

BOOKS

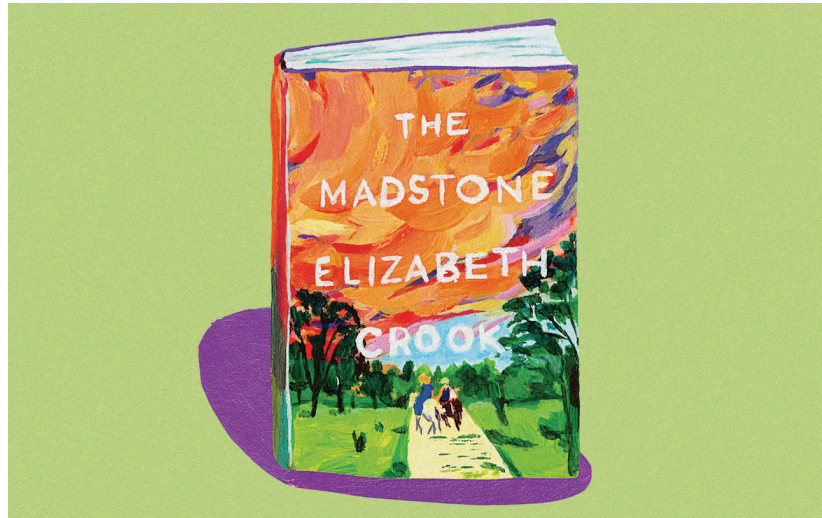
# Elizabeth Crook's Thrilling New Western

*The Madstone*, a sequel to 2018's *The Which Way Tree*, is a compelling read on its own terms.



By Jeff Salamon

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Elizabeth Crook's new western, *The Madstone*.

Illustration by Molly Snee

Austin writer Elizabeth Crook's new western, *The Madstone* (Little, Brown), takes place in 1868, five years after the events of her much-loved previous novel, *The Which Way Tree*. Benjamin Shreve, the orphaned protagonist of the earlier book, is now nineteen years old and working as a carpenter. By various machinations he finds himself, at first grudgingly, pulled into a domestic drama that carries him from the Hill Country to the Gulf Coast, with no shortage of violence along the way.

Although *The Madstone* is as thrilling as its predecessor, the Benjamin we meet here is no longer a callow, somewhat unformed teenager. Shaped by the events of *The Which Way Tree*, he assumes the sort of obligation to others that his allies Preacher Dob and Mr. Pacheco selflessly took on when he was in dire need.

At the end of *The Which Way Tree*, Crook offered us a glimpse of Benjamin in old age, a successful rancher presiding over vast acreage. *The Madstone* takes us a bit further down his path to that status, and no doubt there will be many takers for a third and even fourth novel that detail the rest of his journey.

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