Out of Jim Riva's satiric, comic novel *The Champion of Reason* comes a section in which the Champ crashes a pseudo-science class at Addleton Central High and socks it to the Creationists and their attempt at subterfuge with Intelligent Design.

The *Addleton Times* had hardly cooled down from the heat of the press when the Champion of Reason struck again – in Pip Tripke's science class on the second floor of Addleton Central High.

Wearing a cowl with the hood pulled over a Saint Francis of Assisi tonsure hairdo, Pip Tripke, the new science teacher hired to replace Roger Wagner, put his rosary down on the pulpit he used as a podium and picked up the new science book, published by the Loving Christian Publishing Company. Bound in velvet and printed in Gothic print, the text offered more, much more, than just an alternative to what the school board called the 'hypothesis' of evolution.

Pip Tripke received a Ph.D. in science from an Internet diploma mill. (He also received Ph.D.s in Philosophy, Linguistics, and Anthropology.) But it wasn't the diploma as much as it was going to the job interview with the *Bible* that made him the most appealing applicant for the science-teaching position at Addleton Central High.

"... God said, 'Let the waters under heaven be gathered into one

place, so that dry land may appear'; and so it was. God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of waters he called the seas; and God saw that it was good. Then God said, 'Let the earth produce fresh growth, let there be on earth plants bearing seed, fruit trees bearing fruit with seed according to its kind.' So it was; the earth yielded fresh growth, plants bearing seed according to their kind and trees bearing fruit each with seed according to its kind; and God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning came, a third day," Pip read from *Genesis* before going off into a Gregorian chant in front of the students of the seventh and final period of the day.

Larry Atkins, who was one of the students in the class, raised his hand and asked how a reference could have been made to a *first* day at a time when Earth had supposedly not yet come into existence because, he asked, doesn't a day consist of a revolution of Earth? Pip looked to the crucifix at the front of the room for fortitude and, in what he considered to be a burst of brilliance, reminded Larry that a day also consists of twenty-four hours, to which Larry reminded Pip that the temporal measurement of an hour wasn't used until the fourteenth century. Pip was answering in terms of God's omniscience about the future when everyone's eyes went to the door, because there at the door stood the Champion of Reason.

With arms akimbo, the Champion of Reason stood motionless for what seemed like a long time. Then he threw one end of a rope with a slipknot in it across the room and said as he unsheathed his sword, "Your religion class has just come to an end. Your science class is about to begin. You, with the baseball cap on backward, put the noose over the window latch and pull the end until it's taut."

Barney Quackenbush, the kid singled out, did as he was ordered to do, which, because the Champion of Reason had already fastened the other end of the rope around the inside door handle, made it impossible for anyone to open the door from either the inside or the outside. The Champion of Reason held the sword straight out as a fencer does before parrying, and walked to the front of the classroom, toward Pip Tripke.

Pip raised his hands and walked backward away from the point of

the sword – backward, past the pulpit, backward, past the crucifix, backward, past a Charles Darwin dartboard – all the way to the corner, where he collided with the intersecting walls and slumped deep down into a waste basket.

The Champion of Reason kicked the pulpit over and broke it, causing the terrified students to become more terrified. But then he lowered his sword.

"Today's lesson is going to be a lecture because you don't know enough to have a good class discussion. Pay attention. There are differences between hypotheses, theories, and established facts. A hypothesis is just a guess made for the sake of testing. It becomes a theory only if it seems to stand up to tests, although further testing is needed. It becomes an established fact only if it gets proven, thereby making further tests unnecessary. The discovery that the galaxies are moving led to the theory that the universe is expanding and – Shut up!"

Pip Tripke stopped mumbling a prayer in Latin while slumped in the waste basket, and the Champion of Reason continued.

"When the theory that the universe is expanding became an established fact, two main theories arose to account for the expansion: the *Steady State Theory* and the *Big Bang Theory.* The Big Bang has been confirmed. It is therefore no longer a theory but an established fact. You over there near the door with your eyes on the rope, don't try it! Yes, I'm talking to you, with the tattoos all over your arms. Don't try it."

The Champion of Reason brought his sword down hard on the fallen pulpit and left a groove in the wood, which left an impression in everyone's mind about what a lethal weapon the sword was. "Okay. Now listen carefully. Approximately fifteen billion years ago, an incredibly dense fireball of energy violently exploded, and elementary particles shot out in all directions at a fantastic speed. After a hundred million years or so, gravitation became possible. Elementary particles gravitated together to form hydrogen atoms, hydrogen atoms gravitated to form swirling clouds of hydrogen gas, and hydrogen atoms within the swirling clouds gravitated together to form dense fireballs of hydrogen that we call stars. When you think about the sun,

you – Yes, what do you want?"

"Can I go to the bathroom?" said Des Cruttenden, who had raised his hand because of an intestinal response to fear.

"No, you can't. I'm not going to talk long, so hold it in. When you think about the sun, you should think about it as a star because that's what it is. Although it's a million times bigger than Earth, it's just an average-sized star, and, like all presently existing stars, it will continue to exist only as long as it has enough hydrogen to burn.

"Don't you people ever look up at the sky at night and think about the stars and where you are as earthlings? Of course you don't. You don't think about why you are or what you are or who you are or when you are, so why should you think about *where* you are? But it's high time you started. It's – I told you, 'No.'"

"I gotta shit real bad," said a rigid Des Cruttenden, who had raised his hand again while his other hand was pressed firmly down on the seat of his chair.

"I don't care. I'm not going to let you go. You can go in your pants for all I care. It's high time you took some time out from watching TV, playing computer games, and talking drivel on your cell phones and looked up at the sky at night. It's high time you took your thinking to a higher level. Pay attention. The stars are not just above you; they're also below you. They're all around you. And they don't just come out at night; they're there during the day too. On a clear night, you can see about 2,500 of them with the naked eye, but there are countless others out there – and they're not just out there, they're *way* out there. The nearest one after the sun, Alpha Centauri, which is actually a triple-star system, is about 270,000 times farther away than the sun. You there in the tight Hooters T-shirt, stop taking notes."

"I'm proud of what I've got," said large-breasted Laura Yober while sticking her breasts out.

"You ought to be ashamed of what you *haven't* got – a brain that gets some exercise. Your brain is as flabby as your breasts are going to be. Too bad you can't get a brain implant. All of you, there's no need to take notes. Forget about the details and concentrate on the gist. There's

not going to be a quiz after this lecture. Tennyson was right when he said, 'Knowledge comes, wisdom lingers.' I'm not trying to pump you full of knowledge. I'm trying to wise you up. So do yourselves a favor and pay attention.

"Think about the stars three-dimensionally. Think about them that way because that's the way they are, and there are vast distances between them. Understand that the number of stars you can see on a clear night is an infinitesimal fraction of all the stars out there. There are approximately two-hundred billion stars in the Milky Way. That's a two hundred with nine zeroes behind it. Think about that. And then think about this: there are billions of other galaxies besides the Milky Way. Think about it until it boggles your mind, and then think about it some more. The Andromeda Galaxy, which is the farthest thing you can see with the unaided eye, is about two and a half million light years away. That means that when you look at it, you are seeing it as it was two and a half million years ago. The Milky Way – Stop moving your desks!" Students seated near Des Cruttenden stopped scooting away from him.

"The Milky Way is just a speck within the universe, the sun is just a speck within the Milky Way, and Earth is just a speck within the solar system, a speck within a speck within a speck. And you're just a speck on Earth, composed entirely of matter that came from stars that have died – because nuclei of hydrogen atoms left behind after novas or supernovas can combine to form helium, and the nuclei of helium atoms can combine to form carbon, and so on. That's how all of the elements are produced. Listen. You're composed entirely of matter. About sixty-five percent of you is water, and all of the water molecules and all of the other kinds of molecules that compose you are made up of elements that came from now dead stars. Think about that. Think about it until you feel an affinity with the stars. Then you'll have taken your thinking to a higher level. Then you'll be getting somewhere. Now you're not getting anywhere. You're just staying on the surface. You're more interested in television stars, movie stars, sports stars, and rock stars than you are in *real* stars. You're not getting down to the nitty-

gritty. You're not getting down to science. You, with the graffiti all over your desk, take the gum out of your mouth."

"I didn't write the graffiti."

"I didn't say you *did*. What's your name?"

"Joe."

"Joe Brackman?"

"Yeah."

"So somebody else wrote 'Joe Brackman was here', eh? Now stick the gum on the tip of your nose. Do it!"

The Champion of Reason pointed his sword at Joe, which made Joe do as he was told. A couple of the less-terrified students laughed. "Don't laugh," the Champion of Reason said. "You don't know how foolish you yourselves look in your superficial world of appearances. Get out of the world of appearances and into the world of substance. You're just sleepwalking through life. I'm trying to wake you up. I'm trying to get you to look up at the stars and think at a higher level than it takes to make a wish or locate the Big Dipper. I'm trying to give you some food for thought. You'll have to go through the digestive process yourself, but at least you might have something to chew on. So pay attention.

"Billions of stars have already died and left behind heavier elements amidst all of the hydrogen floating around. That's how new gravitational pulls have led to the birth of new stars with planets revolving around them. Many stars, perhaps billions of them, have planets revolving around them.

"About four and a half billion years ago, matter left behind by three supernovas gravitated together in a particular area of the Milky Way and formed the sun and the nine planets that comprise what we call the solar system. You, with the neon-pink hair and the piercings in your lips and eyebrows, when did Earth come into existence?"

"About four and a half billion years ago?"

"Is that an answer or a question? If it's a question, the answer is yes. Now listen more carefully. When Earth came into existence, there was no life on it, but atomic reactions soon produced organic molecules in

the water that could self-replicate and create diversity through slightly imperfect replications, and, over the course of a few hundred million years, different kinds of molecules joined together and eventually formed Earth's first living things: single cells. From one of the single cells, and I'm talking about only one, a particular one, mitosis with slight mutations eventually produced multicellular organisms that reproduced asexually and led to slightly different asexually reproducing organisms until germ cells came into existence and made sexual reproduction possible, which led to a wider variety of multicellular organisms that had some specialized cells and more intercommunication networks. In case you haven't figured it out yet, I'm talking about evolution.

"You've been told that evolution is a theory." The Champion of Reason removed the darts from the Charles Darwin dartboard. Then he picked up Pip Tripke's teacher's book from the floor and kicked it so hard with his right frog's foot that it bounced off the back wall and hit the head of kid wearing a doo rag, causing a few students to laugh. "Quiet! I'm here to tell you that what you've been told is false, and I'm here to tell you the truth. So pay attention.

"Evolution by mutation and natural selection is an established fact. It's confirmed by both the protein/amino-acid sequences of different species and the fossils contained in different rock strata. The evidence makes it perfectly clear. It's one-hundred percent sure. There's absolutely no doubt about it.

"I'm not saying you should believe it because I say it. I'm saying you should objectively look at the evidence yourself and be reasonable. If you do, there will come a point in the learning process in which you not only believe evolution to be true, you *know* it to be true. And then you'll see the absurdity of religious people claiming to know otherwise with nothing more to offer as evidence than their so-called 'holy' books.

"Most of you were raised as Christians, so you grew up believing that the *Bible* is a holy book. But admit this to yourself: If you had been raised by Jews, you would have grown up believing that the *Talmud* is a holy book, and if you had been raised by Hindus, you would have

grown up believing that the *Vedas* are holy books, and if you had been raised by Moslems, you would have grown up believing that the *Koran* is a holy book, and so on. Admit it. Think a little more objectively and a little less *sub*jectively, and understand that beliefs, no matter how strong, even if felt with complete certainty, can be wrong, which is to say that there is a difference between strong beliefs and knowledge. Evolution is known. It is known to those who have examined the evidence. Religious people who say otherwise don't have knowledge; they only have strong beliefs. I'm not preaching, I'm teaching. There are a lot of people telling you to believe this or believe that. I'm not telling you to believe *any*thing. All I'm saying is, 'Be reasonable.' The world would be a better place if people were less religious and more reasonable. Religious leaders and their followers who would return us to the Dark Ages with religion prevailing over science are among my main enemies because I am the Champion of Reason. And I am declaring not a so-called 'holy' war but a *rational* war. I don't have the audacity to claim that I've got God on my side. What I've got on my side are facts. So pay attention. You might learn something.

"Evolution is not a matter of getting bigger and bigger. It's a matter of getting better and better – in adapting to the environment. Sometimes bigger is not better. For one thing, more food is required. For another, unless the increase in weight is accompanied by stronger leg muscles, agility is diminished, which is a hindrance for predators as well as for prey. So along many evolutionary lineages, creatures became smaller, not bigger. And it wasn't just the inability to compete with others for food that drove many kinds of creatures to extinction. The environment on land was much more changeable than it was in water, and not just in terms of temperature. Lightning could start forest fires, torrential rains could cause floods, and volcanic eruptions could cover vegetation. Plants could become extinct too, and many disappearing plants were the main food source for certain kinds of creatures. Moreover, many of the reptiles were carnivorous and preyed on others, not only on the plant-eaters, but also on other carnivores, and the extinction of a prey could lead to the extinction of its predator. So

thousands of kinds of reptiles, and amphibians, became extinct. But thousands more evolved because mutations kept occurring in reproduction.

"By about 225 million years ago, there was a warm-blooded kind of reptile that had five toes on each foot. Being warm-blooded, they could be active at night while the cold-blooded reptiles, predators and prey alike, were inactive. So they flourished, and from them, after about forty-five million years, there evolved a big, furry, carnivorous rat that carried its young, which was safer for the survival of the offspring than leaving eggs to be hatched. So those first mammals flourished too, and from them new evolutionary lineages began – and after a hundred million years or so, thousands of kinds of mammals, ranging in size from mice to mastodons, had evolved. Many of them, such as lions and sabertooth tigers, were fast and ferocious predators that made the land very unsafe for the smaller mammals. So when shrews evolved that could live in the safety of the trees, they flourished, and from them many kinds of monkeys evolved. You, with the sunglasses on, what happened gradually between about 240 million years ago and about forty-five million years ago?"

"Dinosaurs became extinct."

"Wrong. Dinosaurs, and thousands of other kinds of creatures, became extinct about *sixty*-five million years ago, and relatively suddenly, after a meteor hit Earth and threw up so much dust that it caused a greenhouse effect with heavy acid rain. Pay attention. About 240 million years ago, the land, which had been all together, began breaking up. By about 160 million years ago, India, Africa, South America, Australia and Antarctica were together in one big land mass, and Asia, Europe, and North America were together in another big land mass. And the breaking up continued. By about forty-five million years ago, the situation was relatively similar to what it presently is with respect to the continents.

"Listen. There was a particular kind of monkey in Africa that was about two feet tall, and from that kind of monkey, apes gradually evolved. Some of them were big enough and fit enough to be not so

afraid to come down from the trees, and the ones that were coming down from the trees were the most intelligent animals on Earth. You, with the headphones down around your neck, why were the apes coming down from the trees the most intelligent animals on Earth?"

"Because they had bigger brains?"

"No. It wasn't because their brains were bigger. Whales have bigger brains than humans, but they're not more intelligent. It was because their brains had a cerebral cortex. The cerebral cortex began developing along evolutionary lineages from the first primate, the tree shrew, about seventy million years ago. In the evolving cerebral cortex, which evolved along primate lineages and especially along lineages leading to the apes coming down from the trees, non-inherited connections could be made between nerve cells, and that enabled the creatures to go beyond instinct and learn, which is what intelligence is all about.

"Listen. By four million years ago, there were ape-humans about four feet tall that could walk and run upright and, when in their groups, which they were almost always in, were feared by almost all other animals except giant baboons and the many kinds of big cats. But those ape-humans became extinct. You in the short-sleeved shirt with the pack of Marlboros rolled up in the sleeve, given the fact that those ape-humans of four million years ago became extinct, why are there humans today?"

"I don't know."

"I would have been surprised if you did. Listen. About ninety-five percent of all the different kinds of animals that have ever evolved have became extinct, and many of them were around for a long time. The dinosaurs, for instance, were around for about 135 million years. But extinction wasn't always an evolutionary dead end. For instance, the big rat that was the first mammal became extinct long ago, but the many thousands of mammalian species that became extinct, as well as the 5,500 or so mammalian species that exist today, evolved along lineages from it. So the extinction of the ape-humans of four million years ago doesn't entail that the evolutionary lineage ended, because it didn't. By about two million years ago, there were three different kinds

of ape-humans: *Australopithecus robustus*, *Australopithecus boisei*, and *Homo habilis*. *Australopithecus robustus* and *Autralopithecus boisei* were brawny vegetarians with prominent jaws, and *Homo habilis* was a more slender meat-eater with a slightly bigger brain. In the slightly bigger brain of *Homo habilis*, who were hunting and scavenging and eating carcasses raw, there was a slightly more developed cerebral cortex, so they were more intelligent; but they, and *Australopithecus robustus* and *Australopithecus boisei*, had become extinct by about a million years ago. However, once again there was not an evolutionary dead end, at least not with respect to *Homo habilis*, because a more human than apish ape-human evolved from them: *Homo erectus*.

Homo erectus had a still more developed cerebral cortex that made them intelligent enough to use fire. Think about that. *Homo erectus* wasn't stupid. And they weren't around for a short time. They were around for about one and a half million years. And they were building fires more than a *million* years ago. And they could talk to some extent. But they had become extinct by about 50,000 years ago. However, the extinction was once again not a dead end, because humans, *Homo sapiens*, with a still more developed cerebral cortex, had evolved. And after about 2,500 generations, during which mutations brought about different races of humans, *you* came into existence.

"So here you are, a highfalutin human being. Here you are, with a cerebral cortex that would cover about twenty square feet if the convolutions were all flattened out. And yet here you are, so stupid it's pathetic. Aristotle defined humans as 'rational animals', but he could have just as appropriately defined them as '*ir*rational animals' because of all the foolish beliefs you have and hold and all the foolish things you say and do. There is an area in the left frontal lobe of the limbic area of the cerebral cortex that enables you to reason. That's the part of your brain that I'm trying to get you to use. And I'm trying to get you to use it well, so you don't continue presenting and accepting so many slipshod arguments that I sometimes can't help wondering if you've got rocks for brains. Listen. Reasoning is a process of going from premises to a conclusion. There is good reasoning and there is bad reasoning,

both *de*ductively and *in*ductively. You, with spiked Mohawk, who am I?"

"The Champion of Reason."

"That's right. I'm the friend of fact and the foe of folly, and I came here today to tell you that evolution is a fact and intelligent design is folly. You may not like to think that humans evolved from apes because you consider it dehumanizing, but trace the evolutionary lineage further and further back and you'll find it even more dehumanizing. Your ancestors of 100 million years ago were rats. Your ancestors of two-hundred million years ago were reptiles. This is the way you should think when you think about your roots. Think back. Think way back. Your ancestors of 400 million years ago were fish. Your ancestors of eight-hundred million years ago were worms. Think about that. I mean really think about it. And then think back further. Think back another three billion years to your ultimate ancestor, a single cell. Then think back even further to the first organic molecules on Earth. Then think back still further before Earth came into existence from stellar debris.

"Look up at the stars and think. Think hard. Use your rational faculty to take your thinking to a higher level. Do some studying, and let the evidence, not your feelings, be your guide. Then you'll be getting somewhere. Getting somewhere is better than getting nowhere."

The Champion of Reason pointed his sword at Pip Tripke and ordered him to scoot around in the waste basket until he was facing the corner. He then took a black Magic Marker out of the back pocket of his cut-off jeans and wrote THE CHAMPION OF REASON WAS HERE in the bald area within Pip's Saint Francis of Assisi ring of hair. "Now it's *your* turn, Joe," he said and threw the Magic Marker to Joe Brackman.

"I've said a lot in just half an hour," the Champion of Reason said as he walked over to the window. "It's amazing how much you can say in a short time. It's equally amazing how *little* you can say in a *long* time. Your ape-human *Homo erectus* ancestors of 500,000 years ago could not have conversed at a lower level than *you* do, even with their rudimentary language." He opened the window. "Your conversations

are so superficial, they're sickening. But they're just a reflection of the level of your thinking, and the level of your thinking is really what's dehumanizing. So take it higher. Take it a lot higher. Then you can stop merely existing and start really living." Very carefully, the Champion of Reason made his exit from the second-story window.

In the classroom below, Henry Schmidt, the trigonometry teacher, was writing another formula on the formuli-covered blackboard. Bored students looking out the window suddenly saw a pair of blue frog's feet. A moment later, they saw the Champion of Reason drop down into full view. Several students shrieked; other students cried out in astonishment. Mr. Schmidt turned around. Before watching the Blue Swashbuckler scamper from sight, he and his students watched him write backward with his finger on the dusty window (for them to see frontward):

TRUE PREMISES + VALID REASONING = ?

Two more sections of the book in PDF files, as well as a reading by the author in an MP3 file, are free of charge at www.jimriva.com. The whole shebang, available as an eBook, can be purchased through the Kindle.