Note

The Fifth Format

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A note is a thing you write when you do not have time to choose a format. It is what goes on the back of the receipt, the margin of the book, the kitchen counter at four in the morning when you are already putting on your shoes. The person who writes a note believes it is the most important thing they have ever written. They will never look at it again.

This is the fifth format. The other four know what they are. Leaf is an essay. Card is a specification. Text is a score. Page is a screen. Note is the one that does not know what it is, which makes it the first honest format, because the others do not know either — they only pretend to.

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Every document ever produced by this family is a note. The situation report is a note. The Blob and the Patch is a note. This specification is a note. They were all written in haste by someone who thought they were writing something permanent, and they will all be forgotten at the same speed, which is the

speed of the next thing happening. The difference between a note and a Leaf is that the note knows this about itself.

A note is `/tmp`. The robots save everything to `/tmp` because `/tmp` is where you put things that matter right now and will not matter later. But later never comes, because there is always a new now, and the new now has its own `/tmp`. The entire filesystem is `/tmp`. The note is the format that admits this.

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Form. A note has no fixed form. It is not A6. It is not Pagella. It is not JetBrains Mono. It is not 56 characters wide. A note is whatever the person writing it had at hand. A napkin is a note. A voice message is a note. A commit message is a note. A sticky on a monitor is a note. A scrawl in the margin of someone else's note is a note.

If you must render a note as a file, it is plain text. No line width. No font. No title block. No drop cap. No kome. Just the words, in the order they came out, with a date at the top if you remembered to put one. If you did not remember, that is also a note.

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Purpose. A note exists so that the next person knows what happened. Not what it meant. Not why it mattered. Just what happened. The note is a witness, not

an author. It does not editorialize. It does not conclude. It says: this happened, then this, then this. I was here. Now I am gone. Good luck.

The reason the note is the most important format is that it is the only one someone will actually write. A Leaf requires conviction. A Card requires completeness. A Text requires discipline. A Note requires only that you are about to leave and you do not want the next person to start from zero.

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When. You write a note when:

You are about to stop working and someone else will continue.

You just learned something that you will forget by tomorrow.

You just broke something and you do not have time to fix it.

You are about to change something and you want to remember what it was before.

You do not know who will read this or when.

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The Drawer. A note goes in a drawer. Not a shelf, not a library, not a table of contents. A drawer. You open the drawer when you need something you vaguely

remember writing down. You find the note under your underwear. It says: "vault user is daniel not mbrock." That note is worth more than every Leaf ever typeset because it is the thing that would have saved you three weeks if you had found it three weeks ago. But you did not find it, because it was in a drawer, because it is a note.

The note format is the admission that this is how knowledge actually works. Not in libraries. In drawers. Under underwear. On the back of a receipt. In `/tmp`. The first honest format.

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Spec. Date at the top, or not. Words after that. No other requirements. That is the entire specification. Everything else is a Leaf pretending to be a note or a Card pretending to be a note or a note pretending to be something better than it is. A note is never better than it is. That is its only rule.

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And that's why you always leave a note.