(October 19th, 2026)

If you know someone who would benefit from being an Insider, feel free to forward this PDF to them so they can sign up here.

Note: As an Insider, you can read all prior Insider newsletters here.

Quick Tips for our Insider friends

It's only three weeks to PASS! It's been three years since I was last at PASS and four years since I last presented there so I'm very excited to be returning to its stage for my workshop (*Performance Tuning with Waits and Latches*) and session (*Advanced Data Recovery Techniques*). Kimberly will be there too – join us in Seattle!

SQLskills News

I've had a large number of requests over the last few weeks from companies who'd like to use a PO+invoice then check/wire to buy training courses instead of our credit card payment system. That is not a problem at all, either in the US or anywhere else in the world. Access is granted as soon as we receive payment. Shop now!

Book Review

Anthony Trollope was a prolific English novelist (47 novels!!) from the 1800s, who I discovered by chance when I tried the first novel (*Dr. Whortle's School*) in his six-part *Chronicles of Barsetshire* series. See here for his Wikipedia bio. I devoured that series and I hugely enjoy not only his writing, but the narration of his books on Audible by acclaimed actor Timothy West, who really brings all the characters to life and lends constancy to the protracted storyline.

This year I've been working through Trollope's six-part *Palliser* series and they are just an utter joy to listen to. I've just finished the fifth book, *The Prime Minister*: A wonderful novel that I hugely enjoyed! From Amazon: "... it is a story of social, sexual and domestic politics. The Prime Minister raises one of the most enduring questions in government - whether a morally scrupulous gentleman can make an effective leader. With beautifully developed characters, Trollope intertwines the political and domestic stories, analysing the politics behind both government and marriage." Highly recommend the whole series! (start with Can You Forgive Her?)

If you're looking to try something new, either of these series is well worth your time!

Ponderings…

AI is obviously the hot new thing and prognostications for the future range from the unicorns-and-rainbows life of idleness for us all to the post-apocalyptic killer robots hunting down the cowering survivors of mankind a la Terminator 2. I confidently predict that immediate reality will be somewhere in between 😊

As we've become more permanent here in Camp Savage, I've been working on our network infrastructure. It's pretty sophisticated and pretty complex. It's all Unifi gear, with multiple VLANs, Wi-Fi networks, VPNs, NAS, long radio links, runs of fiber, and myriad APs, switches, sensors, and IoT clients. There's a lot to configure and keep track of and I've learned, relearned, and remembered a ton in the last few months.

Although Unifi gear is really top-notch when it comes to interoperability of all the hardware in their range, there are lots of gotchas with configuration, physical connections, and other networking esoteria. Whenever I've become stuck, I've turned, of course, to Google to search for. Its AI Overview has been mostly invaluable for cutting through the tedium of watching YouTube videos and scouring blogs for answers. But occasionally it's taken me on wild goose chases because I didn't know any better.

The easiest example to explain is when I had random client disconnects happening in one building only. It took me down the path of isolating the most twitchy client onto its own network, and changing all kinds of parameters for hours to try to stabilize the connection. After several days of trying lots of things and seeing if overnight performance worked, someone on a forum suggested a totally different path. They asked what's the connection to this building? Fiber. Any fiber errors in the Unifi logs? Yes! Upshot: I had multi-mode fiber SFP adapters with single-mode fiber cable. Swapping out the adapters fixed the problem instantly.

AI wasted my time because it didn't have any way to think that far outside the box, because it hadn't encountered that explanation or diagnostic step. Maybe a more powerful AI would have, but it took a human to actually point me down the right path.

The most frustrating examples were the many times I asked for steps to config X or Y and it confidently gave me steps and screenshots based on UIs or hardware from several versions ago, even when prompted with the exact version being used.

And over to SQL Server…

Jonathan has encountered several cases of long-term clients introducing AI developer tools that have instructed devs to make changes that have crippled their systems in production because the tools just did not get the complexity of the environment and made assumptions. Wrong assumptions, costing the client time and consulting dollars to identify and put right.

These devs blindly followed the advice of their expensive AI tools without understanding what they were doing and the possible ramifications and got bitten hard. If you're trying to understand a performance problem and just blindly trust the AI tool to diagnose and propose a fix, it might get it right. It might get it wrong. Will you understand what it did and why?

And now more specifically to my specialty and my upcoming precon: internals, how stuff works, and wait statistics.

Mangling the well-known proverb: you can't keep just giving fish to someone otherwise they get further and further from being able to fish themselves, and eventually when the fish-provider isn't there, of the fish are no longer trusted to be edible, how does the person eat?

Don't stop learning. Don't rely on tools that try to do your job. Absolutely use AI, but only as a tool to help guide you. Be sure to do further research or ask for references / links / sources, and verify them! Don't give up your ability to understand SQL Server; it's what will separate you from the rest and keep your servers productive.

Thoughts?

The Curious Case of…

This section of the newsletter explains recent problems we've helped with on client systems or been asked about online; they might be something you're experiencing too.

Back next time…

#TBT

(Turn Back Time…) Blog posts we've published since the previous newsletter plus some older resources we've referred to recently that you may find useful.

In this TBT I want to point you at a 30-part blog post series that the team did a few years ago that covers a lot of introductory topics, aimed at accidental/involuntary DBAs. Rather than listing all 30 posts, here is a link to the main page for the series. The series covers these main areas:

- Setup and configuration
- Backups
- Implementing maintenance and security
- Troubleshooting performance
- High availability
- General troubleshooting

- Although the series was aimed at accidental DBAs, these posts are all worth reading to make sure your basic understanding of topics is current and complete.

I hope you find these useful and interesting!

Video Demo

(If nothing else, check out the last 30 seconds of the video where Jon makes an offer…)

In this demo, Jon shows an enhancement in SQL Server 2025 Window functions that allows ignoring NULL values for FIRST_VALUE and LAST_VALUE, which is especially useful when reporting on IoT or telemetry data where gaps might exist in the series of data, and you need to report the last known value for the data whenever a gap in the data actually occurs.

The video is 5 minutes long and you can get it in MP4 format here.

The demo code is here.

Enjoy!

SQLskills Training

We have no live, public classes in 2026, but we do have new courses this year! And of course, all our recorded courses from the last few years are still as relevant as ever.

To help your manager understand the importance of focused, technical training, we've also added a few items to help you justify spending your training dollars with us:

- Letter to your manager explaining why SQLskills training is worthwhile
- Community blog posts about our classes

You can get all the details in our shop.

Summary

I hope you've enjoyed this issue – I really enjoy putting these together. If there's anything else you're interested in, I'd love to hear from you - drop me a line.

Thanks,
Paul