Setting up WordPress on AWS

As a part of my move to AWS, I wanted to continue using WordPress for my CMS, as it is so simple to set up and yet highly configurable. Amazon makes this pretty easy using LightSail, and kicking off a bitnami WordPress package. That gets you set up with an instance of WordPress that you have total control over, and can customize to your heart's content.

The next step is getting a domain name mapped to your site, so you need to use the Networking tab to set up a static IP, that you then use the DSN service to map to for proper name resolution. Now, you have a site addressable by a friendly name, hosted on a lighting fast platform you have total control over!

So, that is where things took a turn for the worse. I wanted to get SSL & Email service up and running, so I started poking around a bit on options. The SSL portion seemed straightforward enough if I wanted to set up a load balancer, tie it into my LightSail instance and use Amazon for the cert. That was a non started for a couple of reasons, but one of those reasons was that a basic load balance starts at 18$ a month, and I am trying to build a re-usable pattern that will reduce my overall costs while improving performance across multiple sites / domains.

I turned to an open source Cert authority, called "Let's Encrypt". They offer 90 day duration certs that you can tie into your Bitnami instance using the SSH terminal access provided through AWS, to setup the Apache cert mapping on the Linux VPC. After some non trivial fiddling (I am clearly a little rusty on my linux command line over ssh) I got it working like a champ, with a cron job to refresh the certs periodically.

Looking into email was another challenge, as the documentation flat out said AWS was a bad choice for that, and so I was pushed outside. I have my existing provider account, so I mapped my MX records to point back to that provider, and forwarded from them to my Gmail, so I can keep using one stop shopping for my email. The whole config works like a charm with only a few seconds total latency in transport, so I will use it as is.

The final output of this days work is a WordPress based site, hosted on AWS with an SSL cert from an open source provider, and integrated domain based email. I am now able to re-use this pattern to pull my other sites

over to AWS and I think I will see a considerable savings while also making significant gains in performance!