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RIVER SONG by Craig Lesley. Houghton Mifflin, \$18.95. Danny Kachiah, the protagonist of Mr. Lesley's novel, mourns for his dead wife and worries about his teenaged son, who wants to be a rodeo rider, an ambition that did his father no good. Danny drifts about Oregon from one hand-to-mouth job to another, cuts his hair short, and can survive dinner in a fancy tourist trap with aplomb. He is, in short, a decent, industrious, sensible man, but he is also a Nez Perce Indian with an acute awareness of tribal history and a profound regret at the fading of old customs and loss of old traditions. He still owns a guardian spirit and is subject to visions that indicate that something should be done but are exasperatingly vague about what that something is. When Danny learns that a group of Indian fishermen are having trouble over salmon rights, he joins them. Mr. Lesley's presentation of these people is wonderfully solid. His characters recall old tragedies (salmon fishing from a slippery catwalk in dangerous, and a net hustled up downstream merely catches the corpse), gossip about distant relatives, swap anecdotes, and share a dry, understated wit. For sound reasons, they thoroughly mistrust all white authorities, but except for one hot-tempered young woman, say little directly about the injustices they endure. Mr. Lesley, however, says a great deal on that subject, not through polemic but by his vivid creation of actions and circumstances in the present and, through Danny's visions, of brutality and betrayal in the past. Those visions are a remarkable achievement by the author. They may alarm or distress Danny, but they are presented to the reader in the same practical, commonsense style that controls the rest of

the narrative. They carry conviction precisely because they are devoid of spooky trimmings.
