

Again to Carthage

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John L. Parker, Jr.'s first novel, *Once a Runner*, is the cult novel for runners. Self-published in the late 1970s, and for years sold out of the trunk of the author's car at running events, it went on to sell over 100,000 copies and achieve legendary status among runners.

It perfectly captured the intensity, relentlessness, and sheer lunacy of a serious miler's life. Kenny Moore of *Sports Illustrated*—himself an Olympic runner—called it “by far the best fictional portrayal of the world of a serious runner . . . a marvelous description of the way it really is.”

For over twenty-five years, fans of *Once a Runner* have wanted more. Parker has finally written the sequel, which begins in the early 1970s where the previous book left off. The protagonist of the first book, Quenton Cassidy, has lost his best friend and teammate from college, a helicopter gunship pilot who dies a horrific death after crashing in the jungle. Cassidy is plunged into a depressive spiral in which he is forced to re-examine his studiously carefree life as a young, single attorney.

Cassidy's return to the world of competitive running is dramatic and revelatory both to Cassidy himself and to the reader, as is his desperate, all-out attempt to make one last Olympic team.

John L. Parker, Jr. is the author of the highly acclaimed novel *Once a Runner*. He has written for *Outside*, *Runner's World*, *Running Times*, and numerous other publications. He lives in Tallahassee, Florida, and Bar Harbor, Maine.

Again to Carthage Details


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Charlotte says

pretty disappointing. the first half of the book was pretty bad--boring self-indulgent irrelevant ramblings about fishing and lawyers, all leading very obviously to the part where quenton starts running again. once it got to that part it was pretty good, yes, it was, but not as good as OAR. felt a bit forced. and way too many references to weight/body fat. hopefully racing the rain will be good.

Sadie says

As a runner I really enjoyed reading this book. What I find interesting about Parker's writing is that instead of just telling what happens to the characters he instead paints a picture and right when you start to wonder where it's all going it suddenly all makes sense.

It's not a quick read as the writing doesn't lend itself to reading quickly but it's beautifully written and like I said I love all the parts that talk about what it means to be a runner. A really good book that made me want to pull out my running shoes and hit the trails.

And I almost did go running but I instead decided to sleep in. Maybe tomorrow.

Jennifer says

I loved "Once a Runner" but I found this one harder to get through. I had to force myself through some chapters that were entirely uninteresting to me. I love the main character, Quenton Cassidy, I think the author's writing is clever and often very funny, I love the running stuff, and the ending was good. But the writing seemed too self-indulgent, like the author figured his first book was so successful that he could put whatever he wanted in the second one and people would automatically love it. I do still highly recommend "Once a Runner" though.

Alex says

Parker really blows it this time- his book is a literary jumble, with lots of extraneous characters and a rambling plot. The writing is pretty mediocre, almost laughable... until you get to the race description, which is awesome. You have to suffer 300 pages to get there. Not sure it's worth it.

Misha says

I have just finished it and I think it is a good book. It is worth reading his "Once a Runner" first since "Again to Carthage" is a sequel to it. Moreover, Parker does not spend time introducing the characters and somewhat

assumes that the reader is familiar with the first novel. OaR achieved a cult status among people who enjoy the sport. OaR is out print but copies are scanned in and available on the Internet.

"Again to Carthage" is a more complicated book than OaR. The characters are given a bit more depth. It is also not just about running. One of the major characters (from the first book) goes and dies in Viet Nam. The wistful and somewhat despondent tone is more pronounced in the sequel as the protagonist -- Quenton Cassidy (and the author) had to come to terms with the sunset of their running career. Quenton Cassidy is well aware that the race, set in the end of the book, is his swan song. Yet, this very race and the reckless drive for physical perfection come out as the victory against inevitable decline and the affirmation of the joy of life itself. The description of the race and the book's ending, reminiscent of the first book's, are quite moving.

Parker is a former elite runner. He essentially writes about himself which brings to the novels the raw authenticity that won the first book so many admirers among runners. Actually, the novel is structured as a sequence of notes written as if by a runner in heavy training as an escape from the grind of the routine and torment of twice-daily workouts. The book has its weaknesses. A letter from Quenton to his girlfriend that takes up a whole chapter is rambling at best. The arch-villain is painted with a broad black brush. He is introduced nearly at the very end of the book just late enough for Quenton to raise the stakes. Overall, the narrative's direction weaves, turns and occasionally seems to be lost. However, the book's sincerity and authenticity is certain to endear the book to generations of runners.

Jordan Hanlon says

I finally got around to read the long awaited follow up to the cult classic *Once A Runner* by John L. Parker Jr. (here is my book review in case you missed it). *Once A Runner* was one book that I thought did an amazing job at really engulfing you into the mindset and body of what it is like to be a runner. John L. Parker Jr. did an amazing job at evoking what it is really like to be a runner and specifically a track runner. It was one of those books that drew you into the characters so much that you didn't want the book to end because that would mean that you would no longer have a connection to them.

Parker wrote *Once A Runner* in 1978 and it took Parker 29 years to publish a followup to his hit. There were many anxious readers that have waited a long time to see if anything else would ever happen to the great Quenton Cassidy. In *Again to Carthage* Parker pens the next chapter in Cassidy's life and provides a glimpse into the lives of the myriad of other characters we grew close to in the first book.

Again to Carthage follows our main character Quenton Cassidy as he tries to come to terms with his post competitive running life. Cassidy, after a very successful track career now is working on his professional career and a more normal life, though he is still having a hard time letting go of the feeling and lifestyle of competitive running.

I really don't want to give anything away for those of you who have not read it yet, but I will say that it is a good read and though it is almost impossible to recapture what Parker did in his first book I think that he did a good job at following up a book that many consider that best book on running ever written.

Lisa says

As the follow up to *Once A Runner*, I loved this book as well, if not more because its focus on distance running. Like a long run itself, it ambles and glides over seemingly random and at times odd events that lead to a collective ending worth the read.

Jonathan Nichols says

Parker's sequel picks up after Quenton Cassidy has become an olympian and now has to go back to something he has been avoiding: life. After establishing himself as a respectable lawyer though, he finds that there is something missing: his life simply is not challenging enough. After reconvening with his old friend Bruce Denton, Cassidy goes after his dreams one more time in an effort to qualify for the Olympic Marathon. Readers will be pleased to hear that Parker adheres to his nonchalant style of writing, while ushering in an older, more mature version of his main character Quenton Cassidy. This is one for the record books (no pun intended).

Danielle says

As a runner, I liked the storyline and cast of characters. As a reader, I was entertained most of the time but annoyed often enough that I can't really recommend it. As a writer, I was appalled at the poor editing. Parker's prose is straightforward, so what's with the run-on sentences throughout the book? I know that fiction doesn't necessarily follow standard written English, but this strikes me as laziness, not style. Someone should have also caught Parker's habit of repeating stock phrases and a too-heavy reliance on empty adjectives and adverbs. Somewhere in this book is a great story--I just wish he'd had a stronger editor.

Mason says

This is by far the best of the series, but unfortunately the author did not get better at writing in any elegant manner. I will admit, I'm a terrible writer, and I have no excuse for it because I constantly am writing in my career (career student, that is). I really have no right to criticize another's writing, but I'm also notoriously hypocritical so here it goes. Parker is describing a very emotional exchange between two characters that's supposedly powerful and moving, which involves one character kissing another. He says:

"He ran over and kissed her really hard."

Of all the lines in the book to slack on, this one? Really hard? It's haunted me for days that this is how he chose to describe the exchange. Most of the book seems to be written in very simple language with no sentence structure variability. It seems like maybe the author went through and picked random words, replaced them with the most difficult word in the thesaurus, and then didn't make sure it made sense (connotation vs denotation is something that really matters for most people, not Parker).

That being said, the story is solid and I highly recommend the book to anyone returning to running, it's a fun read. Parker does a great job of capturing what makes a runner tick. Towards the end when he's describing the process of actually racing a marathon he does a great job, I was getting fired up just imagining it! Happy to have finished the trilogy and overall it was satisfying, I think I may just be a little harsh because I don't love his style of writing and I haven't had enough sleep lately so I'm a tad ornery.

Glenn Pawl says

I really liked "Once a Runner" and this sequel is just as good. As others have stated, it's not for everyone. If you've enjoyed the pain and the pleasure of doing endless intervals, long solitary runs, and marathon racing, you'll connect with this book. I read a negative review on Amazon where the individual stated that the book didn't inspire him to get off the couch and start running. Those are the ones that just won't get it.

Only negative was the chapter devoted to one of his former college teammate's Viet Nam experience. It seemed out of place and a distraction.

Sandy says

At first I didn't like this book very much. I was annoyed by the detail given about the weekend fishing trips and such. Once Cassidy goes to NC to attend a funeral, though, the story shifted. And then the earlier details fit perfectly into the rest of the story.

It's a corny book about running. But, I enjoyed it. It's also better written than Once a Runner. If you're a runner dork, I think you'd like both books.

Thomas says

The sequel to Once a Runner, this book initially seems like a cheap attempt to sell two novels for the effort of one book. However, this book grew on me. Again, John Parker draws parallels with the real world, both in events of the Cold War, and in the power trips of the athletics governing bodies.

This may not be the novel for someone into masterpieces of fiction, but it was an easy read and kept my interest.

Pete Jennings says

I know it seems like blasphemy to only give three stars to any book about Quenton Cassidy, but only about 3/5ths of the book is any good, so it seems appropriate. The first half is slow-moving, and hardly mentions running in any way. Parker is clearly trying to show the new world of Cassidy, which would be fine, if it was interesting at all, or if we found any reason to care about this new cast of characters. Maybe someone who is as into fishing as *Once A Runner* fans are into running, would appreciate the multiple chapters and in-depth explanations of this passive past-time, but I don't get it.

Once Quenton moves back into the woods though, and starts hammering the miles, *Carthage* satisfies the expectations of the sequel. In fact, I have to admit, during the week I read these pages, I doubled my weekly mileage and have virtually committed to again attempting the marathon (If Quenton can do it... There's some flawed logic for you).

So if you can muddle your way through the first 100 pages - much in the same way Parker does - then it is well worth it.

Brian says

If you aren't a runner I don't think you could possibly enjoy Parker's books. The banter of group runs, the methodical, repetitiveness of training, and the agony of a long race are where Parker is at his best. The rest of the book felt almost like a story of his life (from what I can tell of his personal bio, his non-running life seems a lot like Quentin's).

I read *Once a Runner* many years ago, and in my head, that remains the better book. Of course, I was doing a lot of running then, and so I might only be remembering the good parts.
