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IN SHORT

IN SHORT; FICTION

By MICHAEL LICHTENSTEIN

RIVER SONG. By Craig Lesley. (Houghton Mifflin, \$18.95.) In this worthy sequel to Craig Lesley's acclaimed first novel, "Winterkill," readers once again follow the exploits of Danny Kachiah, a Nez Perce Indian, a drifter, migrant farm worker and small-time rodeo cowboy who has reclaimed his 17-year-old son Jack after his former wife's death. The boy hopes to follow in his father's footsteps on the rodeo circuit, but Danny has other ideas. Instead he plans to show his son the traditional ways of his people, heading for the ancestral salmon fishing grounds of the Nez Perce along the Columbia River in eastern Oregon. But Danny Kachiah is a man with a troubled past, haunted by images of his dead wife, his alcoholic father and his great-grandfather, Left Hand, a heroic warrior under the great chief Joseph. When a meeting with a medicine woman is arranged, she instructs Danny on the ancient healing procedures that he must undertake before he can purge these ghosts. The process is begun, and Danny returns to the fishing village - only to discover that the nets have been cut and several buildings dynamited, presumably by sport fishermen who have been attempting to force the Indians from their sacred lands. In presenting the resolution of this crisis, "River Song" becomes not only a tale of reconciliation between father and son, and of a people with their heritage. It also emerges as a skillfully told story that illuminates the plight of American Indians as they battle to keep their way of life alive.