



SAMPLE · EDITORIAL FRAMING BRIEF

Editorial Framing Brief

Sample deliverable — generated from Chad Prevost’s Substack archive (The Descent)

AUTHOR: Chad Prevost **Source corpus:** “The Descent” (Substack), thirteen posts, late 2025–April 2026 **Brief prepared by:** Crossroads Press **Date:** April 2026

What we read

Thirteen Substack posts from *The Descent*, comprising eight published essays, one restack, and four drafts in progress, written between February and April 2026. Notable architectural feature: a declared 9-part series (“The Land Where Nothing Hurts” is Part 1 of 9) following Odysseus and Dante through what we read as an extended descent-and-return arc.

PUBLISHED: - “Desiring This Man’s Art” — On Envy, Disguise, and the Self You Keep Missing - “False Abundance” — How Much False Self Are You Willing to Shed? - “The Island That Goes Nowhere” — You Search for What You Cannot Find - “The Fire That Eats Everything” — Wanting Everything, Becoming Nobody - “Soul Work Is Not a Rebrand” - “The Dark Wood: You Didn’t Wander In — You Woke Up There” — How did you find yourself here, and how the hell do you get out? - “The Land Where Nothing Hurts” — Part 1 of 9, Odysseus and Dante series - “The Help You Don’t Know You Need” — Two kinds, and the second is pretty magical - “You Don’t Even Understand What Understand Means” — An Epiphany Over Margaritas and Gurdjieff

IN PROGRESS / DRAFTS: - “The Skeleton at the Feast” - “The Shout Across the Water” - “The Second Simplicity” - “The Oldest Map for the Crisis Nobody”

What this corpus is, actually

You don’t have a stack of disconnected essays. You have, almost without realizing it, the spine of a single book.

The titles alone declare a coherent thesis: midlife as a *descent* — not a depression, not a crisis to be solved, but an ancient, mappable passage that the great traditions (Dante, Homer, Gurdjieff, the Christian mystics) all recognized and described. Your distinctive move is refusing the contemporary self-help frame (“crisis to be optimized away”) and reaching instead for the older maps. The phrase from your draft — “*The Oldest Map for the Crisis Nobody*” — is, frankly, almost the perfect title for the whole book.

Three patterns recur strongly enough to be structural:

RECOGNITION. “You didn’t wander in — you woke up there.” The dark wood is recognized, not chosen. Several essays do this work: naming where the reader is.

DIAGNOSIS OF THE FALSE. Envy (“Desiring This Man’s Art”), false abundance, the rebrand mistaken for soul work, the fire that consumes — multiple essays interrogate the *counterfeit* responses to descent.

THE OLDER HELP. Odysseus, Dante, Gurdjieff, the soul tradition. The corpus repeatedly insists that what’s needed is not new but ancient, and not optimization but accompaniment.

Below are three ways this could become a book. They differ in scope, audience, and how much new bridging material you’d need to write.

Concept A — *The Descent*

THE LITERARY MIDLIFE MEDITATION. TIGHTEST SCOPE. MOST YOU.

A book of essays under the unifying title *The Descent*, drawing exclusively from your Substack work, organized around the dark-wood / descent / return arc. The 9-part Odysseus/Dante series becomes the structural backbone (Part II of the book), with standalone essays flanking it as Part I (entry / recognition) and Part III (emergence / second simplicity).

PROPOSED STRUCTURE: - **Part I — The Dark Wood (Recognition)** Entry essays. “The Dark Wood: You Didn’t Wander In,” “Soul Work Is Not a Rebrand,” “The Help You Don’t Know You Need.” A new opening essay welcoming the reader into the descent. - **Part II — Old Maps (the Odysseus/Dante series)** All nine parts of the series, in order, as the structural heart of the book. - **Part III — The Second Simplicity (Return)** “The Second Simplicity” (currently a draft — finish it), “Desiring This Man’s Art,” “False Abundance.” A new closing essay on what return looks like.

WORD COUNT TARGET: ~55,000–70,000 words depending on essay lengths.

AUDIENCE: Literary nonfiction readers; midlife readers who already know the self-help shelf isn’t enough; readers of David Whyte, Parker Palmer, Bill Plotkin, Robert Bly’s *Iron John*, James Hollis, Stephen Cope.

COMP TITLES: *Falling Upward* (Rohr), *Iron John* (Bly), *The Wild Edge of Sorrow* (Weller), *Soulcraft* (Plotkin).

WHAT YOU'D STILL NEED TO WRITE: The four Substack drafts in your archive (estimated 1–2 weeks each, three of them at minimum), plus a new book introduction and a closing piece. Conservatively, six to eight weeks of writing on your end if you sustain a draft a week. If you want this faster, Architected tier with structured weekly accountability.

RISK: This is the most demanding draft for you to complete because the Odysseus/Dante series isn't done. But it's also the most distinctive book.

Concept B — *A Self Is Always Becoming*

THE WIDER-AUDIENCE CROSS-CORPUS BOOK. MOST ACCESSIBLE. BEST FOR SALES.

A book that draws from *both* your Substack and your earlier Medium work (especially the Big Self Society pieces), organized around the longer arc of becoming. The Medium essays bring practical accessibility (“How to Define Your Core Values,” “Failure Is an Answer,” “Be Patient and Tough”); the Substack work brings the depth, mythic frame, and literary edge. Combined, you have a book that meets readers where most of them actually are while still pulling them toward the deeper material.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE: - **Part I — Becoming** Foundational essays from Big Self Society — defining values, growing through fear, patience, what Emerson says is the greatest accomplishment. The reader grounds in language they already trust. - **Part II — Failing** “Failure Is an Answer,” “Embracing Failure as a Path to Growth,” and the Substack pieces on false abundance and envy. The book darkens. - **Part III — Descending** The Substack “Dark Wood” cluster and selections from the Odysseus/Dante series — perhaps three or four parts, not all nine. - **Part IV — Returning** “The Second Simplicity,” “Desiring This Man’s Art,” and a new closing essay.

WORD COUNT TARGET: ~70,000–85,000 words.

AUDIENCE: Substantially broader than Concept A. Self-development readers who like real depth; coaching clients and anyone in the “personal growth that’s tired of personal growth” market; readers of David Whyte’s *The Three Marriages*, Parker Palmer’s *A Hidden Wholeness*, and the more literate end of the genre.

COMP TITLES: *The Three Marriages* (Whyte), *A Hidden Wholeness* (Palmer), *Falling Upward* (Rohr).

WHAT YOU'D STILL NEED TO WRITE: Less than Concept A, because much of the corpus already exists. Probably one new section opener for each of the four parts (~1,000 words each), plus a book intro and conclusion. Three to four weeks of writing if focused.

RISK: Tonal coherence between the older Medium work and the recent Substack work. The voices need to be reconciled, which may mean some light rewriting of the older pieces — flagged here as a likely Editorial Polish add-on at the \$1,500 tier.

Concept C — *The Oldest Map for the Crisis Nobody*

THE THESIS-DRIVEN BOOK. TIGHTEST ARGUMENT. MOST DISTINCTIVE IN THE MARKETPLACE.

Take the title from your existing draft and run with it as a framing thesis: that the cultural script for midlife is broken, that the older traditions had real maps, and that recovering them is the actual work of the second half of life. Use the Odysseus/Dante series as the central case study. This is closer to a single argument than a collection of essays — more like Rohr’s *Falling Upward* or Hollis’s *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life* than a Whyte-style essay collection.

PROPOSED STRUCTURE: - **Introduction** — **The Crisis Nobody** The argument: midlife isn’t a crisis, it’s a passage; modern self-help has the wrong map; here are the older ones. - **Part I — The Maps We Inherited** The cultural diagnosis. “Soul Work Is Not a Rebrand,” “False Abundance,” “The Fire That Eats Everything.” What the dominant scripts get wrong. - **Part II — The Older Maps** The Odysseus/Dante series, framed as case studies. All 9 parts. Plus “You Don’t Even Understand What Understand Means” (the Gurdjieff essay) as a methodological interlude. - **Part III — Walking the Map** Practical applications. What it looks like to actually take this seriously. Likely the most new writing required here.

WORD COUNT TARGET: ~60,000 words.

AUDIENCE: Narrower but more committed than Concept B. Readers who buy thesis books, who underline. The Hollis / Rohr / Plotkin reader specifically. Probably also a strong Substack-to-book translation, where your existing readers feel they’re getting the *consolidated argument* of what they’ve been reading in pieces.

COMP TITLES: *Falling Upward* (Rohr), *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life* (Hollis), *Soulcraft* (Plotkin).

WHAT YOU’D STILL NEED TO WRITE: A real introduction (~3,000 words) that sets the thesis, and a Part III that may be largely new (~10,000–15,000 words). The most ambitious of the three drafts in terms of new writing, but also the most marketable.

RISK: Demands the most new writing. But also the easiest book to sell, because it has a clear elevator pitch.

Recommendation

If you want me to be direct: **CONCEPT A IS THE MOST DISTINCTIVELY YOURS, CONCEPT B WILL SELL THE MOST COPIES, AND CONCEPT C WILL GET YOU THE MOST INVITATIONS TO SPEAK.**

If this is your first book under Crossroads and you want to use it to build the Difficulty/Crossroads platform, **CONCEPT C** is the strongest bet — it has the clearest thesis, the most quotable structure, and the greatest probability of being shared by readers describing it to others. The Odysseus/Dante series sitting inside a thesis frame is more powerful than the series as a literary spine.

If you have a strong attachment to the literary essay form and want to make a beautiful object, **CONCEPT A** is the right book — it's the one you'd be happiest with at midnight a year from now.

I'd rule out Concept B for a first book; the audience compromise dilutes both halves. Save the Big Self Society material for a different volume or a teaching-focused project.

Bridging material analysis

Regardless of which concept you choose, here's what the corpus is currently missing:

1. **A book-level introduction.** None of your existing essays do this work. Estimated 2,000–3,000 words.
 2. **Section openers.** Each Part needs a brief framing essay (500–800 words each).
 3. **Completion of in-progress drafts.** “The Skeleton at the Feast,” “The Shout Across the Water,” “The Second Simplicity,” and “The Oldest Map for the Crisis Nobody” are all flagged as drafts. At minimum the title essay needs to be finished.
 4. **The Odysseus/Dante series itself** is currently 1 of 9 published. The remaining 8 parts are the largest open question. Concepts A and C both depend on the series being completed; Concept B uses only a subset.
 5. **A closing essay.** Something that does the work of “what does return look like.” Could be derived from “The Second Simplicity” but likely wants to be its own piece.
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Decision framework

To move into production, we need from you within seven days:

1. **Concept selection** — A, B, or C.
2. **Title preference** — proposed working titles below; you may have your own.
3. **Bridging-material plan** — which of the gap pieces above you'll write, on what timeline.
4. **Editorial readiness self-assessment** — a quick honest look at where the existing essays sit on the Levels 1–5 rubric.

WORKING TITLES FOR CONSIDERATION:

- *The Descent: An Older Map for the Midlife Crisis Nobody*
- *The Dark Wood: You Didn't Wander In*
- *Old Maps: A Field Guide to the Second Half*
- *The Crisis Nobody: Recovering the Older Maps for Midlife*
- *A Self Is Always Becoming* (Concept B specifically)

End of brief. Reply with your concept selection and any pushback on the analysis above. Once we lock direction, we move into intake completion and production.

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