

TOP SECRET

Nauticus exhibit turns the battleship Wisconsin into the setting of an espionage adventure. **PAGE 12**



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COVER STORY

Secret research

Spy Ship is the brainchild of Stephen E. Kirkland, assistant executive director of Nauticus. To research the world of espionage, he immersed himself in "all things spy." That included visiting the Spy Museum in Washington, D.C., collaborating with a real-life British secret agent and watching spies do their thing on the silver screen.

"I live over near Ghent, and I go to the Naro video store all the time," he said. "For the last six months, I've basically seen any spy-themed video they have."

Here are three recommendations:

"Garbo:

The Spy" (2009) This documentary tells the story of Juan Pujol Garcia, a Spanish double agent for Britain and other Allies during World War II. He was nicknamed Garbo for his superb role-playing abilities, which fooled the Nazis enough that they awarded him an Iron Cross.



"Spy Game"

(2001) Robert Redford and Brad Pitt star in a thriller about a retiring CIA agent who works to save a protégé who has been captured in China.



"Spy Ship"

(1962) A World War II-era reporter suspects a famous radio commentator is broadcasting shipping secrets to German and Japanese spies. He convinces her sister to help him reveal her treacherous actions. (And no, Kirkland didn't get the "Spy Ship" name from this movie.)



"Spy Ship" adventure exhibit turns the Battleship Wisconsin into the setting for a game that lets participants into the deepest recesses of the war vessel

Travel a mystery

By TERESA TALERICO | Correspondent

THIS MONTH, a real-life James Bond spent a weekend in Norfolk on a not-so-top-secret mission: putting the finishing touches on "Spy Ship," an interactive game of World War II espionage aboard the Battleship Wisconsin. // His name? Thomas.

His handler? K. As in, Stephen E. Kirkland, the assistant executive director of Nauticus who's the mastermind behind "Spy Ship," which opens Saturday and runs through Labor Day.

The setting of the spy game is 1945, off the coast of Iwo Jima. An agent, posing as a sailor, has infiltrated the Wisconsin. "Spy Ship" participants will play detective, exploring the historic battleship to uncover his identity. They'll hunt for clues, decode secret messages, de-bug a stateroom and learn some history and nautical terminology along the way. They'll even visit nooks and crannies that are off-limits to the general public during its tours of the decommissioned battleship that's moored in downtown Norfolk.

"They'll literally go from stern to stern," Kirkland said. "If you enjoy solving puzzles, breaking codes and solving mysteries, this is just a fun experience."

On June 8, as Harborfest visitors stroll past Nauticus, Kirkland and Thomas prowled the Wisconsin, tweaking their Spy Ship creations.

They were especially stoked about their *pièce de résistance*: a laser maze. The green beams of light criss-cross a dark room filled with fog-machine smoke. To reach a safe that needs cracking, participants must navigate the maze by crawling and ducking around the lasers.

but impressive alliance. Just consider their dossiers:

During the Cold War, Thomas, 46, worked with the Special Air Service, an elite regiment versed in counterterrorism and other high-risk missions. He looks the part: muscular and rugged, with a striking resemblance to a young Bryan Brown, the Australian actor who co-starred with Tom Cruise in "Cocktail."

Thomas and his Spy Games team designed those lasers, and other devices and effects for "Spy Ship."

"Having a battleship as a venue was fantastic," said Thomas, who once arranged a spy-themed challenge aboard the HMS Belfast, a Royal Navy light cruiser in London. "We have some really cool and challenging activities for children and adults. These have been designed and created with Stephen's input, specifically for this ship."

Kirkland, 41, is a former TV reporter, Carnival cruise director and Disney World Jingle Cruise operator. Sandy-haired and boyish, he has the infectious enthusiasm of Mickey Rooney in a Busby Berkeley musical. "I just thought, what if we were to think of the battleship as a giant board game for people to come on board and experience it in a totally unique, different way?" Kirkland said. "So, what do kids love? They love pirates, they love spies. And that's how it all came about. I'm just really jazzed."

Collaborating was a trans-Atlantic challenge. Except for a brief visit by Thomas to the states around February, he and Kirkland have spent the past several months doing long-distance reconnaissance.

Reunited, they form an unlikely

if you go

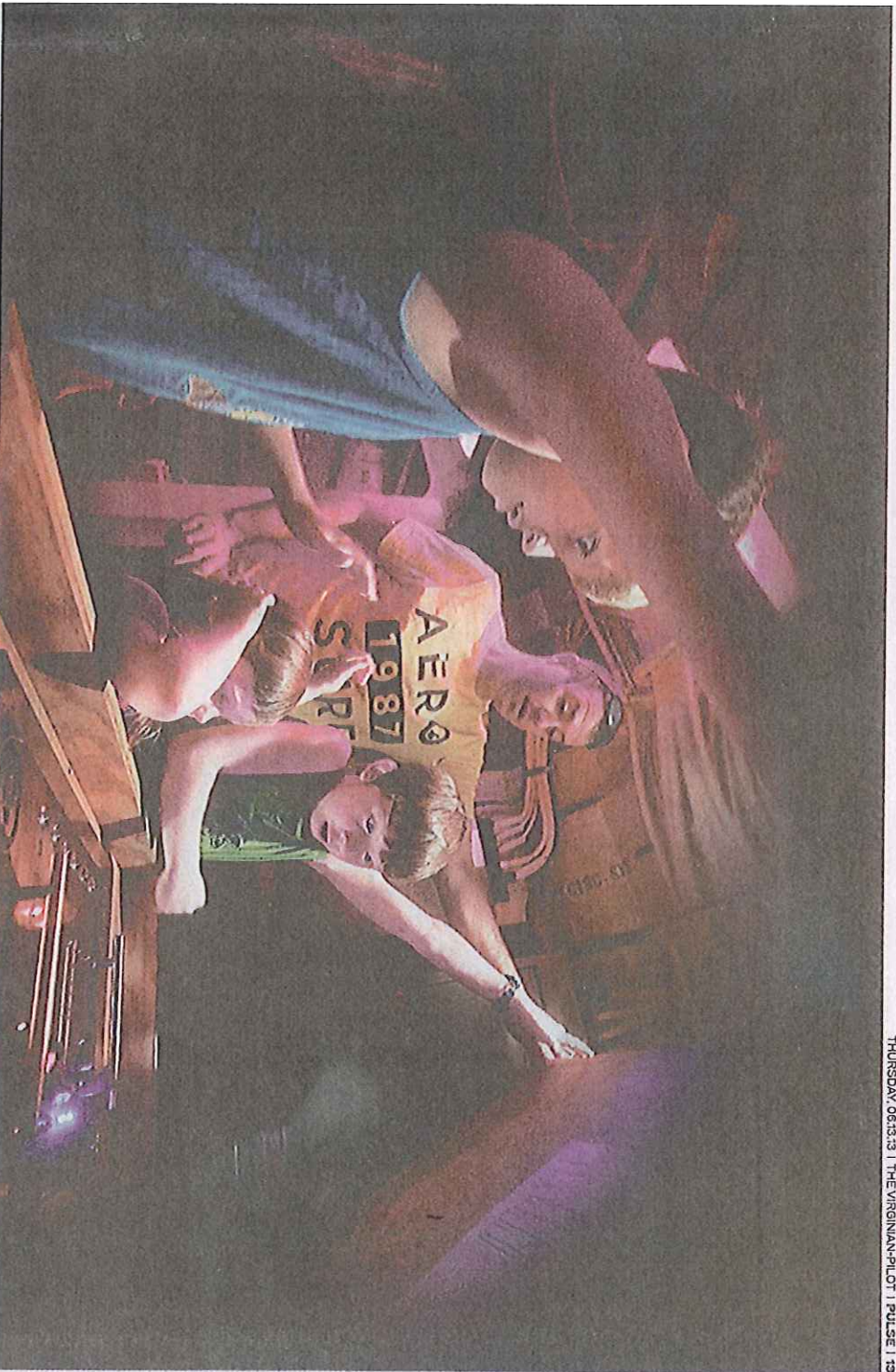
What "Spy Ship"
Where Battleship Wisconsin at Nauticus, 1 Waterside Drive, Norfolk

When "Spy Ship"
opens Saturday and runs through Sept. 2. The Nauticus is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day through Labor Day.

Cost "Spy Ship"
is part of the Blue Ticket package at Nauticus, which includes a "Living River" Boat Tour, 3-D theater and general admission to the museum and battleship. Pricing is \$25.95 for adults, \$21.50 for children ages 4-12 and \$10 for members.

More info
www.nauticus.org, 664-1000

SP595



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NAUTICUS

prominent role in WWII's Pacific Theater.

"That's all true," Kirkland said. "The ship actually served in 1945 and fired its mighty 16-inch guns off the coast of Iwo Jima. There was an Admiral (Raymond) Spruance who was commander of the Third Fleet. So, all of a sudden, you're sneaking in a little bit of history."

A laser maze is an anachronism, he conceded. But it's fun.

"The kids are going to love this," Kirkland said. "A laser maze on board a battleship—how cool is that?"

Thomas agreed, even though in all his years as a spy—which included running his own investigation agency that specialized

in covert surveillance and business intelligence—he's never been trapped in a laser maze. (He has, however, trailed death-threat suspects in Greece, ob-taining their DNA from cigarette butts and napkins left behind in a restaurant. He also staged a car crash in Holland to entice drug smugglers who were using junked vehicles to transport their contraband.)

Still, the maze is always a highlight of the challenges he designs for spy games clients. And it got Kirkland's attention.

"I searched high and low for a company to come in and do some of this stuff for us," Kirkland said.

"You can't beat a battleship

as a cool venue," Thomas said. "I had to think about it for a second and a half before saying yes. I was really keen to come out and explore the ship."

Kirkland hopes other visitors will be just as keen, especially those who aren't necessarily fans of naval war history.

"We want to introduce a different audience to the battleship. It's the same thing as what we're doing with 'Swingtime Salute' (the on-deck USO-style variety show)," he said. "Spy Ship is really reflective of a larger organizational goal for us, and that is we want all kinds of folks to come visit the battleship."

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Above, exhibits hold secrets, clues and surprises. At left, participants must crawl and duck to avoid being hit in a laser maze. Green beams of light crisscross a dark room filled with fog-machine smoke.