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[Nonfiction Sample: Excerpt from the entry on *Fallen Son: The Death of Captain America* for *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels* (Salem Press, 2012)]

### **Publication History:**

*Fallen Son* was published as a hardcover collection in October of 2007. This followed the publication of its five chapters as individual issues between June and August of 2007. Each chapter uses as its theme one of the five stages of grief for the dying according to the Kübler-Ross model – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This stands in slight contrast to the format used when the chapters were published as individual issues; then, each issue bore in its title the name of the character or characters at its focus (for example, the first of the five issues was called *Fallen Son: Wolverine*).

According to an interview, although he was not writing the *Captain America* monthly series at the time, Jeph Loeb was vetted by other creators and editors at Marvel Comics as the writer best equipped to handle the aftermath of Steve Rogers's death. This was due in large part to the death of Loeb's son Sam at the age of seventeen two years before, which left Loeb acutely familiar with the grieving process. Once he had the idea of telling his story in terms of the five stages of grief, Loeb quickly asked to work with several well-known artists over the course of the project, allowing multiple respected artists to pay tribute to the iconic character.

### **Plot:**

Simply expressed, *Fallen Son* presents popular characters from the Marvel Comics universe in the days following Captain America's death by assassination (which occurred in the monthly *Captain America* series) and, ultimately, at his funeral, showing the various ways that these characters choose to grieve and remember their fellow hero. The actions of each chapter's central heroes reflect the stage of grief from which the chapter derives its title.

The first chapter, "Denial," depicts the skeptical Wolverine's efforts to prove that Captain America is not truly dead. With the help of allied superheroes Doctor Strange and Daredevil, Wolverine infiltrates the facility where the body identified as Captain America's is being held. His animal-like sense of smell confirms that the body is indeed that of the fallen hero, but before he can leave, Iron Man appears and threatens to arrest him for violating the Superhuman Registration Act, which requires all masked heroes to make their true identities known (and which pitted Iron Man against Captain America in the *Civil War* event). Wolverine, however, convinces Iron Man to release him so that he can inform other doubtful heroes of the veracity of Captain America's death.

"Anger" follows by presenting the contrast between two superhero teams: The New Avengers, who had sided with Captain America against the Superhero Registration Act, and the Mighty Avengers, who sided with Iron Man. In "Anger," the Mighty Avengers engage in battle to release the anger that they collectively feel at Captain America's death. By contrast, the New Avengers engage in a tense game of poker until their comrade Wolverine enters the mansion and confirms Captain America's death. Wolverine's report sends New Avenger Spider-Man into a fit of rage that causes him to walk out on the game.

In the third chapter, “Bargaining,” Iron Man offers Clint Barton, formerly known as the bow-wielding hero Hawkeye, the chance to assume the role of Captain America using replicas of his outfit and iconic disc shield. Barton initially accepts, but while out in the costume with Iron Man, he witnesses two young heroes, Patriot and Kate Bishop – currently using the moniker Hawkeye – immobilize a villain. A conversation with them, combined with the realization that Iron Man wishes to arrest *them* for violating the Superhero Registration Act, convinces Barton that Captain America would not support Iron Man's agenda.

“Depression” returns to the story of Spider-Man, who, after running away from the New Avengers hideout, is paying a nighttime visit to the grave of his Uncle Ben, one of many people dear to him who have died. While he is mourning the loved ones who have passed from his life, his spider-sense leads him into battle with the Rhino. Once the Rhino is defeated, Wolverine, who had followed Spider-Man from Doctor Strange's mansion, attempts to share words of comfort.

The final installation, “Acceptance,” brings most characters from the Marvel universe (save the New Avengers, who remain in hiding) to Washington, D.C., for Captain America's public funeral. Three days after the funeral, however, Iron Man travels to the Arctic with The Wasp and Yellowjacket, where he reveals that it was a decoy that was buried before, and that Captain America and his shield are to be buried in the cold, peaceful sea.