

★ **The Splendid Baron Submarine**

Eric Bower

Agnieszka Grochalska, Illustrator

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Delightfully absurd, imaginative, and fun, W.B.'s adventures will make for great read-aloud fare.

The Splendid Baron Submarine is a summer adventure story full of unexpected danger and wacky surprises, and is funny from its first page to its last.

The story begins with Waldo, better known as W.B., finding himself stuck in the corner of his classroom with the dunce cap on his head, in trouble for telling tall tales. Except W.B. was actually telling the truth about his summer vacation—it just sounds over the top.

Two thugs showed up at the Baron estate, you see, and took the family to see the vice president, who had been challenged with retrieving the lost treasure of Captain Affect to pay off the country's debt. The family decided to head to the site of the pirate's shipwreck themselves, in the submarine that W.B.'s father invented. So their adventure began.

Every time it seems like the plot can get no more outrageous, something new and unexpected happens. Still, it's the characters who truly bring the story to life. W.B.'s mother, M, is wonderfully logical, and his father, P, is just a bit crazy. Rose is the inventor's assistant—bright, capable, and fitting perfectly into the family.

W.B. is the most appealing character of all. He is chubby and clumsy, and has a bit of an inferiority complex. "The fun always stops when I get my head stuck in the fireplace," he proclaims early on—a sentiment that sums up his personality quite well. He has great admiration and respect for his family but a fairly low opinion of himself, which makes his contributions to the family adventures all the more satisfying.

Illustrations by Agnieszka Grochalska are sprinkled throughout the book. These simple ink drawings highlight some of the story's funnier moments. Drawings of gears serve as section breaks and add a nice touch.

The Splendid Baron Submarine is delightfully absurd, imaginative, and fun—a wonderful book for middle-school children to read on their own, and an even better book for families to read aloud together.

CATHERINE THURESON (November/December 2017)

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