts endpoint, testing, 173
Post endpoint, using Mongoose with,
46–48
post notifications, publishing, 130–132
post ordering, fixing, 57
posts
adding to recent posts page, 34–37
making with Protractor, 154–155
Node.js API, 44
posts.html, serving through Node, 55
progressive enhancement, 4–5
promises
clarifying with chai-as-promised, 159
using with Node.js and Angular, 52
prototyping, 6
Protractor. See also testing frameworks
booting Node inside, 149–151
Chai assertion, 157
configuring, 147–149
Protractor (continued)
  DOM element for locator, 151–152
  editing server.js, 150–151
  enableTimeouts setting, 147
  expectations, 156–158
  installing Mocha, 147–148
  locators, 151–152
  login form, 153–154
  login nav link, 152–154
  making posts, 154–155
  onPrepare function, 149–150
  running, 147–149
  setting up, 144
  wiping database after running, 155
Protractor test
  e2e directory, 146
  .spec.js suffix, 147
  user login and posting, 146
publishing events from clients, 139
pubsub message broker, 137–138
pushstate, enabling, 118, 121

Q
QUnit testing framework, 145

R
recent posts page
  $scope, 32
  adding posts, 34–37
  declaring controller, 31
  including Angular, 31–33
  JSON representation, 32
  <script> tag, 31–32
  static markup, 26
Redis
  on Heroku, 208–209
  installing for Digital Ocean, 225–226
  pubsub message broker, 137–138
  systemd commands, 226
registration, 119
remembering users, 121
routers, namespace, 61
routing, 104–106

S
Sass CSS preprocessor, 80
<script> tag, using with recent posts page, 31–32
security in WebSocket, 136
server.js
  breaking out /api/posts, 59–61
  breaking out sendfile endpoint, 62
  cleaning up, 58–62
  JWT (JSON Web Token), 90
  namespace routers, 61
social API, WebSockets in, 129–132
social app
  running, 232
  running on Digital Ocean, 227
  running under systemd, 228
social networking project. See recent posts page
social posts, authenticating, 116–117
.spec.js suffix, using in Protractor test, 147
SSH key, using with Digital Ocean, 221
startup
  vs. enterprise, 13
Node.js in, 14
static apps
  Ajax-empowered JavaScript, 4
  mobile APIs, 5
  progressive enhancement, 4–5
static assets, serving in Angular, 63–64
static mockup, building, 26
strings, passing messages as, 127
Stylus CSS preprocessor, 80
SuperTest
  done callback, 168
  using base router with, 170
  using with Node, 168

T
TCP layer, 127
templates/posts.html file, 105
test code, placement in directory, 146
testing controllers with authentication, 173–174
testing frameworks. See also Angular.js
testing; Protractor
  Jasmine, 145
  Mocha, 145
  QUnit, 145
tests, writing for Node stack, 164. See also
  Node-server testing
thick clients, 6
token authentication
  JWT (JSON Web Token), 89
types, 88
U
Uglifier minification tool
  defining dependencies, 76
  installing, 72
  ng-annotate tool, 76
  rebuilding /assets/app.js, 77
  “Unknown provider” error, 75
unit testing, 164
UNIX processes, hosting, 203
“Unknown provider” error, seeing in
  Angular, 75
URL, updating, 108
  .use method, passing namespaces into, 61
users, foreign keys, 122
users, remembering, 121
W
Walmart, use of Node.js, 15
web architecture
  back end, 6
  benefits, 6
  flow, 6
  modularity, 6
  performance, 6
  prototyping, 6
  standardized tools, 6
web pages. See recent posts page
web server, creating with Node.js, 19
websites
   Digital Ocean private networking, 235
   “Introduction to NPM,” 18
   JSHint documentation, 178
   Node.js, 14

WebSocket architecture
   message broker, 137
   multiprocessing/multiserver design, 137–138
   publishing events from clients, 139
   reconnection, 135
   security, 136

WebSockets
   in Angular.js, 133–134
   broadcasting events, 131
   client-server communication, 128
   dynamic hostname, 140
   loading data, 128
   ng/websocket.js file, 133

overview, 127
publishing post notifications, 130–132
in social API, 129–132
trouble with, 128
uses, 128
ws websocket, connecting to, 129–130
wscat command, 130

Y
Yammer, 14

Z
zero-downtime deploys
   .disconnect() method, 229
   .fork() method, 229
   boot.js script, 229–231
   Digital Ocean, 229–233
   integration into systemd, 233
   ZeroMQ message broker, 137