

*Van Allen Plexico's*

*Gideon Cain*  
*Volume One*

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*Gideon Cain  
and the  
Le Wein Naming Method*

by Kurt Busiek

**J**t was another Gideon, the first time I noticed it. Gideon Faust, Warlock at Large. It was...

\* \* \* \* \*

Wait. Let's back up a second. What am I doing here, introducing this book?

It could be that I'm known, at least a little, as the writer of the award-winning relaunch of Robert E. Howard's Conan, at Dark Horse Comics, and since this book's about a rather Howardesque character, it makes sense to tap someone like me to do the introduction. And yeah, maybe there's a little of that. But it's not the real reason.

Or it could be that I'm known, at least a bit, for Astro City, a series that features characters who have a reputation for having underlying similarities with other characters — though I swear, the reputation is exaggerated, and the number of times I read online that some Astro City character or other is “clearly based on” some character I barely known or

hadn't come close to thinking about are legion. But I do know how to play with archetypes, how to strip an idea down to its basics and build it back up again as something else, retaining the core strengths while changing everything else. And that came into play, certainly. But it's not why I was asked to write this.

No, I was asked to write it because I was there at Gideon Cain's birth. Or his naming, at the very least. And because I'm the guy who brought up the Len Wein Naming Method.

\* \* \* \* \*

So. Len Wein Naming Method?

I first noticed it in Gideon Faust, Warlock at Large, a character Len and Howard Chaykin showcased in a single story in *Heavy Metal* magazine. And it was a clever and well-crafted story, and it's a shame there weren't more. But mostly, it was the name I liked — that rich, dramatic, memorable name. Three syllable first name. One-syllable last name. An austere, Biblical first name, a last name that suggests dark and dangerous magic — Faust's deal with the devil, to their regret. Cool name.

I started noticing similar names in other Len Wein stories. Garrison Slate, the founder of DC Comics' S.T.A.R. Labs, clearly a tough and capable guy, with a hard, competent-sounding name. Nicholas Scratch, from Marvel's *Fantastic Four* — the devil had been "Old Scratch" and "Old Nick" for centuries, but I think Len was the first to combine the names into the mellifluous "Nicholas Scratch."

Years later, when I got to know Len, he confirmed it — it was a deliberate naming pattern, the three-beat first name matched to a short, blunt last name, a paradiddle and a boom. Load 'em up with evocative images, and it's a great way to get a memorable, affecting name.

Other writers have used the pattern. Marv Wolfman's Adrian Chase, the Vigilante. David Michelinie's Donovan Flint of the *Star Hunters*. I have no idea if they got the pattern from Len, of course, but I've used it, quite deliberately, for such characters as *Astro City*'s ill-fated monster-hunter, Mordecai Chalk, for Delilah Stone, the tough leader of InterCop over in

my Jack Kirby's Silver Star mini-series, and for others.

Look around, you'll see more.

And it really works, doesn't it? If a big, rough-looking guy walks into a bar and announces that his name is Ragnarok Smith, you're going to pay attention, right? A visiting professor. Dr. Allenton Dane. Sounds like he knows his stuff. A jittery, emaciated police informant named "Skeleton" Crewe? Oh, he knows what's going on.

And of course, there's Solomon Kane. Two Biblical names, one denoting wisdom, the other a killer. And with the word "solemn" in there, giving it a kind of dangerous reserve. I don't think Len went back in time and suggested the pattern to Robert E. Howard — more likely the inspiration went the other way. But it sure works.

It's not for every character. But if you need a rich, evocative name to make someone stand out, it's hard to go wrong with the Len Wein Naming Method.

\* \* \* \* \*

Which brings us back to Gideon Cain. I'm a member of an online mailing list, one that originally came together over a shared interest in Marvel Comics' Avengers series, but which has branched out since to many other things, from a love of pulp adventure fiction to a lively interest in SF and fantasy film and TV, to an at times deplorable focus on sports that don't involve the Boston Red Sox. Or at least I deplore it. They seem to enjoy it, God knows why.

So one weekend, Van Allen Plexico announced that he was creating a Solomon Kane-like character for an anthology of pulp-adventure style tales he'd be both editing and contributing to. And a bunch of us started in on it, making suggestions, batting around ideas, arguing over details. Early on, I pushed for Van to take everything about Solomon Kane that wasn't necessary to the new character, and changing it — keep what he loves, the dour, sword-wielding man of God, roaming the world meting out rough justice — but make sure everything else has different roots, will push the character in his own direction, let him become something new. And Van

and the group did that enthusiastically and well, building this new dour Puritan a history and a drive and a world that could easily find its own place, to be something that felt like Kane but could stand on its own.

My best contribution, though, was the Len Wein Naming Method.

Van goes into the details in the Afterword, so I won't repeat them here. But we had a ton of fun — and I very much intend to do something with *Sorrower Pike*, *Harrower Book* and *Absalom Grey* someday. And when we weren't goofing around with names, the group built a fascinating, strongly-textured character whose adventures would surely be rich and strange and compelling — just the images tossed out, of things like Cain sitting at a fire on an African beach by night, cutting angelic runes into a new blade, or possibly into his own flesh — had me wanting to see more.

And things got silly, along the way — we started talking about Gideon making his way to the Black Hills of North Dakota and leaving his Bible behind for a young wounded gunfighter to find, years later, and his subsequent adventures with fellow Method-named adventurer Joshua Tree, who still hasn't found what he's looking for, and all manner of nonsense. But that's good, too; it's part of the process, and you never know what surprises it might lead you to — I'm firmly convinced that the line between "dumb joke" and "high concept" is very, very thin — and in the meantime, people were tossing out bits of history and theology and psychology and more, that just made Gideon Cain all the better.

But this is my introduction, so I'm clinging to the idea that it's all about the name. Gideon Cain. Three syllable first name, one-syllable last name. A paradiddle and a boom. Evocative. Biblical. Austere. Got you to pick this book up off the shelf, right?

So enjoy the tales that follow; they're full of good stuff. And somewhere along the way, thank Len Wein for a part of what brought you along on the journey.

The Len Wein Naming Method. It's sure-fire, I tell you.

"Gentleman" Pick. Barrowman Leaf. Ketterly Wing. You already want to know more about them, don't you?

Hemingway Stone. Callendar Page.

No, wait, come back!

There's more...!



*The tall, gaunt man in black who strode along the forest path was named Gideon Cain.*

- Prologue  
by Van Allen Mexico

**T**he tall, gaunt man in black who strode along the forest path was named Gideon Cain. Death followed him, and righteous vengeance rode at his side.

He wore a dark-stained buff coat covered over by a black cloak and cape. An English mortuary sword hung at his hip. Two flintlock pistols were tucked into his belt, and a black slouch hat rode low above his narrow face. Grey eyes peered out, darting here and there, taking in all potential dangers.

For a moment he could not recall precisely where he was. *So far*, he thought wistfully, almost ruefully. *My travels have taken me so far. Is it any wonder I should momentarily lose track of myself?*

Cain's gaze moved across the thick forest on either side of the path. Where most travelers would see only natural beauty, Cain saw the potential for ambush and attack. This wariness, this deep and instinctual caution, had kept him alive thus far in his travels. That and the strength and purity of his holy mission, of course.

Nonetheless, eventually he felt himself relax a bit. In the time since he had first departed his adopted home of Salem Town on Massachusetts Bay and set out across first the New World and then the Old, he had crossed mountains and deserts and jungles and mighty rivers; by contrast, this serene forest served to soothe his tortured soul and put him into a more reflective state of mind.

Coming in due course of time to a tall, broad oak that grew very close to the trail, Cain halted and gazed up at it. The mighty tree stood alone,

as if in exile, apart from all the rest of the surrounding forest. Yet it stood strong and true, unblemished by any taint.

Cain considered the oak and then, feeling some strange yet undeniable kinship to it, sat himself down at its base and, pulling his slouch hat down over his eyes, rested for a time.

When he awoke, the sun was still high enough above the horizon to provide good illumination, so he drew from a pocket in his coat a bit of parchment and a pen, and he took up once again the missive he had attempted to write so many times before. This time, with the forces of evil seemingly in abeyance and a surreal calmness over his mind, Cain believed he might actually succeed in capturing the words that had eluded him along all of his journeys thus far.

He inked the pen and brought it to the parchment.

*My son, he began, though this may never find you, I hold out hope that it might—and I trust in Divine Providence that someday it will be delivered to you, and that you will see the truth in its words, and in what I have done. And then you in turn will be delivered back unto Abigail and me, and find full forgiveness for your actions—as I hope you can forgive me, as well.*

*My son, you must understand why I was compelled to leave our home when I did. You must understand the holy commission that our Lord entrusted to me, even as your blessed mother came to understand and to accept it.*

*I suppose the tale begins with the great Witch Trials conducted in Salem. You will recall the holy fervor with which that crusade began—the absolute moral certainty with which I and the other prosecutors embarked on the task—and the dark and twisted evil into which the endeavor ultimately sank, sending so many innocents, as I now know, to their doom.*

*I suppose it was at that time that the dreams began. Awful, nightmarish visions at first, I believed them to be the work of the Devil. But soon I came to understand that our Lord himself was sending me a warning of a great evil that lurked in our midst, and at the same time providing me with the weapons to destroy it.*

*I now believe the demon Azazel dwelt among us during the latter days of the Trials, subtly tempting we mortal men and influencing our decisions, our judgment. Upon my discovery of this fact, the demon fled, and now I pursue him hither and yon, across the face of our*

*globe. So many miles have I wandered already, and many more I fear must move beneath my feet before my task has been accomplished.*

*In time I hope to provide you—in person, if Providence is kind—with a full accounting of my journeys, and of the ultimate destruction of the demon whose trail I dog. For now, however, I can but offer a handful of brief descriptions of some of my encounters and incidents of interest along the way.*

Cain sat back again, considering what he had written. Then, nodding once, he inked the pen again and began to write...

*In May of the Year of Our Lord 1693 the puritan soldier Gideon Cain left his family and home in Salem, Massachusetts on a mission from God. He left behind a town and colony shattered by accusations of witchcraft and by the execution of his neighbors. Over the next seven years he traversed the globe on a self-appointed – he would have claimed divinely appointed – mission, seeking the biblical demon Azazel, its agents and mortal pawns.*

*Cain's dogged pursuit of Azazel carried him from the Atlantic coast of the American Colonies to the far corners of the world. The early months of 1696 found him in Europe, urgently pursuing his demonic quarry along the Mediterranean shore. The vessel aboard which he traveled, the barque Scarborough, was forced to shelter from storms in Poreč on the Western coast of the Istrian Peninsula in what is now Croatia. There, Cain discovered that his enemy had been there before him...*



*The Fleeing girl passed straight through his outstretched arms  
and dissolved like a morning mist.*

# *The Girl in the Glass Coffin*

*Jan Watson*

The girl pelted down the muddy cobbled path towards the harbor. Her bare feet splashed through cold puddles and her white shift billowed out behind her as she fled. She ran blindly past the low stone houses, between the carts and upturned fishing boats, too intent on escape to watch where she was going. She hurtled straight towards Cain.

Gideon Cain had just enough time to fix her image in his mind: bright green eyes wide with fear, lustrous unbound Mediterranean hair tousled over a pale narrow face that would have been beautiful if not distorted by terror.

Cain held out his hands to catch her, or to fend her off.

The fleeing girl passed straight through his outstretched arms and dissolved like a morning mist.

Gideon Cain stifled an oath. He glanced around the darkened harbor-front, seeking any trace of the missing woman, preferring to believe that she had somehow dodged around him than what his senses told him had happened. The rain-soaked stone wharves were entirely deserted.

A prickling down Cain's spine focused his attention again. The girl had disappeared, but what of that from which she had been fleeing? The shadows of the waterfront suddenly seemed much more menacing. Cain's hand slid down to the mortuary sword at his side. The cold steel felt good in the Puritan's palm.

Cain had an inexplicable sense that he was being watched, evaluated. Unseen eyes were appraising him, deciding if he should live or die.

"Approach then," he called out into the darkness. "Here you'll find a man!"

His challenge echoed back across the old Roman forum. Behind him the boats creaked in their moorings as the rising wind pressed waves against the sea wall. The North wind brought unseasonal icy rain that was close to sleet.

Cain turned again, casting about for something that might harm him.

The sense of danger dwindled, then passed.

Cain stood alone in the gathering gloom of the wet Adriatic night and reflected on the nature of ghosts.

The wharfside tavern was old, with a low roof of timber and thatch that caught the smoke from the fire in the central hearth. At this time of night the common room was crowded with sailors and merchants, more than usual because of the number of ships harbored from the expected storm.

Cain recoiled as he entered. Sour smells of spilled ale and seldom-cleaned straw assailed him. The noise, a raucous cacophony of lewd sea-shanties and drunken boasting, offended him. A pair of thin painted women in thinner rags eyed him speculatively for a moment but were warned off by his dour Puritan garb and dourer piercing gaze.

Cain's eyes ranged over the noisy crowd until he identified the man he was looking for. He shouldered his way through the drunken patrons until he reached the table in the corner where Captain Morgensen sprawled with a tankard in one hand and a bar-wench in the other.

Morgensen looked up at his looming passenger and tried to focus. "I've already told you," the seaman slurred. "We keep harbor until the storm's past. Weather like this is rare in these waters, but when the Bora's set it's a fool who brings his ship past the hidden coastal reefs. I'll not risk the Scarborough till this is blown out, and every other captain who's sheltered here in Poreč will agree with me." He gave the fat wench beside him a hearty squeeze and grinned. "Why not relax for once and take some comfort in the pleasures of shore, Mister Cain?"

The Puritan leaned forward over the table, his gaunt face shadowed by his broad-brimmed hat. "I take no pleasure in sin, Captain Morgensen. And I do not come here to ask about our journey. I'm seeking someone with local knowledge who can explain something strange that I've just witnessed."

"The landlord, perhaps?" the girl beside the sailor suggested in broken English. "Tadic has lived here all his life and he speaks your tongue."

Cain managed to give her a civil nod. "I'll expect us to be ready to

leave as soon as the wind falls,” he told the Captain. “My adversary uses even the elements to his advantage, but God compels me.”

He left the Captain to his sins and pressed his way to the table by the beer barrels, where a sweaty fat man in a stained tunic was berating a pot boy over a broken mug.

“You are Tadic?” Cain asked, regarding the grubby innkeeper with reserved caution. “I’m told you know Poreč well.”

“Why yes, sir.” Tadic took in the stranger’s apparel and was not misled by its simplicity. When a man wore two flintlocks and a sword that was plain but of good quality he had money and power. “I can get you whatever it is you desire.”

“Information is all I desire,” Cain replied, ignoring any insinuation. “Information about Poreč.”

“What you see is Poreč,” the landlord replied. “Good harbor from the time of the ancients. A walled Venetian town. A good place to trade.” A new thought occurred to him. “Many travelers pass through Poreč. Perhaps like them you would be interested in seeing the buildings that still remain from the days of Ancient Rome? Or the church of the Franciscans?”

Cain had no interest in Popish temples or pagan ruins. “I want to know about a girl – no, still your tongue, quell your filthy mind and listen well. I have just seen a girl of perhaps eighteen summers fleeing through the streets towards the harbor. And then she vanished as I reached for her.”

Tadic’s smile was a little thin now. “Sir, usually a man needs to take a cup or two before he sees wenches that melt away like that. Often the wenches melt away with his purse at the same time.”

“A girl,” Cain insisted, “with long dark hair and green eyes, fleeing for her life from some unseen horror.”

“Green eyes?” Tadic swallowed. His expression became fixed. “Green eyes are unusual in Poreč. I know of only one girl who could match the description that you give.”

Cain glowered at the man. “And?”

The innkeeper shuddered and reached for a mug of his own brew. “And sir, that girl is dead.”

Up from the shoreline the houses became richer and larger. The best still had Roman foundations, with good medieval stonework and carved triphora windows. Cain’s walk took him up the hill to one of the largest estates, and as the first sunlight dispelled the sea-mist that flooded the

streets he pulled hard on the bell-chain beside the door.

“Who disturbs this house of mourning?” asked an aged woman swathed in black.

“I am Gideon Cain, a traveler from the colony of Massachusetts in the New World. I must speak with the master of the house.”

The old retainer regarded the solemn visitor and made a decision. “The master is not yet up, but you may wait in the courtyard. If you wish you may pay your respects to the Lady Maria in the chapel.”

“The Lady Maria... who died?”

The old woman choked back a sob. “My lamb... my darling...”

Cain followed her into an open courtyard. A fountain filled the middle of the space but no water ran. To one side an older, rougher building with a cross atop it was the family chapel.

Cain followed the crone towards the church door. “What happened to the Lady Maria?” he asked.

His guide halted. “You do not know?” She blinked, suddenly suspicious.

“I have come to know,” replied the Puritan. “I do not seek to know for frivolous reasons, but in the name of God.”

That seemed to satisfy the old woman. She resumed her journey to the chapel. “My darling died of a broken heart,” she answered. “She loved too much, and when her beloved was slain on the very day of their wedding... damn those Kovačević dogs and all their spawn!”

“The girl was to be married but her betrothed died,” Cain surmised.

“Died? Murdered!” spat the crone. “Young Peter Janković, that my beloved Maria had known since a child, cut down in a brawl in the streets on the way to his own wedding! And my poor lamb, my dove, waiting at the basilica, not knowing she was a widow before she was e’en a wife! No wonder her heart broke and her life sped from her before a week had passed.”

The old woman had reached the chapel now. She pushed the door open and led Cain into the darkened interior. The somber gloom was lit only by diffused light from tall thin horn windows.

Cain moved forward to see the dead girl. She lay in her wedding gown, a bridal bouquet clutched to her chest, within an expensive coffin of Venetian glass unlike anything Cain has seen before. She looked as if she merely slept, her skin still soft, her lips still red.

And Gideon Cain had seen her before.

“If you are not from the Bishop then begone from this house!” Ivan Mišković thundered. Dead Maria’s father was a large, heavy-set man but his face was sallow with grief and his muscular frame was beginning to show signs of his age. Cain did not flinch as the anguished merchant stormed towards him.

“I serve no bishop, but I serve God,” the Puritan answered. “And on God’s business I come to you today.”

Mišković wasn’t listening. “Tell your Bishop,” he spat, “tell him that Maria is a child of God. A good girl. She was heartbroken over the boy Janković, yes, but not so much that she would break God’s holy law and take her life. She died of grief, yes, but not by her own hand!”

“Suicide?” Now Cain understood the man’s anguish. A suicide could not be buried on holy ground with holy writ. Suicide was a mortal sin, and damned the soul to hell.

“Not suicide!” shouted Mišković. “Grief! Tragedy! If the Bishop listens to the gossip of common fools then he is naught but a common fool himself!”

Something in the man’s tone caught Cain’s attention. “Gossip of fools?” he prompted.

But Mišković was not to be deterred in his rage and grief. “Get out!” he shouted. “Out!”

In the courtyard Cain halted, unsure of what he saw. A woman with dark hair turned towards him, and for a moment he thought the dead bride walked again. Then he realized that there were subtle differences. This girl was even younger, and her eyes were brown.

“Maria’s sister,” he ventured.

“Anna,” the girl replied with a courtesy. She looked around to see if her father was watching, then gestured for Cain to follow her into the shadows of the chapel.

The Puritan followed reluctantly, curiosity and caution warring in him.

“I heard you trying to question my father about Maria,” Anna confessed. “You are not the first. Many have tried to discover the truth about her death.”

“The Bishop’s representative, for one,” surmised Cain. “Why do they suspect suicide?”

“Maria declined from the day of Peter’s death, and none could say why. Some suspect Venetian poison, which is subtle and leaves little trace. Or belladonna, which we use to make our eyes large and beautiful but which