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Arnason, Eleanor. A Woman of the Iron People

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Lixia is one of eight human anthropologists sent down to the surface of an alien planet. There, she encounters the native intelligent species, who are very like humanity in some ways but utterly alien in others. As Lixia travels the planet with Nia, an outcast woman from the Iron People tribal group, she experiences several discrete cultures whose main similarities seem rooted in the species' biological expressions of gender and the mating impulse. But even this seems to be not so monolithic as it originally appears; Nia is outcast precisely because she defied her culture's conventions and fell in love with a man. The pair encounter others who defy this standard, including a man who has rejected the warlike isolation of the other males for a life of spiritual fervor and contemplation.

A quiet, masterful book in the grand anthropological tradition of Ursula LeGuin, *A Woman of the Iron People* won the Mythopoeic Award—normally granted to works of fantasy, not science fiction. But such is the mythic power of the stories recounted by Nia and the other aliens that this book transcends simple genre definitions, becoming a quietly moving meditation on the nature of humanity and the self.

arnason and woman iron people
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