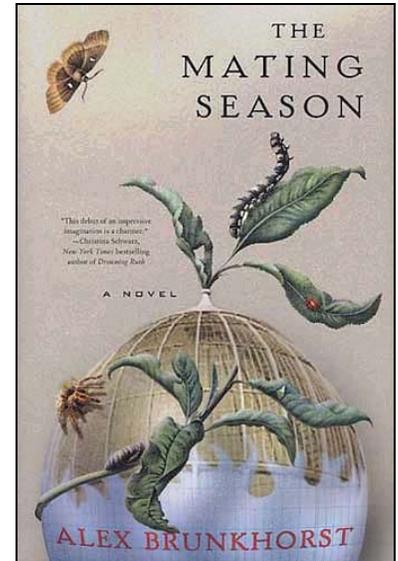


READING GROUP GUIDE

The Mating Season by Alex Brunkhorst



St. Martin's Press
ISBN: 0-312-31853-7 (hardcover)

Introduction to *The Mating Season*

An enchanting, extraordinarily imaginative novel, *The Mating Season* tells the story of the romance between two geniuses who have created their own fantastical worlds to cope with the pain of isolation.

Praise for *The Mating Season*

"Alex Brunkhorst suspends her love story in a web of bewitching whimsy. At once playful and heartfelt, this debut of an impressive imagination is a charmer."

- Christina Schwarz, *New York Times* #1 bestselling author of *Drowning Ruth*

"Welcome to an enchanted kingdom—a world where women talk to their furniture and bugs are household pets. Written as a wildly entertaining love letter that was never intended for publication, *The Mating Season* is a rare gem: extraordinarily inventive, full of irrepressible humor and warmth. Alexandria Brunkhorst writes like no one else. Her voice is as welcome and refreshing as a cool drink of spring water. This beautiful book sparkles with charm."

- Lisa Dierbeck, author of *One Pill Makes You Smaller: A Novel*

"Extraordinary...Alexandria Brunkhorst's *The Mating Season* is a strange and gorgeous novel about the symbiotic relationship between loneliness and love. You can feel your heart expanding as you read it."

- Joe Weisberg, author of *10th Grade*

Reading Group Guide Questions

1. After her father's departure and her mother's rapid descent into insanity, Zorka turns to her "creatures" as a coping mechanism. Are these creatures real? Or are they merely imaginary representations intended as metaphors for the pains in Zorka's life? How often are Zorka's creatures seen by the townsfolk and Richard? In either interpretation – real or imaginary – explain how others could see and/or communicate with Zorka's creatures.
2. Architecture, particularly Modernist architecture, is a theme woven throughout the book. What is Modernism as it relates to architecture? What is its significance in the text? Why is it important to the main characters? Why did the author decide to use Modernism rather than another style of architecture as the story's backdrop?
3. The two protagonists in *The Mating Season* – Zorka and Richard – both have intimate connections to glass houses. What does the glass house represent? Will Richard ever finish designing Dorsey Monument Nine for the woman he once loved? Why or why not?
4. *The Mating Season* takes place primarily between the small towns of Ix and Unity, yet the author gives few geographical specificities to indicate where these towns are located. Is this sense of "placelessness" important? Why? How do Ix and Unity compare to each other? How do they compare to the big city? To 1959?
5. In a relatively insular world, why does Kris Tina Woo play such a prominent role? Who is she? While Zorka remains in Unity and has a personal relationship with Richard, Kris Tina travels the world discovering him through his monuments. Is one approach at learning about a person better than the other? Is this meant as a commentary on society? On love?
6. At one point in the story Zorka, in trying to understand her undying love for Richard, says, "I was very much been Mama's daughter, always breathing on the life-support of hope." Does Zorka's love for Richard in any way mirror her mother's love for Zorka's father? How are they different? Is there any point in the story where Zorka's love for Richard is pushing her towards the insanity her mother experienced?
7. Unrequited love is one of the primary themes of *The Mating Season*. Zorka, Richard, and Zorka's mother all seemingly love people who can't fully love them back. Does Richard Dorsey love Zorka? Is Richard still in love with the woman in his past? Or merely the idea of her? Do these characters define themselves by who they love or who loves them? In real life, how do we define ourselves?
8. Why did Architect Dorsey's monuments go incomplete? The book offers a number of reasons, including Richard's fear of failure, his devastation due to a lost love, his inability to complete things, his reluctance to end something started. Which of these do you believe? Richard is Architect Dorsey to Kris Tina Woo, Mr. Dorsey to Zoë Christie, and Richard to Zorka. How does he view himself? As an architect, a designer, or neither?
9. At various points in their lives Richard and Zorka created distinct and perhaps fantastical worlds in order to cope with their loneliness. What situations in their lives caused them to create these worlds? How are their escapisms – her creatures and his 1959 – different? How are they the same? Does Richard penetrate her world? Does she penetrate his? In order to fully be committed to the other person, must they escape these worlds? In real life do we or people we know use a variation of Richard and Zorka's escapisms to deal with our own lives?
10. Zorka discovers she's been accepted to veterinary school but does not recall sending in the application. Did she, herself, send it in? If not, who did? Was it her creatures? Or was it Richard?

11. When Zorka returns from 1959, her creatures are “turning their backs on natural order.” Why? What can we assume happened to Zorka’s creatures when she was gone? Why does Zorka eventually decide to set them free? In doing so, why is it necessary for her to destroy the glass house in which she resided with them? Do you think that the creatures will be happier back in their natural surroundings? If so, how does this relate back to Modernism and its principles?
12. Does *The Mating Season* end in happily ever after? Why or why not? Had Zorka stayed in 1959, could the ending have been a truly happy one?

About the Author

Alex Brunkhorst graduated from Georgetown University. Until recently, she was an agent at United Talent Agency in Los Angeles, where she represented television writers. A native of Milwaukee, WI, she currently lives in Los Angeles. *The Mating Season* is her first novel.