

Story by Committee

by stephen hastings-king

I am sitting in a coffeehouse. At the next table a committee is writing a short story in which a committee writes a short story in which members of a committee list their favorite pronoun-verb combinations and the other committee agrees or makes fun of those combinations while the third committee writes down what they think they hear and argue when it happens that they mishear differently. None of them gets anywhere because the structure they're using erases the anywhere they might have gotten to. It is a good way for a committee to write a short story.

Q. Do they have someone taking minutes?

A. The minutes of the meeting is the story they are writing. They pass the piece of paper around.

Now they're taking a break. They chat in the inane way of Zen masters.

Q. Please post some dialogue.

A. One says "literally a black hole" which might or might not refer to anything.

They are discussing the structure and whether it works. Which means they've momentarily forgotten that the structure makes the question meaningless.

Now there's a discussion about whether "we contribute" is garble or not.

Declaring themselves satisfied that the structure will continue to generate material regardless of what they do, the committee breaks itself up. The members resume their disguises as small-town Ohio high school students who are leaving a coffeehouse.

All that remains is a half-eaten muffin and an interminable
Creedence song.

Q. What flavor was the muffin?

A. The past has no flavor.

