



# Vortex

*S.J. Kincaid*

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The impossible was just the beginning. Now in their second year as superhuman government weapons-in-training at the Pentagonal Spire, Tom Raines and his friends are mid-level cadets in the elite combat corps known as the Intrasolar Forces. But as training intensifies and a moment arrives that could make or break his entire career, Tom's loyalties are again put to the test.

Encouraged to betray his ideals and friendships for the sake of his country, Tom is convinced there must be another way. And the more aware he becomes of the corruption surrounding him, the more determined he becomes to fight it, even if he sabotages his own future in the process.

Drawn into a power struggle more dramatic than he has ever faced before, Tom stays a hyperintelligent step ahead of everyone, like the exceptional gamer he is—or so he believes. But when he learns that he and his friends have unwittingly made the most grievous error imaginable, Tom must find a way to outwit an enemy so nefarious that victory seems hopeless. Will his idealism and bravado cost him everything—and everyone that matters to him?

Filled with action and intelligence, camaraderie and humor, the second book in S.J. Kincaid's futuristic World War III Insignia trilogy continues to explore fascinating and timely questions about power, politics, technology, loyalty, and friendship.

## Vortex Details

Date : Published July 2nd 2013 by Katherine Tegen Books

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Author : S.J. Kincaid

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Genre : Young Adult, Science Fiction, Dystopia

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# From Reader Review Vortex for online ebook

Ashley says

BookNook — Young Adult book reviews

3.5 Stars

*Vortex* didn't quite have the same magic for me that *Insignia* did. It was still a good book, it just didn't have me screaming and shrieking like an excited, insane girl. ***Vortex* had a bit of a slower start and I didn't get fully sucked into the book until half way or 3/4 of the way through.**

I kind of had a love/hate relationship with Tom in this book. **He definitely came across very immature at times.** It almost made me wonder, *Was he always like this and am I only now noticing it? Or is this just a new thing in Vortex?*

Tom could just be so arrogant, so cocky, and not consider the consequences of his actions. His teachers would specifically tell him, *"Don't do this, it's dangerous."* Then he would turn around and do it, and something bad would happen (as promised). Another example: now that he is no longer a plebe, he and Vik got together and chased the plebes out of the common room area so they could have it all to themselves, just because "they could". **He just acted like an arrogant prick a lot of the time.**

But on the other hand, I do really admire how he refused to suck up to the big corporate guys. Many of those guys were legitimately bad people, and I really appreciated that Tom didn't kiss their asses just for the sake of his career. Instead, he acknowledged that they were bad guys and didn't let them push him around, and didn't take any crap from them. He told them exactly what he thought of them, and it was awesome.

**My other frustration was with Medusa; her relationship with Tom was like whiplash.** It was an annoying cycle of: they're fighting, they don't talk for weeks, they make up, later in that conversation Tom screws it up and they fight again, they don't talk for weeks, etc. Rinse and repeat. As a result, it felt like Medusa was barely in the book and just popped in and out at seemingly random times. **At least whenever Medusa did make an appearance she was kicking some serious ass.**

**Although the beginning of the book was only 'okay' for me, things really picked up at the end.** The corruption and conspiracies finally started to unravel, driving some excitement into the story. There was more defiance, rebellion, and more "big reveals". Those were the bits I finally loved!

Overall, I guess *Vortex* had a stronger focus on the politics. We learn more about the corporations that sponsor the fighters and what stakes they have in the war. It's interesting information, but it wasn't always the most exciting.

I am a bit bummed that I didn't enjoy *Vortex* quite as much as *Insignia* , but it was still a pretty good book.

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Julianna Helms says

Quick reaction:

[illegible]

alsoalso hey guys so imma give away a copy of this soon on da fansite, check it out please? ^.^ The  
Pentagonal Spire

I'm enjoying this series even though its meant for the Y.A and I don't normally go for theses sort of books  
four out of five stars

I suggest you ALL start reading Insignia right now. Soon enough it will be one of the most spoken about series out there, and you will be grateful that you were one of the first ones to discover it.

*Yay, it wasn't me!* Wyatt thought. Then after the words appeared, she thought, *sorry, Tom.*  
*Tom. Wyatt. Try to focus.* Heather thought. *You can control your thoughts.*  
*Boobs.* Wyatt thought. *Aah! Where did that come from?"*

"...as soon as he realized there was no hope—he was finally able to accept a cold, hard truth about life: the

world rewarded sociopaths like Vengerov and destroyed good people like Yuri.

Tom finally understood why his father saw humanity as worthless. It was hard to see much fundamental value in anything when the bad guys always won.

Maybe this was simply what it was like to grow up."

Overall I love Tome Raine's character. He knows what he believes in, and doesn't apologize... or go back on those beliefs when it conveniences him.

"Tom wasn't sorry. He wasn't. And he wasn't delusional, either—he knew he was done for. There was no coming back from this, so he decided to embrace the moment.

"Good to see you again," Tom said to him. "I didn't recognize you at first, but then again, you're not naked and shrieking like a frightened little girl today. So, make any new friends in Jail?"

That of course leads to a lot of problems for him at the Pentagonal Spire, specially since he is supposed to do some ass kissing in order to get sponsors that will help him fight in space. But you still gotta love his bravado. He really stepped up in this book too, at the end I could see a very brave young man starting to realize that some things may be more important than his pride. Sometimes you just gotta play the game.

I also love all the other characters, including the bad guys. I specially love Wyatt, the counter part to Hermione. She is the smartest of them all, but I wouldn't say she has the looks Emma Watson has or the charm. Wyatt is socially awkward in every way, and not cute awkward at that. She can at times be just plain rude, and social cues are out of her league. But she can write code like no one else in the Spire. Plus she is a very good friend to have backing you up. Yuri is also super adorable (the Russian friend), and some things happen in this book that really make you appreciate him more. Before it seemed like if he were to disappear the book's dynamic wouldn't change, but you would be surprised. Every character is essential. Lastly Vik is back, and he also grows in interesting ways. We get to see another side of Vik that is more than Tom's best friend and side kick, a side you might not necessary come to cherish. At the end Vik pulled through though, so I give him props for that.

Have I gone on and on and on about the characters? That is because they are freaking amazing, but the story also merits itself a very long love letter. I am just enamored with this series because it's so different to every other book out there!

The space battles, the very real issues it deals with while at the same time not taking itself too seriously, the enemies, the friends, the lovers and the enemies. It's all a huge web of fantastic that I cannot wait to revisit. It's also a very good read for BOYS. BOYS AND GIRLS will LOVE these books, what are the odds?

So yes, I recommend everyone picks up this series before the media takes note and it becomes this huge thing. You can then say with confidence "hey I read that book BEFORE it was cool". Be one of the cool kids, and read Insignia. And if this argument doesn't work with you just know that it's world will enthrall you and you won't be able to stop thinking about it for days after it's over. I am still thinking about it, and I read it weeks ago.

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## **sierra ? says**

[Tom + Medusa = SO CUTE ?????? (hide spoiler)]

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## **Sana says**

Just so damn good!

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## **Reading is my Escape says**

Book 2 in the Insignia series

That was the thing about real life. Video games could be reset. There were second chances.  
- Chapter 14

Book two in the World War III Insignia series is as thrilling as the first book. This series explores themes of power, corruption, friendship, and loyalty. Evil cooperations control everything, from the water and food to the war. Tom and his friends have computers in their heads and they are controlled by the government (which is controlled by the corporations). Tom is rebellious but loyal. In order to continue in his training, Tom has to get corporations to sponsor him, but he is incapable of hiding his real feelings, incapable of being political.

This is an exciting story. I loved the first book, and this one even more. I am starting book 3 right away! Watching Tom try to act political was so funny. There are some pretty tense moments and it is hard to know who to trust. I sort of guessed who was the leak, but I knew it would involve another twist.

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## **Zunaira Ghazal says**

This, right here? Yeah, its almost better than divergent.

So throughout the book I had this uncanny feeling that I was reading some other version of HP. The spire was Hogwarts, Tom was Harry, Enslow was Hermione and Blackburn was a weird combo of Prof, Solomon from GG series ad Snape from HP. But you know what? It made it a thousand times more epic! Because HP was a cultural phenomenon and this might be next!

it started off as Tom being this prideful idiot! But by the end, I UNDERSTOOD why he was a prideful idiot. And the end. Whoa! Just whoa! Thing is I kind of figured out a part of the plot since the beginning and it was pissing me off that Tom was being so hard headed. But I figured the show must go on and all, so I was pleasantly surprised when things actually added up in the end. Plus there were so many hilarious scenes e.g. that Snowden and Yousaf Saide simulation. God I laughed my ass off.

so the thing is, no matter how much Tom hates Blackburn I can never seem to reciprocate his urge to tear him apart. Truth is, Tom's stupid and hardheaded. He doesn't have all the facts and as far as I can tell, Blackburn really is trying to help him—in his own twisted way. And I believe Tom's distrust in him would ultimately lead to his downfall. And Tom darling has waaaay too much pride—which isn't a good thing but it makes a hell of a book. And he seems to throw waaaay many empty threats. Barking dogs, right?

Medusa. Huh. She was such a unique heroine. Most people portray the heroine as slightly less kick ass than the hero but Medusa was waaaay more skilled and awesome than Tom. I was so happy when they finally found each other—but then the end happened. Which isn't really a bad thing but aw, it took him THAT long to get there. Now he'd have to start over again. See, boys are stupid. So utterly guileless and easily distracted that it pained me to read Tom. He was the most clueless of them all. Sigh.

Elliot is such a giant sweetheart! I wish he'd play a bigger, better role in Insignia 3. I hope he helps Tom take all those freaks down—and DOESN'T DIE in the process. It made me so happy when he finally did that thing that he did near the end! And to be honest I'm still in a little bit of fangirl-ish love with him..

And somehow I end up imagining Joseph Vengerov as this slim medieval guy who wears stockings and ruffles. And then I imagined Lucious Malfoy. Huh.

Throughout the end of the book I was living through Harry Potter and Percy Jackson again. The will, the sheer stubbornness, the utmost stupidity of even the most well thought-out plans was so familiar it made me giddy with excitement! Optical camouflage was very much like Harry's invisibility cloak huh?

All in all, it was just as kick ass as insignia and I LOVED it and I really, really wanna time travel to 2014 to read the 3rd part! >.<

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## **david y biblioflick says**

The *Vortex* sucks a thousand stars (that sound negative). Rating:**4.5 stars**

So Tom is going back to the Spire, as Middle. So there are new classes to take and new rooms to explore (liked the really leveled up in games). Like Insignia, the classes are just something to let us know the character of a character in this book that have characters (of course). The main story is focused on Tom against the Obsidian and Dominion Agra. I got to say, this is way much better than the first book, the some character changes (and I liked it) but Tom is still stubborn (I guess that his quality, but hoping that he will change, he change a bit at the end, though). Plus it is more action packed, a lot of funny scenes, more mysterious atmosphere (who to trust) and a little bit of drama. (view spoiler)

And I disliked, DISLIKED Heather more (I really hated her) but... (view spoiler)

I can't review without making this review into a full-spoiler one. One word to describe this book - AWESOME! Just read it!

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## Müsli says

This was an amazing second instalment of the series. i loved it

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## Valeria Iacovone says

There's this quote from the last page I really liked and it summarizes pretty much this book, the next one and Tom: **"...then Tom was about to give them an inferno"**

Increíble. Me encantó. Excelente. AWESOME. Este libro es waaaay better than Insignia. Tom sigue siendo super stubborn y orgulloso y todo eso, pero me agrada más. Se está poniendo hecho y derecho, y en el próximo libro va a patear unos buenos traseros. Y no puedo esperar para leer eso. Septiembre apurate, por favor.

El plot me parece genial y bastante original (a lo que estoy acostumbrada a leer), y a veces al leer esto y el tema de las compañías y todo eso, me hace imaginar que el mundo será así dentro de unos años, y to be honest, espero estar muerta ya porque no me gusta para nada.

Anyway, los personajes siguen siendo geniales, como está escrito me gusta millones más en inglés y y y y muy excelente todo \*aplaude\*

5 estrellitas porque entra en mi top 10 de sagas ?

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## Experiment BL626 says

I thought after the events of book 1 Tom would learn his lessons and be cautious and prudent in book 2. Nope. \*anger eye-twitch\* He acted the same as before. No character growth. No lessons learned. Dude was fucking TSTL.

\*flips table\*

Rambling rant ahead.

### + the main character

Tom pissed off every influential and powerful person he came across. He pissed off people he needed help from, people he couldn't afford as enemies, people who could make his life very hard for him or put an end to his life altogether. They were bad people so I understood the reasons for his flippant attitude but that was no excuse to go and shake the fucking beehive.

Tom wanted to become an Intrasolar Combatant and fight epic battles among the stars, yet every single action of his showed otherwise. Dude was unbelievably self-destructive. I would admire his courage to stand up to the bad guys and fight for his ideals and not take the dirty path to attain his dream if he wasn't such a filthy hypocrite. I was frustrated at how Tom never considered what it really meant to be a Combatant or realized the great depth of his hypocrisy if by some godforsaken miracle he does become one. To become a



Combatant meant to become a pawn of the bad guys and perpetuate the corruption, oppression, and everything that is wrong with society and the world.

For someone who helped his father swindle, no matter if their targets were bad guys, Tom had little right criticizing others for swindling themselves. Yes, those people were evil capitalists, but that just meant they were swindlers of a much higher level. The point is that Tom was no paragon of righteousness yet he acted as if he was much to my irritation. Hypocrite!

Tom knew how things worked in the dystopian world yet he bumbled along through life like he didn't. He thought he could just head-butt his way towards his goals. He was so astoundingly bull-headed that he took the phrase "dumb as bricks" to several new levels.

Tom failed to practice vital discretion with his technopathy because if people found out about his very rare ability he would get a one-way ticket to the laboratory. He never once thought to train his ability and use it to survive and get the upper hand. For instance, if he thought to use his technopathy for espionage, many bad things could have been easily avoided. So fucking easily.

Tom acted with no consideration of the consequences whatsoever, impulsive as fuck. He ignored countless pieces of advice and warnings, common sense be damned. He was so insufferably TSTL that when one of the bad guys made good on his death threat I felt no pity. I actually felt a little joy that it happened, a little disappointed that it didn't happen sooner, and a bit surprised and befuddled that it didn't happen more often considering the growing number of enemies Tom made as the plot progressed.

In summary, the main character was TSTL on so many levels, levels that I have not even begun to scratch the surface of, that hardly a chapter went by where I didn't think he was an absolute waste of space. A discussion of Tom's personality flaws and dumbass decisions could fill up a book on its own.

#### **+ issues with other characters**

I also took issue with other characters. Of course, they were nowhere near problematic as Tom.

Elliot was one of the cyborgs and Intrastellar Combatants, and I didn't like how he was used as a prop character. He had no purpose other than showing up very conveniently to show Tom the errors of his ways and simultaneously show the readers how dystopian and shitty the world was. Just when I thought things couldn't get more contrived with Elliot, it did. Elliot underwent a sudden change of personality for a dramatic scene towards the end. The scene was supposed to be this gleam of light in the dark, designed to bring a sense of hope to the story so the readers would believe things could change for the better. However, all I could think of was that Elliot got infected with Tom's TSTL-ness. Holy hell, Tom's TSTL-ness was contagious!

Heather was another cyborg and a Combatant like Elliot, and I didn't like how she was portrayed negatively. Heather was self-interested, self-empowered, and a sexual character, and for these qualities she was inflicted with a Madonna-whore narrative complex. As one of the prominent female characters with Wyatt and Medusa, Heather was the one with the sex appeal and sexual interests, and she alone was made out to be a bitch. Nice.

Blackburn was one of the bad guys, a mad scientist trope. I found it very odd how things between him and Tom were, for the most part, drama-less. I expected the two to duke it out after what happened in book 1. Instead, I saw Blackburn helping out Tom a few times. The fuck? It was just very inconsistent how

Blackburn's character was established from the ending scenes of book 1 where his true self was finally revealed. Vengeful. Paranoid. Has a loose screw. The guy should be trying to get Tom on a lab table to be prodded, poked, and vivisected.

Last but not least, I wish there was more nuances to the evil capitalist bad guys. Not that these characters weren't believable, but at their very core they all seemed to blend together and the traits that make them different seemed superficial.

#### **+ characters I liked**

About the only characters I liked were Wyatt and General Marsh. I liked Wyatt because among Tom's cyborg peers she seemed to be the only one who had any sense and who took things seriously. She was one of the few characters who would be the least likely to make a stupid mistake and get killed. Quite pitiful the cast.

I liked General Marsh because he was a dimensional character. I saw him as a good guy despite the bad things he did. I didn't like what he did but I understood his reasons. He fully understood the dystopian world and the necessity for change, and he didn't hesitate to get his hands dirty. Whether readers like him or hate him, at least someone was doing something to change the world, something that was actually productive. I wished the book featured more of General Marsh. His appearances were very few for someone who was an important character.

#### **In Conclusion**

I rate *Vortex* 2-stars for it was okay. Despite the aggravation that was Tom, the book was engaging. I liked the science fiction elements and the world building.

If you like this series, check out Psion Beta and Data Runner.

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#### **Sebastian Alanya says**

Just WOW. This is waaaaay better than insignia. I LOVED IT

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#### **Maud says**

Actually a 4.5 because I felt like Tom was too stubborn sometimes but the plot was once again amazing!

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#### **Shelley says**

\*Genre\* YA, Science Fiction

\*Rating\* 3-3.5

\*My Thoughts\*

15-year old Thomas Raines, trainee for the US Intrastellar Forces, is back in the sequel to Insignia. This time around, the dangers are more pronounced, the villains are out in the open, the odds are getting increasingly more challenging, and Tom will stand with his friends (Vikram Ashwan, Wyatt Enslow, and Yuri Sysevich) against the Coalition of Multinational Corporations who controls the globe and determines whether or not you are able to become a combat pilot or be washed out.

I would say that I enjoyed Vortex the same as Insignia, but there were issues. The issues all pertained to Tom's immaturity and the fact that he overestimates his abilities and is more reckless and dangerous than anyone can predict. While his friends all stand by him, you have to wonder how much pain and suffering they can continue to handle by being his friend. I would eventually like to see a resolution between Tom and Medusa to one that I can be satisfied with. As it is now, Tom has his hands full, and Medusa is left out in the cold even though she is clearly the more badass character.

I will say that I did laugh at times while reading this book. The continued role playing, the war games against fellow trainees was interesting and fun even though there are clearly people who hate him, and want him washed out of the program. I even liked the friendship aspects between the 4 main players as well as the challenges that being Tom's friend brings with it. There is, of course, lots of hi-jinks as well and churlish boy behavior that comes from being a teenaged boy. You have to expect that kind of behavior when you are reading a book about immature teenagers who haven't exactly had the best home life, and their parents are complete and utter messes.

I will also say this about Vortex, there is an underlying message that I believe the author is trying to expound. That is that nobody should bow down to anyone (Hear that OBAMA?) including celebrities, sports players, politicians, world leaders, and those who have billions of dollars and believe they can tell someone to jump at a moments notice and we are to walk quietly into that good night. I am actually behind this message. I don't bow to anyone, nor will I ever suck up to anyone just to get ahead in this world. I think Tom is also a firm believer in this as well along with his father Neil and does everything he can to get under the skin of those who think they are better than him.

Tom's war against Joseph Vengerov, the other CEO's, as well as Tom's fellow trainees and Lieutenant Blackburn, should be interesting to read about in the final installment. The ending of Vortex, while not necessarily a glaring cliffhanger, does offer intriguing possibilities for Tom and the Intrastellar trainees.

Conclusion: Catalyst (Insignia #3) Expected publication: October 28th 2014 by Katherine Tegen Books

Published: July 2nd 2013 by Katherine Tegen Books

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**Esthela Gómez says**

This was me reading Vortex

Can't wait to read the next one!

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### Daph (Loving Books) says

YES YES YES

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### Alice Cai says

4.75\* (I like the first book better, but the pacing was better for this one.)

Summary of this series. Tom Raines is the main character. The setting takes place mainly in The Spire which is pretty much a **VR boarding school. Funny and very character driven series** which I realized more after reading this 2nd book.

Wow the ending was so good. Tom is awesome as always. I took a long time to read this because I keep having to stop because of schoolwork. Tip to anyone who sees this review **try to binge this series** or at least read each book in large chunks at a time because it always takes like 6 pages to get back into each time which really slowed my progress in picking it back up to read.

#### One cute quote from the book:

"WYATT GAVE TOM some solemn advice on the ride up. "I've found there's one surefire way to avoid offending people. Just don't talk. At all. Don't say a word. Make sure people don't even notice you're there. Then you'll never offend anyone." She gave a crisp nod. "I haven't said a single word anywhere we've been. Have you noticed that? It's worked out great."

(view spoiler)

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### Catador de Libros says

S. J. Kincaid no decepciona en su pluma. En esta segunda parte sigue con su fantástica aventura. Nos muestra toda la ciencia ficción de la que es capaz de lograr y como la enfoca y la mezcla causando fascinación y adicción al lector.

Una nueva aventura en la que Tom nos muestra que su valentía y su espíritu de siempre hacer lo que mejor le parezca lo lleva a vivir las mejores aventuras al lado de sus amigos y su entrañable Medusa.

Sin duda es un libro que recomiendo y espero pronto terminar esta genial saga. Pronto les tendré la reseña en el blog.

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### **Christina says**

Tom Raines is now a Middle at the Pentagonal Spire. Along with it comes many roles and responsibilities. He is exposed to an armoury filled with suits and weapons. He faces meet-and-greets with the multinational corporations in attempts at obtaining a sponsor. His meetings with Medusa are becoming more dangerous as they risk revealing what they can do. There are mysterious security breaches at the Spire. A new power-hungry foe is introduced and he will stop at nothing to get what he wants.

Vortex is filled to the brim with new and exciting challenges for Tom. It's a feat for the second book in a series to live up to the first (because usually the first is the best) but Vortex did just that. It continued to deliver a load of fast-paced action, with comedy and mystery. The plot was incredibly unpredictable and I loved it! Tom is a loose cannon that can't and will not be stopped!

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